

Repatriation and Reparations: Land-Based Indigenous and Black Futurity

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Literature Review

## INTRODUCTION

This literature review consists of two parts. The first is an in-depth examination of the structural barriers that Indigenous and Black people face: to survival, and to collaboration. Historically, these two demographics have faced distinct oppressions at the fault of the same overarching structures: settler colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy. In particular, their relationships to land have been compromised as capitalism has ushered them into its strict confines. Following an exploration of these barriers, the second part of the literature review discusses historic examples of ways Indigenous and Black people have respectively practiced alternatives to capitalism in resistance to the triad structure of settler colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy. It also discusses future, theoretical parameters to collaboration. It posits that all Indigenous and Black collaboration must occur on the premise of a fundamental distinction of the differing implications, racializations, and realities of Black and Indigenous people and how they shape each group's agenda. Just as the research population in question is not homogenous, neither is the literature written by and about them. There are multiple, nuanced views about the positionality and presence of Black settlers in North America, and about what constitutes liberatory practices and imperatives that Indigenous and Black people should pursue.

## INTERLOCKING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO INDIGENOUS AND BLACK LIBERATION

### *Settler Colonialism, Capitalism, and White Supremacy*

Settler colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy are foundational to one another. Their exploitations cross-reference one another; the construction of each warrants the sustained presence of the other because they all emerged in tandem. They are structured to support one another, but they affect their subjects whose exploitation they subsist off of differently--

particularly in terms of race and Indigeneity. Hence, Black and Indigenous people in the United States and Canada experience largely distinct, yet interconnected struggles that originate from the same triad of structural oppression.

*Settler Colonialism, Capitalism, and Indigeneity.* Beyond its blatant functions of land theft and occupation, settler colonialism operates covertly to produce a myriad of detrimental effects on Indigenous people. For instance, the traumatic generational longevity of colonialism characterizes Indigenous people's present-day interactions with the settler state: "All Indigenous people's personal interfaces with the state are channeled through and shaped by the collective relationship that their nation has, historically, and currently, with the colonial regime" (Alfred 50:2009). The settler state forcibly mediates Indigenous people's interactions in order to reinscribe patterns of "marginalization" and "forced acculturation" (Alfred 50:2009). By positioning interactions with the state as inescapable, settler colonialism produces detrimental psychological effects on Indigenous people:

This is a major effect of colonization: denial of access to land-based cultural practices leading to a loss of freedom on both the individual and collective levels equating to the psychological effect of *anomie*, or the state of profound alienation that results from experiencing serious cultural dissolution, which is then the direct cause of serious substance abuse problems, suicide, and interpersonal violence (Alfred 49:2009).

The settler colonial foundation of land theft and subsequent occupation, in addition to psychological manipulation, shifts Indigenous relationships with land by propagating itself and the economic system that enables it--capitalism--as the singular framework by which to conceive of relationship to land (Alfred 48:2009). Capitalism and settler colonialism position themselves as the primary modalities through which survival is possible but are inherently structured to eradicate Indigeneity. Moreover, the eradication of Indigeneity is a function of white supremacy,

because the eventual assimilation of Indigenous people into whiteness fortifies the settler colonial existence.

*Settler Colonialism, Capitalism, and (Anti)-Blackness.* Historically, white supremacy has sought to eliminate Indigeneity to justify the presence of settlers but has racialized Black people in an opposite way. In early United States and Canada settler societies, the logic of anti-Blackness strived to multiply the number of people considered Black in order to grow the pool of available slave labor. The structure and sentiment of anti-Blackness that resulted from Black people's subjugation has endured. However, although Black people's presence in North America--particularly those descended from slaves--is often solely attributed to white supremacy, it is also a tangential consequence of settler colonialism. Most notably, settler colonialism used the logic of white supremacy as means to forcibly migrate and racialize Black people as Black to justify exploiting their bodies for labor and to occupy Indigenous land: "The reality then is that Black peoples have not been quintessential "settlers" in the White supremacist usage of the word; nevertheless, they have, as free people, been involved in some form of settlement process" (Amadahy and Lawrence 107:2009). Therefore, the logic of settler colonialism forcefully produced mass Black displacement and subjugation, and non-consensually implicates Black people in the occupation of Indigenous land.

The effects of settler colonialism on Black people and anti-Blackness shield themselves behind the supposed, all-encompassing logic of white supremacy, and thus are not widely acknowledged in anti-racist theory. The Black diasporic presence in the US and Canada has often produced the internalization of settler colonial epistemology, simply by virtue of Black people living within such a structure. A dual function of anti-Blackness and settler colonialism is to frame how colonized or subjugated Black people envision their own liberation: "In the process

of knowledge production, individual and society influence each other intimately. Any knowledge produced by any individual is, therefore, not objective but reflective of the society in which the individual is raised” (Akena 602:2012). Black visions of liberation that are partially reflective of the logic of settler colonialism and thus serve to strengthen the settler state.

Black conceptions of liberation, such as those that involve Black ownership of [stolen] Indigenous land, are therefore informed by the structure of a settler colonial society. More broadly than just liberation theory, social science itself as a discipline and method of inquiry has also been shaped by settler colonialism (McKittrick 2011; Akena 2012). Firstly, methodology can reify violent structures of settler colonialism, because research endeavors that focus on violence and oppression “require the conceptual and thus material subordination of the black/non-white human” (McKittrick 953:2011). Thus, a methodology centered on chronicling oppression mimics the structure of settler colonialism in that its sustained existence is predicated on violence. Secondly, a vast portion of anti-racist social science methodology does not take into account or center an Indigenous presence and supports the settler colonial aim of Indigenous erasure. Thus, oppression centered social science that offers neither Indigenous agency nor solutions emerges as a part of the settler colonial project--the same settler colonial project that works to sustain white supremacy. Therefore, anti-racist theory and practice which do not center Indigenous frameworks of knowledge and people not only maintain the settler colonial structure (Amadahy and Lawrence 2009; Jafri 2010; Lawrence and Dua 2005), but inadvertently bolster white supremacy.

## RESPECTIVE BLACK/INDIGENOUS LAND RELATIONSHIPS

Settler colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy have contorted the relationships that Black and Indigenous people have with themselves, each other, land, and liberation. Before delving into an in-depth examination of the resultant tension, however, it is necessary to conduct a brief overview of what generally characterizes Black and Indigenous relationships to land and liberation.

### *Indigenous Relationships to Land*

Indigenous relationship to land has historically constituted Indigenous ways of life and the exchange of resources: “The key principles of Indigenous economies--sustainability and reciprocity--reflect land-based worldviews founded on active recognition of kinship relations that extend beyond the human domain” (Kuokkanen 219:2011). Thus, the subjugation of Indigenous economies and ways of life has occurred primarily through settler domination of land.

When the lasting structure of settler colonialism was implemented to plunder Indigenous land and life, non-Indigenous occupation of land quickly became a core strategy to attempt to abolish Indigenous sovereignty. In addition to land theft and occupation, settler colonialism functions to produce Indigenous dependency on the settler state (Alfred 2009). Since the settler state denies Indigenous people the ability to use their land for their own economic and social sovereignty, Indigenous people are relegated to turning to the state to fulfill such needs (Alfred 2009).

Land repatriation, therefore, is central to Indigenous liberation. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) declare plainly in their well-circulated work, “Decolonization is not a metaphor”, “decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools” (1). Indigenous

visions of liberation and sovereignty vary widely; however, because settler colonialism uses land theft and occupation as a primary modality by which to enforce oppression, it follows that decolonization is a principle objective toward achieving sovereignty. Taiaiake Alfred writes: “The solution to the problem of First Nations psychological and financial dependency on the state caused by colonialism is the return of land to First Nations and the re-establishment of First Nations presences on and connections to their homelands” (Alfred 54:2009). This brief analysis does not posit that Indigenous relationships to land can or should be defined solely by settler occupation and settler colonialism. Rather, it is to assert that Indigenous relationships to land are the core feature that constitute Indigenous liberation, since it is land theft and occupation that serves as the principal tool of their historic subjugation (Tuck and Yang 2012; Alfred 2009). Thus, Indigenous relationships to land and Indigenous liberation, sovereignty, and resurgence cannot be separated.

### *Black Relationships to Land*

Black people in the US and Canada have a complicated relationship with land. Much of the Black presence in Canada and North America is a direct result of the forcible migration of Black people to North America during the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Many diasporic Black residents are unable to trace their lineage to the pre-colonialism or pre-slave trade era, which affects their sense of place. As Katherine McKittrick (2011) postulates, “A Black sense of place is therefore tied to fluctuating geographic and historical contexts” (949). Black relationships to land are widely and variably theorized in works about Black space and geography.

There is an emerging consensus that a significant portion of Black presence in Canada and the United States constitutes “stolen people on stolen land” (Amadahy and Lawrence 125:2009). This expression conveys the forced transit of much of the Black diaspora in North

America and their descendants as part of the greater agenda of settler colonialism and white supremacy (i.e., use of Black bodies both for labor and to occupy of Indigenous land). The positionality of Black people in North America is sometimes acknowledged in anti-racist literature. However, it is widely critiqued and interrogated among [Indigenous-led] works that specifically interrogate the relationship “unintentional” settlers--people of color and Black people who immigrated to North America, often not entirely of their own volition--have to Indigenous land and people (Amadahy and Lawrence 2009; Lawrence and Dua 2005).

However, there is a deficit in literature that moves beyond the problem Black occupation poses for Indigenous liberation, particularly in work that theorizes Black liberation. “The next step, however, is for Black people to begin to interrogate how “stolen people on stolen land” can situate themselves in relation to today’s existing Native peoples who are *still* struggling to reclaim stolen lands” (Amadahy and Lawrence 125:2009). In many works articulating conceptions of Black liberation, the settler state is taken for granted or conceived of as a historic event rather than as a continuing structure, such as in the case of some theories of reparations.

## CONFLICTING STRUGGLES FOR LIBERATION

### *Incommensurability in a Black-Indigenous Relationship*

Two factors characterize the incompatibility that exists in the relationship between Black and Indigenous liberatory goals. First, Black people’s mere presence as settlers on Indigenous land is not compatible with Indigenous sovereignty and decolonization (Tuck and Yang 2012; Lawrence and Dua 2005; Amadahy and Lawrence 2009). Tuck and Yang specifically use the term “incommensurability” to describe this incompatibility present in theories that allot land to Black Americans or Canadians: “Decolonizing the Americas means all land is repatriated and all

settlers become landless. It is incommensurable with the redistribution of Native land/life as common-wealth” (Tuck and Yang 27:2012). Secondly, an overwhelming amount of the literature that falls under the sphere of anti-racism theorizes about liberation in a way that does not center Indigeneity, thus contributing to theoretical Indigenous erasure (Amadahy and Lawrence 2009; Jafri 2010; Lawrence and Dua 2005): “...both the theoretical and literary writing coming out of Black America positions Black people as being at the core of racial oppression and marginality in the United States, in ways that exclude the possibility of an Indigenous presence fundamentally mattering.” (Amadahy and Lawrence 122:2009). The non-acknowledgment of Indigenous presence and settler colonialism is attributable to the settler colonial narrative that Black American and Canadian residents--including scholars--are steeped in.

This inherent incompatibility need not function as paralysis, but rather as a point of acknowledgment: a starting point.

To fully enact an ethic of incommensurability means relinquishing settler futurity, abandoning the hope that settlers may one day be commensurable to Native peoples...The Native futures, the lives to be lived once the settler nation is gone - these are the unwritten possibilities made possible by an ethic of incommensurability (Tuck and Yang 36:2012).

“Incommensurability”, as Tuck and Yang term it, is thus a necessary component of analysis and the envisioning of Indigenous futurity in relationship to settlers (Tuck and Yang 2012; Tuck et. al 2014).

*Black Reparations.* Within and outside of the academy, there is a longstanding concept of Black reparations that circulates as a solution to slavery’s legacy of Black disenfranchisement. Some works have theorized reparations more conceptually than tangibly, such as in the case of Ta-Nehisi Coates: “Reparations—by which I mean the full acceptance of our collective biography and its consequences—is the price we must pay to see ourselves

squarely” (2014:51). Others have offered frameworks for material practices to be implemented, suggesting measures such as payments to Black youth from a centralized fund (Stewart 2016). There are many ways that reparations could be put into place, with theories about their actualization and premise in constant flux (Coates 2014; Stewart 2016). In this review of the literature, the working definition of reparations is: dedication and diversion of resources (primarily monetary or land-based) from the state toward Black Americans in order to resolve the lasting maladies of slavery and anti-Black discrimination.

Although land-based reparations are intended to improve the social and economic condition of Black America, the concept is incompatible with Indigenous liberation; the land given would be stolen Indigenous land and redistributed monetary resources would also be derivative of the stolen land. Some authors posit that the notion of reparations glosses over the lasting implications of settler colonialism in their consideration of those of white supremacy: “In other words, there is a history of genocidal policies that is easily erased in calls for reparations for descendants of the slave trade” (Jafri 270:2010). Indeed, some literature about reparations does not mention how settler colonialism and Indigenous people would be implicated (Coates 2014; Stewart 2016). Ultimately, there is a prevalent central critique against reparations that emerges. Beenash Jafri succinctly summarizes the critique: “The argument made by Indigenous peoples was that settler states cannot give out land that is not theirs in the first place (Smith 47:2005)” (270:2010). Land-based reparations therefore are inherently incompatible with Indigenous sovereignty and could serve to *strengthen* the settler state if implemented.

#### *Theoretical Parameters of Solidarity*

For collaboration to occur between Black and Indigenous communities--whether theoretical or practical--those theorizing must include an analysis of how multicultural

(Gaztambide-Fernández 2012) and “pluralistic” (Lawrence and Dua 2005) frameworks are conducive to Indigenous erasure in analysis. Black and Indigenous people in the United States and Canada have dissimilar relationships to the settler colonial state, and it is thus not useful to theorize a monolithic solution to their oppression that merely acknowledges racial oppression. Although Black communities face struggles produced by the same overarching structures of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism that also govern Indigenous oppression, they cannot be collapsed into the jurisdiction of decolonization. Tuck and Yang further elucidate the distinction between quests for Indigenous sovereignty and racial justice, proclaiming “Decolonization, which we assert is a distinct project from other civil and human rights-based social justice projects” (Tuck and Yang 3:2012). Indigenous sovereignty and decolonization are not solutions that exist purely to counter white supremacy, but rather to address settler colonialism. Thus, it is *not* useful to conceive of Indigenous people solely as another race in the overarching category of people of color reaching for racial justice. Rather, it is imperative to specifically acknowledge Indigeneity in addition to race (Lawrence and Dua 2005).

Although it is not possible to form a strategy of solidarity that mutually benefits Black and Indigenous people in their entirety, there is a recurrent theme in the literature which suggests partial solidarity is possible. Tuck et. al. refer to this possibility as “contingent collaborations” (2014). “Contingent collaborations provide a counterpoint to how others have theorized solidarity and allies and require an ethic of incommensurability that recognizes what is distinct between various projects of social justice and decolonization” (Tuck et. al 57:2014). As settler colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism mutually support one another, so too can strategies to deconstruct them, particularly as Black and Indigenous people theorize them (Ciccariello-Maher 2016; Palacios 2016). If relationships between Black settler and Indigenous people can

inherently never be commensurable, liberation theories must seek to acknowledge that. Moving forward, their task is to create the groundwork for a different Black settler/Indigenous relationship than is slated to exist by oppressive structures of power (Snelgrove et. al 17:2014).

Some authors suggest explicitly different modalities and frameworks of solidarity to guide collaboration between settlers and Indigenous people (Smith 2005; Deloria 1969). Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández (2012), for instance, suggests “creative solidarity”, which requires an understanding of culture as something that is in flux and a rejection of notions of essentialism (57). In his own words, “Creative solidarity works to reveal new horizons, against which we might not only imagine, but also produce new ways of being together” (Gaztambide-Fernández 57:2012). Creative solidarity, then, calls on Black and Indigenous people in the United States and Canada to creatively co-envision ways to support one another’s liberation in ways that might not have been done before. He also suggests “relational solidarity”, which demands that we recognize the complex and sometimes contradictory personal histories that bring us together into treaty relations based on a commitment to decolonization” (Gaztambide-Fernandez 61:2012). Relational solidarity invites Black and Indigenous people in the United States and Canada to consider how oppressive structures pit them against each other, and to consider how to support each other within that contradiction. Other works, such as those of Katherine McKittrick (2011), also suggest analyses that explicitly recognize the connectivity that structures and systems of oppression produce between Black and Indigenous people: “Instead of pointing to those ‘without’ and citing injustice, we might imagine how we are intimately tied to broader conceptions of human and planetary life and which demonstrate our common and difficult histories of encounter” (960). Additional works chronicle present-day attempts by Black and

Indigenous communities to form a “contingent” (Tuck et. Al 2014) relationship or union of solidarity, albeit with various results and approaches (Jafri 2010; Palacios 2016).

## BLACK AND INDIGENOUS ALTERNATIVES TO CAPITALISM

An acknowledgment of incommensurability is one framework through which to view the possibility of Indigenous and Black resistance as existing in tandem and to reject the internalization of colonial logic into movement frameworks. However, research and analysis of present and future ways Black and Indigenous communities and co-resist capitalism, the economic system that upholds settler colonialism and white supremacy, is not complete without a review of historic anti- or pre-capitalist communities of practice. What follows are examples that serve as a testament to how Black and Indigenous people in the United States and Canada have always practiced engagement with land and/or each other in different ways than capitalism prescribes. In resistance to white supremacy’s valuation of linear time, these histories are centered as models of practice. Past histories of Black and Indigenous communities whose respective economies functioned in resistance to capitalism serve as examples of resistance or nonadherence to the interlocking structural network of settler colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy. These alternative economies integrate valuation of land and interdependency with one another, rather than revolving primarily around the well-being of the individual.

### *Indigenous Subsistence Economies, Mixed Economies and Social Support*

The particularities of Indigenous economies, like Indigenous people, were and are varied, nuanced, and tribally specific. Despite variance and nuance in practice, however, Indigenous subsistence economies and mixed economies are generally characterized by their interrelated relationships to land:

These [Indigenous] systems include a variety of land-based small-scale economic activities and practices as well as sustainable resource management. Indigenous economies are often characterized by a subsistence mode of production. At the center of the economic activity is not the exchange for profit or competition but the sustenance of individuals, families, and the community (Kuokkanen 219:2011).

As a result of the state dependency and forced assimilation into capitalism that the settler state produced, many subsistence economies that remain today take the form of mixed economies, which employ features of Indigenous economies and the capitalist economy (Kuokkanen 2011).

Colonization facilitated the imposition of institutions and destruction of Indigenous economic autonomy (Alfred 2009), which led to the gradual decline of subsistence economies. “For generations, Indigenous Peoples in the US and Canada were controlled through confinement on reservations, banning spiritual ceremonies, and forcing children to attend Christian boarding schools” (Tamburro and Tamburro 48:2014). Settler colonial structure employed the use of institutional confinement of Indigenous people to aid and expedite processes of assimilation and erasure (Tamburro and Tamburro 2014). However, despite the attempted total eradication of Indigeneity by settler colonialism, Indigenous people and their non-capitalist economies, relationships, and modes of exchange still exist (Kuokkanen 2011).

### *Black Social Support*

Black systems of social support and mutual aid fundamentally differ from Indigenous forms of social support and economies because there was never a time in North America when Black alternative economies or societies were entirely mutually exclusive from capitalism. For this reason, they can be likened more closely to Indigenous mixed economies than to Indigenous subsistence economies. In other words, the lack of social support that white supremacy and capitalism denied to Black communities spurred social support organizations into existence; they were not pre-existent in North America prior to forced migration. Although, early iterations of

mutual aid societies and Black alternatives to capitalism in communities of slaves were influenced by (Indigenous) African customs and systems of social support (Martin 1985).

Slavery, settler colonialism, and white supremacy fragmented and displaced Black families and communities. During the post-Emancipation period in particular, Black people banded together to create forms of mutual support that capitalism was--and is currently--denying them (Harris 1979; Martin 1985). One such way this took form was through the emergence of Black benevolent societies, which were “voluntary associations” that banded together to achieve immediate and/or future material goals and needs (Harris 1979). They emerged out of “the economic insecurity of free Blacks in the cities...This was not merely a process of urbanization, however, but a key element in the transition from slavery to freedom” (Harris 608:1979). By providing social services to each other without the prerequisite of monetary exchange, but rather “a sense of shared commitment” (Harris 607:1979), Black benevolent societies supported the economic advancement of Black communities. They, and other forms of Black social support persisted and evolved throughout different North American political and economic periods (Martin 1985). For instance:

Du Bois, in his study of blacks in Philadelphia in the early part of the twentieth century, found that mutual aid organizations were almost as prevalent then as they were in the nineteenth century when caregiving among black Americans reached unprecedented heights (Martin 62:1985).

As long as the conditions created by capitalism necessitated organizations that facilitated Black communal and social support and mutual aid, they persisted.

Black social support organizations have also faced erosion from capitalism, but dissimilarly from Indigenous social support: “In the final analysis, the early black benevolent society functioned as the wellspring for Afro-American institutional life” (Harris 620:1979). In other words, when Black communities increased their ability to meet immediate, material needs

through generating capital, rather than social support, their participation in voluntary exchange of services declined, particularly as urban Black populations increased (Martin 1985). “And faced with the individualistic, secularistic, competitive thrust of the dominant urban values, the black helping tradition appeared to be an obsolete relic of the past...” (Martin 65:1985). Their latest iteration has been co-opted and mutated by capitalist wage-labor agendas that encourage the individual pursuit of capital as means of survival (Martin 1985).

### *Indigenous and Black Collaboration and Futurity*

Indigenous-Black models of collaboration whose aim is liberation should not replicate the materialistic, capitalist framework that produces their oppression. “Whatever emerges from relationship-building between Black and Indigenous communities should take place within this framework as opposed to competitive materialistic ones, which to date have not served either people” (Amadahy and Lawrence 131:2009). Indigenous-Black solidarity should be place-based and tangible; to center the history of land, place, and space is to consider and center Indigeneity and sovereignty (Snelgrove et. al 2014). That is to say, Black and Indigenous solidarity is inescapably land-based. Place-based--land-based--analyses and theories of solidarity encourage a full consideration of the experiences of Black people within settler colonialism: “Black life is very much connected to land in the past, present, and the future. Experience is land-based and could only have happened on solid earth” (Tuck et. al 70:2014). Measures of solidarity which theorize and center the significance of geography and land to Black and Indigenous communities alike are thus conducive of tangible action (Snelgrove et. al 2014).

Even so, Indigenous-Black solidarity can never be fully aligned. “Solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples must be grounded in actual practices and place-based relationships and should be approached as “incommensurable but not incompatible” (Snelgrove

et. al 3:2014). Acknowledging incommensurability should be foundational to strategizing collaboration because it makes visible what settler colonialism seeks to hide: itself as a structure, and with it Indigenous presence and sovereignty. Finally, settler colonialism is not a structure that expresses itself singularly; thus, there should exist a multiplicity of solutions to address it (Alfred 57:2009), including in the case of Black and Indigenous solidarity.

#### CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

From the literature reviewed here, the need to theorize use of a method that simultaneously does not reproduce settler colonial methods of inquiry and envisions the tangible futurity of Black and Indigenous collaboration and resistance arises. Fruitful collaboration will recognize barriers to full alignment, persist despite them, and seek to grow Black and Indigenous resilience. (How) do the existing frameworks and practices of Black and Indigenous land-based collectives in the United States and Canada align in their engagement with the land and strategies for liberation?

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