Settler Colonial Socialization in Public Sector Work: Moving from Privilege to Complicity

NISHA NATH
Athabasca University, Canada

WILLOW SAMARA ALLEN
University of Victoria, Canada

ABSTRACT *In this piece, we ask, what are the risks of a pedagogy and politics that begins and ends with privilege? What does it mean to declare privilege when embedded in institutions of the settler colonial state? These questions are raised through an ongoing project where we interview provincial public sector workers on Treaty 6, 7 and 8 (Alberta, Canada) and Coast Salish Territories (British Columbia, Canada) about their implications in settler colonialism through public sector work. In the project, we articulate the interdisciplinary framework of settler colonial socialization to consider the space between individuals and structures – the meso-space where settlers are made by learning how to take up the work of settler colonialism. For these reasons, in our research we ask, "what do the pedagogical processes of settler colonial socialization tell us about how systemic colonial violence is sustained, and how it might be disrupted or refused in public sector work?" In this paper, we narrow our focus to the declarations of privilege that many of our interview participants are making. We reflect on these declarations and consider whether focusing on settler complicity and Indigenous refusals can better support a decolonial politics for settlers working in the public sector. We argue that declarations of privilege risk reproducing settler-centric logics that maintain settler colonialism, settler jurisdiction, and settler certainty, and we reflect on how to orient participants (and ourselves) towards the material realization of relational accountability and towards imagining otherwise.*

KEYWORDS settler colonial socialization; settler colonialism; deep colonizing; public sector workers; reconciliation; antiracism; privilege; complicity

Correspondence Addresses: Nisha Nath, Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies, Athabasca University, Canada; Email: nnath@athabascau.ca. Willow Samara Allen, Faculty of Education, University of Victoria, BC, V8P 5C2; Email: willowallen@uvic.ca.

Introduction

What are the risks of a pedagogy and politics that begins and ends with privilege? What does it mean to declare privilege when embedded in institutions of the settler colonial state? These questions are raised through our ongoing project where we interview provincial public sector workers on Treaty 6, 7 and 8 (Alberta, Canada) and Coast Salish Territories (British Columbia, Canada) about their implications in settler colonialism through public sector work. In the project, we articulate the interdisciplinary framework of settler colonial socialization to consider the space between individuals and structures. It is in this meso-space where settlers are made by learning how to take up the work of settler colonialism (see Crosby & Monaghan, 2012; Matsunaga, 2021). Although public sector work is frequently perceived as serving the public good, it relies on and reproduces colonial domination, dispossession and violence, yet its inner workings are largely hidden (Matsunaga, 2021). For these reasons, in our research we ask, "what do the pedagogical processes of settler colonial socialization tell us about how systemic colonial violence is sustained, and how it might be disrupted or refused in public sector work?"

In this paper we narrow our focus. At the present preliminary stage of our research, in which we are still recruiting and interviewing, we adopt Tuck's (2015) pedagogy of pausing by "intentionally engaging in suspension of one's own premises and project, but always with a sense of futurity" (p. xii). Our pause is with the notion of privilege. Despite our choice to veer away from privilege frameworks in our interview questions, many of our participants thus far have chosen to name their privilege. We reflect on these declarations, and consider whether focusing on settler complicity and Indigenous refusals can better support a decolonial politics for settlers working in the public sector.

We begin this paper by outlining our project's theoretical frame and methodology, and then consider the limitations of privilege. Illuminated through participant articulations, we reflect on how and why some participants have gone to a comfortable and legible space of declaring privilege. We argue that the declaration of privilege risks reproducing settler-centric logics that maintain settler colonialism, settler jurisdiction, and settler certainty. This risk is particularly pernicious in the public sector given that the public sector relies on its jurisdiction to act as being treated as absolute, which is in part justified through notions that it works for the "public good" (Matsunaga, 2021). We then offer reflections on why we bring settler complicity and Indigenous refusals together in our interviews, through our interview structure and subsequent analysis, in order to foreground Indigenous people's sovereignty and the material realization of relational accountability to orient participants (and ourselves) towards imagining otherwise.

Grounding this Research

As researchers, we share experience with providing public-sector training on Indigenous specific racism. In our roles as facilitators, we witnessed direct links between workplace narratives and violent manifestations of settler colonialism across jurisdictions and sectors in health, child welfare, policing, and education (Allen & Nath, 2019). Encounters described by public sector workers, and widely witnessed by the public, made apparent the systemic nature of racism and the fatal implications of colonial myths. In a recent statement, coroner Gehane Kamel, who oversaw the inquiry into the death of Joyce Echaquan, an Atikamekw mother who confronted ongoing racism while in a Québec hospital, confirmed that Joyce's death was preventable (Richardson, 2021). Although long voiced by Indigenous people and thoroughly documented in media, scholarship and reports, systemic harm continues (Blackstock et al., 2020; Gouvernement du Québec, 2019; Harding, 2018; NIMMIWG, 2019; Rhoad, 2013; TRC, 2015; Turpel-Lafond & Johnson, 2021). Reflecting on our experiences in antiracism training, we witnessed that public sector workers across sectors and roles enacted, ignored or sometimes themselves experienced colonial violence rooted in a set of strikingly coherent mythologies. Some public sector workers did intervene; others were uncertain about how to do so, especially if institutional leadership and accountability mechanisms were lacking.

Bearing witness to this harm brought us together as non-Indigenous researchers – Nath, a settler woman of colour living on the lands covered by Treaty 6, and Allen, a white settler woman living on ləkʷəŋən peoples' lands – to investigate how colonial violence becomes institutionalized at the meso-level. At this level the authorization to act (and not) is rooted in (re)asserting settler entitlement to Indigenous lands, and in the settler "logic of elimination," which attempts to disappear and assimilate Indigenous people (Wolfe, 2006). Our focus on what we call the meso-level positions settler colonialism as a deep colonial structure,[1] reproduced in part through the routine work of public sector workers (Neu & Therrien, 2003; Wolfe, 2006). Critically, these deep structures – of culture, norms, attitudes, and reward, recognition, and penalty – are not absolute. Instead, they are marked by spaces of "tension, resistance, subversion and sabotage" (Batliwala, 2013, p. 200). Our research attempts to access the deep structures of settler colonial organizations in order to unpack the entrenched beliefs and practices grounding resistance to structural change, and to identify the organizational cultures that endure despite official commitments to reconciliation, antiracism and equity (Ahmed, 2012; Liu, 2020; Regan, 2010). Moreover,

---

[1] We draw from feminist scholar Srilatha Batliwala (2013), who writes that deep structures are "the hidden sites and processes of power and influence, the implicit culture, the informal values and systems of reward and recognition… deep structures [invisible and obscured power hierarchies] are, in a sense, like the elephant in the room – we all know they're there, but we do not know how to name them and tackle them analytically or practically" (pp. 199-200).

this research becomes distinctively urgent given that provincial public sector workers are entrenched in the most "visible and pervasive components of the state… [shaping] daily life like few others" (Leifso, 2020, p. 12).

Our research is anchored by Rose's (1996) concept of "deep colonizing," which describes the "conquest embedded within institutions and practices which are aimed towards reversing the effects of colonization" (Rose, 1996, as cited in Veracini, 2011, p. 179). Deep colonizing reveals the temporal manipulation characterizing the settler colonial project, wherein equity, justice and sovereignty for Indigenous people are forever promised in the future (Tuck & Yang, 2016). Initiatives aimed at reconciliation have been accompanied by powerful critiques that they neither aim to effect structural change nor buttress Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty (Coulthard, 2014; de Costa & Clark, 2016; Yellowhead Institute, 2019). The implication is that state actors can further deep colonizing by simply following the aims and orders of their institutions.

Consequently, in our project, we ask: How do white settlers, settlers of colour, and other people of colour learn to uphold the settler colonial state and reproduce the violence of colonialism? How might interrogating the meso-level with public sector workers – principally in the "helping" professions of health, education, child welfare – illuminate how they are socialized to reproduce settler colonial structures and enabled to resist them?[2]

To respond to these questions, we articulate a framework we call "settler colonial socialization," which integrates individual learning processes and the structures of settler colonial governance through two principal pillars: settler colonial common-sense (Rifkin, 2013, 2014) and settler colonial pedagogies (Hiller, 2017). Settler colonial common-sense refers to how "non-Native access to Indigenous territories *comes to be lived as a given*, as simply the unmarked, generic conditions of possibility for occupancy, association, history, and personhood" (Rifkin, 2013, p. 323; emphasis added). Tied to settler colonial pedagogies, this learning works to "clear the land discursively, materially, and violently of its Indigenous occupants/owners in order to make way for (white) settlement and development" (Hiller, 2017, p. 417). Critically, settler colonial pedagogies are social projects that "school our imaginations... rendering as well as enforcing the given-ness of our place here, and shoring up the legitimacy of our claims to be the *true* inhabitants of the land" (Hiller, 2017, p. 417; emphasis in original).

---

[2] Although our focus in this paper is non-sectoral, our ongoing analysis is located in a rich body of research that examines the reproduction of settler colonial harm in various sectors; see e.g., Lafontaine (2018) and Allan & Smylie (2015) in health, Blackstock et al. (2020) in child welfare, and Battiste et al. (2002) in education. Moreover, other key threads of our analysis consider the specific complexities of positionality in processes of settler colonial socialization. Note that when referencing participant narratives, we include the racialized and gender identifications that participants themselves name in the interview process.

Settler colonial socialization pulls together logics (common-sense) and learning (pedagogy) to illuminate how structures of domination, jurisdiction and authority enact and codify extractive, siloed, and inequitable relationalities: to other people, to structures, and to land, waterways and other-than human life. This framework focuses on the impacts of colonization for Indigenous people within a context where Indigenous sovereignties are pre-existing and enduring, and where Indigenous relationalities are grounded in duties of care to human and other-than human kin. Critically, in the constant making of settler colonial common-sense is the potentiality for unmaking, particularly given our context of "enduring indigeneity" (Kauanui, 2016).

In light of our project's focus on the meso-level and the learning processes that position public sector workers to take up the work of settler colonialism, we turn to the theme of privilege, which has been raised specifically by many participants thus far. What do privilege pedagogies tell us about patterns of learning for settlers? What can be learned through public sector workers' declarations of privilege? Do these declarations, and the pedagogies they can be reliant on, disrupt or reinscribe settler colonial common sense and settler colonial pedagogies in public sector work?

Methodology and Participants

We center pedagogical processes and anti-racist interventions in our interviews, drawing on Okolie's (2005) interviewing methodology. This methodology tasks researchers to respond to participant narratives and intervene by unpacking with participants how they understand their lives and broader structural conditions through the experiences and discourses they bring forward. Researchers are meant to critically analyze participant discourse, returning to build on their analysis with participants in a second interview. Our three-step interventive process consists of a brief survey and two 90-minute interviews.[3] This staging supports participants in drawing connections between structures and their meso-level worlds, with the intention to animate reflection on complicity, and to prompt participants to

---

[3] The survey contains questions about participants' early lives, their memories of racism, and their learning about colonialism. This step is intended to set the stage for participant reflection, and to provide a sense of the participant's experiential and relational entry points. Building on individual survey responses, the first interview is structured around three themes: (1) identity and social location, (2) relationships and distance, and (3) impacts of settler colonialism. Following the first interview we ask the participants to reflect on four questions during the intentional space of two to three weeks allocated between interviews. These questions foreground the four themes of our second interviews that focus on participant experiences in the workplace through non-identifying examples based around four key themes: (1) settler colonial common-sense, (2) naming and disrupting complicity, (3) the authority and discretion to act, and (4) imagining relationships and governance otherwise in response to Indigenous refusals.

enter into a place that "confounds colonial 'common sense'" (Martineau & Ritskes, 2014, p. iv).

Seven months into the project, we are at different stages of interviewing with 24 participants from British Columbia (14) and Alberta (10) in the sectors of education, health, child welfare, lands and resources, housing, and business development. Participants work in a variety of policy, front-line and management positions. Participants thus far are predominantly white settlers (19) and settlers of colour (5), with upcoming interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. Participants are being recruited through social media and snowball methods.

In what follows we draw from the interviews we have conducted thus far to consider privilege and complicity, as part of a "pedagogy of pausing" in which we continually reflect back and sometimes disrupt our own interview scripts as spaces of our learning as well. We consider how the assumptions animating privilege pedagogies surface in interviews, what this illuminates about settler complicity within the public sector, and the implications of this for our research. In addition, in drawing on participant quotations, we recognize the limitations of including short excerpts of extensive dialogues, rich with the complexity of experience and analysis that participants brought forward. We analyze the excerpts not to center individuals, but to locate privilege pedagogies as social patterns of learning situated within the structures of settler colonialism.

Circling Privilege

Drawing from scholarship on privilege and complicity, we consider how privilege pedagogies can impede transformational politics in three ways: (1) by invoking a confessional politics, reinforcing a settler-move to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012) and colonial unknowing (Vimalassery et al., 2016); (2) by reproducing a static and non-relational understanding of power, and (3) by operating as a performative "declarative politics" (Charania, 2015, p. 383) where the declaration becomes "the doing" (Ahmed, 2012), and the "confession ends up being the antiracist action" (Lensmire et al., 2013, p. 410).

As Cabrera (2017) notes, white privilege pedagogy – or the conception that learning about one's privilege is integrally transformative – is meant to disrupt "epistemologies of ignorance." White people can learn about and name the unearned social benefits they receive but do not notice.[4] Moreover, one can presumably shed or contest benefits according to one's own volition,

---

[4] Note, declarations of privilege can manifest variably, even in the absence of the word "privilege." In that, we take up privilege declarations as a set of structured encounters invoking a set of discursive acts.

a framing that does not attend to the insidious ways that whiteness is "constitutive of one's very being" (Applebaum, 2008, p. 294). Since McIntosh's (1989) accessible metaphor of the invisible knapsack, "privilege" has emerged in many contexts as *the* focus of pedagogical disruption (e.g., Cabrera, 2017; Flynn, 2015; Margolin, 2015). While several critiques have emerged about white privilege pedagogies, we focus on their settler-centricity. Patel (2021) describes settler-centric pedagogies as extractive and foreclosing engagement with "the power and heterogeneity of Indigenous peoples' histories, resilience, and work of decolonization" (p. 7). Moreover, privilege as a settler-centric pedagogy comes packaged within narratives of "good intention" or "benevolence," risking forms of allyship that happen "on *behalf* of Indigenous peoples like they are disappearing, and not already fighting colonialism more fiercely than racialized or white settler allies ever can" (Patel, 2021, p. 8; emphasis in original).

The Confession

As Levine-Rasky (2000) notes, the "body of the white individual resides at the fulcrum of the confessional model and at the core of white privilege pedagogy" (p. 274). When rooted in a liberal understanding that education is individual transformation, learning about one's privilege fulfills a "redemptive function" in a confessional encounter (Levine-Rasky, 2000, p. 276). This confession is powerful:

> It can purify us and change not what we do, but *who we think we are...* white people are revealed as racists and in this revelation are purified and made into non-racists, or at least people seeking to become non-racists. (Lockard, 2016, p. 16; emphasis in original)

Also released in the confession is the accountability to act (Levine-Rasky, 2000, p. 276). This can be challenging given that our interviews can affectively feel like a confessional space that invites individualized declarations of privilege. The register of confessional and of performing the "good settler" can feel particularly "thick" when asking participants to reflect on their social location.

Yet, thinking of these declarations of privilege as structured and patterned invites consideration of what privilege pedagogies "do," anticipate or expect. As a relationally structured encounter, absolution lingers in the air; if one announces one's privilege, and in that same gesture establishes that they are a "good settler," they become the exception and their morality remains intact. This can be challenging to interrupt when participants name the privilege they possess, then move swiftly to resolve that privilege through good intention. For instance, after noting she wanted to take responsibility for her

family's history of participation in colonial structures, a white woman in health stated:

> I certainly have privileges, someone who has white skin and has been born in Canada. And the biggest privilege that I do recognize is that I have a really good working brain….that's another piece of privilege that I've added on to my scope of trying to ensure that when I'm leading a meeting, or if I'm the person in the room, like to advocate for someone...or give space... (Interview #1)

Similar to some other white participants, this participant demonstrates how privilege can be an essential framework for knowing oneself as white *and* reconciling one's relationship to power. Here, privileges are lived and embodied possessions that can be itemized. While this list can contract or expand, the declaration of privilege coupled with the declaration to use one's power to advocate becomes the tentative resolution. In learning to understand and draw on privilege in these ways, setters are positioned as owners of privilege who can do better with that privilege and are (re)centerd as moral agents of change (Applebaum, 2008).

Another participant, a white woman in child welfare/children's services, described how early learning experiences related to settlement and whiteness shaped her. Articulating a commitment to equality from a young age, she shifted to focus on the intersection of whiteness with gender, navigating between racism she stated she could not know due to her racial identity, and her experiences of sexism. Following this, she noted:

> You get that sense of, 'guilt' like, okay, I am blessed. I mean I worked hard, and I was able to walk through the world system easier based on my colour and location. And then at the same time, it's like, I fucking hate... those barriers that get put up for you as a woman. (Interview #2)

One can consider how the confession of guilt can feel like an obligation of privilege pedagogies. Such declarations beg the question of what guilt is meant (or not) to do as a settler colonial politics of emotion, particularly when interwoven with conceptions of self-determined (hard work) and endowed (blessed) articulations of self. Although frequently unnamed, power operates palpably in discussions that turn to privilege, through its implication (e.g., what allows a white settler body to walk through the world with ease), and through its negation (e.g., barriers for white women).

Relationally, power becomes "slippery" within these encounters. Those receiving the confession are positioned to exercise a narrow and constrained response. The pressure to praise, comfort or grant absolution for (often white) settler guilt and shame can be intense. These are dynamics that bring our own social locations into play. The expected absolution in the confessional space would "resolve" not only the tension in the moment, but a deep sustaining tension of the structures of settler colonialism.

Confessional declarations of privilege are settler-centric and powerful in their extension of settler innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Discussing distance within relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, another white woman in health shared her memory of first coming to know that extreme racism against Indigenous people existed through hearing another woman's strong racist utterance:

> She expressed something that I had never heard before, which was extreme racism against Indigenous people. And I had no idea that existed... that was the first time it clicked in my head about slurs, and like why would you be racist against Indigenous people? That didn't make any sense to me... that was the first time that I really saw my whiteness and my privilege. (Interview #1)

Another participant, a woman of colour in child welfare/children's services identified how this innocence is a collective process of conditioning:

> A frame of mind is necessary to justify not only the harms that have been done, the harms that continue to happen, but also to remain kind of innocent of guilt. And also to maintain the certain status quo, right?... If you're in a position of power and privilege, you're going to want to hold on to that positionality... *through learning and teaching, settlers have been conditioned in a way... to not have to see a lot of things.* (Interview #3)

These settler moves to innocence secure a colonial unknowing that is "[produced] and practiced in concert with material violences and differential devaluations", and works to "preclude relational modes of analysis and ways of knowing otherwise" (Vimalassery et al., 2017, p. 1042). A woman of colour in health describes this as manifesting through "guilt, complacency and sometimes malice." This obstinate unknowing is a response, an "epistemological counter-formation which takes shape in reaction to the lived relations and incommensurable knowledges it seeks to render impossible and inconceivable" (Vimalassery et al., 2017, p. 1042).

Severed Relationality

Colonial unknowing in the confessional requires several violent erasures, one being the obfuscation of agents of domination, or "who is doing what to whom" (Leonardo, 2004, p. 138). Privilege is articulated as a non-relational status, which "[renders] unintelligible" relational entanglements of power (Vimalassery et al., 2016, n.p.). Often functioning at the level of the individual who is expected to divest themselves of privilege through self-awareness, understandings of privilege as a "status" that incurs material benefits erase settler colonialism's reliance on a "constitutive relation to Indigenous peoples" (Vimalassery et. al., 2016, n.p.). These settler colonial relationalities that require both Indigenous displacement and settler

emplacement are produced through settler colonial knowledge formations (Monaghan 2013, p. 491).

Settlers can name their privilege, yet never articulate that privilege emplaces us in relationship to Indigenous people and lands. This silence is imposing when declarations of privilege are accompanied by harmful colonial narratives. A white woman in education illustrates how the declaration of privilege cannot resolve how settler colonial violence continues, in spite of (and sometimes precisely through) the processes through which non-Indigenous people come to learn and name privilege. She named herself as a white settler for the first time in this interview, attributing her learning to a former student:

> And she talked quite a bit about colonialists, and how she had to deal with a lot of colonial stuff at [her university]. When she first said it, it was like, 'Oh my god, she's talking about me!'… I started thinking about it over the last couple of years, and in fact, a former principal and I ...had such a wonderful conversation about it. I realized in talking to him how much connection I've had with First Nations people, more than maybe the average colonialist… I just never thought about it. *It just always seemed so normal and natural*… I didn't say it out loud at the time, but you're saying it out loud definitely made me feel, 'Okay, I'm just gonna come out and say it.' That's who I am. (Interview #4)

Elaborating further, she stated that "there's that little anxious, nervous kind of connecting to something that I've always thought was so horrible. But I am connected to it. So I have to start getting used to that idea." After this moment, the participant named a family member's specific role in residential school administration. Yet, the declaration of white settlerhood is buffered through recounting the openness of other family members and their "very positive connection" to Indigenous people. In this participant's words, and variably in other interviews, we witness how the work of reconciling pulls violently in two directions:

> I do remember when they first started talking about the terrible things that were happening in residential schools. And I remember very well worrying about my [family member], and what happened and did anything happen? And, in fact, my cousin sent me a beautiful piece that was put into the newspaper... but it was all about how my [family member] had been a good man. And he let them speak their language. And he had let them continue on with their canoe building and different things... And that was written by a First Nations person who had been to the school, so I felt a little bit better about it then… I think it's horrendous and would never condone anything like that now, but then you just sort of took for granted. (Interview #4)

While declarations of privilege can be moments of recognition, they are often not moments of deep disruption, and instead can become spaces of intense (re)investment in settler colonial relationalities. These declarations

render it possible to not only reconcile extraordinary settler colonial violence, but to do so in service of the need for settlers to (re)constitute themselves and avoid implication.[5] This impulse can be particularly strong given the exaltation of white femininity within the helping professions in which this participant is situated (Allen, in press, 2020).

Focusing on the individual, as opposed to how settler colonialism is (re)established relationally, obscures power (Levine-Rasky, 2000, p. 274). As witnessed with many participants, they have power to shape their work lives (through mandate letters, policy development communications, intake procedures, assessment tools, consultation frameworks, etc.), and they have power to intervene and disrupt. Put differently, settler-centric pedagogies of privilege rely on obfuscations of the relationships of power in which settlers are implicated. Settler participants are challenged to even name where they exert power and discretion. This obfuscation renders it possible to "think" about oneself, instead of collectively reconstituting to dismantle power structures. The move is that by acknowledging my privilege, I can do better with my privilege, by acting more responsibly and being better intentioned. A woman of colour in health describes this as follows:

> I think it comes from, basically trying to convince ourselves that our presence here is okay... it's almost like trying to tell ourselves whatever it takes to sleep better at night – that we stole these people's land, and we're living here and it's completely unjust still, and nothing's being done about it. (Interview #5)

Retreat to Comfort

Finally, while naming privilege can in some contexts be disruptive, its easy extraction from relational and structural understandings of power renders it comfortable. For example, as Ahmed (2012) notes, confessions of privilege regularly become the political project itself. Charania (2015, p. 383) elaborates:

> The impulse to narrate ourselves in these ways reveals the long reach of neoliberalism where auditing our politics and lives to some place comfortable and implicated, comes to stand in for collective forms of life and social organizing.

---

[5] We also found that until intentional additions were made into our interview script, participant responses to our probing around hegemonic forms of settler colonial common sense and mythologies rarely if ever invoked the reliant forms of common sense and mythologies about settlers, white settlerhood and Canadian sovereignty. Put differently, the mythologies described were largely about Indigenous people, and few participants brought forward mythologies grounding white settler forms of entitlement, or mythologies about the benevolent and multicultural Canadian state. Where participants did trouble, for example, the myth of meritocracy, the focus was less on how the myth of meritocracy sustains forms of anti-Indigenous racism, and more on their own negative experiences of navigating assumptions around meritocracy.

The implication is that the perpetual deferral of decolonial change reflects settler colonial temporalities (Tuck & Yang, 2016). If declarations of privilege are structured encounters that "do" something, they are "delimited by the timeframes of modern colonizing states as well as the self-historicizing, self-perpetuating futurities of their nations" (Tuck & Yang, 2016, p. 6). They push decolonial change into a future never meant to come.

The responses privilege declarations invoke are not unlike "emotional responses evoked by a therapeutic model of unlearning racism" (Jafri, 2012). Reconfiguring anti-racist critique, this approach recenters "the subject rather than destabilizing the settler/native binary through which the settler's social power is constituted in the first place" (Jafri, 2012). In effect, this approach ignores how "white emotionality is socially and politically produced within material, affective, and discursive structures of whiteness and white supremacy" (Barreiro et al., 2020, p. 138). Extrapolating further, this therapeutic approach depoliticizes whiteness, white supremacy, and white settlerhood.

This settler-centricity enables a retreat to comfort as the possibility for (and accountability to) structural change is foreclosed (Jafri, 2012). Consider how MacIntosh's metaphor has led to a series of checklists to visibilize the privileges that white people receive. These checklists operate from a white normative pedagogy that centers white people's learning, delimiting understanding of how visibilization, and "privilege" itself, are experienced in vastly distinct ways for non-Black racialized people, Black people and Indigenous people (Jafri, 2012, 2013). The premise of visibilization negates the reality that these privileges *are* deeply visible to non-Black racialized people, Black people and Indigenous people. A woman of colour in child welfare/children's services invoked this complexity as she began to unpack what she identifies as a "different experience" of mixed familial lineages, and structural processes of settlement:

> It's a bit of a different experience as a person of color. And I'm also mixed race, so grappling with some of the complexities of knowing that, for example, my great grandfather was gifted land, and that's part of my history. And my privilege is that I've benefited from. (Interview #3)

Articulations like hers steer us toward a "messier" orientation that does not end with declaration, but is imbued with more analytical, pedagogical and relational possibilities.

Circling Complicity

Moving to contemplate complicity can animate settlers to think through implication and power in settler colonial structures and then, most critically, build and enact relational accountabilities. Patel (2021), for example, invokes a relational ethos and describes thinking about complicity as "mandatory" work for white settlers and racialized people. She argues that interrogating our complicity asks more of us, in that we must attend to how to be "in better ethical relationships with Indigenous peoples of this territory" (Patel, 2021, p. 7). Citing Probyn-Rapsey (2007) who describes thinking about complicity as ethical engagement, Patel (2021) foregrounds how complicity must be taken up at multiple scales, including methodology, practice, theory of ethical engagement, and as relational across time. Thus, acknowledging and naming one's complicity must extend into "an effective regular practice for non-black and settler people" (Patel, 2021, p. 17).

Where Patel is attuned to ethical engagements, Jafri (2012, n.p.) takes up complicity as "messy, complicated and entangled," where settlerhood is not simply an "object that we possess." Jafri (2012) points to the "field of operations'' in which settlers are located and acting, inviting consideration of how complicity manifests in the exercise and extension of settler state authority and jurisdiction through agents of the state. Both orientations to complicity are instructive in this research with public sector workers who are bound by codes of conduct or ethical frameworks that discount the settler colonial context, existing Indigenous sovereignty, and the ethical accountabilities of settlers, particularly those vis-a-vis Indigenous people and nations.

Part of the messiness that Jafri (2012) brings forward relates to how social location (e.g., migration status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, caste, education) mediates settler privileges and advantages. For example, when accounting for pervasive anti-Blackness, we cannot trace complicity "along the same coordinates as white people's complicity" (Patel et al., 2015, p. 9). Moreover, positionality can animate distinct settler logics and feelings. For example, Rifkin (2014) and Mackey (2016) discuss feelings of entitlement and certainty for white settlers in securing intergenerational power and land, while Jafri (2013) addresses feelings of desire and precarity for racialized immigrants in securing a place in the settler state and economy. Taking up Patel's understanding of complicity as ethical engagement, and Jafri's (2012) call to distinguish between privilege and complicity, we shift our attention to systemic conditions and relationships rather than (re)centering the settler-self.[6]

---

[6] This focus helps to sift through discussions over who is deemed to be a settler, the extent of access one has to settler privileges and citizenship advantages derived from living on and off Indigenous lands and resources, and recognition or status within state institutions, but also to the investments in sustaining settler colonialism certainty and power (Jafri, 2013; Mackey, 2016; Rifkin, 2013, 2014). As one does not become a settler through arrival to these lands alone, we

In the remainder of the paper, we explain our intentional move to complicity in our interviews in two ways: first, that complicity demands a relational understanding; and second, that complicity can illuminate the distinctive ways that non-Indigenous public sector workers are implicated in settler colonialism. Drawing from the interventions of participants, we foreground why locating complicity in the settler colonial bureaucratic context is critical. We stress how settler colonial logics shape the field of operations of public sector workers, but also how settler colonial relationalities can impede settlers from imagining and acting outside of these logics and the asserted authority and jurisdiction of settler governments.[7]

Complicity and Relationality

When privilege pedagogies characterize settlerhood as an inert status, the agency, domination, and investment of white settlers and some settlers of colour in settler colonial governance is submerged. Yet the structures of settler colonialism are reliant on particular relationalities. As Gaztambide-Fernández (2012, p. 52; emphasis in original) writes, "individual subjects do not *enter* into relationships, but rather subjects are *made* in and through relationships." As such, settler colonial socialization is a pedagogy of a particular kind of relationality that teaches, at a minimum, disconnection, extraction and settler innocence. Oriented differently, Indigenous relationalities are socially interconnected and premised on culturally embodied knowledges connected to other-than-human life, land and waterways. This understanding of relationality has been a core epistemological and ethical premise of the Indigenous social research paradigm that begins "with an awareness of our proper relationships with the world we inhabit, and is conducted with respect, responsibility, generosity, obligation and reciprocity" (Moreton-Robinson, 2017, p. 71). Wilson (2008) further explains that relational accountability is grounded in respect, reciprocity and responsibility.

Settler colonial relationalities do not invoke these understandings, nor an "ecological understanding of human relationality" (Donald, 2012, p. 535). In this way, settler colonial relationalities are meant to foreclose the material realization of Indigenous conceptions of relational responsibilities,

---

take up complicity to unpack how immigrant and arrivant settler subjectivity-making takes place and how "a process of becoming" contributes to ongoing settlement (Jafri, 2013, p. 81). For additional recent work on complicity and implication, see Rothberg (2019) and Shotwell (2016).
[7] Here it is helpful to note the distinction we are making between *relationality*, which, in this paper, references distinctive ways of being in relationship (e.g., settler colonial relationalities and Indigenous relationalities), from *relational* which references an analytic orientation to understanding power, processes and structures that decenters individuals *qua* individuals, and points instead to co-implication.

conceptions that could transform Indigenous-settler relationships in meaningful, liberatory ways. Analytically then, we understand settler complicity as "always enmeshed in complex social relations and influenced – though not fully determined – by one's location within those relations" (Mihai, 2019, p. 506). Moreover, attuned to the complexities of power, we also consider the intra- and inter-dynamics of domination in relationships among Indigenous, Black and other people of colour (Dhamoon, 2021). Dhamoon (2021) describes this as relational Othering: "the interactive processes of re/making, re/organizing, and managing subjugating formations of difference… [operating] not only in contexts of dominance but in relation to one another as well" (p. 874). This invites a focus on systems of white supremacy, but also looks to how "nonwhites become sutured, even necessary, in racist and colonizing hegemonies" (Dhamoon, 2021, p. 877).

These complex settler colonial relationalities are manifest in our interviews. For instance, a non-binary participant of colour in business development reflected on their implication in a work experience that did not feel ethical or just, and that had punitive consequences for an Indigenous business:

> I did something, but it's like the safety of behaviors that I function in… I'm only willing to push this far because this is what I'm comfortable with... I am implicated in this, 100% implicated... if I'm in a place where I'm still mentally thinking about what I can do and what I can't do, I'm mostly not gonna say anything… *I guess the rights of Indigenous people, in terms of self-determination, access to their culture, identity, shouldn't be dependent on... a settler's emotional process.* They shouldn't have to trigger my emotions for me to say this is something that I should [do]. (Interview #6)

This participant's words are contextualized in the bureaucracy which they, and to differing extents other participants, describe as a space where one's identity, humanity, and emotions are to be "checked at the door." This is especially the case for Indigenous people, Black people, and people of colour. In their interviews, this participant named how the racialized, gendered and classed entanglements of immigration and settlement shape their position, access, safety, and experience of racism in the whiteness of the public sector, and what this means for their resistance to decision-making that negatively impacts Indigenous people. They identify settler affective processes we are witnessing and shed light on the emotional and cognitive distancing we encounter with some participants from colonial violence and their authority to act in their roles. This participant's intervention links back to our assertions about settler-centric privilege frameworks, which rely on appeals to settler affectability as the basis for change.

Participants seem to buttress the complexities of Jafri's analysis of the logics of entitlement and certainty for white settlers, and desire and precarity for people of colour. Bringing forward how racialized participants can become adjacent to white settlerhood, participants also illuminate logics of

settler colonial relationality that are entrenched in the way of doing work and relationships in the public sector. The critical insight here is the coherence across provinces, sectors and roles that we can map from participant articulations. Strong themes of settler colonial common sense and relationality include: hierarchical, siloed working environments and relationships; tightly controlled and "sanitized" communications;[8] the anticipation of resistance, hence the self-policing of one's work from being "too" disruptive; pressures of leadership-imposed timelines and political mandates; paternalistic relationships in front-line work; extractive engagement and intentional absences of full consultation with Indigenous people; and a broader commitment to protect government from "risk."

Many participants spoke, for example, about the temporalities of extractive and transactional bureaucratic relationships. These relationships can deprioritize change as illustrated in statements made by a white woman in child welfare/children's services, and by a woman of colour in education:

> *It's presumed common sense that we can just take, take, take info and – as opposed to flip it.* What info do you want to share? Or... what can we give in return?... So it's not even a relationship-building exercise, it's an information gathering exercise, not a people-centric process. *So common sense is missing people and humanity at the center of our processes.* (Interview #2)

> Because we are the funders and working with Indigenous stakeholders, there is that power dynamic... I get the sense that it's not a priority to sort of repair the relationships with Indigenous folks. Especially with my department, people are really bogged down by work with the daily grind, and there's not many opportunities to think about things that are really higher level in terms of reconciliation and addressing problematic structures like racism and paternalism. (Interview #7)

These articulations demonstrate how the bureaucracy is grounded in temporalities in which there is never "enough" time to consult with Indigenous people, to build relationships, or to think beyond the immediacy of meso-level demands. Participants describe how their work is shaped by multiple temporal pulls – where change is deferred, work is tied to electoral cycles and mandate letters, but also where everything must be done "right now." In this, participants reveal how settler colonial temporalities do not simply exist but are deployed through public sector work and workers.

Across provinces, sectors and roles, participants also describe how they are expected to come into this work. As opposed to mutuality and interrelatedness, themes of alienation, silos, abstraction, extraction and dissonance come forward clearly in participant narratives, especially around the ethics of "good intentions" and "the public good." These discourses speak

---

[8] For example, silencing terms like colonialism, racism, or violence in clinical communications.

to the role benevolence has in masking individual and institutional complicities.[9]

> Everything that we do in the public service is... grounded by good intentions... it rarely happens that there is good impact to the extent that it was intended. Like there might be marginal impact at most, like good impact at most, but *I think a lot of good intentions are actually harmful.* I always think about the residential schools policy – the government probably had, from their perspective, good intentions, but the impact was – it's still felt to this day, and it's very negative. I still think about [it], especially in working in education. (Interview #7; a woman of colour in education)

> It's a common understanding that whatever the public service decides is for the public good... there's a general acceptance of 'this is just the way it is' right? *And that a public servant is here to provide our best in a way that's palatable for whiteness as an institution.* We're such big institutions, so what's decided as good policy must be good policy – how could it be that a ministry or department of 500 people is doing something wrong? (Interview #6; a non-binary person of colour in business development)

The coherence of these articulations of settler colonial relationality points to the importance of examining "the *function* of these convergences, divergences, and multidirectionality for modalities of governance" (Dhamoon, 2021, p. 877; emphasis in original). A shift to complicity invites interrogation (and interruption) in ways that are distinct from privilege frameworks. As Jafri (2012) writes, shifting to complicity can turn to the strategies that produce relational hierarchies and authorize settlers' governance and sense of entitlement to act upon others.

Complicity and Bureaucracy

Turning to complicity is particularly salient in a bureaucratic context that positions itself as apolitical. Mihai (2019) describes this as "routinised, often unreflective, patterns of complicity or series of complicitous acts in temporally stable, structural violence" (p. 506). A non-binary participant of colour in business development names this bluntly: "the public service and

---

[9] In our interviews the gendering of "good intentions" and benevolence, and the role of white women as exalted national subjects is a strong theme. Particularly as we interview a range of white women at various stages of their careers, how white women have found their authority to act within the state is a prominent theme that speaks to a distinct form of gendered and racialized relationality cultivated in this public sector work. This echoes back to a long lineage of white women's particularized emplacement and complicities in settling and securing the state through the "helping" professions and within the home and community (Allen, in press). Also see LeFrançois' (2013) discussion of the intersection of white identity and "benevolent" institutions in constituting the "good" social worker, all the whole reconstituting "the social relation of dominance and subordination with racialized and colonized others" (p. 116).

government in general... is extremely violent, right?... the basis of the crown... is... rooted in colonial violence, right?" (Interview #6). They go on to expand the conception of what counts as violence, describing systemic neglect and its implications for "access to shelter, food, healthcare, well-being and identity" as a form of "state sanctioned violence."

In this context, the aforementioned sense of dissonance gains meaning, particularly given how participants describe the public sector as guarding against "risk":

> I've looked very carefully at the high level... documents that are supposed to be guiding government operations. There's UNDRIP. There's the TRC report... then the missing and murdered Indigenous women report [and] the new report on health care… *they're about sovereignty, they're about self-determination. The government reads those and interprets them through an assimilationist lens that they call reconciliation*... And then a layer beneath that is actually how policies work and what they look like in the community... it just gets watered down at every step. (Interview #8; a white man in health)

> There's always been a lot of fear... *there's a risk averse thing that you're going to make a bad decision, it's going to end up in the news and somebody is going to get fired*… to be able to operate outside the bureaucracy, you need to have a sense of safety... emotional safety, physical safety, psychological safety, career safety, to take risks and do things differently. (Interview #9; a white woman in child welfare/children's services)

Participants illuminate a fundamental tension with respect to who they "serve." Speaking about settler colonial common sense, and what it means to work as a bureaucrat, a white woman in child welfare/children's services stated that "*as a representative of government, you will not do harm to government*" (Interview #2). Another white woman in child welfare/children's services reflected, "I learned very quickly that... *we needed to in some weird way protect the government from itself*" (Interview #9). Complicity, then, lends a critical lens, allowing for "recognition of the historical, social and political conditions that render some sufferings and injustices permissible and habitual, or part of everyday repertoire and social interaction" (Zembylas, 2020, p. 323). Put differently, it is striking that harm to the state is clearly centered as requiring the vigilance of non-Indigenous public sector workers.

Here, we recognize that in bureaucratic contexts "collaborators, beneficiaries of violence and bystanders often have mixed motives for action, that long-term, indifferent collective passivity frequently elides reflexive intent, and that the effects of complicity are often ambitious and difficult to isolate" (Mihai, 2019, p. 507). Pushing further, participants reflect on what it means to be a public sector worker who is implicated in the settler colonial state:

I'm choosing to make some pretty huge ethical compromises to live this lifestyle that I lead. *I don't delude myself into thinking that I'm making a positive difference in the world. I work for a colonial capitalist government, that's hell bent on genocide…* that's a compromise that I have to find ways to live with right now. It's a temporary compromise... But that's kind of the sacrifice I needed to make to live the lifestyle I do. (Interview #8; a white man in health)

I know that I'm very privileged to be in this position. This position provides me with all the benefits, like financial stability… I already see myself as complicit because I work for the state. I already don't think that we should have states, I don't think that people should have power over other people... hopefully, I'm helping people with my policy. *But I am part of the state, I am complicit in the system that is enacting violence on people.* (Interview #5; a woman of colour in health)

Complicity is neither incidental, nor immaterial. Lethabo King (2013) writes of the materiality of settler colonialism in terms of settler commodification, conquering, and owning of land, but also of a cognitive ordering of the "mind of the Settler, shaping and allowing the settler to survey land, knowledge, bodies – and art – for potential yield as commodities" (as cited in Martineau & Ritskes, 2014, p. vi). This securing of settler colonial order is inextricably linked to presumptions that the authority, legitimacy and jurisdiction of the public sector are absolute. In variable ways, many participants describe their discretion to act within these assertions of settler jurisdiction:

At the end of the day, I'm an entry-level administrator in a giant public service. And there's only so much that I can do... There are things that I can do as an individual in terms of learning systems of colonialism and trying to challenge that part of my being, there are things that I can do in my team… then again, I'm the most junior member of our team. So there's a power dynamic there in terms of how much I can get away with pushing back and challenging. (Interview #10; a white male in health)

It's very recommended that we need to consult with Indigenous people, but even then, today, my friend was like, 'oh my god, I was just thinking about how we didn't consult with Indigenous people on this framework.' I know that he holds a lot of the same beliefs as we do, and he tried to push for it in his own work. But it just didn't happen for whatever reason – *you can still get away with not doing it. If we exist in Indigenous sovereignty, it would be like of course you have to do it.* (Interview #5; a woman of colour in health)

I'm consulting, but my duty is to seek consent not to get it. So right from the beginning, I know that I have all the power and the rights to make this decision. And I will take input from any group. And even if it's no, it's still my decision to make. (Interview #11; a white man in natural resources)

These conversations on complicity have demonstrated how the investments of settlers are protected, and how this delimits imagining a future outside of

settler colonial governance. Still, we consider what complicity may open up imaginatively, particularly as we reflect on one participant's utterances:

> I see a responsibility to do the best that I can from the position I'm in. I think it's working towards ensuring that your position is no longer needed in the future... we should be working to work ourselves out of a job to ensure that we are limiting how complicit we are... It's bigger in the public service, because it's like, how are you going to work yourself out of the state? As an individual can I actually?" (Interview \$5; a woman of colour in health)

Orienting Towards Refusals and Otherwise

Adopting a different framework or language does not unravel settler colonialism; this is not simply something that settlers can "think themselves out of" on their own. Reflecting on complicity can still activate a similar confessional process, ultimately centering and emplacing settler colonial futurities (Patel, 2021). Consequently, our focus on complicity is not meant to begin and end with transforming settler consciousness. Rather, this naming and rupturing of complicity is meant to disrupt settler colonial pedagogies and orient participants to act at this meso-level. More critically, complicity is never meant to be read outside the imperatives of decolonization, meaning that in this research and in the interview questions, complicity is not simply linked to settler agency, but framed as invoking relational accountability to Indigenous sovereignty and refusals. Put differently, our move to interrogate complicity is meant to support material practices of relational responsibility.[10]

   Thus, we end our interviews by inviting participants to imagine otherwise, and learning from Patel (2021), we similarly ground complicity by turning to Indigenous refusals. Critically, the invitation to imagine otherwise at the end of our second interview comes after extensive conversation in which we have: (a) supported participants in locating themselves and their learning within larger structures and patterns; (b) supported participants in identifying patterns (and impacts) of settler colonial common sense in which they (and we) are complicit; and (c) dislodged and disrupted the certainty of settler colonial jurisdiction to act. As an ongoing series of interview interventions meant to support participants in decentering themselves as settlers, we name both settler refusals to be in Indigenous sovereignty (Nicoll, 2004), and share Arvin's (2019, p. 228) articulation of Indigenous regenerative refusals:

---

[10] Notably, throughout most interviews, participants wanted to speak about their involvement in change. At times this serves as a pivot away from pointed questions about complicity, and in other contexts, their challenges to settler colonial common sense and relationalities *are* critically illuminative of how participants are trying to navigate the system to disrupt.

> Regenerative refusals recognize violence and pain, but not to make that the center of Indigenous identity; rather, these refusals highlight the importance of envisioning and enacting different futures that are suffused with more love, humor, connection, and freedom… Refusals allow for a blooming of desires beyond the structures of settler colonialism that pretend to be eternal and unchangeable.

Specifically, we ask participants to reflect on Indigenous refusals they have witnessed, often invoking a reinterpretation of previous encounters, and a recognition that the erasure and delegitimization of Indigenous refusals as intentional and political are critical sites of complicity. In doing so, we invite participants to contemplate how settlers can be accountable to Indigenous refusals moving forward, even when some refusals are not "for" settlers.[11] For settler participants, the invitation to imagine otherwise is meant to start from the already destabilized ground of settler authority, jurisdiction and legitimacy, from collective thinking away from individual narratives of self-improvement, and towards creating futures where we are different selves under changed relations of governance.

As Goodyear-Ka'ōpua (2019) notes, futurities are "ways that groups imagine and produce knowledge about futures, that assemble styles of thinking, practices that give content to futures, and logics" (p. 86). With this in mind, we ask participants to imagine beyond settler colonial relationalities and futurities of "containment, removal and eradication" (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2019, p. 86). Goodyear-Ka'ōpua (2019) describes Indigenous futurities as enactments of radical relationalities "that transcend settler geographies and maps, temporalities and calendars, and/or other settler measures of time and space" (p. 86). These settler colonial relationalities and scales obscure as opposed to illuminate – foreclosing horizons, as opposed to extending them. This has stood out to us when posing questions about what relationships and governance might look like outside of existing settler colonial dynamics of "power over," and in imagining sovereign Indigenous nations. For example, a white male in health responded, "I guess that's *part of the trick of colonization is such a different reality, it makes it almost unimaginable*" (Interview #8). A woman of colour in health answered that,

> It's hard to imagine what [Indigenous sovereignty] would look like beyond the state, but still living in our modern society... if we continue with an allegory of the public service, then Indigenous people are their own ministry or something, and therefore their own nation, and we have to work with them – they're not just like

---

[11] Drawing from Coulthard (2014) and Simpson (2007), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) has described several sorts of refusals that have been articulated by Indigenous scholars, including the refusal of "state recognition as an organizing platform and mechanism for dismantling the systems of colonial domination" (p. 176). Refusal also includes refusing how the state frames the issues to be organized around (Simpson, 2017), and the refusal of "divisions of colonial spatialities, networks, or constellations" (p. 197).

an optional stakeholder that we can maybe consult with and not pay. (Interview #5)

Lastly, a non-binary person of colour in business development said,

> I have always kind of thought about, 'oh, let's dismantle the system,' but I don't know if I've really visualized for myself what that looks like afterwards. *It's not that I don't have an imagination... I think maybe it's just how much we've accepted this is our reality* that I haven't really taken the time to think about what that may look like otherwise. (Interview #6)

These articulations speak to the deep ways settler colonialism can delimit imaginations, and what is perceived as already existing, possible or impossible. We note this delimitation even for people with political orientations against settler colonialism, and even for several participants who engage in anticolonial and anticapitalist organizing.

Of course, as Batliwala (2013) reminds us, deep structures are not absolute because they are contested, and subject to sabotage; this requires imagining that is relational. Drawing from Joy James and Edmund Gordon's assertions on the foundation of radical subjectivity, Martineau and Ritskes (2014) describe that the task for decolonial researchers, activists and artists is not one of rehabilitation, or of offering "amendments or edits to the current world, but to display the mutual sacrifice and relationality needed to *sabotage colonial systems of thought and power for the purpose of liberatory alternatives*" (p. ii; emphasis added). We hope to prompt participants and ourselves to get to a place that is "not simply *away from colonialism*, but *away from any standpoint where colonialism makes sense*" (Martineau & Ritskes, 2014, p. iv; emphasis added).

Conclusions: Implications of Complicity and Witnessing for Us

In this paper we have paused while immersed "in the deep" with our participants. The reflection invited here is not only of our participants' complicities, but of ours as well. Indeed, as Zembylas (2020) notes, "a critique of complicity is never free of complicities" (p. 323). Neither centering nor decentering our or our participants' privilege enables us to think through ethical engagement, or our relational accountabilities in this research. While we have been and will continue to structure this work in discussion with Indigenous contacts and colleagues within our institutions, particularly vis-a-vis local protocols and accountabilities, we also see the limits of the academe, whose logics are not oriented to the temporalities of decolonial work, much less the fundamental refusal of settler colonialism. Yet, while the academe values settler colonial temporalities and certainty – of methodology, findings and impact – the framework of settler colonial

socialization implores a methodological opening that resists this settler hubris. Guided by Indigenous colleagues and educators who have made clear that settler decolonization work is for settlers to take responsibility for, as settlers, we still question, how are we being accountable and not reproducing extractive relationalities with Indigenous participants, colleagues, and researchers throughout this process?

At this time, our intentions with the broader findings – to locate possibilities of antiracist learning and decolonial change, and bolster support for the development of policies and practices that challenge settler colonialism and foreground Indigenous people's sovereignty – situate us in the paradoxical tensions of this work. Are we looking for change within the existing structures? Are we asking participants to make everyday disruptions and to create greater equity in violent institutions while also asking them and ourselves to imagine and act beyond them? We linger in this paradoxical space of asking participants and ourselves to do differently in institutions set up to harm, while being accountable to Indigenous refusals and honouring an orientation of otherwise.

Theories of change are implicit in all social science research, shaping "the directions a project takes, how it begins and where it ends, who a project is responsible to, speaking to, and speaking for… how we think things are known, what counts as evidence, and what argumentation style will convince those we want to convince" (Tuck, 2018, p. 157). We hold that settler colonial socialization is never wholly determinative, given that settler colonial common sense and pedagogies are characterized by moments of learning, reproduction, and complicity, as well as possible contestation and disruption. Heeding the call to move "beyond telling a simple story about complicity" (Saranillio, 2013, p. 36), we aim to unpack settler colonialism as pedagogies of dominance and illuminate pedagogies of relationality grounded in material practices of relational responsibility that are and can be otherwise.

Acknowledgements

References

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional Life*. Duke University Press.

Allan, B., & Smylie, J. (2015). *First Peoples, second class treatment: The role of racism in the health and well-being of Indigenous people in Canada.* Wellesley Institute. http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Report-First-Peoples-Second-Class-Treatment-Final.pdf

Allen, W. S. (2020). Learning to become white girls in a settler colonial context: Exploring the racial socialization of white Euro-Canadian women. *Journal of Settler Colonial Studies*, *10*(3), 378-402.

Allen, W. S. (in press). Tracing the harmful patterns of white womanhood. In A. Gebhard, S. McLean & V. St. Denis (Eds.), *White benevolence: Racism and colonial violence in the helping professions*. Fernwood Press.

Allen, W. S., & Nath, N. (2019, Nov. 14). *In the deep: The potential of disruptive conversations on settler colonial socialization* [Conference session]. National Women's Studies Association Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA, United States.

Applebaum, B. (2008). White privilege/white complicity: Connecting 'benefiting from' to 'contributing to'. *Philosophy of Education Archive*, 292-300.

Arvin, M. R. (2019). *Possessing Polynesians: The science of settler-colonial whiteness in Hawai'i and Oceania*. Duke University Press.

Barreiro, J., Vroegindeweij, M., Forte, M., & Zymbylas, M. (2020). Posthumanism, education and decolonization: A conversation with Michalinos Zymbylas. *Matter: Journal of New Materialist Research, 1*(2), 123-153.

Batliwala, S. (2013). *Engaging with empowerment*. Women Unlimited Press.

Battiste, M., Bell, L., & Findlay, L. M. (2002). Decolonizing education in Canadian universities: An interdisciplinary, international, indigenous research project. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, *26*(2), 82-95.

Blackstock, C., Bamblett, M., & Black, C. (2020). Indigenous ontology, international law and the application of the convention to the over-representation of indigenous children in out of home care in Canada and Australia. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 110*(1), 104587. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu. 2020.104587

Cabrera, N. L. (2017). White immunity: Working through some of the pedagogical pitfalls of 'privilege'. *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity*, *3*(1), 78-90.

Charania, G. R. (2015). *Fighting feelings: Racial violence in everyday Life*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

Coulthard, G. S. (2014). *Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition.* University of Minnesota Press.

Crosby, A., & Monaghan, J. (2012). Settler governmentality in Canada and the Algonquins of Barriere Lake. *Security Dialogue*, *43*(5), 421-438.

de Costa, R., & Clark, T. (2016). On the responsibility to engage: Non-indigenous peoples in settler states. *Settler Colonial Studies*, *6*(3), 191-208.

Dhamoon, R. K. (2021). Relational othering: Critiquing dominance, critiquing the margins. *Politics, Groups, and Identities, 9*(5), 873-892. doi:10.1090/21565503.209.1691023.

Donald, D. (2012). Forts, curriculum, and ethical relationality. In N. Ng-A-Fook & J. Rottman (Eds.), *Reconsidering Canadian curriculum studies* (pp. 39-46). Palgrave Macmillan.

Flynn Jr., J. E. (2015). White fatigue: Naming the challenge in moving from an individual to a systemic understanding of racism. *Multicultural Perspectives, 17*(3), 115-124.

Gaztambide-Fernández, R. A. (2012). Decolonization and the pedagogy of solidarity. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 1*(1), 41-67.

Goodyear-Ka'ọpua, N. (2019). Indigenous oceanic futures: Challenging settler colonialisms and militarization. In L. Tuhiwai Smith, E. Tuck & K. W. Yang (Eds.), *Indigenous and decolonizing studies in education* (pp. 82-102). Routledge.

Gouvernement du Québec. (2019). *Public inquiry commission on relations between indigenous peoples and certain public services in Québec: listening, reconciliation and progress. Final report*. https://www.cerp.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/Fichiers_clients/Rapport/Final_report.pdf

Harding, L. (2018). *What's the harm? examining the stereotyping of indigenous peoples In health systems* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Simon Fraser University.

Hiller, C. (2017). Tracing the spirals of unsettlement: Euro-Canadian narratives of coming to grips with Indigenous sovereignty, title, and rights. *Settler Colonial Studies, 7*(4), 415-440.

Jafri, B. (2012). Privilege vs. complicity: People of colour and settler colonialism. *Equity Matters, 21*, 73-86

Jafri, B. (2013). Desire, settler colonialism and the racialized cowboy. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 37*(2), 73-86.

Kauanui, J. K. (2016). 'A structure, not an event': Settler colonialism and enduring indigeneity. *Lateral: Journal of the Cultural Studies Association, 5*(1). http://csalateral.org/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-settler-colonialism-enduring-indigeneity-kauanui/

King, T. (2013). In the clearing: Black female bodies, space and settler colonial landscapes [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Maryland, .

Lafontaine, A. (2018). Indigenous health disparities: A challenge and an opportunity. *Canadian Journal of Surgery*, *61*(5), 300-301.

LeFrançois, B. A. (2013). The psychiatrization of our children, or, an autoethnographic narrative of perpetuating First Nations genocide through 'benevolent' institutions. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 2*(1), 108-123.

Leifso, J. (2020). *Shapeshifting: political rationalities, lean, and the transforming landscapes of Canadian public bureaucracies* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Alberta.

Lensmire, T., McManimon, S., Dockter, J., Lee-Nichols, M., Casey, Z., Lensmire, A., & Davis, B. (2013). McIntosh as synecdoche: How teacher education's focus on white privilege undermines antiracism. *Harvard Educational Review, 83*(3), 410-431.

Leonardo, Z. (2004). The color of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of 'white privilege'. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *36*(2), 137-152.

Levine-Rasky, C. (2000). Framing whiteness: Working through the tensions in introducing whiteness to educators. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 3*(3), 271-292.

Liu, H. (2020). *Redeeming leadership: an anti-racist feminist intervention*. Bristol University Press.

Lockard, C. A. (2016). Unhappy confessions: The temptation of admitting to white privilege. *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly, 2*(2). doi:10.5206/fpq/2016.2.2

Mackey, E. (2016). *Unsettled expectations: Uncertainty, land and settler decolonization*. Fernwood Press.

Margolin, L. (2015). Unpacking the invisible knapsack: The invention of white privilege pedagogy. *Cogent Social Sciences, 1*(1), 1-9.

Martineau, J., & Ritskes, E. (2014). Fugitive indigeneity: Reclaiming the terrain of decolonial struggle through Indigenous art. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 3*(1), i-xii.

Matsunaga, J. (2021). The red tape of reparations: settler governmentalities of truth telling and compensation for Indian residential schools. *Settler Colonial Studies*, *11*(1), 21-41.

McIntosh, P. (1989). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and Freedom, 49*, 10-12.

Mihai, M. (2019). Understanding complicity: Memory, hope and the imagination. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy, 22*(5), 504-522.

Monaghan, J. (2013). Settler governmentality and racializing surveillance in Canada's north-west. *Canadian Journal of Sociology, 38*(4), 487-508.

Moreton-Robinson, A. M. (2017). Relationality: A key presupposition of an Indigenous social research paradigm. In C. Andersen & J. M. O'Brien (Eds.), *Sources and methods in Indigenous studies* (pp. 69-77). Routledge.

Neu, D. E., & Therrien, R. (2003). *Accounting for genocide: Canada's bureaucratic assault on Aboriginal people*. Zed Books.

Nicoll, F. (2004). Reconciliation in and out of perspective: White knowing, seeing, curating and being at home in and against Indigenous sovereignty. In A. Moreton-Robinson (Ed.),

Whitening race: Essays in social and cultural criticism (pp. 17-31). Aboriginal Studies Press.

NIMMIWG (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls). (2019). *Reclaiming power and place: Executive summary of the final report.* https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Executive_Summary.pdf

Okolie, A. C. (2005). Chapter twelve: Toward an anti-racist research framework: The case for interventive in-depth interviewing. *Counterpoints, 252*, 241-267.

Patel, S. (2021). Talking complicity, breathing coloniality: Interrogating settler-centric pedagogy of teaching about white settler colonialism. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy,* 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2020.1871450

Patel, S., Moussa, G., & Upadhyay, N. (2015). Complicities, connections, & struggles: critical transnational feminist analysis of settler colonialism. *Feral feminisms, 4*(Summer), 5-19.

Probyn-Rapsey, F. (2007). Complicity, critique and methodology. *ARIEL, 38* (2-3), 65-82.

Regan, P. (2010). *Unsettling the settler within: Indian residential schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada.* UBC Press.

Rhoad, M. (2013). *Those who take us away: Abusive policing and failures in protection of Indigenous women and girls in Northern British Columbia, Canada.* Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/canada0213webwcover_0.pdf

Richardson, L. (2021, October 5). *Would Joyce Echaquan still be alive if she were white? Quebec coroner says 'I think so'.* APTN News. https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/would-joyce-echaquan-still-be-alive-if-she-were-white-quebec-coroner-says-i-think-so/

Rifkin, M. (2013). Settler common sense. *Settler Colonial Studies, 3*(3-4), 322-340. doi:10.1080/2201473X .2013.810702

Rifkin, M. (2014). *Settler common sense: Queerness and everyday colonialism in the American Renaissance*. University of Minnesota Press.

Rose, D. B. (1996). Land rights and deep colonising: The erasure of women. *Aboriginal Law Bulletin, 3*(85), 6-13.

Rothberg, M. (2019). *The implicated subject: Beyond victims and perpetrators.* Stanford University Press.

Saranillio, D. I. (2013). Why Asian settler colonialism matters: A thought piece on critiques, debates, and Indigenous difference. *Settler Colonial Studies, 3*(3-4), 280-294.

Shotwell, A. (2016). *Against purity: Living ethically in compromised times.* University of Minnesota Press.

Simpson, A. (2007). On ethnographic refusal: Indigeneity, 'voice' and colonial citizenship. *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue, 9*, 64-80.

Simpson, L. B. (2017). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance.* University of Minnesota Press. https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctt1pwt77c

TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada). (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the truth and reconciliation commission of Canada.* http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/ Findings/ Exec_ Summary_2015_ 05_31_web_ o.pdf.

Tuck, E. (2015). Foreword. In L. Patel (Ed.), *Decolonizing educational research: From ownership to answerability* (pp. xii-xv). Routledge.

Tuck, E. (2018). Biting the university that feeds us. In M. Spooner & J. McNinch (Eds.), *Dissident knowledge in higher education* (pp. 149-167). University of Regina Press.

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 1*(1), 1-40.

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2016). What justice wants. *Critical Ethic Studies, 2*(2), 1-15.

Turpel-Lafond, M. E., & Johnson, H. (2021). In plain sight: Addressing indigenous-specific racism and discrimination in BC health care. *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly, 209*, 7-17.

Veracini, L. (2011). Isopolitics, deep colonizing, settler colonialism. *Interventions, 13*(2), 171-189.

Vimalassery, M., Pegues, J. H., & Goldstein, A. (2016). Introduction: On colonial unknowing. *Theory & Event, 19*(4). https://muse.jhu.edu/article/633283

Vimalassery, M., Pegues, J. H., & Goldstein, A. (2017). Colonial unknowing and relations of study. *Theory & Event, 20*(4), 1042-1054.

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing.

Wolfe, P. (2006). Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native. *Journal of Genocide Research, 8*(4), 387-409.

Yellowhead Institute. (2019). *Land back: A Yellowhead Institute Red Paper*. https://redpaper.yellowheadinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/red-paper-report-final.pdf

Zembylas, M. (2020). Re-conceptualizing complicity in the social justice classroom: affect, politics and anti-complicity pedagogy. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 28*(2), 317-331.