

# Cultivating Diasporist Ontologies: Identity-Based Agrarianism and the Practices of Anti-Colonial Place-Making

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## ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades there has been an increase in studies connecting identity-based agrarianisms to global anti-colonial struggle. There has, however, been little scholarship bringing Jewish agrarianism into conversation with other racialised and displaced groups to consider its contribution to anti-coloniality. Diasporism ideology emerged in the Black Radical Tradition, Indigenous anti-colonialism and Jewish Radical Diasporism and has created a constellation of anti-colonial political identities. Diasporist political identity is practiced culturally, socially, and politically, including within identity-based agrarianisms. This paper proposes ‘diasporist ontologies’ as the generation of new belonging and ways of being, which situate diasporism through the practice, production, and renewal of culture in place. Drawing on an ethnography of identity-based agrarianisms in the Great Lakes region of Turtle Island (USA) I consider how places produce diasporist ontologies. I reveal how diasporist ontologies are cultivated through relational connection with place and consider the emergent anti-coloniality that is produced.

## CONTRIBUTOR

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## CRYNODEB

*Dros y ddau ddegawd a fu, gwelid cynnydd mewn astudiaethau sy'n cysylltu agrariaethau seiliedig ar hunaniaeth â'r frwydr fyd-eang wrth-wladychiaeth. Er hynny, prin iawn yw'r ysgolheictod sy'n dod ag agrariaeth Iddewig mewn deialog â grwpiau hiledig a grwpiau wedi'u dadleoli i ystyried eu cyfraniad at wrth-wladychiaeth. Daeth ideoleg ar sail y diaspora i'r amlwg yn y traddodiadau radicalaidd Du, y gwrth-wladychiaeth frodorol, a'r diabara radicalaidd Iddewig, ac mae hynny wedi creu cytser o hunaniaethau gwleidyddol gwrth-wladychol. Caiff hunaniaethau gwleidyddol mewn alltudiaeth eu hymarfer yn ddiwylliannol, yn gymdeithasol ac yn wleidyddol, gan gynnwys agrariaethau seiliedig ar hunaniaeth. Mae'r papur hwn yn awgrymu mai cenhedlaeth o berthyn a ffyrdd newydd o fodoli yw 'ontolegau mewn alltudiaeth', sy'n gosod y cyflwr o fod mewn alltudiaeth yn un a grëir drwy ymarfer, cynhyrchu ac adnewyddu diwylliant yn ei le. Gan dynnu ar waith ethnograffig ar agrariaethau seiliedig ar hunaniaeth yn rhanbarth Great Lakes yn Ynys y Cruban (UDA), rwy'n rhoi ystyriaeth i sut mae llefydd yn cynhyrchu ontolegau mewn alltudiaeth. Byddaf yn dangos sut mae ontolegau mewn alltudiaeth yn cael eu meithrin drwy gysylltiadau perthynol â llefydd, ac ystyried y ideoleg wrth-wladychol sy'n dod yn eu sgîl.*

## KEYWORDS

Ontology, diasporism, agrarianism, identity, place, anti-colonial, cultural practice

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## INTRODUCTION

The spread of the food sovereignty movement has linked small scale farmers globally in struggles against the colonality of industrial agriculture (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010). This has increased an interest in identity-based agrarianism over the last two decades with a proliferation of work which centres many different dimensions of identity; race, ethnicity, religion, gender (Barry et al. 2020; Goldberg et al. 2024; Hoffelmeyer 2021; Penniman 2018). Studies have connected identity-based agrarianisms to: global anti-colonial struggle (Garth and Reese 2020; Gilbert and Williams 2020; McCutcheon 2019; Ramírez 2015; White 2018); food justice (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Sbicca and Myers 2017); environmental movements (Carlisle 2022); migrant and refugee solidarity (Glowa et al. 2019); and critiques of racial capitalism (Bradley and Herrera 2016; Garth and Reese 2020). Indigenous food ways, ancestral practices, regenerative farming and ecological food production have shown small farms and gardens to be: political places (Carlisle 2022; White 2018); places of resistance and struggle (Burow et al. 2018; Ramírez 2015); places of justice (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Coulthard and Simpson 2016); places of cultural practice and identity renewal (Carlisle 2022); and places of repair (Bruno et al. 2024; Tyler 2022).

Jewish agrarianism in North America has had less attention, though the agricultural traditions embedded in the culture are increasingly embraced, and Jewish agrarianism contributes to many food geographies (Goldberg et al. 2024). Jewish agrarianism has been explored within the context of American Jewish environmentalism (Rice and Goldberg 2021; Silvern 2021), Jewish cultural and religious identity (Coons 2019; Most 2016), and how Jewish values and practices bring the Jewish Agricultural Movement into critical engagement with radical food geographies (Goldberg et al. 2024). To date there has been little scholarship bringing Jewish agrarianism into conversation with other racialised and displaced groups to consider its contribution to anti-coloniality.

Jewish agrarianism is heterogenous, particularly politically, and with regards to Zionism this requires initial clarification. While I acknowledge the different emphases that adherents to and critics of Zionism have placed on the term at different times and places, this paper follows Said (1979) in addressing Zionism from the standpoint of its victims. Zionism is, in its simplest terms, a political ideology that believes Jewish people have a right to self-determination through the nation-state. In the twentieth century, Zionism manifested through the settling and colonisation of Palestine and the creation of what is in essence an ethno-state: contemporary Israel. While many Jewish agrarians may connect with the *land* of Israel and consider it the birthplace of their culture, settler-colonisation through the *state* of Israel is more contentious. Jewish anti-Zionism and ‘radical diasporism’ are Jewish political identities which embody the possibility of Jewish self-determination through relationship to land and place that is anti-statist, non-dominant and anti-territorial. This concept is discussed in greater detail later.

Indigenous ontologies and Black abolition necessarily continue to be central to anti-colonial thought. The inclusion of Jewish experience in discussions of race, racism and anti-coloniality are complicated by the privileges of Jews racialised as White, the assimilation and participation of Jews in settler-coloniality, and the colonality of Zionism over the last century (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993; Butler 2012; Feldman 2007; Said 1979). The (erroneous) tendency to homogenise Jewish experience into White-Zionism has masked and erased the experiences of other Jews, particularly Jews of colour, and

anti-Zionist Jews (Slabodsky 2022). Decolonial scholars have known for decades that ‘antisemitism, antiblackness, Islamophobia, coloniality, and White supremacy work co-constitutively’ (Lentin 2020: 170). As geographers attempting to interweave related but distinct struggles, we must work to ensure that we can explain *why* this is still true.

Writing about decolonisation as a political project, Curley et al. discuss ‘questions of land and sovereignty, gesturing towards framings that are inclusive of Black, Native, and immigrant communities’ (2022: 1044). I explore diasporism as an ideology which emerges variously across racial, cultural and ethnic groups and manifests materially as practiced diasporist identities, for example within identity-based agrarianisms. As opposed to diaspora, which can mean a transnational identity, a relational network, or an identity bound to a nation-state but spread out from its territory, diasporism is not linked to ‘fixed roots, territories or stable boundaries’ (Topolski 2020: 276). Diasporism offers an alternative political community that links identity across colonial boundaries and embraces belonging amongst many others in place (Butler 2012). Diasporism is never static; this is why it is given the active suffix ‘ism’, to recognise that its ideological imaginings are ‘fundamentally anti-essentialist and can never be fixed’ (Topolski 2020: 276). From this ideological position diasporist identity is created and performed: culturally, social, and politically. I expand this framing to introduce the concept diasporist ontologies as the generation of new belonging and ways of being, which situates diasporism through the practice, production and renewal of culture in place. Diasporist ontologies are located in communities evolving languages, foods, stories, music, spirituality, herbalism and rituals. Diasporist ontologies are practices of being which are reclaimed, renewed and transformed in relationship to place and displacement.

Initially I review where diasporism emerges across various literatures and follow this with a more detailed introduction to diasporist ontologies. I then explore the emergent anti-coloniality of diasporist ontologies through case studies of identity-based agrarianism and, in particular, Black, Jewish and Indigenous agrarianisms. Anti-coloniality is revealed through considering the ‘doings’ of farmers. Firstly, I interrogate the Indigenous/diasporist binary through an exploration of Indigeneity as movable. This discloses a relational connection to land and place that is mobile and can be reclaimed, practiced and renewed after displacement. I follow this with an analysis of placemaking in the pursuit of freedom. Following Gilmore’s *Abolition Geography* (2022) I consider why cultural practice is placemaking and in what ways place transforms cultural practice. I expand on why this process manifests ethical reciprocal frameworks which teach a non-dominant, non-territorial, and non-exploitative relationship with land. Finally, I explore notions of place-agency expanding on farms’ active participation in both the maintenance and production of cultural identity. Recognising diasporist ontologies’ ubiquitous learning, awe and gratitude to reveal place as teaching, speaking and creative (Larsen and Johnson 2016).

The findings presented in this paper come from ethnographic research conducted in the Great Lakes region of Turtle Island (USA) in 2023, and predominantly within the city of Detroit. Detroit is the ancestral homeland of three Anishinaabe nations: the Ojibwe, the Ottawa, and Potawatomi. I also spent time on farms during a trip through New York State on occupied Schaghticoke and Mohican territory. The combined histories of systemic racism, industrial collapse and population collapse created 24 square miles of vacant land within the city limits (Detroit Future City 2017). By the 1970s

poverty, unemployment and a lack of access to fresh food catalysed the cultivation of small community farms and gardens. Farms and gardens vary in scale from allotment-style plots shared between neighbours, to school gardens, church gardens, homesteads, community farms and agri-industry. During the time of carrying out my ethnography, Keep Growing Detroit – a farm also delivering a garden programme distributing seeds and plug plants to individual and community gardens – supplied over 2000 registered growing sites.

Much of my analysis refers to my six months' participation and observation in the fields and farms. I lived on the east side of Detroit and worked on farms most days. I collected a variety of primary source materials from my time spent with farmers, including field journals, photographs and sketches. During the fieldwork I conducted semi-structured and in-the-field interviews with people with diasporist and/or Indigenous identities. Some interviews were conducted over the phone or on Zoom. I conducted 39 interviews with farmers with a variety of Indigenous and diasporist identities. Interviewees were selected making use of the existing networks and through social media. In this paper there are excerpts from seven interviews that I considered relevant to my analysis. While my intention is to use these case studies to expand diasporist ontologies as a framework, this paper proposes an idea rather than generalising experience or seeking conclusive findings. The paper aims to offer new terms and a framework which can both offer analytical insight and highlight synergy and resonance across identity-based agrarianism, furthering the creation of constellations of anti-colonial practice.

As a non-Indigenous or POC academic, I am always conscious of my problematic positionality when discussing indigeneity and racialised belonging. I identify as a white Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jew, with mixed European and Ottoman heritage. A primary concern of my research and activism has been to understand both my participation-in and displacement-by European racism and coloniality, and the radical political theory that continues anti-colonial struggles. My work has given me the opportunity to work with Black, Indigenous and People of Colour farmers on Turtle Island and in the UK. I am currently based at a university in Wales, and I am committed to emphasising the relevance of anti-colonial geographies in places which seem distant from the frontlines of colonialism. This feels relevant to my positionality as I wrestle with maintaining an authentic and diasporist Jewishness, whilst grappling with the significance of my Englishness on land still struggling with its own legacy (as both victim and perpetrator) of settler coloniality.

## DIASPORISM

Diasporism has created a constellation of anti-colonial political identities which challenge nationalist ideologies (Butler 2012; Gilroy 1993; Topolski 2020). Diasporism is a political ideology creating diasporist identities that traverse colonial boundaries. Emerging from a variety of diasporic movements, diasporism highlights solidarity across borders, and favours anti-statist and decolonial frameworks alongside a critique of state-centric nationalism. Diasporism appears in Black radical thought particularly through the Black Radical Tradition which understands that the fight for liberation and the struggle against colonialism and racial capitalism are interconnected and global (Robinson 2000). The term diasporism itself is not commonly used in Black radical discourse, which instead uses terms like diasporic, or Black/African diaspora, however black radical activists and

scholars connect the African diaspora to broader anti-imperialist and decolonial struggles (DuBois 2017; Fanon 1963; Gilmore 2022; Gilroy 1994; Hall 2021; Kelley 2017b; Robinson 2000; Thomas 2005). Diasporism as an active shared identity appropriately describes the political, and cultural associations which are manifest through and continue to inform the contemporary Black Radical movement (Johnson and Lubin 2017).

Indigenous diasporism has become an increasingly necessary site of geographic exploration. Indigeneity has historically been concerned with Indigenous peoples in relation to their ancestral lands, however Indigenous displacement has created linked diasporist identities which add to the constellations of anti-colonial struggle and research. Examples of Indigenous diasporism research is emerging in Latin Studies (Blackwell et al. 2017), a reconsidering of Black indigeneity in the Americas (Mays 2021) and examinations of Amazigh (non-Arab North African) diasporas in France (Harris 2022). Palestinian diasporism is a key example and has been central to framing Zionism as a colonial ideology and a manifestation of US imperialism (Said 1979). Further to specific studies of displaced indigeneity, solidarity between Indigenous peoples has created a shared politicisation of global Indigenous identities. Colonised people recognise the anticolonial struggle of other peoples across oceans.

Diasporism has been used variously within Jewish studies to reject traditional nationalisms (Boyarin 2023; Boyarin and Boyarin 1993; Magid 2024b), within the expanding Jewish anti-Zionist movement (Arkush 2009; Bergen 2021; Magid 2024a) linking to decoloniality and Palestine solidarity (Omer 2019; Slabodsky 2014) and queer theory (Bergen 2021). Diasporism has informed new concepts such as Torres' (2024) *anarchist diasporism*, linking insights from anarchist theory and diaspora studies to describe 'the anti-statism of stateless peoples based upon their specific relationship to time and territory' (2016: 1). As an embrace of situated and practiced diasporist identity and a rejection of nationalism and statehood, diasporism has become a Jewish radical tradition (Bergen 2021). This collection of Jewish anti-statist, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial aspirations consolidates under the umbrella of Jewish Radical Diasporism.

Kaye/Kantrowitz (2007) popularised the term Jewish Radical Diasporism (JRD) in *The Colors of Jews*. JRD links heterogeneous Jewish experiences, foregrounding how Jews have made home all over the world for millennia and many, if not most, of those stories had been stories of 'naturalisation' rather than settling or colonisation. It also acknowledges how some Jews have participated in European settler coloniality in the Americas (and elsewhere) for several hundred years and, over the last century, in Palestine. Kaye/Kantrowitz said JRD 'represents tension, resistance to both assimilation and nostalgia, to both corporate globalization that destroys peoples and cultures, and to nationalism, which promises to preserve people and cultures but so often distorts them through the prisms of masculinism, racism, and militarism' (ibid xii). She developed the concept of *doikayt* (hereness), a principle rooted in the Jewish Labour Bund (the Bund), a revolutionary socialist political party that emerged in the Pale of Settlement (within the Russian Empire) in 1897. Medem (2012), one of the Bund's leading ideologists writing in the early twentieth century, argued that the Jews did not constitute a nation, nor did he believe that Jews should or could fully assimilate. For him the idea of a Jewish nationalism which linked Jews globally was absurd and froze Jewishness to a historic past that no longer existed. Instead, the Bund organised around the principle of *doikayt*, claiming 'wherever we live that's our homeland' (Jewish Womans's Archive

2024) to counter the Zionist call for nation-statism. This asserted Jewish belonging on the lands where they were, and not through a state-based nationalism elsewhere (Medem 2012). Kaye/Kantrowitz's version of diasporism similarly emphasises the rejection of Zionism and instead roots into the political, spiritual and material life of the diaspora.

Diasporist practices have manifested materially in identity-based agrarianisms. These heterogenous diasporist identities, including Black, Indigenous, Jewish and other racialised and minority identities have cultivated ways of being in relation to land and place which I call diasporist ontologies. There has been extensive scholarship considering how diasporism contributes to anti-colonial struggle through activism, autonomous economies, and political imaginaries. This paper instead considers how places produce diasporist ontologies through the practice, production and renewal of culture.

## DIASPORIST ONTOLOGIES

Kimmerer (2013) says that all peoples *became* Indigenous at some point, that even 'sky woman' (the first woman in many Haudenosaunee First Nation creation stories) was from somewhere else. She elaborates that process of becoming Indigenous rather than the settler-coloniser is like a plant that naturalises on new soils rather than one that becomes 'invasive'. She reflects on the role of plantain, a prolific herb that flourishes in disturbed ground and has multiple healing qualities for land, soil, and humans (Kimmerer 2013). Once naturalised it does not dominate but rather enhances its new environment. This metaphor of 'naturalised belonging' appropriately describes how diasporist ontologies are cultivated in place.

Jewish anarchist Milstein (2021: xvi-xvii) defines diaspora as 'the spreading of seeds across both space and time. It is a scattering apart, and also a seeding of many places and moments. It holds pain, loss, and separation, but hope, growth, and nurturance too'. With the spreading of seeds peoples may become rooted anew, this does not need to look like assimilation entirely into a new place nor can it remain entirely unchanged without dominating and invasive means. Drawing on Kimmerer's analogy, plantain is still plantain on Turtle Island, but plantain has not changed the ecosystem, it has not invaded and taken over. Its presence does not oppress or marginalise other species. But it will inevitably grow anew there, not abandon its being, but draw from and be on the land differently, adapt to new climates, find new nutrients, new relationships with other ecologies, new fungal partners, new pollinators. It will change and still be plantain.

Mays describes a new Black Indigeneity that emerges in the Americas using a very similar framework. He explains how Black Indigeneity has created belonging: a way to 'connect with land, form community, and ... exist in relationship to the Indigenous people. Black Indigeneity is how African Americans have generated their sense of home within dispossessed Indigenous land' (Mays 2021: 43). This new Indigeneity is inseparable from an explicit longing 'real or imagined' for Africa. The trauma of severance, racism, dislocation, are part of Black Indigeneity and inform the cultivation of this new belonging, new sovereignty and freedom that is managed through the 'maintenance and production of culture' (Mays 2021: 43). Mays refers to the creolising of languages, the hybridity of foods and music, the melding of spirituality *in situ*, as forms of cultural production that do not assimilate into the racial state; instead, culture is created in relationship with new lands. Mays claims a 'Black indigeneity' (Mays 2021: 42) because of the

‘sleight of hand ... which turned Africans into Black Americans’ (Kelley 2017a: 268). He claims that the Black American experience is unique and that not all migrants can or should make a claim of indigeneity. Black Indigeneity in Africa was actively erased in the colonial process. Yet there are many resonances that carry through the Black Indigeneity that Mays describes and echo in Indigenous ontologies and Jewish Radical Diasporism ontologies. All express a situated but non-territorial and reciprocal relationship with place, locations which cultivate both the continuation and renewal of cultural practices.

There are various Jewish identities that resonate with Mays’ description of indigeneity on new land, with its narrative of forced relocation and the hybridising of cultural practices that ensue: for example, that of Jewish Berbers who lived for centuries in the Atlas Mountains, with languages like Judeo-Amazigh, and who remain in deep land-based relationship to this day; the Sephardi Jews of the Moorish Empire whose languages hybridised into Ladino, a mixture of Hebrew, Spanish and Arabic; the Yiddishkeit of the Pale of Settlement; Arab Jews in the Middle East and North-Africa. Each of these dispersions has thoroughly distinct foodways, art, languages, folklore, herbalism, rituals, stories. None assimilated completely into their host communities; many experienced huge oppressions, whilst others prospered. I hesitate to call any of these Jewish iterations Indigenous (in Mays’ sense) to their new lands, because I understand Indigeneity to be ‘a political relationship to the structure of settler colonialism’ (Nabulsi 2023: 30–31). Jewish people have not experienced European settler coloniality in the same way as the African Diaspora, or Indigenous peoples across the settled and colonised world. Jews have been othered, and racialised, expelled, and faced genocide, but these histories are multiple, heterogenous, and not consistent across the Jewish Diaspora. Jewish political relationships to land are various. They have been designated citizen and foreigner across many nations with particularly frequent changes to Jewish legal status across Europe over the last 400 years. For example, in France in 1870 Jewish political status changed from *indigène* (indigenous) to *étranger* (foreigner). However, when Jewish diasporic identities such as the Judeo-Amazigh locate, transform and make home in new places I consider these to be diasporist ontologies.

Diasporist ontologies are distinct from, but resonant with, Indigenous ontologies and emerge through the place-making of cultural identities with histories of displacement, migration, enslavement and genocide. Diasporist ontologies are an understanding of practiced cultural identity that is both non-territorial (in that it makes no exclusive or supremacist claim to territory or land) and anti-assimilationist (in that it sees forced or coercive absorption into homogenous nation-state identity as violent). Diasporist ontologies practice an alternative way, one that values historic identities while also understanding that they undergo constant transformation and are never ‘fixed in some essentialised past’ (Hall 2021: 261). I develop this understanding of diasporist ontologies through my empirical work.

## THE RELATIONAL PRACTICE OF DOINGS

In order to effectively interpret the practices of farmers, I employ the concept of *doings*. According to Barker and Pickerill (2020), relationality is best understood through the lens of doings. They articulate that ‘doings are practices and processes that continuously renew, are ongoing, moving, evolving new relations, and generating new forms of the world’ (Barker and Pickerill 2020: 647–648). Doings are a demonstration of ways of knowing,

and ways of being, synthesised into cultural practices. These doings ‘are seen in our language, art, imagery, technology, traditions and ceremonies, land management practices, social organization and social control’ (Martin and Mirraoopa 2003: 210). Cultural practices with historical roots are revived and reclaimed within new contexts and serve as responses to the transformative nature of the landscapes they inhabit. These doings encapsulate the longing and connection to histories, the resistance to assimilation, nostalgia, the belonging fostered through connection, and the aspiration for liberation (Kaye/Kantrowitz 2007).

My ethnography is an inquiry into cultural practice within identity-based agrarianism and what farmers do ‘in and with the world’ (Barker and Pickerill 2020: 644) to cultivate Indigenous/diasporist ontologies. I analyse the relational connection to land and place that emerges within Indigenous/diasporist communities through an analysis of doings. I illustrate the emergence of living practices across diasporist identities and displaced cultures using case studies from Black, Indigenous and Jewish agrarianisms. I bring displaced Indigenous ontologies into conversation with Black and Jewish diasporist ontologies to interrogate this binary and to analyse the emergent anti-coloniality. My objective is to elucidate themes that traverse heterogeneous cultural experiences, finding resonances and expanding anti-colonial constellations.

#### Doings (dis)placed: place-making in relation to new soils

Indigenous cultural production is deeply entwined with people’s relationship to their ancestral homelands. This relationship manifests both within the realms of identity and cultural practice and also as a vital means of resistance in the ongoing anti-colonial struggle against displacement, dispossession, oppression, and genocide (Barker and Pickerill 2020; Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2017; Tuck and Yang 2012; Wolfe 2006). The work of Byrd (2019) offers a compelling framework for understanding how displaced peoples maintain and produce culture and identities by challenging the invasive structures imposed by coloniality. Byrd invites us to embrace a more expansive perspective: ‘To hold ground as Indigenous but also hold ground as relational’ (Byrd 2019: 212). This invitation recognises the relational possibility of heterogenous cultural practice on the same ground. Reiterating themes from my previous discussion on diasporist ontologies, it is essential to consider Indigenous ontological perspectives that challenge the idea of land connection as exclusive to a historic location and instead see their mobility. In this section I analyse both the movability of Indigenous and diasporist ontologies, and the doings in new places I witnessed during my ethnography.

My conversations with K, an Indigenous Tlingit farmer, during my fieldwork in Detroit/Waawiiatanong (the traditional name for the Detroit/Windsor area, meaning ‘where the river bends’) catalysed a deeper interrogation of the Indigenous/diasporist binary. The Tlingit peoples are originally from so-called Alaska, which underscores the importance of acknowledging the fluidity of Indigenous identity and the evolving nature of land relations. They tell me:

It’s less about geographic location, and more about ... cosmology ... my people come from Alaska, I come from Oregon...the reason why you feel like you’re a part of so many places, is because of that relationship ... like with partners you’ve had ...that has altered you in a lot of ways. (K, personal communication, 2023)



Daigle (2016) posits that while specific places hold sacred significance, this does not preclude the possibility of continuous, dynamic relationships to land that are cultivated and renewed as people traverse different geographies. Daigle emphasises that ‘we carry our responsibilities to our homelands as well as our families, communities, clans, and nations as we travel and become visitors on another Indigenous nation’s territory’ (Daigle 2016: 262). While Indigenous connections to land may be fluid and mobile, this mobility does not diminish the significance – or the historical weight – of specific locations and relationships rooted in particular geographies.

K reflected on the interconnectedness of my own Jewish heritage and their Indigenous identity, asserting that Jewish populations have always had ties to the lands they have moved through, and that the Jewish culture remains preserved but evolving. They resonate with the diasporic condition, saying it does not erase cultural connection to land; cultural practices re-form in new places, it ‘gets spread out’ (K, personal communication, 2023). This resonates with JRD agrarianism: Morales (2024) writes, ‘I nourish doikayt in the way I approach my garden’ in an Instagram post with an image saying, ‘we nourish where we land’. Morales expresses the practice of caring for the soil, letting herself root into the intimacy, community and transformation of this relationship. K similarly describes their evolving land relationship, a relationship cultivated alongside both the peoples and the land of Detroit. They even articulate that all these overlapping, cohabiting doings are ‘different types of Indigeneity’, a sentence that is inclusive of migrant communities that practice a relational culture that honours the land (K, personal communication, 2023). By saying this K demonstrates what Simpson (2017: 197) called ‘refusing the divisions of colonial spatialities’; they deny constructed boundaries and borders and instead demonstrate how different types of Indigeneity can overlap, share place, and inhabit the same lands. Daigle & Ramirez (2019) uplift these interconnected grounded practices as ‘constellations in formation’ which are essential to the place-based theory and practice of decolonial geographies. They recognised the power of ‘embodied knowledge of Indigenous peoples coming into dialogue and relationship with those of Black and other dispossessed peoples’ (Daigle and Ramírez 2019: 79). Instead of reifying settler proprietary logics which treat ground as exclusive and owned, constellations link together Indigenous struggles with others through the lenses of abolition, anti-capitalism and decolonisation.

A live and evolving land relationship and practice is necessary if the relationship is to remain authentic. Without a living and evolving quality, cultural practice can be reduced to ‘an aesthetic of alterity’ (Harris 2022: 2123). Whether this is Indigenous, ethnic, religious or other, an unchanging performance of culture becomes essentialising, it fixes identity to a static past. Instead of resisting assimilation this performance is disempowering; difference becomes contained within behaviours which ‘entrench the stereotypical expectations of wider society’ (Harris 2022: 2123), ultimately becoming tolerable and unthreatening in their familiarity. K’s words evoke Hunt’s formulation that the embodiment of Indigeneity is ‘lived, practiced and relational’ (Hunt 2014: 3); their description is of a hybridising practice. This facilitates a further relating of Indigenous and diasporist ontologies.

### Place-making

There is a particular affinity that emerges between Indigenous doings in place and Gilmore’s (2022) *Abolition Geography*. Abolition geography reiterates a challenge to normative notions of territory as ‘alienable and

exclusive' (Heynen and Ybarra 2021: 27) and makes a similar call for solidarity with Indigenous peoples through reciprocal land relations. Gilmore makes this claim with the invocation that we see abolition geography through the 'homely premise that freedom is a place' (2017: 238). She locates freedom not in undoing the histories of past dispossession but in continuing active processes of place-making. Abolition is not only past or future oriented but must be cultivated in our everyday practice (Heynen and Ybarra 2021).

How do we take seriously Gilmore's appeal that freedom is a place? Indigenous and diasporist ontologies do this by cultivating placemaking practices or doings that continue to unsettle coloniality. Structural transformation, towards liberation and self-determination, is made possible through place-making and relational doings. M, a Black radical farmer, explains that contemporary cultural expressions within Black America hold both the yearning for the past and the connection to the present place. He says, 'Culture that's developed in Black America ... includes both ... our yearning to reconnect with the traditional, with our roots, and also to continue expressing ourselves as human beings and creating culture' (M, personal communication, 2023). He is describing a dynamic process of practicing cultural identity which contains histories, personal experience, collective memory, and responds to this new situation. This practiced act of doing brings a consciousness of displacement – through yearning, resistance, and struggle – and cultivates profound healing and liberation through continued creation of culture and belonging.

C, a White Jewish farmer, tells me how farming with Jewish ritual enabled her to reconnect with cultural practice she felt estranged from within organised religious spaces. She spoke about several Jewish place-time doings that transformed her experience, situating her own cultural practice in the landscape. Three practices that stand out from our time together are: 1. Early mornings singing prayers of gratitude during a practice call *Avodat lev*. 2. The monthly rituals at *Rosh Chodesh* where the new month and new moon is celebrated. 3. Downing tools and doing *mikvah* (a ritual submersion into wild water) on a Friday as a transition into shabbat. These practices rooted everyday doings into Jewish-time and Jewish-place. They gave C a connection both to her own cultural heritage but simultaneously a deep, embodied and relational connection with her farm, and the more-than-human. Far from a performance of static cultural practice, the rituals C practices respond to the more-than-human world: singing gratitude for the day and her surroundings; welcoming, witnessing and celebrating the lunar cycle; interacting with rivers and lakes. These doings are lived and live, they react to time-place, they generate new ways of being in place and respond to the places they are practiced within.

Both these examples resonate with the call of abolition geography: they bring something of the history of the past into the place-making of the present. They seek liberation through dynamic and cultivated practice. By allowing this practice to evolve in place, to be transformed, it invites an alternative future: a future not defined by the traumas of past dispossession but instead defined by transformative praxis of place-making. Kelley (2022) defined freedom dreams which drew on Black radical imagination to describe the possibility of liberated connection to land for the Black diaspora. Place-making holds a conversation which resonates across difference and speaks to the joy of cultivating liberation. Instead of defining communities by histories of violence, it instead focuses on the freedom blossoming in the 'places they have made for themselves' (Heynen and Ybarra 2021: 23).

## Place Agency

Counter to the proprietary relationships with land that are made exclusive through ownership-of and dominance-over land, many Indigenous ontologies understand land as source: ‘Land is, therefore we are’ (Bang et al. 2014: 45). This understanding of land has no commonality, or way of comparison, with notions of land as something that can be owned (Tuck et al. 2014). The settler-enslaver logic of land as property has become entangled with some struggles for sovereignty, constructing property as the mechanism for land reparations (Bonds 2019; Byrd 2019; Curley et al. 2022; Hamlin 2023; Harris 2019; Tuck and Yang 2012), and reifying the territorial nation state as an anticolonial strategy (Farsakh 2021; Gilmore 2022; Levins Morales 2019; Pappé 2017). Byrd et al. ask us to reflect deeply on what it means when ‘land is understood not as property or territory but as a source of relation with an agency of its own?’ (2018: 11). In this section I consider examples within Indigenous, Black and Jewish diasporist ontologies where place agency is experienced and honoured, with the consequence of unsettling colonial logics.

The request from Byrd et al. (2018) is a welcome provocation to challenge geography as a discipline and to confront Euro and anthropocentric understanding of the *geographic self*, where place and self are co-constituted (Barker and Pickerill 2020; Larsen and Johnson 2016). Here I understand that ‘place has agency independent of human embodiment or awareness and, in fact, human embodiment and awareness are an extension of the agency of place’ (Larsen and Johnson 2016: 151). As such, the farms occupy a role beyond that of a site for cultural practice and beyond the place-making that constantly renews through reciprocal relationship. The farm actively participates in both the maintenance and production of cultural identity because the land is animate and has its own will and agency (Daigle 2016).

S, a Black farmer, told me that ‘the land is the basis of everything. Not just your food, shelter, clothing, but also the stories enmeshed in the culture come from the land. All of the rituals, all of the music, the food traditions, all reflect seasons and topography’ (S, personal communication, 2023). These reflections of the abundance of culture that are created by and learnt from the land decentre the human from place-making and instead resonate with Coulthard’s and Simpson’s (2016) ‘grounded normativity’. Coulthard and Simpson explain grounded normativity as an ethical framework manifested through our intimate, relationship to place where ‘the land itself generates the processes, practices and knowledges’ (2016: 254). These inform our existence, teaching us how to live in relation to other human and nonhuman life. This ethical framework is manifest in K’s garden. They describe golden rod – often considered a weed – to be in ‘medicinal relationship with the land’ even if they don’t understand what that relationship is. They take great care to listen to what their garden is telling them, observing these relationships. I witness K’s Tlingit ontology through practices like this. K steps back, to watch the land heal with golden rod, they wait to learn what the farm is saying about its needs, about its history. They wait to hear how they can tend and care for this place, and in listening they act differently.

Larsen & Johnson (2016) discussed the powerful agency of place and its capacity to create, speak and teach. I reflect on what it might be to observe the creativity of place, to hear place speak or learn from it. It is common in the JRD agrarian spaces I have encountered to reclaim the meaning of the word Torah. In its common/contemporary parlance, Torah refers to the first

five books of the Hebrew Bible. During my time with JRD farmers Torah is instead used akin to the word wisdom. This meaning is a return to broader historic definition as ‘the substance of divine revelation’ to the Jewish people. Expressed in this way, I hear people, plants, streams, the dawn, rays of sunshine, songs and moments all be thanked for their Torah. This gratitude for the revelation of places seems to embody an understanding of place-agency. It decentres the human as a necessary component in place-making and instead situates the human as student of, or witness to, an agency or vitality which exists irrespective of human embodiment and awareness.

Morales, a Puerto Rican Jewish essayist and land-steward, writes, ‘because the land is alive, our relationship with it is real. We are kin to the land, love it, know it, become intimate with its ways, sometimes over many generations. Surely such kinship and love must be honoured’ (Levins Morales 1995: 38). This active honouring and awe for land’s vitality and personhood appears again in conversation with L, a White Jewish farmer, who tells me, ‘one of the most important things that I get from ... connecting to land Jewishly is reverence for the land’ (L, personal communication, 2023). They have a huge amount of gratitude that their own ‘traditions and languages hold the capacity for reverence’. Similarly, R, a Black Jewish farmer, revealed how their mixed ancestral practices held gratitude for place. They told me, ‘both my Jewish practice and Yoruba Ifa religion I think of ... as being primarily traditions of land-based people ... fundamentally rooted in story, praise and gratitude’ (R, personal communication, 2023). They tell me about Jewish blessings for gratitude that they integrate into their daily life: gratitude for a waterfall, for a rainbow. The land itself evokes the rituals, the practices and the knowledges which in turn generates a relational ethic of care, reciprocity and reverence. These relations of reciprocity underpin how we conceive our connection with the more-than-human. Coulthard & Simpson (2016) write that grounded normativity is an articulation of the ethics of the land as a transformative praxis and a baseline for anti-colonial struggle. It is ‘Our relationship to the land itself ... that inform our political systems, and through which we practice solidarity’ (Coulthard and Simpson 2016: 254).

Walsh uses the metaphors of cultivation abundantly in her descriptions of decoloniality. In the face of the ‘capitalist hydra’ (2021: 11) the practices of sowing, nurturing and cultivating decoloniality are essential. In the case of identity-based agrarianism these practices are literal as well as metaphorical, as the garden creates the tangible acts of doing which ‘advance and open possibilities of an otherwise’ (Walsh 2021: 11). Through Indigenous and diasporist ontologies I witness place agency, which produces an ethical framework of reciprocity, attentiveness, interdependence and cooperation. All these challenge ‘enlightenment notions of self, liberty and property’ (Byrd et al. 2018: 13) which prioritise the human as exceptional and enforce hierarchies of dominance over place. Instead, diasporist ontologies cultivate non-territorial, non-dominant and non-exploitative practices. These practices pay attention to the ‘dynamic and emergent’ qualities of place, understanding how place changes people and impacts human actions (Barker and Pickerill 2020: 648).

## CONCLUSION

Diasporism traverses colonial borders and manifests through shared social, political and cultural performance. Diasporist identities are anti-statist and anti-nationalist and recognise that the fight for liberation against colonialism and racial capitalism is global. Constellations of anti-colonial struggle are

forged between diasporist and Indigenous identities. While diasporist identities are shared globally, to avoid reproducing essentialising and performative identity and to remain authentic they must also be produced, renewed and transformed in relation to place. This paper has introduced the concept of diasporist ontologies to describe relational placemaking practice which generates new ways of being and belonging. Based on an ethnography of Indigenous and diasporist agrarianism, I have described how the possibility of new belonging is cultivated.

I highlight Indigenous ontologies that challenge the idea of land connection as exclusive to an historic location and, instead, see their mobility. Indigenous ontologies displaced, can be considered Indigenous diasporist ontologies. I bring these into conversation with other diasporist ontologies, particularly Black diasporist ontologies and Jewish diasporist ontologies. All carry previous relationships with place with them, holding them as part of their being as they come into new land and place-making. Diasporist ontologies which are mobile and transforming are analysed through abolition geographies which take place-making seriously as a liberatory practice. While colonial ontologies create normative relationships with land which are possessive, territorial and dominant, diasporist ontologies practice an alternative way: where the relational exchange allow farms to be place-making and making-place. The ways of being and knowing are continuously renewed and demonstrated through doings. These doings are cultural practices with historical roots; they materialise as languages, art, rituals, song, foodways, herbalism, folklore. The ontologies themselves are evolving, revived and reclaimed within new contexts and serve as responses to the transformative nature of the landscapes they inhabit.

This paper explains why identity-based agrarianism and the process of transforming diasporist ontologies elucidates an understanding of place agency. Diasporism is not merely performed in the farm, treating the farm as a site for cultural practice. Neither is the farm a place made anthropocentrically through reciprocal meaning-making where place and self are co-constituted. Diasporist ontologies *are* because place *is*. The farm-place exists and has its own will and agency. I have described the powerful agency place has to speak, teach and create as an active participant in the maintenance and production of diasporist ontologies.

Though the case studies I have used are by no means exhaustive they are illustrative of the resonances that can be found within and between displaced identities and from which there is an emergent anti-coloniality. This happens in a number of ways: through the practice of diasporism and diasporist political identities which traverse colonial boundaries; through the production and transformation of diasporist ontologies as they come into relationship with new lands; through authentic practice which renews and responds rather than being essentialised through static performance; through relational practice that unsettles normative dominance and possession of land and instead practices non-dominance, non-territoriality and non-exploitation; and finally through the understanding of place agency which understands that it is the land itself which creates an ethics and a transformative praxis for cultivating anticolonial ways of belonging.

#### ***Ethics and consent***

*Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Aberystwyth University with the reference number 12475. Written informed consent was obtained for anonymized participant quotes and reflections to be published in this article.*

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# AGO AD

## A Journal of Spatial Theory

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