



Book Review

Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land and Settler Decolonization

Mackey, Eva. (2016). Halifax, NS & Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood Publishing. ISBN 9781552668894 (paper) CDN\$24.00; ISBN 1552668986 (ePub) CDN\$23.00; ISBN 9781552668993 (Kindle) CDN\$23.76. 224 pages

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While his father's political legacy includes the infamous 1969 "White Paper" calling for full assimilation of Indigenous peoples into Canadian society, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will likely be remembered for his commitment to reconciliation and his attempt to "renew the relationship with Indigenous peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership" (Government of Canada, 2018). A foundational component of his election and governmental platforms, Trudeau's reconciliation efforts have included, thus far, establishing the long overdue National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; appointing Canada's first Indigenous Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Jody Wilson-Raybould (Kwakwaka'wakw/We Wai Kai Nation); and promoting implementation of the 94 calls to action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission based on its investigation of Indian residential schools. This politics of reconciliation, however, doesn't appear to include meaningful and fair resolution to the issue which lies at the genocidal core of Canada's settler colonial domination over Indigenous peoples: land. In perhaps the most prominent example of this, Trudeau has doggedly pursued expansion of the Trans Canada Pipeline for the natural gas sector, including putting Canadian taxpayers on the hook to the tune of \$4.5 billion to purchase the existing pieces of the pipeline, despite vehement opposition from many Indigenous communities whose existing land holdings and traditional territories would be impacted.

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Carlton University anthropologist Eva Mackey's new book, *Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land and Settler Decolonization*, offers critical insights into Prime Minister Trudeau's and, indeed, much of Canadian society's reticence and refusal to address issues of land in this period of reconciliation. Using ethnographic data collected from multiple sites in Canada and the United States, Mackey argues that the anger many settlers express in connection to Indigenous land rights is due to the uncertainty and disruption of their expectation of ongoing entitlement to the land that such rights pose for settlers. In what she refers to as "settled expectations," settlers and settler nation states construct "a normative state of affairs in which [both] did, or believed it did, have certain and settled entitlement to the land taken from Indigenous peoples" (p. 8). Colonization and settler colonial state nation-building, Mackey contends, is organized around the "repetitive embedding and realizing of settler assertions of certainty and entitlement, and the repeated denial of Indigenous personhood and sovereignty" (p. 11). Consequently, the settler people that she interviewed, Mackey writes,

consistently referred to the threats and dangers of land rights to the nation and to a deep sense of entitlement and a supposedly natural right (even a responsibility) to own and develop property/land, even if it may have been taken from Indigenous people. They felt they had laboured and improved the land and helped build the nation and that they were entitled to their private property. On these grounds, they felt certain of their entitlement to the land and expected it to ongoing and unchallenged. (p. 8)

For this reason, "they also consistently expressed powerful feelings of uncertainty, crisis and anxiety about the future within the context of land claims" and "they felt angry about this uncertainty, treating it as unexpected and unfair" (p. 8). Given the power and pervasiveness of this ideology among settlers and the settler nation states, Mackey concludes that necessary "legal, political and economic acts of redistribution" required to meaningfully address Indigenous land claims "may not be possible or sufficient without a fundamental shift in settler common-sense frameworks, a shift in concepts for thinking about and experiencing relationships and power within spaces" (p. 11).

Unsettled Expectations is organized into three parts. Part One provides the methodological and theoretical foundations of this research. Here Mackey not only articulates her analytical framework organized around settler logics of certainty and uncertainty about land, but also establishes its centrality and necessary repetition throughout Canadian colonial history, including contemporary manifestations of the Canadian nation state. Particular attention is paid to the operations and reinforcements of the settler colonial logic of settler certainty of ownership of Indigenous lands through the law. Part Two is devoted to exposing the operations of these logics within settler discourses collected through Mackey's ethnographic work in communities involved in two existing land claims cases involving (1) the Caldwell First Nation in

southern Ontario, Canada, and (2) the Cayuga Indian Nation in upstate New York, United States. Part Three is organized around understanding what decolonization and embracing settler uncertainty might look like through consideration of the Onondoga Land Rights Action, as well two examples of existing Indigenous and settler alliances (SHARE/Cayuga Indian Nation and NOON/Onondaga Nation) that Mackey describes as “offer[ing] provocative ways of imagin[ing] decolonizing relationships” (p. 165).

In his endorsement featured on the cover of *Unsettled Expectations*, prominent American scholar of white settler studies, Mark Rifkin, claims that this book is “an invaluable contribution to the scholarly literature on settler colonialism” – and I couldn’t agree more. What I appreciate most about Mackey’s contribution is its commitment to decolonization through exposing and critically interrogating the specific manifestations of settler colonial power and domination over Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States. Power, French philosopher Michel Foucault warns us, “is only tolerable on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself” and “its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (1978, p. 86). Secrecy, he contends, is not only indispensable to isolating and silencing those who are dominated, but also for securing the support of dominant groups, predominantly through the ideological and discursive transformation of abuses of power into expressions of freedom for these dominant subjects (Foucault 1978, p. 86). For this reason, “secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its operation” (Foucault 1978, p. 86) – and, thus, doing the hard work of mapping and exposing the discourses of domination and operations of abuses of power that underpin settler colonial nation states like Canada and the United States are critical to decolonization and dismantling these systems. It is particularly important when such analyses involve land. Another strength of Mackey’s analysis is its careful attention to how Canadian law has played and continues to play a fundamental role in legitimizing, securing, and normalizing settler colonial ownership of Indigenous lands and Canada’s ongoing domination of Indigenous peoples (despite being in this so-called period of “reconciliation”).

True decolonization requires addressing Canada’s ongoing occupation of lands stolen from Indigenous peoples, and Eva Mackey’s *Unsettled Expectations* makes a critical contribution to current and future discussions of how this is possible. This book is required reading for everyone.

References

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