

# **Unknowable: Against an Indigenous Anarchist Theory**

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## A brief introduction.

Yá'át'ééh, I feel it necessary to offer these pieces of the introduction I wrote for *Black Seed: Not On Any Map*, particularly because this overall piece was originally situated in the midst of a larger conversation and may feel like it's missing a couple of things to some readers.

...I was upset the first time I read *Locating an Indigenous Anarchism*, though like with certain textual oddities, with each re-read over the years I became less frustrated.

Perhaps like you, I picked up the zine with the same zeal that enticed you to open the pages of this book. You wanted some answers from people who have been thinking about these questions. You expect that from analysis, next steps and an action plan follows, right? The response is both disappointing and refreshing, "No, it does not."

The smug assertion that, "the last hope for an indigenous world-view... is patience" was terribly insufficient punctuation.

I've nurtured my impatience over the years. It's been a personal project of intentional temperament disorientation that is the byproduct of not taking shit and doing activisty projects like organizing direct actions and establishing an infoshop. As I grew to know Aragorn! and converse more about these ideas, I realized this was a baited truth. I've longed for this conversation to continue but not like this, not in these pages.

For a range of reasons you'll observe throughout the entirety of this offering, Indigenous Anarchy is not a conversation we really desired to have. ...our reluctance was affirmed at the 2019 Indigenous Anarchist Convergence... Yet here we are, beating our thoughts out like a neglected rug, pulled from the abandoned house of a dead relative. Indigenous Anarchism is that dreaded collect call...

...Perhaps this project here is tasked towards ensuring that this conversation is never a doctrine. In terms of Indigenous Anarchy, that this remains part of its anti-discovery.

For those that desire as much, here are some short cuts and it was nice to meet you:

If we understand that European Anarchism is "1) A history of iconic figures. 2) A set of increasingly radical ideas about social transformation. 3) A practice that has only been uniform in its rejection by those in power."<sup>1</sup> And that it is also a dynamic politic that invites its very destruction yet maintains composure of core principles: Direct Action, Voluntary Association, and Mutual Aid.

Then we build on this dynamic an understanding that Indigenous Anarchism is 1) An anti-history of ancestral memory. 2) A set of radical (as in total negation) ideas that are not a detour but a bridge between anti-colonial struggle and Indigenous liberation. 3) A practice that expresses and asserts autonomy in the context of where it is located. As Aragorn! observed, "An indigenous anarchism is an anarchism of place." 4) Is not an identity.

And that its first principles as articulated by Aragorn! are: Everything is Alive, The Ascendance of Memory, and Sharing is Living.

For distinction I would add that an Anarchist would pronounce, "There is no authority above yourself." An Indigenous Anarchist would offer, "There is no authority but nature."

...When pressed against many of these words I don't find myself. When I'm not home I call myself an Indigenous Anarchist to agitate against assimilation and shitty liberal politics. When

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<sup>1</sup> [www.theanarchistlibrary.org/library/aragorn-a-non-european-anarchism](http://www.theanarchistlibrary.org/library/aragorn-a-non-european-anarchism)

I'm home I am a child of Yoolgai asdzáá (White Shell Woman). I am in her arms, where the constraints of colonial political control and categories are totally meaningless.

In these words I find others. I locate an affinity of longing. A shared lament and dreaming.

Find the earth in your fingers and let the questions of these beliefs, values, and practices "haunt you."

There are worse and more voracious ghosts in the dead world of the colonizers.

## **Unknowable: Against an Indigenous Anarchist Theory**

"This land is a sacred land. The man's law is not our law. Nature, food and the way we live is our law."

– Roberta Blackgoat, Diné matriarch from Big Mountain.

## **The Unraveling**

My actions are clumsy and deft. My hands are shaking. I have a fever. These are the convulsions of bitter medicine and the spirit.

We have become entangled in words that are not our own. They cut our tongues as we speak. They eat our dreams as we sleep. This is a reluctant offering.

A thread that weaves a story, pulled gently at first. So focused on the line that we become disoriented in the delicate tension. When we remember to breathe. When we step away from these stars and into constellations, we see new symbols have emerged.

The idea of "civilization" was translated to Diné bizaad, as it was in many other languages of the land, in the brutal and fractured words of imposition that were spread through a multitude of ruptures throughout the world and refined in Europe. This is not an evaluation of what has proceeded as the depths of its telling has been surveyed acutely in other spaces. Though it is important to speak of its stark shadow as it was announced in the eclipsing language of domination, control and exploitation. And when it consumed and it did not swallow us whole, it voraciously welcomed us into its folds. Our ancestors knew this was the language of non-existence, they attacked it.

When we ask the question "What does civilization want?" we are visited by the ghosts of our children. The specters of a dead future. Emaciated skeletons buried beneath vulgar stories of conquest upon conquest upon conquest. Civilization has no relatives, only captives. Breathing dead air and poisoned water, it owns the night and creeps towards distant constellations. Its survival is expansive unending hunger, a hunger that has been named colonialism; a vast consumption that feeds on spirit, and all life. It fashions its years and seconds into an anemic prison. It has shaped time into the most exquisite of weapons, obliterating memories, killing cycles. Its essence is time. The temporal and spacial imposition of awareness is the oblivion that is modernity and linear, or one-way time. When we name the genocidal fulfillment of a colonized future, civilization pronounces itself as The Existent. This is what is meant by "modernity." It is authoritarian temporality. We name this consuming of existence, this assertion of "superiority," as a war of wars against Mother Earth.

Capitalism is the alimentary tract of this monster, it is a transmuter. Recoiling onto itself to keep its accumulations from others, only moving when there is something to be gained. It speaks

between acrid breaths, “the air is mine, the water is mine, and the land is mine,” as it carves the earth and draws lines, “even the night, is mine.” We cannot even sleep without a payment to exist within its expansive nightmare.

Everything can be transmuted into commodity; this is what is meant when the words free and market are conjoined. Whether driven by capitalist expansion or other political and economic means, industry demands resource. It covets them and produces a hierarchy of existence, or power, through a vulgar alchemy. It fragments our lives into manageable tasks. To produce. To make. To Grow. To Serve. To build. To move. To gain. It cultivates food not to eat. It builds pipelines through sacred rivers to fuel industries, to benefit those who believe in its “order,” its adherents, its devout believers, those who name themselves “capitalists.” The lights are left on. The fridge is still cold. The water flows down the drain to somewhere. Our lands are left ravaged by open sores where they were scraped and dug for coal, uranium, lithium, metals, glistening stones...

When they shit we are left to live and feed on the wastes.

That we cannot live freely from the land is the ultimatum of capitalism, it is the banner waving over the death march of progress across the world. That the earth has been scorched so we submit, that our children were stolen so we forget. It has not solely been that our existence is what has been the target of civilization though, in terms of commodities and productivities; we can exist with the condition that our world ends within us. So long as we shed our skin and unravel that which has been woven since time immemorial.

Na’ashjé’ii Asdzáá taught us how to weave.

Each thread has memory and recoils towards its restoring. When it is so tightly woven it holds water, that is how familiar, how deep our mutuality is. Place, beings, each other, ourselves, this depth is beyond the reaches of memory.

It is what has always made us a threat.

## **Civil (Dis)Agreements**

Civilization’s urge is to constitute itself in ways to manage, or govern, by a range of means i.e. divine right, social contract, etc. its people and resources; it has come to articulate this arrangement in the form of the State. However it has been organized, we can understand the State plainly as centralized political governance. Its characteristics have always been the same: a privileged group makes the decisions for everyone else and upholds those decisions with military and police forces, the judiciary, and prisons. Whether it is constituted in a religious, class, hereditary, or ethnic authority, there is nothing voluntary, or consensual about the State except within the ranks of its elite privileged groups. The “rights” of the governed can be granted or taken away.

Max Weber offers this candid and most useful definition of the state as, “a polity that maintains a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.”

Its violences are most often obscured (because some form of agreement is necessary to maintain power) but always upheld through some combination of implicit and explicit institutional brutality.

In the political theater of “democracy,” that obscurity is maintained through the symbolic act of voting. Voting is ritual agreement of the legitimacy of the state and its mandate over society.

It only ever resolves the question of rules and rulers. Decolonization will never be on the ballot, yet Indigenous captives continue to play out their roles and vote for their colonial masters.

The process of bringing people and lands that have not been civilized into civilization is the essential and vicious role of colonialism. When a State has consumed its available resources it is compelled to look elsewhere and to others. This is the etymology of colonialism; it is the language of domination, coercion, control, exploitation, assimilation, and annihilation. It expands and contracts in between breaths of unending wars, it colonizes memories to justify itself, this is what it calls History. Its corroded conscience constructs a national identity out of its insecurities: stories of greatness, of the world before and the world to come. It emerges entitled and assembles against its persistent enemies, the menace of those who refuse captivation, those fluctuating threats it names as “others.”

The maintenance of this internalized violence is its nationalism. When it becomes so pervasive that it has no need to pronounce its dominance and authority, this is what we also call “fascism.”

The settler colonial State has always meant war against Indigenous Peoples in so-called North America. The military designs of reservations were open-air prison camps. Treaties were negotiations of the terms of our surrender. The strategy of “Tribal sovereignty” was planned as a temporary management project towards total assimilation. That Indigenous Peoples have been politically corralled into the colonial designation of “domestic dependent Nations” is antithetical to the very concept of sovereignty (in terms of self-governance). From the Doctrine of Discovery to the Marshall Trilogy, these acts are the formal legal basis of ongoing genocide, ecocide, and slavery on these lands. Indigenous politicians (those that aren’t outright colonial puppets) are still sentimental to the fantasy of “Tribal sovereignty” under colonial occupation. Their strategies are social and political suicide.

While Indigenous scholars and activists like Vine Deloria Jr. and members of the American Indian Movement have focused on the goal of an Indigenous sovereignty “without political and social assimilation,” this objective has been limited and ultimately reinforced the Euro-colonial, or more precisely the Westphalian system, of nation-state sovereignty. “Tribal sovereignty” is not possible while colonial authority exists, and perhaps a more pressing concern is that it is fundamentally a colonial political concept. While calls to “honor the treaties” on one hand could be viewed as assertions of Indigenous political authority, on the other, they are a myopic urge to revisit forced negotiations made under duress to benefit the colonial order. The strategy of colonial expansion was not designed to sustain treaties with Peoples that invaders planned to assimilate into their order. The U.S. government had absolutely no problem breaking every treaty it marked its name on. From the colonizer’s perspective treaties were always temporary; they were a concession to captivity, an agreement to civilization. They were merely a symbolic and political formality of capitulation. Treaties are dead words on dead pieces of paper that were negotiations of the surrender of our ancestors.

In its simplest terms, settler colonialism is violent dispossession, appropriation, and imposition. Resource colonialism is only differentiated in that it is oriented to enslave and exploit. Both forces of colonialism are most often imposed in tandem; always depending and shifting based upon the benefits sought by the colonizer. In its mapping of existence, colonialism dispossess all life. Its first discreet violence is discovery, the brutal act of making “knowable,” the unknown. It then imposes one way of living, one way of time, and one way of knowing, over another. What has been called “manifest destiny” —More’s utopian impulse— is the mass-death march of settler futurity. Always towards a temporal hegemony. Its power coalesces in spacial moments by its

adherents. As it breathes it is scalable; it is at once the State, the monarchy, the church, the colony, and the empire. For those that continue to reap the rewards of colonization, it is a “civil” agreement they silently make and uphold everyday.

## **Nature negates the state.**

As we trace tree rings and dust turned stone carved by powerful waters into vast canyons, we are comforted with the unknowledge that nature has always negated the State. As it controls and consumes existence to sustain and build itself, the State, as a constitution of civilization, exists against nature.

For Diné, our lives are guided in relation to six sacred mountains that are the pillars of our cosmology. Each of these mountains is adorned in sacred elements and presents a teaching of how we maintain and restore harmony as we exist in this world. Through our ceremonies and prayers we maintain a living covenant (physically maintained as Dził Leezh or mountain soil bundles) to exist in harmony with nature.

At points in our existence, a collective social process called Naachid (to gesture in a direction) has been implemented to address significant matters facing our people. Naat’aáni (the one who speaks) have been misinterpreted by colonial anthropologists as “leaders” of Diné yet their role, as those responsible for the medicine bundles for their families, was ceremonial and not absolute or coercive. This way of being is incompatible with any form of centralized governance. It is incoherent to the State.

Throughout the world Indigenous Peoples live their mutuality on varied terms in complex (and sometimes conflictual and contradictory) social relationships. The cosmology of existence, the continually emergent worlds and manifestations of being and becoming, are all outside of “civilized” order and the state. They are unknowable.

Yet the settler anthropologist wants more evidence, more rationale, more comparison, more information, and more justification to feed itself on the unknown. It scavenges for barbarity to justify its own violent social urges: “this is how it’s been, this is why we dominate and destroy.” The living world is sacrificed and consumed on the altar of progress; this is the sacrament of Darwin.

Perhaps to also clear their genocidal consciences, European invaders have been fascinated with projecting “enlightened” ideals of social management (like calling even the slightest agreeable political cohesion a “democracy”), hierarchies, and power relationships to justify their ongoing march of “modernity.” Anthropologists have nearly dissected everything they can about who we are and how we relate to each other. As we’ll discuss later, it is no surprise to see radical leftists calculate their existence on that same path, with similar projections.

Ours is a continually emergent world, our existence and our future is continuous manifestation, and we are always in the process of becoming.

To unmap Indigenous social relations from the colonial political geography means to become unknowable again. When we restore or heal ancestral living knowledge, we become a remembering against time. Indigenous memories are anti-history and anti-future. Indigenous physical and mnemonic resistance is the rejection of colonial temporal “awareness,” it is the negation of oblivion. Our mutuality with existence has always occurred outside of time.

Our existence is organized in cycles that have rejected coercion into the static geography of settler-colonial understandings. We find more affinity with the juniper and sage that grow through impossible sandstone. We locate ourselves in the springs where our ancestor's footprints have worn a path like an umbilical cord. We know the land and the land knows us. Where and who we are mean the same thing. This is an understanding that is cultivated through generations upon generations of mutuality. This is where our thinking comes from. It is a place where no government exists. Indigenous liberation is the realization of our autonomy and mutuality with all life and the Earth, free from domination, coercion, domination, and exploitation. This is also an anarchist assertion, so we locate a connection.

The anarchist position is one that locates the fundamental oppression and power in society in the very structure and operations of the State. Although autonomy and anti-authoritarianism didn't originate in Europe, as a political idea, Anarchy was named through hundreds of years of resistance to domination by the State, monarchs, capitalists, and the Christian church. For those who assert themselves as anarchists, any form of State power is an imposition of force. They fundamentally reject and critique political authority in all its forms. In its early expressions, those now considered "classical" anarchists such as Bakunin & Kropotkin, found anarchism in what they observed as a "natural law" of freedom and sought harmony in its order. Though there is some interesting ancestry with Lewis Henry Morgan (who fetishized the Haudenosaunee) and William Godwin, and the influences of the products of their fascinations with Indigenous Peoples in the so-called Americas, we're not interested in the pedigree of anarchism. They drew from our blood and we kept bleeding. In their distillation they separated out our matriarchy, our queerness, and that which made us whole, so what would they have to offer except a vague essentialization?

When anarchism speaks we locate an affinity in our hostility towards those who have imposed themselves upon us.

But we resist to be reduced to political artifacts, so this has also made us hostile towards anarchist identity, though not entirely to anarchism.

When it is asked, "how can we locate an Indigenous Anarchism" and "how can we heal and live our lives free from colonial constraint?" Our first response is an extension of our hostility; there is no Indigenous anarchist theory and perhaps there never should be.

## **Against an Indigenous Anarchist Theory**

Theory proposes to map who and what we are into the awareness we reject; to make us known and formulate a position through the cartography of settler knowledge. But what use do we have for political ideologies that have been imposed through colonial relations?

Political science theories are established through substantiation, explanation, and justification. The reference points for these standards are Euro-subjectivities that inherently delegitimize and dispossess Indigenous knowledge. Those who aspire to be scholars, by design of their institutional careers, most often are placed in the position of ideological authority.

The contours of the existent political geography have been over-mapped by intellectuals, academics & armchair revolutionary theoreticians who desire to flatten our earth-view into categories that are too stifling for the complexities of our desires. Their pastime is building walls within walls of concrete structures where they can hang their accolades and intellectually manage those of us below. Their affinities are shaped within the same halls of other "sciences" that



are reductive fascinations born of, benefit from, and ultimately serve to perpetuate a materialist culture of domination, exploitation, and death.

After a political theory is solidified, a banner is waved, a flag is planted, and allegiance is due.

We do not seek that our ways of knowing, being, and acting ever be wrapped up into a fixed belief and presented as a pitiful rag. We do not wish that Indigenous anarchism ever be a flag that is planted anywhere on Mother Earth. The calcification of an Indigenous anarchist theory would precipitate all the merchandizing that relegates other political theories to banal dramaturgy, and we fanatically reject these conditions.

Indigenous autonomy needs no theoretical foundation to justify itself.

As an anarchist who was also an Indigenous person, Aragorn! identified this rejection, “Anarchism is the term used to describe an open ended theory that will not be set in stone. Anarchy isn’t named after a man, it is named after negation.”

The modern leftist political urge towards unified (centralized) revolutionary struggle, with meticulously identified “points of unity” and check box manifestos outlining programs, are all propositions of philosophical, ideological, and political homogeneity. This is a tendency that the Zapatistas – who are romanticized ad nauseam for their particularly wonderful sustained insurrection – were very aware of. Much to the frustrations of leftists seeking legitimacy and to have their political theories confirmed, the Zapatistas were intentionally elusive about their politics due to the trappings of modern leftist political projections. While it was clear that the assertion of Zapatismo by Ch’ol, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tojolobal, Mam, and Zoque people embodied autonomous anti-capitalist anti-colonial struggle, land back, and mutual aid, the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee Zapatista Army of National Liberation asserted, “Zapatismo is not a new political ideology, or a rehash of old ideologies. Zapatismo is nothing, it does not exist. It only serves as a bridge, to cross from one side, to the other. So everyone fits within Zapatismo, everyone who wants to cross from one side, to the other. There are no universal recipes, lines, strategies, tactics, laws, rules, or slogans. There is only a desire – to build a better world, that is, a new world.”

Leftists have excessively applied “post-modern” (a concept that placed them farther along their linear timeline) anthropology and studied their uprising (while almost always neglecting struggles of Indigenous Peoples whose lands they occupy), but their rebellion is incomprehensible without understanding the Indigenous heart (through language, ceremony, cosmology, etc.) at the center of their struggle. We appreciate and desire to build on this negation of comprehensibility. We do not fetishize Zapatismo because it does not exist.

We also reject the proposition that any political ideology could comprehensively represent the desires, aspirations, resistance, autonomy, and social organizing of all Indigenous Peoples throughout the world. When we say Indigenous, we mean of the land. That means who we are is specific to a place.

This is something Aragorn! explored from a position of dispossession in *Locating an Indigenous Anarchism*, “An indigenous anarchism is an anarchism of place. This would seem impossible in a world that has taken upon itself the task of placing us nowhere. A world that places us nowhere universally. Even where we are born, live, and die is not our home.” Aragorn! reflected passed those of us who are still rooted in place and not in the location that, “...is the differentiation that is crushed by the mortar of urbanization and pestle of mass culture into the paste of modern alienation.” But this is the beauty of this conversation. When we start talking about our

relationships to place, we draw out the tensions, the exclusions, the conflicts and contradictions. (Perhaps we should also be asking or proposing, “how can we weaponize our alienation?”)

Our aspirations are already well articulated by our original (living) teachings; no theory or postulation can substitute. This is not to say that our ways are rigid, but to break the dams imposed by colonial stunting and let the rivers of our ways of being flow. Without breaking those barriers, we face stagnation of any political aspiration in the tepid waters of theory. Our existence is guided but it is also fluid and as such, no river should live as a lake if its waters were born to flow.

## **The disharmony of Anarchist identity & solidarity.**

There is a push by settler leftists, particularly by those entangled in the academic industry, to define an Indigenous Anarchism. They come as inchoate anthropologists with their half-chewed hypothesis in their mouths, speaking for us before we have spoken. Perhaps the impulse is a moment to celebrate for some, as the alternatives are to continue the status quo towards our social death and the fulfillment of colonial future or to compete for equal access to coercive power through “revolutionary” leftist propositions. But settler sciences and politics can only define what we are not. Their reference point is European thought that slaughtered their own Indigenous understandings long ago. For the better part of its articulated existence, Anarchism has been a response to power in the context of European cycles of social domination, exploitation and dehumanization. And so the expectation for Indigenous Peoples to answer with a clear ideological and political response is in many ways, a project that (unintentionally) serves to justify settler colonial identity and existence. It is an insidious survival strategy, veiled as an overture of political solidarity. So why should Indigenous Peoples join the chorus of this death rattle when the killing of a settler colonial future is what we mean when we pronounce “Indigenous Liberation”? The project of politicizing Indigenous identity produces Indigenous actors assuming roles in a political theatre that ultimately alienates our autonomy. But if we study civil movements in the so-called U.S., apparently this is how we qualify for solidarity.

It would appear that we would naturally find affinity with those asking and answering the question, “How can we live our lives free from authoritarian constraint?” Yet the terms of affinity or solidarity have almost always been skewed towards the pursuit of a settler colonial future. Indigenous Peoples constantly have had to justify our existence in political terms to be suitable for support.

This false solidarity has never been mutual; it has existed as an instrument of settler colonial assimilation. It seeks to justify itself through captivating Indigenous Peoples rather than examining how it is itself a product, perpetuator, and benefactor of settler colonial domination. There is nothing more contradictory than an autonomous settler asserting a standard for which Indigenous autonomy should be justified.

To make this point clear, early “American” anarchists never declared war against colonialism.

One of the most prominent representatives of the early Anarchist tendency on these lands, Voltairine de Cleyre, celebrated colonial violence against Indigenous Peoples in her 1912 essay “Direct Action.” That it has never, in all of these years of study, come to the attention of students of anarchism to address her example as settler colonial defense against Indigenous Peoples, is a

glaring reality of the blind spot that European descended anarchists continue to maintain. In her essay *De Cleyre* stated,

“Another example of direct action in early colonial history, but this time by no means of the peaceable sort, was the affair known as Bacon’s Rebellion. All our historians certainly defend the action of the rebels in that matter, for they were right. And yet it was a case of violent direct action against lawfully constituted authority. For the benefit of those who have forgotten the details, let me briefly remind them that the Virginia planters were in fear of a general attack by the Indians; with reason. Being political actionists, they asked, or Bacon as their leader asked, that the governor grant him a commission to raise volunteers in their own defense. ...I am quite sure that the political-action-at-all-costs advocates of those times, after the reaction came back into power, must have said: ‘See to what evils direct action brings us! Behold, the progress of the colony has been set back twenty-five years;’ forgetting that if the colonists had not resorted to direct action, their scalps would have been taken by the Indians a year sooner (emphasis added), instead of a number of them being hanged by the governor a year later. In the period of agitation and excitement preceding the revolution, there were all sorts and kinds of direct action from the most peaceable to the most violent; and I believe that almost everybody who studies United States history finds the account of these performances the most interesting part of the story, the part which dents into the memory most easily.”

*De Cleyre*, like most early anarchists in the U.S., critiqued authority, domination, and coercion yet glorified the brutality of colonial conquest as an exemplary unmediated act.

The deeper story of Bacon’s 1675–1676 “rebellion” is that this colonial invader went against British authority and manipulated Occaneechi warriors to assist in his attack against the Susquehannock who were defending their homelands. After their raid, Bacon’s white militia immediately turned on their Occaneechi allies and massacred men, women, and children. That this analysis has remained unchallenged is remarkable considering that thirty years after this “rebellion,” settler militias like Bacon’s transformed from Black slave and “Indian” patrols into the first police forces in “America.”

We can also look to Cindy Milstein’s 2010 book *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* for more recent examples of settler colonial advocacy. While the majority of the book succinctly states what anarchism is about, in the section on Direct Democracy Milstein states, “...we forget that democracy finds its radical edge in the great revolutions of the past, the American Revolution included.” For Milstein, settler colonial violence was a reconcilable complication, “This does not mean that the numerous injustices tied to the founding of the United States should be ignored or, to use a particularly appropriate word, whitewashed. The fact that native peoples, blacks, women, and others were (and often continue to be) exploited, brutalized, and/or murdered wasn’t just a sideshow to the historic event that created this country. Any movement for direct democracy has to grapple with the relation between this oppression and the liberatory moments of the American Revolution.”

Milstein then states, “At the same time, one needs to view the revolution in the context of its times and ask, in what ways was it an advance?” and later calls for “a second ‘American Revolution.’”

Settler colonialism by definition is involuntary association. Colonizers who are anarchists still maintain an implicit position of domination over Indigenous Peoples and Lands, which is unmistakably contrary to anti-authoritarianism. This has been incongruously apparent in “primitivist,” green anarchist, and re-wilding tendencies that have been wrought with cultural appropriation,

fetishism, and erasure. Without consent, without meaningful relationality with Indigenous Peoples, settler colonizer anarchists in the so-called U.S. will always have to face this deep contradiction. Anarchism, or any other political proposition for that matter, simply cannot be imposed or “re-wilded” on stolen lands.

While settler colonizer anarchists preserve the idea of “America” in their revolutionary imaginary, Black Anarchists such as Ashanti Alston, Kuwasi Balagoon, Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin in the so-called U.S. have long articulated their deep concerns with anarchism’s lack of racial analysis while struggling with propositions of Black statist nationalism. In *As Black As Resistance: Finding the Conditions of Liberation*, William C. Anderson and Zoé Samudzi dig directly into this matter by asserting, “We are not settlers. But championing the creation of a Black majoritarian nation-state, where the fate of Indigenous people is ambiguous at best, is an idea rooted in settler logic.” They observe that,

“Black American land politics cannot simply be built on top of centuries-old exterminatory settler logic of Indigenous removal and genocide. Rather, the actualization of truly liberated land can only come about through dialogue and co-conspiratorial work with Native communities and a shared understanding of land use outside of capitalistic models of ownership.”

The solidarity of stolen people on stolen lands is built through mutuality, consent and breaking the manipulations of colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy that have dispossessed all of us from Indigenous ways of being.

That “American” anarchist history and contemporary analysis is devoid of meaningful anti-colonial analysis and action speaks volumes to this concern. For all its aggressions towards the state, there are no excuses for its lack of implication of the overlying function of the first violences that compose “America” and from which the continuity of its power flows to this day.

Anarchism, as with all settler produced or adjacent political ideologies, has a compatibility issue with settler colonialism.

In the recent past, settler colonizer anarchists continually excused themselves out of solidarity for Indigenous struggles. From denouncements that “Indigenous struggles are nationalistic,” which really is a projection by fragile settlers of national identities that have absolutely no correlation with Indigenous social organizing (other than with the likes of republican & violent misogynist Russell Means), to outright attacks on the spiritual basis of Indigenous relationality, if solidarity matters, settler colonizers have to confront their hang-ups. This is not to argue that Indigenous Peoples should be considered solely as candidates for political alliance, this goes beyond solidarity, it is an assertion that any liberatory impulse on these lands must be built around the fire of Indigenous autonomy. Whether its performative allyship through land acknowledgements or adopting the label “accomplice,” settlers need to implicate themselves fully into the destruction of their social order. Otherwise we end up satisfied that *Its Going Down* and *Crime-thinc* check boxed anti-colonial as part of their politic and feature the occasional Indigenous story that they share affinity with. It’s meaningless unless it is a position that informs every part of their analysis and actions, not just when a radical Indigenous moment occurs and they can attach their own analysis to it.

We reject the identifier of “anarcho-Indigenous” for this reason. We are not an appendage of a revolutionary ideology or strategy for power for someone else’s existence. We do not seek to merely be acknowledged as a hyphen to anarchism or any liberation or resistance politics only to be subsumed into its counter movement against a dominant culture.

The question of Indigenous Anarchism isn't one that we arrived at as corollary of or due to the shortcomings of white or settler Anarchism—it isn't "what it wasn't doing for us"—it is a question arrived at in relation to the existence of the State, of the ongoing brutalities of civilization of colonialism, capitalism, cis-heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy, and the desire for an existence without domination, coercion, and exploitation.

From capitalism to socialism, the conclusion towards an affinity with anarchism is in part made due to the anti-Indigenous calculations of every other political proposition.

Marxism's theoretical inadequacy as a strategy for Indigenous autonomy and liberation lies in its commitment to an industrialized worker run State as the vehicle for revolutionary transformation towards a stateless society. Forced industrialization has ravaged the earth and the people of the earth. To solely focus on an economic system rather than indict the consolidation of power as an expression of modernity has resulted in the predictions of anarchist critics (like Bakunin) to come true; the ideological doctrine of socialists tends towards bureaucracy, intelligentsia, and ultimately totalitarianism.

Revolutionary socialism has been particularly adept at creating authoritarians. Anarchists simply see the strategy for what it is: consolidation of power into a political, industrial, and military force pronouncing liberation to only be trapped in its own theoretical quagmire that perpetually validates its authoritarianism to vanquish economic and social threats that it produces by design.

To be required to assume a role in a society that is premised on colonial political and economic ideology towards the overthrow of that system to achieve communalization is to require political assimilation and uniformity as a condition for and of revolution. Marxist and Maoist positions demand it, which means they demand Indigenous People to reconfigure that which makes them Indigenous to become weapons of class struggle. The process inherently alienates diverse and complex Indigenous social compositions by compelling them to act as subjects of a revolutionary framework based on class and production. Indigenous collectivities exist in ways that leftist political ideologues refuse to imagine. As to do so would conflict with the primary architecture of "enlightenment" and "modernity" that their "civilized" world is built on.

This is why we reject the overture to shed our cultural "bondage" and join the proletariat dictatorship. We reject the gestures to own the means of production with our expectant assimilated role of industrial or cultural worker. Any social arrangement based on industrialization is a dead-end for the earth and the peoples of the earth. Class war on stolen lands could abolish economic exploitation while retaining settler-colonialism. We have no use for any politics that calculates its conclusion within the context of these kinds of power relations.

As Indigenous Peoples we are compelled to go deeper and ask, what about this political ideology is of us and the land? How is our spirituality perceived and how will it remain intact through proposed liberatory or revolutionary processes? As any political ideology can be considered anti-colonial if we understand colonialism only on its material terms as colonized forces versus colonizer forces. When the calculation is made; all other propositions such as Communism, revolutionary socialism, and so forth become obsolete in that the core of their propositions cannot be reconciled with Indigenous spiritual existence. Anarchism, with its flawed legacy, is dynamic enough to actually become a stronger position through the scrutiny; this is primarily due to the matter that as a tension of tensions against domination, anarchism has the unique character of resisting urges towards intransigence. It has been developed and redeveloped as a dynamic position that strengthens with its contortions. Anarchists have constantly looked inward and convulsed with (and even celebrated) their contradictions.

## Dislocating an Indigenous Anarchism

If anarchism doesn't make us more whole, what use do we have for it?

When we ask the question, "What do our cultures want?" The response for Diné is hózhó, or harmony/balance with existence. This is expressed and guided through Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Házhóón.

The idea of collective care and support, of ensuring the well being of all our relations in non-hierarchical voluntary association, and taking direct action has always been something that translated easily into Diné Bizáad (Navajo language). T'áá ni'ínít'éego t'éiyá is a translation of this idea of autonomy. Nahasdzáán dóó Yádiłhił Bitsaądeę Beenahaz'áanii (the natural order of mother earth and father sky) is the basis of our life way. Many young people are still raised with the teaching of t'áá hwó' ají t'éego, which means if it is going to be it is up to you, that no one will do it for you. Ké', or our familial relations, guides us so that no one would be left to fend for themselves, it is the basis for our mutuality with all existence, not just human beings.

Our culture is our prefiguration.

I only share this to assert that the principles of anarchism are not at all unfamiliar to Indigenous ways of being: a harmonious life without coercion based upon mutual aid and direct action.

Anarchism is among the few (anti-)political propositions that can be configured through our teachings and remain intact. This is perhaps why some Indigenous Peoples have either identified as Anarchists or drawn connections through affinities with Anarchism. We can look to the autonomous collectives and anti-authoritarian actions of Indigenous Peoples throughout the world and list an incredible amount of brilliant examples. We could easily calculate the principles of anarchism and compare, but we resist that urge, simply because they need not be justified by comparison to any fixed political ideology. Though we could explore texts, historical documents, and oral histories and tease anarchisms out from within them, we reject this kind of anthropological political tourism.

Overall, in many ways anarchism appears to be what we're already doing. So what use do we have for developing a formal affinity or a political identity of it?

Although we can review the genealogy of leftist political propositions such as Anarchism and Marxism and unveil limited Indigenous inspirations for those ideologies (Kropotkin's Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution being a prime example), there have been only a handful of Indigenous thinkers and writers who have articulated their positions linking Indigenous ways and anarchism more formally. Out of the range of texts that relate to Indigenous Anarchism, only Aragorn!'s two essays: Locating an Indigenous Anarchism (2005) and A Non-European Anarchism (2007), and Taiaiake Alfred's 2005 book Wasàse: indigenous pathways of action and freedom, offer a more direct naming of an Indigenous anarchism.

While Aragorn! offered first principles of Indigenous Anarchism: "Everything is Alive, The Ascendance of Memory, and Sharing is Living," he rejected a pinning down of an Indigenous Anarchist position and challenged the ways academics, particularly anthropologists, have attempted to domesticate an Indigenous Anarchism in their scholarship.

In his 2005 book, Wasàse: indigenous pathways of action and freedom, Taiaiake Alfred spoke of "anarcho-Indigenism." In explaining why he felt this term is appropriate to identify a "concise political philosophy." He stated,

"The two elements that come to mind are indigenous, evoking cultural and spiritual rootedness in this land and the Onkwehonwe struggle for justice and freedom, and the political philosophy

and movement that is fundamentally anti-institutional, radically democratic, and committed to taking action to force change: anarchism.

...strategic commonalities between indigenous and anarchist ways of seeing and being in the world: a rejection of alliances with legalized systems of oppression, non-participation in the institutions that structure the colonial relationship, and a belief in bringing about change through direct action, physical resistance, and confrontations with state power.”

Both Aragorn!’s and Alfred’s analysis emerged at the same time with different conclusions. Alfred fetishized non-violence and called for revolutionary change through spiritual resurgence, while Aragorn!, who was an anarchist without adjectives, proposed patience.

In the aftermath of these openings, other articulations have been made, some less clear than others.

In 2007 Táala Hooghan Infoshop was established (myself being one of many “founders”) as an autonomous, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist space by Indigenous youth in occupied Kinłani (Flagstaff, Arizona) with the statement, “We are an Indigenous-established, community based and volunteer-run collective dedicated to creatively confronting and overcoming social and environmental injustices in the occupied territories of Flagstaff and surrounding areas.” In 2013 I helped host “Fire at the Mountain” which was an anti-colonial and anarchist book fair. This is also the location where we (a small temporary collective of sorts) held the 2019 Indigenous Anarchist Convergence.

In *Anarchism is Dead! Long Live ANARCHY!* (2009), Rob Los Ricos, who maintains strong affinity with anti-civ critiques, asserts that, “The greatest fallacy of Western ideology is that human beings are something apart from — and somehow superior to — the natural world.” but he does not offer an Indigenous perspective. He articulates what he thinks anarchism should be “for” (one race, earth centric, etc.) and cautions anarchists to be wary of progress, “If the enlightenment view of progress can be interpreted as an ideology of the annihilation of life on Earth in the pursuit of monetary gain, then anarchism can only be seen as a more democratic form of worldwide genocidal-euthanasia.”

In 2010, an anti-authoritarian bloc was called for to intervene in a march against a fascist cop named Joe Arpaio organized by liberal migrant justice groups in occupied Akimel O’odham Pi-Posh land (Phoenix, Arizona). It was named the Diné, O’odham, Anarchist Bloc due to its composition of Indigenous and non-Indigenous anti-authoritarians. The call for the bloc stated,

“We are an autonomous, anti-capitalist force that demands free movement and an end to forced dislocations for all people... We categorically reject the government and those who organize with its agents. And we likewise oppose the tendency by some in the immigrant movement to police others within it, turning the young against movement militants and those whose vision of social change goes beyond the limited perspective of movement leaders. Their objectives are substantially less than total liberation, and we necessarily demand more. Also, we strongly dispute the notion that a movement needs leaders in the form of politicians, whether they be movement personalities, self-appointed police or elected officials. We are accountable to ourselves and to each other, but not to them. Politicians will find no fertile ground for their machinations and manipulations. We have no use for them. We are anti-politics. We will not negotiate with Capital, the State or its agents.”

The bloc was singled out and severely attacked by police and five people were arrested. Unsurprisingly non-profit migrant justice groups denounced the bloc as “outside agitators,” they

claimed that the bloc had brought the violence upon themselves. These so-called “outside agitators” were elders and youth Indigenous to the area and their accomplices.

In 2011 Jacqueline Lasky compiled a collection of essays building on Alfred’s work titled, *Indigenism, Anarchism, Feminism: An Emerging Framework for Exploring Post-Imperial Futures*. Lasky offered that “...anarch@indigenism attempts to link critical ideas and visions of post-imperial futures in ways 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.”

In a 2012 essay, Cante Waste expressed their interest in an Indigenous Egoism, “I recognize no authority figure over me, nor do I aspire to any particular ideology. I am not swayed by duty because I owe nothing to anyone. I am devoted to nothing but myself. I subscribe to no civilized standards or set of morals because I recognize no God or religion...Egoist anarchists have declared war on society, war on civilization.”

The transcription of a powerful talk in 2018 by Tawinikay was published into a zine titled, *Autonomously and with Conviction: A Métis Refusal of State-Led Reconciliation*, that offered,

“Anarchism is a political philosophy – some might say a beautiful idea – that believes in self-governed societies based on voluntary association with one another. It advocates for non-hierarchical decision making, direct participation in those decisions by affected communities, and autonomy for all living persons. Furthermore, it leaves space for the valuation of non-human entities beyond their monetary worth or usefulness to human beings. My Indigenous teachings have communicated to me that our communities are important, but so are we as individuals. Traditional ways saw decision making as a participatory process, based on consensus, where communities made choices together. My teachings tell me that the land can offer us what we need, but never to take more than that. I see these ideas as fundamentally compatible. I’d like to see an anarchy of my people and the anarchy of settlers (also my people) enacted here together, side by side. With an equal distribution of power, each pursuing healthy relationships, acting from their own ideas and history. Just as the Two Row imagined. I would like to see the centralized state of Canada dismantled. I’d like to see communities take up the responsibility of organizing themselves in the absence of said central authority.”

While there are many other examples and actions to list, such as the Minnehaha Free State of 1998 and the Transform Columbus Day actions throughout the 1990’s in so-called Denver, many of those were alliances with anarchists rather than assertions of Indigenous anarchy.

While Indigenous anarchists have long articulated themselves in urban displaced contexts where anarchism is expressed in various forms, primarily as a counter-cultural phenomenon in spaces such as infoshops, Food Not Bombs, punk shows, squats, guerrilla gardens, mutual aid collectives, direct action affinity groups, etc, we also find them in the mesas, the canyons, the corn fields, and the sacred mountains.

We offer these select aforementioned expressions of Indigenous Anarchism as a connection to an ongoing conversation that is much more interesting than anything we could offer in the texts of this essay or that we could expect from any books on the subject.

This is a sentiment that was shared by many after the 2019 Indigenous Anarchist Convergence in occupied Kinłani, as an anonymous Diné wrote in their report back *Fire Walk with Me*,

“...the Indigenous anarchism I saw was kind of unfamiliar and mostly unappealing...I believe people will grow this indigenous anarchism. An ideology succinct enough for Instagram stories, 280 character limit tweets, and vibrant screen printed art, excuse me, memes. A movement



global enough to essentialize a racial, humanist, and material struggle of indigeneity so others will comfortably speak for any absent voice. A resistance so monolithic the powers that be could easily identify then repress all indigenous anarchists.” They added, “The potential I have discovered at the convergence is the particulars of Diné anarchy...I suggest that Diné anarchy offers the addition of a choice to attack. An assault on our enemy that weakens their grip on, not only our glittering world, but the worlds of others. An opportunity for the anarchy of Ndee, of O’odham, and so on, to exact revenge on their colonizers. Until all that’s left for Diné anarchists is to dissuade the endorsements of the next idol expecting our obedience.”

As Aragorn! stated in *A Non-European Anarchism*, “The formation of a non-European anarchism is untenable. The term bespeaks a general movement when the goal is an infinite series of disparate movements. A non-European anarchism is the thumbnail sketch of what could be an African anarchism, a Maquiladora anarchism, a Plains Indian anarchism, an inner-city breed anarchism, et al. A category should exist for every self-determined group of people to form their own interpretation of a non-European anarchism.”

We anticipate the deeper exploration of Indigenous Anarchism to go two ways: one way will be by activist scholars (both Indigenous and settlers) from an anthropological and philosophical perspective that is totally out of touch with those closer to the fires of autonomy in our lands (and clearly this is the path we reject), the other way will be messy, bold, fierce, experimental, full of contradictions. It will be shared in smoke around fires, speaking dreams. It will be found between shutting down pipelines, smashing corporate windows, and ceremonies. It will be in hooghans and trailer parks. It will be something that refuses with all its being to be pinned down, to be brought into the folds of the knowable, to be an extension of the colonial order of ideas and existence. It will make itself unknowable.

It is in this spirit that we offer the following provocations, assertions, thoughts and questions, not as a conclusion but as an invitation to further this discussion if we are to orient ourselves as Indigenous People who are also Anarchists.

## **An Ungovernable Force of Nature.**

Indigenous Anarchists are an ungovernable force of Nature. We maintain that no law can be above nature. That is to say, how power is balanced and how we organize ourselves socially is an order that flows from and with Nahasdzáán (Mother Earth). This is what we are accountable and what we hold ourselves responsible to. Our affinity is with the mountains, the wind, rivers, trees, and other beings, we will never be patriots to any political social order.

As a force, we defend, protect, and take the initiative to strike. Indigenous anarchism presents the possibility of attack; it is the embodiment of anti-colonial struggle and being.

Our project is to replace the principle of political authority with the principle of autonomous Indigenous mutuality. To live a life in conflict with authoritarian constraint on stolen occupied land is negation of settler colonial domination.

This is also a negation of settler impositions and social mappings of gender, gender roles, ability, who is and who isn’t Indigenous, borders, religion, tradition (as a temporal constraint and not the in living cultural sense of the term), education, medicine, mental health, and so forth.

Before colonial invasion on these lands Indigenous societies existed without the State. While inter-Indigenous conflicts on various intensities and scales occurred, we embrace the negative

implications regardless of “cultural relativisms.” Where people of the earth have tended towards domination, there are powerful stories and ceremonies that have brought them back into the circle of mutuality.

We offer that in the incompatible brilliance between understandings of anarchism and Indigenous existence, a space is revealed where we can shed the poisoned skin of formal political entanglement in the dominant social order.

In this way we view anarchism as a sort of dynamic bridge. A set of radical (as in total negation) ideas that are a connecting point between anti-colonial struggle and Indigenous liberation. A practice that expresses and asserts autonomy in respect to the context of where it is located (place). It is an antagonistic connection between the point of where we are dispossessed and ruled over, to a point towards liberation and autonomy. As a rejection of all systems of domination and coercion, it is the utility anarchism has for Indigenous liberation of which we are interested in. And most specifically, it is in its indictment of the state and total rejection of it that we find the greatest use. Indigenous anarchism is a commitment to the destruction of domination and authority, which includes colonialism, white supremacy, cis-heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and the State.

We think beyond the solidarity of nationalisms (as this is what internationalism is predicated upon) and ask our relatives to consider the solidarity of mutuality with the Earth and all beings. That our solidarity is projected out from our relationship with the Earth. Our solidarity focuses more than just on intersections, it is centered on interrelationality.

We do not seek to “Indigenize” anarchism, or to turn that which is not our thinking into something that works for us. This kind of appropriation is relative to assimilation, and we see no use in it. We do not seek to “decolonize” anarchism simply because we do not share its ancestry. What we would like to offer is that we have already pronounced and located an Indigenous Anarchism, and it doesn’t and should not exist.

Our project isn’t to translate anarchism into Indigenous languages, as so many other ways of thinking have been missionized, but to build ways with which we can end coercive relations in our every day lives. Leftist political ideologies are an unnecessary step towards Indigenous Liberation. We offer no allegiance to colonial politics.

The question of anti-authoritarianism also pulls us farther beyond the trappings of pan-Indigeneity. When we critically ask, “What hierarchies exist in our distinct ways of being?” and “What traditions or cultural knowledge deprives people in our societies of their autonomy?” we resist anthropological temporal trappings that seek to preserve social artifacts to a fixed point.

The notion of life without authoritarian constraint doesn’t belong to a group because it found itself in compounded utterances of dead greek words, nor does it due to the succession of thinkers and practitioners in its beautiful and troubled genealogy. It belongs to no one and thus to everyone. It has been on the tips of our tongues so long as anyone has tried to dominate, control, and exploit our being and others. It has flowed from our thoughts and contracted our muscles to reflexively pull or push back.

Our social relations have had little distractions between what we want and how we live for generations upon generations.

We assert that every formation and theorized political matrix is at its core comprised of manipulation, coercion, and exploitation. Our existence is unmediated by any dominating force or authority. We’re not interested in engineering social arrangements, we’re interested in inspired formations, agitations, interventions, and acts towards total liberation.

We are not preoccupied with the imposition of an identity or social category, our enemies may call us whatever they want until their world crumbles around them. It is not our past time to convince them of anything, it is our intention to do everything possible by whatever means is effective to end the domination of our Earth-mother and all her beings.

If anarchy is the “revolutionary idea that no one is more qualified than you are to decide what your life will be,” then we offer that Indigenous Anarchists consider how deeply the “you” or “we” is as part of our mutuality with all existence.

## **The Re-Bundling/Weaving Again**

Ours is a radical incoherence.

Only by experience will you understand what is taking place in ceremony.

When we ask, “why and how are we dispossessed and by what forces?” it is natural that what follows is the question, “what can be done?”

Civilization and the state are myths colonizers keep telling themselves and forcing others to believe. It is their ritual of power, their prayer is time. The settler imaginary, the civilized mind, is always haunted by everything in them that they have killed. Their State, their entire civilization, exists on the precipice of rupture. Their instability is possibility that can be made to spread. When their spirit is attacked and corrupted, they fail. When we shed the language of non-violence and embrace our dispossession, it becomes more clear how to precipitate that vital failure. When their imaginary cannot justify itself against its brutalities, it becomes so vicious and fearful that it attacks and consumes itself.

The myth ends in powerful unraveling disbelief.

Na’ashjé’ii Asdzáá still speaks. She shared her fascination and we began to weave, she said if we have forgotten, she will teach us again. The restoration is itself a ceremony. We pull at the thread and unbind ourselves and each other. We unravel one story and reweave. This is the pattern of the storm, it is carried by sacred winds.

As it blesses us and our breath mixes with the breaths of our ancestors, we are rewoven and bundled into its beauty. We are reminded, “There is no authority but nature.”

Hwee’díí’yiin déé’ haazí’aanii, éi’ ní>hxéé’ bééhaazí’ áánjì aat’eeh. Baalagaana, Bíí’ Laah’ Áshdlaa’ii, bééhaazí’ áánjì bíí’jii’ niinii, éi’ dóh’ ááljìdaa’.

## **Recommended readings**

Locating an Indigenous Anarchism, Aragorn!

A Non-European Anarchism, Aragorn!

Autonomously and with Conviction, Tawinikay

Black Kitty Conspiracy For Another World: Deconstructing Anarchism, Settler Colonization & Anti-Blackness, edxi

Black Seed: Not on Any Map, Various

Bitter Water: Diné Oral Histories of the Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute, M. Benally

Our Word Is Our Weapon, Galeano/Marcos

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)  
Anti-Copyright



Klee Benally, Ya'iishjááshch'ílí  
Unknowable: Against an Indigenous Anarchist Theory  
June 2021

Originally published in *Black Seed: Not On Any Map* Retrieved on 2022-01-02 from  
<https://www.indigenoussaction.org/unknowable-against-an-indigenous-anarchist-theory-zine/>

**[usa.anarchistlibraries.net](http://usa.anarchistlibraries.net)**