

Towards Horizontal Relationships: Anarcha Indigenism, Decolonial Animal Ethic, and Indigenous Veganism

Denisa Krásná

den.krasna@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-002-4086-4917

Masaryk University, Czech Republic

Submitted: November 6, 2021

Accepted: February 13, 2022

ABSTRACT

This paper introduces anarcha-Indigenism and a decolonial animal ethic as emerging decolonial frameworks. Anarcha-Indigenism represents an intersection between Indigeneity, anarchism, environmentalism, Indigenous feminism, and other liberation movements as a promising decolonial framework that could initiate transcultural cooperation of diverse justice groups that are committed to change that would ensure the peaceful co-existence of diverse species and ecosystems on Earth. The article introduces anarcha-Indigenism and its primary principles and roots, discusses its potential and analyses some major challenges that anarcha-Indigenism faces. It expands the discussion by introducing Billy-Ray Belcourt's decolonial animal ethic that connects (de)colonization of Indigenous peoples with (de)colonization of non-human animals. Special attention is paid to perspectives of some prominent Indigenous vegans. Finally, the role of activism and imagination in decolonization is discussed. The article posits that anarcha-Indigenism needs to include human treatment of non-human animals in the discussion if it strives to establish non-hierarchical interrelations, and that decolonization has to always be at the movement's core.

Keywords

Anarcha-Indigenism; Decolonial Animal Ethic; Decolonization; Indigenous studies; Radical Politics; Interspecies Justice; Indigenous veganism.

Introduction

Indigenous traditions are well stocked with warnings against human destructiveness and lessons for more respectful co-existence with our other-than-human relatives.

Daniel Heath Justice (39)

Western humanist ontologies that treat other-than-human animals as objects for human use are at the root of much suffering. As violence begets more violence, it is essential to address all kinds of injustices perpetrated by the traditional Western philosophy, including human abuse of other animals. Billy-Ray Belcourt, a writer, poet, and scholar from the Driftpile Cree Nation, advocates for interspecies justice by applying a decolonial framework. Like Indigenous peoples, he posits, nonhuman animals are colonized subjects, and their liberation is thus crucial to decolonization (Belcourt 3). Belcourt's "decolonial animal ethic" highlights the connections between North American settlers' encroachment on Indigenous lands and agriculture by tracing the history of displacement of Indigenous populations due to factory farming. He applies "politics of space" to theorize how Indigenous and nonhuman animal bodies have been both physically and conceptually relocated within particular settler-colonial spaces (Belcourt 3). Centring "both indigeneity and animality as sites of anti-colonial possibility" is thus crucial to the dismantling of settler colonial spaces (Belcourt 4). Decolonial animal ethic can be traced in Indigenous cosmologies that offer alterNative human-animal relationships and through which non-speciesist decolonial futures can be re-imagined and reinvented.

Most Indigenous worldviews are intrinsically connected to land and the natural world in its entirety. The concept of interconnectedness, or better yet *interrelatedness*, that forms the basis of these worldviews is grounded in the belief that the world revolves around reciprocal relationships, including human interactions "with the more-than-human world: the local plants, animals, and elements that give us life, the sun, moon, wind, fire, soil" (Nelson 53). Respecting this *interrelatedness* translates into respect for the natural environment as all its elements are protected as relatives. Glen Coulthard, a Yellowknives Dene scholar, uses the term "place-based ethics of reciprocity" instead of *interrelatedness* and explains that the word "land" in his language (Yellowknives Dene dialect of Dogrib) includes all that is in relation to "land" (in its Western meaning), i.e. nonhuman animals, plants, lakes, rocks, other humans, etc. (80). Land and all its elements are considered a part of life to which people hold obligations.

Indigenous ontologies are essential in addressing the effects of environmental degradation. The Laguna Pueblo eco-feminist writer Paula Gunn Allen

asserts, in *The Sacred Hoop*, that Indigenous worldviews should be pivotal for all activists whose final goal is to inhibit environmental destruction and “increase [the] quality of life for all inhabitants of planet earth” as traditional Indigenous social systems closely resemble what most activist groups seek (17). As climate change became the most pressing issue of our lifetimes, environmentalism penetrated all spheres of social and political life and diverse activist groups have reframed their agendas and shifted their priorities to reflect this daunting reality. However, many activist groups perpetuate inequality by being anthropocentric, as well as racist and sexist. This paper presents anarcha-Indigenism—an intersection between Indigeneity, anarchism, environmentalism, Indigenous feminism, and other liberation movements—in combination with the decolonial animal ethic as a viable decolonial framework for transforming the increasingly fractured world.

Anarcha-Indigenism is grounded in an intersectional analysis and combines critical ideas of post-colonial and post-imperial futures that are “non-hierarchical, unsettling of state authorities, inclusive of multiple/plural ways of being in the world, and respectful of the autonomous agencies of collective personhood” (Lasky 4). Anarcha-Indigenism derives from traditional anarchist political philosophy and social movements that resists oppression and domination but differentiates itself by placing colonialism at the core of its analysis and by grounding itself in Indigenous feminism. Moreover, anarcha-Indigenism is rooted in the Indigenous concept of interconnectedness of all things in the world and respect for the natural environment, a worldview that is foreign to traditional anarchists (Lewis 145-186). The defining characteristic of anarcha-Indigenism is decolonization, i.e. “it calls for the destruction of the settler state and its associated modes of operability” (Belcourt 2).

This paper follows on from an existing scholarship on anarcha-Indigenism to foreground its primary principles and roots and contributes by expanding the discussion to include the question of interspecies justice, proposing Belcourt’s decolonial animal ethic. The paper argues that the return to Indigenous respectful practices and foodways that do not require the subjugation of non-human animal bodies must be an essential aspect of any anarcha-Indigenist society. Veganism is proposed and analysed as a resistance strategy and perspectives of some prominent Indigenous vegans on traditional Indigenous hunting and fishing in the settler state are provided to enrich the conversation. Additionally, the role of artivism (art and activism) in decolonial movements is discussed. Finally, this paper foregrounds some challenges anarcha-Indigenism faces, with special attention being paid to environmentalists and animal rights activists and their often uninformed activism that perpetuates colonialism of both Indigenous people and non-human animals.

Anarcha-Indigenism: An Emerging Framework

As an emerging theoretical and activist approach, anarcha-Indigenism was first coined and theorized in 2005 by the Mohawk scholar and former professor of Indigenous governance at the University of Victoria, BC, Gerald Taiaiake Alfred in his book *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (2005). In *Wasáse* he formulates a political philosophy of “anarcho-Indigenism” that fuses the concept termed as “Indigenism,” which evokes the Indigenous spiritual and cultural connectedness with the land and Native peoples’ struggle for decolonial justice, and the anarchist movement and philosophy that is democratic, anti-capitalist, anti-institutional, anti-imperial and committed to radical action (45). Alfred challenges those Indigenous resistance movements that negotiate and co-operate with political and social institutions operating under capitalism and presents the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, as an exemplary manifestation of powerful Indigenous resurgence. He critiques the Western cultural and intellectual tradition for reproducing colonialism and hence argues for the deconstruction of colonial mentality and society and for the decentralization of the normative subject, i.e. white heterosexual male (151).¹

Although Alfred was the first scholar to coin and theorize anarcha-Indigenism, its early foundations can be traced in the writings by the anarchist political theorist, publisher, and writer Aragorn!. Jacqueline Lasky dives even deeper into history and identifies the first roots of anarcha-Indigenism in pre-colonial times when Indigenous societies were built on principles of egalitarianism, gender and sexual openness, and a celebration of diversity and difference. The obvious similarities between anarchism and Indigenism did not go unnoticed in early colonial times. Baron de Lahontan, the 17th century French ethnographer, used the word “anarchy” in its literal sense meaning “no ruler” when he characterized non-hierarchical collective-oriented Indigenous societies that lacked authority structures (Lasky 3). Anarchism and Indigenism constitute a natural alliance that finds unison in principles of “direct action, mutual aid, and voluntary cooperation” (Aragorn!. 3). Moreover, where Marxist and Indigenous

1. Ironically, Alfred resigned from UVic in 2019 following an investigation that found evidence that the Indigenous governance program established and chaired by Alfred perpetuated “discrimination” and “hyper-masculinity” and had “little tolerance for LG-BTQ and two-spirited individuals” (Barrera). In his “Statement on Leaving Academia,” Alfred self-reflected: “Even as an Indigenous man who has battled against racism and colonialism, I carry old and harmful ways of thinking ... My former partner, friends, and mentors such as Lee Maracle and Graham Smith have helped me understand the ways I embodied toxic masculinity and how I did wrong and harmed people because of it” (qtd. in Dodd and Fagan).

understandings of oppression differ—exploitation is seen as the “time” lost by Marxists but as “dispossession,” i.e. land control by Indigenous people (Coulthard 81)—anarchist and Indigenous thinking somewhat coalesce given anarchism’s emphasis on freedom of movement and open borders. Nevertheless, traditional Western anarchism is insufficient on its own as it does not take colonialism into account.

Since the publication of Alfred’s *Wasáse*, anarcho-Indigenism has been further developed by several activists and scholars, primarily Richard Day, Glen Coulthard, Jacqueline Lasky, Adam Lewis, Benjamin Pillet, and Erica Lagalisse, some of whom refined the concept by stressing the importance of inclusion of Indigenous feminism and hence started using the term “anarcha-Indigenism” (Lasky 4). In her study, Lagalisse asserts that anarcho-Indigenism could initiate “critically engaged conversation across difference” but highlights the importance of dialogue and constant redefinition of Indigenism and anarchism and their engagement with “a third universalism, feminism, which itself must constantly be reformulated” (674). Anarcha-Indigenism has the potential to provoke a systemic change as Indigenous feminism, environmentalism and anarchism can together oppose environmental destruction and colonization of Indigenous lands as well as combat violence against Indigenous women.

Since the 1970s, substantial evidence of a close relationship between the perpetuation of violence on (Indigenous) women and exploitation of (Native) lands has been documented by ecofeminist scholars so it is imperative to address these two issues as interconnected. Indigenous feminism can thus serve as a driving force of anarcha-Indigenism. Winona LaDuke, a renowned American Indian scholar and environmental activist, asserts that in their majority, Indigenous women perceive their struggle as “integrally related to the struggle of our nations for control of our land, resources, and destinies” (“An Indigenous Perspective”). She differentiates Indigenous feminism from mainstream feminism by highlighting its emphasis on Indigenous land claims and environmental justice. LaDuke argues for a total systemic change as she believes that Indigenous people cannot survive in a capitalist society that has conquest and colonization at its core. Therefore, she affirms, “Indigenous women embrace other social movements, embrace them to the extent that they are interested in systemic change” (“An Indigenous Perspective”). LaDuke’s definition of Indigenous feminism echoes all working formulations of anarcha-Indigenism that could thus be also seen as an expanded form of Indigenous feminism.

Anarcha-Indigenism can be especially useful as a framework now that the world is becoming increasingly aware of climate change and its environmental impacts. Anarcha-Indigenism’s universality and applicability to a great variety of global struggles is what makes it an inviting option. Lasky writes that anarcha-Indigenism “prioritizes locality while simultaneously linking with

globality" (5). The Zapatistas were among the first to realize the importance of international cooperation in facing "the racialized, gendered, and capitalist logic of neoliberal globalization" (Lagalis 656). While they work towards local control of land within the Mexican state, they also encourage global alliances as oppression "transverses places and times" (Lasky 2). To spread their revolutionary ideas and share their experiences the Zapatistas sent delegations overseas to five continents in 2021. The first destination was Madrid, symbolically on a historic day of mourning, August 13, which marks the day when Spanish colonists conquered Mexico ("Germany").

One of the principal pillars of the Zapatista society is food sovereignty, as dependence on capitalist food production would undermine their autonomy as well as the primary principles of equality and justice. According to the data collected by the ETC Group and published in the book *Comer es Rebelión II*, the industrial chain of food production uses 70% of the planet's agricultural resources and delivers only 30% of global food supplies. Paradoxically, peasant networks demand only 30% but produce 70% (CACAO 29). Additionally, the varieties that peasants grow are much more diverse, and their agricultural practices support a wide variety of species as well as diverse ecosystems. The renowned food sovereignty advocate and agro-ecological scholar Vandana Shiva explains how monocultural farming and corporate patents on seeds destroy variety and whole ecosystems as well as promote violence. In *Biopiracy*, Shiva contends that through modern agricultural techniques "life itself is being colonized" and the bodies of women, plants and nonhuman animals serve as the last frontiers (Ch. 2). In contrast to the industrial chain, peasant networks do not waste food nor devastate the environment, are less likely to cause suffering, and are designed to provide a healthy diet for the entire population, not just a small, privileged proportion (CACAO 29).

As capitalist industrial farming plays an essential role in sustaining the neoliberal capitalist order, a decentralized and a decolonized food system is key to its disruption. As the settler-colonial food system relies heavily on the exploitation of nonhuman animal bodies, the position of nonhuman animals has to be reified and re-imagined in a decolonial society. To this purpose, Billy Ray Belcourt proposes what he calls "decolonial animal ethic" (2015).

Decolonial Animal Ethic

The oppression of non-human animals is of a colonial and neoliberal nature and parallels that of colonized Indigenous people, bringing their struggle closer to the centre of anarcho-Indigenist analysis. In his paper "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought," Billy-Ray

Belcourt draws connections between the colonization of Indigenous peoples and animal oppression by showing how settler colonialism, white supremacy and neoliberal capitalism depend on “the simultaneous exploitation and/or erasure of animal and Indigenous bodies” (1). Belcourt posits that non-human animals are colonial subjects and thus argues that decolonization in its literal sense applies to both Indigenous peoples and nonhuman animals.

Belcourt employs a “politics of space” that evokes colonial concepts such as the frontier, westward expansion, and relocation that could be applied to both groups (3). Like “domesticated animals,” Indigenous people have been relocated and confined to geographic spaces away from the settlers’ eyes, hence rendered invisible. Both slaughterhouses and reserves are strategically located to hide the state-induced suffering from the settlers as the capitalist system is dependent on their passive acceptance of state-sanctioned violence. Thanks to the strategic positioning (both literal and conceptual) of non-human animals and Indigenous people, white settlers engage in this collective overlooking of oppression. Invisibilization of Indigeneity has been essential for the normalization of settler life-ways that include “domestication” of nonhuman animals and “politicization of animality [which] progresses the settler state” (Belcourt 3). Belcourt’s emphasis on land and space in animal ethic is central to the understanding of animal and Indigenous peoples’ oppression.

Similar to Belcourt, Dylan Powell reveals connections between settlers’ encroachment on Indigenous lands and animal agriculture by tracing the history of displacement of Indigenous populations due to factory farming that “imposes a food system that is hierarchical and expansionist” (19). Today, he reveals, animal agriculture takes up “more land in North America than all remaining reserve land combined—and one third of all land mass globally” (19). Such large-scale farming has catastrophic implications for the environment, non-human animals, and people alike and “should be of concern to more than just animal advocates” (20). Hence, both Belcourt and Powell argue for a concurrent focus on decolonization and animal liberation as the return of land to Indigenous populations could also mean the return to pre-colonial food practices that did not involve the large-scale slaughter of non-human animals.

Furthermore, Belcourt writes that “anthropocentrism is the fourth logic of white supremacy [and] ... therefore *the* anchor of speciesism, capitalism, and settler colonialism” (4, emphasis in original). As such, anarcha-Indigenism needs to address anthropocentrism if its aims are to be accomplished for “decolonization is only possible through an animal ethic that disrupts anthropocentrism” (5). Ignoring animal oppression would only bolster the capitalism and colonialism that anarcha-Indigenism wants to disrupt. Similarly, ignoring Indigenous peoples’ struggle for decolonization would not undermine anthropocentric thinking since centring on whiteness instead of Indigeneity would “leave intact

the power relation that makes speciesism possible” (Belcourt 4, emphasis in original). Or, in Powell’s words, it would mean “a continuation of the same line of thinking which first placed those animals here [in a subordinate position]” (20). Therefore, it is desirable for environmentalists and animal rights activists alike to prioritize decolonization.

Anthropocentric thinking is a colonial construct based on the existence of social hierarchies that are foreign to Indigenous mentality. Indigenous worldviews highlight the interrelation of, among other elements, human and non-human animals, and as such stand in sharp opposition to the anthropocentric perspective. Normalization of speciesism within Indigenous communities can be paralleled to the normalization of patriarchy among Indigenous people who have been forced to accept the colonial “assimilationist food system” that has deepened their dependency on the settler nation-state and has caused numerous health problems, such as obesity, diabetes, and the metabolic syndrome (Powell 20). Since both speciesism and patriarchy have been used to further colonize and marginalize Indigenous people, their dismantling is crucial to decolonization. Belcourt critiques decolonial politics for being anthropocentric and argues for the centring of animal ethic in decolonization as it would “be anthropocentric to ignore animality if our politics of decolonization is to disrupt all colonized spaces and liberate all colonized subjects” (4). Along the same lines of thinking, some Indigenous scholars and activists have proposed Indigenous veganism as decolonial resistance to the settler violence perpetrated against both Indigenous and nonhuman animal bodies.

Indigenous Veganism

Rejecting animal experimentation, disrupting the commodification of animal bodies, and abolishing animal agriculture are gestures that can be deployed as anti-colonial gestures that reify decolonial futurities.

Billy-Ray Belcourt (8)

Veganism, understood here as a “lifestyle that, for ethical reasons, eschews the use of animal products” (Robinson 189), has been marketed and widely represented as an invention and lifestyle for white middle-class people. However, it is a myth that animal liberation and veganism are white settler domains, irreconcilable with Indigeneity. Such assertions ignore the voices and hard work of Indigenous people involved in these movements and further marginalize them. By framing veganism as a white settler invention, Indigenous epistemologies

that imagine animals “as active agents ... capable of creating kinship relations with other (human) animals” are further silenced and disregarded (Belcourt 8). In most Indigenous communities of North America, hunting and fishing were never the primary means of subsistence but only resorted to in times of scarcity, and the killing of non-human animals was otherwise avoided. While such tribes often use symbols of the animals they hunt or fish, their traditional diet consists primarily of crops. The Ojibway Nation member and professional artist and activist Linda Fisher stresses that carnism² is a Euro-Settler concept and Indigenous people in the Americas “had a much more varied diet” that included but was not limited to “berries, vegetables, nuts, beans, squash, roots, fruits, corn, and rice” (“On the ‘Right to Hunt’”). She blames Hollywood for perpetuating the false portrayal of Indigenous people as, most prominently, buffalo hunters, while, in fact, meat began to be consumed more regularly only after contact with Europeans.

Fisher is an example of a prominent Indigenous animal rights activist who advocates for reconsidering the tradition of hunting and fishing. She argues that nowadays most Indigenous people can comfortably survive without these practices and that killing in the name of tradition goes against the most fundamental Indigenous principles. To support her stance, she recalls Chief Seattle who spoke of the need to protect the Earth and all living beings and highlighted that non-human animals “are our brothers, and we kill only to stay alive” (qtd. in Fisher, “On the ‘Right to Hunt’”). Thus, she considers today’s practice of hunting and fishing reactionary and certainly not necessary for cultural survival.

Fisher prioritizes stories, ancient teachings, and spirituality to physical manifestations of “Indianness”: “It is not our dark hair, dark eyes, or Indian facial features that speak for who we are, but something much deeper, something not visually apparent: our commitment to the teachings of our ancient Ojibway ancestors” (“On the ‘Right to Hunt’”). Here, she echoes many other Indigenous people’s efforts to combat stereotypes and the widespread popular imagination that only considers “authentic Indians” those that dress as their ancestors. She criticizes the continuing practice of using animal products by Indigenous tribes for further perpetuating these associations and helping sustain the depiction of Indigenous people as people of the past. As she contends, “I assure you, even though I avoid hides and furs and choose a vegan diet, my Indianness is critical to who I am” (“On the ‘Right to Hunt’”).

Fisher names several traditions of the Mayans, the Maoris of New Zealand, and the tribes of New Guinea, that included cannibalism or the sacrifice of

2. Melanie Joy’s term referring to the invisible “belief system in which eating certain animals is considered ethical and appropriate” (Joy 30).

women, but have been abandoned to demonstrate that cultures are fluid and evolving, which is exactly what makes them live and thrive. She believes that her “ancestors would tell us that it is time to stop the suffering and the killing” (“On the ‘Right to Hunt’”), as we live in times when non-human animals are scarce and the return to Indigenous people’s teachings is essential for the survival of both non-human animals and humans since, as Chief Seattle said, “whatever happens to the beasts happens to man, for we are all of one breath. All things are connected ... Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself” (qtd. in Fisher, “On the ‘Right to Hunt’”).

Fisher is not the only renowned Indigenous person advocating for reconsidering traditions that require the killing of non-human animals. Margaret Robinson, a Mi’kmaq ecofeminist scholar, proposes Indigenous veganism as an act of political resistance. She condemns colonial food production for being violent and at odds with Indigenous worldviews. In her paper “Veganism and Mik’maq Legends,” Robinson recalls some important Mi’kmaq food traditions that were entirely vegetarian but does not conceal that the Mi’kmaq diet consisted traditionally primarily of meat. She explains that hunting was an important part of the Mik’maq culture, especially for men whose identity was tightly linked to hunting and fishing. Nevertheless, Robinson argues that the arrival of colonizers marked an abrupt change of context and since then “meat, as a symbol of patriarchy shared with colonizing forces, arguably binds us with white colonial culture to a greater degree than practices such as veganism” (191). In order to participate in the fur trade, fishing industry, and factory farming, Indigenous people had to adjust their practices and start viewing non-human animals as “the other” or an object rather than a sibling. This detachment from non-human animals also meant detachment from traditional spirituality to which Robinson, like Fisher, ascribes higher value than to cultural manifestations.

Belcourt also stresses the importance of a changed context and maintains that “hunting as a recreational activity” is incompatible with decolonization “because hunting has been weaponized as speciesism to normalize the killability of animals for human ends” (8, emphasis in original). Robinson parallels Fisher in her argument that killing non-human animals is only justifiable when human life is at stake. She traces Mi’kmaq legends that teach about “dependence, not dominion. Human survival is the justification for the death of ... animal friends. The animals have independent life, their own purpose and their own relationship with the creator. They are not made for food” (192). She contrasts this view with that of white hunters who construct non-human animals as subordinate to men, and whose only purpose is to serve humans. Belcourt also explains that in most Indigenous traditions “animals occupy sacred ceremonial roles from which the Earth and its occupants are created and are thus not subject to

human domination" (8). Robinson's interpretation of Mi'kmaq legends implies that where people can survive on a vegan diet, "hunting and killing our animal brothers is no longer authorized" (193). Hunting as a recreational activity is be-
reft of any higher value and detached from Indigeneity.

Veganism, on the other hand, respects non-human animals as equals and is therefore much closer to the Indigenous concept of interrelatedness. Robinson contests the construction of veganism as a lifestyle for white people and joins the ranks of those Indigenous people and people of colour who perceive "veganism as ethically, spiritually and culturally compatible with our indigeneity" (190). She also defies those who accuse Indigenous vegans of "sacrificing our cultural authenticity" and, like Fisher, refuses to be dictated what it means to be an "authentic Indian," condemning the dominant colonial rhetoric that is responsible for the spread of stereotypes that portray Indigenous people and their culture as a thing of the past. By reinterpreting old traditions, Robinson argues, Indigenous people showcase that their culture is thriving and "responsive to changing social and environmental circumstances" (194). The adoption of a new practice that better suits the contemporary situation can be similarly empowering. Robinson proposes Indigenous veganism as a new tradition through which Indigenous people can "recall our connection with other animals, our shared connection to the Creator, and prefigure a time when we can live in harmony with the animals" (194). The daily practices of veganism "are in keeping with the values of our ancestors" and could potentially even reinforce one's Indigenous identity and sense of belonging (194).

Global Solidarity Network

But if veganism is to be an effective means of resistance to capitalism and settler colonialism, anarcha-Indigenist vegan practitioners will have to cut their support of companies that simultaneously profit from vegan consumers and the meat and dairy industry. All around the world, groups of people are organizing and starting food projects that are local and operate outside or on the fringe of the capitalist food system. The practice of guerilla gardening that uses public spaces to grow vegetables shows how a simple and peaceful act like gardening can spark an effective social revolution. By adopting this practice, people make a powerful political statement as they become self-sufficient and no longer dependent on the capitalist food system that causes and perpetuates climate change, environmental degradation and social inequality (Pietrowski).

The Zapatistas can be considered pioneers of this food revolution as they established food sovereignty in their territories. Food sovereignty means that a community can "exercise autonomy over their food systems while concurrently

ensuring that the production/distribution of food is carried out in socially just, culturally safe, and ecologically sustainable ways" (Gahman). Food is one of the five main pillars of the Zapatista society because co-dependency on the Western food system would also inevitably mean political co-dependency. Thus, the Zapatistas practice sustainable organic agriculture based on ancient ancestral Mayan ways, where all work is distributed equally among all members and the harvest is shared collectively throughout the community (Gahman).

The Zapatistas's ethical, highly egalitarian and productive food system inspired many in and outside of the country. One prominent example is the Kurds in Rojava, or the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), who established close relationships with the Zapatistas and started practicing sustainable agriculture that earned them such denominations as "radical eco-anarchist experiment" (Shilton). Around 5 million people of all backgrounds, genders, religions, classes, and nations united in 2012 in Rojava to create a multi-ethnic egalitarian, cooperative, and environmentally conscious society with decentralised self-governance and direct democracy that stands against capitalism and patriarchy. The Rojava social revolution was successful, and it became "an example to the world" (Allard et al.).

In 2019, Rojava was invaded by Turkey. As a reaction to this violent invasion, members of Indigenous Nations from across Turtle Island published an article in which they expressed solidarity with the Kurd community in Rojava, writing that a military intervention from a dominant power came in order "to eradicate what all fascist powers fear most, a free people daring to create brave and successful experiments outside the globalised, extractive system" (Allard et al.). The authors stress the importance of global united action and solidarity among local alternative social movements in order to stop the dominant powers from suppressing their voices, creating alternatives, and ultimately from stopping the inevitable transformation that is necessary to avoid environmental apocalypse (Allard et al.).³

The Zapatistas and the Kurds provide an exemplary case of such transcultural cooperation. The latest meeting between members of the two movements took place in September 2021 in Frankfurt, where a party of Zapatista women and a delegation of six Kurd women discussed their joined experiences as women fighting against colonial patriarchal oppression and creating decolonial societies. They "exchanged messages of international solidarity" and acknowledged

3. In February 2022, Turkey still occupies regions in North and East Syria and routinely violates human rights. Reports include unlawful arrests and unfounded accusations, brutal torture of detainees, gender violence, etc. Follow recent events at: <https://rojavainformationcenter.com/>.

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that they are “soul sisters in their struggle for freedom” (“Germany”). The strong solidarity between the two movements on opposite sides of the world serves as strong evidence that the creation of “global network of solidarity” between anarchy-Indigenist non-hierarchical movements is possible (Yasar). The Kurd writer and activist Melike Yasar stresses the importance Indigenism plays in societal transformation: “we must recover traditional Indigenous cultures, histories and way of life, in other words, we must decolonize and always make a revolution *with* nature” (Yasar, emphasis in original). Or in yet other words, it is crucial to “listen to and learn from the living Earth as she continues to show us how to create societies which live in cooperation with all beings” (Allard et al.).



Figure 1: Zapatista activist mural in Oventic expressing solidarity with the Kurds Source: Author

Artivism

Imagination and curiosity are essential to the empathy required for healthy, respectful, and sustainable relationships with a whole host of beings and peoples.

Daniel Heath Justice (77)

To spread and consolidate their ideas, anarcha-Indigenist movements all around the world use artivism (activist art) as a non-violent revolutionary tool. The Zapatistas can be considered pioneers of artivism as a clearly defined movement whose roots can be traced back to the meeting between the Zapatistas and Chicano artists from East Los Angeles in 1997 (“Artivism”).⁴ The Zapatista villages are decorated with activist murals that both evoke Mayan traditions and raise awareness about gender equality, food justice, neoliberalism, the history of the Zapatista revolution, and solidarity with other anarcha-Indigenist movements.

Murals have become a very powerful tool of resistance as they are available to everyone and easily visible. Furthermore, through mural painting, Indigenous women artists are disputing their colonial patriarchal confinement to private spaces by reappropriating public spaces that have been rendered male-dominated by the settlers. This feminist intervention is applied in Oventic, one of the five Zapatista *caracoles*, where feminist murals dominate the space. The Zapatista activist mural expressing solidarity with the Kurds (see Fig. 1) is one such example of an anarcha-Indigenist activist piece that highlights the major role of Indigenous women in both societies.

Artivism empowers those who depict and those who are depicted. Artivism is also impactful because unlike many other forms of resistance, art touches people emotionally (creativism). In his poignant work *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, the Cherokee Nation scholar of Indigenous literary and cultural studies Daniel Heath Justice makes a case for Indigenous art and literature by highlighting their ability to re-imagine human kinship relations with the other-than-human world. As he states, “imagination and curiosity are essential to the empathy required for healthy, respectful, and sustainable relationships with a whole host of beings and peoples” (Justice 77).

4. Art being used as a resistance tool dates far back in history but the word “artivism” and the articulation of the activist movement is only a fairly recent phenomenon. The Zapatistas turned artivism into one of the main pillars of their society, adding an extra value to the meaning and role of art in decolonial movements.

Justice accents the importance of horizontality in these relationships that need to be void of any hierarchies. In the settler-colonial context nonhuman animals are exploited as “resources” because they are rendered as unworthy of consideration in the socially constructed vertical hierarchy of relations. In contrast, a horizontal model of relationship reifies nonhuman animals into beings deserving the same respect we grant to other humans. In such a context, “monolithic settler colonial authority is difficult if not impossible to maintain or justify, and widespread exploitation of land, plants, and animals, as well as humans, is difficult to fully realize” (Justice 90). By imagining horizontal kinship relations to the other-than-human world, Indigenous art and literature assume an active role in decolonization.

Belcourt also believes in the transformative power of Indigenous cosmologies that can be transmitted via the medium of literature or other art forms. As nonhuman animals “must first be excised from their colonized subjectivities” (Belcourt 9), their decolonization needs to be imagined before it is implemented. This can be done by “recalling the representation of animals in Indigenous cosmologies/oral traditions and unsettling speciesism as a ‘colonial mentality’” (Belcourt 9). Many Indigenous artists and writers across Turtle Island are evoking these alterNative kinships with the other-than-human world. In doing so, they are also imagining and creating foundations for anarcha-Indigenist non-hierarchical decolonized societies.

For example, the aforementioned Ojibway vegan artist Linda Fisher uses her art to evoke the interrelatedness of the world by depicting Indigenous women in unity with other animals, plants, and water, among other elements. She names these works “visionary paintings,” invoking their power of imagining alterNative futurities that reflect Indigenous cosmologies (see <https://www.lindagfisher.com>). It is beyond the scope of this paper to present more Indigenous creators who deserve far more extensive consideration than they can be given here. For better reference, see Daniel Heath Justice’s book in which he provides an overview of some contemporary Indigenous artists and an in-depth analysis of some of their works.

Anarcha-Indigenism: Challenges

Despite their common goal—eradicating oppression—activist movements’ varying priorities often cause misunderstandings and result in disagreements that can lead to estrangement and cutting off ties, hence ultimately weakening the larger anarcha-Indigenist movement. What could be called the major “umbrella” risk is the danger of anarcha-Indigenism falling into the trap of perpetuating the hierarchies it strives to eradicate. Decolonization has to define the

movement which, in Pillet's words, needs to "assume the priority of indigenous sovereignty" (Pillet). His analysis of Canada's colonial history reveals several layers of colonial racism that he claims are actively overlooked and treated as taboo. He considers this "official denial of colonialism an integral part of Canadian identity and rule of law" (Pillet 3). Arguably, what Michael Taussig calls "public secrets" and Margot Francis "active 'not seeing'" is characteristic of all nations where any form of marginalization takes place (qtd. in Pillet 5). Disregarding oppression and racism is what connects dominant group members and likely translates into their identity. Recognizing this inherent white privilege must be integral to anarcha-Indigenism.

In his critique of anarchists' failure to compromise, Aragorn! asserts that "anarchists do not expect to deal with anyone outside of their understanding of reality" (6). Lagalisse shows that Aragorn!'s contention is legitimate in her illustration from a lecture tour of two Mexican anarchists, Juan and Magdalena, in Canada in 2006. In her speeches, Magdalena evoked God and used catholic references that were, however, often omitted in English translation. Gradually, Juan, whose speech was secular, was given more space than Magdalena, resulting in the anarchists "marginalizing Magdalena's subjectivity and voice" (659-662). Lagalisse unmasks traditional anarchists' prejudice against religion and their inability to accept differing worldviews which also echoes Aragorn!. In her analysis, Lagalisse argues that secularism "impedes anticapitalist and anti-imperialist resistance" as it obstructs transcultural solidarity work (663). She goes even further and calls secularism "a form of racism" as its fervent proponents often marginalize those who subscribe to a religious faith, as shown in the example of Magdalena (654).

Lagalisse's article does not extol religious institutions nor argue against anarchist critique of the church. On the contrary, it acknowledges the wrongful assimilative practices of the church during the residential school era while emphasizing the distinction between institutionalized religion and sacred belief. Moreover, traditional anarchists' secular prejudice not only hinders cooperation but also entails the rejection of Indigenous worldviews of interrelatedness which, as was established earlier, need to form the basis of anarcha-Indigenism. Alas, as Aragorn! writes, "a secular person may not see the Great Spirit in things that [Indigenous people] are capable of seeing life in" (4). Similarly, Paula Gunn Allen highlights that what has been missing in various activist groups as opposed to Indigenous societies is a "ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused world-view" (17). Erasing what Anzaldúa calls "the dichotomy of spirit and matter" could be the steppingstone to a decolonized mindset and to successful transcultural alliances (qtd. in. Lagalisse 664).

But accepting and adopting Indigenous worldviews also comes with challenges. While anarcha-Indigenism necessarily involves cultural exchange,

it is important to avoid disrespectful cultural and spiritual appropriation that perpetuates colonialism. It has become common practice of many non-Native environmental groups to appropriate Indigenous knowledge, voice, and identity to convey their environmental message. Gunn Allen warns that while progressive environmentalists may “allow the noble savage” to act as inherently environmental beings that are connected to nature, in the end they still treat Indigenous cultures as inferior (20). But the Indigenous environmental movement fits in anarcha-Indigenism as it “confronts both corporations and the state” and stands in opposition to “the dominant society organized around the operations of the capitalist system” (410). Their sovereignty struggle makes Indigenous people “one of the most powerful and effective groups for protecting the environment” (Clark). Indeed, gaining sovereignty for Indigenous tribes is in direct relation to achieving environmental justice for all, and should thus be at the centre of any environmental movement. It is thus yet again evident that Indigenism has to be at the forefront of the movement.

Indigenous peoples’ difficult relationship with environmentalists extends to animal rights groups. The reasons are essentially the same and have to do primarily with animal rights activists disrespecting Indigenous peoples, ignoring their sovereignty struggle, and perpetuating colonialism as a consequence. Naturally, this generalisation overlooks the genuine efforts of many animal liberation groups to simultaneously address other types of social injustice and to highlight the various intersections at play. That being said, many of these groups still fail to incorporate decolonization into their rhetoric and action plan. By co-operating with the State and assisting it with its colonial enterprise, animal rights activists are inadvertently approving its speciest practices and further inhibiting their termination. On the other hand, decolonization goes hand in hand with animal liberation as it constitutes a direct “threat to Euro-Settler animal agriculture” (Powell 23).

Powell’s article explains how the disrespectful and uninformed activism of mainstream animal rights groups perpetuates colonialism and unwittingly enhances factory farming. Protesting Indigenous hunts is often done with the State’s assistance which creates a false dichotomy that posits the State as the ally and Indigenous people as the enemy. Moreover, the ally is then naturally framed as non-violent while the latter is seen as cruel and savage which not only perpetuates the worst colonial stereotypes but also justifies settler colonialism and its assimilative practices (Powell 20). Justin Kay explains that framing Indigenous people as “uncivilized” means “utilizing the logics of animalization and racialization that harm both people of color and nonhuman animals” as such rhetoric is used to justify hierarchical relationship and subjugation of those perceived as inferior (19).

Furthermore, Powell asserts that animal rights groups often fail to recognize the significant work Indigenous people have been doing in conservation and animal species protection that far outweighs that of the State that continues to extensively destroy land and natural habitats (23). The State willingly supports animal rights groups' protests against traditional hunts because they help further its colonial agenda as well as divert attention from its own large-scale violent practices. Thus, animal rights advocates need to start regarding Indigenous peoples as their allies and guides if they want any real change for both non-human animals and people. Such cooperation might require some introspection and compromise, nevertheless, refraining from actions that "reproduce the very structures that render animal enterprise visible, material, and profitable" is fundamental to animal liberation (Kay 3). If colonization is the primary cause for the continual animal oppression, decolonization needs to be at the heart of the animal liberation movement.

Conclusion

And why do we even ask why animals aren't more like humans?

...

The only thing that really seems to be unique about humans as a species is our capacity for wilful, self-deluding destruction.

Daniel Heath Justice (38)

The new century has been increasingly defined by environmental concerns as people around the globe face the impacts of climate change. Scientists speak of the "anthropocene," a unit of geologic time characterized by an accelerated shift in the Earth's climate and ecosystems generated by human activity. The era of industrialization and capitalism has been highly destructive, causing harm to the planet and its inhabitants, both human and non-human. This paper has proposed anarcha-Indigenism as a promising framework that could initiate transcultural cooperation of groups with diverse interests that are, however, committed to change that would ensure the peaceful co-existence of all species and ecosystems on Earth. Anarcha-Indigenism strives to establish non-hierarchical relationships "that sustain differences, rather than try to deny or eliminate them" (Lasky 4). Finding common ground and learning to co-operate despite differences is essential for "strategic reasons" as the dominant colonial, capitalist, patriarchal, anthropocentric system would

be impossible to change “without fostering alliances with outsider and larger groups” (Pillet 14).

Cherishing difference is essential if non-hierarchical order is to be created and preserved. Liberation movements themselves often perpetuate the hierarchies they strive to eradicate, be they hierarchies of gender, religion, class, race, or species. The goal needs to be to create a world where difference can thrive or, in the words of Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos, “one world with many worlds in it” (qtd. in Lasky 5). As the Western anthropocentric humanist ontologies are speciesist and thus hierarchical, Billy-Ray Belcourt’s decolonial animal ethic needs to inform anarcha-Indigenism. Nevertheless, as Belcourt says, “decolonial thought has yet to engage with a politics of animality” (8), and as this conversation is still in its beginnings and often disregarded for the controversies it entails, it may likely constitute anarcha-Indigenism’s most challenging aspect.

Ultimately, in the settler state context, decolonization has to be at the core of any social justice movement as colonialism characterizes every aspect of society and is the driving force of neoliberal capitalism. Returning the stolen land to Indigenous people is not only just but also desirable for any liberation movement, as Indigenous worldviews and the concept of interrelatedness are essential to the restoration of a natural balance on the planet. If it overcomes its major challenges, anarcha-Indigenism has the potential to provoke global change and can function as “an engaged universal” and be constantly reinterpreted as it “travels across difference” (Lagalis 673). It is however important that Indigeneity remains the defining aspect of anarcha-Indigenism and decolonization its principal aim.

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