

Inhabiting Contemporary Upper Canada: An Experiment in Decolonial Method

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## Introduction

The following is an effort to sketch a background for emancipatory political action in the suburbs of Southern Ontario. It is an effort to engage seriously with indigenous voices and integrate insights from decolonial literature into theory about political emancipation in mainstream Canadian society. At meetings with socialist activists in Ottawa, standard practice involves acknowledging that we are working on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Algonquin people, and that we should bear in mind the need to decolonize as we go about our work. However the encounter between these two projects—decolonization and mainstream emancipation—often does not feel fully thought through. What does it mean to take decolonization into account on an everyday basis? What ethical imperatives exist vis-à-vis indigenous peoples when we contemplate political action in a major Canadian city?

I cannot fully answer these questions. What I am trying to do in this paper is think through the implications of the decolonial literature emerging from indigenous people for how non-indigenous people can understand their place in the world—the context and horizons of their citizenship and political action. To a large extent, I will argue that these implications necessitate a work of positioning, both politically and geographically. I will argue that a useful place to start is by reconsidering our relationship to the land we inhabit in a critical light. I will examine my relationship with my own home region as an example, proposing a method in which a subversive understanding of local history might constitute a practice of resistance against the established liberal capitalist order. By positioning myself in history and in space, I attempt to think through a way of inhabiting my home region which is in solidarity with the resurgent aims of indigenous activists. This is not an alternative to political action, but rather an attempt to provide an example of what ethical cultural understandings of our surroundings can look like on an individual level.

In short, this paper argues that it is possible to work towards solidarity with indigenous struggles on a cultural level and an individual level by rejecting colonial understandings of land from within European intellectual traditions, and by learning to inhabit a particular territory through the lens of local history. This practice is a subversive *art de faire* which does not appropriate indigenous philosophy and which makes an effort not to blur the space between indigenous and non-indigenous political identities. It is not a prescription or a model, but rather an attempt to record what moving beyond colonial prejudices can look like in one territory.

My argument is structured in four sections. Section 1 reviews conversations in the decolonization literature, and attempts to theorize an ethical response on the part of non-indigenous people. Emphasizing resurgence as a key concept, I proceed to argue that non-indigenous scholars must conduct a work of positioning in relation to indigenous emancipatory struggles, accepting that their own political space is on the European side of the two-row wampum belt. I contrast this approach with the more fashionable liberal politics of reconciliation. The only meaningful way of acting in solidarity with indigenous resurgence is to engage in one's own emancipatory politics, in a way that recognizes the colonial context. I propose a critical reappraisal of attitudes toward land as one way of breaking down prejudice and moving toward solidarity with indigenous struggles, and offer some thoughts on the integrality of a commodified conception of land with the ruling liberal ideology in Canada.

In Section 2, having identified attitudes toward land as a strategic area in which it is helpful to break down colonial understandings, I move on to reflect on what resisting those understandings can look like at an individual and local level. Rather than appropriating indigenous philosophy, I draw on Michel de Certeau's insights about how everyday people engage in tactics that subvert the meanings imposed on spaces. I argue that doing local history in

the suburbs can be a subversive *art de dire*, and furthermore that it is possible to engage in a subversive *art de faire* by inhabiting a suburban space as a particular territory. Here I have also drawn on the ideas of Peter Kulchyski.

In Section 3, I sketch an example of what this type of subversion can look like by tracing my own experience of my home region—Durham Region, Ontario—through an historical lens. By presenting my surroundings in the context of an historical narrative of colonization of the territory, I engage in an *art de dire* and trace an *art de faire* for inhabiting the region in a way which moves beyond the commodified understandings of the land on which the Canadian liberal order is built. I interpret the land as colonized by two layers of war and capital, following Éric Alliez and Mauricio Lazzarato’s characterization of the two phenomena as intimately related.

I conclude by offering some commentary on my local historical narrative, and tie it into theoretical conversations by reflecting on how to position an emancipatory politics in the suburbs of Southern Ontario.

## **1. Towards an authentic solidarity with indigenous struggles**

### ***1.1/ Resurgence as an indigenous project***

In recent years in North America, a new generation of indigenous scholars has led the growth of an impressive literature on decolonization vis-à-vis the Canadian and US nation-states. In his foreword to Glen Coulthard’s *Red Skin, White Masks*, Mohawk political theorist Taiaiake Alfred praises the rise of a “New Indigenous Intelligentsia”, whose political horizons are no longer bounded by the colonial legal order. These theorists write with the goal of helping to bring about the end of colonialism altogether, and in the process insist on a “politics of authentic

self-affirmation.”<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to theorize about political emancipation in Canada without engaging seriously with this forceful literature, whose prominent figures include Alfred, Coulthard, Audra Simpson, Hayden King, and others.

Perhaps the most important single concept to emerge from this literature is Alfred’s notion of resurgence. The current hegemonic discourse in Canada understands indigenous grievances through the lens of ‘reconciliation’, in which the settler state needs to make amends in order to be forgiven by indigenous people, and then both sides can move forward together. The federal government has formally institutionalized the discourse of reconciliation through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whose language permeates respectable circles along with the policy-making sphere. For Alfred, this conversation misses the mark. In *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, he places the emphasis on “resurgence” of indigenous communities through a spiritual revolution and rediscovery of authentic ways of thinking and living. Politically, resurgence means a rejection of compromise with colonial institutions, and a shift from “articulating grievances to pursuing an organized... battle for the cause of our freedom.”<sup>2</sup>

Alfred’s concept of resurgence is important for a number of reasons. First, it stands as a radical alternative to the hegemonic discourse of reconciliation. Glen Coulthard identifies this discourse as an element of the “colonial politics of recognition” in Canada. By situating the violence of colonialism in the past, rather than recognizing it as an ongoing phenomenon, the reconciliation discourse attempts to close the book on indigenous grievances without addressing the real issues of resource exploitation and capitalist imperialism. This takes place in an overall

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<sup>1</sup> Taiaiake Alfred, foreword to Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Alfred, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 22.

context where the settler state limits the efficacy of indigenous activism by ‘recognizing’ certain indigenous rights without allowing the sovereignty of the state to come into question.<sup>3</sup>

Second, framing the conversation in terms of resurgence situates the conversation about decolonization where it is truly most relevant—within indigenous communities. This is an important point, since too often well-meaning non-indigenous writers have engaged with the discourse of decolonization in problematic ways. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang warn against turning “decolonization” into a metaphor, outlining a variety of “settler moves to innocence” in which non-indigenous people attempt to avoid a sense of responsibility for colonialism by appropriating indigenous identity or political language. The authors point to several cultural touchstones that demonstrate such “moves to innocence”, notably the novels of James Fenimore Cooper. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, the white protagonist is symbolically adopted by the vanishing Indian tribe, and thereby takes up the mantle of rightful inheritor of the land.<sup>4</sup>

In contemporary Canada, we can wonder whether similar ‘moves to innocence’ may be said to be taking place on the national political stage. As the federal government makes a variety of cultural gestures towards indigenous peoples through the framework of ‘reconciliation’, it pushes forward with tar sands expansion and pipeline projects. In Ontario, mining development in the Ring of Fire appears set to go forward at full steam, and in British Columbia the NDP government has elected to continue construction of the Site C dam. The colonial order of the Indian Act remains intact. Meanwhile, respectable institutions like the University of Ottawa find it meaningful to hold canoe-making workshops and similar activities geared toward raising awareness of local indigenous cultures.

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<sup>3</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 22 (see also Chapter 4).

<sup>4</sup> Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), 15. I thank Hayden King for bringing this article to my attention.

In the spirit of Tuck and Yang, I think these sorts of gestures miss the point. Indeed, I think they operate in continuity with an older colonial symbology which politely recognizes the presence of native peoples, indeed fetishizes them as cultural exhibits, and in so doing seeks to legitimize the ongoing colonial order. When Princess Elizabeth visited Canada with the Duke of Edinburgh in 1951, they met ceremonially with Blackfoot and Kainai chiefs in traditional garb, who presented the royal couple with gifts, after “the Indians put on some of their dances.”<sup>5</sup> The ethics of relating to indigenous peoples in Canada is not primarily a matter of cultural appreciation, nor is it a matter of hybridizing elite institutions, or of the Prime Minister holding an eagle feather. It is a matter of real material relationships, and of working in solidarity with resurgence.

### *1.2/ The work of positioning*

Tuck and Yang reserve a searing critique for a certain kind of non-indigenous intellectual work. Drawing a comparison to the novels of James Fenimore Cooper, Tuck and Yang write:

...the settler intellectual who hybridizes decolonial thought with Western critical traditions (metaphorizing decolonization), emerges superior to both Native intellectuals and continental theorists simultaneously. With his critical hawk-eye, he again sees the critique better than anyone and sees the world from a loftier station. It is a fiction, just as Cooper’s Hawkeye, just as the adoption, just as the belonging.<sup>6</sup>

Tuck and Yang thus warn sternly against appropriating the work of indigenous theorists. This is an important point to grapple with. Decolonization through resurgence concerns indigenous communities and indigenous people. While perhaps non-indigenous scholars can make themselves useful in these efforts, they must be wary of engaging with decolonial literature in a way that confuses their own position.

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<sup>5</sup> David Bairstow, Roger Blais, and Gudrun Parker, *The Royal Journey* (National Film Board, 1951), c. 25m 45s.

<sup>6</sup> Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor”, 16.

I have come to believe that the key notion here is positioning. The positioning in question is not a matter of saying “I am a settler scholar”, and then proceeding to do research that metaphorizes decolonization, intervenes unhelpfully in indigenous peoples’ conversations, and so on.<sup>7</sup> Recognizing one’s position must frame the very way research is conceived of and undertaken. I find it helpful here to recall one of the first agreements made between Europeans and indigenous North Americans in the 17<sup>th</sup> century: the two-row wampum belt. Mohawk scholar Rick Monture recounts its history as follows:

Recognizing that these newcomers seemed content to live within their own small villages along the Hudson River while conducting a mutually beneficial trade with them, the Haudenosaunee sought to define a formal, peaceful relationship with the Dutch in 1613. This first agreement... is the philosophical foundation of how the Haudenosaunee have conducted themselves politically in relation to Europeans ever since.<sup>8</sup>

The Haudenosaunee made the same agreements later on with the British and the French. The two parallel rows of the belt—an oral document for an oral culture—represent the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch. Each is a people with its own distinct customs, and both paddle the same river together without interfering in each other’s affairs. Monture describes the belt as “a declaration of sovereignty as well as recognition of the rights of outsiders within [Haudenosaunee] territory”, reflecting traditional values of sharing, cooperation, and concern for the well-being of others. While the Haudenosaunee still honour the principles of the two-row wampum belt, its European parties seem to ignore it today.<sup>9</sup>

The political implications of the two-row wampum begin with respecting indigenous sovereignty and political integrity. However this foundational document also has epistemic and

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<sup>7</sup> Dalie Giroux may recognize her own reflections here, and I am grateful for her guidance.

<sup>8</sup> Rick Monture, *We Share Our Matters: Two Centuries of Writing and Resistance at Six Nations of the Grand River* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014), 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

methodological implications. Anthropologist Audra Simpson's work has much to offer here. In her study of her own community—the Mohawks of Kahnawa:ke—Simpson makes a point of speaking from an indigenous perspective as a way of refusing the paradigms traditionally imposed by the Eurocentric discipline of anthropology. Turning her own lived experience into knowledge, she proposes elements of political strategy for indigenous peoples, such as refusal as an alternative to recognition vis-à-vis settler states.<sup>10</sup> Simpson's self-positioning in regards to her discipline is noteworthy because of the explicit terms in which she elaborates it, but a similar epistemic orientation informs the work of other members of the so-called New Indigenous Intelligentsia.<sup>11</sup> Insofar as research necessarily constitutes a kind of political intervention, respecting the spirit of the two-row wampum belt means leaving certain types of work to indigenous scholars.

Recognizing myself as paddling one line—the European line—of the two-row wampum means accepting my positioning in several ways. First, I do not belong to an indigenous nation. I have little choice but to understand my political community as that of the province of Ontario and the state of Canada. I participate in the political space of the Canadian state, whether I like it or not. Crucially, this does not mean that I fetishize the Canadian nation-state or insist on the primacy of its sovereignty. Following Audra Simpson, I inhabit the messy space of acknowledging that “sovereignty may exist within sovereignty”, and that pre-contact indigenous polities persist within the borders of Canada.<sup>12</sup> But I am not indigenous. This is something that non-indigenous scholars and activists must get straight. We must understand our political horizons in our own terms.

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<sup>10</sup> Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 10, 97.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, Alfred and Coulthard.

<sup>12</sup> Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, 10.

### *1.3/ Solidarity, solicitude, and the ethics of land*

Assuming my position in the two-row wampum belt means the obligation to diverge from certain elements of Tuck and Yang's analysis. They argue:

In the unwritten decolonial version of Cooper's story, Hawkeye would lose his land back to the Mohawk - the real people upon whose land Cooperstown was built and whose rivers, lakes, and forests Cooper mined for his frontier romances. Hawkeye would shoot his last arrow, or his last long-rifle shot, return his eagle feather, and would be renamed Natty Bumppo, settler on Native land. The story would end with the moment of this recognition. Unresolved are the questions: Would a conversation follow after that between Native and the last settler? Would the settler leave or just vanish? Would he ask to stay, and if he did, who would say yes? These are questions that will be addressed at decolonization, and not a priori in order to appease anxieties for a settler future.<sup>13</sup>

This argument comes after Tuck and Yang affirm that “[in] order for settlers to make a place their home, they must destroy and disappear the Indigenous peoples that live there”.<sup>14</sup> They also argue that non-indigenous people need to “[relinquish] settler futurity”.<sup>15</sup> The implication seems to be that I must reconcile myself to the possibility that my very presence on this land is immoral. I must then accept that it is further immoral for me to be attached to “settler futurity”, which presumably means the expectation that my children would also be able to grow up in North America.

In the abstract, we might give some credence to the notion that a settler's only moral option is to go back to England. In the real world of history, I cannot relinquish “settler futurity”, firstly because I don't think I can be called a settler. I did not “settle” on this land. My parents and my grandparents were born here. North America is the only home I have ever known. Moreover, I am not being asked to leave. Alfred affirms that “[irredentism] has never been in the

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<sup>13</sup> Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor”, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 36.

vision of [indigenous] peoples”, and the real task is to demonstrate respect for the land once again and allow indigenous peoples to realize their freedom.<sup>16</sup>

The true moral imperative is not for me to be uncomfortable and writhe in perpetual guilt for my presence on this land. This is a red herring. The imperative is for me to strive to bring about a situation in which the Canadian nation-state holds up its end of the two-row wampum belt’s bargain, in a context where indigenous peoples are doing the work of resurgence in their own communities. Tuck and Yang argue that settler moves to innocence are problematic specifically because they “attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege”.<sup>17</sup> Non-indigenous people have moral responsibilities toward indigenous people, and they must act on the basis of these moral responsibilities. But they have no obligation to feel guilt on an ongoing basis. Wendat intellectual Georges Sioui makes the important point that guilt is not a productive sentiment, and it interferes with the urgent task of “healing” North American society from its sick ways of thinking.<sup>18</sup> Alfred echoes this point and adds that the very concept of guilt is “a monotheistic concept foreign to indigenous cultures”.<sup>19</sup>

In *Wasáse*, Alfred takes a brief moment to offer non-indigenous people advice on how they might be helpful in relation to indigenous resurgence. He acknowledges that this is a meaningful question when asked in good faith, and offers up the words of Malcolm X in the context of the US civil rights struggle “Whites who are sincere should organize among

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<sup>16</sup> Alfred, “Restitution is the Real Pathway to Justice for Indigenous Peoples”, 167.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Georges Sioui, *Histoires de Kanatha. Vues et contées / Histories of Kanatha: Seen and Told* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2008), 206-207.

<sup>19</sup> Alfred, “Restitution is the Real Pathway to Justice for Indigenous Peoples”, 167.

themselves and figure out some strategy to break down the prejudice that exists in white communities. This is where they can function more intelligently and more effectively.”<sup>20</sup>

So there is a role for non-indigenous allies in resurgence struggles, and this role involves acting within the mainstream Canadian society which is their own. Tuck and Yang warn against confusing the work of “decolonization” with social justice struggles more broadly, since decolonization is not a metaphor.<sup>21</sup> Certainly we should not conflate all critical politics with the work of decolonization, since resurgence is its own project. But here I would like to make an important contention: the only way non-indigenous people can meaningfully support the work of resurgence is by engaging in their own emancipatory politics, based on a recognition of the colonial character of their situation.

I follow Alfred in acknowledging that the appropriate response to resurgence from the colonial state must be “restitution”, understood as “the return of what was stolen, accepting reparations... for what cannot be returned, and forging a new socio-political relationship”. In other words, a massive transfer of resources is necessary in order to make indigenous freedom possible and restore the pre-colonial spirit of peaceful cooperation.<sup>22</sup> Such a transfer of resources is not possible under the current liberal capitalist order. Here I must again take issue with Tuck and Yang, who operate on the basis of a restatement of Sandy Grande’s affirmation that “both Marxists and capitalists view land and natural resources as commodities to be exploited”, and later venture that decolonization “would impoverish, not enrich, the 99% of the settler population”.<sup>23</sup> While colonialism may exist independently of capitalism, framing decolonization in these terms as a zero-sum game between individual settlers and indigenous people ignores the

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<sup>20</sup> Malcolm X, quoted in Alfred, *Wasáse*, 236.

<sup>21</sup> Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” 17.

<sup>22</sup> Alfred, “Restitution is the Real Pathway to Justice for Indigenous Peoples”, in *Speaking My Truth, Volume II: Response, Responsibility, and Renewal* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2012), 167.

<sup>23</sup> Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” 4, 23.

very real exploitative capitalist dynamics which have fuelled North American colonialism since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> It is a hypothetical empirical question whether meaningful restitution would require a large number of non-indigenous people to give up an important amount of their material wealth. The real political expediency is to arrive at a situation in which it is possible to think seriously about large-scale redistribution of wealth, most importantly downward from the hands of the super-rich minority in Canadian and global society. In this sense, a strategic alliance between Left movements and resurgent indigenous activists is not only commensurable but imperative.

I agree with Tuck and Yang on one important point however, which resurfaces often in the indigenous literature: decolonization must involve a changed relationship with the land on the part of non-indigenous people. This is the key insight on which I would like to elaborate in the course of this work. Thomas King sums up the matter in plain language:

For non-natives, land is primarily a commodity, something that has value for what you can take from it or what you can get for it. Helen [King's wife]... believes thinks that this is a gross generalization. She believes that there are all sorts of people in Canada who have a deep attachment to land that extends beyond the family cottage on the lake, and that there are Native people who have little attachment to a particular geography. I don't disagree. Individuals can fool you, and they can surprise you. What I'm talking about here is North America's societal attitude towards land.<sup>25</sup>

King goes on to discuss the prescient example of the Alberta tar sands. Indeed, since a commodified understanding of land underpins contemporary colonial practices, a good starting point for breaking down colonial prejudices is the way in which we understand our relationship to the land.

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<sup>24</sup> I thank Miles Krauter for insisting on this point.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2012), 218.

There is much inspiration to be taken here from the work of indigenous scholars. It is possible to relate to the land other than as a commodity. Georges Sioui views the natural world as

l'expression vivante d'un ordre transcendant créé par une Intelligence infinie capable et désireuse de pourvoir aux besoins de tous les êtres... lesquels ne doivent, ni n'ont besoin de se substituer à cette Intelligence, sous peine de compromettre leur propre équilibre... à l'intérieur de cette même Nature.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, for Sioui, human history is located firmly within nature, and it would be hubristic to behave otherwise. We do not own the land, so much as we are of the land. In his largely Marxian critique of the liberal politics of recognition, Dene theorist Glen Coulthard understands indigenous relationships with the land through the concept of “grounded normativity”. In Coulthard’s words,

...the theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism, including Indigenous anticapitalism, is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around *the question of land*—a struggle not only *for* land in the material sense, but also deeply *informed* by what the land *as system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms—and less around our emergent status as “rightless proletarians”.<sup>27</sup>

For Coulthard, the land implies a social and environmental ethics for its indigenous inhabitants, whose cultures and languages have grown up in symbiosis with the land. It is this ethics of the land that informs anticolonial political praxis.

In the history of European cultures, there was a time when land was not viewed primarily as a commodity. Before the development of capitalism and the modern state, peasants in Europe had intimate relationships with their surrounding ecosystems. In *Seeing Like a State*, James C.

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<sup>26</sup> Sioui, *Histoires de Kanatha*, 230.

<sup>27</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 13.

Scott describes the types of knowledge of the Prussian forest which were ignored by government foresters, such as parts of trees “which may have been useful to the population but whose value could not be converted into fiscal receipts”. Official forest management would pay no heed to “the vast, complex, and negotiated social uses of the forest for hunting and gathering, pasturage, fishing, charcoal making, trapping, and collecting food and valuable minerals as well as the forest's significance for magic, worship, refuge, and so on.”<sup>28</sup> Peasant farmers worked together to toil the land, held many resources in common, and shared the fruit of their labour according to custom. This communal relationship with the land sustained a “vigorous cooperative spirit” in the countryside.<sup>29</sup>

The commodification of land originated in the enclosure of the English commons, which Karl Marx analyzed as the primitive accumulation of capital. In a long process which began in the Tudor period and accelerated through the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, nobles forcibly usurped the common lands from the yeomanry, extinguishing customary land use rights in order to convert land into production for international markets. Raising sheep for wool was an example of this type of use.<sup>30</sup> The separation of producers (peasants) from the means of production (land) meant the genesis of agrarian capitalism, as the economy shifted from a dynamic of production for use to production for exchange. The novel idea of private property formed an integral part of this new dynamic, as customary understandings of land use ceded to the notion that the owner of the land could do as he pleased, including selling that land as a commodity.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 12-13.

<sup>29</sup> Joan Thirsk, quoted in Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 13.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954 [1887]), 670-677. All of Section 8 is a discussion of primitive accumulation with a focus on the English case.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 672-677.

With this understanding of private property came a novel logic of “improvement” and productivity based on profits from exchange, which also formed part of the justification of private ownership. The process is well-narrated by Ellen Meiksins Wood:

As the productivity and profitability of agriculture became essential concerns of both landlords and their tenants, claims to land increasingly came to depend on its ‘improvement’, its productive and profitable use - first, in the sense that success in commercial agriculture gave farmers privileged access to more and better land; then, in the sense that even legal property rights were subject to the same requirements. Improvement, for instance, could be the decisive consideration in legal disputes over enclosure. Such conceptions of property rights were rooted in new principles of value...<sup>32</sup>

European thinkers came up with a variety of philosophical justifications for these new principles of value and logics of property, as narrated by Wood. Moreover, logics of private property and its protection lie at the heart of prominent philosophical justifications for the liberal state. The case is perhaps best made by C.B. Macpherson in his commentary on John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*. Macpherson argues that inconsistencies in Locke’s account of human nature, as well as his labour-based justification of ownership, serve to support an overarching aim of defending a role for the state to protect aristocratic landholdings. In historical context, this suspiciously famous classic of political philosophy is indeed an “eminently usable” partisan argument in favour of “the liberal cause”.<sup>33</sup>

#### ***1.4/ Canadian liberalism***

In the contemporary North American context, a perception of the sanctity of private property in land indeed pervades political understandings. Both Thomas King and Dale Turner offer up Tom Flanagan’s *First Nations, Second Thoughts* as an example of how liberal

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<sup>32</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (London: Verso, 2003), 77-78.

<sup>33</sup> C.B. Macpherson, introduction to John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980 [1690]), xxi.

individualist understandings of citizenship and land ownership are frequently articulated by non-indigenous people as if they were common sense. Like the federal government's infamous 1969 *White Paper*, Flanagan's argument proposes the extinguishment of Aboriginal rights and a move towards converting reserve lands into private holdings. The 'common sense' of this argument betrays a liberal ideological lens in which "Indians" are only understood as individuals, who must be citizens of the Canadian state and must relate to land in the only way possible for civilized people.<sup>34</sup>

Liberal understandings of citizenship and political community—built implicitly on the primacy of the individual and his dominion over nature—frame the orthodoxy of Canadian political ideology. We have inherited an imperialistic nationalism. It draws its roots from the ideology of the British Empire and the project of building a dominion across the continent. When Pierre Elliott Trudeau defended the federal order in *Cité libre* half a century ago, he dismissed the rights of nations and the idea of a sovereignty based on nationality. Trudeau cited the 1862 writings of Lord Acton, which opined that a political claim of nationality "crushes all natural rights and all established liberties for the purpose of vindicating itself".<sup>35</sup> For Lord Acton, "modern liberalism" was "a state of greater advancement than the national unity".<sup>36</sup> Incidentally, this is the same sort of argument that could have been called up in support of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> Trudeau's argument may hold some weight against the notion of a state embodying an ethnicity. But this was never the matter in question. Hubert Aquin responded to Trudeau that Québec's project of national self-determination was not about reifying

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<sup>34</sup> Dale Turner, *This is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), notably 23-25. See also King, *The Inconvenient Indian*, 199, and of course Thomas Flanagan, *First Nations? Second Thoughts* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Elliott Trudeau, "La nouvelle trahison des clercs." *Cité libre* 46 (April 1962), 157.

<sup>36</sup> Lord Acton, as cited in Kenneth McRoberts, "Canada and the Multinational State." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 34, no. 4 (2001): 686; the reference is to

<sup>37</sup> This was part of the argument levied against Trudeau by Hubert Aquin in "La fatigue culturelle du Canada français," *Liberté* 4, no. 23 (May 1962), 308.

the nation of Québec in a state. It was about giving full expression to “une culture globale” which was not founded on blood, and which was oppressed by the Canadian constitutional and cultural order.<sup>38</sup>

Ian MacKay calls on historians to embark on a “reconnaissance” that understands Canada as a “project of rule” based on liberalism as a totalizing philosophy,<sup>39</sup> and this call rings meaningfully to me. Taking stock of the impressive literature and political mobilizations around indigenous resurgence, it becomes clear that contesting hegemonic liberalism in Canada means taking a position of solidarity with indigenous resurgence struggles. Interestingly, this rationale was partially articulated by Hubert Aquin with remarkable prescience over fifty years ago. Aquin criticized the solicitude with which the federal government protected French Canadian culture while ignoring its aspirations:

En cessant d’être globale, la culture du Canada français imprégnerait, sans danger et de façon dépolitisée, plusieurs aspects de la vie canadienne. Nous-mêmes, [les Québécois] de concert cette fois avec nos partenaires Anglophones, attachons un certain prix aux survivances folkloriques des tribus amérindiennes. Nous avons même inventé le snobisme de la goutte de sang indigène qui coulerait dans nos veines, concession raffinée à une pré-existence sauvage et instinctuelle ! En tant que colonisateurs et vainqueurs, nous avons le réflexe d’encourager l’art esquimau, la poterie huronne, la répétition de chants guerriers des peuples dont la culture a cessé d’être globale et de se manifester comme un vouloir-vivre collectif. Plus l’attention du majoritaire-vainqueur devient particulariste et pleine de sollicitude, plus elle manifeste qu’il ne redoute plus les manifestations globales de la culture majoritaire.<sup>40</sup>

Aquin was wrong in assuming that indigenous cultures were no longer “globale”. But otherwise, this is a paragraph that would not be out of place in an article by Tuck and Yang. Appropriating

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Ducharme and Jean-François Constant, “A Project of Rule Called Canada: The Liberal Order Framework and Historical Practice,” introduction to Michel Ducharme and Jean-François Constant (eds.) *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, 3-34. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Aquin, “La fatigue culturelle”, 313-14.

the cultural output of a subaltern group is an act of domination. Solidarity with indigenous resurgence means understanding that I am paddling one side of the two-row wampum.

But moreover, a true solidarity with indigenous peoples cannot be based on solicitude. Enough with liberal politics of guilt. Resurgence is the business of indigenous communities. Emancipation is the business of us all. Alfred makes the case clearly when he says that the goal of indigenous resurgence is freedom, and that happiness is an immaterial phenomenon. He identifies “imperialist consumerist forces” not only as an obstacle in indigenous communities, but as sources of “anxiety, stress, and depression for colonized and colonizer alike”. Indigenous resurgence is one instance of a political project that seeks to “free people from the grip of these forces and seek to restore the connections that colonialism has severed”.<sup>41</sup> This analysis is not unique to indigenous communities. In the context of US black radicalism, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten make a parsimonious request:

The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it’s fucked up for you, in the same way that we’ve already recognized that it’s fucked up for us. I don’t need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know?<sup>42</sup>

Point taken. In the remainder of this paper, I would like to make some suggestions about how to approach the dimension of “this shit” that is most relevant to the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in North America: our understanding of the land. This is a matter of grounding political praxis in a certain *art de faire*.

## **2/ Local history, cultural poaching, and inhabiting the city as bush**

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<sup>41</sup> Alfred, *Wasáse*, 187.

<sup>42</sup> Stefano Harney and Frank Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 10.

## ***2.1/ Land and cultural poaching***

I alluded earlier to the idea that positioning is a key consideration in thinking through solidarity with indigenous resurgence. One dimension of positioning involves recognizing, in the spirit of Hubert Aquin, Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, and the two-row wampum belt, that I am not a member of an indigenous nation. I think and act within my own cultural tradition. Another dimension of positioning is geographical. Canadian liberal ideology is based on an abstract and commodified perception of the land. Indigenous resurgences are based on a rejection of this view of the land. This view of the land is an imperialistic dimension of English Canadian culture which, as we have seen, is not inherent or natural. Recall Thomas King's wife's insistences that many non-indigenous people have deep attachments to place. In a study of the Trent River region in south-central Ontario, environmental historian Neil S. Forkey emphasizes how "bioregionalism"—an approach to history that emphasizes "the reciprocal relationship between people and environment"—can help us learn to "re-inhabit" the earth in a new way with an authentic sense of place.<sup>43</sup>

Moving beyond an abstract, commodified view of the land means learning to inhabit a specific territory. No doubt many indigenous people have much to offer in regards to specific territories, as well as the land in general. Perhaps they speak the languages in which the lakes are named. To the extent that intercultural dialogue is consistent with resurgent aims, it is valuable for non-indigenous people to learn about the land they inhabit from its original inhabitants. Certainly, the invitation has been extended by Georges Sioui in regards to indigenous cultures altogether, in his call to "americize America"<sup>44</sup>. Nevertheless, the ethics of relating to the land

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<sup>43</sup> Neil S. Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier: Environment, Society, and Culture in the Trent Valley* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003), 1, 8, 112.

<sup>44</sup> Sioui, *Histoires de Kanatha*, 277.

cannot be a matter of chasing indigenous people around and asking them to enlighten us. This would be problematic for obvious reasons.

We must embrace a non-commodified relationship with the land with the tools that are available to us, according to whatever cultural referents we have. There are probably many ways of approaching this task. Eduardo Kohn's notion of "sylvan thinking"—getting in touch with pre-symbolic mental processes which are of a sort with the material thinking of forests—might be one ambitious way of inhabiting a territory in a non-commodified way.<sup>45</sup> The method I would like to propose is derived from the work of Michel de Certeau. In *L'invention du quotidien*, De Certeau offers a riposte to Foucauldian conceptions of surveillance and governmentality by arguing that ordinary people continuously invent their everyday experience through a variety of "tactics" which undermine the "strategies" of control imposed by the prevailing order. These tactics are "arts de faire"—ways of going about life—which include practices of reading and of inhabiting space which sometimes constitute poetic "bricolages".<sup>46</sup>

Since tactics always operate in the terrain of the other, they can be said to "poach" in the spaces of proprietary power. One instance of poaching is the process of reading for everyday people. While the intended meaning of a text is generated by members of a cultural elite, the received meaning is actively produced by the reader through their own process of associations and interpretations.<sup>47</sup> Other instances of cultural poaching involve inhabiting a space through various practices that do not conform to the intended uses of the space according to scientific reason—see for instance De Certeau's discussion of New York City.<sup>48</sup> On the level of academic

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<sup>45</sup> Eduardo Kohn, "Anthropology as Cosmic Diplomacy," lecture at the Université du Québec à Montréal, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2018. See Kohn's book *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien, I: Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), xl-xli.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 61, 249.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 139.

research, cultural poaching can manifest itself as an “art de dire” which makes theory into a kind of practice by embracing the narrative form, against more conventional understandings of scientific research.<sup>49</sup> De Certeau also proposes an alternate understanding of the “economy” of research, in which the instrumental logic of the scientific factory is subverted to selfless and artistic ends.<sup>50</sup> I would like to experiment with a tactics of inhabiting my own home region in a way that refuses strategies of control embodied in the landscape.

On one hand, I am proposing an *art de dire* through the method of local history. I grew up in Ajax, Ontario, part of a massive suburban region which sprawls outward from Toronto to the east, west, and north, home to over six million people. The country east of the Rouge River along Lake Ontario makes up the Regional Municipality of Durham and its constituent cities of Pickering, Ajax, Whitby, and Oshawa. A walk around Ajax or Pickering in the east much resembles a walk around Mississauga or Brampton in the west. In the suburbs, hills are paved over and flattened, arterial roads are arranged in grids, landscapes of shopping malls, apartment buildings, and single-family detached houses feel interchangeable.

In Ajax, doing history feels like a subversive activity. The very act implies a suspicion of the present—a failure to be satisfied with consuming things in your big house. The act is all the more subversive for what it reveals—a cumulative story of conquest and rupture with the land. Indeed, colonialism in Canada cannot be understood without an awareness of historical context. In a manner inspired by De Certeau, I would like to tell the story of the country east of the Rouge as an exercise in cultural poaching which resists the meanings imposed on the land by proprietary power. This is a way of attempting to embrace a non-commodified relationship with the land.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 48.

## 2.2/ *The bush*

On another hand, I am documenting an *art de faire* in which my own subjective experience refuses to cooperate with the imposed meanings of my surroundings, at least to some extent. By reading Durham Region in the light of history, I inhabit the country differently as an individual than the environment would otherwise condition. This type of *art de faire* is not a substitute for a political project, but it is a cultural and subjective counterpart to a politics of emancipation and solidarity with indigenous resurgence, since it refuses what Thomas King calls “North America’s societal attitude towards land”.<sup>51</sup> This *art de faire* is not purely based on knowledge of local history. I believe it embraces something Peter Kulchyski calls “the bush”, a concept which “unlike wilderness, allows us to think a lived relation to and in this landscape”. Although the bush is geographically situated in northern Canada, it can surface elsewhere as a culture and a way of being.<sup>52</sup> Kulchyski affirms that it is possible to live the city as bush:

the bush is a space of qualitative difference, the feel of sitting on this rock overlooking this beaver dam, rather than that rock and that pond. a palimpsest space overwritten by glaciers and beavers and berrypickers and winds and satellites and partridges and lightning-lit fires and nomadic hunters and dramatic storms and the shrieking of crows against high winds. try to paint it, try to see it: a much more difficult proposition than it sounds. the bush is a great site for play and for possibility; for repetition and for difference. you can find the bush, even in the toronto eaton’s centre, but first you have to get the mall out of your head.<sup>53</sup>

Living the suburbs as bush is a tactic for inhabiting the land subversively. I have collected photographs of locations in Ajax in Pickering as a way of trying to show how the subjective experience of a landscape can rupture with the homogeneity and commodity logic embodied in that landscape. I have tried to give some flavour of what it might feel like to inhabit the suburbs

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<sup>51</sup> King, *The Inconvenient Indian*, 218.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Kulchyski, “bush culture for a bush country: an unfinished manifesto,” *Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue d’Études canadiennes* 31, no. 3 (Fall 1996), 192, 194.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

as bush. What follows is a synthesis of local history and subjective experience of the suburban landscape. I attempt to show the present physical environment as part of an historical continuity of interrelated dynamics of war and capital.

In taking stock of my surroundings and their past, I have been reminded in some sense of Walter Benjamin's angel of history, borne by the wind ceaselessly into the future, but gazing wildly back on the growing destruction termed progress.<sup>54</sup>



**Figure 1:** Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus* (monoprint, 1920). Discussed by Benjamin in “Le concept d’histoire,” *Essais III* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).

Part of the importance of the subjective understanding of local history which I propose is that it breaks with conventional narratives of progress to view the history of the land critically. For all that has been built, this has nevertheless been a history of rupture, colonization, and destruction, as traditional patterns of land use gave way to increasingly commodified and exploitative relationships through British imperialism and Canadian capitalism.

### **3/ Inhabiting Contemporary Upper Canada**

#### ***3.1/ War and Capital***

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<sup>54</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Le concept d’histoire,” *Essais III* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000)

My narrative of the history of Ontario, Upper Canada, and Durham Region is framed by the work of Éric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato. In *Guerres et capital*, they lay out a new reading of the history of capitalism which places the concept of ‘war’ at the centre of its analysis. The monetarization of the ancient Athenian economy amounted to the continuation of civil war—understood as a contest over resources—by other means. Similarly, the origins of English capitalism amounted to a kind of warfare against the peasantry as the gentry enclosed the commons by violent means. This primitive accumulation of capital—separation of the producers from the means of production, and commodification of nature and life—is ongoing in our own time. The history of imperialism and racism has been integrally bound up with the accumulation of capital in a war for the consolidation of power by the capitalist elite, most importantly through the mechanism of the state.<sup>55</sup>

The history of Southern Ontario and Durham Region since the early days of European colonization has been shaped by the dynamics of war and capital which Alliez and Lazzarato trace on a global scale. Today, the clearest way of reading our surroundings is to identify two historical layers in which these dynamics of war and capital have embodied themselves. The first layer is the early history of Upper Canada and pre-confederation Canada West, during which time the land of the Haudenosaunee and Mississauga was transformed into a settler colony of the British Empire. The second layer is the history of Ontario from the Second World War to the present day, marked by a renewed relationship with the land through industrialization and suburbanization. Both of these layers have left their physical and ideological traces on the territory. Elucidating these traces in a critical light allows us to experience the land in a different way.

### ***3.2/ Upper Canada***

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<sup>55</sup> Éric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato, *Guerres et capital* (Paris: Amsterdam, 2016), 38-47, 46, 51.

The lands west of Montréal along the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes were not colonized by European settlers in significant numbers until the end of the U.S. Revolutionary War, when United Empire Loyalists came north as refugees from the newly independent United States. In their forested traditional territory on the north shore of Lake Ontario, the Mississauga people migrated seasonally, sustaining themselves through a variety of means, including hunting, fishing, and the cultivation of corn and wild rice.<sup>56</sup> Nations of the Haudenosaunee also established villages on the north shore of Lake Ontario during their period of expansion in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, such as the Seneca village of Gandatsetiagon at the mouth of the Rouge. French missionary Fr. François Fénelon visited this village in 1669, where the Seneca cultivated the three sisters: corn, beans, and squash. The location of Gandatsetiagon reflected the indigenous relationship with the land, as the Seneca chose the location for its convenience at a southern terminus of the portage from Lake Simcoe into the Rouge.<sup>57</sup>

The war on the Mississauga began with the usurpation of their lands by treaties with the British Crown. Alliez and Lazzarato point out that the violent enclosure of the common lands in Europe took place at the same time as the appropriation of lands in the new world.<sup>58</sup> We would do well to view the appropriation of Mississauga territory by the British as part of this phenomenon. In his classic history of Upper Canada, G.M. Craig gave a rather misleading account of this process, stating simply that Governor of Québec began purchasing land from “the Indians” in 1783, and that “[unlike] the nearby American states, Upper Canada never had an angry Indian frontier.”<sup>59</sup> It is true that native resistance did not force Britain to conquer the Haudenosaunee or Mississauga militarily. However, Britain did not come by these nations’ lands

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<sup>56</sup> Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> John W. Sabeau, *Time Present and Time Past: A Pictorial History of Pickering* (Pickering, ON: Altona Editions, 2000), 1.

<sup>58</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Guerres et capital*, 51.

<sup>59</sup> Gerald M. Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years, 1784-1841* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1963), 5.

honestly. The frequent use of blank deeds in land purchases—indicating vaguely the land in question—coupled with translation problems to produce a great deal of confusion over what exactly was being given up. Moreover, there a fair claim that the indigenous nations often did not really understand themselves to be making permanent cessions, as their own ways of viewing the world did not include European notions of private property or ownership of land.<sup>60</sup>

Indigenous peoples did not accept the ensuing transformation of the land by settlers without protest. For instance, in 1797 a British official scolded settlers in the Trent River valley in response to the “many heavy and grievous complaints” which the Mississauga were making over “injuries done to the fisheries and to the burial places”, contrarily to the spirit of diplomatic friendship which the Mississauga believed to exist. Violence almost erupted near Marmora in 1821 in a controversy over mill construction near a burial ground.<sup>61</sup>

The dishonest and force-backed seizure of indigenous lands west of Montréal was a very similar phenomenon to the usurpation of the common lands in Europe, in that the British seized land and turned it into a commodity. In England, nobles took communal and feudal property—with all its complex traditional usufruct rights—and converted it into private property, booting the traditional users out of the way in order to raise sheep.<sup>62</sup> It is interesting to note that many of those who settled Upper Canada in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were literally English peasants, their crossings paid by landowners seeking to clear their estates or parishes seeking an alternative to poor relief.<sup>63</sup> In this sense, the settlement of Upper Canada directly participated in the processes underway in England.

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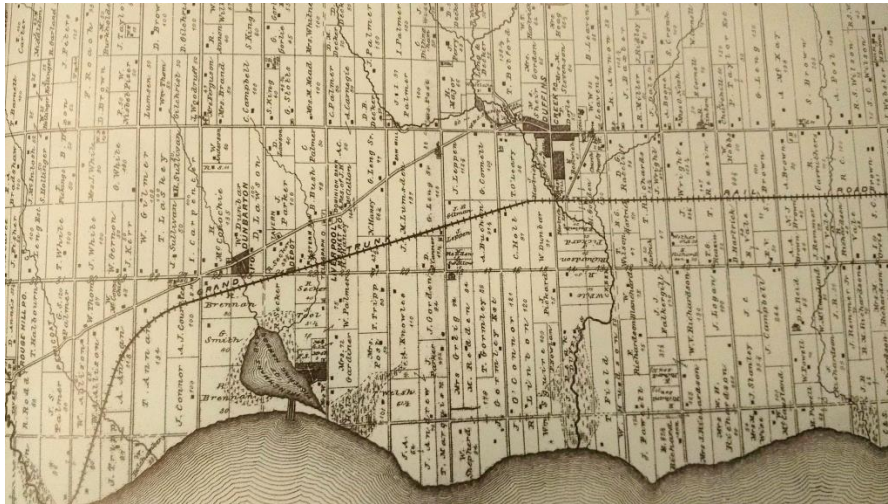
<sup>60</sup> Peter A. Baskerville, *Sites of Power: A Concise History of Ontario* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2005), 45-46.

<sup>61</sup> Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier*, 15, 19.

<sup>62</sup> See the discussion in Section 8 of Marx, *Capital*, particularly 672-677.

<sup>63</sup> Craig, *Upper Canada*, 129.

The concept of private property brought with it a novel logic of the “improvement” of land, understood as a commodity which could be made profitable by increasing its value. The British first exported this philosophy by launching colonization schemes in Northern Ireland.<sup>64</sup> The surveying and settlement of Upper Canada took place in the mold of this capitalist conception of land, and it continues to structure our lived experience of Southern Ontario. The British administration first surveyed the lands west of Montréal in order to give land grants as payment to veterans of the U.S. Revolutionary War, and early political debates often surrounded the allocation of lands. The standard grid system of a township, based on a “broken front” along the lake, a base line, and concession lines, took shape in the 1790s during the administration of John Graves Simcoe.<sup>65</sup>



**Figure 2:** Pickering Township as it appeared in Beer's Atlas, 1877. Reproduced in Sabeau, *Time Present and Time Past*, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (London: Verso, 2003), 77-79.

<sup>65</sup> Craig, *Upper Canada*, 11-12.

This system remains the basic way we understand the land in Durham Region today. Simcoe named the lands east of the Rouge “Pickering Township” after a town in his native Yorkshire. The surveyor laid out a base line inland from the lakeshore in 1791, and divided the township into 200 acre lots.<sup>66</sup> “Base line” remains a local way of referring to Bayly Street, an arterial road in the present-day towns of Pickering and Ajax. The Toronto portage entry at the mouth of the Rouge is not embedded in local parlance. We can remark here that the presence of subversive tactics and cultural poaching does not necessarily mean the replacement of colonial spatial vocabularies or logics. To a very significant extent, the suburban subject is indeed the product of the environment, and subversive tactics have no choice but to coexist with rationalistic European conceptions of the land. The trick is to be able to mentally situate these conceptions.

Another dimension of the first layer of war and capital in Southern Ontario is the co-constitutive relationship between economic and strategic geo-political motivations in the creation of Upper Canada. Before its settlement, the value of the country west of Montréal was in the lucrative fur trade extending into the interior. Historian Donald Creighton interpreted the Seven Years’ War in North America as a clash between two competing economies: the Atlantic and the St. Lawrence. These material, commercial empires—nominally British and French—clashed over the Ohio and Mississippi country as they moved westward. When the French surrendered to the British in 1763, the new elites of Québec could scarcely do differently than to go on pursuing the lucrative trade to the west. The Anglophone merchant class of Montréal merely tied the growing Empire to the new and stronger metropole of London. Creighton’s words are suggestive, as he affirms “[it] was certain that the British Canadians would fight to realize the commercial empire of the St. Lawrence... [and] fight in company with the Canadians of French

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<sup>66</sup> Sabeau, *Time Present and Time Past*, 1-2.

descent.”<sup>67</sup> Creighton depicts the commercial expansion of the colony in warlike terms, and these terms are not unwarranted.

The development of Upper Canada as a settler colony was largely driven by warlike considerations. The province’s first governor, John Graves Simcoe, was a veteran of the U.S. Revolutionary War, and believed that the majority of citizens of the fledgling republic to the south remained latently loyal to the King. He pursued the colonization project in Upper Canada as an opportunity to create a model society with tight links to England, which would demonstrate the superiority of the British constitution. In the meantime, it would be necessary to build a robust defence infrastructure in the new province to deter invasion. Simcoe hoped that if the British retained forts at Detroit and Michilimackinac, Upper Canada could be the base from which Britain might negotiate the existence of a buffer state of indigenous peoples to check U.S. expansion.<sup>68</sup>

Based on these considerations, Simcoe planned to build a capital at the head of navigation on the “Thames” River, to be called “London”, because it was at a relatively safe distance from the border. He sent a contingent of Queen’s Rangers to build a military road from the head of Lake Ontario to this site, which he named “Dundas Street” after the Secretary of State, Sir Henry Dundas. Another military road was built from Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe, named “Yonge Street” after the Secretary at War, Sir George Yonge. These roads went on to become useful in the settlement of the country.<sup>69</sup> Simcoe also established a number of garrisons,

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<sup>67</sup> Donald Creighton, *The Empire of the St. Lawrence: A Study in Commerce and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014 [1937]), 19-21.

<sup>68</sup> Craig, *Upper Canada*, 20-24.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

around which towns grew up. Craig describes Simcoe's goal as not only to "safeguard Upper Canada", but to "put it on the road to eventual predominance in internal America."<sup>70</sup>

If we use Creighton's terminology, Simcoe was fighting to build the commercial empire of the St. Lawrence. The early building of Upper Canada was part of a counter-offensive, and this counter-offensive was part of the same struggle between economies that had exploded in the 1750s. The province's "eventual predominance" must be understood in economic terms. Later development projects such as the Welland Canal sought to improve the St. Lawrence route in competition with the Mohawk-Hudson route on the New York side.<sup>71</sup>



**Figure 3:** Highway 401 and CN rail corridor viewed from the top floor of a chain fitness club in Ajax, Ontario, looking south. Lake Ontario lies just beyond the trees, at a distance of about 4 km. Photograph by author, January 2018.

The commercial eminence of Upper Canada is a foundational aspect of the relationship between people and land in Durham Region. Today the empire of the St. Lawrence is physically visible in the busy transportation corridor that links Toronto and Montréal. While container ships

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 151.

on Lake Ontario still bring goods along the seaway, transport trucks race freight and passenger trains along the lakeshore.

The built environment in Durham Region continues to bear subtly witness to another dimension of Simcoe’s project: the ideological. Upper Canada played host early on to an internal war and a war of subjectivities. For Alliez and Lazzarato, imperialism is closely related to a “guerre intérieure” of elites against the population. An historical dimension of this war has been “guerres de subjectivité”, in which elites have used tools such as religion and misogyny to subject individual behaviour to greater and greater degrees of control.<sup>72</sup>



**Figure 4:** St. George’s Anglican Church in Pickering Village, today part of Ajax. Note the Canadian flag flying in the yard, and the location on the historic road to Kingston. Photograph by author, January 2018.

Simcoe sought to build a model society that would closely imitate Britain and thereby demonstrate the superiority of the Empire. As part of this effort, he believed strongly in treating the Church of England as the established church in Upper Canada. In the years following the War of 1812, key elite figures such as John Strachan continued to push for the Church of England to be given privileges above other denominations, even though the Anglican population

<sup>72</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Guerres et capital*, 44, 57.

in the province was not significant until the 1820s. Debates over churches were a source of significant tension between the elected assembly and the appointed legislative council.<sup>73</sup> At issue here was not so much individual moral conduct, in the manner of the counter-reformation, but the political associations of denominational adherence. The internal subjective war in Upper Canada sought to bring people into adherence with a state religion which fostered loyal sentiment, in contrast to more decentralized denominations like Methodism which were seen to be carrying the “noxious principles” of democracy and republicanism from the neighbouring United States.<sup>74</sup>

Indeed, the concept of loyalty to the Crown was a central component of Upper Canadian ideology from the very beginning. The very *raison d’être* of the early settlements was to give new homes to those who had been forced out of the American colonies for their loyalty to Britain. With much immigration from American states in the ensuing years, however, the population’s actual commitment to the Empire was far from clear. During the war of 1812, locally raised militia forces were unreliable. British regulars did most of the fighting, and many residents of the province either sat on the fence or joined the U.S. cause. Elites ran a pro-Britain ideological campaign by founding the Loyal and Patriotic Society in December of 1812.<sup>75</sup> In the period following the War of 1812, political debates often centred around the status of U.S.-born residents and the need to administer oaths of loyalty.<sup>76</sup>

The early history of Upper Canada was shaped by a colonizing war against indigenous peoples, the English war against the peasantry, and the British commercial war against the United States. Inhabiting Durham Region with this understanding inscribes certain dimensions of

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<sup>73</sup> Craig, 165.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>75</sup> Craig, *Upper Canada*, 74-75.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 89.

our surroundings with a new significance. Transportation corridors are the arteries of a long-established commercial empire; old churches bear witness to wars of subjectivity. To subjectively experience our surroundings in this way is to subvert an understanding in which the 401 is just a road and St. George's Church is just a quaint old building. Both are evidence of how today's world was shaped by a warlike process of colonization. It is subversive to experience them as legacies of colonialism on this land.

### ***3.3/ Ontario Since 1939***

The second layer of war and capital which we inhabit in Durham Region is the ongoing impact of the Second World War and its related economic expansion. This period reflects an important insight of Alliez and Lazzarato, which posits that "l'appropriation de la machine de guerre par l'État consiste moins dans sa transformation en une armée professionnelle que dans son intégration dans le circuit de la production, de la fiscalité, de l'innovation technologique, de la science, de l'emploi."<sup>77</sup> The state wages war not necessarily by maintaining a standing army, but by integrating itself into the material reproduction of society. Moreover, in Europe since the First World War, states have undergone an organizational revolution based on the governmentality of capital (*gouvernementalité du capital*). This organizational revolution, characterized by strengthened executive control and financial hegemony, was originally spurred by the industrial war effort, but has grown to constitute a new paradigm of war within the population (*guerre au sein de la population*).<sup>78</sup>

Alliez and Lazzarato's arguments overall transfer well to the Canadian context, where federal executive strength grew significantly between 1939 and 1945 through the development and control of a massive system of war industry. C.D. Howe became known as "the minister of

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<sup>77</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Guerres et capital*, 46.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 334-337.

everything”.<sup>79</sup> The postwar influence of this strengthened executive in pursuing continental economic integration was an important foundation of George Grant’s argument in *Lament for a Nation*. With the close association between the Liberal Party and the business elite, “economic and political power were mutually dependent.”<sup>80</sup>

There is perhaps no better place to appreciate the material impact of the industrial war effort than Ajax, Ontario. The year 1940 inaugurated a radical new era in the relationship between people and land in Pickering Township. To meet requirements for enormous quantities of munitions, the federal Department of Munitions and Supply contracted the Crown Corporation Defence Industries Limited (D.I.L.) to build a shell-filling plant in the farm country west of Duffins Creek. The federal government expropriated 3,000 acres of farm land, and D.I.L. rapidly built a complex of over 400 buildings, including assembly lines and housing for employees.<sup>81</sup>

After the war, the federal government’s Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) oversaw the conversion of this wartime village—named “Ajax” after Admiral Harwood’s British flagship at the 1939 Battle of the River Plate—into a peacetime “model community”. Industrial buildings were converted turned over to private companies for consumer-market production, and the CMHC laid out a plan for separate residential neighbourhoods segregated by income-level according to the prevailing urban liberal planning philosophy of the day.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Michael Bliss, *Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 445.

<sup>80</sup> George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1965), 10-11.

<sup>81</sup> Defence Industries Limited, “Defence Industries Limited Shell Filling Department Pickering Works plant history”, (Canada: Defence Industries Ltd, 1946), vol. 1, 1

<sup>82</sup> Robert McGeachy, “The CMHC in Ajax, Ontario: 1948-1950.” *Ontario History* 98, no. 2 (November 2006): 209–224.



**Figure 4:** The only remaining former D.I.L. assembly line building in Ajax, now subdivided for use by several light-industrial tenants. Photograph by author, January 2018.

Several aspects of this history bear a closer look. First, the Canadian state—indeed the executive—basically created an entire town as part of the industrial war effort, and set that town on a path of liberal suburban development after the war. To live in Ajax today is to tread that path which was launched between 1940 and 1945. Here is a remarkable instance of the state playing an integral role in the material reproduction of society by not only integrating itself into economic circuits, but radically laying the groundwork for a new kind of economy and society. Describing a related process in Verdun, Québec, in which the government converted wartime industrial infrastructure for peacetime use, historian Serge Durflinger tellingly describes the postwar economic development strategy as “making wartime continue”.<sup>83</sup> This war was not against Germany, but against the possibility of fundamental changes to the social order.

The actions of the Canadian state also brought about a new revolution in the relationship between people and land in Pickering Township. Industrial and residential development

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<sup>83</sup> Serge Durflinger, “Making Wartime Continue: War Industry and Economic Recovery in Verdun, Quebec, 1941-1946”, in Serge Bernier and John Macfarlane (eds.) *Canada, 1900-1950: Un pays prend sa place / A Country Comes of Age* (Ottawa: Organization for the History of Canada, 2003).

amounted to a new phase of primitive accumulation on the lands of the Mississauga and the Haudenosaunee.



**Figure 5:** Suburban housing development rises on the Simcoe-era concession grid in Scarborough, Ontario in 1960. City of Toronto Archives. Series 12 (Aerial photographs).

Residential and industrial suburbs expanded rapidly around Toronto during the period of increased consumerism and economic growth following the Second World War. The value and productive capacity of land ceased to be understood in agricultural terms, but in urban terms. Development companies could make profits by expanding housing and industrial campuses into relatively inexpensive agricultural land. In Pickering Township—eventually reorganized into the City of Pickering and the Town of Ajax within the larger Regional Municipality of Durham—the agricultural economy largely disappeared in the decades following the war, as housing expansion turned farms into suburbs.<sup>84</sup> The relationship with the natural environment shifted from one of management to one of rupture, as an expanding urban world covered the country with pavement.

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<sup>84</sup> Sabean, *Time Present and Time Past*, 5.



**Figure 6:** Kingston Road (Highway 2) crossing Duffins Creek at Pickering Village, viewed from the north. Photograph by author, January 2018.

The appearance of Duffins Creek in Figure 6 illustrates this new relationship. The photograph was taken near the site of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century mill which has disappeared. Waterways like Duffins Creek were originally central features of the landscape, first as transportation routes for indigenous peoples, next as settlers' access routes to the interior. Duffins Creek played an important role in the early settler economy by powering mills. In the postwar relationship with the land, Duffins Creek is an afterthought, an obstacle crossed by major arterial roads like Highway 2.

The suburban-industrial relationship with the land is complemented by a postwar culture of loyalty which is not without parallels to the years following 1812. To some extent, this postwar culture—based largely on the patriotic honouring of veterans—is pervasive throughout English Canada, embodied in cenotaphs and legion halls.



**Figure 7:** The Royal Canadian Legion, Ajax Branch, and a vacant adjacent lot, viewed from Hunt St. Photograph by author, January 2018.

Figure 7 is interesting for the way it depicts the situation of postwar culture in the economic context of renewed primitive accumulation. The legion hall stands adjacent to a vacant lot—formerly devoted to industrial use—that has been fenced off for high-density residential development. In the background, two relatively new residential developments are visible. The houses behind the legion were built about a decade ago on land that had previously housed industrial users in old D.I.L. buildings. Behind them, the tower of Pat Bayly Square is currently under construction at the time of writing. It appears that an overheated housing market is causing residential land use to trump industrial use. Building houses is the top way to ‘improve’ the land, so much so that Ajax, like much of Scarborough, is beginning to expand upwards.

The postwar culture of loyalty is very prominently embodied in Ajax, in a way that seems to associate the war effort with the ongoing flourishing and prosperity of the community.



**Figure 8:** Veterans' Point Gardens, imitating the warship HMS Ajax, at the foot of Harwood Avenue. Photograph by author, January 2018.

Figure 8 shows the symbolic prow of a British warship facing out into what the Wendat first called *ontari'io*, or “Lake of Shining Waters”.<sup>85</sup> Here Lake Ontario is more of a stand-in for the South Atlantic, commemorating the exploits of British sailors. Plaques tell the story of D.I.L. and the resultant growth of the new community. Little of the darkness or absurdity of war comes through in Ajax’s public memory. Though violence is not missed, war is honoured as the generative principle of this society. The positioning of Veterans’ Point Gardens, facing outward from the foot of Ajax’s main north-south arterial road, makes it seem as if the entire town were a warship. Composed of rectangular lots and uniform suburban streets, HMS Ajax steams forward toward progress.

Like Benjamin’s angel, I cannot help but dwell on what has been lost in the process. Elucidating the relationship between Ajax’s built environment and the warlike trajectory of postwar Canadian capitalism is a practice that subverts the intentions that environment embodies.

#### **4/ Conclusion**

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<sup>85</sup> Donald B. Smith, *Sacred Feather* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 10.

#### ***4.1/ Positioning an emancipatory politics in the suburbs of Southern Ontario***

In the preceding account, I have attempted to give some sense of what it involves to inhabit the suburbs as bush through the lens of local history. By experiencing my surroundings as manifestations of two layers of war and capital accumulation on the territory east of the Rouge, I move beyond a commodified understanding of the land where I come from. This is a subversive tactic which resists the imposed meanings of my surroundings, which embody a logic of commercial expansion and capitalist economic growth. Experiencing Durham Region this way is an *art de faire*. Documenting it is an *art de dire*, a tactic of rejecting a certain scientific political economy of the academy in order to produce research whose value is more inherent than utilitarian. In the process, I have experimented with a method in humanities scholarship which responds to the ethical challenges raised in indigenous resurgence literature by conducting a work of positioning.

Non-indigenous people in Canada can respond most effectively to the work of indigenous resurgence by breaking down the prejudices that exist within their own communities, in the context of their own emancipatory struggles. Embracing local history and reading it in a critical lens is a way of breaking down a colonial mindset in which places and lands are interchangeable, valuable mainly in their potential for profit-making, and possessed absolutely by the person who holds legal title to them. Learning to relate to a particular territory in a way which values its particularity—that is, inhabiting it as bush—can form a helpful epistemic background to a political project of emancipation in solidarity with indigenous resurgence.

The nature and strategy of such a project remains a question for discussion. It is beyond my scope here to begin evaluating the practical implications of solidarity with resurgence on emancipatory politics generally. Nevertheless, inhabiting the suburbs as bush can give us some

orientation in the types of political praxis we wish to pursue. For instance, perhaps we should shy away from falling back on ethics of property, or from focussing on wealth redistribution in crude terms. Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval's notion of *le commun* as the organizing principle of twenty-first century struggle may inform a serviceable way of proceeding. The authors propose the opposition of use rights (*droit d'usage*) to property rights (*droit de propriété*), as part of a broader project based on the recognition that

il ne s'agit... pas tant de protéger des « biens » fondamentaux pour la survie humaine que de transformer profondément l'économie et la société *en renversant le système des normes* qui menace maintenant très directement l'humanité et la nature.<sup>86</sup>

Indeed, struggle against the prevailing global political order becomes all the more urgent in a time of catastrophic climate change and ecological collapse. The problem of relating ethically to our ecosystems is not an abstract one—it is material and urgent.

What I have tried to show here is how it is possible for individuals—even in a landscape profoundly shaped by war and capital—to think their relationship to the land in a more ethical way. In Durham Region, mundane features of the built environment can be experienced as particular signposts in the colonization of the land, informed by a local historical consciousness.

#### **4.2/ Peter Matthews**

In December of 1837, a band of poorly-armed rebels assembled at Montgomery's Tavern on Yonge Street, to march on Upper Canada's capital, York. They were met by government-led militia and quickly dispersed. Men from Pickering Township were central players in this ill-fated rebellion, driven by a host of grievances including an unfair tax system and restricted religious

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<sup>86</sup> Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *Commun. Essai sur la révolution au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: La Découverte, 2014), 13.

freedom. When the authorities put two men to death over the affair, one of those they hung was Peter Matthews, a farmer from the village of Brougham in Pickering.<sup>87</sup>

The dominant ideology and the rule of elites in Upper Canada has always been contested. We inhabit an environment that has been shaped by the victors of history through war and the accumulation of capital, from the British military colonizers to the capitalists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But it is still possible to relate in another way to this land. In 2018, might we pick up the spirit of Peter Matthews and act in some way to resist the seemingly inexorable continuation of the capitalist war of accumulation? Perhaps there are some hints in the not-so-distant past. When the federal government expropriated farm lands in the 1970s to build an enormous Pickering Airport, John W. Sabean identifies “the spirit of 1837” in the ensuing citizen mobilizations which succeeded in stopping the development. The fight against Highway 407 was not so successful. But the Pickering Airport still has not been built.<sup>88</sup>

In G.M. Craig’s history of Upper Canada, the rebellion of 1837 is portrayed as an ill-conceived, half-hearted, and badly executed effort, stirred up by the efforts of the fiery reactionary William Lyon MacKenzie. For Craig, MacKenzie represented a misguided agrarian ideology which mistakenly attributed moral purity to the notion of a simple, agricultural society. The rebels’ suspicion of commercial development and “progress” was irrational. Jeffrey L. McNairn identifies this portrayal of the rebels as part of a broader liberal worldview that informed Craig’s work in general.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, Craig’s ‘balanced’ treatment of the Family Compact must have been rather easier when he took stock of the liberal developmentalist tendencies that prevailed in the province in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Peter Baskerville documents the ways in which the York and Toronto-based elite pursued commercial ascendancy for Upper

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<sup>87</sup> Sabean, *Time Present and Time Past*, 4.

<sup>88</sup> Sabean, *Time Present and Time Past*, 8.

<sup>89</sup> See McNairn’s introduction to Craig, *Upper Canada*. The most relevant section of Craig is 210-226.

Canada's capital at the same time as they made active and strategic use of state tools. It would be quite outdated to understand the Family Compact purely as a conservative, corporatist clique whose interests ran against those of the commercial classes.<sup>90</sup>

A certain revolutionary heritage exists in Southern Ontario, and it consists in the legacies of movements which contested the onward march of progress as defined by liberal elites. Certainly, the rebels of 1837 were creatures of their time, and probably understood land in the conventional terms of the day. They had a stake in the ongoing colonization of the territory. But they were not speculators who bought up vacant lots and sold them to the highest bidder. Nor did they support the agenda being pursued by the Family Compact. The trajectory of Upper Canada was contested by British settlers early on, if imperfectly and colonially.

This contestation has been ongoing since the nineteenth century, and its bases have shifted with the times. The growth of socialist movements in the 1920s and 1930s presented a more comprehensive and meaningful vision of rupture with the status quo. James Naylor has used extensive documentation to paint a more radical picture of the Canadian Left as a whole in this period than has often prevailed in scholarship. Members of both the Communist Party and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) "overtly rejected the fundamental premises of liberal individualism, viewing property as destructive of rights and seeing the social order as constructed of collectivities... rather than individuals."<sup>91</sup> Again, the records of these movements can be critically appraised—no doubt they were at times pervaded by colonial sensibilities around indigenous peoples in spite of themselves. David Quiring has made a well-documented argument about the colonial impact of policies and projects carried out by the CCF government

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<sup>90</sup> Baskerville, "Entrepreneurship and the Family Compact: York-Toronto, 1822-55," *Urban History Review* 9, no. 3 (January 1981): 15-34.

<sup>91</sup> James Naylor, *The Fate of Labour Socialism: The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and the Dream of a Working Class Future* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 9.

in Saskatchewan.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, there is a radical emancipatory tradition in Canada that has at times succeeded in putting forward alternatives to the liberal capitalist order.

Today non-indigenous people must engage with this tradition—their own tradition—while understanding the colonial context of their action and the separate, resurgent aspirations of indigenous peoples. This call has many different implications on different territories. In Durham Region, I contend that it involves rejecting a commodified relationship with the land. Past mobilizations against projects like the Pickering Airport have rejected the language of economic development—as would no doubt take place if such projects came to fruition—in favour of valuing the land in itself. The well-known local slogan “land over landings” can be read as a testament to such a mindset. Inhabiting the land as a shared heritage, rather than as property, can inform an emancipatory politics by pushing back against growth and development as desirable ends.

Mobilization against the suburbanization of the countryside can be complemented—perhaps on some level motivated—by the ability of people to inhabit the suburbs as bush. Certainly, the ability to see inherent value in remaining agricultural lands has played some role in local-level struggles so far. To affect a broader shift in cultural attitudes toward land must be an ongoing effort. Scholarly works can play a role in this effort by positioning themselves in local colonial histories, and showing the present as the product of a colonial past. Where it is possible to conduct this work in dialogue with indigenous voices at a local level, then reflection stands to be substantially enriched. Indeed, scholarly perspectives on colonial histories should be careful not to take ownership over the past in a way that effaces, precludes, or sidelines the perspectives of colonized peoples themselves. What non-indigenous scholars need to embrace, however, is

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<sup>92</sup> David M. Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan : Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

the project of writing about Canada and theorizing their own political context in a way that takes to heart the substantive interventions of the New Indigenous Intelligentsia, which point out deep flaws in the prevailing political and economic order. The negative impacts of this order are not limited to colonized peoples, although they suffer the most. Writing about indigenous people and borrowing concepts from indigenous philosophy is not a substitute for figuring out our own way forward toward political freedom. We must instead situate this way forward in a way that supports and complements indigenous resurgent aims, in a spirit of solidarity rather than solicitude.

For many of us in urban Canada, one small epistemic step along this path is to subvert commodified understandings of land by making some effort to inhabit the suburbs as bush. Living my home region in the light of local colonial history has been my own attempt to get the mall out of my head.

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