Idle No More
An Introduction to the Symposium on Glen Coulthard’s Red Skin, White Masks

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Abstract

This article introduces the symposium on Glen Coulthard’s Red Skin, White Masks. It begins by situating the book’s publication in the wake of the extensive mobilisations of the Idle No More movement in Canada in 2012–13. Coulthard’s strategic hypotheses on the horizons of Indigenous liberation in the book are intimately linked to his participation in these recent struggles. The article then locates Red Skin, White Masks within a wider renaissance of Indigenous Studies in the North American context in recent years, highlighting Coulthard’s unique and sympathetic extension of Marx’s critique of capitalism, particularly through his use of the concept of ‘primitive accumulation’. Next, the article outlines the long arc of the argument in Red Skin, White Masks and the organisation of the book’s constituent parts, providing a backdrop to the critical engagements that follow from Peter Kulchyski, Geoff Mann, George Ciccariello-Maher, and Roxanne Dunbar-Oritz. The article closes with reflections on Coulthard’s engagement with Fanon, who, besides Marx, is the most important polestar in Red Skin, White Masks.

Keywords

Indigenous – decolonial – anticolonial – Marxism – Canada

Glen Coulthard’s Red Skin, White Masks ends with a set of strategic hypotheses on the horizons of Indigenous struggle in Canada, linked closely to the lessons of Idle No More, the Indigenous movement that erupted in late autumn and early winter of 2012–13, and which constituted perhaps the most sustained
and far-reaching grassroots Indigenous mobilisation in the country since the contestation of the assimilationist White Paper of 1969. Omnibus Bill C-45, or the Jobs and Growth Act, was the spark. Issued by the Conservative government of Stephen Harper in December 2012, the wide-ranging bill promised to alter key components of the Indian Act, the Fisheries Act, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, and the Navigable Water Act, among other pieces of federal legislation, threatening further expansion of the interests of capital – above all in the natural-resource sectors of mining, oil and gas – into Indigenous territories.

But if Bill C-45 was the proximate catalyst of the movement, it represented only the visible topsoil of grievance, resting on vast sedimentary foundations of settler-colonialism beneath. ‘The impetus for the recent Idle No More events’, a collective statement of the movement’s leadership reads, ‘lies in a centuries-old resistance as Indigenous nations and their lands suffered the impacts of exploration, invasion, and colonization.’ In a recovery of this popular culture of opposition, Idle No More emerged to once again ‘assert Indigenous inherent rights to sovereignty and reinstitute traditional laws and Nation to Nation Treaties by protecting the lands and waters from corporate destruction. Each day that Indigenous rights are not honoured or fulfilled, inequality between Indigenous peoples and the settler society grows.’

Idle No More began as a small, women-led education campaign across the prairie provinces regarding the negative implications of the bill, but quickly expanded when, ‘on December 4, Chief Theresa Spence of the Attawapiskat Cree Nation announced that she would begin a hunger strike on December 11 to bring attention to the deplorable housing conditions on her reserve in northern Ontario, to raise awareness about the impacts of Bill C-45, and to demonstrate her support for the emerging Idle No More movement.’ A national ‘day of action’ was called for December 10, and protests reverberated across the major cities. The occupation of public spaces – from major street intersections to shopping malls – dominated early tactics, with ‘round-dancing and drumming’ paired with ‘community-led conferences, teach-ins, and public panels’.

Tactics grew increasingly militant by the end of December and early January – including road blockades and train and traffic stoppages – but the Harper government quickly countered with a move to separate authorised from unauthorised Indians, as the anthropologist Charles R. Hale has described

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1 Idle No More n.d.
similar efforts at co-optation in the Latin American context. Harper set a meeting with the leadership of the Assembly of First Nations – the body recognised by the Canadian state as the representative institution of Indigenous peoples – for January 11, while unauthorised Indians organised another national day of action for January 16, ‘this time focusing on more assertive forms of Indigenous protest’, Coulthard points out. ‘Actions including rallies, railway blockades, and traffic stoppages swept across the country, including railway barricades erected in Manitoba, Ontario, and British Columbia; highway and bridge stoppages in British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Alberta; as well as the now regular display of marches, flash-mob round-dances, drumming, and prayer circles’.

The most visible signals of Idle No More’s presence on Canada’s highways and rail lines, as well as in the public spaces of its major cities, have since receded, but Coulthard insists that the turmoil they expressed has merely shifted for the time being to a subterranean fomentation, and we should not therefore see in the temporary decline of above-ground mobilisation ‘a deterioration of the movement’s spirit and resolve’.

Using the relative downtime of the subterranean period, Coulthard has reflected on his experience as a militant in Idle No More’s activities in British Columbia, drawing up a set of critical theses on Indigenous resurgence and decolonisation, in the mode of what the late French Marxist Daniel Bensaïd called ‘strategic hypotheses’. ‘Our insistence is not on a “model”,’ Bensaïd argued,

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4 See Hale 2002, 2004, 2006. Hale’s notion of the indio permitido, or ‘authorised Indian’, refers to the way in which neoliberal states in Latin America in the 1990s adopted a language of cultural recognition of Indigenous people and even enacted modest reforms in the area of Indigenous rights. At the same time, these states set strict limits on the extent of reform. Neoliberal multiculturalism, in this way, played the role of dividing and domesticating Indigenous movements through selective co-optation. The ‘unauthorised’ Indigenous movements that refused to accept the parameters of neoliberal multiculturalism were frequently targeted and repressed by these ‘multicultural’ states. In particular, the era of the indio permitido has meant that cultural rights are to be enjoyed on the implicit condition that Indigenous movements will not challenge foundational neoliberal economic policies and their accompanying forms of capitalist class power. Indigenous movements that have submitted more or less to the framework of neoliberal multiculturalism fall into Hale’s socio-political category indio permitido, or ‘authorised Indian’.

5 Coulthard 2014, p. 164.

6 Coulthard 2014, p. 165.
but on what we have called ‘strategic hypotheses’. Models are something to be copied; they are instructions for use. A hypothesis is a guide to action that starts from past experience but is open and can be modified in the light of new experience or unexpected circumstances. Our concern therefore is not to speculate but to see what we can take from past experience, the only material at our disposal. But we always have to recognize that it is necessarily poorer than the present and the future if revolutionaries are to avoid the risk of doing what the generals are said to do – always fight the last war.7

Coulthard’s first thesis pivots on disruption, the necessity of direct action, a plea for the unauthorised Indigenous route to rebellion, an insistence that legitimate struggle is not confined to ‘official’ representatives of the Indigenous people, the channels of formal negotiation, and the parameters of the ‘rule of law’.8 One reason is efficacy. ‘I would venture to suggest’, Coulthard writes, ‘that all negotiations over the scope and content of Aboriginal peoples’ rights in the last forty years have piggybacked off the assertive direct actions – including escalated use of blockades – spearheaded by Indigenous women and other grassroots elements of our communities.’9 Another cluster of reasons to defend this assertive dynamic has to do with self-emancipation:

first, the practices are directly undertaken by the subjects of colonial oppression themselves and seek to produce an immediate power effect; second, they are undertaken in a way that indicates a loosening of internalized colonialism, which is itself a precondition for any meaningful change; and third, they are prefigurative in the sense that they build the skills and social relationships (including those with the land) that are required within and among Indigenous communities to construct alternatives to the colonial relationship in the long run.10

The drivers here are self-emancipation of the oppressed, the partial overcoming of internalised colonialism in the subjectivity of Indigenous participants through struggle, and the prefiguration of radical alternatives to colonial rule in contemporary Canada.

7 Bensaïd 2006. 
8 Coulthard 2014, p. 166. 
10 Coulthard 2014, p. 166.
This parallels, in a particular sense, Marx's notion of 'revolutionary practice', in which there is a 'coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change'. For Coulthard, as for Marx, in their struggle to satisfy their needs, the oppressed come increasingly to recognise their common interests and become conscious of their own social power; through their self-activity they come to see themselves as subjects capable of altering the structures of society as well as changing themselves in the process through self-organisation and self-activity from below. While the connection to Marx in this regard is not made by Coulthard, he does draw explicit parallels with Frantz Fanon. Coulthard's first thesis on Indigenous resurgence and decolonisation draws on Fanon's engagement with Nietzsche at the close of *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which humanity is understood simultaneously as an affirmation and a negation. ‘Through these actions’, Coulthard contends, ‘we physically say “no” to the degradation of our communities and to exploitation of the lands upon which we depend. But they also have ingrained within them a resounding “yes”: they are the affirmative enactment of another modality of being, a different way of relating to and with the world.’

 Ensuring that anti-capitalism is at the core of Indigenous resurgence is the basis of Coulthard's second thesis. ‘For Indigenous nations to live,’ he concludes, ‘capitalism must die.’ Coulthard sees in recent Indigenous tactics like traffic- and train blockading an anti-capitalist impulse, rooted in the disruption of the sphere of circulation. Such actions ‘seek to impede or block the flow of resources currently being transported to international markets from oil and gas fields, refineries, lumber mills, mining operations, and hydroelectric facilities located on the dispossessed lands of Indigenous nations’. Such actions are consciously built to intensify their ‘negative impact on the economic infrastructure that is core to the colonial accumulation of capital in settler-political economies like Canada’s’. Although Coulthard does not highlight the connection, this strategic orientation resonates in many ways with what might be labelled the turn to circulation in much of contemporary Marxist and

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11 Marx 1845.
13 Fanon 2008.
17 Ibid.
anarchist strategic theory, particularly in the domain of historical-materialist geography.\textsuperscript{18}

Another urgent concern of Coulthard’s anti-capitalist thesis is again one of socio-geography: ‘how might we begin to scale up these often localized, resurgent land-based direct actions to produce a more general transformation in the colonial economy?’\textsuperscript{19} He recognises that short of a ‘massive transformation in the political economy of contemporary settler-colonialism, any efforts to rebuild [Indigenous] nations will remain parasitic on capitalism, and thus on the perpetual exploitation of our lands and labour’.\textsuperscript{20} A project of transformation at this level inevitably requires networks of solidarity beyond the Indigenous movement:

This reality demands that we continue to remain open to, if not actively seek out and establish, relations of solidarity and networks of trade and mutual aid with national and transnational communities and organizations that are also struggling against the imposed effects of globalized capital, including other Indigenous nations and national confederacies; urban Indigenous people and organizations; the labour, women’s, GBLTQ2S (gay, bisexual, lesbian, trans, queer, and two-spirit), and environmental movements; and, of course, those racial and ethnic communities that find themselves subject to their own distinct forms of economic, social, and cultural marginalization.\textsuperscript{21}

An anti-capitalist strategy of Indigenous liberation, then, requires broad networks of solidarity and purposeful linkages between local battles and wider scales of conflict.

A third thesis stems from the reality that in Canada today a majority of Aboriginal people lives in cities.\textsuperscript{22} While rural land and territory remain integral to the project of Indigenous sovereignty in the Canadian state, Coulthard

\textsuperscript{18} One expression of this general trend is Deborah Cowen’s recent work on logistics. See Cowen 2014a, 2014b. See also Karatani Kōjin’s recently translated *The Structure of World History*, in which modes of exchange take precedence over modes of production (Kōjin 2014). For a critique of the latter, see Lange 2015. These issues are also discussed in Toscano 2011 and Clover 2012a, 2012b. A variant of the circulationist thesis appears in a Venezuelan context in George Ciccariello-Maher’s work on that country in the era of Hugo Chávez. See Ciccariello-Maher 2013. For the limitations of this perspective, see Webber 2015.

\textsuperscript{19} Coulthard 2014, p. 170.

\textsuperscript{20} Coulthard 2014, p. 171.

\textsuperscript{21} Coulthard 2014, p. 173.

\textsuperscript{22} See Lawrence 2004.
insists that the ‘analytical frame of settler-colonialism’ can also act as an ‘important lens through which to interrogate the power relations that shape Indigenous people’s experiences in the city, especially those disproportionately inhabiting low-income areas’. Drawing on the pioneering work of Neil Smith, among others, Coulthard sees the gentrification of urban space as ‘yet another “frontier” of dispossession central the accumulation of capital’. Racialised Indigenous spaces in the city ‘are now being treated as urbs nullius’, empty urban space, characterised by the ‘waste’ of land and property devoted to institutions like social housing and shelters. Gentrification is the process of their ‘improvement’ through the displacement of racialised working-class and poor communities and the introduction of what is characterised by developers as ‘socially and economically productive’ private capital. In such a scenario, a successful strategy of Indigenous resurgence depends on ‘its ability to address the interrelated systems of dispossession that shape Indigenous peoples’ experiences in both urban and land-based settings’.

The third thesis hinges on the integral incorporation of gender justice into the political project of Indigenous resurgence and decolonisation. Especially important in this regard is the imperative to respond to the interlocking systemic and symbolic violence faced by Indigenous women in contemporary Canada.

It is systemic in the sense that it has been structured, indeed institutionalized, into a relatively secure and resistant set of oppressive material relations that render Indigenous women more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to suffer severe economic and social privation, including disproportionately high rates of poverty and unemployment, incarceration, addiction, homelessness, chronic and/or life-threatening health problems, overcrowded and substandard housing, and lack of access to clean water, as well as face discrimination and sexual violence in their homes, communities, and workplaces. Just as importantly, however, the violence that Indigenous women face is also ‘symbolic’. Symbolic violence is the subjectifying form of violence that renders

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25 Coulthard 2014, p. 175.
26 Coulthard 2014, p. 176.
the crushing materiality of systemic violence invisible, appear natural, acceptable.\textsuperscript{27}

Any meaningful politics of Indigenous resurgence will therefore require that ‘society, including Indigenous society and particularly Indigenous men, stop collectively \textit{conducting ourselves} in a manner that denigrates, degrades, and devalues the lives and worth of Indigenous women in such a way that epidemic levels of violence are the norm in too many of their lives.’\textsuperscript{28} The gendered politics of Indigenous liberation are also taken up at length in Chapter 3, in which Coulthard focuses a critical lens on the work of Seyla Benhabib, and in particular her justifiable concern that in colonised societies traditionalist claims for cultural preservation can be mobilised to condone practices of gender oppression.\textsuperscript{29} For Coulthard, Benhabib ‘fails to adequately address the colonial context in which these practices have come to flourish’.\textsuperscript{30} He roots his criticisms of Benhabib empirically through a historical investigation of ‘Indigenous women’s struggle against sexist provisions of the Indian Act and an examination of the ways in which this history of struggle informed an Indigenous feminist critique of the gendered dynamics underwriting the decade-long (1982–1992) effort of mainstream Aboriginal organizations to secure a constitutional right to self-government in Canada’.\textsuperscript{31}

Coulthard’s final thesis involves a strategic orientation that moves beyond the state and a reliance on its legal apparatus and institutions of negotiation. ‘In our efforts to \textit{interpolate} the legal and political discourses of the state to secure recognition of our rights to land and self-determination’, Coulthard argues, ‘we have too often found ourselves \textit{interpellated} as subjects of settler-colonial rule’.\textsuperscript{32} While this does not signify a Hollowayan scream of refusal\textsuperscript{33} – present conditions, for Coulthard, necessitate ‘that we continue to engage with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Coulthard 2014, p. 177. The extraordinary numbers of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada in the last three decades has led the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to call on the Canadian government to establish a national inquiry. See \textit{The Canadian Press} 2015; \textit{Guardian} 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Coulthard 2014, p. 178.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Benhabib 2002.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Coulthard 2014, p. 80.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid. In his contribution to this symposium, Peter Kulchyski offers a critique of the Foucauldian aspects of Coulthard’s discussion of gender in Chapter 3 and elsewhere, preferring instead an analysis rooted in modes of production. Coulthard responds to this criticism in his rejoinder that concludes this symposium.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Coulthard 2014, p. 179.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Holloway 2010a, 2010b.
\end{itemize}
the state’s legal and political system’ – it does mean ‘that we begin to approach our engagements with the settler-legal apparatus with a degree of critical self-reflection, skepticism, and caution that has to date been largely absent in our efforts’.34

**Situating Red Skin, White Masks**

*Red Skin, White Masks* is Coulthard’s first book. It appeared on the scene as part of a much wider renaissance of Indigenous Studies in the North American context.35 But Coulthard’s book stands out in this literature, in part because of its sympathetic engagement with aspects of Marx’s critique of capitalism.36 In the past several decades, such potent cross-fertilisation between Indigenous-liberation traditions and unorthodox Marxism has occurred only at the margins of both schools in North America; the apex of Indigenous-Marxist collaboration in thought and praxis was no doubt the Red Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s, although the alliance was also fraught with limitations.37 In Latin America, by contrast, the theoretical and practical comingling of Marxism and Indigenous liberation has a much more profound history, albeit one that

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34 Coulthard 2014, p. 179.
37 On the history of relations between the Marxist left and Indigenous movements in Canada, see Bedford and Irving-Stephens 2001. For evidence of the engagement with Marxism during the Red Power era, see Dunbar-Ortiz’s contribution to this symposium. Howard Adams was perhaps the most important theorist of the Red Power period in the Canadian context. See Adams 1975. For negative personal accounts of Indigenous experiences with the paternalism of the Canadian far-left during the era of Red Power, see Maracle 1990; Harper 1979; and Armstrong 2002.
historically has also by no means been free of tension and contradiction. In South Asia, too, Maoist insurgencies have brought to life debates around the relationship between class struggle, Marxism, and indigeneity.

Published in the wake of Idle No More, and in the context of the outbreak of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, the resonance of Red Skin, White Masks in the current North American scenario quickly became apparent. Hundreds have gathered to engage Coulthard in discussion and debate at each of the dozens of public community forums and academic conferences he has attended across North America since the launch of his book. No text in the recent history of Indigenous struggle and study in the context of the Canadian state has been received with parallel levels of anticipation. It is against this wider backdrop that Historical Materialism is pleased to host this symposium, taking up the principal themes of Red Skin, White Masks and breaking them open for further reflection, interrogation, and expansion.

Architecture

Red Skin, White Masks takes as its principal theoretical objective a critique of the politics of recognition, with the relevant work of philosopher Charles Taylor standing in as the principal antagonist in this regard. Elements of Marx and Fanon constitute the core arsenal of Coulthard’s assault on this tradition. The scope of the task is to ‘challenge the increasingly commonplace idea that the colonial relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian

38 The most influential theoretical encounter occurs in the work of Jose Carlos Mariátegui. See, especially, Mariátegui 2011; Vanden and Becker (eds.) 2011; and Webber forthcoming. The work of Bolivian Marxist and current Vice-President, Álvaro García Linera, has also been important in this regard – although his writings of the late 1990s and early 2000s are far superior to his output since he assumed office in 2006. See the relevant sections of García Linera 2008. The historiography of the relationship between Indigenous movements and the left in Latin America is rich. For a selection, see Grandin 2004; Becker 2008; Hylton and Thomson 2007; Gould 1990, 1998; and Webber 2011.

39 For a recent discussion of these issues in the context of Nepal and India, see Ismail and Shah 2015.

40 In his contribution to this symposium, George Ciccariello-Maher notes the context of the Black Lives Matter movement and links Coulthard’s Fanonian threads in Red Skin, White Masks with the Black radical tradition in the United States.

state can be adequately transformed via such a politics of recognition.\textsuperscript{42} Coulthard traces the militant forms of Indigenous anticolonial nationalism in the Canadian context in the 1960s and 1970s, from the Red Power movement to the Dene struggles of the north (the latter is the subject of an extended historical investigation in Chapter 2), and argues that these forms of militancy forced a modification of the form assumed by colonial relations in Canada in recent decades. While colonialism in Canada historically involved a structure ‘primarily reinforced by policies, techniques, and ideologies explicitly oriented around the genocidal exclusion/assimilation double’, movements of anticolonial nationalism in the late twentieth century transformed this ‘[in]to one that is now reproduced through a seemingly more conciliatory set of discourses and institutional practices that emphasize our recognition and accommodation.’\textsuperscript{43} ‘[I]nstead of ushering in an era of peaceful coexistence grounded in the ideal of reciprocity or mutual recognition,’ however, ‘the politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialis, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend.’\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{Marx}

In an effort to escape this cul de sac, Coulthard’s first move is to Marx, and specifically the concept of primitive accumulation. But there is some preliminary ground to clear. Coulthard notes that the relationship between Indigenous Studies and Marxism has sometimes been ‘hostile and polarizing’. On the one hand, he detects a ‘premature rejection of Marx and Marxism by some Indigenous studies scholars’; and, on the other, ‘belligerent, often ignorant, and sometimes racist dismissal of Indigenous peoples’ contributions to radical thought and politics by Marxists’.\textsuperscript{45} At its worst, this dynamic has characterised the relationship. ‘At their nondogmatic best, however,’ Coulthard argues that,

the conversations that continue to occur within and between these two diverse fields of critical inquiry (especially when placed in dialogue with feminist, anarchist, queer, and post-colonial traditions) have the potential to shed much insight into the cycles of colonial domination and

\textsuperscript{42} Coulthard 2014, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{43} Coulthard 2014, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{44} Coulthard 2014, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{45} Coulthard 2014, p. 8.
resistance that characterize the relationship between white settler states and Indigenous peoples.46

In one of the critical passages in Capital Marx writes:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalised the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation.47

In this specific passage, and throughout chapters 25 to 32 of Capital, Coulthard discovers novel ways of understanding ‘colonialism as a form of structured dispossession’.48 These are the moments in Capital where ‘Marx most thoroughly links the totalizing power of capital with that of colonialism by way of his theory of “primitive accumulation”’.49 Of course, Coulthard’s observations on the contemporary relevance of primitive accumulation build from and contribute to a wider renewal of its study in a variety of Marxist circles, but perhaps most famously in David Harvey’s formulation of ‘accumulation by dispossession’.50 In Coulthard’s specific summation, the ‘historical process of primitive accumulation . . . refers to the violent transformation of noncapitalist forms of life into capitalist ones’.51

Although Marx’s reading of primitive accumulation is at the centre of Red Skin, White Masks, Coulthard’s engagement with Marx is unstained by churchly devotion.52 In his view, Marx needs to be rendered applicable to the

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46 Ibid.
47 Marx 1976, p. 915.
49 Ibid.
50 Harvey 2003.
52 This is not a fashionable dig at ‘Marxology’. As Derek Sayer pointed out some time ago, it is odd that ‘some circles . . . decry “Marxology”; because we ‘do not speak in the same tones of “Kantology” or “Weberology”; though studies of Kant and Weber abound’. Still, Sayer continues, ‘there is, none the less, a particular problem with writing about Marx . . . However disinterested one’s scholarly motives, conclusions often become part of other people’s politics. The study of Marx can be a coded form of social criticism (in East and West alike), it can be snivelling apologetics, but it can hardly be politically innocent.’ See Sayer 1987, pp. vii–viii. Coulthard’s encounter is neither snivelling nor innocent.
context of settler-colonialism through a transformative encounter with critical Indigenous theory and practice. As an initial step in this direction, Coulthard proposes three areas in Marx’s thinking that need to be abandoned from the outset. First, is Marx’s ‘rigidly temporal framing of the phenomenon’ of primitive accumulation. Here Coulthard follows much extant literature on the continuous as opposed to originary character of primitive accumulation within capitalist development. Second, Coulthard sees ‘normative developmentalism’ as a constitutive feature of Marx’s original formulation of primitive accumulation. However, he follows in the footsteps of scholars like Kevin Anderson (with acknowledgment) and Teodor Shanin (without), who suggest that Marx overcame this ‘teleological aspect of his thought in the last decade of his life’, and that ‘this reformulation has important implications with respect to how we ought to conceptualize the struggles of non-Western societies against the violence that has defined our encounter with colonial modernity’.

A third area of necessary innovation in Marx’s primitive accumulation has to do with the ways in which it is enacted in twenty-first century settler-colonial contexts like Canada, more through the politics of recognition than perpetual violence: ‘in the Canadian context, colonial relations of power are no longer reproduced primarily through overtly coercive means, but rather through the asymmetrical exchange of mediated forms of state recognition and accommodation’.

By some distance the most original reinterpretation of Marx, through a dynamic stretching of his thought to better fit the settler-colonial Canadian present, is Coulthard’s move to ‘contextually shift’ our investigation from an emphasis on the capital relation to the colonial relation. Such a reorientation should allow us, first, he argues, to posit ‘the inherent injustice of colonial rule… on its own terms’, rather than merely in its contribution to capitalist development historically. Secondly, focusing on the colonial-relation allows us to see the importance of land, territory, and resources in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples in Canada as capitalism expanded, rather than only, or primarily, their conversion into propertyless labourers. ‘It is now generally acknowledged among historians and political economists that following the waves of colonial settlement that marked the transition between mercantile and industrial capitalism (roughly spanning the years 1860–1914, but with significant variation between geographical regions)’, Coulthard points out, ‘Native labour became increasingly (although by no means entirely) superfluous to the

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54 Coulthard 2014, p. 15.
55 Coulthard 2014, p. 10.
56 Coulthard 2014, p. 11.
political and economic development of the Canadian state'.\textsuperscript{57} The centrality of land in Indigenous dispossession in Canada has had important implications for the shape of resistance:

Stated bluntly, the theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism, including Indigenous anticapitalism, is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and orientated 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'. I call this place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice grounded normativity, by which I mean the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time.\textsuperscript{58}

For Coulthard the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from land and territory has been the primary form that primitive accumulation has assumed in the Canadian context. This has affected the character of anticolonial contestation, through the defence of land, understood in all of its multifaceted complexity. Anticolonial praxis in this setting has in turn formed the contours of Indigenous radical thought, especially its sense of grounded normativity.\textsuperscript{59}

A third component of the contextual shift to the colonial-relation is an opportunity to better incorporate ecology into our understanding of capitalist development, principally by being attentive to the ways in which Indigenous struggle for land and territory has consistently raised these issues. Fourthly, Coulthard follows many critics in charging Marx with economic reductionism. ‘Although it is beyond question’, he writes, ‘that the predatory nature of

\textsuperscript{57} Coulthard 2014, p. 12. For a seminal study on Indigenous labour, see Knight 1978.

\textsuperscript{58} Coulthard 2014, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{59} Although he does not make them, there are many parallels here with the social histories of E.P. Thompson and Peter Linebaugh of early capitalist development in England and the enclosure of the commons. See Thompson 1966, 1993, 2013; Hay, Linebaugh, Rule, Thompson and Winslow 2011; Linebaugh 1976. For an extraordinary combination of such a social-historical approach with environmental history, see Thomas Miller Klubock’s study of the dispossession of Mapuche Indigenous communities in the southern frontier of Chile, seen through the lens of the forestry industry (Miller Klubock 2014).
capitalism continues to play a vital role in facilitating the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples in Canada, it is necessary to recognize that it only does so in relation to or in concert with axes of exploitation and domination configured along racial, gender, and state lines.60 A shift to the colonial-relation, Coulthard argues, ‘is one way to facilitate this form of radical intersectional analysis’. At the same time, he insists, ‘shifting our position to highlight the ongoing effects of colonial dispossession in no way displaces questions of distributive justice or class struggle; rather, it simply situates these questions more firmly alongside and in relation to the other sites and relations of power that inform our settler-colonial present.’61

The Interlocutors

Several of the contributions to this symposium focus on Coulthard’s engagement with Marx and Marxism. In Peter Kulchyski’s intervention, for example, the central criticism of Red Skin, White Masks is its failure to fully appreciate Marx’s concept of ‘mode of production’, and therefore its relative neglect of the way that ostensibly ‘economic’ modes of production shape apparently ‘separate’ spheres, such as culture. For Kulchyski, Coulthard treats ‘mode of production as a secondary or contingent theoretical formulation rather than as the central organising category it deserves to be’. ‘A historical-materialist approach to the concept of culture’, Kulchyski contends, ‘must begin with mode of production: culture as the manner in which values and ways of seeing the self, the other, the world are shaped by distinct modes of production.’ It is through the use of mode-of-production analysis, according to Kulchyski, that ‘Marxist or materialist-oriented anthropologists in Canada have made some of the stronger contributions to aboriginal struggles’. Rather than turn to Foucault and discourse analysis, as Coulthard does in Chapter 3 of Red Skin, White Masks, Kulchyski urges that we view the social relations of gender through the lens of mode of production, and link the history of gender egalitarianism among Indigenous peoples of northern Canada precisely to their gathering and hunting mode of production. The debate between ‘essentialists’ and ‘constructivists’ on gender and its relationship to Indigenous liberation, and likewise the theoretical contestation between recognition and redistribution – both with feature-roles in Coulthard’s book – fade into irrelevance, from Kulchyski’s vantage point, once the appropriate historical-materialist approach to mode

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of production is considered fully, with all of its implications, and its novel window into the totalising power of capital.

If mode of production is what allows Kulchyski to understand land and Indigenous peoples’ relationship to it in the Canadian north, as well as to conceive their culture as having an internal relation with the hunting, gathering, and harvesting that they conduct on that land and territory, Geoff Mann also begins with land in his contribution to this symposium, but then takes us away from mode-of-production controversies and toward sovereignty and possession. If mode of production is what allows Kulchyski to understand land and Indigenous peoples’ relationship to it in the Canadian north, as well as to conceive their culture as having an internal relation with the hunting, gathering, and harvesting that they conduct on that land and territory, Geoff Mann also begins with land in his contribution to this symposium, but then takes us away from mode-of-production controversies and toward sovereignty and possession. Here we find a creative and far-reaching challenge to Coulthard’s explicit and implicit understandings of these concepts in Red Skin, White Masks. Specifically, what concerns Mann is Coulthard’s notion of ‘grounded normativity’, which takes the land to be ‘a mode of reciprocal relationship’. If the logic of grounded normativity were followed consistently by Coulthard, to its depths, it would become clear that the concept is antithetical to any notion of sovereignty, which is ‘at root, all about rule’, not reciprocity. But Coulthard wavers, and according to this critique presents contradictory understandings of sovereignty at different points in the text. Mann is convinced that what Indigenous struggles are actually about, and a better way of describing what Coulthard captures in his historical narrative of these struggles, is the notion of ‘countersovereignty’:

what is at issue is not captured by the idea of sovereignty, and a dynamic construction of countersovereignty – in contradistinction to a struggle over who will be sovereign – must be understood as an attempt to come to grips with what it means to claim ‘the right to be responsible’, individually and collectively: to have power, to have meaning, to understand oneself, one’s communities, and one’s histories as not only inseparable but also ineliminable from the land. This is not land that individuals or peoples or nations ‘own’ in the liberal sense, but land of which one is a fundamental part.

More hesitantly, Mann shifts from here to the related concept of possession, through an engagement with Coulthard’s contextual reorientation from the capital-relation to the colonial-relation vis-à-vis dominant Marxist understandings of primitive accumulation, and more recently accumulation by dispossession. Mann finds the emphasis on dispossession rather than accumulation in

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62 In his discussion of sovereignty, Mann’s critique builds in part on Alfred 2005a, 2005b.
63 Coulthard 2014, p. 60.
this dynamic attractive, at least at first glance. But what is being dispossessed? ‘It seems to me that there is a very real, material, and in some senses political-economically prior way in which it is the lands themselves who are also unjustly dispossessed,’ he writes; ‘that from the perspective of an Indigenous political economy, the crimes of colonialism lie at least partly in stripping the land of one of its essential elements, its people and the modes of life that nourish a reciprocal, mutual flourishing’. The understanding of land embedded in the framework of grounded normativity is not amenable to the idea of it having been ‘possessed’, in the liberal sense, by Indigenous peoples historically. Land as a mode of reciprocity is necessarily cancelled out in such a conception, as it is in the notion of sovereignty. ‘If the concept of countersovereignty can do the work it must’, Mann thus concludes, ‘I cannot think of a better term for this than “counterpossession”’.

The shift from the capital-relation to the colonial-relation in Coulthard’s text is George Ciccariello-Maher’s first access-point in his contribution to this symposium. Unlike Kulchyski and Mann, Ciccariello-Maher endorses without qualms Coulthard’s re-reading of primitive accumulation, and takes as his task rather its extension to the context of the United States and a historico-political comparison of Black Americans and Indigenous peoples in North America. In Canadian history, Ciccariello-Maher accepts, dispossession of Indigenous peoples has been principally rooted in the expropriation of their land and territory rather than their labour-power, and consequently the form that struggle has assumed is likewise one centred mainly on land rather than wage-labour. ‘By contrast,’ Ciccariello-Maher argues,

slavery in the United States and elsewhere was clearly an institution whose raison d’être was the extraction of labour, but notably, this extraction similarly occurred outside the tight Marxian circuit of dispossession-enclosure-proletarianisation that Coulthard calls into question. But if this meant that struggles were often implicitly about labour – struggles in a sense to become proletarian – in the aftermath of abolition much has changed: the spatial enclosure of slaves themselves as fixed unfree labour gave way to a nominally mobile labour force that, in the anxiety it provoked, revealed the degree to which slavery was never only about labour extraction, and as a result, spawned policing as a new form of control.

What is more, Ciccariello-Maher contends, the twentieth century witnessed a subsequent shift of Black Americans to a surplus labour force, heavily policed
in the cities and over-represented in the prisons. While this transition from unfree to free to surplus labour was not strictly speaking a question of the economic need for land,’ he writes, ‘it had everything to do with the reconfiguration of space’. These historical-structural characteristics of Black American life, for Ciccariello-Maher, suggest political possibilities and potential alliances. ‘In other words, despite persistent socio-economic and political differences, the late twentieth century has seen something of a convergence of Black Americans with Indigenous peoples in their territorial relation to the state and capital. . . . Coulthard’s analysis begs us to share this optimism of the will to ask what new alliances and territorial struggles this shared positionality might make possible.’

Marxism, rather than Marx per se, is Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’s primary concern in her study of Red Skin, White Masks, featured in this symposium. She provides a rich contextualisation of engagement with Marxism by Indigenous thinkers and movements in the recent past, and broadens the scope of the discussion onto a global terrain, positioning Coulthard’s contribution within a broader milieu than perhaps he himself is able to recognise. Drawing parallels between the Red Power movement in Canada and the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, Dunbar-Ortiz explains this movement’s engagement with radical dependency theory in Latin America, and the theoretician-practitioners of radical nationalism in the decolonial struggles of Africa, particularly Amilcar Cabral. She recounts her time in a San Francisco sister study-group to that of the Maoist-inflected Red Power movement in Vancouver, British Columbia, and draws fascinating parallels between investigations into various currents of anticolonial Marxism by the Navajo in the southwestern United States and the Dene in Canada’s north. She points to the deeper entwinement of Marxism and Indigenous-liberation struggles in Latin American history, and points to precursors of Coulthard’s attempt to understand Indigenous dispossession through the lens of primitive accumulation, including her own study of land tenure in New Mexico in the early 1980s.

At a theoretical level, Dunbar-Ortiz raises two important issues. One of her disputes with Red Skin, White Masks is its neglect of the ‘national question’. In contradistinction to Mann, she continues to see struggles for Indigenous sovereignty as unavoidably central to Indigenous conceptions of nationhood, but suggests that the conceptualisation of nation and nationalism is relatively

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64 Here he follows Wacquant 2002.
underdeveloped in Coulthard’s work. For Dunbar-Ortiz, *Red Skin, White Masks* would have been enriched in this domain through the incorporation of Lenin. In neglecting Lenin on the national question, ‘[i]t seems that a valuable theoretical tool is abandoned by not dealing with the dialectic of the workers or masses of citizens in the colonial state and their potential for revolution and the Indigenous peoples and other nationalities that are colonised by that state’.

A second mode of critique is developed through another lacuna in Coulthard’s text – the international context. The global context, for Dunbar-Ortiz, provides clues to ‘how Indigenous nations’ self-determination movements were turned into domestic quests for recognition’. Indigenous militancy in North America in the 1960s and 1970s is only understandable in the context of decolonisation struggles in Asia and Africa, and the fragmentation and domestication of Indigenous militancy since also corresponds to international defeats of the socialist left and other radical projects in newly-independent Asian and African states within the context of a world-historic rise of neoliberalism. Finally, the international question also looms large in terms of struggle. Specifically, the complicated imbrication of the international Indigenous movement with the contradictions of international law and the United Nations are central components to understanding contemporary Indigenous movements anywhere in the world, according to Dunbar-Ortiz, but are notably absent in Coulthard’s study of the Canadian context.

**Fanon**

If a modified version of Marx’s notion of primitive accumulation is, therefore, Coulthard’s entry-point into his study of dispossession, Fanon is his alternate pathway into the politics of recognition. In particular, according to Coulthard, Fanon’s 1952 book, *Black Skin, White Masks* ‘provides a strikingly perceptive answer’ to situations of colonial rule such as the type currently subjugating Indigenous peoples in Canada:

in situations where colonial rule does not depend solely on the exercise of state violence, its reproduction instead rests on the ability to entice Indigenous peoples to *identify*, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly *asymmetrical* and *nonreciprocal* forms of recognition either imposed on or granted to them by the settler state and society… but also over time slave populations (the colonized) tend to develop what he called ‘psycho-affective’ attachments to these master-sanctioned forms.
of recognition, and that this attachment is essential in maintaining the economic and political structure of master/slave (colonizer/colonized) relations themselves.67

The danger here is both subjective and objective, the internal attachment of the colonised to structurally asymmetrical relations of recognition: ‘Fanon argued that it was the interplay between the structural/objective and recognitive/subjective features of colonialism that ensured its hegemony over time’.68 Breaking subjectively and objectively with the structured domination of colonial rule involves conflict and mobilisation. Linking back to our earlier discussion of Marx’s ‘revolutionary practice’ – the simultaneous changing of selves and circumstances through struggle – for Fanon, ‘it is through struggle and conflict (and for the later Fanon, violent struggle and conflict) that imperial subjects come to be rid of the “arsenal of complexes” driven into the core of their being through the colonial process’.69 In the absence of ‘conflict and struggle the terms of recognition tend [pace Charles Taylor] to remain in the possession of those in power to bestow on their inferiors in ways that they deem appropriate’.70

It is also through Fanon that Coulthard argues in defence of the political utility of resentment and anger, emotions that tend to be pathologised in the liberal pluralism of recognition. He contends that ‘these negative emotions . . . mark an important turning point in the individual and collective coming-to-consciousness of the colonized’. Anger and resentment, in this political sense, represent the externalization of that which was previously internalized: a purging, if you will, of the so-called ‘inferiority complex’ of the colonized subject. In the context of internalized colonialism, the material conditions of poverty and violence that condition the colonial situation appear muted to the colonized because they are understood to be the product of one’s own cultural deficiencies. In such a context, the formation of a colonial ‘enemy’ – that is, a source external to ourselves that we come to associate with ‘our misfortunes’ – signifies a collapse of this internalized colonial psychic structure.71

68 Coulthard 2014, p. 32.
69 Coulthard 2014, p. 38.
70 Coulthard 2014, p. 39.
71 Coulthard 2014, p. 114.
There are parallels with this line of argumentation evident elsewhere in the few radical currents of contemporary social-movement studies, not least in Jane Mansbridge’s notion of ‘oppositional consciousness’. For Mansbridge, this sort of consciousness ‘is an empowering mental state that prepares members of an oppressed group to act to undermine, reform, or overthrow a system of domination’. Not merely a consequence of cold calculation, oppositional consciousness ‘is usually fuelled by righteous anger over injustices done to the group and prompted by personal indignities and harms suffered through one’s group membership’. ‘In the context of internalized colonialism,’ Coulthard asserts, ‘it would appear that the emergence of reactive emotions like anger and resentment can indicate a breakdown of colonial subjection and thus open up the possibility of developing alternative subjectivities and anticolonial practices’.

The one area of Fanon’s thought which Coulthard explicitly lets go – Fanon’s reading of the negritude movement of his era – Ciccariello-Maher holds on to, but for different reasons. For Coulthard, Fanon had an instrumental relationship to negritude’s attachment to precolonial tradition, insofar as Fanon’s assessment of the movement’s potential hinged… entirely on [its] ability to transcend what Fanon saw as its retrograde orientation towards a subjective affirmation of a precolonial past by grounding itself in the peoples’ struggle against the material structure of colonial rule in the present… he was decidedly less willing to explore the role that these forms and practices might play in the construction of alternatives to the oppressive social relations that produce colonized subjects in the first place…. In this specific sense… it will be shown that Fanon clearly shared Sartre’s view that negritude’s emphasis on cultural self-affirmation constituted an important ‘means’ but ‘not an ultimate end’ of anticolonial struggle, even though both authors arrived at this analogous conclusion via different paths.

Because cultural self-affirmation is crucial to Coulthard’s understanding of the critical revival of aspects of Indigenous traditions in the contemporary Canadian context, he distances himself from Fanon on this score. According to Ciccariello-Maher, Coulthard misreads Fanon on this set of issues, and in

73 Mansbridge 2001, p. 5.
74 Coulthard 2014, p. 115.
75 Coulthard 2014, pp. 132–3.
so doing exaggerates the proximity between Sartre and Fanon, and the gap between Fanon and Coulthard’s later formulation, via the work of Taiaiake Alfred and Leanne Simpson: Indigenous ‘[r]esurgence, in this view, draws critically on the past with an eye to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present.’ In other words, according to Ciccariello-Maher, Fanon would agree entirely with this position.

Drawing on Marx, Fanon, and Dene elders, Coulthard has produced a searing indictment of the politics of recognition in contemporary Canada. In Idle No More he locates a prefigurative form that effective decolonial mobilisation might increasingly assume. In the symposium that follows, Coulthard’s seminal text is taken apart and reconfigured many times over. It is put into dialogue with other traditions and regions of the world. Coulthard concludes the symposium, following the expositions and critiques made by Kulchyski, Mann, Dunbar-Ortiz, and Ciccariello-Maher, with a new set of answers, questions, and synthesis.

References


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