

# WHAT CAN "SETTLER OF COLOUR" TEACH US?

Presenting Shaista Patel and Nisha Nath's article "What Can 'Settler of Colour' Teach Us" in the book, *White Benevolence: Racism and Colonial Violence in the Helping Professions*.

In 2000, Haunani-Kay Trask, a Kanaka Maoli scholar, posited that Asians are "settlers of colour" because they uphold ongoing colonial violence and Indigenous dispossession in Hawaii. Nash and Patel argue that locating non-Black people of colour within settler colonialism disrupts the binary of Indigenous People and white settlers. Holding settlers of colour accountable to Indigenous Peoples and Black people is essential to decolonization.

## KEY TERMINOLOGY:

**Settler Colonialism:** uses a logic of elimination to displace and erase Indigenous Peoples while emplacing settlers and foregrounding settler knowledges/insitutions of power.

**Settler of Colour:** describes non-Black settlers of colour within settler colonialism, refers to Asian people as settlers, and emphasizes settler of colours' accountability to Black people and Indigenous Peoples.

- People who have been enslaved/fled war zones are not settlers of colour because they've arrived in settler colonial nations due to violence & dehumanization caused by white supremacy. Considering refugees or Black people to be settlers distracts from understanding settlerhood as upholding colonial power.

**Racialized Settlerhood:** does not centre white (or non-white) settlers' relationship to the land, but focuses on the ongoing "violence of conquest and dispossession of Indigenous Peoples".

**Decolonization:** must challenge anti-Muslimness, anti-Blackness, casteism, and multiple colonialisms.

- Decolonization cannot happen without shaking the roots of imperialism, war, and ongoing invasions by white settler states which bring "racialized people to other occupied territories".
- Casteism holds clear historical and contemporary connections to Hindu nationalism, white supremacy, and multiple colonialisms, yet it is not understood as a vertical system of hierarchy despite involving 2,500+ years of dehumanization. Casteism challenges how we think about race and power by complicating how white supremacy is upheld by Asian bodies. Caste hierarchies disrupt notions of shared oppressions among settlers of colour thereby reinforcing the importance of expanding our understandings of white supremacy without letting white people "off the hook".

**Whiteness:** a revolving category wherein different people benefitted from white privilege at different points in history. Whiteness a) demands a centering of white settlers and b) makes demands on and tries to limit relationships between Black, Indigenous, and other People of Colour (BIPOC).

**White Supremacy:** is a structural ideology that strategically condones Indigenous dispossession, anti-Black violence, anti-Muslim racism, casteism, xenophobia, and other insidious acts of violence.

## IDENTITY DISTINCTIONS WITHIN SETTLERS

- Many racialized settlers arrived in Canada and the USA because of "multiple forms of dispossession" such as "religious persecution, caste-based violence, indentureship, global interconnections of racial capitalism, and invasion by western countries". Instead of conflating all settlers as the same, Patel and Nath argue that emphasis must be placed on white supremacy and how settlers uphold racist colonial violence.
- Racialized settlerhood uncompromisingly focuses on questions of ethics, complicity, and settler of colours' accountability to Indigenous Peoples and Black people. Decentering white settlers and re-centering the stories of settlers of colour is essential to cultivating decolonial accountabilities within white supremacist insitutions (e.g. universities).



## WHITENESS IN ACADEMIA

- In universities, whiteness “has structural implications for BIPOC” which leads to structural violence:
  - Through biased hiring practices, university administrators continually privilege white hires and put white people in positions of governance.
  - Institutionalized approaches to equity, diversity, and inclusion don't address systemic racism or challenge racially conferred institutional power.

### Whiteness makes BIPOC scholars feel sick.

- Political science as a discipline tells a story of “progress” and asserts deeply colonial origin stories of which naturalize Canadian sovereignty over Indigenous lands, reaffirms Canadian governance, and frame Canadian laws as absolute while erasing Indigenous sovereignty and the multitude of Indigenous legal/political orders within “Canada”.

## “SETTLERS OF COLOUR” WITHIN UNIVERSITIES



- Settler colonial whiteness is not solely about individuals but must consider structural locations like universities. Settlers of colour can continuously challenge and take responsibility for countering the genealogies of whiteness which continue to demand oppression within universities.
- Whiteness not only lives in white bodies but is also upheld by settlers of colour maintaining white supremacy and strategically condoning Indigenous dispossession, anti-Black violence, anti-Muslim racism, casteism, xenophobia, etc.
- Specifically for South Asian people, anti-Muslimness, and casteism are key ways that whiteness and settler colonialism are maintained.
- A conversation that is frequently disciplined within academia is how “whiteness is performed and shored up by non-Black racialized people”.
  - Whiteness functions to foreclose settlers of colour from discussing race, settler colonialism, and decolonization through academic journals' gatekeeping publications. When deviating from mainstream conceptions of colonialism/decolonization, settlers of colour risk penalization, harm, or career stagnation.

## CONNECTING SETTLERS OF COLOUR TO DECOLONIZATION



Patel and Nath call for settlers of colour to be undisciplined in academia and ask the important questions “we have been disciplined into never asking”.

- An ethic of being undisciplined means refusing to work/teach/learn within the constraints of colonial paradigms and instead examining the complexities, tensions, and power dynamics inherent to our relationships. Being undisciplined betrays the organizing logic of whiteness and undermines the power of white supremacy.
- Through settlers of colour telling stories which challenge white supremacy, narratives which have the power to save lives are promoted.
  - e.g. countering stories which reproduce white supremacist violence and are anti-Indigenous such as challenging anti-Muslimness and casteism.
- By settlers of colour being accountable to stories, counter-stories are furthered, held, taught, and listened to by other settlers of colour thereby furthering decolonization. By disrupting the binary of white settler/Indigenous Peoples, settlers of colour emphasize how decolonization cannot happen without challenging the roots of imperialism, war, and ongoing violence by white settler states.

## References

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