

# **Imagining autonomy on stolen land**

**settler colonialism, anarchism and the possibilities of decolonization?**

Adam Gary Lewis

2017

# Contents

Abstract . . . . .	3
Introduction . . . . .	3
Settler colonialism and settler colonial studies . . . . .	8
Indigenous resurgence and resistance . . . . .	15
Questions of land . . . . .	19
Conclusion . . . . .	22
Acknowledgements . . . . .	23
Disclosure statement . . . . .	23
Notes on contributor . . . . .	23
Funding . . . . .	23

## Abstract

This paper examines the connections between anarchist organizing, Indigenous resistance, settler colonial studies, questions of land, and prospects for decolonization. I challenge anarchism, and anarchist projects that occur on stolen Indigenous lands, to integrate analysis of historical and contemporary colonization into their theory and practice and begin to explore what decolonizing relationships to land might look like. Indigenous theorists such as Glen Coulthard and Leanne Simpson have called for increased attention to the anti-colonial and decolonizing imperatives in settler-dominated movements and political projects. The example of the recent Occupy movements shows the danger of experiments in alternative futures that risk reinscribing structures of settler colonialism if their underlying context on Indigenous land is not challenged. Settler colonialism, connected to white supremacy, is the necessary context of resistance in settler colonial North America and within social movements that exist on these lands. I suggest a turn towards Indigenous theory and action that aims to construct prefigurative futures outside the state and capitalism as a necessary reference point that all radical projects need to defer to explicitly, to foster direct relational accountability to Indigenous laws and lifeways.

## Introduction

This paper seeks to aid in the push towards greater discussion of settler decolonization work within social movement contexts. I argue that left, radical and most explicitly anarchist or anti-authoritarian movements need to attend to the realities of settler colonialism and Indigenous resurgence in the contexts in which we struggle.<sup>1</sup> I put anarchist prefiguration, which seeks to build a new society in the shell of the old, into conversation with settler colonial studies to detail settler colonialism as the context in which resistance takes place. Further, I draw explicitly from Indigenous resistance to capitalism and the state as the necessary basis for anarchists, and all those seeking a future free society, to engage directly in seeking to decolonize the constructive processes of social movements. Anarchists in particular might find aspects of Indigenous resurgence movements that resonate with their politics, and this could serve initially as a basis of anarchist solidarity with Indigenous struggles, but more significantly, the impetus to place prefigurative politics firmly under the direction of Indigenous laws and political systems. Radical futures, to be decolonial, must be on Indigenous terms.

I come to the elements discussed in this paper as both a settler and an anarchist. My family history is a mixture of British, Scottish, Welsh and Irish ancestry that has my early relatives settling in Pennsylvania and Woodstock, Ontario in the late 1700s and early 1800s. I currently reside on Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Neutral lands, on the Haldimand Tract (Six Nations of the Grand River Territory) in Kitchener, Ontario. For the last 10 years or so, I have been involved in social movement, Indigenous solidarity and anarchist organizing and resistance. In part, the

---

<sup>1</sup> North American anarchist theory and practice occurs on the lands of Indigenous peoples, and therefore benefits from settler-colonial privileges and colonial histories. Further, in the case of Europe, contemporary anarchist theory predominantly emerges from the colonial centres of empire, from within states that built their Western hegemony by exporting colonialism and creating colonies in other locales. This is not to discount the wide spectrum of anarchist (or anarchistic) theory and practice that occurs in nearly all regions of the globe, but seeks to acknowledge a specific Eurocentric tendency within anarchism. So, although this paper deals directly with the settler colonial states of Canada and the US, there is hopefully greater lessons for anti-colonial and decolonizing projects beyond.

impetus for this article comes from my observations having participated in a wide range of social movement struggles and projects that often have little to say about the context of settler colonialism where they are situated. I am most interested in anarchist movements (although this paper will surely resonate with any people and movements seeking to move towards a free society) because this is where I find myself organizing, as well as focusing on my academic work.

Anarchists have long prided themselves on the ability to articulate a relevant and dynamic political project that opposes all forms of oppression and domination; one that sets anarchism apart from other perspectives of resistance.<sup>2</sup> In general, anarchists seek anti-state, anti-capitalist, non-hierarchical and anti-oppressive futures gained through direct action and direct democratic practice. Many anarchists differ on the tactics that might be used to put such politics into place and some oppose organization and institutions, whatever their form. Anarchism, as a political perspective, is wide-ranging and dynamic. Most anarchists, however, recognize that some institutions of coordination and cooperation will be required to put into place and maintain a free society. Here anarchists hold up the principle of ‘voluntary association’ where individuals freely choose which projects and desires they wish to explore along with the free association with others who share similar commitments.<sup>3</sup> Such institutions need to be based in principles of equalitarianism, voluntary association and direct participation, and face to face if possible. Fundamentally such institutions would be anti-authoritarian and flexible, and would be discarded once they have exhausted their usefulness. In this sense, anarchists employ a ‘dual strategy’ of seeking to destroy oppressive systems and build alternatives outside the state and capitalism.<sup>4</sup>

These commitments offer a number of useful tools to imagine the wholesale re/construction of society beyond capitalism and the state. As Jeff Shantz and Cindy Milstein suggest, contemporary anarchism, far from seeking only revolution and an overthrow of the state, has been focused on the creation of change and alternatives in the here and now.<sup>5</sup> Constructing a new society, therefore, does not have to wait for some revolution before being built, but can begin immediately. As Milstein suggests, anarchists take up the notion of prefiguration to put possible futures in place in the present.<sup>6</sup>

This anarchist conception of prefiguration has been gaining ground, having surfaced in many diverse settings such as the anti-globalization movement that came to the fore in the 1990s<sup>7</sup> and more recently with the various ‘Occupy’ encampments that have sprung up.<sup>8</sup> Rather than the solely destructive caricature of anarchism often presented by mainstream media narratives, an anarchist view to prefiguration seeks the destruction of current systems of oppression and

---

<sup>2</sup> Cindy Milstein, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2010), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Milstein, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations*, 59.

<sup>4</sup> Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive! Anti-authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 18.

<sup>5</sup> Jeff Shantz, *Constructive Anarchy: Building Infrastructures of Resistance* (London: Ashgate, 2010); Milstein, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations*.

<sup>6</sup> See also David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> David Graeber, ‘The New Anarchists,’ *New Left Review* 13 (Jan–Feb, 2002): 61–73. David Graeber and Andrej Grubacic, ‘Anarchism, or the Revolutionary Movement of the Twenty-First Century,’ ZNET, January 6, 2004, <http://www.zcommunications.org/anarchism-or-the-revolutionary-movement-of-the-twenty-first-century-by-david-graeber2004>. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/andrej-grubacic-david-graeber-anarchism-or-the-revolutionary-movement-of-the-twenty-first-century> (accessed May 15, 2013).

It is important to note, however, that the notion of prefiguration is not strictly anarchist in its genealogy but has drawn from a number of anti-racist, feminist, and anti-war movements in previous decades.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Bray, *Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street* (Washington, WA: Zero Books, 2013). Aragon!, *Occupy Everything: Anarchists in the Occupy Movement 2009–2011* (Berkeley, CA: LBC Books, 2012).

domination alongside the creation of new institutions, forms of organization, ways of living and relations.<sup>9</sup>

Infrastructures of resistance, as a synonym for prefiguration, might be employed as the ‘rudimentary infrastructure of alternative ways of being, an alternative future in the present.’ Shantz suggests that anarchist transfer cultures are to be put in place so that when moments of contestation arise, people will be ready, will know how to act, and will have networks and supports in place to move towards a future society.<sup>10</sup> By coupling transfer cultures and infrastructures for resistance Shantz argues that in the shorter term, movements can oppose the dominating systems of the state and capitalism with a long-term view to replace them with a ‘critical mass’ of alternatives that contest the state and render its operation redundant.<sup>11</sup>

The anarchist aim, ultimately, following the old Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)<sup>12</sup> adage, is ‘forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.’ Anarchists seek a movement and future that resonates with the Zapatista’s: where ‘many worlds fit’ and there are no predetermined blueprints for how society will be structured.<sup>13</sup> Anarchist-inspired political formulations are firmly part of the current discourses of social movement resistance. The work that needs to begin now is contextualizing and radically situating the critique of all forms of oppression and domination, including the relative gap in engaging with settler colonialism as a core system of oppression and domination.<sup>14</sup>

Settler colonialism is a necessary consideration for the North American context. To situate ourselves otherwise, as anarchists and/or settlers, is to continue to perpetuate the dynamics and structures of settler colonialism. Grounding analysis in settler colonial studies and primitive accumulation, and also looking to Indigenous resistance and resurgence movements, can contribute to an ongoing critique of the state, capitalism and settler colonialism. Even this does not go far enough unless anarchists seek to forge new relations with the first peoples of the lands and communities where we live and resist. This means becoming directly accountable to Indigenous laws and political systems. Without these new relations, anarchist aims are little more than a ‘new’ radical vision of society on stolen Indigenous land that keeps colonial relations intact.

Before moving forward a few comments are needed on the relationship between anarchists and deferring to Indigenous political systems and laws. This seems, at first glance, a somewhat

---

<sup>9</sup> Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!*

<sup>10</sup> Ehrlich (1996, 329) cited in Shantz, *Constructive Anarchy*, 154.

<sup>11</sup> Shantz, *Constructive Anarchy*, 173–4. A crucial component must be the development of alternative values. This includes principles of mutual aid, political confederation, direct democracy, consensus-based decision-making and gift economies. Shantz, *Constructive Anarchy*, 158–64.

<sup>12</sup> The Industrial Workers of the World are an international industrial workers union that organizes on the commonality of being workers, rather than via division into trades. Founded in 1905, the union is still active today and incorporates a wide range of anarchist, syndicalist and socialist influences. See [iww.org](http://iww.org). The phrase ‘forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old’ comes from the preamble to the IWW constitution. <http://www.iww.org/culture/official/preamble.shtml>.

<sup>13</sup> Milstein, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations*, 93; see also Randall Amster, *Anarchism Today* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012), and Alex Khasnabish, ‘Anarch@-Zapatismo: Anti-Capitalism, Anti-Power and the Insurgent Imagination,’ Glen Coulthard, Jacqueline Lasky, Adam Lewis and Vanessa Watts, eds., *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action* 5, no. 1 (2011): 70–95.

<sup>14</sup> There are, of course, difficulties with this sort of framing, such as the ease at which different forms of oppression can be added to an ever-expanding list of things that ‘we’ oppose, while actualizing a comprehensive sense of opposition is much more difficult. See Adam Gary Lewis, ‘Anti-State Resistance on Stolen Land: Settler Colonialism, Settler Identity and the Imperative of Anarchist Decolonization,’ in *New Developments in Anarchist Studies*, ed. P.J. Lilley and Jeff Shantz (Brooklyn, NY: Thought Crimes, 2015), 145–86.

contradictory position, and one that will be provocative to many anarchists. Anarchists, after all, actively resist the laws and structures imposed from above by the state, and are against any imposition of authority, in favour of a high degree of individual and collective autonomy. In this sense, and with the anarchist principle of voluntary association in mind, I want to suggest that this would be a voluntary relationship that anarchists take up, as occupiers/visitors on Indigenous lands, in recognition of our participation and complicity with settler colonial relations. Indigenous laws and political systems, as the work of Taiaiake Alfred has shown, are not synonymous with Western conceptions of the state, sovereignty and law.<sup>15</sup> They are much more grounded in cultural and community-based practices of direct democracy and collective decision-making. This would, at least initially, be a voluntary deferral of autonomy to Indigenous nations, at least until further relations might be worked out. It is conceivable that settlers might be granted their own spaces of autonomy, where alternative societies along specific anarchist visions could be constructed. This, however, needs to be a later step after situating ourselves as visitors to Indigenous lands. A just set of relations in the future needs to take Indigenous autonomy and sovereignty as paramount given the deeply entrenched nature of settler colonialism. So anarchists might consider delegating authority, as it were, to Indigenous nations, in part because resurging Indigenous political systems are themselves anti-state and anti-capitalist, and share a number of affinities with anarchist ideas. This is one way that anarchists might adapt their general radical visions to the specific context of settler colonialism. I turn to some of these points more specifically below.

Glen Coulthard in his important book *Red Skin White Masks* suggests some of the implications for resistance to capitalism (and the state) in the present moment. He argues that an over emphasis on capitalism (and the state) often leaves out the colonial underpinnings that impact all other forms of oppression and domination and provide the context of resistance. The crucial analysis of settler colonialism is missing. Coulthard argues that

By shifting our analytical frame to the colonial relation we might occupy a better angle from which to both anticipate and interrogate practices of settler-state dispossession justified under otherwise egalitarian principles and espoused with so-called ‘progressive’ political agendas in mind.<sup>16</sup>

This includes projects that advocate a return to a ‘commons’ that is too disconnected from histories and continued dynamics of Indigenous dispossession.<sup>17</sup> As Craig Fortier argues ‘the

<sup>15</sup> See Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 12. This point has been underscored by other theorists as well, such as Leanne Simpson (*Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring, 2011) or Andrea Smith (*Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005)). My own personal experience in the anarchist movement in Southern Ontario often attests to this reality, where other forms of oppression, such as class, are brought to the forefront, while others, such as colonization or racism, fade to the background.

<sup>17</sup> I discuss this point in some detail in Adam Gary Lewis, ‘Anarchy, Space, and Indigenous Resistance: Developing Anti-colonial and Decolonizing Commitments in Anarchist Theory and Practice,’ in *Theories of Resistance: Anarchism, Geography and the Spirit of Revolt*, ed. Marcelo Lopes de Souza, Richard J. White and Simon Springer (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 207–35. Craig Fortier has taken up a sustained treatment in ‘(Re)claiming the Commons in a Context of Settler Colonialism’ (Chapter 5 of his PhD Dissertation), *Unsettling Movements: Decolonizing Non-Indigenous Radical Struggles In Settler Colonial States* (York University, 2015).

struggle to *reclaim the commons* should give way to a struggle to *decolonize the commons*’ and the transformation settler-Indigenous relations. ‘Rather than see the commons as an object of ownership (even if it is common ownership)’ with ‘land, air, resources that are “empty” for settlers to reclaim,’ Fortier argues, ‘a decolonial commons must fundamentally re-orient our relationships to the territories on which we live.’<sup>18</sup> Such a reorientation must be towards the Indigenous laws and political structures that have, and continue to, exist.

As I have argued in other work<sup>19</sup> it is useful to draw from Joel Olson’s concept of ‘strategic centrality,’<sup>20</sup> in order to see settler colonialism as an underlying aspect of the context in which we struggle. Olson argues that white supremacy needs to be seen as ‘strategically central’ to all struggles that occur in such a context, as underwriting the material realities of white supremacy and black and white divisions under capitalism. He argues that the contemporary US anarchist movement has been caught up in ‘info shops and insurrection’ as the two focal points of anarchist organizing, rather than movement building in context.

While Olson’s concept certainly applies outside the US context as well,<sup>21</sup> his work does not go far enough to capture the settler colonial underpinnings that are closely linked to white supremacy, capitalism and the state. The lack of attention to the settler colonial context has been challenged by a variety of theorists and organizers recently. As Andrea Smith argues, colonization, in addition to slavery and war, is a key pillar that upholds white supremacy.<sup>22</sup> Leanne Simpson argues, ‘western-based social movement theory has failed to recognize the broader contextualizations of resistance within Indigenous thought, while also ignoring the contestation of colonialism as a starting point.’<sup>23</sup> There is a concerted lack of attention to Indigenous dispossession and questions of land in anti-capitalism struggles broadly, especially given the ways that the state has adapted to further processes of accumulation and land acquisition.<sup>24</sup> Settler colonialism is the structure that has both paved the way for the rise of capitalism and the state. I turn to the specificities of this structural set of relations below.

Anarchists and all those committed to building a free society while resisting all forms of oppression and domination might therefore see settler colonialism as the *necessary* context with which to ground our resistance and orient ourselves to possible radical futures. This is not to say that resisting other forms of oppression and domination, and the ways that they are connected to settler colonialism, are not themselves important. Rather, I argue that, in our particular context, focusing on other forms is necessary but *insufficient* in order to deal with the structures of domination here. There can be no resistance on stolen land without resistance to settler colonialism.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Fortier, ‘(Re)claiming the Commons in a Context of Settler Colonialism,’ 13. Emphasis in original.

<sup>19</sup> See Lewis, ‘Anti-state Resistance on Stolen Land.’

<sup>20</sup> Joel Olson, ‘The Problem with Infoshops and Insurrection: US Anarchism, Movement Building and the Racial Order,’ in *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology to Anarchy in the Academy*, ed. Randall Amster, Abraham DeLeon, Luis A. Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella II, and Deric Shannon (New York: Routledge, 2009), 35–45.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Ajamu Nangwaya, ‘Race, Oppositional Politics, and the Challenges of Post-9/11 Mass Movement-Building Spaces,’ *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* 1 (2011): 171–209.

<sup>22</sup> Andrea Smith, ‘Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing,’ in *The Colour of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology*, ed. INCITE Women of Colour Against Violence (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006), 66–73.

<sup>23</sup> Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*, 31.

<sup>24</sup> Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2013), 46.

<sup>25</sup> Thanks are due to Glen Coulthard for pushing me to think about this idea in much more nuanced terms. It is not that I am arguing that settler colonialism is itself at the top of some hierarchy of oppression, as the problematics

To assist in framing this context of resistance I turn briefly to recent work within settler colonial studies.

## Settler colonialism and settler colonial studies

As Patrick Wolfe suggests, settler colonialism must be understood as a structure and not as a singular event: 'Settler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies. The split tensing reflects a determinate feature of settler colonization. The colonizers come to stay – invasion is a structure not an event.' Settler colonialism is primarily predicated on the destruction of Indigenous populations, in order to make way for 'a new colonial society on the expropriated landbase.'<sup>26</sup> Settler colonialism attempts to clear the way of Indigenous peoples in order to make space for settlers and the establishment of their societies. It is not an event because the dynamics of settler colonialism continue unabated, although with different forms and techniques. As Lorenzo Veracini has discussed in detail, settler colonialism takes up a number of forms of 'transfer' in order to empty out the Indigenous side of the settler colonial relationship. Thus, it is essential to take stock of the terms 'settler' and 'Indigenous' as markers of this relationship. Positionality, as a result 'is not just central to the issues – it is the issue.'<sup>27</sup>

In this paper, I refer to the more expansive term Indigenous, drawing from Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel who state:

The communities, clans, nations and tribes we call *Indigenous peoples* are just that: Indigenous to the lands they inhabit, in contrast to and in contention with the colonial societies and states that have spread out from Europe and other centers of empire. It is this place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples from other peoples of the world.<sup>28</sup>

Alfred and Corntassel point to two central elements in their definition: land and resistance to colonization, two crucial points that separate Indigenous peoples from non-Indigenous others.

The term settler, while hardly free from contestation, often generally refers to all non-Indigenous peoples, although such a definition is often too broad and lacks specificity. Settlers, according to Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds, are those who

went, and go, to new lands to appropriate them and to establish new and improved replicas of the societies they left. As a result Indigenous peoples have found an ever-decreasing space for themselves in settler colonies as changing demographics en-

---

of such social movement decrees have been shown in a variety of contexts but rather that it to ignore its structures renders our understandings of context insufficient and ignores a major point of intersection.

<sup>26</sup> Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,' *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388.

<sup>27</sup> Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 34–50.

<sup>28</sup> Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, 'Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism,' *Government and Opposition* 40, no. 4 (2005): 597. On the complexity of definitions of Indigenous, see Aman Sium, Chandni Desai, and Eric Ritskes, 'Towards the "Tangible Unknown": Decolonization and the Indigenous Future,' *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): VI.

abled ever more extensive dispossession. Settlers, in the end, tended not to assimilate into Indigenous societies, but rather emigrated to replace them.<sup>29</sup>

The crucial distinction here is that settlers aim to recreate the societies that they left in their own image and on their own terms, while also asserting a continual sovereignty when they travel to new lands. Migrants (or ‘exogenous others’<sup>30</sup>), on the other hand, which would include immigrants, refugees and descendants from previously enslaved populations, arrive to find an already created political order that is governed and controlled by settlers. While they might attempt to join or assimilate into it, they lack any degree of sovereignty, and their ‘right to belong’ within the polity is eternally conditional.<sup>31</sup> The ultimate distinction is that ‘while migrants move to *another* country, settlers move to *their* country.’<sup>32</sup>

According to Eve Tuck and K. Wang Yang ‘[i]mmigrants are beholden to the Indigenous laws and epistemologies of the lands they migrate to. Settlers become the law, supplanting Indigenous laws and epistemologies. Therefore, settler nations are not immigrant nations.’<sup>33</sup> As an important specification Tuck and Yang suggest a settler-native-slave triad to mark slavery as a key founding logic of the settler state, particularly in the US. This marks the specificity of slave descendent peoples and the ways that settler colonialism has stolen their labour as a complement to the theft of Indigenous lands in the furtherance of both the state and capitalism. Migrants have come to Indigenous lands not to live by the laws and ways of Indigenous nations, but rather immigrate and become incorporated into the settler state.<sup>34</sup> Decolonization, as I suggest below, requires a whole reordering of settler identity to become ‘beholden’ and accountable to Indigenous laws and political structures.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Emphasis mine. Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds, ‘Introduction: Making Space in Settler Colonies,’ in *Making Settler Colonial Space*, ed. Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2.

<sup>30</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 16.

<sup>31</sup> Lorenzo Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 40.

<sup>32</sup> Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, ‘Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,’ *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 6–7. This also points for the need for migrant justice movements to recognize Indigenous sovereignty, a point underscored by Walia in *Undoing Border Imperialism*. On relations with African slave descendant populations, see Bonita Lawrence and Enaski Dua, ‘Decolonizing Anti-racism,’ *Social Justice* 32, no. 4 (2005): 120–43 and Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence, ‘Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?’, in *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-colonialism in Canada and the US*, ed. Arlo Kempf (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2009), 105–36.

<sup>34</sup> Significant in the discussion of identity in settler colonial contexts is the influential article by Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, ‘Decolonizing Anti-Racism,’ *Social Justice* 32, no. 4 (2005): 120–43 and the response by Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright, ‘Decolonizing Resistance, Challenging States,’ *Social Justice* 35, no. 3 (2009): 120–38. I do not have the space to detail the complexities of this debate here, although it is significant in that the key point of contention is whether or not all non-Indigenous peoples are settlers. On this debate, see Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present*, 44–8.

<sup>35</sup> Some, such as Patrick Wolfe (see ‘Recuperating Binarism: A Heretical Introduction,’ *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3–4 (2013): 263), have argued for the maintenance of a settler colonial binary between Indigenous and non-Indigenous/settler peoples, given that all non-Indigenous peoples become wrapped up in, and benefit from settler colonialism. He argues that the ‘will’ of various settler populations perhaps has little overall consequence then as the migration of peoples does not ‘alter the structural fact that their presence, however involuntary, was [and is] part of the process of Native dispossession.’

This is an attractive view (one that previously I have argued for, see ‘Anarchy, Space, and Indigenous Resistance’), and an easy one to uphold by settler theorists who are not on the receiving end of all manner of settler colonial and

It might be strategically necessary to emphasize one or more categories of relating under settler colonialism depending on where we find ourselves. Employing the term ‘settler’ can have a disruptive function, especially with those who might be resistant to the term or to taking up the realities of settler colonialism. I employ it in this fashion in the remainder of this paper.<sup>36</sup> Within a white dominated settler movement the binarist framing will likely be used strategically, while those working with a migrant justice group will need to point out the differences in settler and migrant experiences, while also linking each in relation to settler colonialism. Ultimately, context will need to be a primary consideration for how we engage these issues, not a default to strictly abstract principles.

In order to maintain divisions and settler supremacy there are a number of myths that are mobilized by settlers and the settler colonial state. First there are settler denials of Indigenous presence outright. This is the oft used myth of *terra nullius*, which constructs continents as empty lands either free from previous inhabitants, or host to inhabitants that are not understood as human, and thus irrelevant in the occupation and appropriation of the land. Following the philosophical tradition of John Locke, Indigenous peoples do not use the land to its potential, leaving it idle, and thus settlers gain a right to such lands if they put it into more productive service.<sup>37</sup> As I suggest below, this is a core element of justifications for primitive accumulation. These myths are used by settlers to lay claim to whole continents, while denying the existence of Indigenous societies.<sup>38</sup>

A further mythology is mobilized by recasting the term Indigenous, appropriating it for settler colonial motives. The settler imaginary positions settlers as fleeing violence, as a myth to eclipse the violence against Indigenous peoples. As the narrative goes, settlers are not violent themselves but are seeking first and foremost to return to a previous existence without violence. The settler polity is constructed as non-violent.<sup>39</sup> This is especially the case with the Canadian settler state’s discussion vis-à-vis the settler colonial US, where Canada constructs its past as one of peaceful relations with Indigenous peoples, compared to the ‘Indian Wars’ of the US.<sup>40</sup> Settler constructions of their own inherent indigeneity are carried over from previous homelands and combined with *terra nullius* to lay claim to Indigenous lands.

Settlers also might seek explicit processes of Indigenization, directly appropriating from Indigenous nations. Veracini notes this as one of the various 26 forms of transfer that settler colonialism employs. This can range from settlers by staking claim to Indigenous status or actively performing Indigeneity through dressing as natives, but also by appropriating aspects of Indige-

---

white supremacist violence. The difficulty here is that this binary does little to take stock of the specific relationship to sovereignty and dispossession that settlers have, while newcomers who are racialized and themselves policed by the settler state, do not. It does not map the particularities of every settler colonial context.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, on this point, Cory Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel, ‘Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations,’ *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 2 (2014): 1–32.

<sup>37</sup> Paula Sherman, ‘Picking Up the Wampum Belt as an Act of Protest,’ in *Alliances: Re/envisioning Indigenous-non-Indigenous Relationships*, ed. Lynne Davis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 114–30.

<sup>38</sup> It is imperative to note, however, that Indigenous resistance has consistently stood in the way, and continues to flourish, whatever the pervasiveness of settler colonialism. Indigenous resistance continues to be the bulwark against settler colonialism, though further action and support by all those interested in the seeing the demise of all systems of oppression and domination need to begin to take this centrality of settler colonialism much more seriously.

<sup>39</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 77.

<sup>40</sup> Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

nous culture or of Indigenous resistance. This often makes reference to the ‘ancestral’ lands of settlers and histories of occupation of land.<sup>41</sup> For anarchists there might be a very fine line here, and one that I too am approaching in this article. Indigenous political traditions and resurgence movements, as I discuss below, are inseparable from Indigenous cultural contexts and cannot be appropriated by settlers. I reference the work of Taiaiake Alfred, Leanne Simpson and Glen Coulthard below, but seek to remain conscious that there is a danger of trying to appropriate their work into an autonomist anarchist context. This might often happen when anarchists seek to draw connections between Indigenous political projects outside the state, but fail to account for the context of settler colonialism and asymmetric power relations that privilege settlers.

Settler colonial theory shows in detail the ways that settler colonialism has come to operate, the ways that such a structure aims to secure its existence and the ways in which particular identities are constructed within such a structure. This is crucial to begin to map out the explicit nature of settler colonialism within social movement contexts. This is a necessary framing with which to examine the anarchist context. Despite this importance several Indigenous and settler theorists<sup>42</sup> have pointed to a number of drawbacks with settler colonial theory. These include the inability to imagine a future beyond settler colonialism (and the state), and the possible prefigurative processes of decolonization that might bring such visions about. As Alissa Macoun and Elizabeth Strakosch<sup>43</sup> have argued settler colonial theory has a particular difficulty imagining a future beyond settler colonialism. Veracini, in his recent book *The Settler Colonial Present*, acknowledges this as much. While settler colonial studies allows greater detailing of the specificities of settler colonialism as a distinct colonial formation and in particular contexts, ‘it offers no practical answers’ for exactly what a decolonization process could look like.<sup>44</sup>

Veracini’s previous work suggested that there is ‘no intuitive narrative of settler colonial de-colonisation’ and this ‘contributes crucially to the invisibility of anti-colonial struggles in settler colonial contexts.’<sup>45</sup> Part of the difficulty in imagining a decolonized future is that, in contrast to other colonial forms, it is not simply a question of making settlers leave and return to their home countries. As I noted above, settlers aim to bring their sovereignty with them, and sever connections to their previous homelands, while remaking new colonies in their image. The difficulty then, Veracini argues, is that within settler colonies ‘sovereignty needs to be negotiated *within* a polity rather than *between* polities.’<sup>46</sup> He envisions three possible endpoints of settler colonialism where settlers leave and go back to their original home countries (besides the question of this as a practical option, he notes that departure itself can replicate settler colonialism’s attempts at exclusivism, although for Indigenous nations this hardly seems like a negative option); where processes of Indigenous-settler reconciliation are undertaken (most clearly the attempt at ‘negotiation within the polity,’ perhaps even that settlers reconcile with Indigenous political formations); or where ultimately settlers refuse to recognize the oppressive nature of settler colonialism and fight for its continuation. Practically speaking, while the first option is unlikely, and the final

---

<sup>41</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 46–7.

<sup>42</sup> Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, ‘Unsettling Settler Colonialism’; Jodi Byrd, ‘Follow the Typical Signs: Settler Sovereignty and Its Discontents,’ *Settler Colonial Studies* 4, no. 2 (2014): 151–4; Alissa Macoun and Elizabeth Strakosch, ‘The Ethical Demands of Settler Colonial Theory,’ *Settler Colonial Studies*, 3, no. 3–4 (2013): 426–43.

<sup>43</sup> Macoun and Strakosch, ‘The Ethical Demands of Settler Colonial Theory,’ 435.

<sup>44</sup> Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present*, 100–1.

<sup>45</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 105.

<sup>46</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 105. Emphasis in original.

option is certainly likely to occur at least initially but must come to pass if any semblance of justice and freedom is to occur, option two is left as the possible way to move forward.

Now certainly there must be a reconciliation process for past wrongs. This has been gaining ground recently in settler colonial Canada following the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on residential schools and its 94 Calls to Action.<sup>47</sup> This is an important turning point that has the potential to begin to push settlers towards greater recognition and action against past and recurring forms of colonial violence, and in the case of the TRC, as a healing and acknowledgement process for survivors of the schools. This process, however, would have to occur with a much larger degree of participation by all those within settler society and fundamentally question the roots of the settler colonial state. It is worthwhile to ask what this might look like not simply at a national level of reconciliation, but also in smaller community contexts as well.

One of the difficulties with reconciliation and negotiation processes, however, is that they often occur at the level of the state, and are likely to presume the continuation of the state. Glen Coulthard has put forth a sustained and detailed critique of the politics of recognition and argues that ultimately 'colonial powers will only recognize the collective rights and identities of Indigenous peoples insofar as this recognition does not throw into question the background legal, political, and economic framework of the colonial relationship itself.'<sup>48</sup> The hegemony of the state has thus far not been up for debate in the broader, public discourses of recognition and reconciliation. Furthermore, engaging in discussion and negotiation as a means of removing institutions such as the state or settler colonialism which are premised on continued monopolies of violence, seems itself wholly unlikely. Thus taking up a process of reconciliation, as currently understood, and within a singular polity, risks maintaining the inherent dominating nature of the state, and shifting into the limited politics of recognition of Indigenous peoples amongst other competing claims.

As related to the question of within or between polities, the above critique of recognition/reconciliation occurs within the state as a container, as well as between two largely constructed polities – Indigenous peoples and all others. Veracini's suggestion, rather, is that there is potential in a reconciliatory discourse were it to be premised on settlers reconciling themselves to Indigenous-determined projects of resurgence.<sup>49</sup> This is a key element necessary for decolonial futures on Indigenous terms. Moving forward in any other fashion carries the potential to maintain the state in settler hands, or at least places Indigenous resurgence within negotiated constraints with settlers. Settlers are the current occupiers and have no future identity to claim, at least in the interim, other than 'visitor.' They need to be accountable to Indigenous political structures and laws. For this second option to be at all effective it will need to occur on Indigenous terms.

This is something that might be further examined in settler colonial studies more broadly, and is a crucial point for the intervention I am seeking to make here into anarchist and broader social movements. Even the suggestion of a nation-to-nation relationship between settler society and Indigenous nations, while invoking the possibility for autonomies on both sides, carries a number of its own difficulties despite the seeming radical potentials. This is often the result of anarchist

---

<sup>47</sup> See the Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada – [www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca).

<sup>48</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 41.

<sup>49</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 107.

prefiguration – networks of autonomy between communities. This, however, does not explicitly reconcile autonomy with the reality of settler colonialism, and as I suggest below, can lead to an anarchist replication of settler colonialism. It might be possible for some sort of negotiated autonomy to occur, if this were to foreground an Indigenous framing of what such a process would look like, beginning with settler deferral to Indigenous law and modes of governance in specific territories, before moving towards new relations of autonomy. In the meantime, anarchists need to attend to the connections between settler colonialism, capitalism and the state.

Glen Coulthard, in detailing the connection between the state, capitalism and settler colonialism, argues that colonialism has ‘forcefully opened up what were once collectively held territories and resources to privatization (dispossession), which, over time, came to produce a “class” of workers compelled to enter the exploitative realm of the labor market for their survival (proletarianization).’<sup>50</sup> Colonialism has opened up the possibility for others to live and exist on the lands of North America. Specifically primitive accumulation has been a central dynamic tying settler colonialism, the state and capitalism to one another. As Adam Barker argues, with specific reference to the recent Occupy movements, ‘the reality of capitalist oppression is inseparable from the history of colonization’ where wealth, and the resultant wealth disparity that was deemed so objectionable was (and certainly is) a direct result of settler colonial conquest.<sup>51</sup> Looking at processes of primitive accumulation is one way to detail the continuing links between capitalism, settler colonialism and the state. The following section argues that capitalism began to accelerate in its development and reach, abetted by the state, through the enclosure of the commons and privatization of land, which pushed migration to cities and forced many workers into wage work. The lens of primitive accumulation, with some modification of Marx’s original conception by Sylvia Federici (2004) and Glen Coulthard (2014), shows the complexity of the rise of capitalism and its expansion and links with settler colonialism.<sup>52</sup> This is an essential point of consideration for processes of resistance seeking to destroy settler colonialism. Resistance to capitalism and the state will always be incomplete without detailing the connections and overlaps with settler colonialism. As Chris Crass argues, speaking to anti-oppressive movements in general: ‘If systems of dominance are interconnected, then systems of liberation are also interconnected.’<sup>53</sup>

Karl Marx, in Chapters 26–33 of Volume One of *Capital*,<sup>54</sup> argues that primitive accumulation, which violently divorces the peasant from the soil, is what precedes capitalist forms of accumulation. In order to force peasants into wage labour, they had to be forcibly dispossessed from their lands, with common lands enclosed, and therefore limited in their ability to work for their own subsistence.

Sylvia Federici suggests primitive accumulation as a process that has been continually used, not just at one initial point to kick-start the ascendance of capitalism. She suggests, that Marx’s conception of primitive accumulation, which ‘consists essentially in the expropriation of the land from the European peasantry and the formation of the “free”, independent worker’ with

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*, 46–7.

<sup>51</sup> Adam Barker, ‘Already Occupied: Indigenous Peoples, Settler Colonialism and the Occupy Movements in North America,’ *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (2012): 3.

<sup>52</sup> Sylvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004); Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*.

<sup>53</sup> Chris Crass. *Towards Collective Liberation: Anti-racist Organizing, Feminist Praxis, and Movement Building Strategy* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2013), 18.

<sup>54</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume 1* (1887), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/index.htm> (accessed May 29, 2016).

some tacit reference to slavery and colonization, is an insufficient characterization, and needs to consider the ‘transformation of the body into a work machine’ and primitive accumulation as the ‘accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class,’ specifically race, gender and age.<sup>55</sup>

As Gabriel Piterberg and Lorenzo Veracini<sup>56</sup> note in detail, Marx was keenly aware of the realities of settler colonialism being linked to primitive accumulation as a means of paving the way for later capitalist production. As they note, settler society was more so based on reproduction of settler populations and their expansion onto Indigenous lands, rather than production. The available surplus of land initially prevented the rise of exploitative capitalist relations, until the state intervened to facilitate wage labour relations. Settler colonialism was initially essentially non-capitalist. First land had to be conquered and populations expanded before permanent settler settlements created the conditions for capitalist accumulation.

In order to apply Marx to settler colonial contexts, Glen Coulthard argues, primitive accumulation needs to be translated in ‘conversation with the critical thoughts and practices of Indigenous peoples themselves.’<sup>57</sup> To do so Marx’s concept needs a temporal reframing – away from something relegated to the past and mostly complete. Its ‘normative developmentalism’ and modernist associations with progress need to be jettisoned, coupled with a contextual shift ‘from an emphasis on the *capital relation* to the *colonial relation*’ away from the primary subject as the waged worker to the colonized.<sup>58</sup> By reframing primitive accumulation in this way, Coulthard suggests that it is dispossession that becomes the fundamental logic that underscores capitalism, not proletarianization. This recontextualization of primitive accumulation shows the root of capitalist expansion in the dispossession of Indigenous nations, as a process continually pushed by the state and as one that continues into the present. Further in turning to analyse continued forms of primitive accumulation we also need to be keenly aware of the dangers of advocating a return to a global commons as a corrective to neoliberal enclosures. He argues ‘the commons belong to somebody,’ after all – ‘the First Peoples of this land.’<sup>59</sup> As a specific example he notes the ways that these processes of dispossession have occurred more recently in the Dene area of Denendeh in the north of settler colonial Canada.<sup>60</sup> David Lloyd and Patrick Wolfe have argued further, following Veracini’s notion of the ‘settler colonial present,’ that neoliberal processes have taken up a further era of accumulation that seek the creation of spaces of exception and surplus populations whose strategies of management draw on the repertoires of settler colonial treatment of Indigenous peoples. In this case surplus populations are created within capitalism itself, rather than

---

<sup>55</sup> Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 63–4.

<sup>56</sup> Gabriel Piterberg and Lorenzo Veracini, ‘Wakefield, Marx and the World Turned Inside Out,’ *Journal of Global History* 10 (2015): 457–78. Piterberg and Veracini detail the engagements that Marx had with Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s theory about colonization, how this influenced Marx and how each were coming from different standpoints (Wakefield to further cement capitalism in the colonies, and Marx as a revolutionary seeking to overthrow capitalism). Importantly, they note how settler colonialism was employed as a means to quell revolutionary outbursts.

<sup>57</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 9–11. Emphasis in original.

<sup>59</sup> Glen Coulthard, ‘From Wards of the State to Subjects of Recognition?’, in *Theorizing Native Studies*, ed. Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 61.

<sup>60</sup> Coulthard, ‘From Wards of the State to Subjects of Recognition?’

outside of it, but share a similar function of Indigenous peoples as impeding capitalist expansion, hence leading to state strategies for management, containment and destruction.<sup>61</sup>

Primitive accumulation is one way to account for the expansion of capitalism that continues to inform attempts at Indigenous dispossession in the present. Indigenous communities are on the frontlines of resistance to primitive accumulation and show the way for efforts to move beyond capitalism and the state. In order to take stock of the intersection of these systems anarchists need to look with greater care at Indigenous writers, theorists and organizers and the general work being put forth on Indigenous resurgence. As occupiers of Indigenous lands, anarchists, and settlers broadly, need to foster accountable relationships to Indigenous laws and political systems. This is a crucial consideration, and compromise of sorts, for anarchists to adapt their visions to the realities of the settler colonial context and enduring Indigenous resistance. To do otherwise continues a process of settler colonization that tramples Indigenous lands, autonomy and self-determination.

## Indigenous resurgence and resistance

Here I look at the work of Indigenous scholars Taiaiake Alfred, Leanne Simpson, Bonita Lawrence and Glen Coulthard to detail anti-capitalist and anti-statist Indigenous perspectives of resurgence and resistance as key guideposts for envisioning more comprehensive, and contextual, resistance to settler colonialism that is directly accountable to Indigenous political systems and laws. Under the political and legal jurisdiction of Indigenous nations, and having given up colonial privileges and occupier status, settlers might come to be visitors on Indigenous territories and therefore directly accountable to Indigenous nations. This change in relations effectively turns settler colonialism on its head. This is an essential starting point given the historic asymmetrical power relations between settlers and Indigenous peoples.

Non-state autonomous communities are often suggested as the means to move forward outside the state, where communities would enter freely into agreements and federations with one another. While this is an attractive view, and a cornerstone anarchist prefiguration discussed above, this does not account specifically for the context of Indigenous land bases and relations to land. Settler autonomy on stolen land is not justice, and upholds and replicates settler colonial claims to land. Anarchist settlers seeking to create their own autonomous communities carry the danger of replicating ‘the transfer of settlers’ that Veracini discusses – ‘when settlers move into secluded enclaves in the attempt to establish a population economy that is characterized by no indigenous presence.’<sup>62</sup> Anarchists might not seek to remove Indigenous presence directly, but by imagining settler futures without direct engagement with the reality of settler colonialism and Indigenous resurgence performs a comparable function: Indigeneity continues to be erased and displaced. This is not to say that autonomy might come forth in the future, perhaps through negotiations with Indigenous nations, or delegated federalism. But this can only come with def-

---

<sup>61</sup> David Lloyd and Patrick Wolfe, ‘Settler Colonial Logics and the Neoliberal Regime,’ *Settler Colonial Studies* 6, no. 2: 109–19. As an additional connected element, Anthony Hall in *Earth Into Property: Colonization, Decolonization, and Capitalism* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2010), argues, slavery and colonization converge for the purpose of pushing capitalist accumulation and expansion further. ‘Indeed,’ he suggests, ‘the genesis of slavery and the history of Aboriginal dispossession were closely intertwined throughout much of the Americas as interrelated aspects of the same process of economic transformation,’ 324.

<sup>62</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 49.

erence to Indigenous jurisdiction first and foremost, within which Indigenous communities can make their own decisions about land use and where settlers might fit.

First of all it is important to clarify, following Leanne Simpson, that Indigenous resistance must not in be framed in terms of ‘dissent,’ as is the frequent parlance in Western-dominated social movements, but of resurgence. She states:

From an Indigenous perspective we are not dissenting, mobilizing, resisting or creating controversy to ‘win’ superiority or to dominate settler society. We are advocating and building a resurgence in order to provide the best political and cultural context for the lives of our people to flourish.<sup>63</sup>

Resurgence relies on a restoration of balance in all the relations of Indigenous communities and a ‘disruption of the capitalist industrial complex and the colonial gender system ... within settler nations by challenging the very foundation of the nation-state and its relationships to the land and Indigenous nations.’<sup>64</sup> This challenge allows for the creation of self-determining and autonomous Indigenous spaces and a return to ‘nonhierarchical, non-authoritarian and non-coercive’ relationships and ways of organizing society<sup>65</sup> outside the state and capitalism.

Simpson’s definition of resurgence is firmly situated within Nishnaabeg social, political and spiritual traditions and practices. This grounding is beyond the reach and understanding for those not firmly embedded in such a worldview. This notion of resurgence is specific to Nishnaabeg people and lands and is not one that can be taken up by, for example, anarchist settlers even if their radical projects might seem to resonate with the one Simpson suggests. The same must be said for Indigenous perspectives I detail below. Each is embedded in a network of relations situated on particular lands. These are therefore not projects that can be created by settlers (as this would be a direct act of appropriation out of a very specific context). I detail them here to suggest that anarchists need to frame any possible future projects within an explicit relation to local Indigenous political systems and laws. Anything less would continue to be an act of colonial imposition.

In his book *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, Taiaiake Alfred similarly points to the need for Indigenous peoples to resurge and recontextualize traditional value systems as a means to strengthen communities and empower resistance to the state, capitalism and settler colonialism.<sup>66</sup> The current limits of resistance, Alfred argues, have often been placed within the context of the Canadian state, which only allows for modest and limited reforms, and prolong state hegemony without directly challenging its power. He argues that Indigenous peoples must ‘deconstruct the notion of state power to allow people to see that the settler state has no right to determine indigenous futures.’<sup>67</sup> Rather, a traditional orientation suggests ‘focusing not on opposing external power, but on actualizing [Indigenous people’s] own power and preserving their intellectual independence,’ empowering Indigenous peoples and moving beyond relations of coercion and contract.<sup>68</sup> A traditional perspective advocates moving beyond a whole-scale revolution against the state towards creating relationships of autonomy, self-determination and independence, and engaging

---

<sup>63</sup> Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*, 86.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>66</sup> Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>67</sup> Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, 71.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 72.

with settler society on the basis of federalism. Such federalism must be on Indigenous terms, based in relations to land. This is an example that affirms any future settler colonial transformation needs to be on Indigenous terms, which are explicitly outside the state and capitalism. So anarchists will need to compromise with Indigenous articulations of resurgence – not a surrender of anarchist core beliefs but an affirmation of the terms of relating in a settler colonial context.

Ultimately, Alfred advocates the creation of Indigenous nationhood with ‘no absolute authority, no coercive enforcement of decisions, no hierarchy and no separate ruling entity.’<sup>69</sup> In his 2005 book *Wasáse*, Alfred suggests that this form of Indigenous politics might be termed anarcho-Indigenism if an analogous Western political framing was conceived.<sup>70</sup> He argues for reconnecting to traditional governance structures and lifeways, to take stock of current colonial realities and terrains of resistance. He argues for a militant<sup>71</sup> warrior ethic of Indigenous resistance outside the state, with an aim of creating autonomous self-determining spaces for Indigenous communities:

I might suggest, as a starting point, conceptualizing *anarcho-indigenism*. Why? And why this term? Conveyance of the indigenous warrior ethic will require its codification in some form – a creed and an ethical framework for thinking through challenges. To take root in people’s minds the new ethic will have to capture the spirit of a warrior in battle and bring it to politics. How might this spirit be described in contemporary terms related to political thought and movement? The two elements that come to my mind are *indigenous*, evoking cultural and spiritual rootedness in this land and the Onkwehonwe struggle for justice and freedom, and the political philosophy and movement that is fundamentally anti-institutional, radically democratic, and committed to taking action to force change: *anarchism*.<sup>72</sup>

Resistance, therefore, must seek to transcend the state form, to move outside of its parameters with the establishment and revitalization of Indigenous nations. Anarcho-Indigenism, in reference to the work of Indigenous feminists, has undergone a slight modification to anarchy-Indigenism, to reflect the necessary connections between anarchism, feminism and Indigeneity.<sup>73</sup> This might be one way for anarchists to begin to articulate their relationship to Indigenous nations.

In a similar fashion, Bonita Lawrence points to historic confederacy structures (such as the Blackfoot or Iroquois confederacies) as non-state means to respond to the weaknesses that have been created as a result of colonization and the Indian Act system. In particular she suggests:

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>70</sup> Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2005).

I have undertaken a more sustained discussion of anarchy-Indigenism, as a feminist modification of Alfred’s anarcho-Indigenism, in several other works (See Lewis, ‘Anti-state Politics on Stolen Land’ and ‘Decolonizing Anarchism: Expanding Anarchy-Indigenism in Theory and Practice’). This might be a productive angle for envisioning anti-colonial, decolonizing, anti-capitalist and anti-state politics that centre Indigenous resistance.

<sup>71</sup> He suggests that militancy must necessarily operate within the realm of non-violence, not because of some sort of moral superiority but in part because the forces of the Canadian state are still vast compared to the ever-growing strength of Indigenous communities. Part of resistance efforts, therefore, must be to seek to begin to build strong autonomous communities of resurgence and resistance outside the state.

<sup>72</sup> Alfred, *Wasáse*, 45. Alfred, 288 refers to Onkwehonwe in the Mohawk language as: “the original people” ... referring to the First Peoples of North America.’

<sup>73</sup> See Lewis, ‘Decolonizing Anarchism: Expanding Anarchy-Indigenism in Theory and Practice’ for a more in-depth treatment of anarchy-Indigenism and its development.

The confederacies present a way out of the deadlock of fragmentation and division that Native people have been sealed into by the Indian Act for two reasons – they not only present the possibility of renegotiating the boundaries that have currently been erected around different categories of Indigeneity, but they envision a potentially sufficient landbase to do so.<sup>74</sup>

These broad political frameworks, with their own histories of agreement and treaty-making between them, might be the base units with which settlers directly relate and become accountable to. Such confederal structures resonate with anarchist federalist ideas, of self-determining communities linking up through macro-level voluntary structures of coordination, where community control is paramount without coercive influence from outside, top down, authoritarian interference.

Glen Coulthard, in *Red Skin, White Masks*, sets out a number of alternatives to the politics of recognition that often predominates as a strategy for Indigenous resistance. Specifically, he notes the recent Idle No More movement as a key example of politics that are beginning to move beyond recognition towards direct action that is anti-capitalist, anti-state and decolonizing in form. As opposed to recognition he suggests that Indigenous peoples need to ‘*enact or practice our political commitments to Indigenous national and women’s liberation in the cultural form and content of our struggle itself. Indigenous resurgence,*’ he argues, ‘*is at its core a prefigurative politics – the methods of decolonization prefigure its aims.*’<sup>75</sup>

Economically, Coulthard suggests this requires a return to land-based cultural and community practices/knowledges that ‘emphasize radical sustainability’; using localized forms of self-sufficiency to reduce dependency on capitalist forms of relations; and a revitalization of Indigenous decision-making processes as a means to ‘foster sustainable economic decision-making,’ empowerment and equitable forms of resource distribution.<sup>76</sup> Ultimately: ‘For Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die. And for capitalism to die, we must actively participate in the construction of Indigenous alternatives to it.’<sup>77</sup> While Coulthard is primarily directing his work to other Indigenous peoples, the resonance with broader anarchist and social movement discussions is crucial. He points, significantly, to the reality that it is Indigenous peoples, communities and movements that are both at the forefront of resistance, but who also need to be the ones who envision what the terms of decolonization will look like. Indigenous communities need to be the ones whose visions of the destruction of settler colonialism, capitalism and the state we most carefully refer to because the lands on which various movements resist are Indigenous lands. As I argued above, this is the context of resistance, whether against settler colonialism, capitalism, the state or the myriad forms of oppression and domination that intersect and mutually reinforce each other.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Bonita Lawrence, *‘Real’ Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 242.

<sup>75</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 159. Emphasis in original.

<sup>76</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 172.

<sup>77</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 173.

<sup>78</sup> Indigenous peoples surely have a large degree of internal work to do within their own communities, by the communities themselves, without settler interference. This is one theme that runs through Simpson, Alfred and Lawrence and needs to be highlighted. Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel (‘Being Indigenous,’ 605) argue for the need for Indigenous communities to create ‘zones of refuge’ as a means to resist continued colonization and to ‘begin to achieve the re-strengthening of our people as individuals so that these spaces can be occupied by decolonized people leading authentic lives.’

While recognizing the need for separation and autonomy there are potential important links to be drawn between Indigenous struggles outside the state and capital, and settler-dominated anarchist and anti-authoritarian social movements. Such links point toward possible avenues for solidarity in the interim and ground struggles in anti-state, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial resistance. Alfred suggests the following commonalities between anarchist and Indigenous philosophies that make relating to one another possible under anarcho-Indigenism:

A rejection of alliances with legalized systems of oppression, non-participation in the institutions that structure the colonial relationship and a belief in bringing about change through direct action, physical resistance, and confrontations with state power.<sup>79</sup>

Richard Day makes a similar argument with regard to social movements generally, suggesting that the ‘newest social movements’ have sought to undermine previous hegemonic conceptions of social change and move beyond appeals to the state. Such movements seek to create alternatives in the present ‘with the end of creating not a new knowable totality (counter-hegemony), but of enabling experiments and the emergence of new forms of subjectivity.’<sup>80</sup> This ‘logic of affinity’ makes space for discussion of resistance outside the state and capitalism. Day points out that it is in fact Indigenous peoples who, around the world, are leading the construction of alternatives to the dominant order and notes the resonance of Alfred’s conception of traditional values and governance structures with anarchist forms of federalism. Importantly, it is not Indigenous peoples who have drawn from anarchist forms of organization, but rather the other way around, with major anarchist theorists drawing from the Haudenosaunee confederacy or the struggles of the Zapatistas, for example.<sup>81</sup> These points of contact, with anarcha-Indigenism as but one example, might be fruitful places to enact anarchist solidarity with Indigenous struggles now, with a view to deferring to Indigenous self-determination and autonomy in the future.

## Questions of land

As I have suggested the creation of prefigurative alternatives to the dominant statist, capitalism and settler colonial mode requires careful consideration of the context of resistance. Land is fundamental. This includes histories of Indigenous land use, the development of primitive accumulation, settler colonialism and Indigenous political systems and laws as key guideposts to understanding the context in the present.

As Richard E. Atleo (Umeek) argues, for Indigenous peoples, ‘everything is one’ within the world, including between physical and spiritual realms that are deeply connected to the ancestral and ceremonial lands of Indigenous peoples.<sup>82</sup> Indigenous epistemologies and research perspectives focus on the interconnected relationships of all beings in the world, a perspective that runs

---

<sup>79</sup> Alfred, *Wasáse*, 46.

<sup>80</sup> Richard JF Day, ‘From Hegemony to Affinity: The Political Logic of the Newest Social Movements,’ *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 5: 740. On these notions of radical subjectivity, see also Richard J.F. Day and Adam Lewis, ‘Radical Subjectivity and the N-Row Wampum,’ in R.W. Tafarodi (ed.), *Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). 169–89.

<sup>81</sup> Richard J.F. Day, *Gramsci Is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 196.

<sup>82</sup> Richard E. Atleo (Umeek), *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2004).

through Indigenous political theory as well with the connection of all the relations of the environment.<sup>83</sup> This is one of the connections that (anarchist) settlers have lost, and one of the primary differences between worldviews, philosophies and political theories of settlers and Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples have maintained their relationships to land and the natural world as central to their epistemologies.<sup>84</sup> This is a current that runs through the works of Alfred, Simpson and Coulthard discussed above. As Coulthard argues:

the theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism ... is best understood as struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around *the question of land* (a struggle not only for land in the material sense but also deeply informed by what the land as a complex system of reciprocal relations and obligations can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms) and less around our emergent status as 'rightless proletarians' [as might be the case in Western left political terms].<sup>85</sup>

Such a holistic physical and spiritual relationship to the natural world, like that of Indigenous peoples, has not been cultivated on account of settlers having lost previous connections to the lands of their original continents.<sup>86</sup> Settlers lack the epistemological and ontological groundings in land and relations with land that characterize Indigenous worldviews. Whether settlers could develop such connections is entirely another matter. If settlers are to move towards decolonization and interrogate how the occupation of land is connected to colonial domination and colonial privilege, the current disconnection from land needs to be examined.

Since we cannot take up processes of settler Indigenization, as I discussed above, the implications of engaging with the complexities of relations to land need to be directed by Indigenous peoples themselves. Settlers need to develop relations with local Indigenous nations and defer explicitly to Indigenous ways of living with the land. Perhaps through this form of relating settlers might be able to gain at least a partial glimpse, or appreciation, for the land beyond merely the physical realm. In the interim settlers must recognize the histories of the lands that we occupy and the laws and political structures of Indigenous nations that continue to relate to them to this day.

Land explicitly came to the fore with the recent Occupy movement, as an example of a movement that attempted to employ prefigurative politics. Indigenous peoples were quick to point out the colonial occupation of land and the contradictions inherent in a movement calling for 'occupation.' This inattention and ignorance of colonial realities is perhaps indicative of a broader

---

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009) and Glen Coulthard, 'Place Against Empire: Understanding Indigenous Anti-colonialism,' *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action* 4, no. 2 (2010): 79–83.

<sup>84</sup> Marie Battiste, ed., *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002).

<sup>85</sup> Coulthard, 'From Wards of the State to Subjects of Recognition?,' 62.

<sup>86</sup> Robinder Kaur Sehdev, 'Lessons from the Bridge: On the Possibilities of Anti-racist Feminist Alliances in Indigenous Spaces,' in *This Is an Honour Song: Twenty Years since the Blockades*, ed. Leanne Simpson and Kiera Ladner (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2010), 105–24.

ignorance within social movement and anarchist theory and practice,<sup>87</sup> and points to the continuance of settler colonial relations.

Adam Barker argues that the general character of the Occupy encampments ‘co-opt[ed] the power of place’ that removed Indigenous communities from the context and actively reinscribed settler colonialism.<sup>88</sup> Doing so, Occupy served as ‘another settler colonial dynamic participating in the transfer of land and space to the hands of the settler colonial majority.’<sup>89</sup> Sandy Grande argues that Occupy performed an ‘accumulation of the primitive,’ that echoes settler colonial assimilation and removal by seeking to absorb Indigenous peoples into a liberal project of general inclusion.<sup>90</sup> Stated differently, participation within such a movement became ‘contingent on abandoning fundamental aspects of indigeneity’ in place of a generalized 99% vs. 1%.<sup>91</sup>

Ultimately, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>92</sup> looking at the case of Occupy as a microcosm of attempts to prefigure alternative futures in the here and now shows a profound lack of attention to the context of settler colonialism. The Occupy movement, in name and aims, replicated the settler colonial myth of terra nullius, in favour of more generalized dissent and resistance to capitalism. While not specifically anarchist, the Occupy movement shares many anarchist methods and should serve as a caution to all movements employing prefigurative politics without a grounding in the context of settler colonialism and Indigenous resistance.

As Richard Day argues, as soon as we begin to purchase and accumulate land on which to set up our own autonomous alternatives outside the state, as soon as we begin to create physical infrastructures of resistance, we begin to repeat the logics of colonialism. He summarizes that ‘it would appear that the resurgence of settler autonomy, our escape from the tyrannies we have foisted on ourselves, once again can only come on the backs of Indigenous peoples.’<sup>93</sup> At any rate our prefigurative experiments need to take stock of the context of stolen lands, and forge relationships with the Indigenous communities seeking resurgence on such lands. Otherwise our experiments continue to be predicated on land that was accrued through theft, violence, dispossession and colonialism.

One step forward might be to develop a ‘felt history’ that is grounded in our relations to others and the land. It is a history that is alive, not relegated to the past: a history that is more about relations than the chronological ordering of events.<sup>94</sup> The reconnection to land, as the basis for all other forms of relating and as that which sustains communities, is important to ground struggles in their intimate contexts. Reconnecting to land also means a move away from the commodification of land, private property relationships and continued attempts of primitive

---

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Adam Barker, ‘Already Occupied: Indigenous Peoples, Settler Colonialism and the Occupy Movements in North America,’ *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 11, no. 3–4 (2012): 327–34.

<sup>88</sup> Barker, ‘Already Occupied,’ 4.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>90</sup> Sandy Grande, ‘Accumulation of the Primitive: The Limits of Liberalism and the Politics of Occupy Wall Street,’ *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3–04 (2013): 370.

<sup>91</sup> Barker, ‘Already Occupied,’ 5.

<sup>92</sup> Lewis, ‘Anarchy, Space, and Indigenous Resistance.’

<sup>93</sup> Day, ‘Angry Indians, Settler Guilt and the Challenges of Decolonization and Resurgence,’ 268.

<sup>94</sup> Sheila Gruner, ‘Learning Relations and Grounding Solidarity: A Critical Approach to Honouring Struggle,’ in *This Is an Honour Song: Twenty Years since the Blockades*, ed. Leanne Simpson and Kiera Ladner (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2010), 91–104.

accumulation predicated on the supremacy of hierarchical economic relationships mediated by the state.

Reconnecting with place and landbases and renewing ethical obligations to living in relation to the land might form a crucial part of already occurring Indigenous resurgence, and is one means of orienting settler accountability to Indigenous struggles. Coulthard argues that 'Place is a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating to the world – and these ways of knowing guide forms of resistance to power relations that threaten to erase or destroy [Indigenous peoples'] senses of place.'<sup>95</sup> For settlers, and many migrants, developing relationships with the Indigenous communities in whose territory we live and work is a necessary step to begin to become accountable to ethical and renewed relationships to land and place. As a very basic starting point all peoples need to learn the history of the land on which they live and contextualize that colonial history within the current social movements and efforts at resistance.

Settlers thus need to move towards the decolonization and 'unsettling' of themselves and the decolonization of their relationships to land.<sup>96</sup> Settlers need to recognize that colonialism functions at a multiplicity of levels – within ourselves, our communities, our economic relations, our governance structures, our education systems and so forth. We need to consider, as Ramnath argues and as anarchists on stolen lands, how we might '[work] on all these levels in addition to (but not instead of) tackling capitalism and the state, without reducing the struggle to either the material or ideological/discursive plane.'<sup>97</sup> Decolonization will mean creating new forms of relationships with Indigenous peoples with specific deference to Indigenous laws and political structures. Decolonial futures will need to be on localized Indigenous terms, rather than a settler creation. Decolonization is first and foremost an Indigenous project, though one that should be supported in earnest by settlers, and will need to be considered in specifically settler terms as well. Settlers might consider the histories of the lands they are on, the Indigenous resurgence projects that continue to exist on such lands, the way that we frame effective political resistance, and the context of struggle that we prioritize.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have aimed to detail how anarchists might specifically and carefully consider the context of settler colonialism and Indigenous resurgence. Settler colonialism is a structure that narrates context of resistance in North America, but is not without the continued resistance and resurgence of Indigenous communities. While anarchists bring the notion of prefiguration to the forefront of social movements and begin to imagine a future society in the here and now, settler colonialism as a necessary context that structures resistance has been largely ignored. Settler colonial studies might assist in moving towards more specific analysis of settler colonial structures and their implications, but must also be linked with Indigenous resurgence projects. As Snelgrove et al. argue, in a general sense, '[d]econtextualized conceptions of settler colonial studies, "settler", and solidarity risk further eschewing Indigenous peoples and thereby reifying the stolen land each of the above is founded on.'<sup>98</sup> Detailing the context of settler colonialism and

---

<sup>95</sup> Coulthard, 'Place Against Empire,' 79.

<sup>96</sup> Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>97</sup> Ramnath, *Decolonizing Anarchism*, 27.

<sup>98</sup> Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Cornthassel, 'Unsettling Settler Colonialism,' 26.

its connections to other forms of oppression and domination is insufficient itself without direct relations with Indigenous peoples.

Settlers, and anarchists in particular, need to actively resist settler colonialism, while supporting Indigenous struggles and resurgence projects that we might be accountable to in the future. Prefiguration, as an oft cited anarchist project, needs to be reframed in Indigenous terms, with settler deferrals to Indigenous political systems and laws. As suggested by Coulthard above Indigenous resurgence is itself prefigurative, and a place for anarchists, and social movements writ large, to defer to.

## **Acknowledgements**

Heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the anonymous reviewers and to Jeff Denis and Lynne Davis for their extensive and helpful feedback. This paper is based partially on one of the same name presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Sociological Association at Congress 2015. I would like to thank the participants in this session for their helpful comments and questions. This article draws as well from the chapter 'Toward an Intersection of Feminist Resistance: Anarcha-Feminism, Indigenous Feminism and the Development of Anarcha-Indigenism' from my 2012 Master's Thesis: Adam Lewis, 'Decolonizing Anarchism: Expanding Anarcha-Indigenism in Theory and Practice,' MA Thesis, Cultural Studies, Queens University, 2012.

## **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## **Notes on contributor**

*Adam Gary Lewis* is a settler anarchist of Welsh, Scottish, Irish and English heritage working towards settler decolonization and 'unsettling' in social movement and academic contexts. He is working on a Ph.D. at York University in Environmental Studies on anarchist engagements with Indigenous struggles of resistance. He lives in Kitchener, Ontario (Haldimand Tract-Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, Haudenosaunee, Neutral and Anishinaabe lands).

## **Funding**

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council through a Doctoral Fellowship while preparing this paper.

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Adam Gary Lewis  
Imagining autonomy on stolen land  
settler colonialism, anarchism and the possibilities of decolonization?  
2017

*Settler Colonial Studies*, Volume 7, 2017 — Issue 4: Pathways to Settler Decolonisation.

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**