

Radicalizing Relationships To and Through Shared Geographies: Why Anarchists Need to Understand Indigenous Connections to Land and Place

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Abstract: Indigenous activists and anarchist Settler people are articulating common ground in opposition to imperialism and colonialism. However, many anarchists have faced difficulties in Indigenous solidarity work through unintentional (often unwitting) transgressions and appropriations. Through the introduction of settler colonialism as a complicating power dynamic, we observe that anarchists bring unconscious spatial perceptions into their solidarity work. Further, Indigenous activists often perceive anarchists as Settler people first and foremost, which carries another set of spatial implications. We examine a number of examples of anarchist and Indigenous activism, at times empowering and at times conflictual, in order to reveal some general trends. Through an intensive synthesis of Indigenous peoples' theories and articulations of place-based relationships, we suggest that deeper understandings of these relationships can be of great importance in approaching solidarity work in place and with respect.

Keywords: anarchism, indigeneity, relationships, place, settler colonialism

Introduction

We are all life forms. If nature goes down, we go down with it, because we are only one part of that life form. But we have been given the responsibility at the beginning of the world to be grateful for what we have, and for the earth. We have the understanding and we have the attitude, but it's hard to practise the way we live today. We cannot go to the river to drink from it anymore; therefore, our relationship with the river is now changed. Our relationship to everything in the world is now changed. And we have to teach our children to invent new ways of looking at things.

Swamp (2010:20)

Anarchists and Indigenous peoples' movements have been, and are increasingly coming into, contact in Canada and the United States. Primarily through the dynamics of radical politics, Indigenous activists and anarchist Settler people are articulating common ground in opposition to imperialism and colonialism. However, many anarchists have faced difficulties in Indigenous solidarity work through unintentional (often unwitting) transgressions and appropriations. Many more simply lack the experience of working in solidarity in place with Indigenous peoples, required to understand Indigenous politics and governance, heterogeneity

and aspirations, or perceptions of settler colonialism and decolonization. In this paper, we complicate assumed-affinities between anarchist and Indigenous politics and political movements. Through the introduction of settler colonialism as a complicating power dynamic, we observe that anarchists bring unconscious spatial perceptions into their activism. Further, Indigenous activists often perceive anarchists as settler colonisers first and foremost. We examine a number of examples of anarchist and Indigenous activism, at times empowering and at times conflictual, in order to reveal some general trends. Deeper understandings of Indigenous peoples' place-based relationships can be of great importance in approaching solidarity work in place and with respect. Although prescriptive conclusions would be inappropriate, we close with our own thoughts on important techniques and approaches for building solidarity across colonial differences.

As Kanienkehaka (Mohawk) political theorist Taiaiake Alfred presciently observes, the anarcho-indigenous ethic of cooperative alliance and principled movement "has yet to develop into a coherent philosophy" (Alfred 2005:46). Yet, there is reason to believe that anarchism and Indigenism are discourses increasingly occurring in the same or similar spaces, at times in conflict with each other, but with enough resonance to suggest the need for continued, deepened engagement. In academic spaces, these discourses have begun to be textually combined: a recent special edition of the journal *Affinities* focused on anarchism and Indigenism (Day 2011); an article in the journal *Signs* examined solidarity across difference between anarchists and Indigenous activists in Montreal (Lagalis 2011); and Alfred and anarchist sociologist Richard Day wrote popular and contentious complementary works (Alfred 2005; Day 2005) that articulated resonances between anarchist activism and Indigenous resurgence. Meanwhile, in spaces of activism and social change, anarchist and Indigenous discourses have been interacting for many years, often invisible outside of direct personal involvement.

Anarchist and Indigenous peoples' movements do have a great deal in common. They share the goal of creating decolonized societies, defined by the mutual sharing of place, maintenance of social-spatial organizations commensurate with their respective cultures, and mediated through respectful protocols designed to maintain alliances across, rather than in spite of, difference. However, these lofty and commonly held goals (Ferguson 2011:103–106) are frequently sabotaged by taken-for-granted spatial perceptions with major impacts on the practices and processes of pursuing decolonization. For as much as it is commonly understood that decolonization is a place-based process, an attempt to counter centuries of settler colonial usurpation of Indigenous lands, there remains a lack of engagement with colonization as a highly spatial process.

The starting point of this process is an explicit recognition that Indigenous conceptions of place are important. Accepting this place-based ethics enables a clear recognition of the settler colonial society's dependence on the continued dispossession of Indigenous land and place. Failing to recognize this can lead to potentially transformative social movements actually reproducing the very structures of colonial domination they are often seeking to oppose. Moreover, Indigenous knowledge, practised in relation to land and place, offers a necessary challenge to settler colonial values by espousing mutual care, obligation and reciprocal relations

of responsibility between human and non-human life, which are arguably necessary to sustain our future. Much existing work that explores how coalitions that form across difference (such as Rose 2000) exclude consideration of Indigenous people's space and place. Moreover there is an absence of work from Indigenous perspectives about the challenges of working with anarchists. This paper explores why there are not better alliances between these groups and what needs to be done—particularly by non-Indigenous or Settler activists—to enable more collaborative and supportive processes of working together.

Given the heterogeneity of both Indigenous and anarchist groups, and our insistence on geographic understanding and specificity, it is impossible to search for answers that will apply everywhere equally. This paper concerns itself with conditions in the “northern bloc” of settler colonialism, roughly the area (at present) claimed by the Canadian and American states. This space is the stage for intertwined discourses of settler colonialism, social “Settler” identity development, Indigenous resistance to colonization, and radical politics. At different scales these discourses interact in a variety of ways, but with the general effect of creating a territorial “assemblage” (Anderson and McFarlane 2011) of practices of power and traditions of resistance. Further, some Indigenous peoples have articulated practices in place and through spaces in generally common ways across the northern bloc (see for example Deloria 2003; Jojola 2004; Little Bear 2004). So, while remaining cognoscente of the importance of specific Indigenous peoples' relations to place (see below), we begin by establishing this space as the geographical limit of our discussion.

As activist-academics influenced by anarchist thought, who have been fortunate to work with Indigenous communities as part of decolonising struggles, we are connected to this work. In our own experiences, we have been party to many anecdotes and stories over the years that have indicated the potential—but also the ongoing problems—of Indigenous-anarchist alliance building. As such, parts of this article are based on our interactions with a variety of activist communities; it is impossible to separate the academic and the personal in this research. We also recognize that we ourselves are not homogenous; we identify ourselves differently. As a white, male, Settler Canadian who identifies as an anarchist, and whose experiences of Indigenous solidarity work are situated in Haudenosaunee and Coast Salish territories spanning the Canadian–USA border (author 1), and a white, English woman who identifies with autonomous activism and has had the privilege of engaging with Indigenous Aboriginal Australians (author 2), our experiences of anarchism, indigeneity and place are varied. Yet, in our discussions we have repeatedly discovered deep commonalities and resonances between our experiences and the understandings that have resulted from them, indicating the possibility for us to (carefully) generalize on these experiences and understandings.

We do not (neither could nor would) speak for all anarchists, and do not intend to speak for any Indigenous peoples; rather we intend to speak as geographers and social activists to a broad cross-section of geographically informed activists concerned with the way that relationships to place and space can enhance or frustrate diverse struggles for freedom. We speak from an informed anarchist perspective and seek to combine academic concerns with those of the activist practitioner (Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010).

We begin by defining the key categories dealt with in this article—anarchist and Indigenous—in the context of settler colonialism. The different understandings of space and place used by these groups are then explored in order to outline what a shared geography might entail. Using examples of existing attempts at alliances and acts of solidarity we illustrate the diverse and problematic spatial practices of anarchist activists so far and conclude by suggesting some ways in which anarchists could overcome these difficulties by paying greater respect to Indigenous understandings of land and place.

Defining Difference

Relationships to land and place cut across “anarchist” and “Indigenous” identities in spaces of activism through the identities of “Settler” and “Indigenous”. These act as a non-discrete non-binary dual (Waters 2004) that exerts continued effects upon solidarity across difference. Anarchists in the northern bloc often cannot escape the identification and corresponding social privileges of being a Settler person, even as they seek to dismantle colonial structures of privilege. Similarly, Indigenous peoples reasserting Indigenous identities are confronted by continuously colonising, invasive, heterogeneous Settler societies; while some Settler people may radically confront colonial power, the majority legitimate and benefit from it. This raises complicated questions for activists pursuing solidarity across difference.

Anarchist Activists

Throughout this article, we make reference to anarchist scholars and activists; this is not meant to restrictively reference only those who explicitly identify as anarchists. Following Gordon’s (2007:12–14) observation that many individuals and communities inspired by anarchist thought reject labels—including “anarchist”—for principled and ethical reasons, and Day’s (2005) articulation of “anarchistic” social movements which deploy anarchist analyses and methods of organization and action, our use of the term should be considered as broadly as possible. We do draw several distinctions: not included are “anarchist capitalists” in the American tradition, or other right-wing “rugged individualist” traditions that claim anarchist genealogy. These do not rely on critiques of hierarchy that bring other anarchists into opposition to imperialism and colonialism, nor do they respect collective and community will, essential to alliances with Indigenous peoples.

We construct anarchism as a complex mixture of tactics and ideology, wherein there is no such thing as “pure” anarchism. Much of the practiced anarchism discussed here can be aligned with autonomous activism. Autonomous activism includes those who believe in “a questioning of the laws and social norms of society and a creative desire to constitute non-capitalist, collective forms of politics, identity, and citizenship” (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006:1). Within this broad, autonomous field, we do recognize that anarchists must enact multiple identities, often creating paradoxical or invisible clashes between identities (see below on settler colonialism).

Indigenous Peoples

“Indigenous” remains a contested term, in no small part because it is the imposition of colonial domination and dispossession that renders an Indigenous collectivity or commonality across diverse places visible. We draw on Alfred and Cornthassel’s (2005:597) articulation of Indigenous identity as founded on an “oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples”. Niezen (2003), among others, has argued that commonalities generally exist between diverse Indigenous traditions. Among these are intimate relationships to the places anchoring Indigenous identities, expressed through imperatives of respectful coexistence with the elements of place (further, see Holm’s “peoplehood” concept in: Holm, Pearson and Chavis 2003; Cornthassel 2003).

To attempt definition of “Indigenous” “creates a tangle of ambiguities” (Johnson and Murton 2007:127) and produces a result both problematic and partial. This ambiguous bind is “Often applied to those with connections to pre-colonial lands who were then subsumed and dispossessed by colonising powers, [and] its definitional boundaries are contested and fluid” (Pickerill 2009:67). We accept that there is “interdependence, a mutual responsibility that flows in all directions from Indigenous/non-Indigenous interactions which upsets the colonial stereotype and acknowledges the agency and power of Indigenous” peoples (Pickerill 2009:67). Indeed this paper is based on this sense of responsibility.

Settler Colonialism

The growing understanding of the dynamics of colonial power in settler societies impacts anarchists concerned with anti-imperial, anti-colonial politics, and Indigenous peoples concerned with questions of freedom and cultural survival. Alfred describes the northern bloc settler colonial context as a “spiritual and psychological war of genocide and survival” and poses this important question:

If we contrast this current turn of empire, represented by spiritual and cultural annihilation and the denial of authenticity, with the classic imperial strategy of brutal physical dispersion and dispossession, which often left the spiritual and cultural core of the surviving imperial subjects intact, could we with any certainty say which form of imperialism is more evil or effective in killing off nations in the long term? (Alfred 2005:128).

Here also is the bind for Settler activists in the northern bloc: as much as anarchist Settler people occupy different conceptual spaces from non-radicalized Settler people, the dualistic divide between Settler and Indigenous identities remains. Well meaning anarchist Settler people may transgress in Indigenous conceptual space, ignorant of the dynamics of “personal terror” that “invariably infuses these relations” (Scott 1990:xi).

Colonization, most especially settler colonization, has not and does not rely simply on the crude swapping of one people for another in place¹; rather, entire ways of being in place, of perceiving spaces, underlie the colonial project. Were settler colonization simply about occupation, decolonization would involve primarily

the reversal of colonial settlement: the removal of Settler societies and the “replacement” of Indigenous societies in their homelands. Such a course of action is not only simplistic; it is also unlikely to succeed. Further, it clashes with anarchistic ethics of “autonomous geographies” (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006) and Indigenous traditions of alliance and generosity (Sherman 2010:114–115). So, what does decolonization of a settler colonial society look like? How does a decolonized Settler identity relate to Indigenous peoples’ places? Answering these questions should be a primary goal of anarchist Settlers pursuing Indigenous solidarity; however, the pursuit is not so simple.

While the heterogeneous makeup of anarchists involves an array of other discourses—race, class; tactics, ethics—in this discussion, anarchists in Settler societies remain largely, however ambiguously, connected to dynamics of settler colonialism. Anarchist methods often involve the formation of collectives that assert a differential autonomous capacity against centres of power involving the state and capital. However, this method is symmetrical with the historical settler colonization of the northern bloc, “characterised by a pattern of self-constituting local jurisdictions contesting the established claims of seaboard centres of power” (Veracini 2010:62). Veracini locates conceptual separation “at the origin of the settler project, the moment when a collective body ‘moves out’ in order to bring into effect an autonomous political will” (63). For anarchists, this separation is political rather than physical, but the colonial dynamic remains the same.

This common foundational basis opens the possibility of well-meaning Settler anarchists appropriating Indigenous thought, symbolism and language of resistance into settler colonial discourses through “modernist ‘affinity’” and “post-modern quotation” (Haig-Brown 2010:930). This constitutes a kind of narrative transfer wherein “a radical discontinuity within the settler body politic is emphasised, and references to its ‘postcolonial status’ are made” (Veracini 2010:42). This type of narrative transfer can support denials of responsibility (“I cannot be colonial because I fight the state!”), or the collapse of indigenous autonomy into a “multicultural” or other “fair” social arrangement (43).

Given the persistence of the “first discourse”—the discourse of Settler peoples—and the difficulty and complexity of learning (without appropriating) Indigenous discourses (Haig-Brown 2010:932–935), it is no surprise that settler colonial dynamics continue to subtly inform even anarchist and other “radically democratic” (Veracini 2010:63) settler collectives. The multiple institutions of privilege operating in Settler society often confer, without consent, colonial privilege on Settler people (including anarchists) unattainable by Indigenous peoples. For example, whiteness has been shown to operate in Canadian “multicultural” society in ways that continue to privilege whiteness above all racialized identities, Indigeneity included (O’Connell 2010; Shaw 2006). Meanwhile, institutions of patriarchy and intolerant secularism can be shown to be at work even inside anarchist organizations engaging with Indigenous peoples (Lagalis 2011), demonstrating that anarchist analysis alone is not protection against participation in dominating power dynamics.

Space, Place and Shared Geographies

Given these complex dynamics of settler colonialism, understanding colonial space and place is crucial for envisioning decolonising alliances. As such, it is necessary to disentangle the various perceptions of place and space interacting within, and across, settler colonial dynamics.

Colonial Impacts on Perceptions of Place

Indigenous understandings of place have generated criticism of many aspects of society in the northern bloc: Christian theology's influence on political and economic colonial practice (Deloria 2003); the concept of "sovereignty" and the state system (Alfred 2006); constitutionalism as a method of governmental organization (Tully 1995; 2000); capitalism and relationships under a capitalist system (Adams 1989:17); language and culture (Basso 1996) and many other understandings of place, space, nature, and human relationships. Indigenous relationships to place fundamentally challenge colonial spatial concepts, from the ways that we move from place to place and through spaces (Pandya 1990) to how we move through time (Jojola 2004). Indeed Coulthard (2010:79) asserts that for Indigenous people place is central to understandings of life, whereas "most Western societies . . . derive meaning from the world in historical/developmental terms, thereby placing *time* as the narrative of central importance".

Historically, EuroAmerican cultures conceived of human relations to the environment in one of two ways, which John Rennie Short labels the "classical and romantic" (Short 1991:6): either "natural" places are improved through development and human spatial creation and use (with "wilderness" as a frightening, exterior "other"), or despoiled through human contact and change (with the natural environment as a pristine and perfect spatial concept, and the suggestion that human identity must be bounded within it). Both conceptually marginalize or fully erase Indigenous presence in place.

Contra this erasure, Indigenous peoples' understandings of place have become important to the understanding of colonial geographies and the efforts of anti-colonial activists.² Indigenous peoples have traditionally related to place through spatially stretched and dynamic networks of relationships (Cajete 2004; Johnson and Murton 2007). These networks bear some resemblance to Sarah Whatmore's concept of hybrid geography, "which recognizes agency as a relational achievement, involving the creative presence of organic beings, technological devices and discursive codes, as well as people, in the fabrics of everyday living" (Whatmore 1999:26). Through these, Indigenous peoples have challenged the classical/romantic dichotomy that continues to haunt some aspects of anarchist spatial perceptions. For Indigenous peoples, place holistically encapsulates networks of relations between humans, features of the land, non-human animals, and living beings perceived as spirits or non-physical entities. All of these—humans included—are understood to have autonomy and will, but also obligation and responsibility to all of the other elements to which they are related and among whom they are situated. As such, we acknowledge that land and place are different to each other but seek to use the way they are interrelated throughout this article. Although land can

be considered as material, its meaning is constantly interwoven into the relationality of place so that land is often taken to have multiple meanings beyond its simple materiality—as a resource, as identity and as relationship (Coulthard 2010).

Indigenous peoples assaulted by settler colonization have and continue to face concerted attempts to break Indigenous connections to place. Religious conversion, for example, has had a massive impact on the ways that Indigenous peoples perceive the spaces occupied by spirit and otherwise metaphysical beings. Though no longer considered “tantamount to a complete transformation of cultural identity” (Axtell 1981:42), conversion to and participation in hierarchical-organized, spatially dislocated, and temporally defined Judeo-Christian religions (Deloria 2003:62–77) encouraged Indigenous peoples to see the spiritual as something above (literally) and beyond the direct contact of the human world.

The general result is displacement and dislocation. Indigenous peoples are displaced from their relational networks by introduced relationships that increasingly reorient Indigenous social organization towards colonial authority. Indigenous places are dislocated in the sense that the knowledge of and relationship to them, essential for generating spatial meaning in Indigenous contexts, is marginalized or over-written. This creates observable “cultural blanks” (Little Bear 2000) among Indigenous youth; Settler peoples, conversely, fill corresponding blanks that result from traditions that fit incompletely with changed/changing geographies (Harris 2004) with myths of peaceful expansion, cultural superiority, and frontier valour (Regan 2010).

Chris Gibson (1999), in discussing Australian settler colonialism, warns against over-focusing on cultural colonization; it is important to note that the economics of settler colonization also depend on displacement and dislocation. While some Indigenous peoples benefitted from trade relations with colonial agents, the networks of capitalist dominance and exploitation intensified through settler colonization eventually forced many Indigenous individuals to choose between a waged economy that denied opportunities to connect to place and fulfil communal responsibilities, or poverty in the circumscribed spaces of the reserve (Harris 2002:285–289). Many Indigenous scholars, activists, and community members have recognized that dislocation from place and disconnection from spatial networks of relations undermine Indigenous identities (Alfred 2009:28; Little Bear 2004); this has led to calls for Indigenous peoples to reassert connections to place and reinvigorate relational networks. As Holm et al note, even Indigenous peoples dislocated from their traditional homelands can and do rely on relational networks and stories of “lost sacred lands” to maintain their identities and community cohesion (Holm, Pearson and Chavis 2003:14). Settler colonization continues to target these connections—and by extension Indigenous being in the sense described by Alfred and Corntassel—for erasure.

Anarchist Concepts of Place and Space

Anarchist analyses have significantly impacted methods of understanding and perceiving place and space; anarchist analyses of hierarchy and power have broadly influenced the ways that academics articulate ties between social organization and

the potential for horizontalist, egalitarian communities. However, not all anarchist thought has escaped the problematic basis of spatial perception that enables colonial imposition. Consider Short's dichotomy (see above); to some extent, anarchist analyses have historically followed these classical/romantic distinctions. Witness the (now somewhat naïve) technological positivism of Kropotkin (1972:41–42), or the critical pessimism of anarcho-primitivists (Antliff 2005:272–282).³ However, anarchist praxis have also led to a reimagination of possibilities for social organization and, consequently, opened avenues to create forms of social and political organization designed to defy domination.

One possibility that must be discussed here is broadly encompassed under the rubric of autonomous zones. For anarchist Settlers, the identification and construction of these spaces is a particular challenge; the spatialities of settler colonialism depend on the erasure of Indigenous peoples and spatial networks from place, making a decolonized autonomous zone difficult to realize. Decolonization can confound anarchist spatial practices because it is a process that requires particular de/construction; Indigenous spaces may be invisible to or impossible to construct by those lacking Indigenous knowledge of place, a problematic we will return to.

Spatial Practices of Solidarity, Responsibility and Decolonization

Anarchist spatial practices tend to approach alliances with Indigenous groups much as they do alliances with other groups and communities—including other anarchist individuals and collectives—through the creation of solidarity networks, affinity groups and the support of anti-racist, anti-capitalist politics generally. This, sadly, has the potential to further reinforce the perception of anarchism as a “one size fits all” solution. We explore some examples of attempts at alliances below.

Problematic “Support” for Indigenous Causes

Indigenous peoples, meanwhile, experience frustrations with respect to anarchist and other Settler activists. After the anti-G20 protests in Toronto, Ontario (17–27 June 2010), we heard anecdotal expressions of frustration from Indigenous activists (Taillefer 6 July 2010, among others) who felt that their struggles, foundational to the existence of unequal and oppressive Settler states, were being subsumed under “sexier” issues popular among alter-globalization movements (neoliberalism and poverty; surveillance and criminalization of dissent; opposition to war and military adventurism). They resented that Indigenous deprivation was conceptualized as another form of poverty resulting from neoliberal capitalism, with little understanding of the complexities of settler colonialism and loss of land that predate and, in many cases, enable capitalist exploitations. There were similar frustrations that activists of many kinds were incensed at the brutal mass arrest and detention of Settler and non-Indigenous activists, given decades of paramilitary abuse of Indigenous peoples (Smith 2009), vast overrepresentation of Indigenous

people in prisons (Gordon 2006), and relative silences on the disappearance and/or murder of Indigenous women (Schatz 2010: 12–13).

These frustrations are connected to a history of subtle but highly affective misinterpretations of Indigenous ways of knowing and being among activists of various affiliations; for example, the deployment of the trope of the historical “ecological Indian” by activists who do not give equal attention to the struggles for freedom being undertaken by real, living Indigenous peoples. Erica Michelle Lagalisse has identified deep-seated issues among anarchist collectives in Montreal that prevented effective Indigenous–Settler alliance building. Lagalisse has observed two dynamics of note:

a secular worldview compromises anarchist activists’ ability to engage in horizontal solidarity across difference. The same tale also serves to illustrate another aspect of anarchist activist praxis . . . anarchists’ lack of engagement with gendered power within activist collectives and the gendered aspect of neoliberal political economy (Lagalisse 2011:653).

In the same way that women of colour have challenged the precepts of feminism (for an important crossover between this and Indigenous activism, see Trask 1996), Indigenous communities often feel that they must fight well intentioned activists who they see as having a “one size fits all” solution to ongoing colonial oppression. Indigenous peoples have been badly let down by “radical” activists in the past, especially by environmental groups who, while willing to fight corporate resource extraction, either refused or were unable to differentiate between these practices and Indigenous use of resources in their own lands (Pickerill 2009:74–75).⁴

Difference and Respectful Engagement

Clearly, issues of who speaks, who hears, and how speaking and listening are conducted remain significant barriers. Anarchist activists have at times had difficulty connecting to Indigenous communities (especially those outside of urban centres, a spatial division we will return to) which seem to rely on unfamiliar social and cultural vernaculars; it is very easy to give offense, violate protocols, or misinterpret cultural signifiers. At times, the fear of conflicts causes problems in itself, with hesitation breeding inappropriate levels of deference. Perhaps these vernaculars can never be understood by Settlers, anarchist or not. However, difference itself is important to understanding “the significance and implications of who is speaking and who is listening” which “has the potential to and does effect real harm for indigenous people, their ancestors, and descendants” (Haig-Brown 2010:931). The practical complication for many anarchists is an inability to know how to respectfully engage with Indigenous activists or communities. Conceptual divides are exacerbated by physical divides; Indigenous and settler spaces are often circumscribed (Dean 2010; Harris 2004; Schatz 2010), and many anarchist activists do not have the opportunity to interact with Indigenous people in place prior to seeking or claiming solidarity.

The “dislocation” of Indigenous peoples from place—which is to say the rupturing of relational networks in particular places and prevention of new relational networks from being generated—can be seen as being at the root of many conflicts within

Indigenous communities. This impacts directly on the efforts of anarchist activists seeking to ally with Indigenous peoples. Anarchists must not only contend with their own preconceived spaces, they must be aware that in entering Indigenous spaces and attempting to understand Indigenous relationships to place, there is the very real potential of failure to find common ground, or worse, to do harm.

Relational Moments

Despite conflicts and problems, Indigenous communities have not rejected anarchistic alliances wholesale or refused to cooperate with activists employing anarchist tactics. On the contrary, recent publications based on experiences of solidarity organising across difference have called for further engagement between Indigenous communities and anarchist activists (Alfred 2005; Goodyear-Kaōpua 2011, Lasky 2011). Lagalisse asserts that “Anarchoindigenism may carry within it the potential for a critically engaged conversation across difference but only if the universalisms of anarchism and indigenism are constantly reformulated through dialogue” (Lagalisse 2011:674). The potential for Indigenous–anarchist alliances in the northern bloc only dissipates when dialogues between anarchist Settler people and Indigenous activists cease.

There are particular cases and scenarios in which Indigenous and anarchist activists have participated with each other in productive, “anarcho-indigenous” ways. Though not free from conflict, these relational moments are telling. Noelani Goodyear-Kaōpua relates two types of shared actions between Indigenous and Settler activists in Hawaii centred around Hawaiian concepts “kuleana (authority and obligation based in interdependence and community) and lāhui (peoplehood)” (Goodyear-Kaōpua 2011:131), and based in the experiences of a joint coalition for Hawaiian independence called “called Hui Pū (to join together)”, which “shed light on the tensions around indigeneity and Hawaiianness in contemporary activist and academic discourse” (136). The coalition led to many promising, important shifts in activist dynamics in Hawaii, including a rejection of state-based politics of demand, and the understanding that “denial of Hawaiian sovereignty under US occupation has not been equally detrimental to all descendants of Hawaiian Kingdom subjects, which included people of various ethnicities” (142). Indigenous and Settler Hawaiians participated together in a ceremony designed to foreground the importance of and connection to place that is core to Hawaiian culture (145). This joint participation shows some effect in confronting settler colonial privilege and revealing potential in Indigenous–anarchist cooperative actions.

Increasingly, discourses like this are becoming more visible as they are worked out in public spaces, such as the Hawaiian “Ho‘ā ‘Ākoako” action (145), but also the highly visible and contentious Six Nations land reclamation (Day and Haberle 2006).

Sharing Methods and Approaches

Anarchist and Indigenous peoples also demonstrate some resonances between their methods and approaches. Anarchist organization is most often identified by

insistence upon preconfiguration and, by extension, cooperative and horizontal decision-making processes (Gordon 2007:14–17). Indigenous peoples' resistance to colonization has, similarly, often been predicated on collective organization; Indigenous societies generally articulate and are seen as collective entities upon their land. Of course, Indigenous peoples' forms of collective occupation of place and anarchist anti-capitalism and socialism do not necessarily imply symmetry between respective political structures and social spaces. Indigenous societies are not "anarchist" *per se*.

Indigenous relationships to place are often articulated in terms of nationhood with specific governmental forms (Alfred 1995; Goodyear-Kaōpua 2011), which many anarchists may find problematic given anarchist opposition to nationalism and state structure. However, Indigenous legal and governance structures are remarkably different from those of the European states that anarchists have long opposed (Alfred 2006). The lack of coercive power in traditional Indigenous political structures circumvents many anarchist objections to government and nationhood. For Lasky (referencing Ward Churchill), "the political affinity between indigenous and anarchist activists is not surprising, because 'indigenism is an ancestor to anarchism' and the contemporary alliances being forged reflect anarchist elements in indigenous struggles for over 500 years" (Lasky 2011:13).

Autonomous Spaces

As discussed, anarchists have pursued alliances and cooperative relationships with Indigenous peoples and communities in a variety of ways; anarchists are often among the first to seek and declare solidarity with particular, situated Indigenous struggles, resulting in highly particularized political engagements, as well as more general expressions of solidarity. Large protest marches and summit gatherings often visibly feature Indigenous symbols carried by members of local and distant Indigenous communities alongside commonly recognized anarchistic symbology and action (Doxtater (Horn-Miller) 2010:97–98). One common spatial methods of pursuing cooperative relationships is through the creation of autonomous zones. Inspired by the autonomist Marxist Italian social centres and the creative, temporary possibilities apparent in large protests such as Seattle, when constructed in reference to Indigenous allies or imperial opponents, these spaces are imbued with explicit anti-colonial intents.

At the same time, it is extremely important to remember that at present many anarchists misunderstand Indigenous concerns through "the equation of 'egalitarian' and 'stateless'" (Lagalisse 2011:674). Indigenous peoples are not anarchists and anarchist practices do not *necessarily* lead to the creation of decolonized social relations. For example, autonomous zones generally are defined and bounded by difference vis-à-vis mainstream society. However, these differences are often articulated as differences between the ways the people in these spaces relate to each other: non-dominating, horizontalist, anti-capitalist, and so on. From the perspective of decolonization, they do not specifically counter the defining features of colonization—especially settler colonization—in that they do not depend on networks of relationships to place for meaning, imply obligations for occupants

with respect to the non-human world or restore Indigenous presence on and enhance relationships to the land. Equally they do not address the fact that, like colonial spaces of exploitation, Settler people can and do benefit disproportionately from occupying autonomous spaces. These spaces, whether bookstores or ad hoc meetings and rallies during mass protests, are often autonomous with respect to dominating state- and capital-bounded societies, while they are not *necessarily* responsible to underlying and pre-existing relational networks in place.

Moreover, there is a dissonance between the urban location of many of these autonomous zones and the rural location of many Indigenous communities. Despite ongoing efforts to assert Indigenous connection to urban land, many Indigenous people have had more success at reinvigorating relational networks to rural places. Thus there is a disjuncture in assumptions made by anarchists about urban spaces potentially offering more transformative possibilities, and the need to work with those who are located elsewhere, often in non-urban spaces.

Are these spaces “better” (less immersed in and contributing to networks of colonial power) than the openly colonial spaces of prisons, reserves, or strip mines? They often are, and one would suppose they should be; many anarchist spaces are used effectively to bring together diverse individuals and communities, and incubate or launch fruitful and powerful oppositional strikes against aspects of colonial society and for this they should be lauded. However, while many function as a tool for opposing *colonization* (as part of the hierarchical structuring of settler colonial societies), they are not by definition a means of establishing or implementing *decolonization*—a subtle but important difference. It is important here to keep clearly in mind a “traditional distinction” in colonial theory:

between “colonialism”, as exercised over colonised peoples, and “colonisation”, as exercised over a colonised land, for example . . . a long-lasting and recurring feature of settler colonial representations, and a trait that contributes significantly to remove settler colonialism from view. While this differentiation is premised on the systematic disavowal of any indigenous presence, recurrently representing “colonialism” as something done by someone else and “colonisation” as an act that is exercised exclusively over the land sustains fantasies of “pristine wilderness” and innocent “pioneering endeavour” (Veracini 2010:14).

For an effort to be truly decolonizing, the effort must seek to simultaneously address the dominating power being exercised over Indigenous individuals and communities, and also the power historically and currently directed to structure territory in such a way that Indigenous peoples are not able to tap into traditional relational networks. That can become a very wide ranging project: as Jake Swamp’s introductory remarks imply, changing the relationship to one element of place—a river—changes the relationships between all the elements of place, including Indigenous peoples.

Most attempts to create shared spaces of activism have not had the inspirational success of Goodyear-Kaōpua’s (2011) experiences. In fact, these and other “productive” alliances between Indigenous peoples often share a common feature: Settler allies joined an already-vibrant tradition of Indigenous resurgence with a clear connection to and specific concerns about place. Conflicts often arise in movements that, regardless of anti-colonial or anti-imperial rhetoric, have been generated

primarily by and for Settler societies, often without clear spatial understandings of histories of place and colonial dispossession. Conflicts have abounded primarily concerned not with activists' means and ends, but rather with basic attitudes and understandings of colonization and Indigeneity.

Being in Place Together

To overcome these barriers, anarchist activists need to alter their basic practices of solidarity and affinity with respect to Indigenous communities. It is often necessary to begin by pursuing deep understandings of place-based relationships, connections to governance and nationhood, as well as impacts of settler colonization on relational networks and implications for decolonization. Olson suggests that, with respect to communities of black Americans, anarchists must focus less on magazines, rallies and social centres, and more on movement building, engaging directly with community members (Olson 2009). With respect to Indigenous communities, anarchists must chart a different course yet again: anarchists must understand that to be truly decolonizing and effective allies to Indigenous peoples, they must step back from attempts to draw Indigenous peoples into movements or insert themselves into Indigenous struggles.

First, anarchists must understand Indigenous peoples' roles in, and connections, to place. Anarchistic spaces such as autonomous zones and social centres can remain tactically important, but anarchists need to spend time with Indigenous peoples in place, learning the "personality" (Deloria and Wildcat 2001) of the place and the ways that Indigenous peoples perceive and interact with the entire dynamic community of place. In this way, anarchists can begin to understand the subtle difference in spatial perception, construction and behaviour that differentiate an autonomous zone from a decolonized space. This might also involve tackling the inherent urban-bias in anarchist organising and venturing into more rural spaces.

A decolonized space empowers the complex place-based relational networks rooted in, and connected to, all the elements of place, which can enable decolonized Indigenous identities. If an Indigenous identity emanates from place, and requires therefore the decolonization of place to reach full articulation, then anarchists must seek to connect to Indigenous peoples' struggles through and in place rather than through community solidarity and affinity-group building. This is the first step to approaching alliances with Indigenous peoples in a respectful way: on their ground and in their time, something that so many activists have failed or been unable to do.

Any attempt to connect to Indigenous peoples through place is fraught with challenges. Perhaps the most important of these involves appropriation. Anarchist activist and practicing witch Starhawk has intimate knowledge of the wedges created between Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists amidst accusations of appropriation of cultural traditions by pagans (Starhawk 2002:201–205), and her accounts paint a complex picture. Indigenous communities are often sensitive to appropriation and use of cultural practices by non-Indigenous peoples, and with good reason. Activists attempting to speak for Indigenous peoples or, potentially worse, with Indigenous voice have participated in the disempowerment and

marginalization of Indigenous peoples (Haig-Brown 2010), unwittingly furthering the goal of elimination of Indigenous peoples under settler colonization.

Activists may feel that accusations of appropriation are too harsh. Indigenous communities have unequivocally demanded that their ways of knowing and being be respected; by attempting to internalize Indigenous ways, anarchists often intend only to show respect for the power and profound utility of those ways. While that perspective is very attractive and by some logics makes sense, the disconnect between anarchist respect for and utilization of Indigenous terms, names, concepts, and protocols, and Indigenous objections on the grounds of appropriation indicate one of the practical effects of misunderstanding Indigenous connections to place.

In Indigenous networks of place-based relationships, all of the elements—whether (drawing from Jake Swamp’s opening statement) a blade of grass, a leaf on a tree, a river, or a person—have roles that are only fully revealed in their interactions with each other (through their reciprocity). Anarchists must learn about Indigenous connections to place not to learn specific Indigenous ways, as these connections are not appropriate for all humans. Rather, this learning is necessary to see the dynamics of relationality between Indigenous peoples and their places. What is appropriate behaviour for Indigenous peoples in place is dependent on their roles in the larger relational matrix; it does not necessarily apply to others, regardless of their support for decolonizing efforts. Starhawk illustrates this with a poignant example, noting that a “Hopi clown can ritually mock the ceremony he is part of—but were a stranger to jump in and do the same, it would be a hostile and destructive act” (Starhawk 2002:202). Similar dynamics, while less visible, exist throughout Indigenous practices of relations; imitation should always be approached sceptically.

It is only through the observation of how Indigenous peoples relate to place (and why they do so using the methods which they do) that anarchists can come to understand the *needs* of place. As Indigenous peoples confront colonization and reassert Indigenous ways of knowing and being, their relational networks have become fluid and mutable. As Jake Swamp says, Indigenous peoples are inventing “new ways of looking at things” (Swamp 2010:20) in order to establish new relationships with the changed and/or changing elements of place; the true challenge for anarchists who would be allies is to find their own new way of looking at—and being in—place that compliments but does not replicate what Indigenous peoples are attempting to do. Replication of relations, as with appropriation of voice, is an unwelcome and unneeded imposition.

This ultimately leaves anarchists on what can seem to be very unsteady ground with respect to Indigenous communities. The establishment of relationships to Indigenous peoples *through* rather than *in* place implies a great deal of observation (without always understanding precisely what is observed), introspection and contemplation, and likely a great deal of action that fails to enhance decolonization. The pursuit of solidarity, affinity, and affective bonds is already one of the most theorized, debated, difficult aspects of anarchist praxis; this intense and unsettling process of coming to know and see relationships to and in places, across colonial differences, adds another layer of complexity to those existing challenges. Is it asking too much from anarchists to immerse themselves in such networks of

place-based relations, on Indigenous peoples' terms, with no certain revolutionary outcome?

Not at all; rather, such an approach is a necessary exercise for anarchists. By localizing anarchist politics not within a city or region or even reserve, but within the network of relationships—which itself can be very spatially stretched—anarchists can powerfully root their politics in the matrix of lives, resources and spirit that empowers Indigenous ways of being. However, it would be wrong to consider Indigenous networks of place-based relations as being simply spatially bounded; rather, they are often diffuse, overlapping and predicated on proximity of effect rather than spatial proximity. In the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address, thanks is given to the “thunder beings” (Alfred 2005:15; Swamp 2010:16–17), spirits who are seen to live far in the west and bring rains and storms; those beings do not live in a place that might be thought of in contemporary spatial terms as “local”. Similarly, Hopi migrations connect very distant places across stretches of time and space to Hopi homelands, with the relationship enacted through spiritual rituals and complex mapping process that illustrate the route of interconnection (Jojoba 2004). This change of perceptual scale is just one that anarchist activists must overcome as part of transcending colonial difference.

There will be difficulties and failures in these attempts to find the role of anarchist praxis in these relational networks of place; that is why it is important to pursue relationships with the ethic of “radical experimentation” firmly in mind (Barker 2010:324–327). Settler anarchists must in part be willing “to transcend activist spaces and identities, to seek creative alliances, to literally ‘give up activism’” (Chatterton 2006:260). There is no “perfect” way to engage in solidarity with Indigenous communities, to understand networks of place, or pursue decolonization, any more than there is a perfect way to be an anarchist, an activist, or a geographer. Seeking perfection out of fear of failure is colonial retrenchment; risking comfort and privilege by becoming just one part of a vast network of lives and existences is decolonizing liberation. Given these stakes, it is important that we not seek “perfect” activism (Bobel 2007); our humbling mistakes are too valuable to miss.

We can never exist in the Indigenous part of place-based networks, but we can interact through the network as separate, respectful, and vitally inter-dependent elements. This may seem daunting, but we must remember that:

spending enough time with others on uncommon ground often reveals shared concerns and fears, and look at the possibilities that arise, not from activists looking to gain allies, converting people to causes, or building a broad social movement, but from taking encounters on uncommon ground as a starting point for a dialogical and normative...politics based upon the need for us all to engage in politics as equals (Chatterton 2006:260).

Additionally, anarchists must remember that Indigenous peoples, in the shifting and changing networks of place affected by the imposition of colonial power and dealing with resulting “cultural blanks” (Little Bear 2000), are also searching for new ways of seeing the grass, the leaf, the river that make up Indigenous places. As

Secwepemc and Syilx filmmaker Dorothy Christian observes, “a large percentage of my time is taken up figuring out who I am on my own homelands. The paradox: this quest for identity is also what enables me to reach my full humanity” (Christian and Freeman 2010:377). We may forever occupy different spatial worlds, but that should be no permanent barrier to us learning how to become humble, respectful and allied elements of the places that we share.

Conclusions

It is impossible to create a framework or protocol that would ameliorate all of the barriers and challenges to Indigenous–anarchist alliances in the northern bloc. However, we suggest some particular approaches cognoscente of the major challenges outlined above. Consider first the contrast between Indigenous–anarchist solidarity in Hawaii, with the challenges and acrimony associated with Indigenous peoples in Montreal. In the first instance, Settler people participated in a non-dominating way with Indigenous communities around a common goal (the protection of land); the Indigenous communities in this case provided clear articulations of the importance of place and suggested ceremonial framing for action that imported significance and generated unity. In Montreal, many Settler activists have only come to grapple with Indigenous presence and colonial power after the fact; assertions of Indigenous identity within anarchic activist networks has resulted in racism, dismissal and cross-cultural silencing.

However, it is not the role of Indigenous activists to instruct Settler anarchists in the dynamics of colonization. It is not up to Indigenous peoples to decolonize Settler society. Rather, Settler anarchists must make the conceptual leap from a position of “anti-colonial solidarity” generally, to “decolonising affinities” specifically. Our suggestion here has been to observe (and understand) carefully Indigenous relationships to place, to consider the role that Settler people might play in Indigenous relational networks, and from these roles to proactively engage in efforts and relationships that support Indigenous being. While it is not Indigenous peoples’ responsibilities to teach Settler people, it remains the responsibility of the Settler to learn; decolonization is an act of becoming.

It is also an experimental act; as such, it is not possible to detail what ultimately this decolonized space will look like. To do so would foreclose the very collective and creative acts of becoming what we are arguing for. As this decolonized space needs to be enacted through place-based practices what it will look like, how and where it could transpire, are as yet uncharted. We are simply proposing that the best way to begin to create such a necessary space is through this complex, slow journey of learning.

Anarchists in the Settler societies of the northern bloc must commit to understanding the relational practices of Indigenous peoples whose lands they occupy. Further, these relational practices must be understood as deeply informing governance and social practice; as Lagalisse notes, it is not enough to assume that stateless is synonymous with egalitarian. This can also have the effect of revealing assumed (settler; settler colonial) connections to place that anarchists bring with them into common ground. Settler anarchists must commit to learning about place

in ways that are challenging, and to using this knowledge to inform their own generated practices of relating to place that create decolonized rather than simply anti-colonial spaces. This requires interrogating—with the assistance of dialogues with Indigenous peoples—taken-for-granted settler colonial inflections in anarchist theory and practice. Rejecting any ‘one size fits all’ solution—be it secularism (Lagalisse 2011), the politics of demand (Goodyear-Kaōpua 2011), or otherwise—is a start. Engaging experimentally in solidarity across difference remains a vital practice. Many anarchists already do this, but doing so while learning to be in a relationship with place rather than assuming a political affinity with Indigenous peoples is a radical, and necessary, departure.

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Endnotes

¹ Which in no way should be read as a denial of the genocidal efforts of removal and elimination that underpin the settler colonial project. As Veracini, drawing on anthropologist Patrick Wolfe, has argued, settler colonizers fundamentally have relied on the physical and conceptual erasure of indigeneity (Veracini 2010:8–9; 2007) that otherwise continually exposes the illegitimacy of Settler occupation of Indigenous places.

² See, for example, the Haudenosaunee two-row Guswentha treaty, an outgrowth of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy’s founding event and metaphor of the “great tree of peace”, which formed the basis of Confederacy alliances with European powers and, later, Settler nations. This treaty has had incredible influence on Indigenous–Settler relations in Canada and the USA. For further discussion of these conceptual frames of alliance building, see Wallace (1994) and Turner (2006:48, 54).

³ Kropotkin’s positivism extended from his challenging and revolutionary perception of cooperation as the driving force of the natural world and a necessary social value (Galois 1976). Noting the change of anarchist thought over time should not be taken as a critique of the core of anarchist thought. Indeed, it is vital we recognize these dynamics in order to prevent perfectionist thinking in activism.

⁴ It should be noted that some anarchists have recognized this tendency in leftist political organizing generally and have made efforts to try and address it (see for example Antliff 2005:216–218).

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