

# **Unsettling settler colonialism: The discourse and politics of settlers, and solidarity with Indigenous nations**

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## **Abstract**

Our goal in this article is to intervene and disrupt current contentious debates regarding the predominant lines of inquiry burgeoning in settler colonial studies, the use of ‘settler’, and the politics of building solidarities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Settler colonial studies, ‘settler’, and solidarity, then, operate as the central themes of this paper. While somewhat jarring, our assessment of the debates is interspersed with our discussions in their original form, as we seek to explore possible lines of solidarity, accountability, and relationality to one another and to decolonization struggles both locally and globally. Our overall conclusion is that without centering Indigenous peoples’ articulations, without deploying a relational approach to settler colonial power, and without paying attention to the conditions and contingency of settler colonialism, studies of settler colonialism and practices of solidarity run the risk of reifying (and possibly replicating) settler colonial as well as other modes of domination.

**Keywords:** *settler colonial studies; solidarity; Indigenous resurgence; place-based solidarity*

## Introduction

Our goal in this article is intervene and disrupt current contentious debates regarding the predominant lines of inquiry burgeoning in settler colonial studies, the use of ‘settler’, and the politics of building solidarities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. These three themes are not only salient in scholarly debates but also in practices of Indigenous resurgence, decolonization, anti-racism, feminist and queer work, and in alliances that challenge corporate pipeline expansion, resource extraction, colonial environmentalism, neo-liberal exploitation of temporary foreign workers, and violence against women, transgendered, and queer people. Through our own particular engagements with these issues, the three of us came together to think through our different relationships to settler colonial studies, debates about the term ‘settler’, and decolonizing relations of solidarity, with a shared commitment to practicing and/or supporting Indigenous resurgence. By Indigenous resurgence we mean ways to restore and regenerate Indigenous nationhood (Corntassel, 2012) and the “repatriation of Indigenous land and life” (Tuck & Yang, 2012). By centering Indigenous resurgence, we resist the disavowal of a colonial present still defined by Indigenous dispossession, we center transformative alternatives to this present articulated within Indigenous resurgence, and we remain attentive to the very ground upon which we stand. Indigenous resurgence, then, is our organizing frame for responding to the three themes of this essay, namely settler colonialism, settlers, and solidarity.

First, our process of thinking together revealed some uncertainty about the emerging institutionalization of *settler colonial studies* and its relationship to Indigenous studies; at the same time, the practice, structure, governmentality, and politics of settler colonialism distinctly sharpens the focus on ongoing colonialism, the dispossession of Indigenous lands, and the actual/attempted elimination of Indigenous peoples. It is this focus on power, land, and Indigenous bodies that we centre in our approach to the study of settler colonialism. But our understanding of settler colonialism is not one-dimensional; instead, we begin from the position that it is intrinsically shaped by and shaping interactive relations of coloniality, racism, gender, class, sexuality and desire, capitalism, and ableism. This multi-dimensional understanding of settler colonialism enables specificity in the ways to which place, culture, and relations of power are approached; reflects the ways in which the State has governed subjects differently; and emphasizes that the disruption of settler colonialism necessitates the disruption of intersecting forces of power such as colonialism, heteropatriarchy and capitalism. Second, our analysis and dialogue about the term ‘*settler*’ illuminated that, whether using Indigenous words for ‘settler’ or the English word ‘settler’, these terms should be discomfiting and provide an impetus for decolonial transformation through a renewed community-centered approach. This decolonizing praxis requires what Kanaka Maoli scholar Noelani Goodyear-Ka’ōpua (2013, pp. 30, 36) calls “land-centered literacies” which are “...based on an intimate connection with and knowledge of the land.” At the same time, our concerns go beyond the proper assignment of ‘settler’, where we are vigilant of those who adopt and legitimize a “way of thinking with an imperialist’s mind” (Alfred, 2009, p. 102). Third, while the language of *solidarity* does not fully capture the way we approach social struggles as interconnected, our collective conversations highlighted for us that

solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples must be grounded in actual practices and place-based relationships, and be approached as incommensurable but not incompatible.

We came together to think through the organizing concepts and politics of this paper together after a roundtable discussion at a Canadian political science conference that included two of the authors, with the third in the audience. The roundtable topic was broadly on settler colonialism, territorialities, and embodiments. Because of our pre-existing interests in anti-colonialism and decolonization, we were already aware of each other's scholarly and non-academic work and commitments to the politics of Indigenous resurgence. In particular, we were aware that as a methodology, a collective interview between a cis-gendered Tsalagi (Cherokee) man (Jeff Corntassel), cis-gendered white male (Corey Snelgrove), and cis-gendered woman of colour of Sikh origin (Rita Dhamoon) with different vantage points and interests would prompt multiple, albeit circumscribed, perspectives on settler colonialism, settler, and solidarity.

Given the proliferation of academic and non-academic sources on these topics over recent years, we had already been engaging together in these conversations informally (we have been at the same institution for two years, on Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ territories) and it was a natural step to co-author a paper. We began first by assessing some of the recent literature on these concepts, and then started with the same questions for each concept, which we posed to one another in a series of face-to-face meetings over a period of a year. Our guiding questions were: how did we assess the current debates/literature on settler colonialism, and how can we disrupt some of the hegemonies that inevitably arise in the theory and practice of solidarity work between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Flowing from these questions emerged other sub-questions that reflected the debates in the relevant literature and our understanding of Indigenous resurgences. We recorded the interviews, and Corey transcribed the interviews (it is not lost on us that he was the student among us!). Two important methodological and epistemological points are worth emphasizing in our choice to conduct our collective interviews over an extended period of time: first, that it disrupted some (certainly not all of) the power dynamics of 'the expert scholar', where we each learned from one another and shifted our thinking collaboratively, challenged one another about our power differentials, and were constantly reminded of practicing our politics in theoretically-rich and action-oriented ways. Second, we unexpectedly built new kinds of relationships with one another that will travel with us as we take social action across issues and navigate the academy. This relationship building was an important reminder to us that good relations across differences take time and care, and a willingness to live in contention. As Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson points out, "Resurgence cannot occur in isolation. A collective conversation and mobilization is critical to avoid reproducing the individualism and colonial isolation that settler colonialism fosters" (2011, p. 69). Similarly, for Tsalagis (Cherokees), there is a word, *digadatsele'i*, which means 'we belong to each other'. If we take these relationships seriously, we must be willing to work through contention and, at times, disrupt discourses that reinscribe the colonial status quo.

As a way to anchor our power differentials and our various approaches to decolonization and resurgence, we begin by locating our social and cultural positions. This form of self-location

is already a common practice among some feminists and Indigenous peoples, but we specifically self-locate in relation to conceptions of ‘settler’ and settler colonialism and in response to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) definitions (see Appendix), which Corey reviewed in tracing the etymology of these terms. This self-location exercise is a political practice that, while susceptible to performativity, ultimately reveals how each of us is coming to the paper differently and differentially. The rest of the paper is organized around the three major concepts of settler colonialism, settler, and solidarity. While somewhat jarring, because our collective interviews are in part responding to the respective literature on each of these concepts, we provide an assessment of that literature followed by the interview on each. Our overall conclusion is that without centering Indigenous peoples’ articulations, without deploying a relational approach to settler colonial power, and without paying attention to the conditions and contingencies of settler colonialism, studies of settler colonialism and practices of solidarity run the risk of reifying (and possibly replicating) settler colonial, as well as other, modes of domination.

### **Self-locations: Locating settlement**

*Jeff Corntassel:* What does it mean to acknowledge the Indigenous territory you’re on? Are you coming to community, place-based relationships as a settler or as an Indigenous person? Additionally, how are you entering Indigenous homelands – as an invited guest, uninvited, trespasser, visitor, resident, immigrant, refugee etc.? How you situate yourself and your level of awareness about colonial occupations of Indigenous homelands brings new responsibilities to the forefront. Awareness of colonial realities requires us to go beyond a simple acknowledgement of the Indigenous nations and peoples of the territories you are visiting. It is a call for justice and the return of stolen lands/waterways to the Indigenous peoples who maintain special relationships to these places. Ultimately, what we are arguing for is a responsibility-based ethic of truth-telling to identify and act upon new pathways to Indigenous resurgence.

As a Tsalagi (Cherokee), the connection and responsibility to our homelands is unbroken, despite forced removal and dispossession. From our family history living in the Tsalagi homelands of Toquo, Tennessee, Lookout Mountain, Georgia, and Westville, Oklahoma, the Corntassel family’s living historical legacy is to defend these places and honor our ancestral relationships. Like many Cherokee families, the consequences of forced removal and the Dawes Act (1901, 1906 amendments), which broke up collectively held land and distributed plots of land to individual Cherokees (and other Indigenous nations across the U.S.), led to further forced migrations; today my family is dispersed from Tennessee to California, all the way up to Alaska.

How do we carry our community consciousness and responsibilities with us even when we’re not on our own territory? When visiting another Indigenous nation’s territory, as Cherokees and Indigenous nations, we carry our communities and sense of place with us. According to Cherokee Elder Benny Smith, when arriving at another nation’s territory, you are to come in the calmest, gentlest state of your being. This exemplifies *t’hi dyanisti*, or a call to

peaceful or healthy relationships. You only approach another Indigenous nation after you have thought it through, over and over again, and if there is willingness on the part of the host nation(s) to include or accept strangers.

How do our ancestors recognize us as Cherokee or Indigenous even when we're not living on our homelands? Ultimately it's about how we honor our place-based responsibilities and live our values and principles, as Tsalagi in everyday life, even when the land we're on does not recognize us. While the land may not recognize us, the goal is to be known not as strangers but as welcome visitors with accountability to the Indigenous nations and peoples of the territory.

*Corey Snelgrove:* I come from a family of predominantly English, Scottish, and German ancestors who arrived to the Eastern coast of what is now known as the United States from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, moving west and north in search of “opportunity” until arriving, at various times and in various places, on Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee homelands around Lake Ontario. I come from a family of white settlers. And like my ancestors, I too have moved in search of “opportunity” and I now find myself occupying Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ homelands. I too am a white settler, a colonizer. This recognition though is not meant to signal any innocence. There are no good settlers; there are no good colonizers. Instead, it signals complicity in the on-going processes of dispossession and eschewal of Indigenous nationhood. It necessarily connects me to histories and presents which shape how I came and come to be(ing) here. It is a sign that demands, that alludes to an accounting of, responsibility for, and nothing less than the destruction of settler colonialism. But a sign can also obscure, acting as an illusion, and disavow, operating as an elusion...

As the OED definition (in the Appendix) states, “to settle” involves both subject-formation and governance. Settlers have to be made and power relations between and among settlers and Indigenous peoples have to be reproduced in order for settler colonialism to extend temporally and spatially. Part of this subject formation involves disavowal of the processes of dispossession and disavowal of Indigenous governance structures. If we do not want to, my family and I do not have to think about, let alone experience, the violent processes that condition(ed) how we came and come to be here. Conversely, when we do choose to think about this, we are often able (and even encouraged) to think of it in terms of a celebratory, benevolent past. Yet, are all settlers able to ignore the processes of how one come's to be here or to think of it in terms of a celebratory past?

The subject formation and governance inherent to settling also involves processes of ordering, which govern the very notions of belonging. These processes of ordering, such as those based on white supremacy, not only enhance our privileges through exploitation, but also further enable my family and I to feel at home in other's homeland(s), or as the case may be, to disparage and even flee at the sight of Other(s). Belonging, after all, requires the discursive production and circulation of those who do not belong. “To settle” then remains differentiated in terms of race, national-origin, religion, class, dis/ability, sexuality, and gender. All of these

differentiations though are underwritten by the dispossession of Indigenous lands and eschewal of Indigenous governance orders. So while all non-Indigenous peoples residing in settler states may be complicit in settlement, making us all settlers, not all settlers are created equal. Subject-formation in settler colonies works in multiple ways, privileging in multiple ways, and settler colonialism's conditions of possibility rely on the differentiated forms of subject-formation and privilege. For myself, as a white, class-privileged, temporarily able-bodied, heterosexual, university-educated cis-male, the social world really is crafted in my image...

In spite of this worldly reflection, it is not the world that I want to live in. Thus, the term "settler" and the reason for its use, which brings forth the intimate and affective relationships to ancestral, social, cultural, economic, and political histories and presents which shape this world, necessarily leads not to pride, but rather to shame, frustration, alienation, and anger towards myself, other settlers, as well as the structures of settler colonialism. These feelings though also potentially signal an opening, a recognition of an un(der)realized interdependence. However, alone, these feelings are not sufficient. After all, I cannot just critique or declare that this world falls short of my desires and expect it to transform itself. Nor can I ignore the power differentials between settlers, as such willful acts risk stalling the decolonial engine. Instead, if these desires and simultaneous feelings of shame, frustration, alienation, and anger are to be at all transformative, they must be accompanied by thought and practice attentive to their respective sources; they must be guided by accountability and respect, care and renewal, with urgency and insurgency, to address and destroy the parasitical relations that exist between and among settlers and Indigenous peoples, as well as to support those (potentially) good relations that already exist, and those that we wish to establish between and among settlers and Indigenous peoples.

*Rita Dhamoon:* To settle in Canada, first on the traditional territories of Ojibway-Anishinaabe, then Musqueam and Qay'qayt First Nations, and now Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ territories is, for me, linked to the global colonial context in which the British planted themselves, which includes now partitioned India and Pakistan. My family is from Punjab, India. I am from Punjab, India. This is a place where my great grandparents and grandparents struggled against British colonialism, and died for their struggle, and also where the seeds of colonizing fantasies were planted in the imaginations of my parents. The Brits were good at planting seeds, or should I say getting brown and black people to plant for profit. In the case of my parents, and many from their generation, moving westwards, moving to England was part of that colonizing fantasy, where 'progress' was supposedly available to everyone in European societies. After that fantasy collapsed with racial employment discrimination, displaced masculine violence, and attacks on my family from white supremacists, we moved further west, to Canada. This 'unsettling' move across continents, a move I made as a 'woman of colour' (a term I learned in Canada, as I was 'Black' in 1970s and 1980s England), means that I am structurally located as a settler.

When reflecting on the meaning of 'settle' (see Appendix), I think about what it means to materially take up residence, to take up abode in a foreign country, which I have done. 'To settle' is an attitude, a way of being that gets fixed in one's heart and mind, such that I don't have to

think about the violence against Indigenous peoples if I choose not to; it is to presume permanency, a temporality without an end; it is a way to establish authority over others, as the State and its settlers seek to do over Indigenous peoples; it is a mode of masculinity in which the land is married to exploitative capital; to settle does not require all settlers to own private property, but like many settlers I do. I now have citizenship in Canada, I was born and educated in the UK, and later further educated in Canada, I speak English with a western accent, I have a middle-class income, I carry no overt religious markings, and I have settled on stolen Indigenous land. Are these just performative declarations...

And, I do not have a “firm foundation” in this place, I have not “ceased from migration,” am not resting “after agitation” or occupying a place that represents an “end of a series of changes”, I am not seeking to secure “permanent regulations” upon others by “decree, ordinance, or enactment”. But it doesn’t matter. Settler colonialism does not work at the individual level, or need my consent or the consent of other individuals even, for it is a way of governing through a naturalized nation-state that erases Indigenous peoples and implicates us all, however well-intentioned we are, or differentially located. Like Corey, the white man among us, I am a settler, but the structural location of colonizer is more complex for me. My family, especially my great grandparents and grandparents were anti-colonialists in India, during formal British imperialism. Being anti-colonial is in me. I work to honour the struggles of my people against white supremacy and in my ongoing responsibilities towards other Others. I am suspicious of white men, and also know that the relationship with them cannot just be instrumental. I am suspicious of cis-men active in social struggles more generally, and also have obligations to Jeff, our Indigenous cis-male co-author, who symbolically legitimizes this collective paper, and in other ways to Corey who is also seeking a different way of being in the world. What holds us together, I think, in writing this paper, is our willingness to build relationships that centre power, anger (against what we each represent to the other), and the possibilities of love. With others, and in the context of interwoven struggles of social justice, I seek to unsettle.

## **Disrupting the institutionalization of settler colonial studies**

Indigenous activists and scholars have long centred the constitutive features of settler colonial studies – land and the attempted elimination of Indigenous peoples – but now there is increasingly a body of work that signals the core of what has become known as settler colonial studies. Settler colonial studies as a distinct emerging field of study (rather than a site of struggle already critiqued by Indigenous peoples) has been centrally defined by Lorenzo Veracini’s 2010 book, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Patrick Wolfe’s 1999 book, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, and his 2006 article “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” and more recently with articles in the *Settler Colonial Studies* journal.

The burgeoning field of settler colonial studies has made several important contributions, both theoretically and politically. First, settler colonialism is conceptually distinct

from other kinds of colonialism, in that it is rooted in the elimination of Indigenous peoples, politics and relationships from and with the land (Wolfe, 2006). Building on this, the distinctiveness of settler colonialism works to highlight the incommensurability between Indigenous struggles and, for instance, civil rights projects (see Byrd, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This has led Grande (2013), Macoun and Strakosch (2013), and Morgensen (2011c) to note the convergence of conservative and progressive goals by revealing settler investments in the dispossession of Indigenous lands. Second, conceptualizations of settler colonialism have provided ways to articulate its operations and effects. For instance, settler colonialism is being conceptualized in terms of its everyday modalities, what Rifkin (2013) calls ‘settler colonial common sense’. Adam Barker (2012) draws on Wolfe and Veracini’s definitions but also identifies settler colonialism as “a distinct method of colonizing” that involves “the creation and consumption of a whole array of spaces by settler collectives that claim and transform places through the exercise of their sovereign capacity” (p. 1). Settlement, then, is not led by elites alone (Barker, 2012, p. 1). Third, critics of settler colonialism have sharpened critiques of dominant power. Moreton-Robinson (2007, 2008), for instance, situates patriarchal white sovereignty as a constitutive feature of settler colonialism and the premise of settler logics of property; Byrd (2011) centres the deployment of Indianness as a constitutive feature of settler colonialism; Morgensen (2011b) centres settler colonialism in theories of biopower, state(s) of exception, and global governance; while Jackson (2014), King (2014), and Smith (2014) discuss the complex relationship between anti-blackness and settler colonialism. Fourth, studies of settler colonialism have also generated intellectual and political synergies between queer and feminist theories, Indigenous studies, and critiques of settler colonialism (Driskill et al., 2011; Morgensen, 2010, 2011a, 2012; Smith, 2010; Tuck et al., 2013), illuminating intersections and interactions, while simultaneously acknowledging the incommensurability of forces of colonial, gendered, and heteronormative power that Indigenous feminists (Green, 2007; Barker, 2008; Simpson, 2014) and postcolonial feminists have long emphasized.

In the tradition of critical approaches, scholars of (or engaging with) settler colonialism have also identified several challenges or weaknesses of this burgeoning field of study. Joanne Barker (2011), on the blog *Tequila Sovereign*, questioned the specificity of settler colonialism. Drawing on the etymological origins of “settle” as ‘to reconcile’, as well as in light of settler state apologies, Barker warns that settler colonialism may signal a nation-state that has moved “beyond its own tragically imperial and colonial history to be something else, still albeit colonial, but not quite entirely colonial.” Second, Macoun and Strakosch (2013) note that settler colonial theory “is primarily a settler framework” that is largely about settler intentions to think through colonial relations (p. 427). This in itself may not be a problem, but as Macoun and Strakosch warn, settler colonial studies can re-empower non-Indigenous academic voices while marginalizing Indigenous resistance (2013, p. 436). Third, while settler colonialism is posited as both a condition of possibility (Rifkin, 2013) and a site of potential hope (Barker, 2012), there is an underlying “colonial fatalism” (Macoun and Strakosch, 2013, p. 435) that posits a structural inevitability to settler colonial relations. Macoun and Strakosch (2013) in particular note that



settler colonialism is unable to transcend itself precisely because it is conceptualized as a structure, where the only polarizing choices available to Indigenous peoples are either to be co-opted or hold a position of resistance/sovereign, while anti-colonial action by settlers is foreclosed. Fourth, the framework of settler colonialism has fostered over-characterizations of binary positions. Sarinillo (2013), for instance, notes two common charges against settler colonial studies: that it affirms a binary of Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and that it leads to a neo-racist form of politics that requires non-Natives leave Indigenous territories (arguments that Sarinillo rejects). Moreover, we note that this binary, at times, has the effect of treating settler colonialism as a meta-structure, thus erasing both its contingency and the dynamics that constitute racist, patriarchal, homonationalist, ableist, and capitalist settler colonialism.

The institutionalization of settler colonial studies is quite remarkable. While some Indigenous journals have struggled to receive institutional support and funding, the journal *Settler Colonial Studies* – first published in 2011 in an open access format (entirely run on volunteer labour) to bring together critical scholarship on settler colonialism as a distinct social, cultural and historical formation with ongoing political effects (Edmonds and Carey, 2013, p. 2) – moved to a large academic publishing house, Taylor & Francis, within two years of being established. This institutionalization has been coupled with a proliferation of academic conferences, workshops, courses, and has also moved beyond academic confines through blogs, websites, workshops and teach-ins.

The institutionalization of settler colonial studies (rather than Indigenous studies) is on the one hand a significant shift in the academy. On the other hand, as de Leeuw, Greenwood, and Lindsay (2013) rightly argue, even when (and perhaps because) there are good intentions to decolonize and to “cultivate a culture of ‘doing the right thing,’” there are no “fundamental shifts in power imbalances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples or the systems within which we operate” (p. 386). Settler colonialism and the *study* of settler colonialism, in other words, cannot be decolonized because of good intentions. Following this, paradoxically and in deeply troubling ways, settler colonial studies can displace, overshadow, or even mask over Indigenous studies (for example, see Veracini, 2013) and variations within Indigenous studies, especially feminist and queer Indigenous work that is centred on Indigenous resurgence. Indeed the link between Indigenous studies and settler colonial studies is still in process. The synergies between the literature by/on two-spirited Indigenous identities, queer theory, Indigenous studies more broadly, and settler colonial studies are notable in their interwoven conversations across fields of study. But at times, Indigenous peoples and issues are de-centred in settler colonial studies (for example, Rifkin, 2013, p. 323). Furthermore, while Rifkin is right to argue that settler colonial practices and processes operate in everyday ways, are these practices really in the “background” (2013, p. 331), and for whom? Is settler colonialism “largely invisible”, as Barker (2012) claims?

Yes, settler colonialism is naturalized, pervasive, and not just state-centred, but for whom is settler colonialism in the background and invisible? These kinds of claims seem to presume white settler subjectivity as the monolithic lens through which to examine settler colonialism and

dispossession, both in the context of whites and people of colour, in ways that obscures differentials of power. For Indigenous peoples, settler colonialism may not be the primary lens of living or theorizing, but it is also neither in the background or invisible.

## Discussion

*Jeff:* What is the role of settler colonial studies in Indigenous studies? How should this conversation take place?

*Corey:* A recent issue of *Settler Colonial Studies* (3:3) came out with a corresponding issue in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* (37:2), though both issues were edited by Patrick Wolfe. This makes me wonder about whether this is a way of building bridges between settler colonial studies and Indigenous studies, or instead, given that Wolfe edited both issues, is this a ‘talking at?’ I also wonder whether settler colonial studies is isolating itself, talking to the same crowd? What’s more useful, isolation or disruption?

*Rita:* It does seem self-sustaining on some level – which may be inevitable since we’re operating within an academic industrial complex. It seems complicated because on the one hand it’s really good that settlers are taking this on as a project both theoretically and in practice. My concern is that it resonates with the emergence of critical whiteness studies and men’s studies in the 1980s and 1990s, where there is some sort of anxiety at play for dominant groups. I wonder what anxieties are being masked over in the emergence and legitimacy of settler colonial studies, as a field distinct from Indigenous studies.

*Jeff:* It is interesting to see where *Settler Colonial Studies* thinks this is going to go. Are there legitimate linkages that they are trying to make? Or is it just about establishing their legitimacy as a field of inquiry?

*Rita:* Those scholars building queer critiques of settler colonialism who are working with Indigenous peoples in collaborative ways seem to make linkages in ways that is not as well reflected in settler colonial studies more generally. It’s hard to assess at this stage, as in some ways it is early days for this field of study, although as Veracini notes in his work, settler colonial studies has a long history.

*Corey:* One reaction I have to these questions is that, for myself at least, it wasn’t reading settler colonial studies that triggered anything for me, to begin to look critically at myself, my family, Canada. I can’t help but think that in these works, the work and resistance of Indigenous peoples is overshadowed. For example, we

can look at Veracini's history of the concept [of settler colonialism] where Indigenous studies and Indigenous resistance is pretty much erased. Veracini briefly names both on the second last page, but then immediately goes on to credit white historians.

*Rita:* What you say Corey reminds of Black feminist bell hooks, who made the same point in the 1980s around the ways in which white feminists talk about critical whiteness studies, about how she was always doing critical whiteness studies – that was always her work. She's not a black feminist just talking about women of colour, for whiteness constitutes how we understand 'women of colour'. And so I wonder at the same time whether the claiming, or the framing of settler colonial studies itself, casts a shadow over the work that is being done by Indigenous scholars, who have been talking about the centrality of land, the specific nature of Indigenous experiences, and the role of settlers in dispossession for a long time now.

*Jeff:* I saw that when I was a grad student in political science. In the early 90s, political science scholars were just beginning to discuss Indigenous self-determination when Indigenous scholars and activists had been acting on it for decades by asserting their self-determining authority within United Nations' forums and on their homelands (for example, Akwesasne Notes, 1978). Yet it was non-Indigenous folks writing about this that received the acclaim... the other Indigenous research didn't conform to what was conceived of as Political Science... so when settlers take up these questions, it's suddenly considered a legitimate field of study.

*Rita:* Right. Exactly.

*Jeff:* Before it's viewed as a bunch of native activists...as I was called once, "an activist posing as an academic." And now with the involvement of settler academics it's viewed as a legitimate field of inquiry.

*Rita:* And there's something interesting too as people of colour are entering this discussion, often on terms set by white scholars and activists. This is a really interesting, ambiguous moment I think for people of colour, generating an anxiety that has prompted new ways of making declarations of solidarity. It is not Indigenous peoples who are anxious whether people of colour are defined as settlers. And while I think this moment serves to relieve white anxiety, for people of colour it has become about which side we are on, where do we place ourselves as non-Indigenous people who are trying to navigate racism and be accountable to

Indigenous peoples in the context of white supremacy and settlement. It can be a very tense moment, but one that can also tend to mask over the ways settlement happens through patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Black racism, Islamophobia.

*Jeff:* That's the really interesting part. It becomes about, like you said, how does settler colonial studies fit into Indigenous studies?

*Rita:* It seems that the current debate forces us to answer a question that, first of all, requires us to ask a very sort of positivist type of question: who's a settler. And it is also a necessary question when deciphering actual activist struggles against colonization... but it almost feels like a red herring. I just keep coming back to that. If our preoccupation becomes 'who is a settler', if that's what social justice activists (broadly defined) are fighting over, then who is dealing with white supremacist capitalism and heteropatriarchy, what's our target of critique? Where are we putting our energies? It's an important question and way to build relations, but such declarations can only take us so far.

*Jeff:* Well you see it in different ways, with the definition of Indigeneity. There's still this preoccupation with defining the term versus the implication of that term and the power of that term can be wielded to promote justice. It's a form of control – as I see it. You've got to narrow it down to a certain point where you can easily define it. It's only viewed as a legitimate field of study if you can define Indigenous in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Now that settler scholars are attempting to define the word settler, they are beginning to see the futility of such an exercise.

*Rita:* Right. Contain it. That's a modern liberal impulse...

*Jeff:* And the response to defining Indigenous has been a reliance on self-identification – 'okay, we're not going to fall into that definitional trap' – but then it creates other problems as well – groups just using that label of Indigeneity as an opportunistic way to distinguish themselves in the world system.

*Rita:* So what do you see as the work of that requirement to name, to categorize? How would you characterize that move to name, categorize – is that a process of delegitimizing? A process of containment?

*Jeff:* I see it as more containment. It's kind of that policy impulse – you've got to define your target.

*Rita:* Right. Manage it, with the effect of depoliticizing the gendered nature of dispossession.

*Jeff:* And if we have 5000-8000 Indigenous nations around the world trapped within 77 different countries, we become peoples for states to ‘manage’. The underlying logic is that of an “Indigenous problem” to be contained. Locate the problem, and...

*Rita:* Eradicate it...

*Jeff:* Spatially locate it, ideologically, temporally all these things...

The questions we raise here on settler colonialism and power, prompted us to further reflect on the scholarly and activist debates on conceptions of ‘settler’ and how we understand this positionality.

## **Discussion**

Who is a settler? And why does it matter? These questions have been a preoccupation in activism and theory over recent years, especially for non-Indigenous peoples engaged in anti-colonial work, rather than Indigenous peoples. It is an anxiety that has manifested itself among white allies and, it seems more recently, communities of colour. Yet, despite the discussion and debate within the academy and beyond, there is ambiguity in regards to what is meant by ‘settler’.

In examining the definition of ‘settler’ in the hegemonic site for English definitions and etymologies – that is the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), in comparison with other, critical articulations of ‘settler’, we can observe some resonances with and perhaps even a foreshadowing of the contemporary discussions and debates around the term. Perhaps most importantly in terms of its utility, throughout both the OED definition and other articulations, the occupation of land is central. In the OED definition of “settle”, “place” and “property” are central in a number of usages. This is echoed by a number of other articulations. For example, Wolfe (2006) states that access to land is the primary motive for eliminating the native, and in settler colonialism “settler-colonizers come to stay” (p. 388); Bonita Lawrence and Ena Dua (2005) locate people of colour as settlers by virtue of living and owning land appropriated from Indigenous peoples, as well as exercising and seeking rights that are collectively denied to Indigenous peoples; Veracini (2011b) notes that “settlers do not discover: they carry their sovereignty and lifestyles with them. As they move towards what amounts to a representation of the world, as they transform the land into their image, they settle another place without really moving” (p. 206); and Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) similarly conclude that settlers are those who make Indigenous land “their home and source of capital.” In addition, the OED also gestures to the relationship between settler colonial power and other forms of power, such as

capitalist property regimes and heteronormativity. Importantly signalling that this political positioning is not outside of other dominant discourses and State formations of masculinist, patriarchal, capitalism; in other words, while settlers are not without agency, they are variously and systemically positioned according to the shifting terms of State hegemonies.

However, the OED usage also differs in a number of respects. For example, the OED obscures the existence of Indigenous peoples and at times colonization, thereby performing terra nullius in the lexical register as well as portraying a perfection of settler colonialism. This is in stark contrast to other articulations, such as Lawrence and Dua (2005), Alfred (2009), and Tuck and Yang (2012) which center Indigenous sovereignty. Moreover, in other articulations, such as those just noted, ‘settler’ is deployed as a counter-performative term; not as containment, but as a demand for the transformation of ‘settlers’ through subjective *and* objective transformations. Furthermore, the OED also foreshadows some contemporary concerns through its emphasis on certainty. Once again, do all marginalized people feel certain, naturalized in white settler colonies? At the same time, how does that uncertainty lead one to disrupt complicity in Indigenous dispossession?

## Discussion

*Corey:* So the question of ‘who is a settler?’

*Rita:* I think about the work I’ve done with Indigenous peoples – we’ve had the conversations around about being on stolen land, or treaty land, where treaties have not been honoured by colonizers, and the obligations of non-Indigenous peoples, but I’ve not had Indigenous peoples express anxiety about the term settler. There has been an anxiety that I think has long existed among non-Indigenous peoples about how to be accountable about being on colonized land. The anxiety about ‘settler’ is just a recent manifestation of that.

*Jeff:* And also what is your set of criteria in defining a settler...

*Rita:* It’s in activist spaces for sure – these kinds of declarations – ‘I’m a settler, I’m pro-Palestinian, I support gays’... it can become a kind of mantra if we don’t explain why we are making these statements. The term can be paralyzing for some non-Indigenous people who are absorbed by guilt, or it can mobilize action. ‘Settler’ certainly situates non-Indigenous peoples in a structural relationship to dispossession of Indigenous land and within imperialistic nation-building projects that require ongoing settlement. But it’s contentious. Some folks are using different terms altogether: Scott Morgensen (2010) uses the term ‘non-Native’ in his piece on ‘Settler Homonationalism’ and Jodi Byrd (2011) references ‘arrivants’ in *Transit of Empire* to make distinctions between white settlers and settlers of

colour. It's also become clear that statements of 'I am settler' can become performative.

*Jeff:* Exactly. The thinking or mindset seems to be that settlers are in a different category, that they've shifted the terrain of discussion.

*Rita:* Yes. This seems especially heightened among people of colour since Bonita Lawrence and Ena Dua published their 2005 piece on decolonizing antiracism, which criticizes people of colour for failing to centre our implication in Indigenous dispossession. From their perspective, while there are differences among differently positioned people of colour (refugees, migrant workers, economic immigrants etc.), we are settlers. Sharma and Wright (2009) have responded to this by arguing that people of colour are not settlers, but they make their argument by denying Indigenous peoples relationship to their traditional lands. Then a third kind of response has emerged from some people of colour to say that we are settlers but not the same as white settlers. I find this third response more compelling, but I think the debate about types and degrees of settler is a distraction from critiques of how gendered dispossession, neo-liberal migration policies, and masculinist, capitalist white supremacy are linked.

*Corey:* I'm hesitant on the analogy between white declarations of anti-racism, and settler declarations of being a settler. Mostly because a declaration of being an anti-racist is different than saying one is a settler. The former is a move to innocence, the latter is not necessarily so. Yet, at the same time, I don't mean to argue that moves to innocence aren't happening with these declarations. For instance, we can see it on social media around 'upsettler'.

*Rita:* Tell us about this concept.

*Corey:* I think it was actually Eric Ritskes who said this phrase 'upsettler'<sup>1</sup> is a form of distancing, a move to innocence, as if those using it are saying 'I'm not like them. I'm not the problem'. As a move to innocence, it's a deferral of one's complicity and responsibility, as if colonization is only a problem because of others not quite getting it. In moves to innocence, those performing the move presume that there is such a thing as a good settler, a good colonizer, as if decolonization can occur outside of large scale, systematic subjective *and* objective transformations. While I've used 'upsettler' myself, its use, obviously including my own, raises concerns because I'm interested in the potential of the 'settler' term – how it can be used to open discussions around responsibility, to

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<sup>1</sup> A mash-up term, of 'upset' and 'settler', which began as a [hashtag on Twitter](#).

identify and signal that colonization has never ceased, to “jumpstart the decolonial engine” by identifying the enemy, as George Ciccariello-Maher (2010) writes. But, at the same time, there is a danger of it being only a performance or, as others have noted, used by white settlers to flatten differences between non-Indigenous peoples, both of which, I think, stall the decolonial engine. I also think its potential depends on the space that you use it in. For instance, I see it used in Indigenous studies classrooms or at the Indigenous Governance program’s Indigenous Leadership Forum at the University of Victoria. But, for example, I don’t see it used in this political theory class that I audited last fall. This I think is an example of how ‘settler’ declarations can be just a move to innocence, which is problematic and disappointing in a number of ways. I think it can be disruptive, I think it – and its affects and effects – can foster transformative change (obviously not on its own), but it depends on the context, the space you’re in.

*Rita:* I wonder then if it is more effective to make these kinds of statements/declarations in a context in which Indigeneity is not considered relevant? So it maybe is less effective to declare, ‘I am a settler on X Indigenous land’ in places where people are already mindful and aware of whose territory they are on, and more effective when people are not even aware that the territory is Indigenous.

*Jeff:* And then it just becomes, almost like a re-affirmation of the original logic of colonialism – paying lip service to the Indigenous peoples of the region but subsequently reinscribing settler names and histories on the landscapes. But settler studies, from what I’ve read, doesn’t really discuss any new ways to confront that. It doesn’t problematize it at the same time as declaring it.

*Rita:* Right. It depends on your audience.

*Jeff:* If you think about it, the most effective times I’ve used the term settler have been in spaces where folks are most resistant to it. And then it creates these tensions, but it also creates these great conversations about what is their role and responsibilities. I think folks become complacent with the term. There are several Indigenous words for settlers that provide deeper insights into the violence and destructiveness of historic and ongoing colonization. For example, yonega is a Tsalagi (Cherokee) term for white settlers, which connotes “foam of the water; moved by wind and without its own direction; clings to everything that’s solid.” Wasicu is a Dakota term for settlers, which means “taker of fat.” In the northwest, hwunitum is a Hul’qumi’num and SENĆOŦEN word for settler, that some have described as “the hungry people”. None of the above terms are positive reflections



of settler society and represent the lived experiences of Indigenous nations amidst settler occupation. Often hearing that the word settler is offensive to some people or polarizing, I find that using Indigenous words to describe settler relationships can help to re-center the discussion and potential actions of solidarity back into community. Just as it is a challenge for Cherokees to be welcomed into another nation's territory as strangers, there is an urgent need for settlers to change their current relationships with the local Indigenous nations on whose territory they reside. If this is not the relationship one wants to embody, whether as *yonega* or *hwunitum* or any number of Indigenous terms for settler, then the impetus is on the settler to change the nature of the relationship by taking direction from Indigenous nations themselves. The ultimate goal is to create the need for a new word or phrase to describe positive features of a settler-Indigenous relationship.

*Corey:* We've had similar conversations about this Jeff. And I think there is great potential in using Indigenous terms. It literally makes that Indigenous nation known to the settler, challenging the lie of Indigenous disappearance. It also reminds me of that scene on the train in France in *Black Skin, White Masks*, where Fanon identifies the enemy and makes himself known. And although the deployment of 'settler' certainly identifies the enemy (to me that is its function), it fails to make the Indigenous nation known. So, what you're talking about Jeff, this sort of counter-performative and thereby transformative demand, is often obscured by the definitions alone, especially when they are taken out of context, as well as by settler colonial studies, through their representation of settler colonialism as transhistorical and inevitable. I think this is at least partially attributed to the overshadowing of Indigenous peoples' articulations – their own accounts of Indigenous-settler relations, their own governance, legal and diplomatic orders. This then also stresses the importance of centering Indigenous resurgence to avoid the further disavowal of colonization and colonial fatalism, as well as to inform decolonization efforts.

In the next section, we build on Jeff's conclusions to consider ways to approach settler-Indigenous relations in ways that are directed towards disrupting settler colonialism and fostering Indigenous resurgences.

## **Responsibility for/in settler colonialism: Indigenous resurgence and settler solidarities**

Above, Jeff discussed the importance of re-centering the discussion and actions of solidarity back into communities *and* a transformation of Indigenous-settler relationships. This reflects a broader trend in Indigenous studies, particularly within the Indigenous resurgence paradigm.

Indigenous resurgence is not a new phenomenon; as Leanne Simpson writes, it is Indigenous peoples' "original instruction" (2011, p. 66). In recent years though, Indigenous resurgence emerged to signal the importance of a turn away from dominant settler institutions, values, and ethics towards Indigenous institutions, values and ethics of "interdependency, cycles of change, balance, struggle, and rootedness" (Alfred, 2009, pp. 110, 250; Coulthard, 2008, 2013; Simpson, 2011, p. 17; Corntassel, 2012, p. 91). This simultaneous 'turn away and turn to' reflects Jeff's call for a re-centering of community in both discussion and action. Yet, there is much more to Indigenous resurgence than a 'turn away' from settler society. Since Indigenous resurgence is inherently in contention with settler society, it also has explicit and implicit demands of that which is being contended with – namely, settler society and its dominant values. Theorists of Indigenous resurgence, such as Taiaiake Alfred and Leanne Simpson, among others, also express the possibility for settler society listening, learning, and acting, with respect to one's position in relation to the colonial difference, in accordance with and for what is being articulated; in short, the possibility of settlers being transformed through anti-colonial resistance (see, for instance, Alfred, 2009, p. 35; Arvin, Tuck & Morill, 2013; Coulthard, 2013; Simpson, 2008 2011). Indigenous resurgence is ultimately about reframing the conversation around decolonization in order to re-center and reinvigorate Indigenous nationhood.

Recognizing how settler colonialism works through other forms of power, Indigenous theorists have also stressed the importance of dismantling other power structures for Indigenous liberation. For instance, Alfred states that "the end goal of our Wasáse – our warrior's dance" is the "transform[ation of] the whole of society," and a "remak[ing of] the entire landscape of power," to ultimately "reflect a truly post-imperial vision" (2009, p. 27); Arvin, Tuck and Morrill (2013) note how, "Native feminist theories offer new and reclaimed ways of thinking through not only how settler colonialism has impacted Indigenous and settler communities, but also how feminist theories can imagine and realize different modes of nationalism and alliances in the future" (p. 9); Coulthard (2013) definitively states that, "for Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die"; Simpson (2011) writes that Indigenous resurgence, "requires a disruption of the capitalist industrial complex and the colonial gender systems (and a multitude of other institutions and systems) within settler nations" (p. 87); and Smith (2005) notes how sexual, gendered, and racial power works to naturalize hierarchies that effect both Indigenous and settler peoples (though, of course, in different ways), subsequently undermining alternatives to settler colonialism.

It seems clear to us that these explicit and implicit demands expressed through Indigenous resurgence, also provide important alternative and transformative visions articulated for Indigenous peoples and/settlers. As Smith (2005) writes, "when we do not presume that [settler colonial states] should or will always continue to exist, we create the space to reflect on what might be more just forms of governance, not only for Native peoples, but for the rest of the world" (p. 311). This is because, "Indigenous sovereignty and nationhood are predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility" rather than hypermasculine configurations of sovereignty and self based on a rejection of interdependency and projection of impermeability (p. 311). At the

same time, following Coulthard (2014), centering the colonial relation corrects an “excessively temporal framing of [primitive accumulation]” (p. 58), resists “becoming complicit in the very structures and processes of domination that [critical theory] ought to oppose” through, for instance, blanket calls to reclaim the commons (p. 61), and, echoing Smith above, prevents “overlooking what could prove to be invaluable glimpses into the ethical practices and preconditions required of a more humane and sustainable world order” (p. 61).

In our collective discussion, we consider the question of solidarity in relation to the challenges and alternatives articulated above, specifically looking at some of the temporal and spatial aspects of solidarity building and how these relationships unfold.

## **Discussion**

*Rita:* We need to problematize the question of solidarity because it separates issues, as if Indigenous issues are distinctly separate from migration issues, issues around temporary foreign workers, violence against women, etc. in two ways. One, it suggests that the white settler nation doesn't need to maneuver different bodies – Indigenous bodies, white bodies, bodies of colour, male, female, trans, queer, poor, disabled, religious, secular, citizens, noncitizen workers, refugees – differently. And also, in my case, people of colour are also structurally implicated in dispossession, whether that's our choice or not. So it posits that 'your' issues of Indigenous land are not separate from 'my' issues if I care about racism, sexism, and that I must think about the ways they are related to settler colonialism.

*Jeff:* I guess for me 'solidarity' gets away from the direct accountability, the trust elements that are embedded in any relationship that you have. So that trust and accountability are ongoing feedback loops, if you will, that you have to constantly renegotiate or reinterpret in order to act in solidarity, or act in concert, or act in camaraderie. But I think these terms mask the messiness of that overall process.

*Corey:* I agree with both your critiques. Solidarity does sometimes seem to imply a distinctness that, like you state Rita, ignores relations and complicity between. And like you state Jeff, there does seem to be an underlying conceptualization of solidarity as temporal event.

*Jeff:* And in terms of the temporal, at what point does forgetfulness become a problem? A Tsalagi saying, “Live in a longer 'now'— learn your history and culture and understand it is what you are now,” urges us to consider that notions of time are fluid and flexible. After all, the Tsalagi word for “I am forgetting” is *agikewsga*, which literally means I am blind or am unable to see something that happened in the past (Altman and Belt, 2012, p. 232). To live in a longer 'now', it

becomes one's responsibility to live in tohi, or a process of balance and according to the pace of the natural world (p. 227). In this sense, 'the longer now' implies not just a different time scale but also future generational responsibilities. So there is a different sense of Indigenous place-based and living histories that should be understood by folks proposing to act in solidarity. If someone is just simply saying 'I'm a Canadian, and I don't know my history', how useful is that to deepening solidarity? Maybe that forgetfulness... is also sort of convenient. You haven't done the hard work to uncover your role, or your family's role in, whether it's direct colonial actions or just settling here.

*Corey:* This not knowing, this forgetting of our own histories, just supports the claiming of space and place. These histories too are obviously entangled and complex. For instance, my great-great grandfather and his family were settlers in Ohio, eventually becoming a doctor and Christian missionary in the interior of China. This side of my family stayed in China – over time, transitioning from Christian missionaries to foreign capitalists – until the Second World War, when my great-grandfather was interned and my grandmother with her mother and brother came to Canada. So my own ancestral history is entangled with the global structures of settler colonialism, capitalism, christianity, white supremacy and imperialism. And how does this affect my own approaches and thoughts to solidarity? If I'm responsible to Indigenous peoples who have been and continue to be displaced and dispossessed by myself and my ancestors, and thus accountable to the structures and practices of settler colonialism and ultimately their destruction, am I not also responsible for my ancestors who served as missionaries and capitalists in China, and thus accountable to the structures and practices undergirding those acts? How does this longer, entangled, complex history contribute to solidarity practices with Indigenous peoples, *and* (in combination and/or isolation) amongst settlers ourselves?

*Rita:* It is a challenge to know what it means to be 'fully grounded', in a social and political sense. Growing up in the UK as a brown person in the 1970s and 1980s, during the era of overt police racism, the rise of the National Front, the anti-immigrant stance of Margaret Thatcher, I recall noting that there was a battlefield and that I was in solidarity with nonwhites. When I first arrived in Canada, the terrain shifted. I remember a series of racist incidences my family and I experienced. One of them was when my brother went to apply for a job as a bar tender and, in the window it said, 'No dogs allowed, no Indians allowed'. He was mad when he got home, we were all angry. It took us a few months to realize that the notice was about Indigenous peoples, not us as peoples from India. But the connections and differences started to form in my mind. I find it helpful when I

think of the history of colonialisms, of my family, and my role in Canada now to use ‘settler colonialism’ because it centres the dispossession of land as a distinguishing and ongoing colonial feature. Colonial assemblages certainly exist in India today too, such as in the road or education system but this is not government by a colonial body. The challenge is when we see colonialisms and racisms as separate, because the dispossession of Indigenous peoples lands is related to the history of British and European imperialism in India, Africa, the Caribbean, and other parts of the world, and also continuing. And these are patriarchal, heteronormative, ableist, and capitalist imperial formations that remain relevant today.

*Corey:* This relational, interdependent focus is also important amongst settlers ourselves – perhaps as a way to counter the flattening of differences that occurs amongst settlers, particularly in solidarity work. Settlers obviously need to be doing our own work and challenging ‘our’ institutions and practices that serve to protect or further colonization. But we can’t do this if we flatten the differences and ignore the inequalities and power relationships that exist within settler society. Not only does such flattening prevent much needed alliances but flattening itself can actually work to protect certain elements of settler colonialism. For instance, white supremacy works to naturalize *white* settler presence. In terms of solidarity then, I find it problematic for myself, as a white, class privileged, cis-hetero, and able bodied male (as well as people like me) to demand other peoples to act in solidarity, while also not holding myself (and others like me) responsible and accountable to other forms of violence that may be a contributing factor to the further reification of structures that support settler colonialism, like the State. Now I’m not arguing for the continued eschewal of Indigenous governance and legal orders because others experience violence, but rather, that the substantive recognition of Indigenous governance and legal orders also requires a dismantling of other, related forms of domination. This latter dismantling I see as necessary but also insufficient for the dismantling of settler colonialism. These sites and spaces of domination and resistance are distinct, but also connected dialectically. This seems to be something that settlers, white settlers specifically, have yet to articulate and take up, critique and act against. And this is perhaps most evident in how settlers seem to be continuously waiting for instruction from Indigenous peoples on how to act.

*Rita:* I wonder if this relational approach is a more useful direction for settler colonial studies, not unlike the kind of work you do Jeff, in thinking about colonialism in a global, comparative context.

*Jeff:* And I think, the more you can make those links, the British occupation of Maori territory is directly related to HBC's strategy to begin treaty making here... All those things are interrelated. They are shared, and they are seen as shared strategies. The other thing I see is this impulse to delocalize it... it's always that kind of Free Tibet Syndrome... the further away acts of genocide are from your location, the more outrage expressed at these injustices. It's a way of avoiding complicity, but it's also a way of recasting the gaze. It's like, 'We're not going to look right here, because this appears to be fairly peaceful' And so it's always that sort of re-directing away from localized responsibility, and almost magnifying impacts farther away.

*Rita:* So what settler colonial studies *does* do, is help us relocate to locality, which is helpful. You mention the HBC. I wonder what was the relationship between the Hudson Bay Company in Canada and the East India Company or the East Africa Company? If we're thinking about settler colonialism as a structure, how is it related to other modalities of gendered and sexualized white supremacy? How are the logics of State sovereignty and authority over nonwhite bodies connected? If we're thinking about it, as non-Indigenous peoples being 'in solidarity', part of that is locating, attacking the whole structure of imperialism that is deeply gendered and homonationalist, that depends on neo-liberal projects of prioritizing able-bodied workers who can serve capitalism.

*Corey:* Part of this, I think, what we've been discussing here, relates to what I sometimes see as the framing of 'settler' as event, rather than structure – where we are perhaps overly focused on the question of 'who' at the expense of the 'how'. If we don't understand how settlers are produced we run the risk of representing settlers as some sort of transhistorical subject with transhistorical practices. So I'm worried that while in one moment the term 'settler' denaturalizes our – that is all non-Indigenous peoples – presence on Indigenous lands, in the next, and through this construction of the 'settler' as transhistorical, we renaturalize it. In short, we go from a disavowal of colonization, to its representation as inevitable. Here is where I think a historical materialist or genealogical approach to the production of settler subjects may be useful in showing how this production is conditioned by but also contingent on a number of factors – white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, capitalism, colonization, the eschewal of Indigenous governance and legal orders, environmental degradation, etc. Now this is also not to say that the binary of Indigenous/Settler isn't accurate. I think its fundamental. Rather, I think it is possible and important to recognize that there have been, and are, individuals (or even collectives) that might be referred to as something other than settlers by Indigenous peoples, perhaps as cousins. Or in a similar vein, that there have been

and are practices by settlers that aren't colonial (and here is where centering Indigenous peoples' accounts of Indigenous-settler relations, as well as their own governance, legal and diplomatic orders is crucial). But I think it's just as important to recognize that these relations have and do not occur *despite* settler colonial and imperial logics, and thus outside of the binary. Rather, such relations occur in the face of it. The binary then is fundamental as the logics that uphold the binary cannot be ignored due to the existence of possibly good relations as the logics that uphold the binary threaten those relations through the pursuit of the elimination of Indigenous peoples.

*Rita:* Yet, how do we act in light of these entanglements, and with, rather than overcoming differences?

*Corey:* Tuck and Yang (2012) had this really great article, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor." In it, they talk about the importance of an ethics of incommensurability – a recognition of how anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggles are incommensurable with decolonization. But what I've been thinking about recently is whether these struggles are *incompatible*. For example, in the Indigenous resurgence literature, there is a turn away, but it's also not an outright rejection. It also demands settlers to change. Yet recognizing that settlers are (re)produced, the change demanded is not just an individual transformation, but one connected to broader social, economic, and political justice. There are then, it seems, potential lines of affinity between decolonization and others, though incommensurable, struggles. And in order to sustain this compatibility in the face of incommensurability, relationships are essential in order to maintain accountability and to resist repeating colonial and other relations of domination, as well as, in very strategic terms, in supporting each other's resistance.

*Rita:* As some anti-racist and Indigenous feminists have long argued, it's not possible for people of colour to confront different racisms without thinking about sexism, capitalist exploitation, homophobia and transphobia, Indigenous struggles – they are tied to one another. There is an affinity between decolonization and other struggles. Differently positioned people of colour and Indigenous peoples are not operating with the same kinds or degrees of authority as whites or each other, but nonetheless we are not outside of these relations and forces of power.

*Jeff:* I like building off Tuck and Yang too. It's a way of showing the linkages across these movements, but also how they can be tighter. How can we deepen them and focus on the everyday acts of resurgence that Indigenous peoples engage in?

*Rita:* What you say reminds me Corey about a question you have raised in another context on temporal and spatial solidarities.

*Corey:* In June 2013, at Congress, you both were on a panel titled “Solidarities, Territorialities, and Embodiments.” At this panel, Jeff, you seemed to be challenging Rita’s notion of “temporary solidarities” by emphasizing the importance of relationship grounded in place. So I first would question how useful ‘temporary solidarities’ as a concept is. Second, I’m wondering about the importance of bringing the role of territorialities within these discussions of solidarity themselves. Maybe, Jeff, what you were talking about at Congress and in conversations you and I have had, is a gesturing towards what we could potentially call ‘spatial solidarities’ – or bringing spatiality into discussions of solidarity.

*Jeff:* As the late Vine Deloria, Jr. (2001) has said, “power and place produce personality.” In this sense, place-based relationships are personal and anything approaching spatial solidarity would entail the regeneration of Indigenous languages, ceremonial life, living histories, and nationhood. For this reason, spatial solidarities can be a way to localize struggles for Indigenous resurgence. While the “Idle No More” movement, which began in 2012 in Canada as a response to proposed legislation by Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s government that undermined Indigenous protections of land and water, tapped into an ongoing and collective Indigenous struggle for land, culture and community, the settler support for it was predominantly temporally driven and performative rather than localized and land-based. I find that the most powerful mobilization for change happens when the spatial and temporal intersect.

*Rita:* This centering of land strikes me as constitutive to any kind of political work with Indigenous peoples. Can you give an example Jeff?

*Jeff:* One example might be how settlers are welcomed onto Indigenous homelands among Native nations in Australia. Beginning in the 1980’s, Tasmanian activist and lawyer, Michael Mansell, issued ‘Aboriginal Passports’ to an Indigenous delegation visiting Libya in 1988. More recently, Aboriginal Passports have been issued to non-Indigenous people living on Indigenous homelands. Someone visiting Indigenous homelands in Australia can apply for an Aboriginal Passport and sign a pledge stating that, “We do not support the colonial occupation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands” (Aboriginal Passport Ceremony, 2012). This innovative strategy challenges the authority of the Australian government to regulate the travel of visitors onto Indigenous homelands and raises



awareness of contemporary struggles of Indigenous peoples in order to build solidarity for future movements.

*Rita:* Corey, your question is helpful, and Jeff's response also helps me think through the movement between time-situated and place-based practices of 'solidarity' and ways of thinking about these situated practices in terms of an *ethos* of 'unsettled solidarities' that moves across time and space, that is a way of being in the world, a set of ongoing relations. Where I, where we, are never outside of struggle, everyone is 'structurally implicated' in the dispossession of Indigenous lands. Everyone is differentially structurally implicated, where the ideology of presumed consent underlies settler colonialism.

*Jeff:* I would add that living on another Indigenous nation's territory also carries an obligation to support those defending their homelands. Cheryl Bryce from Songhees First Nation started the "Community Tool Shed" in 2009 to generate support for the restoration of Lekwungen food systems. The Community Tool Shed in Victoria, British Columbia, is where settlers and Indigenous peoples can come together to rid the land of invasive species, such as Scottish Broom, and to revitalize traditional plants such as kwetlal or camas. Cheryl's focus for this informal group is on reclaiming traditional place names, educating people about the destructiveness of invasive species, and reinstating Lekwungen food systems. The tool shed meets once per month to pull invasive species on places that have been managed by Cheryl's family for generations, such as Meegan (aka, Beacon Hill Park), and Sitchamalth (Willows Beach). To a 'resident' of Lekwungen homelands, the above-mentioned places are public lands. This demonstrates the urgency of reclaiming Indigenous place names in tandem with the restoration of Indigenous foodscapes and landscapes. The May 22, 2013 reclamation of the name PKOLS (formerly known as Mount Douglas) is one of many examples where communities can come together to demand representation on their own terms. These are everyday acts of resurgence that highlight the terrain of Indigenous struggles to restore and reconnect a place-based existence.

*Corey:* And both examples you highlighted Jeff do not foreclose a wide-range of participants. The PKOLS reclamation led by the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, involved participation from Indigenous peoples across Vancouver Island and across Turtle Island, it involved the university through the Indigenous Governance program, and it involved local, non-Indigenous, activist groups, most notably Social Coast. The Community Tool Shed, a project that I've also been involved in for the past two years, does something similar. What I find really interesting in this work is that settlers and Indigenous peoples challenge our environmentally degraded and

colonial present simultaneously. Yet, there is still attention paid to the different roles and responsibilities in this work. For instance, non-Lekwungen people in removing invasive species, and Lekwungen people in managing these lands and in harvesting plants such as camas. So unlike other stewardship groups around Victoria, those participating are not seeking to depoliticize this work, nor do they argue that this work erases their complicity or their potential complicity in colonization. In supporting Cheryl's assertion of her roles and responsibilities, they aren't seeking to restore land in order to claim it for themselves. They aren't Locke redux. And, given the nature and extent of Broom here – you find it pretty much everywhere around Southern Vancouver Island, something like 18,000 seeds are produced in a single plant, and those seeds can lie dormant for up to thirty years – pulling broom one time really does not mean much. So there is a demand for long-term work, which itself can help build accountability through such place-based relationships. And since land is the irreducible element of settler colonialism, and that environmental degradation has often proceeded through and in support of settler colonialism, it provides an example of non-Indigenous practices with the land that aren't necessarily colonial. Now I'm not saying that this is an example of decolonization or that those involved are somehow not settlers. After all, decolonization and the transformation of settlers requires subjective and objective transformations. Rather it's a practice that does not reify colonization, and thus challenges settler colonial studies construction of settler colonialism as inevitable and transhistorical.

## **Conclusion**

Decontextualized conceptions of settler colonial studies, 'settler', and solidarity risk further eschewing Indigenous peoples and thereby reifying the stolen land each of the above is founded upon. Perhaps, most centrally, this is done through de-centering Indigenous peoples own articulations of Indigenous-settler relations, their governance, legal, and diplomatic orders, and the transformative visions entailed within Indigenous political thought. Such de-centering has the potential to present settler colonialism as complete or transhistorical, as inevitable, rather than conditioned and contingent. This failure to attend to the conditions and contingency of settler colonialism can also be traced to the marginalization of how colonization actually proceeds across time and space. That is, as entangled with other relations of domination, and not only through structures, but also practices that serve as, what Paige Raibmon (2008) refers to, "microtechniques of dispossession." Those who critique settler colonialism through transhistorical representations are then able to feel good and satisfied about their criticisms, despite their ahistoricism and decontextualization, and thus their own role in actually sustaining colonial power by failing to attend to its conditions and contingency.

We ask: what good is it to analyze settler colonialism if that analysis does not shed light on sites of contradiction and weakness, the conditions for its reproduction, or the spaces and practices of resistance to it? What is the purpose of deploying ‘settler’ without attention to its utility, to what it alludes to or eludes from? What good is solidarity if it cannot attend to the literal (and stolen) ground on which people stand and come together upon?

In this paper, we have argued for a contextual approach to the questions of settler colonialism, settlers, and solidarity. It is ultimately about accountability to each other, as the Tsalagi word, *digadatsele’i* suggests, and treating Indigenous resurgence as a process that cannot occur in isolation. This, as argued throughout this paper, demands a centering of and support for Indigenous resurgences, and a shift from a one-dimensional to a relational approach to settler colonial analyses that is connected to the issue of other Others. This also demands place-based solidarities – that is, relationships and practices – that center both Indigenous resurgences and more relational approaches to settler colonial power. After all, settler colonialism will not be undone by analysis alone, but through lived and contentious engagement with the literal and stolen ground on which people stand and come together upon.

## **Appendix**

“Settle”, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means:

1. “To seat, place”
2. “To place (material things) in order, or in a convenient or desired position; to adjust (i.e. one’s clothing)”
3. “To place (a person) in an attitude of repose, so as to be undisturbed for a time”
4. “To cause to take up one’s residence in a place; esp. to establish (a body of persons) as residents in a town or country; to plant (a colony)”. Two derivatives from the fourth definition are “to fix or establish permanently (one’s abode, residence, etc.),” and “to furnish (a place) with inhabitants or settlers”
5. “To fix, implant (something) in (a person’s heart, mind, etc.)”
6. “To set firmly on a foundation; to fix (a foundation) securely”
7. “Of things, esp. of flying or floating objects [...] to come down and remain”
8. “To come together from dispersion or wondering [...] of a body of persons: To direct their course to a common point”
9. “Of things: To lodge, come to rest, in a definite place after wandering”
10. “Of persons: To cease from migration and adopt a fixed abode; to establish a permanent residence [...] become domiciled,” with its derivative as “of a people: to take up its abode in a foreign country. Also to establish a colony”
11. “To come or bring to rest after agitation”
12. “Of persons: To become composed; to compose oneself to sleep; to come to a quiet or orderly state after excitement or restless activity”

13. "To quiet, tranquilize, compose (a person, his mind, brain, nerves, etc.); to allay (passion)"
14. "To come to an end of a series of changes or fluctuations and assume a definite form or condition"
15. "To ensure the stability or permanence of (a condition of things, a quality, a form of power, etc.)"
16. "To secure or confirm (a person) in a position of authority, an office; to install permanently, establish in an office, an employment." (First used in this manner by Hall in the *Chronicles of King Henry VI*, 1548: "When Kyng Henry was somewhat setteled in the realme of Scotlande")
17. "To establish (a person) in the matrimonial state"
18. "To establish (a person) in the legal possession of property"
19. "To secure (payment, property, title) to, on, or upon (a person) by decree, ordinance, or enactment"
20. "To subject to permanent regulations, to set permanently in order, place on a permanent footing (institutions, government)"
21. "To appoint or fix definitely beforehand, to decide upon (a time, place, plan of action, price, conditions, etc.) [...] to adjust (one's action) to something". Derivatives of this definition include: "to appoint or arrange (something to be done or to take place)," "to fix by mutual agreement," "to come to a decision; to decide to do something; to decide upon (a plan of action, an object of choice)," "to settle for, to decide or agree on, to content oneself with"
22. "To decide, come to a fixed conclusion on (a question, a matter of doubt or discussion); to bring to an end (a dispute) by agreement or intervention." Derivatives of this use include: "Law. To decide (a case) by arrangement between the contesting parties," "To put beyond dispute, establish (a principle, fact) by authority or argument," "To arrange matters in dispute, to come to terms or agreement with a person"
23. "To close (an account) by a money payment; to pay (an account, bill, score)"

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