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Building an economy and building a nation: Gugu Badhun self-determination as prefigurative resistance

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Abstract

Indigenous peoples around the world are increasingly claiming and exercising sovereignty and self-determination. One important method for this is through economic development, but this raises tensions between Indigenous values and those of the marketplace. While this tension is real, we argue that economic development that is underpinned by Aboriginal values is an act of prefigurative resistance and helps nations move towards self-determination. Based on ethnographic research with the Gugu Badhun Aboriginal nation, we explore theories of recognition and anticolonialism through economic development processes. The experience of Gugu Badhun indicates that a contemporary Aboriginal economy can have very different values to those of neoliberalism, but also demonstrates that this is a slow process that must be built on a firm cultural foundation. In so doing, Gugu Badhun are navigating the tensions and working through them in a process of self-determination in action.

Introduction

In this article, we examine some of the theories and critiques of recognition alongside other theoretical approaches to social change in order to understand Indigenous movements for self-determination, specifically using economic development as the vehicle. We draw on ethnographic research with one Aboriginal Nation in Australia, Gugu Badhun, looking at the Nation's collective attempts to (re)build despite, and outside of, colonising power. We ask how the Gugu Badhun Aboriginal Nation are creating spaces in which settler-colonial power is limited, rather than waiting for governments to make space for them. We use the example of Aboriginal economic development, based on research with the Gugu Badhun, an Aboriginal Nation in the Upper Burdekin region of North Queensland in Australia (see Figure 1). We argue that while economic development may look like an adoption of neoliberal ideals, when these projects are based on Aboriginal values they are an act of resistance and an important step in a larger move towards self-determination.

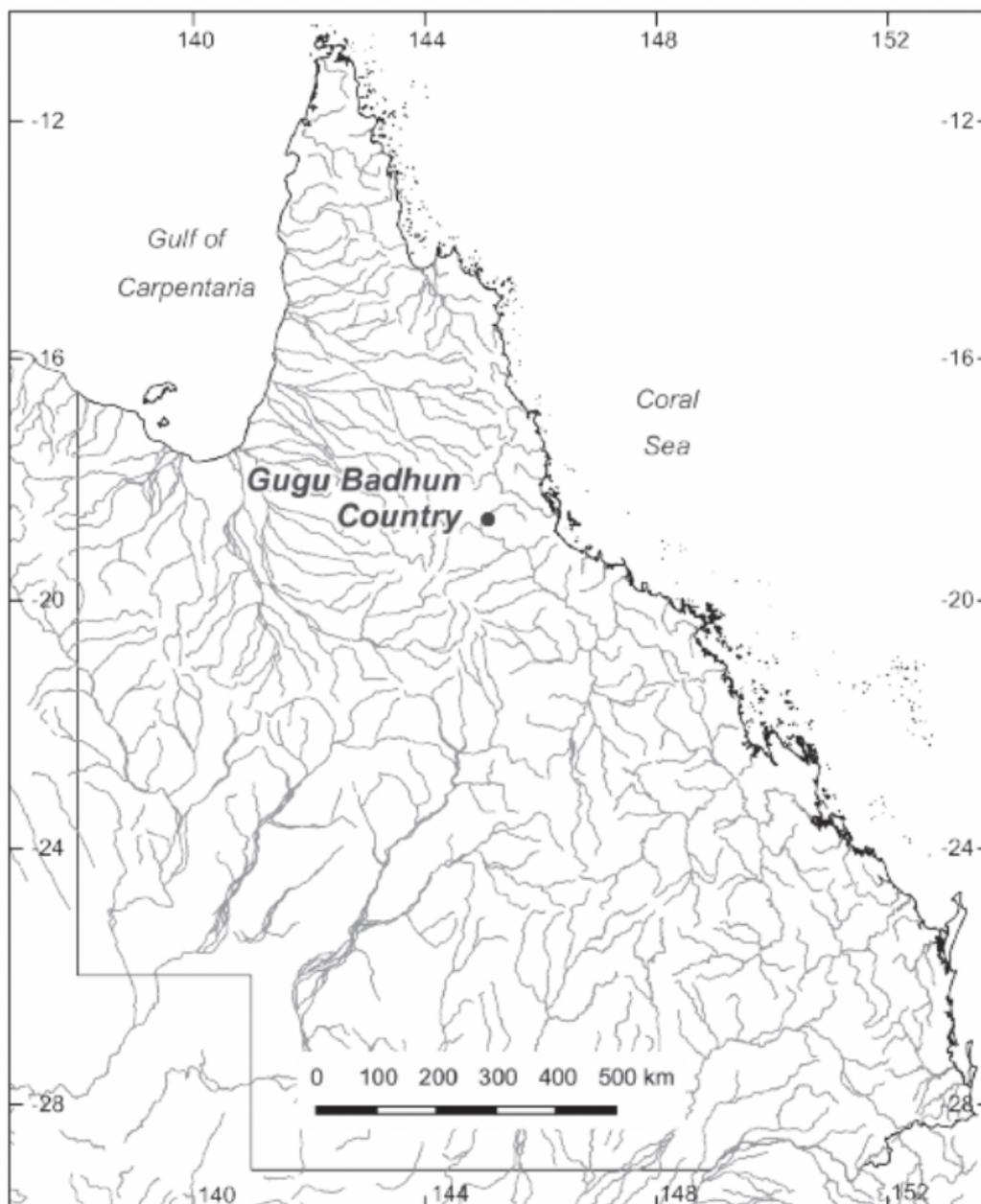
The campaign for Indigenous recognition in the Australian Constitution has gathered much political steam over the last decade, with many non-Indigenous people supporting a proposed referendum in order to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the Constitution. However, widespread political action and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have pointed out the limitations of symbolic recognition. In May 2017, 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates attending a national constitutional convention released the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* that rejected minimal symbolic recognition and proposed major structural reforms (Appleby & McKinnon, 2017).

The *Uluru Statement* seeks three outcomes: first, the establishment of a First Nations Voice with direct influence to parliament enshrined within the Constitution; second, a *Makarrata* or treaty (agreement-making) process; and third, truth-telling about the history of colonisation in Australia. All three outcomes situate Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination as foundational, although some say it does not take Indigenous sovereignty far enough. The rejection of symbolic recognition and adoption of the *Uluru Statement*, alongside much stronger claims for sovereignty, exemplify the shift in the focus of Indigenous politics around the world from the politics of equal rights to the right to be different (Taylor, 1992).

Political discourses about recognition are bound up with discourses about Indigenous economic development and equal participation within the economy. Both are discussed in terms of self-actualisation and self-worth. Economic development is considered an individual human right because it allows people to achieve their full potential (Sen, 1999). Internationally, government frameworks for Indigenous recognition vary theoretically and practically, however the typical model includes 'delegation of land, capital and political power from the State to Indigenous communities through a combination of land claim settlements, economic development initiatives, and self-government agreements' (Coulthard, 2014, p.3).

Neoliberal Australian government programs that promote Indigenous employment and Indigenous business enterprise largely concentrate on the building of *individual* wealth in an endeavour to 'close-the-gap'. The dominant policy approach promotes a view that Indigenous economic development can only be achieved through mainstreaming, which means conformist engagement with the free market via the sale of labour and through the operation of a commercial business (Altman, 2007). Moreover, mainstream economic development programs are often centred on government economic priorities which don't always align with Indigenous community values.

In the next section we explain the research site in order to emplace the theoretical discussion. We then explore theoretical discussions of recognition, de-colonisation, and social change. Finally, we discuss specific examples of Gugu Badhun economic development to illustrate the challenges facing Indigenous Nations seeking economic independence in a neoliberal world.



Map I. Queensland, Australia, showing location of Gugu Badhun country

Figure 1- Map from Gugu Badhun: People of the Valley of Lagoons, p.xv

Gugu Badhun Economic Development

In 2015, we began collaborating on an action-research project about economic development and self-determination within the Gugu Badhun Nation. The community is seeking to build a strong economy that allows people to live meaningful lives on country, and contributes to the strengthening of culture, country and community. Gugu Badhun operate within the context of Australian settler-colonialism, which is underpinned by the 'logic of elimination' (Wolfe, 2006). Unlike other similar settler-colonial states, Australia is unique in the example of a lack of any treaties between settlers and First Nations people. Since 1992, though, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been able to claim Native Title, a type of recognition through the courts of 'continuous connection' to land (Bell, 2014). Gugu Badhun hold Native Title over a large swathe of their country, a process that took 18 years in the Federal Courts (Cadet-James, James, McGinty, & McGregor, 2017). However, Gugu Badhun Native Title is non-exclusive, meaning they share title with other leaseholders, primarily pastoralists and mining leases¹. They maintain a right to access their land, but must do so in negotiation with these other interests. A requirement of Australia's Native Title recognition is the establishment of a corporate governance structure which is registered under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporations Act 2001* (Cth). Whilst this governance structure was government-imposed, Gugu Badhun have adapted the Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) model to suit their cultural protocols. As such, their governance board includes both Elders and Directors from each of six key family groups (Cadet-James et al., 2017).

Following their Native Title determination in 2012, Gugu Badhun produced the *Gugu Badhun Community Plan 2014-2020*. This document was initiated by Gugu Badhun Elders and Directors with the assistance of the North Queensland Land Council, facilitated by an external consultant, and developed with the input of a large number of Gugu Badhun citizens. The *Community Plan* articulates the values and goals of the Nation. In particular, it identifies four key values: culture, community, country (environment), and economy. The *Community Plan* underpins our overlapping research projects with Gugu Badhun. Through a series of community workshops and discussions at Gugu Badhun community events, we have explored these four values and how they may be embedded within an economic development plan for the Nation.

The participatory action research project is a collaboration, with the community as a whole and between the two researchers. Our partnership, a Gugu Badhun researcher (Gertz) and a migrant to Australia (Petray), ensures a productive combination of insider and outsider perspectives. Our research with Gugu Badhun is inspired and influenced by the Indigenous nation-building approach developed by Cornell and Kalt (1998) in North America, and now expanding to New Zealand and Australia (Rigney & Hemming, 2014). This paper refers to transcripts from community discussion workshops, where Gugu Badhun citizens came together specifically to discuss economic development, as well as ethnographic field notes from attendance at community events and Gertz's insider knowledge of Gugu Badhun operations. The research project is a work-in-progress, with the Nation currently still laying the important foundations before embarking further on major projects. This paper reports on this planning, foundation work, and decision-making more so than on specific outcomes.

Gugu Badhun Nation want to build economic prosperity. This is part of an ultimate 'plan of us living and working on country' (Community Workshop, 10 December 2015). On the surface, this may look like an adoption of neoliberal aspirations, that Gugu Badhun people are capitalists and have a simple objective of making money. The *Gugu Badhun Community Plan* guides the Nation's decision-making processes with regard to economic development strategies, and makes it clear that the prosperous economy cannot come at the expense of the other three values. Any Gugu Badhun economic development must contribute to maintaining and enhancing culture, community and country. For example, this could mean that profits from the Nation's economic development projects may be used to support other activities. Ideally, though, the Gugu Badhun economy will go further than this and be built around these other three values.

The types of economic development Gugu Badhun have been pursuing to date are built on, and built from, Gugu Badhun traditional knowledges. Examples include businesses that protect the environment rather than exploiting it, or infrastructure that strengthens community by maintaining kinship connections to one another, to cultural heritage, and to the Nation (Community Workshop, 27 September 2015) and building Aboriginal people's capabilities in Western academic research. A profitable economy will not only provide jobs on Gugu Badhun country for Gugu Badhun citizens, though. Profits can also be used to strengthen governance and deliver community programs that are funded, controlled and delivered by Gugu Badhun but are currently state responsibilities.

While typically the theoretical framework precedes the methodology and findings, we have reversed the order in this paper in order to make clear links between the theory and the ethnographic research. Further, this paper attempts to centralise the Gugu Badhun Nation, in all their specificity, rather than the traditional academic practice of using a case study to illustrate broad discussions. While of course we expect that our discussion will be relevant beyond the Gugu Badhun Nation, and we will in fact engage in some broad discussion ourselves, we recognise that Indigeneity is too often generalised at the expense of the vast cultural and social diversity that exists across Australia. In the sections that follow, we look at theories of recognition and explore their intersections with economic development, followed by theories of social change to understand Gugu Badhun's attempt to largely ignore discussions of recognition beyond current government parameters such as Native Title.

Recognition and Reconciliation

The politics of recognition seeks to reconcile Indigenous assertions of sovereignty and self-determination with settler-state sovereignty by accommodating Indigenous identity and repairing legal and political relationships with the State (Coulthard, 2014). Recognition politics is a double-edged sword. Around the world, it has resulted in substantial gains for Indigenous peoples (Bell, 2014, p.165), such as access to land and resources, and cultural rights. At the same time, though, recognition is arguably the latest advance in the colonisation process (Bell, 2014; Coulthard, 2007).

Recognition 'promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power' (Coulthard, 2014, p.3) because it cannot challenge the colonial relationship, and recognition thus results in Indigenous peoples being subsumed by the colonist. Recognition is about 'inclusion' into settler-colonial frameworks (Bell, 2014, p.144). This is particularly obvious in Reconciliation Australia's (now defunct) 'Recognise' campaign, which was a government funded push for the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the Australian Constitution. The arguments *for* this recognition explicitly point to earlier exclusion and erasure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the foundational document of the Australian state (Castan, 2015; Morris, 2013; Williams, 2015). But even some of the arguments for

recognition suggest that its benefit will be felt by non-Indigenous people, that 'all Australians could walk taller if their Constitution *graciously* acknowledged the distinctive place of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders' (Brennan, 2015, p.18, *emphasis added*). This sentiment explicitly draws attention to the power imbalance, whereby the settler state is the recogniser who might choose to 'graciously' bestow their recognition on Indigenous peoples in an act designed to assuage guilt for past injustices (Bell, 2014; Coulthard, 2014).

Policies that recognise Aboriginal rights to land, resources and culture include an aspect of 'contain[ing] the challenges being presented to the ideas of universality, such as 'one law for all' that are engrained in the settler imaginary' (Bell, 2014, p.12). Indigeneity moreover, challenges the idea of universality in the process of social change (Petray & Pendergrast, 2018). That is, Indigenous movements in self-determination, the creation of spaces where self-determination is enacted rather than asked for, do not seek to change society writ large. They instead seek to carve out spaces free from external influence. Their very existence is an act of resistance, illustrating that another way is possible without seeking to extend that way to anyone outside the Nation in question. These are instances that align with Leanne Simpson's (2011, in Coulthard, 2014, p.148) statement: 'I am not so concerned with how we dismantle the master's house, that is, which set of theories we use to critique colonialism; but I am very concerned with how we (re)build our own house, or our own houses.' To extend the metaphor, while a politics of refusal might see the rebuilding of Indigenous houses, recognition politics is more about renovating the master's house, adding on rooms to allow Indigenous peoples to fit under the coloniser's roof.

Economic development, similarly, is often framed in terms of allowing Indigenous peoples to be included within the neoliberal system. The discourse of policy failure within Indigenous affairs has caused a policy shift away from self-determination and self-management towards assimilationist terms such as 'mainstreaming' and 'normalisation' (Altman, 2007). Whilst government agencies such as Indigenous Business Australia (2018) and Indigenous Land Corporation (2018) do support community enterprises, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic development efforts are directed largely towards the individual. Indigenous Business Australia (IBA), for example, centres individual entrepreneurship and home ownership (Indigenous Business Australia, 2018; Terrill, 2013) which normalises capital accumulation and rests on the alienation and dispossession of Aboriginal land (Coulthard, 2014) through freehold title and other land tenure reforms (Howey, 2014). IBA supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to start businesses so that they have 'the same financial opportunities as other Australians' – namely, the ability to create wealth, accumulate assets, and fulfil their aspirations (Indigenous Business Australia, 2018). Arguably, this government initiative is responding to the lower rate of self-employed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (6%, as compared to 17% of non-Indigenous Australians; Mazzarol, 2014), however it illustrates a Marxist warning of state-constructed power through ownership and capital accumulation that redirects economic resources from the many to the few (Menzies, 2010).

This government support, and much of the research on Indigenous economic development, is very focused on individual entrepreneurs (e.g. Foley, 2006). These individual entrepreneurs may well build their business on Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander values, and Foley (2006) argues that Indigeneity and business success are not mutually exclusive. However, more common is the assertion that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses do not work because of culture. This belief has been discussed in research that argues that it is racism, whiteness and colonisation that are the true barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic development (e.g. Banerjee & Tedmanson, 2010; Foley, 2006; Furneaux & Brown, 2008; Schaper, 1999). Nonetheless, entrepreneurs themselves note the difficulty of maintaining cultural values when operating in the neoliberal business world (Foley, 2006, p.249).

This difficulty is one that surely faces individual entrepreneurs as well as Aboriginal Nations seeking to build economies. In the process of decolonisation, a strong foundation of cultural values is important if colonised peoples are to follow Fanon's (1961, p.78) advice 'not to be content to define itself in the terms of values which have preceded it'. In the process of decolonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations should do their 'utmost to define [their] own particular values and methods and a style which shall be peculiar to' them.

The need for a strong cultural foundation is why our work on economic development with the Gugu Badhun Nation is a long-term process. Pushing economic development too quickly is putting the cart before the horse. We can look towards post-colonial societies for parallel examples. As Fanon (1961: 40) writes, 'Independence has certainly brought the colonized peoples moral reparation and recognized their dignity. But they have not yet had time to elaborate a society or build and ascertain values'. While Fanon writes of political independence, we suggest the argument can be extended to economic development (or economic independence) in Australia, given that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here are still colonised. Economic independence which is not built deliberately on strong values risks 'undermin[ing] the fundamental principles of Indigenous freedom' and by being co-opted or corrupted by the capitalist system (Alfred, 2008; Soldatic, *this volume*).

Gugu Badhun have preemptively prevented this undermining by first elaborating their society and articulating their values via the *Community Plan*. As Landauer (1911, p.125) says, 'if we want a society, then we must construct it, we must practice it' – this is what Gugu Badhun Nation are doing through their nation-building

process. There is a clear sense of purpose which has been developed and is continuously consolidated through community events like the annual Culture Camp. Held each year during school holidays, Culture Camp is an opportunity for all Gugu Badhun citizens to come together on country for camping, fishing, storytelling, and language learning.

Gugu Badhun values of caring for country, culture, and community underpin activities and discussions throughout the camp. For example, at Culture Camp in 2015, a baited fishing line was left on the riverbank. A kookaburra snapped up the bait and was unfortunately hooked. Saving the kookaburra presented an important teaching moment for Gugu Badhun young people who were heavily chastised for their carelessness in leaving the baited fishing line unwound on the riverbank for a kookaburra to snatch. The lesson was long lived – the following year at camp, one of the young people brought the story up again. His elders told him that animals like the kookaburra are connected to Gugu Badhun people as part of the kinship system and need to be cared for as family members. Fishing provides plenty of other lessons, including resource management (only taking as much as you need, returning fish of certain sizes to ensure a healthy breeding population, and so on), listening to country (knowing the seasons) and the importance of sharing resources amongst family. None of these lessons are framed in terms of economic development, but their articulation at events like the Culture Camp is important to ensure that economic development which Gugu Badhun pursue builds upon traditional knowledge and upholds cultural values.

Decolonisation, Prefiguration, and Indigenous Economies

Indigenous scholars such as Glen Coulthard (2014), Taiaiake Alfred (2008) and Jeffrey Corntassel (Alfred & Corntassel 2005), argue that internal colonisation and oppression is the contemporary experience of Indigenous peoples. The social, political and legal legacies of the colonial powers still determine and shape the quality of Indigenous peoples' lives. Coulthard (2014, p.6), for example, explains that the settler-colonial relationship with Indigenous peoples is characterised by a new form of domination and power that has:

...interrelated discursive and non-discursive facets of economic, gendered, racial and state power ...structured into a relatively secure or sedimentary set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority.

The concept of 'settler-colonialism' is essentially about the elimination of Indigenous peoples from the land through the destruction of Indigenous peoples' relationships with the land (Wolfe 2006; Snelgrove, Dahmoon & Corntassel 2014). Coulthard's (2014) Indigenous anticolonialist theory and practice can be best understood as a struggle for land, but not just in a material sense. Indigenous anticolonialism, Coulthard (2014, p.13) argues, includes an Indigenous stance against capitalism:

... deeply informed by what land as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations can teach us about living out our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in non-domination and non-exploitative terms and less around our emergent status as 'rightless proletarians'.

Coulthard calls this Indigenous decolonial thought and practice 'grounded normativity', by which he means:

... that 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 non-human others over time. (13)

Kahnawa:ke Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred (2008) encourages a new phase of Indigenous governance by ceasing to simply rejoice in survival and taking up the challenge of self-determination, a position which is reflected in the calls for sovereignty made by the *Uluru Statement*. Alfred explains that peace is unattainable for First Nations within a society that embraces capitalism and its associated materialism, consumerism and corporate globalisation. These things are in opposition to traditional Indigenous values.

Traditionalist leaders adopt an Indigenous stance focused on actualising their Nation's powers and ignoring opposing external powers. Through the concept of righteousness, Alfred discusses the challenge of Aboriginal leaders being caught between the needs of the community and trying to satisfy mainstream society's demands and expectations. Alfred warns that governing by balance and consensus becomes a struggle when native leaders, motivated by wealth and power, play into the hands of the State. Coulthard and Alfred are not *opposed* to Indigenous economic development but argue for new frameworks which are based on alternative understandings of value. The challenge for Indigenous peoples (and researchers) is to identify how Indigenous projects can sit alongside the capitalist system without being co-opted by it (Petray & Gertz, 2015).

Importantly, Indigenous self-determination movements are unlike many other social movements because they do not seek expansion. That is, an Indigenous Nation seeks self-determination for itself without trying to convince other Indigenous Nations, or the coloniser, to adopt their political and social norms. They do not attempt to universalise their own worldview, but just to create space where it can exist outside and alongside the mainstream (Petray & Pendergrast, 2018). We argue that the economic development process that Gugu Badhun are engaging in is an example of what Day (2004) calls the 'politics of the act', or prefiguration. That is, rather than demanding change from governments, as the *Uluru Statement* has, Gugu Badhun are 'just doing it' (Cornell, 2015).

Much of the existing research on prefiguration looks at anarchist movements, and our discussion refers to that literature while acknowledging key differences between indigeneity and anarchism. Day (2004) theorises prefiguration as 'non-hegemonic' activism. Instead of protesting against the mainstream system to change it, or replace it with a new mainstream system, prefigurative approaches try to build small scale utopias as experimental alternatives to the mainstream system. Through these experimental utopias, participants can begin to imagine an alternative to systems of power and liberate their thinking from those traditional structures (Day, 2001; 2004; Petray & Pendergrast, 2018; Wright, 2013). This approach to activism has parallels in decolonisation theory, for example 'decolonial praxis', the turning away from the colonial state and society. As Fanon (1986) suggests, the colonised must first recognise themselves as free in order to begin the process of decolonisation. Indigenous scholar Audra Simpson (2011, in Coulthard, 2014, p.154) calls this 'decolonisation on our own terms, without the sanction, permission or engagement of the state'. Gugu Badhun have begun the process of recognising themselves as free through several methods. First, their adaptation of the government-defined PBC in culturally appropriate ways, discussed above, is a small-scale but significant move to liberate governance – and thinking – from colonial power. Second, using terminology like 'nation' and 'citizen' to describe themselves emphasises the self-determination agenda maintained by Gugu Badhun.

Coulthard (2014, p.159, *original emphasis*) identifies Indigenous resurgence as, 'at its core a *prefigurative* politics – the methods of decolonization prefigure its aims'. Polletta (1999, p.11) introduces the concept of free spaces to discussions of prefiguration. She says that prefigurative politics 'are formed in order to prefigure the society the movement is seeking to build by modelling relationships that differ from those characterized by mainstream society.' Prefigurative free spaces, according to Polletta, provide the opportunity for movement participants to work together on internal issues – deciding on strategies and tactics, working out conflicts, and creating alternatives – without jeopardising their façade of unity and commitment². However, prefigurative spaces are also centrally focused on the creation of alternatives. Prefigurative spaces are a recognition that the movement's goals are in opposition to the mainstream, and a dismissal of any suggestion that they cannot work.

The term 'prefigurative' was coined by Boggs (1977) to refer to 'the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal.' He points out that 'prefiguring' was mainly the work of anarchists, and he suggests it addresses a key shortcoming of Marxism: the lack of attention to the *method* of the revolution. Boggs' (1977) discussion does focus on Marxism and thus sees prefiguration as the beginning of a universalising process, which is not what we are discussing with regards to Gugu Badhun prefiguring.

Recently, more academic attention has been paid to prefigurative politics, perhaps spurred by activists themselves adopting the terminology and consciously enacting prefiguration (Murray, 2014; Rodgers Gibson, 2013). Prefigurative spaces allow movements to set about creating their desired social relations immediately, rather than waiting for society to change on a larger scale (Day, 2005; Polletta, 1999). Instead of trying to struggle against the state, prefigurative spaces provide the option of standing to the side and putting energy into positive action, engaging with the state only for funding or other resources.

For Gugu Badhun, economic development, while not the only component, is an important part of their program of self-determination. It is a *prefigurative* act that requires strong foundations of decision-making and governance within the Nation. It also provides the resources for further experiments in self-determination. This is what Day (2004, p.734) calls the 'politics of the act', or in other words, 'inventing a response that precludes the necessity of the demand and thereby breaks out of the loop of the endless perpetuation of desire for emancipation'. That is, instead of 'demanding' change, or even support, from the settler-colonial state, Gugu Badhun's preference for economic development would preclude reliance on government support – which comes with government oversight and control. Gugu Badhun people acknowledge that government funding can be 'a step up and an assistance but it can also be a hindrance' because of the conditions that are attached to funds (Community Workshop, 27 September 2015), demonstrating that the leadership within Gugu Badhun is strategic and politically savvy.

The concept of 'self-determination' within the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, includes the freedom to pursue economic, social, and cultural development. This includes the right to participate in the mainstream economy or maintain difference. The pursuit of economic development by Indigenous communities within Australia is growing. The Gugu Badhun Nation has identified economic prosperity as a community priority, with profits to fund social development to maintain culture, country and community. There is a tension, though, between communal

values and profit-focused capitalism. Whilst there are successful examples of Indigenous economic development that maintains the values of the community to draw from, business models need to be culturally relevant and there is no one-size-fits-all example (Cornell, 2009). The theory and practice of decolonisation and post-colonial theory continues to be inspired by the principle of self-determination of peoples.

There is a certain pragmatism to Gugu Badhun economic development. Gugu Badhun plans and discussions are based on the understanding that, while radical changes to the structures of state and market might result in a better match for Gugu Badhun cultural values, they must deal with the global system that exists right now. This returns to the point above, that Gugu Badhun are not seeking *totalising* change but instead creating a small-scale alternative. In the existing structures of state and market, protecting and enhancing culture, country, and community requires money. Given the discussion above about the 'hindrance' and control that comes with government funding, the best option for Gugu Badhun is to enter the marketplace as a Nation, that is, to build up a Gugu Badhun economy. While there have been some discussions of supporting individual entrepreneurs, the focus has primarily been on communal ownership of businesses in areas like agriculture, tourism and education. This will mean directly engaging with the neoliberal capitalist system, but will it mean that Gugu Badhun Nation is also neoliberal and capitalist?

Avril Bell (2014, p.167) says that 'While to critique indigenous capitalism as inevitably assimilationist runs the risk of dovetailing with the view that to be Indigenous is to be pure, traditional and spiritual, there is a genuine tension here that Indigenous communities must navigate.' Altman (2005) challenges simplistic discussions of Indigenous market participation and identifies three overlapping sectors, the state, customary, and market sectors, which work together as a hybrid economy. Altman (2005, p.125) points out that Indigenous hybrid economies are structurally different to the neoliberal economy of Australia: 'it remains an economic form that generates limited material accumulation and little long-term saving and investment in conventional terms – it is at odds with the ideology of the market-based dominant society.'

As we have discussed above, a prosperous Gugu Badhun economy cannot compromise Gugu Badhun values or come at the expense of culture, country, and community. There must be space for the customary economy alongside the other sectors. Further, the Gugu Badhun market-sector should ideally enhance those other values, a point which comes up in all discussions of Gugu Badhun economic development: 'how do we ensure that the community benefits from Gugu Badhun businesses apart from just...you know, the direct jobs' (Community Workshop, 10 December 2015). The Nation is aware of this tension and are actively deciding how to navigate it.

We argue that Gugu Badhun economic development can exist within a neoliberal system while remaining a practice of decolonialism. The key to do so is for all economic development to be firmly underpinned by Gugu Badhun values and ethics and Gugu Badhun success indicators. These are not the same values and ethics, or measures of success, of neoliberal capitalism. Alfred (2005, in Coulthard, 2014, p.158) suggests that capitalist means are not consistent with Indigenous ends, because capitalism is based on environmental exploitation and entrenched racial, gendered, and class inequalities. Coulthard (2014, p.173) expands on this, saying that Indigenous resurgence cannot co-exist with capitalism and Indigenous alternatives to capitalism must be actively constructed.

One key difference between capitalist and Gugu Badhun ideals is the idea of individual accumulation of profits. While Gugu Badhun want their businesses to be profitable, it is not for the sake of individuals to become wealthy at the expense of others. A Gugu Badhun economy would not be made up of haves and have-nots, with a wealthy 'Aboriginal bourgeoisie whose thirst for profit has come to outweigh their ancestral obligations to the land and to others' (Coulthard, 2014, p.42). Participants in our community workshop (10 December 2015) identified possible plans for profits of any Gugu Badhun businesses. All are about improving the community and/or looking after Gugu Badhun citizens. No one mentioned the idea of a dividend-style payment for individual citizens. This was a brainstorming session, and it is important to note that they have not been prioritised or agreed, but we include them here to show the communal nature of Gugu Badhun ontology. Ideas included: a superannuation fund; education scholarships; a Permanent Fund; investment in health care; strategic investment; an elders program; purchases of Gugu Badhun land; reinvestment in Gugu Badhun business; small business loans; and home ownership loans.

A Gugu Badhun economy is based on cooperation, rather than competition. In Community Workshops, partnerships have been central to discussions. First, most participants agreed that Nation-owned, collective businesses are the goal; and second, many business ideas rely on cooperation with non-Gugu Badhun entities, from pastoral lease holders to small businesses located on Gugu Badhun country to neighbouring Aboriginal Nations (Community Workshops, 27 September and 10 December 2015).

Further, wealth creation is about land but not expansion. Building on Marx, Coulthard (2014) suggests that capitalism and colonialism expand and develop not only through the alienation of labour, but also, critically, through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands. Similarly, Wolfe (2006, p.393) points out that settler-colonialism is 'land-centred.' In the push for exclusive control of territory, the 'logic of elimination' sees Indigenous peoples and their connection to country as an explicit barrier. For the same reason, economic development that reasserts Indigenous sovereignty over country is an anti-colonial project. However, Gugu Badhun are faced with a tension, given their *non-exclusive* Native Title to their land. They are

limited in their ability to develop this land and have discussed the possibility of purchasing some land outright. Gugu Badhun have no intention of alienating other Aboriginal Nations from their traditional lands. The land in question is within Gugu Badhun country (relatively small blocks of land in comparison to their Native Title area), this would give Gugu Badhun 'freehold title', allowing them to develop the land as they wish, and to control who can access the property.

Freehold title also comes with the obligation to pay property taxes, and risks being lost in financial hard times. Gugu Badhun are not alone in facing this tension; Wolfe (2006, p.397) uses the example of the Choctaw in the US to explore similar issues. In that case, land ownership was individual rather than collective, meaning that 'the tribe could disappear while its members stayed behind' (Wolfe, 2006, p.397). Gugu Badhun have considered these tensions and thus far have decided that property purchases for the Nation will be collective, which attempts to avoid the individualism, a value central to the colonisation process (Fanon, 1961, p.11). A block of land in Greenvale has been purchased and is used primarily to store gear for Culture Camps and other events. Eventually, storage for important artefacts and documents will be developed as well as an on-country office hub to conduct Gugu Badhun business. But thus far, because of the requirements of the State and neoliberal system, the Nation has delayed the purchase of any more land until there are community endorsed decisions about how to use it, and revenue streams are established to pay for its maintenance.

Coulthard envisions a 'non-colonial economy' which reconnects peoples and their lands and is consistent with Indigenous 'cultural values and 'way of life' (Coulthard, 2014, p.68). Philip Blake says, 'We did not believe that our society has to grow and expand and conquer new areas in order to fulfil our destiny as Indian people' (in Coulthard, 2014, p.63). As discussed above, Gugu Badhun are territorially bounded and their connection is to that country. They do not seek to develop economies elsewhere; for example, there is no suggestion that a successful eco-tourism business could be run in other Aboriginal Nations' country without that Nation's involvement and business partnership. However, developing a non-colonial Gugu Badhun economy is a prefigurative project which exists within and alongside the existing system while remaining distinct from it.

Finally, a Gugu Badhun economy is part of Gugu Badhun society, culture, and governance, rather than operating within the 'free market'. A Gugu Badhun economy, as many other Indigenous economies, will not maintain the division of 'separate administrative spheres of politics, economic, and culture' (Day, 2001, p.185). Altman (2007, p.125) notes that 'the exact size of each sector will vary from one locality to another.' For the Gugu Badhun economy, the goal is to shrink the role of the state sector over time through community controlled economic development strategies.

Conclusions

While building a Gugu Badhun economy is part of a much larger nation-building project, economic development is deemed an 'acceptable narrative of decolonisation' (Veracini, 2007, p.6) because it appears less challenging to existing structures. However, theories of prefiguration allow us to think about this economic development a bit differently. Gugu Badhun economic development is a prefigurative project, simultaneously completely real and an experiment in alternatives. It exists within the current structures of settler-colonialism and neoliberal capitalism while also resisting those structures.

Our paper, and more importantly, the work Gugu Badhun Aboriginal Nation is doing, serve both as an example of Indigenous economic development, and an example of prefiguration or 'real utopias' (Wright, 2013). We have discussed an Aboriginal decolonial initiative that happens to reflect the theoretical stance that we need to start actively building real alternatives to existing structures and the inequality that is part of them (Landauer, 1978; Wallerstein, 2002; Wright, 2013). Wallerstein (2002, p.39) calls this 'decommodification' which means 'we should create structures, operating in the market, whose objective is performance and survival rather than profit.' This is further supported by Day (2004, p.735) who might describe Indigenous economic development as 'constructing concrete alternatives to globalizing capital here and now, rather than appealing to state power or waiting for/bringing on the revolution.' Gugu Badhun's experience of economic development, as with other Nations undertaking similar work, will be important to watch in the near future as examples of these concrete alternatives.

Economic development does however, come with risks in the era of recognition politics. Indigenous Nations that follow the development path begin to look more like settlers, both because they have purportedly 'bought into' the neoliberal logic, and because the economic development typically improves the inequalities that indigenous recognition is redressing. Successful self-determination projects like economic development come with a risk that recognition will no longer be 'graciously' bestowed by the state (Cattellino, in Bell, 2014, p.167). This is always a risk with recognition that is given: 'the existing state people have tended to maintain a "trump card" that ensures their continued control over the parameters of autonomy' (Day, 2001, p.189). This is why Indigenous groups like Gugu Badhun are exercising sovereignty 'by stealth' (Jorgensen, 2007). The outward appearance of capitalism, and success within a neoliberal system, does not automatically suggest that Indigenous economic development is selling out, though. What is being demonstrated here is confident self-determined identity that prefigures a new Gugu Badhun reality.

Footnotes

1. We are using the third person pronoun 'they' here, even though Gertz belongs to this Nation and could use the first person pronoun 'we'. We have made this choice simply for clarity between our choices as authors and the choices of the Nation (which includes one of the authors).

2. This is important because movements are judged externally based on their WUNC, or Worthiness, Unity, Numbers and Commitment (Tilly, 2004). Any infighting that happens publicly risks damaging external perceptions of unity, which allows power holders to write off any claims that are made.

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