Anarcho-Indigenism
“Anarchists have much to learn from Indigenous struggles for decolonization. This thought-provoking collection of interviews with Indigenous activists offers insight into points of contact, affinities and tensions.”

—Lesley J. Wood, Professor of Sociology, York University, Toronto

“Combines rich and arresting reflections on anarchism and indigenism with an incisive analysis of the complexities, tensions and affinities of anarchist and Indigenous politics. Vigorously affirming anarchism’s plurality, Dupuis-Déri and Pillet also make a powerful case for the reconfiguration of anticolonial struggle.”

—Ruth Kinna, Loughborough University Anarchism Research Group

“Timely, finely-tuned, and establishes anarcho-indigenism as a constellation of personal, political, and theoretical relationships that are crucial for decolonizing Turtle Island and imagining new ways for Indigenous peoples and settlers to live and work together.”

—Richard J. F. Day, Associate Professor, Queen’s University and author of Gramsci Is Dead

“[A] vital conversation between anarchists and leading Indigenous activists and intellectuals ... who together explore the relationship between anarchist and resurgent Indigenous politics. At its best, this book is an invitation to non-Indigenous anarchists to (re)consider revolutionary politics by taking up the ‘political histories and current lived experiences of Indigenous communities seriously’.”

—Elaine Coburn, Director of the Centre for Feminist Research, York University, Toronto
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Introduction
A new role: To listen and support

Francis Dupuis-Déri and Benjamin Pillet¹

Convergences and alliances between anarchists of European origin and Natives have been common in the so-called Americas for more than a century. For instance, there was an alliance between the rebellious campesinos led by Emiliano Zapata and the militias of the Liberal Party of Ricardo Flore Magón (who was himself born to a mestiza mother and an Indigenous father) during the Mexican revolution of 1910–11; their rally cry was “Land and Freedom.” Other examples include the manifesto _The Voice of the Peasant_, released in 1929 in so-called Bolivia by the anarchist activist Luis Cusicanqui, himself a mestizo who used the word peasant to also describe the Indigenous workers.² As recalled by Ángel J. Cappelletti (1927–95), the Argentinian author of _Anarchism in Latin America_,

the native and also Indigenous masses adopt the anarchist view of the world and society, from Mexico to Argentina […]. It is seldom noted that the anarchist doctrine of

¹ Translated by Ellen Warkentin.
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self-managed collectivism has a close resemblance to the ancient ways of life and organizations of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Peru.³

More recently, the new Zapatistas’ uprising of Maya-speaking—Tojolbal Tzeltal, Tzotzil communities in Chiapas, Mexico—on January 1, 1994, was met with great interest from European and North American anarchists who saw connections between Indigenous traditions and struggles and their own philosophies and traditions (see David Graeber’s *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, 2004). Anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist members of the alter-globalization movement actively answered the calls of the Zapatistas to participate in the 1996 “intergalactic” assembly of “humanity against neoliberalism,” as well as those coming from the transnational radical network known as People’s Global Action and advocating “global action” against the World Trade Organization International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and G8 summits and meetings.

In the meantime, up north in Canada, Gerald Taiaiake Alfred, a Kanyen’kehà:ka (Mohawk) activist and political scientist, coined the term “anarcho-indigenism,” initially in his book *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (2005). He then explained that

there are [...] important 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

confrontation with the state power. It is on this last point that connections have already been made between Onkwehonwe [original people] groups and non-indigenous activist groups, especially in collaborations between anarchists and Onkwehonwe in the anti-globalization movement.  

This idea was further developed collectively in 2009 during conferences at the University of Victoria in so-called British Columbia, through dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous intellectuals including Glen Coulthard, Leanne Simpson, Erica M. Lagalisse, Richard Day, Alex Khasnabish, Jackie Lasky, and Adam Gary Lewis, and soon after in a special edition of the journal *Affinities* in 2011.  

This collective endeavor is part of a more general movement seeking to grasp anarchism, or anarchy, outside of Eurocentric histories and experiences. Among others, valuable contributions to this discussion can be found in numerous studies on anarchist migration flows around the world (such as those regarding Italian and Jewish settlement in the Americas), as well as in Maia Ramnath’s *Decolonizing Anarchism: An Antiauthoritarian History of India’s Liberation Struggle* (2012), Barry Maxwell and Raymond Craib’s *No Gods, No Masters, No Peripheries: Global Anarchism* (2015), Erica Lagalisse’s mind-blowing *Occult Features of Anarchism: With Attention to the Conspiracy of Kings and the Conspiracy of the Peoples* (2018), and *Anarchist Studies*’ issue (2020, vol. 28, no. 2) on indigeneity and Latin American anarchism (which places a special emphasis

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on early twentieth-century popular struggles in Bolivia and on migration across borders of colonial states). Other recent works on affinities between anarchism and religion (e.g. Laozi6 or Islam7) also bring valuable insights on the topic, as well as those focusing on Middle Eastern and African contexts,8 among which the Black Rose Anarchist Federation/Rosa Negra Anarchist reader Black Anarchism (2016), Kuwasi Balagoon’s A Soldier’s Story: Revolutionary Writings by a New Afrikan Anarchist (2019, 3rd edition), and Marquis Bey’s path-breaking Anarcho-Blackness: Notes Toward a Black Anarchism (2023) deserve special mention.

Anarcho-indigenism should not be seen as a fancy, brand-new theory or political trend, but rather as a call to action, aimed particularly at non-Indigenous self-proclaimed anarchists (although it is our belief Indigenous individuals might find some insight in it as well). It is an invitation to take the political histories and current lived experiences of Indigenous communities seriously, from a perspective that includes their political, economic, social, and cultural realities. Anarcho-indigenism is not so much a movement as it is an attempt to bring together the mostly settler anarchist and Indigenous worlds in order to achieve stronger solidarity and an efficient decolonizing praxis.

Anarcho-indigenism can be seen as deepening and broadening connections that began with the superficial cultural appropriation of symbols associated with Indigenous people by European and North American anarchists in the 1970s and even earlier. Anarchist punks in London, New York,

8 Renée In der Maur and Jonas Staal (eds.), realized with the Kurdish Women’s Movement, Stateless Democracy (Utrecht: BAK, 2015).
and elsewhere adopted the Iroquois “mohawk” hairstyle to emphasize their rebellious, unruly, and uncontrollable nature. (It should be noted Indigenous people also participated in the punk movement, as Gord Hill discusses in his interview in this book.) In 1977 in Bologna, Italy, an anti-government, anti-capitalist group called the Metropolitan Indians incited tens of thousands of people to take to the streets. Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, one of the loudest voices of the autonomist movement in Berlin published the books Feuer und Flamme (Fire and Flame) and Glut und Asche (Ember and Ash) using the pseudonym “Geronimo.” An earlier anarchist, the Italian Sante Geronimo Caserio, assassinated French president Sadi Carnot in 1894 (his real first name was likely Ieronimo). Within the French anti-fascist network, action groups working against the Front National either clandestinely or in broad daylight often had very expressive names digging into Indigenous-related lore. One such group, calling themselves SCALP (Sections carrément anti-Le Pen), produced pamphlets bearing an image of a bare-chested Indigenous man brandishing a war hammer. Author and activist Gord Hill’s Antifa Comic Book references SCALP and also celebrates the memory of the “Navajos,” an anti-fascist group that took action against the Nazis in Germany during World War II. It goes without saying these references to Indigenous lore have fallen under scrutiny by most anarchists and Indigenous peoples outside Europe in recent years, notably for reasons pertaining to illegitimate cultural appropriation.

Anarcho-indigenism has also taken the form of notable (though imperfect) collaborations between anarchist and Indigenous activists, such as during resistance movements against the Vancouver Winter Olympics (see the interview

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with Gord Hill) and the 2010 Toronto G20 Summit.\(^\text{10}\) Since the first edition of this book was released in French in 2019, anarchist settlers have also joined protests blockading the main Canadian coast-to-coast railroad line in 2020, in solidarity with the Wet’suwet’en struggle against the Coastal GasLink pipeline project (see the interview with Freda Huson and Toghestiy in this book), following solidarity movements in the wake of Standing Rock confrontations (2016) in so-called Dakota against the Energy Transfer Partners pipeline project. Other examples include the Indigenous Anarchist Federation-Federación Anarquista Indígena working “to unite the unique anarchist struggle of Indigenous people in the so-called Americas” as well as the 2022 calls for an “active and combative solidarity with our Mapuche brothers and sisters” by the Chilian Federacion Anarquista, in relation to the Mapuche resistance against military settlements in Wallmapu.\(^\text{11}\) Outside of Great Turtle Island, in Aotearoa-New Zealand, the Tamaki Makaurau Anarchists echoed these calls when they declared they “recognize Māori as the mana whenua, and the original inhabitants, of this land known as Aotearoa,” who “never ceded sovereignty of this land,” “support Māori initiatives,” and “work actively to redress the fundamental wrongs of colonialism, imperialism, and white supremacy in all their forms.”\(^\text{12}\)

A shared history of resistance

Many Indigenous communities have long been sources of inspiration for anarchists, due to their history of opposing

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\(^\text{10}\) To find out more: Adam Gary Lewis, *Decolonizing Anarchism: Expanding Anarcha-Indigenism in Theory*, master’s thesis in cultural studies, Queen’s University, 2012.

\(^\text{11}\) Federacion Anarquista, “Wallmapu: Solidaridad con las luchas del pueblo Mapuche,” *Indymedia Argentina* [web], August 5, 2022 (thanks to Marcos Ancelovici for this reference).

\(^\text{12}\) See their website: https://tamakimakaurauanarchists.org.nz/.
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various forms of domination while living in societies devoid of state power. From the very beginning of the colonization of the Americas, the English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish authorities recognized that Indigenous communities could very well become a source of inspiration for some European settlers and a threat to their hierarchical concepts of law and order. The French colonial authorities saw Indigenous people as “sans foi, sans roi, sans loi” (without faith, without king, without law), a derogatory expression that can nevertheless be seen as a precursor to the positive declaration “No Gods, No Masters” used in anarchist circles starting in the nineteenth century and continuing to this day. Written observations of Indigenous communities by colonial travelers, including *coureurs des bois* (wood runners) and missionaries, were a source of concern for the European authorities. For instance, Father Le Jeune, a Jesuit priest living in New France from 1632 to 1639, reported that the “savages had neither political organizations, nor offices, nor dignities, nor any authority, for they only obey their Chief through goodwill toward him.”

Some 150 years later, after a journey in British colonial North America, John Long wrote:

> the Iroquois laugh when you talk to them of obedience to kings; for they cannot reconcile the idea of submission with the dignity of man. Each individual is a sovereign in his own mind; and as he conceives he derives his freedom from the Great Spirit alone, he cannot be induced to acknowledge any other power.

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Furthermore, observers reported that many Indigenous communities didn’t show any distinction between “mine” and “yours”—that is, no understanding of private property—and that relations between men and women as well as between parents and children were in many cases much freer, more equal, and more flexible than in Europe (as discussed by Wendat historian Georges Sioui in his work *For an Amerindian Autohistory: An Essay on the Foundations of a Social Ethic*).¹⁵

This can explain, in part, the oft-repeated prohibition of contact between Indigenous populations and the newly arrived colonists from Europe (and to an even greater extent, slaves from Africa), with colonial elites fearing those brave enough to run away to live within Indigenous communities would undermine early efforts at building settler societies. In some cases and more specifically in Central and South America (although the Seminoles are a well-known example in North America), runaway African slaves built actual towns and cities known as Quilombo, where natives and the white poor could also be accepted while “shar(ing) the same rights and duties as anyone else. Decisions were made by village assemblies, in which every adult, man or woman, of every race, could (and most would) participate,” as recalled by Pedro Ribeiro in an essay about black anarchism.¹⁶

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Europe went through a series of profound changes that caused the existing system of government to become increasingly author-


itarian, disciplinary, and punitive. State militaries gradually modernized their outreach by mandating forced recruitment as a way to build their royal and colonial military forces, the patriarchy tightened its grip on European women, and the emerging capitalist system went into full bloom by privatizing lands previously held in common through what is now known as the enclosure system. The resulting widespread poverty displaced whole populations, who—among other things—migrated into the cities where they had to turn to wage-based work or were sent abroad as cannon fodder in the budding colonies. Radical dissidents were tortured or assassinated by the state under the pretext of fighting witchcraft or reducing vagrancy.

European colonial authorities feared the defection of their own forces, which they described under the idea of ensauvagement (“turning savage” in French), a derogatory term associating Indigenous people to animals and the wilderness. This, of course, was not a new concept, with Enlightenment thinkers building on previous European understandings of human nature. The “savage” was to the New World what the “barbarian” had been to the Ancients: a previous state

17 With regard to the use of torture in Europe, see the first page of Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon, 1977) where the author describes the execution of a man named Damiens for regicide.

The flesh was torn with red-hot pincers from his breast, arms, thighs and calves, his right hand burnt with sulphur and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin wax and sulphur melted together, and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds.

Such a description provides a certain perspective vis-à-vis the shock and horror expressed in response to the torture practiced by the so-called “uncivilized” Indigenous peoples on the Jesuit missionaries in New France, who were subsequently given the title of “martyr saints” in the official story of Quebec’s history.
of nature, a terrible threat, something to be frightened of, to vanquish, to assimilate or exterminate, but also a mirror, creating the image of a perceived threat to the dominant order to become an attractive promise to those bearing the brunt of it. To “turn savage” meant to emancipate oneself, to have the freedom to form relationships based on liberty, equality, solidarity, and safety, the opposite of the hierarchical and disciplinary European monarchic and aristocratic societies of the time. Historian Richard White reported this anecdote about the French king’s officer, Marquis de La Salle, who had left some of his troops at a small fort before going on an expedition. “On his return to Illinois in 1680, La Salle found that his men had not only deserted but had also demolished his fort, stolen his goods, and, in the hand of a man La Salle recognized as Le Parisien, had left scrawled on a board a parting epithet: Nous sommes tous Sauvages” [“We are all savages”].

Many similar examples of desertion and “return to the wild” can be found in the literature, including by women who found that relations between sexes were much freer, more equal, and more fluid in many Indigenous communities than in Europe. Many European women who were captured by Indigenous people refused to be “liberated” by their fathers, brothers, or former companions.

Although much could be said from a critical perspective about the stereotypical and Eurocentric trope of associating concepts such as “nature,” “wilderness,” “freedom,” and

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“indigeneity,” the popularity of such connections cannot be denied even among Indigenous people today. Examples include Savage Family, a hip-hop collective from Kansas, founded in 2001, which advocates resistance to colonialism and racism. Taking the notion a step further, Pessamit Innu poet Joséphine Bacon published a poetry collection with José Acquelin entitled We Are All Savages, in which some poems refer directly to resistance and destruction:

we are all savages
we all deserve the poetic therapy
that the Earth has set aside for us still
it’s the resistance of the last boars
against the armada of warrior pigs
[...]
we are all savages
packed in tightly together
reduced in number by the other
we are naked and one
in the same boat
on the same raft

23 Free translation from: Joséphine Bacon and José Acquelin, Nous sommes tous des sauvages (Montreal: Mémoire d’encrier, 2011), p. 18 (note: José Acquelin titled another of his poetry collections Anarchie de la lumière [Anarchy of Light]).