

AMY FUNG:

"IS SETTLER COLONIALISM JUST ANOTHER STUDY OF WHITENESS?"

SNAPSHOT

Amy Fung's work distilled in this factsheet argues two things: that **settler colonial studies is another study of whiteness**, and that **the settler identity should not be constrained to a racial definition**. The reader will learn about the intricacies of a settler identity, through analyzing the complex historical relations of minoritized groups and white colonizers on stolen Indigenous land.

SETTLER COLONIAL STUDIES

- Fung critiques settler colonial studies as another way to **center whiteness**
 - Settler colonial studies claims to analyze the political, social, economic, and cultural ramifications of colonialism
- The theorization of settler colonialism **did not begin with white male settler scholars, but instead with Indigenous women** who foregrounded the premise of settler colonialism in dehumanizing acts of genocidal violence
 - Feminist scholars Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill explain that "[t]he experiences and intellectual contributions of Indigenous women **are not on the margins; we have been an invisible presence in the center**, hidden by the gendered logics of settler colonialism for over 500 years"
- White male scholars have **shifted the focus of settler colonial studies away from violence and onto the history, feelings, and entitlements of white settlers** using European methodologies and philosophical frameworks
 - The shift from discussing colonial violence **erases** Indigenous knowledge, politics, and experiences of colonization
- Fung uses the academic journal *Settler Colonial Studies* as an example
 - Settler Colonial Studies* was founded in 2011 by two male European scholars
 - Within two years of being published, the journal received unprecedented institutional support from Taylor and Francis, one of the largest publishing houses of its kind
- Some Indigenous journals have struggled to receive institutional support and funding for years, and this journal on settler colonialism was quickly supported
- The unspoken reality of institutional support for settler colonial studies (and lack thereof for Indigenous studies) points it out as **a study of whiteness**
- "If we continue to analyze power relations from the position of the dominant group, our analysis of power will always be limited"**

DEFINITION: Minoritized

Throughout this factsheet I use the language of minoritized instead of minority. Minority suggests that groups' power in society is reflected by population size, while **minoritized suggests an active social process in which some groups are marginalized so that other groups may be centred**

"Feminists since 1492"

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence slogan

COMPLICATING THE SETTLER IDENTITY

Breaking it down

- Fung argues that complicity with **settler colonialism is not solely demarcated by race**
- While recognizing that not everyone came to Turtle Island under free will, Fung uses the designation of 'settler' as **anyone who occupies and benefits from the theft of Indigenous land**
 - meaning that non-white groups qualify as settlers
- The colonization of Turtle Island was established using a social hierarchy that follows ethnographic logic of colour gradation, with whiteness as the apex
 - Whiteness controls and dominates** who is permitted to settle on dispossessed Indigenous territories, yet **does not preclude Black and other minoritized people** from doing so

Complicating it more

- The **wealth** of white settler nations and **success** of colonization would **not have been possible without the fundamental resource of labour performed by minoritized groups**
- Minoritized people had to find a way to survive in a society where non-white people were never imagined to stay or belong
 - Non-white groups battle a **"perpetual foreignness,"** regardless of how long those minoritized groups have been in white settler states
- To **assimilate** and **survive** in a white settler nation, one **must support the nation's land theft and extraction-based capitalism**, becoming complicit in colonialism and settling

'SETTLER' AS AN ECONOMIC IDENTITY

- Fung identifies 'settler' as an **economic identity** rather than a solely race-based one
- Settler colonialism is an ongoing political and economic reality that may **favour whiteness**, but **does not require it** to participate within perpetuating the system
- Economic foundations of settler supremacy rely on the violent **suppression of Indigenous self determination**, barring Indigenous nations from achieving sovereignty
- The boundaries on who can become a settler is thus premised on **who simultaneously supports Indigenous dispossession for extractive economies and contributes economically to the nation beyond their own exploited labour**
- The settler identity cannot be reduced by race or class alone, but requires a dynamic interpretation within a shifting lens of economic power

MOURNING AS METHODOLOGY

- **Mourning:** the reaction we have to the loss of a loved one or an abstracted ideal like a nation
- Canada’s settler nation has an emotional attachment to white settler supremacy, and settlers may **mourn the nation they *thought* existed** when they learn of the reality of colonization and the violent and racist history of the nation
- Recognizing the failures of settler colonialism **does not** translate materially into letting go of its own power
 - Apologizing or mourning by settlers doesn't redistribute power

“Emotions keep us invested in relations of power.”
Sarah Ahmed

UNBECOMING A SETTLER

- The process of unbecoming settler is to allow oneself to be **transformed by the knowledge of violence, loss, and mourning** – not to be paralyzed
 - “Settler feelings without transformative change only repeat the cycle of settler policies aggressively pursuing assimilation”
- The work to rectify these wrongs – racial violence, land and resource theft, forced assimilation – is the **responsibility of all settlers**
- Settlers should not be interested in casting blame or guilt, but rather in how they can take ethical responsibility
- Settlers should move forward as a peace seeking guest on Indigenous lands, with an **ethical standpoint** guided by Indigenous practices
- Settlers need to respect and understand that under Indigenous law and beliefs, land has its own agency, and cannot be owned, sold, or taken without consent
- Understand that **the wealth of white settler nations is predicated on stolen land and resources and on the exploited labour of minoritized groups**
- Settlers need to find a way to acknowledge and build relations with Indigenous peoples instead of “**seeking recognition through empire**”



Amy Fung

image: <https://amyfung.com/bio/>

What is an ethical standpoint?

- Ethical standpoint refers to making decisions based on moral principles and values
- An ethical standpoint asserted by Indigenous practices will be informed by Indigenous law and beliefs
 - This will work to center Indigenous law, practices, and values in settler colonial society

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Indigenous women have theorized settler colonialism since the occupation of Turtle Island in 1492 → the field was not created by white male scholars
2. Settler colonial studies is preoccupied with the feelings of white settlers, shifting focus away from Indigenous experiences of genocide and violence, centring whiteness once again
3. A ‘settler’ is anyone who occupies and benefits from the theft of Indigenous land, regardless of race or gender, and is deeply rooted in economics
4. Apologizing, mourning, and recognizing the failures of settler colonialism does not redistribute power or facilitate reconciliation
5. To unbecome a settler, one must move forward as a peace seeking guest on Indigenous lands with an ethical Indigenous standpoint

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