



PATHWAYS OF SETTLER DECOLONIZATION

Edited by
Lynne Davis, Jeffrey S. Denis and
Raven Sinclair



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Although settler colonialism is a deeply entrenched structural problem, Indigenous peoples have always resisted it and sought to protect their land, sovereignty, and treaties. Some settlers have aimed to support Indigenous peoples in these struggles. This book examines what happens when settlers engage with and attempt to transform settler colonial systems.

What does 'decolonizing' action look like? What roles can settlers play? What challenges, complexities, and barriers arise? And what opportunities and possibilities emerge? The authors emphasize the need for settlers to develop long-term relationships of accountability with Indigenous peoples and the land, participate in meaningful dialogue, and respect Indigenous laws and jurisdiction. Writing from multiple disciplinary lenses, and focusing on diverse research settings, from Turtle Island (North America) to Palestine, the authors show that transforming settler colonial relations and consciousness is an ongoing, iterative, and unsettling process that occurs through social justice-focused action, critical self-reflection, and dynamic-yet-committed relationships with Indigenous peoples.

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Contents

<i>Citation Information</i>	vi
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	viii
 Introduction: Pathways of settler decolonization <i>Lynne Davis, Jeffrey S. Denis and Raven Sinclair</i>	 1
1 Complicated pathways: settler Canadians learning to re/frame themselves and their relationships with Indigenous peoples <i>Lynne Davis, Chris Hiller, Cherylanne James, Kristen Lloyd, Tessa Nasca and Sara Taylor</i>	6
2 Tracing the spirals of unsettlement: Euro-Canadian narratives of coming to grips with Indigenous sovereignty, title, and rights <i>Chris Hiller</i>	22
3 'A lot of catching up', knowledge gaps and emotions in the development of a tactical collective identity among students participating in solidarity with the Winnemem Wintu <i>J. M. Bacon</i>	47
4 Decolonizing solidarity: cultivating relationships of discomfort <i>Katie Boudreau Morris</i>	62
5 Imagining autonomy on stolen land: settler colonialism, anarchism and the possibilities of decolonization? <i>Adam Gary Lewis</i>	80
6 Anti-colonial methodologies and practices for settler colonial studies <i>Elizabeth Carlson</i>	102
 <i>Index</i>	 123

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Chapter 1

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Lynne Davis, Chris Hiller, Cherylanne James, Kristen Lloyd, Tessa Nasca and Sara Taylor

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Chapter 2

Tracing the spirals of unsettlement: Euro-Canadian narratives of coming to grips with Indigenous sovereignty, title, and rights

Chris Hiller

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Chapter 3

'A lot of catching up': knowledge gaps and emotions in the development of a tactical collective identity among students participating in solidarity with the Winnemem Wintu

J. M. Bacon

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Chapter 4

Decolonizing solidarity: cultivating relationships of discomfort

Katie Boudreau Morris

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Imagining autonomy on stolen land: settler colonialism, anarchism and the possibilities of decolonization?

Adam Gary Lewis

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Chapter 6

Anti-colonial methodologies and practices for settler colonial studies

Elizabeth Carlson

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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INTRODUCTION

Pathways of settler decolonization

Lynne Davis, Jeffrey S. Denis and Raven Sinclair

This special issue of *Settler Colonial Studies* collects papers presented on the theme of 'Pathways of Settler Decolonization' at Canada's 2015 Congress of Humanities and Social Sciences. The panel was co-sponsored by the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA/SCS) and the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE/ACFTS).

The upsurge of intertwining scholarship in this field illuminates the present historical moment where scholars in multiple disciplines are turning to settler colonial studies in search of relevant conceptual tools. The authors in this volume write from different disciplines in exploring topics of decolonization, settler learning and solidarities. What they share in common is their engagement with the analysis of settler colonialism as the coherent logic of the state. This understanding provides a unified theme to scholarship that draws upon other disciplinary lenses.

In addition to interdisciplinarity, the papers also share a concern to move from analysis toward action. Scholars such as Macoun and Strakosch,¹ and Snelgrove, Dhamoon and Corntassel² have warned against an abdication of responsibility by settler activists because the structural nature of settler colonialism would seem to defy a transformed future. In assessing the strengths and limitations of settler colonial theory, Macoun and Strakosch challenge those who use settler colonial theory (SCT) to realize its transformative opportunities while acting consciously to counter limitations identified by various critics. They caution against a stance of inevitability of settler colonialism that would risk delegitimizing Indigenous resistance, and they worry about re-inscribing settler academics' political and intellectual authority to the detriment of Indigenous voices. At the same time, they note the contribution of SCT in providing a theoretical language to understand colonialism as a continuing force in the present, including an analysis of how both conservative and progressive settler movements may detract from Indigenous political challenges to the state, thus problematizing settler efforts at reconciliation and decolonization. They identify as one of its strengths the ability of SCT to provide non-Indigenous people with 'a better account of ourselves',³ and to generate new conversations and alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Snelgrove, Dhamoon and Corntassel warn that SCT's rapid ascendancy in the academy could overshadow Indigenous Studies and the voices of Indigenous peoples. They argue that:

without centering Indigenous peoples' articulations, without deploying a relational approach to settler colonial power, and without paying attention to the conditions and contingencies of settler colonialism, studies of settler colonialism and practices of solidarity run the risk of reifying (and possibly replicating) settler colonial as well as other modes of domination.⁴

In their view, Indigenous resistance and resurgence must remain central in discussions of changing relationships:

Theorists of Indigenous resurgence, such as Taiaiake Alfred and Leanne Simpson, among others, also express the possibility for settler society listening, learning, and acting [...] in accordance with and for what is being articulated [by Indigenous people]; Indigenous resurgence is ultimately about reframing the conversation around decolonization in order to re-center and reinvigorate Indigenous nationhood.⁵

Macoun and Strakosch, and Snelgrove, Dhamoon and Cornassel gesture towards action by settler society to follow the lead of resurgence theorists in transforming settler colonialism, despite the structural, relational and affective challenges of anti-colonial struggle, in order to 'reinvigorate Indigenous nationhood'.

The authors in this volume examine pathways of settler decolonization, analyzing the uneven terrain of settler efforts and experiences through the lenses of SCT, Indigenous scholars and grassroots communities, and specific disciplinary analyses. While SCT has been criticized for its inability to theorize a decolonial future, this volume interrogates what happens when settlers engage with and seek to transform the system. What does such action look like? What challenges, complexities and barriers are faced? What are the stumbling blocks? And what opportunities and possibilities emerge?

The articles in this volume all note the need for settlers to transform our/their relations with the land and with Indigenous peoples, while recognizing the structural and psychological challenges of applying these principles in practice. It is one thing to care about the environment, and quite another to reorient one's lifestyle around sustainable practices and the health of local ecosystems. It is one thing to feel a connection to a place, and another to accept the notion of 'non-human agency'.⁶

Likewise, it is easier for settlers to advocate for the return of land to Indigenous peoples 'over there' rather than right where settlers and settler states and corporations (claim to) own property.⁷ Transforming social relations is not just a matter of befriending Indigenous people; it means developing long-term relations of accountability, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and respecting Indigenous laws and jurisdiction.

Learning to transform relationships in these ways – and to transform self-understandings and thinking and feeling patterns or 'settler common sense'⁸ – is an ongoing process; it is not linear, but rather iterative, occurring in what Hiller in this volume calls 'upward and downward spirals'. Moreover, settlers' anti-colonial learning (and unlearning) does not simply precede action; it occurs through action, through meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples and with other engaged settlers, and through experimentation with activism of various sorts. The Nehiyawak (Cree) refer to this relational and iterative social justice-focused process as *kisāhkiwewin*: love in action.

Several papers in this volume also address the role of emotions in settler decolonization. While critical self-reflection is essential to this process, and while emotions such as guilt, shame and indignation can help motivate settlers to change their ways and support Indigenous resurgence (as Bacon shows in one of the articles collected here), it is equally important not to treat 'unsettling the settler within'⁹ as an end in itself; rather than dwelling in discomfort, the point of unsettlement is to be a springboard to action that benefits Indigenous peoples.

A related point of tension (or contention) is whether decolonization is in the interests of settlers. Boudreau (in this volume) argues that deep decolonizing solidarities must not be based on self-interest; decolonization for settlers entails sacrifice, or giving up power and privilege. This may be true and, therefore, if it is believed that there is nothing in it for settlers, why would they ever pursue it? Although decolonization may not be in settlers' short-term economic or political interests, it may fulfill a humanistic, ethical and moral commitment. Moreover, decolonization may be in virtually everyone's long-term interest, particularly if Indigenous resurgence assists in combatting climate change, ever-growing economic inequality, and other political and social problems. As Tuck and Yang make clear, decolonization is not a metaphor for other social justice projects.¹⁰ Nevertheless, settler colonialism does intersect with other systems of oppression, and decolonization would be incomplete without also tackling racism, capitalism and heterosexism.¹¹

Indigenous sovereignty, Indigenous knowledges and place-based relationships may be key to human survival; yet, this only reiterates the question: Where is the place of settlers in discussions of decolonization? What is our/their role? From whence do we/they speak?

In 'Complicated Pathways', Davis, Hiller, James, Lloyd, Nasca and Taylor note the growing number of educational initiatives organized by NGOs, activist groups, Indigenous Nations and organizations, governments, and educational institutions and businesses, all designed to change participants' consciousness through curricula, workshops, seminars, webinars, special events, experiential learning and courses. The authors describe the 'Transforming Relations' website where more than 200 such initiatives in the Canadian context have been documented. Despite the proliferation of such events, particularly those directed at 'reconciliation', many educational initiatives appear to be silent on issues of Indigenous sovereignty, land rights and treaties. The authors worry that despite the current groundswell of expressed desire among many Canadians to change the relationship with Indigenous peoples, the supporting narratives remain limited to small, liberal goals that leave the status quo intact.

Chris Hiller's 'Tracing the Spirals of Unsettlement' proposes to unsettle settler pedagogies, taking spatial unsettling as fundamental to disrupting the reproduction of colonial narratives. Framed upon Willie Ermine's 'ethical space of engagement', Hiller's analysis describes two spirals of learning and unlearning among settler activists. Her research study is grounded in interviews with 22 Euro-Canadians who are committed to supporting Indigenous struggles over land, sovereignty and rights. Hiller learns about their journeys, their critical moments of insight into settler colonial relations, and their complex processes of decolonization which are marked by discrepancies, contradictions and reversions, as individuals grapple with issues of settler identity, implication and responsibility. These are not simple trajectories but complex layered learning pathways, requiring growing understanding of the deep structures of settler colonial society while digging deeply into one's own privilege even while turning back to seek comfort in more stable points of orientation as one's complicity in the status quo becomes evident.

J.M. Bacon, in 'A Lot of Catching Up', explores the terrain of emotions in social justice work in settler colonial contexts. Using a case study of the Winnemem Wintu's defense of their ancestral waters, Bacon looks at the experiences of non-Indigenous students who came to participate in river blockades. Drawing upon theories of emotion in social movement organizing, the article examines the application of 'moral shock' and 'blame' as mobilizers of collective identity in the river blockade context. It is suggested that 'moral shock' was experienced by the students as they came to realize the large gaps in their knowledge, and the need to acquire basic information related to colonial relations and cultural protocols. 'Blame' and 'demonization', which often arouse emotions that unite activists in a cause, were not strong mobilizers of common identity because non-Indigenous settlers were themselves implicated in colonialism. Bacon questions the often-repeated admonition in social justice work to leave behind 'guilt'; rather, 'Guilt' is seen 'guilt' as an important motivator of mobilization in response to the perceived breaking of moral standards by oneself and colonial society. Bacon suggests a more nuanced analysis of 'guilt' and 'shame' in social activism.

Katie Boudreau Morris writes 'Decolonizing Solidarity' from a complex location comprising Acadian-Métis, Irish and Lebanese identities. As an anti-colonial feminist and activist, she draws upon the work of Mohanty and other international feminists to contemplate what it means to engage in decolonizing solidarity in the contexts of both Turtle Island (North America) and Palestine/Israel. She argues that settlers must interrogate their own relationships to the lands they occupy, listen to Indigenous peoples' stories, and act accordingly. Her conclusion is that it is possible to define decolonizing relationships that are not (primarily) constructed around settler self-interest, which give time for relationality and power relationships, and which accept the discomfort that comes with navigating the conflicting identities that are raised in the settler colonial context.