

# Understanding Settler Colonialism: The Importance of Deconstructing the Settler and What to do with this Knowledge

Unless cited otherwise, all material is drawn from Georgia Sitara's lectures on "Knowledge, Power, Race and the Land" and Laura Hurwitz & Shawn Bourque's article, "Settler Colonialism Primer"

## **'Canada' is a settler colonial society:**

'Canada' = this (stolen) land settlers now call home was only named 'Canada' on September 1, 1864... just a few hundred years ago

**Settler Colonialism** is a system that relies on stealing land and literally replacing indigenous peoples with settlers as a way to gain power

- **Colonialism is not a thing of the past:** as long as settlers live on stolen indigenous land, settler colonialism exists today

The continued use of this system depends on processes of Racialization

**Racialization** is a social process that assigns people/groups imaginary "meanings" (or labels) within socially constructed categories of 'race'<sup>1</sup>

- **In a North American context,** settlers name and define Indigenous people (as well as other racialized groups) to assure power and the future of settler society
- **This means** racializing groups to CONTINUE schemes of exploitation and domination as well as the stealing of land and resources

**Key point:** 'Race' is socially constructed; not biological, scientific or genetic<sup>2</sup>

*Example from Settler Colonialism Primer: "Indians are drunk and Violent":*

- This racialization of Indigenous peoples promotes the colonial myth that "*Natives are savages*" and "*Indians are degenerating/disappearing*".
- This act of racialization empowers settler society by scapegoating Indigenous people to justify settler's stealing and occupation of land.

The system of settler colonialism is left unquestioned and white supremacy is normalized

*Example from Settler Colonialism Primer: "We are all colonized":*

- This racialized term glosses over **distinct Indigenous rights and claims to land** while disregarding the violent history of colonization

It lacks recognition of the continuing of unequal power dynamics in settler society

## **What is a Settler:**

- Scholars Laura Hurwitz & Shawn Bourque define settlers as "**anyone who is not Indigenous, living in a settler colonial situation**"
- Not every settler is privileged from settler colonialism; it is largely dependent on 'race' and class

## **Settler privilege is embedded in white supremacy:**

Settler cultures embrace the idea that 'white' people are superior to racialized groups:

- This is evident in the fact that despite Canadian history being founded in genocide and invasion:
  - Ideas of white purity, innocence and superiority collectively persist
  - Ideas that settlers are entitled to and deserve (stolen) land persist
- When confronted with settler colonialism, there are a number of series of 'moves to innocence' which is what settlers rely on to alleviate guilt and complicity, and to assure settler futurity

<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall: *Race the Floating Signifier*. Directed by Joanna Hughes, Spencer Make, & Sut Jhally. 1997; (Media Education Foundation, 2009). <https://uvic.kanopy.com/prodkanuct/stuart-hall-race-floating-signifier>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

**For example: Doing my best as an individual: a ‘good person’ doing the ‘best they can’**

- This allows settlers to remain complicit in the system; provides recognition of privileged status but taking no action
- Taking responsibility must include working toward collective change to disrupt settler colonialism

**“It is all our responsibilities as settlers, especially those of us who descended from European colonizers, to challenge the systems of domination from which we benefit”<sup>3</sup>**

### **Confronting your Settler identity: Ally-ship**

- **Learn about and process your settler identity:** research!!
  - This process *is supposed to be uncomfortable and unsettling*
  - Researching settler privilege reinforces the fact that settlers live on stolen land & settlers must work together to call for that land back to indigenous peoples
- **Actively look to unsettle and disrupt** forms of oppression in settler society even if it threatens the status quo or offends one’s comfort and security
  - Indigenous liberation depends on commitment to this ‘radical’ political struggle
- **Support and mobilize** to create systems that teach about accountability and responsibility
- **Re-center Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and voices** on topics about ‘Canada’
  - Listen to and support Indigenous peoples’ struggles – it was never our time to speak on behalf of indigenous people
- **Actively support Indigenous resurgence:** Cultural revitalisation
  - Supporting the restoration and birthing cultural practices, values, beliefs and knowledges that contribute to the empowerment and benefit of Indigenous peoples
- **Account for Indigenous strength and sovereignty**
- Don’t revictimize indigenous peoples: **Honour Indigenous dignity and strength** in the past and present alike

### **Decolonization: lets simplify multiple points of view**

- A complete dismantling our settler colonialism system in favour of liberating ‘colonized peoples’
- Return stolen land back to Indigenous peoples

### **Key conclusions:**

- **Fighting for Indigenous liberation is life-long commitment to discomfort.**
- **This discomfort is important and necessary in fostering collective action to dismantle racism in settler colonial states.**

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<sup>3</sup> Quote from Unsettling Minnesota Source Book used by Laura Hurwitz and Shawn Bourque in, “Settler Colonialism Primer.”  
<https://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/2014/06/06/settler-colonialism-primer/>