

## CONTROVERSY / POLÉMIQUE

# Settler Colonialism and Labour Studies in Canada: A Preliminary Exploration

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THE 21ST CENTURY HAS SEEN GROWING attention to settler colonialism among academic researchers in Canada and internationally.<sup>1</sup> Precisely how this phenomenon should be understood is contested, and will be discussed in the opening section of this article, but it is commonly seen as a kind of colonialism that aims to dispossess Indigenous peoples and eliminate Indigenous societies rather than just exploit the labour of colonial subjects and appropriate colonies' natural resources. In the Canadian context, interest has been fuelled above all by an ongoing resurgence of Indigenous activism and intellectual work, of which the most visible expression to most non-Indigenous people was the Idle No More movement of 2012–13.<sup>2</sup> To date, however, little attention has

1. As has rightly been observed, "The institutionalization of settler colonial studies is quite remarkable." Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon & Jeff Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 3, 2 (2014): 9. Importantly, though, scholarly work on settler colonialism cannot be reduced to work by researchers who self-identify with "settler colonial studies" as an academic field. For some critical remarks on the latter, see Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism." Scholars located in Indigenous studies, history, geography, and other disciplines are contributing to scholarship on settler colonialism, and not all identify with settler colonial studies.

2. Kino-nda-niimi Collective, *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future and the Idle No More Movement* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2014). It is vital to acknowledge that there are many Indigenous peoples, not a homogenous group. Both "Indigenous" and "non-Indigenous" are concepts referring to groups of persons organized by an interlocking matrix of social relations (e.g. class, gender, settler-colonial, racial). I follow Elaine Coburn in believing that they remain useful as concepts "because they purposefully center an ongoing colonial relationship as a fact of contemporary political and social relations across lands and seas claimed by Canada." Coburn, "Indigenous Resistance and Resurgence," in Elaine Coburn,

been paid to settler colonialism within labour studies, broadly understood.<sup>3</sup> As a modest contribution to remedying this deficiency, this article argues for the importance of understanding Canada as a settler-colonial society and offers some preliminary reflections on integrating analysis of settler colonialism into research in labour history and labour studies.

## Settler Colonialism?

THERE HAVE BEEN VERY FEW discussions of colonialism within labour studies research in Canada. The new edition of the textbook *Work and Labour in Canada: Critical Issues* is notable for containing a two-paragraph overview of settler colonialism that concludes, “The contemporary experiences of Aboriginal peoples in the labour market cannot be separated from this legacy of land dispossession and institutionalized racism.”<sup>4</sup> The leading introductory textbook on unions, *Building a Better World*, mentions “Indigenous subsistence labour” and briefly discusses Idle No More and Indigenous workers in relation to racism but without any contextualization in terms of colonialism.<sup>5</sup> *My Canadian Labour in Crisis: Reinventing the Workers’ Movement* contains one paragraph on the issue.<sup>6</sup> The valuable book chapter on unions and Indigenous peoples by Suzanne E. Mills and Tyler McCreary – probably the most widely read piece on its subject to appear in print – does not develop its passing references to colonialism.<sup>7</sup> Mills and Louise Clarke’s journal article on the same topic goes further. It links racism against Indigenous peoples to “settlers’ need to justify their dispossession from lands.” It also draws attention to ideological depictions that “normaliz[e] the Canadian state and the economic system as fair and racially neutral based on an ahistoric belief in meritocracy” and that allege that “settlers’ relative success vis a vis Aboriginal people is a result of their hard work,” thereby explaining inequality as a

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ed., *More Will Sing Their Way to Freedom: Indigenous Resistance and Resurgence* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2016), 31.

3. In this article I use “labour studies” in a broad sense, to refer to research on work, workers, workers’ organizations, and related issues, past and present, in all academic disciplines including history.

4. Andrew Jackson & Mark Thomas, *Work and Labour in Canada: Critical Issues*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2017), 140.

5. Stephanie Ross, Larry Savage, Errol Black & Jim Silver, *Building a Better World: An Introduction to the Labour Movement in Canada*, 3rd ed. (Halifax: Fernwood, 2015), 19, 148–149, 150–151.

6. David Camfield, *Canadian Labour in Crisis: Reinventing the Workers’ Movement* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2011), 137.

7. Suzanne Mills & Tyler McCreary, “Social Unionism, Partnership and Conflict: Union Engagement with Aboriginal Peoples in Canada,” in Stephanie Ross & Larry Savage, eds., *Rethinking the Politics of Labour in Canada* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2012), 116–131.

consequence of “Aboriginal inferiority.” Mills and Clarke make the crucial point that “Aboriginal peoples’ prior occupancy of, and subsequent dispossession from their territories, as well as other colonial state policies and practices have crucially shaped Aboriginal peoples’ relationship to work and unions.”<sup>8</sup> However, this point about colonial dispossession and state actions is not developed further. Similarly, Bryan Palmer and Joan Sangster, writing as co-editors of a collection of readings in Canadian working-class history, make the noteworthy observation that “the histories of Native peoples and workers are neither separable nor able to be rewritten without understanding the extent to which they are deeply entwined.”<sup>9</sup> However, neither they nor any of the chapters collected in their volume further theorize this entwinement in terms of colonialism.

Inattention to settler colonialism within labour studies in Canada has several sources. The strains of Marxist and *marxisant* thought that have most influenced the field have not been ones in which colonialism figures as a concept relevant to the analysis of some advanced capitalist societies.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, most of the antiracist theories that have had an impact on labour studies have either not analyzed the oppression of Indigenous peoples in terms of colonialism or have subsumed anticolonial struggle as “one component of a larger antiracist struggle.”<sup>11</sup> I suspect I am not the only left researcher who shied away from taking the concept of settler colonialism seriously because of the term’s historical association with forms of sectarian Maoist politics that

8. Suzanne E. Mills & Louise Clarke, “‘We Will Go Side-By-Side with You’: Labour Union Engagement with Aboriginal Peoples in Canada,” *Geoforum* 40 (2009): 995, 996, 993.

9. Palmer & Sangster, “Aboriginal Peoples and Class Formation, 1750–1900,” in Bryan D. Palmer & Joan Sangster, eds., *Labouring Canada: Class, Gender and Race in Canadian Working-Class History* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3. For an overview of Canadian labour historiography that bears witness to the absence of settler colonialism as a critical concept in this tradition of historical writing, see Bryan D. Palmer, “Canada,” in Joan Allen, Alan Campbell & John McIlroy, eds., *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives* (Pontypool: Merlin, 2010), 195–230.

10. For exceptions, see Joyce Green, “Decolonization and Recolonization in Canada,” in Wallace Clement & Lea F. Vosko, eds., *Changing Canada: Political Economy as Transformation* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 51–78; Daiva Stasiulis & Radha Jhappan, “The Fractious Politics of a Settler Society: Canada,” in Daiva Stasiulis & Nira Yuval-Davis, eds., *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class* (London: SAGE, 1995), 95–131. One indication of the inattention to colonialism is the low level of lack of engagement with Howard Adams, *Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View*, 2nd ed. (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1989). Interestingly, the sadly unpublished and little-known dissertation that marks the highpoint of late 20th-century historical materialist analysis of Indigenous issues in Canada does not deploy a concept of settler colonialism: Deborah Lee Simmons, “Against Capital: The Political Economy of Aboriginal Resistance in Canada,” PhD thesis, York University, 1995.

11. Bonita Lawrence & Enakshi Dua, “Decolonizing Anti-Racism,” *Social Justice* 32, 4 (2005): 131.

dismiss the struggles of most workers in Canada and are buttressed by dubious history and theory.<sup>12</sup> Above all, though, I suggest that the inattention to settler colonialism within labour studies in Canada is a reflection of the fact that the field has been developed by non-Indigenous people in a society in which “Indigenous peoples pose a problem ... one to be managed, accounted for, and ultimately dealt with so that Canadians can get on with the business of being Canadian.”<sup>13</sup> In this social environment, non-Indigenous people are much more likely to acknowledge the presence of Indigenous people and their conditions of life than we are to understand that a distinctive social relationship of oppression exists between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples. To use a concept originally developed within critical race theory, an epistemology of ignorance has been generated by this relation of domination.<sup>14</sup> All intellectual fields in Canada have been shaped to varying degrees by ways of knowing that make settler colonialism difficult to grasp or even acknowledge; labour studies is no exception. Observations about labour studies publications in this article should be read in this light. My aim is not to criticize specific authors but to offer some self-critical reflections from within the field and suggestions for strengthening labour studies.

What exactly is this social relation for whose importance I am arguing? Patrick Wolfe, whose work contributed greatly to the 21st-century study of settler colonialism, distinguishes it from other forms of colonialism with the argument that “settler colonies were not primarily established to extract surplus value from indigenous labour. Rather, they are premised on displacing indigenes from (or replacing them on) the land. ... Settler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies.” This elimination is “an organising principal of settler-colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence. ... Invasion is a structure, not an event.”<sup>15</sup> Lorenzo

12. For example, J. Sakai, *Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat* (n.p., 1989). For a critique of Sakai, see Sebastian Lamb, “J Sakai’s *Settlers* and Anti-Racist Working-Class Politics” (2003), <http://newsocialist.org/j-sakais-settlers-and-anti-racist-working-class-politics/>. On such politics, which still influence some anticolonial activists and young researchers today, see also Kim Moody, “Reflections of a Weather Underground Veteran,” review of *Love and Struggle: My Life in SDS, the Weather Underground and Beyond*, by David Gilbert, 25 August 2012, <http://newsocialist.org/reflections-of-a-weather-underground-veteran/>; Gary Kinsman & J. Charbonneau, “Beyond Waving the Red Flag: Towards a Political Critique of the Revolutionary Communist Party and the Revolutionary Student Movement,” *Radical Noise*, 24 May 2017, <http://radicalnoise.ca/2017/05/24/beyond-waving-the-red-flag-towards-a-political-critique-of-the-revolutionary-communist-party-and-the-revolutionary-student-movement/>.

13. Emma Batell Lowman & Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2015), 6.

14. Shannon Sullivan & Nancy Tuana, eds., *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007). It is not difficult to make the case that all relations of oppression have such intellectual effects.

15. Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassell, 1999), 1–2; Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary*

Veracini, the best-known living figure in the field of settler colonial studies, argues that “the settler colonial situation is characterised by a settler capacity to control the population economy as a marker of a substantive type of sovereignty.” Further, Veracini states that “settler colonialism ... is primarily characterised by indigenous deterritorialisation accompanied by a sustained denial of any state-making capability for indigenous peoples.”<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, Veracini has recently confused matters considerably with a colossal act of conceptual inflation. In *The Settler Colonial Present*, he claims that the global neoliberal order “is not interested in reproducing us as labour” and so “we are being treated *like* indigenous peoples: dispossessed by a regime that is not interested in the reproduction of labour.” In short, “We are all facing a settler colonial present.”<sup>17</sup> As Owen Toews has noted, “this analysis is irritatingly simplistic” and “seems to deny the specificity of Indigenous peoples’ struggles in the contemporary moment, exactly what many turn to the settler colonial analytic to help understand.” Veracini’s recent stance amplifies earlier concerns that a focus on settler colonialism can end up depicting it “as complete or transhistorical, as inevitable, rather than conditioned and contingent” as a consequence of marginalizing Indigenous peoples’ ideas and political practices.<sup>18</sup> Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel 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?”<sup>19</sup>

To these analytical and ethical-political problems we can add two others. First, although research on settler colonialism frequently acknowledges that this form of oppression is entangled with other forms of oppression, such as patriarchy, racism, and heterosexism, and with capitalism, there are often difficulties with how this entanglement is theorized. Talk of “interactions” or “intersections” with settler colonialism is common. These metaphors imply that different forms of oppression exist in isolation and subsequently come into contact with one another. This is a social ontology of externally rather than internally related phenomena. Such “formulations risk reproducing what intersectionality feminism” – an important influence on discussions of how settler colonialism and other forms of oppression are intertwined – originally “set out to critique: a fragmented and textualised conception of reality,” argues

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*Structure of Race* (London: Verso Books, 2015), 33.

16. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 12, 105.

17. Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 93, 92.

18. Toews, review of *The Settler Colonial Present*, by Lorenzo Veracini, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, forthcoming.

19. Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Corntassel, “Unsettling Settler Colonialism,” 26, 27.

Susan Ferguson.<sup>20</sup> Second, many contributions to settler colonial studies fail to grasp the extent to which settler colonialism is inner-connected with capitalism and how this shapes settler-colonial social processes. This weakness is largely attributable to the influence of social theories that do not capture capitalism's totalizing logic and sometimes neglect the relationship between settler colonialism and mode of production altogether, as well as the influence of historical writing informed by such theories. As Natalie Knight stresses in contrast, "colonialism ... did not emerge from nowhere, and it did not emerge on its own."<sup>21</sup>

In light of these problems, a conceptualization of settler colonialism adequate for the purposes of this paper can be developed by drawing the best work on the topic into a reconstructed historical materialism, one that fuses the best ideas of Marx and later historical materialists with intellectual breakthroughs generated outside that tradition by theorizing associated with struggles against oppression.<sup>22</sup> This approach is in some ways similar to Glen Sean Coulthard's proposal that "rendering Marx's theoretical frame relevant to a comprehensive understanding of settler colonialism and Indigenous resistance requires that it be transformed *in conversation* with the critical thought and practices of Indigenous peoples themselves."<sup>23</sup>

We can follow Coulthard, then, in defining settler colonialism as a social relation of domination that "has been structured into a relatively secure or

20. Ferguson, "Intersectionality and Social-Reproduction Feminisms: Toward an Integrative Ontology," *Historical Materialism* 24, 2 (2016): 45–46.

21. Knight, "Imperialism, Capitalism and the Revolutionary Potential of Urban Indigenous Land Relationships," *The Volcano*, 5 April 2018, <http://thevolcano.org/2018/04/05/revolutionary-potential-of-urban-indigenous-land-relationships/>. The failure to theorize settler colonialism in relation to modes of production in general, and to capitalism specifically, is evident in, for example, Edward Cavanagh & Lorenzo Veracini, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2017), and Lowman & Barker, *Settler*.

22. David Camfield, "Theoretical Foundations of an Anti-Racist Queer Feminist Historical Materialism," *Critical Sociology* 42, 2 (2016): 289–306. The final version of this article was accepted for publication in early 2014, and thus although it contains brief references to colonialism it was unable to benefit from Glen Sean Coulthard's important *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) or Jeffery R. Webber, "The Indigenous Community as 'Living Organism': José Carlos Mariátegui, Romantic Marxism, and Extractive Capitalism in the Andes," *Theory and Society* 44, 6 (2015): 575–598. Ferguson, in "Intersectionality," also argues for a reconstructed historical materialism.

23. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 8. In addition to the works of Indigenous "critical thought" by Adams, Taiaiake Alfred, Coulthard, Green, and Audra Simpson and the article coauthored by Corntassel cited earlier (Snelgrove, Dharmoon & Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism"), see Elaine Coburn, "Theorizing Colonialism and Indigenous Liberation: Contemporary Indigenous Scholarship from Lands Claimed by Canada," *Studies in Political Economy* 97, 3 (2016): 285–307; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resurgence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous people of their lands and self-determining authority.”<sup>24</sup> Audra Simpson’s emphasis is essential: “When we speak of dispossession we are speaking of the materiality of land. The land that Indigenous peoples own, care for, are related to and are moved from, by force or by fiat for settlement.”<sup>25</sup> Here land, as Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker helpfully clarify, “refers to something akin to ‘place’: territories imbued with social meaning that form the basis of social life, sustaining political economies and informing cultural and community practices.” Indigenous peoples have “a relationship *with* the land” while settler-colonial societies have “a relationship *to* the land.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, dispossession should be understood “in more complex terms than just land loss,” argues Leanne Betasamosake Simpson: it is a “gendered removal of our bodies and minds from our nation and place-based grounded normativities,” the latter being Coulthard’s term for “ethical frameworks generated by ... place-based practices and associated knowledges.”<sup>27</sup>

Dispossession is often partial but is no less real on that account. Similarly, settler colonialism rarely achieves the total elimination (physical and/or cultural) of Indigenous peoples. In socio-spatial terms it can be thought of as a mesh. This mesh is composed of nets of settler-colonial practices that “tighten or slacken as they stretch across space and time” and “is prone to snags and tears,” as Andrew Woolford puts it.<sup>28</sup> In the societies where it is present, settler colonialism exists as part of an interlocking or mutually mediating (internally related) matrix of social relations including those of class, gender, sexuality, and race. Settler colonialism has always been imposed on Indigenous peoples by societies organized by patriarchal gender relations. Although today settler colonialism is everywhere inner-related with capitalism, only in England was capitalism dominant when European settler colonialism first began to take shape in northern North America. Nor were European settler-colonial societies in North America capitalist from their inception. However, the influence of English capitalism was soon apparent and the process of primitive

24. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 7.

25. Audra Simpson, “The State Is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty,” *Theory and Event* 19, 4 (2016), <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/633280>.

26. Lowman & Barker, *Settler*, 49, 53.

27. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 43, 22.

28. Andrew Woolford, *This Benevolent Experiment: Indigenous Boarding Schools, Genocide, and Redress in Canada and the United States* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 3, 4. On the social ontology of a complex totality of mutually mediating social relations, see Ferguson, “Intersectionality”; Camfield, “Theoretical Foundations,” 296–297. For an argument in favour of recognizing settler colonialism and the racial oppression of African Americans and other racially oppressed groups within the United States as specific internally related phenomena, against Indigenous or Afro-Pessimist “exceptionalisms,” see Iyko Day, “Being or Nothingness: Indigeneity, Antiblackness, and Settler Colonial Critique,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, 2 (2015): 102–121.



accumulation began to put its stamp on England's colonies before capitalist industry took off in the mid-1800s.<sup>29</sup> Given the character of settler colonialism as a social relation, it is logical to follow Taiaiake Alfred in concluding that “the most basic changes” that would be required to uproot this form of oppression would be “the return of unceded lands, reforms to state constitutions to reflect the principle of indigenous nationhood and to bring into effect a nation-to-nation relationship between indigenous peoples and Settler society, and restitution.”<sup>30</sup>

It is obvious that, as an oppressive social relation, settler colonialism harms Indigenous people. Its impact on non-Indigenous people is a more controversial issue. In general, a form of oppression confers advantages on members of the dominant social group in question. The latter are, however, divided along class lines as well as by other forms of oppression. The concept of privilege can be a useful tool for analyzing the advantages that accrue to members of dominant groups. However, the way that “privilege” is most often used today – as referring to any difference in social condition – is not helpful. This meaning involves a logic of infinite differences between individuals: you are homeless and starving but because I have a minimum-wage job and live in a dilapidated and overcrowded apartment I have privilege. This obscures rather than illuminates how relations of oppression and exploitation operate. This version of the concept of privilege, which is detached from a critical materialist theory of social relations, is also open to appropriation by neoliberal political forces. For example, in the 2016 US presidential election campaign, arguments like “Only *privilege* would motivate someone to fail to vote for Hillary Clinton” were “mobilized to support a politics in which steady support for drone-bombing, violent coup regimes, criminalization of Blackness, and apolo-

29. Useful theoretical guidance for the study of modes of production is found in Jairus Banaji, “Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History,” *Capital and Class* 3 (1977): 1–44. On primitive accumulation and related issues, a recent theoretical contribution is Daniel Bin, “So-Called Accumulation by Dispossession,” *Critical Sociology* 44, 1 (2018): 75–88. We still lack a major historical materialist account of the development of capitalism in northern North America that draws on theory honed in international debates and the body of historical studies now available. Discussions of modes of production in early settler-colonial societies in North America include Charles Post, *The American Road to Capitalism: Studies in Class-Structure, Economic Development and Political Conflict, 1620–1877* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Allan Greer, “Wage Labour and the Transition to Capitalism: A Critique of Pentland,” *Labour/Le Travail* 15 (1985): 7–22; Simmons, “Against Capital.” See also Allan Greer, *Property and Dispossession: Natives, Empires and Land in Early Modern North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), which eschews analysis in terms of modes of production but contains much of relevance to understanding feudal settler colonialism in New France. For some comparative reflections on the distinctively capitalist character of early modern English colonialism, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (London: Verso Books, 2003), 73–109.

30. Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2005), 268.



for state violence are not worth batting an eye over.”<sup>31</sup> It is in this context that David Roediger has, in the context of racial oppression, written “I wonder if we on the left might be better off with a different terminology, perhaps focusing on white advantage.” Although I continue to use the term “privilege,” I emphasize that here it means “advantage inside a system in which most people are miserable.”<sup>32</sup>

This more precise and carefully considered understanding of privilege uses the term to refer to the material and psychological advantages relative to the conditions of an oppressed group that are conferred on members of a dominant group as a consequence of how they are positioned by a social relation of oppression. Thus the advantages that non-Indigenous people receive as a consequence of living in a settler-colonial society are settler-colonial privilege. The political effects of settler-colonial privilege on non-Indigenous people vary depending on where they are located within their particular society’s interlocking matrix of social relations. For example, the substance of privilege and its impacts on non-Indigenous workers in Israel and Canada today are arguably quite different. In general, however, the advantages that members of the capitalist class derive from settler colonialism are much greater than those conferred on non-Indigenous members of the working class, for whom such advantages are inextricably connected to a social order in which they are exploited and – for the majority who experience sexism, racism, heterosexism, and/or some other kind of domination – oppressed simultaneously. Like white privilege, settler-colonial privilege is real but not actually in the interests of non-Indigenous workers because, like racism (although not identically), it divides and weakens the working class. That few people realize this is tragic, but does not make it any less true.<sup>33</sup>

## Settler Colonialism in Northern North America

IS CANADA A SETTLER-COLONIAL society? Although former prime minister Stephen Harper infamously denied that Canada has a colonial past,<sup>34</sup> the

31. Zach Schwartz-Weinstein, “‘White Privilege’ Defanged: From Class War Analysis to Electoral Cynicism,” *Abolition*, 27 October 2016, <https://abolitionjournal.org/white-privilege-defanged/>.

32. David R. Roediger, *Class, Race and Marxism* (London: Verso Books, 2017), 21, 20.

33. This understanding of privilege in general is developed in David Camfield, “Elements of a Historical-Materialist Theory of Racism,” *Historical Materialism* 24, 1 (2016): 31–70. Among the influences on this conceptualization is Andrea Smith, “The Problem with ‘Privilege,’” Andrea Smith’s Blog, 14 August 2013, <https://andrea366.wordpress.com/2013/08/14/the-problem-with-privilege-by-andrea-smith/>. This understanding can be contrasted with Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker’s discussion of the “benefits” of settler colonialism, by which they refer both to what they see as real advantages and to others that “do not actually exist.” See Lowman & Barker, *Settler*, 85–86.

34. Stephen Hui, “Shawn Atleo Criticizes Stephen Harper over ‘No History of

Canadian state and the colonies of British North America out of which it was created were indisputably built on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples both from the land and from the political authority to determine their own futures. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) – hardly radical critics – notes that by the late 1700s “a fundamental change was occurring in the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Confined initially to the eastern part of the country, change in the relationship was soon experienced in central Canada as well.” While the RCAP report uses the term “displacement,” it recognizes the reality of dispossession: Indigenous people “were denied access to their traditional territories and in many cases actually forced to move to new locations selected for them by colonial authorities.” They were, in the words of the RCAP, “also displaced politically” – that is, deprived by colonialism of the ability to determine their affairs as polities.<sup>35</sup>

Further west, on the prairies, bison hunting was at the heart of Indigenous life. James Daschuk observes that the elimination of the herds by white settlers in the 1870s “ended a way of life that had endured for 10 000 years. While extermination of the herds was the greatest environmental catastrophe ever on the grasslands, it also brought a fundamental change in the power dynamic between First Nations and the Canadian state. With the loss of the bison, indigenous people lost their independence and power.”<sup>36</sup> The environmental, economic, and political dispossession of Indigenous populations fuelled more of the post-Confederation “numbered treaties,” which the federal government continued to sign with First Nations, “side by side with legislated dispossession, through the *Indian Act*,” until 1921.<sup>37</sup> The authority of state power was also extended over Indigenous peoples that did not sign treaties, eventually reaching the northernmost regions of Canadian jurisdiction. However, in the Far North the settler-colonial mesh was loose and full of holes until after World War II.<sup>38</sup> Over time the colonial exercise of “physical power moved

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Colonialism’ Remark,” *Georgia Straight*, 2 October 2009, <http://www.straight.com/blog/shawn-atleo-criticizes-stephen-harper-over-no-history-colonialism-remark>.

35. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP Report)*, vol. 1 (Ottawa 1996), 139, 140.

36. James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013), 183–184. Still of interest in spite of its shortcomings is Irene M Spry, “The Tragedy of the Loss of the Commons in Western Canada,” in Ian A. L. Getty & Antoine S. Lussier, eds., *As Long as the Sun Shines and the Water Flows: A Reader in Canadian Native Studies* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1983), 203–228.

37. Canada, *RCAP Report*, 140. Simmons, in “Against Capital” (p. 309), makes the important point that the negotiation of numbered treaties in the 19th century reflected the weakness of state power in Canada in relation to Indigenous peoples; extensive open warfare in the United States reflected a more powerful colonial state.

38. Marybelle Mitchell, *From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Élite: The Birth of Class and Nationalism among Canadian Inuit* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 112–116.

into the background (while remaining crucial), and the disciplinary strategies associated with the management of people, nature and space, came to the fore.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, settler colonialism in Canada “depended heavily on the deployment of state power geared around genocidal practices of forced *exclusion* and *assimilation*” until the rejection of the federal Liberal government’s infamous 1969 “White Paper” that proposed to do away with the Indian Act and in one fell swoop eliminate all the legal and political rights of First Nations. “Any cursory examination into the character of colonial Indian policy during this period will attest to this fact.”<sup>40</sup> Settler-colonial capitalism “reshaped” “every aspect” of the lives of Indigenous people “in the interests of capitalism and to ensure the opportunity and profit potential of the white population recently settled in their homelands,” as Alfred notes.<sup>41</sup>

What of the decades since the repudiation of the White Paper? Is settler colonialism a contemporary reality? Or are we today living with its after-effects? It is not uncommon to find advocates for the rights and well-being of Indigenous people identifying negative aspects of the condition of Indigenous lives today as consequences of a colonial past. For instance, Shauna MacKinnon argues that “Canada’s history of colonial policies has left a legacy of damage and despair that has had a direct impact on the social and economic outcomes of Aboriginal people.”<sup>42</sup> MacKinnon’s argument implies that colonialism is a thing of the past. Such notions, which have become even more widespread in discussions about Indigenous lives among non-Indigenous people following the 2008 prime ministerial apology for residential schools and the 2015 release of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, are in line with the interpretation of those historians who see the discarding of assimilationist policies such as residential schooling in the years after the White Paper and the recognition of Aboriginal rights in Canada’s 1982 constitution as marking a shift beyond colonialism.<sup>43</sup>

It is definitely true that the character of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples within the borders of Canada today is not identical to its shape prior to the change in federal policy on land claims that followed the 1973 *Calder* decision of the Supreme Court of Canada and the constitutional recognition of “existing aboriginal land and treaty rights” a decade later.

39. Cole Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, 1 (2004): 174.

40. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 4.

41. Gerald Taiaiake Alfred, “Colonialism and State Dependency,” *Journal of Aboriginal Health* 5, 2 (2009): 46.

42. MacKinnon, *Decolonizing Employment: Aboriginal Inclusion in Canada’s Labour Market* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 3.

43. The view that these changes moved Canada beyond colonialism is found in John Milloy, *Indian Act Colonialism: A Century of Dishonour, 1869–1969*, research paper, National Centre for First Nations Governance, 2008.

However, I would argue that the change that has taken place has been a modification of settler colonialism, not its transcendence. Indigenous nations remain dispossessed of most of their land and from the authority to determine their own forms of political organization. As Coulthard argues, the rise of “Indigenous anticolonial nationalism” forced colonialism to change. It is “now reproduced through a seemingly more conciliatory set of discourses and institutional practices that emphasize our *recognition* and *accommodation*.”<sup>44</sup> The only “self-government” arrangements that the federal government is willing to negotiate with First Nations are ones that leave its supremacy and state sovereignty untouched; nation-to-nation negotiations between equals have never been contemplated.<sup>45</sup> The ongoing reproduction of settler colonialism is not a merely philosophical or juridical matter. It oppresses. It is lived as amply documented “causes of harm” to Indigenous “people and ... communities, limitations placed on their freedom, and disturbing mentalities, psychologies, and behaviours.”<sup>46</sup>

Far from fading away, elements of settler colonialism are today being intensified at the same time as an Indigenous resurgence is taking place and more non-Indigenous people than ever before are questioning aspects of colonialism. Above all, capitalist pressures to extract more resources from the land and transport them to markets as profitably as possible – which have increased since the global economic slump began in 2007 – are driving the further spread of dispossession and efforts to get Indigenous people to reconcile themselves with their subordination. Proposals for legislative changes that would commodify reserve lands, which currently, in legal terms, are Crown lands set aside for the communal use of First Nations and as such cannot be purchased, have resurfaced. The federal Liberal government talks openly about reconciliation with Indigenous peoples but continues to use negotiations with First Nations to work toward the longstanding goal of terminating rights that act as barriers to capital accumulation. It is in this context that researchers in labour studies must now confront the implications of understanding Canadian society as a settler-colonial one.<sup>47</sup>

44. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 6, 4–6, 88.

45. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 123–124.

46. Alfred, “Colonialism,” 43.

47. Todd Gordon, *Imperialist Canada* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2010), 78–123; Rebecca Jane Hall, “Divide and Conquer: Privatizing Indigenous Land Ownership as Capital Accumulation,” *Studies in Political Economy* 96 (2015): 23–45; Peter Kulchyski & Warren Bernauer, “Modern Treaties, Extraction and Imperialism in Canada’s Indigenous North: Two Case Studies,” *Studies in Political Economy* 93 (2014): 3–23; Russell Diabo, “When Moving Past the *Indian Act* Means Something Worse,” *Policy Options*, 22 September 2017, <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/september-2017/when-moving-past-the-indian-act-means-something-worse/>; Chelsea Vowel, *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis and Inuit Issues in Canada* (Winnipeg: Highwater Press, 2017), 252–259, 268–275.

## Settler Colonialism and Labour, Past

ONCE WE TAKE SERIOUSLY the settler-colonial dimension of historical social processes in the spaces that are now Canada, a question arises about the scope of labour studies as an academic field of inquiry: What is the labour that we study? This is a question that has not received much sustained attention. The initial work in the field that began in the 1970s – carried out for the most part by graduate students in history and a number of social science disciplines – was almost entirely concerned with wage labour, especially the waged work of white men.<sup>48</sup> Thanks to feminist and antiracist activism's reverberations within academic research, women's unpaid domestic labour and the waged work of workers who experienced racism began to be studied.<sup>49</sup> Wage labour has continued to occupy the centre of historical and contemporary labour studies; unpaid domestic work has not been receiving much attention in research published since the turn of the century.

Wage labour and the unpaid domestic work performed in the households of wage labourers together account for most of the labouring done in contemporary Canadian society. However, this was not always the case. Prior to the establishment of a European colonial presence, Indigenous peoples' labour in northern North America was socially organized outside the couplet of wage labour and unpaid domestic labour altogether. Indigenous people produced what they needed for subsistence through kinship group-mediated relations with one another and the rest of nature in forms including foraging (land and marine hunting and gathering), fishing, and agriculture. The modes of production of their societies were egalitarian-communal except in those Pacific coast societies where class relations including slavery had developed.<sup>50</sup> Over

48. This work had been preceded by H. Clare Pentland's earlier dissertation on "the way that European society in Canada has evolved through the earlier portion of its existence up to the flowering of full industrial capitalism." See Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada 1650–1860*, ed. Paul Phillips (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1981), xlv. Pentland's analysis touched on elements of slave labour. Some historical research conducted contemporaneously to this initial period of labour studies did look at other forms of labouring. See, for instance, Arthur Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670–1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983). However, much of this work was conducted outside of the emerging interdisciplinary field of labour studies.

49. Early publications on women's paid and unpaid work are surveyed in Bettina Bradbury, "Women's History and Working-Class History," *Labour/Le Travail* 19 (1987): 23–43. Early publications on workers of colour include Agnes Calliste, "Sleeping Car Porters in Canada: An Ethnically Submerged Split Labour Market," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 19, 1 (1987): 1–20; Gillian Creese, "Organizing against Racism in the Workplace: Chinese Workers in Vancouver before the Second World War," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 19, 3 (1987): 35–46.

50. See the descriptive survey in Canada, *RCAP Report*, 46–86, and, on slavery in some Pacific societies, John Sutton Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 76–77. I prefer the term "egalitarian-communal" to the 19th-century term "primitive communism."

time Indigenous modes of production were altered through the relations that developed between Indigenous peoples and Europeans. They were eventually supplanted by the modes of production of the settler population, colonial-independent production, and later, colonial-capitalism.<sup>51</sup>

There is a growing body of research on Indigenous peoples' diverse labouring activities since the start of their experience with settler colonialism in what is now Canada, a subject that deserves much more attention from scholars.<sup>52</sup> Mary Jane Logan McCallum points out that "a debate over whether Native cultures and communities 'declined' or 'persisted' after the fur trade period" was long the focus of much of the relevant research, which was mostly concerned with male wage labour in western Canada, especially in resource industries.<sup>53</sup> It has been and continues to be important to unearth the experiences of Indigenous people with wage labour. To do this well demands a discarding of "the old binary of 'traditional culture' and 'modern labour'" as

51. See the sources on modes of production cited in note 29. As Banaji argues in "Modes of Production," it is important not to conflate modes of production with forms of labour (e.g. wage labour, slavery). This is what Lutz does with his notion of a "conditional economy" that combines "wage work, small-scale commodity production (such as farming or fishing), subsistence fishing, hunting and gathering." Lutz, *Makúk*, 23–24. Such forms of labour considered outside of their internal relations with an overarching mode of production whose laws of motion impose themselves on the direct producers are simple abstractions with little determinate social content (e.g. wage labour under feudalism is quite different from wage labour under capitalism).

52. See, for example, Ron G. Bourgeault, "The Indian, the Métis and the Fur Trade: Class, Sexism and Racism in the Transition from 'Communism' to Capitalism," *Studies in Political Economy* 12 (1983): 45–80, but see the critique of aspects of Bourgeault's article in Simmons, "Against Capital," 166–171. See also Robin Jarvis Brownlie, "Living the Same as the White People: Mohawk and Anishinabe Women's Labour in Southern Ontario, 1920–1940," *Labour/Le Travail* 61 (2008): 41–68; Steven High, "Native Wage Labour and Independent Production during the 'Era of Irrelevance,'" *Labour/Le Travail* 37 (1996): 243–264; Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Labour in British Columbia, 1853–1930* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1996); Lutz, *Makúk*; Mary Jane Logan McCallum, *Indigenous Women, Work, and History, 1940–1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014); Janet Mary Nicol, "'Unions Aren't Native': The Muckamuck Restaurant Labour Dispute, Vancouver, BC (1978–1983)," *Labour/Le Travail* 40 (2007): 235–251; Andrew Parnaby, "'The Best Men That Ever Worked the Lumber': Aboriginal Longshoremen on Burrard Inlet, BC, 1863–1939," *Canadian Historical Review* 87, 1 (2006): 53–78; Frank Tough, "As Their Natural Resources Fail": *Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1870–1930* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996); Frank Tough, "From the 'Original Affluent Society' to the 'Unjust Society': A Review Essay on Native Economic History in Canada," *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development* 4, 2 (2005): 30–70. Treating the borders of settler-colonial states as the framework for research on Indigenous peoples can be a problem because, as Paige Raibman has shown, some Indigenous people regularly migrated across these borders to engage in wage labour. Raibman, "The Practice of Everyday Colonialism: Indigenous Women at Work in the Hop Fields and Tourist Industry of Puget Sound," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 3, 3 (2006): 23–56. See also Alice Littlefield & Martha C. Knack, eds., *Native Americans and Wage Labour: Ethnohistorical Perspectives* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996).

53. McCallum, *Indigenous Women*, 5–6.



well as “careful attention to the specificity of the colonial context,” as Paige Raibman contends in an article that is a rare exploration of Indigenous labouring that incorporates an explicit analysis of colonialism.<sup>54</sup> The picture that emerges from the existing historical research on Indigenous people and work in northern North America challenges linear schemes about “decline” and “persistence.” Indigenous participation in wage labour varied a great deal over time and between regions. In keeping with the uneven development of settler-colonial capitalism across the space that became the territory of the Canadian state, there was no smooth shift from kin group-organized independent production for subsistence toward capitalism’s couplet of wage labour and unpaid domestic labour. Indigenous wage labour was most important to capitalist development in 19th-century British Columbia. There, seasonal work for wages “allowed the rapid creation of an economic base, from the fur trade, to coal mining, sawmilling, and salmon canning.”<sup>55</sup>

Contrary to lingering assumptions, Indigenous wage labour remained significant in some industries into the 20th century. For example, Andrew Parnaby’s research documents fluctuating Indigenous employment in long-shore work, with marginalization between 1923 and 1935 followed by a return as strikebreakers in 1935. At the same time as British Columbia employers exploited Indigenous labour, state power – in keeping with a broader trend discussed below – was imposing changes on subsistence labouring. Jo-Anne Fiske has shown how the 1911 ban on salmon weirs led to the passing of fishing among the Carrier from men, who had engaged in weir fishing, to women, who fished with nets. The imposition of trapline registration on Carrier men in 1926 pushed them into other work, but women continued to trap outside the law.<sup>56</sup> This example should caution us against notions of unchanging traditional Indigenous ways of life as well as draw our attention to the high degree of adaptability that Indigenous people demonstrated as settler colonialism undermined their land-based subsistence production. Nevertheless, it also reveals the great importance of a process that must not be obscured by recognition of this adaptability: dispossession and the subsequent role of state power in conditioning where, when, and how Indigenous people could work.<sup>57</sup>

54. Raibman, “Everyday Colonialism,” 26, 27.

55. Lutz, *Makúk*, 279.

56. Parnaby, “Best Men,” 74–76; Jo-Anne Fiske, “Fishing Is Women’s Business: Changing Economic Roles of Carrier Women and Men,” in Bruce Alden Cox, ed., *Native People/Native Lands: Canadian Indians, Inuit and Metis* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1988), 186–198.

57. This is clear from much of the existing research, notably including Tough, “*Their Natural Resources*,” and Lutz, *Makúk*. Martha C. Knack and Alice Littlefield suggest that in North America, Indigenous commitment to wage labour is an index of dispossession. See Knack & Littlefield, “Native American Labor: Retrieving History, Rethinking Theory,” in Littlefield & Knack, eds., *Native Americans*, 14–15. However, this has to be nuanced by the evidence of how in 19th-century British Columbia some Indigenous people – who were not yet forced by dispossession to try to obtain money to survive – did engage in seasonal wage labour. What



It is also worth cautioning against letting the importance of Indigenous wage labour to capitalist development in 19th-century British Columbia overshadow the underresearched history of other areas in which it was also important to the accumulation of capital, for example, in northern Manitoba.<sup>58</sup> Yet in those areas the capitalist development to which Indigenous labour had contributed led to an influx of settlers, the pushing out of Indigenous people from work for wages, and the sapping of their ability to subsist from the land.

McCallum's suggestion that "the attention paid to Indigenous women's working lives" revealed by her research "also highlights the state's investment in and attempts to control the process by which Native people engaged in, failed to engage in, obtained, quit, and were released from employment" rightly draws attention to how intrusively state power administered Indigenous labouring.<sup>59</sup> From the gender-segregated manual labour training of residential schools to agricultural policy and regulations on fishing and hunting that systemically discriminated against Indigenous people, state power conditioned work in many ways. Because dispossession was often incomplete, many Indigenous people were able to maintain at least some land-based independent production, thereby reducing or delaying their dependence on wages or other cash income (sometimes viewed as "indolence" by settler-colonial eyes).<sup>60</sup> There is some evidence that this measure of independence did, however, contribute to capitalists' ability to employ Indigenous people at very low wage rates.<sup>61</sup> Even though dispossession was often partial, Indigenous people seldom participated in wage labour from a "position of strength," as Parnaby puts it.<sup>62</sup>

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state power did was also important in shaping the social environment that enabled racist behaviour by white employers, workers, and farmers toward Indigenous people, including encroachment on reserve land. See, for instance, Andrew Parnaby, "Indigenous Labor in Mid-Nineteenth-Century British North America: The Mi'kmaq of Cape Breton and Squamish of British Columbia in Comparative Perspective," in Leon Fink, ed., *Workers across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 114.

58. Tough, "Their Natural Resources"; Jim Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage: Manitoba's North and the Cost of Development, 1870 to 1930* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004).

59. McCallum, *Indigenous Women*, 226. This confirms Joan Sangster's suggestion that "by studying [Indigenous] women's labour in its multiple forms ... and in multiple contexts ... we can gain immense insight into how colonialism was structured, experienced, negotiated, and resisted." See Sangster, "Aboriginal Women and Work across the 49th Parallel," in Carol Williams, ed., *Indigenous Women and Work: From Labor to Activism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 27.

60. See Tough, "Their Natural Resources," 208.

61. Joan Sangster, "Making a Fur Coat: Women, the Labouring Body, and Working-Class History," *International Review of Social History* 52 (2007): 253; Alicja Muszynski, "Race and Gender: Structural Determinants in the Formation of BC's Salmon Cannery Labour Force," in Greg Kealey, ed., *Class, Gender and Region: Essays in Canadian Historical Sociology* (St. John's: Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1988), 109.

62. Parnaby, "Indigenous Labor," 126. Generalizing from the experience of Indigenous

This reality is important for interpreting the decision to sell labour power. As Robin Jarvis Brownlie writes, “Surely the maintenance of an acceptable livelihood was the pre-eminent objective, probably pursued with the family rather than the individual in mind.”<sup>63</sup> It was precisely the undermining of land-based subsistence production by settler-colonial dispossession that threatened the livelihood of Indigenous families and so often pushed them to seek work for wages. Paid or unpaid, Indigenous labour – above all, that of Indigenous women – was frequently treated by white society as unimportant; as Sangster puts it, “the gendered racialization of Aboriginal women’s bodies *allowed them* to become ‘invisible’ labouring bodies in an economic and political context of both capitalist and colonial relations.”<sup>64</sup> The existing body of research on Indigenous people working for wages challenges the settler-colonial “common sense” that maintains that “Indians don’t work” and the omission or marginalization of Indigenous wage work in the historical representation of labour in Canada. It also points to the need to qualify the overly simple notion found in some anti-/decolonial thought that settler colonialism is interested only in land. Although Indigenous labour power was never the primary resource in the eyes of white rulers and capitalists, it was sometimes wanted in northern North America. There was, as McCallum notes, a “persistent demand for Native labour,” although what it was wanted for and the extent to which it was wanted at all varied enormously.<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, advancing our historical knowledge of Indigenous labour will require an appreciation of the diverse social forms through which the work of Indigenous people has been socially organized; restricting our attention to just waged work or to wage labour and unpaid domestic labour is a barrier to understanding how Indigenous people worked. An anticolonial labour studies will need to follow Sangster, Raibman, and other scholars who have studied the history of Indigenous work through a wider lens. Independent production for subsistence and/or sale (including gathering, hunting, agriculture, and artisanal practices) deserves attention along with and in relation to wage labour and unpaid domestic work.

Yet integrating an analysis of settler colonialism into labour studies should not stop at highlighting the work of Indigenous people, nor at exploring how their labouring has been shaped by settler-colonial dispossession and

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people who had been little affected by dispossession with wage labour in 19th-century British Columbia leads to a misleading contrary view.

63. Brownlie, “Living the Same,” 43. Brownlie questions the claim in High, “Native Wage Labour,” that the motivation for wage work was the preservation of traditional ways of life. Tough, in “Original Affluent Society,” and Parnaby, in “Indigenous Labor,” also question High’s claim.

64. Sangster, “Making a Fur Coat,” 255.

65. McCallum, *Indigenous Women*, 226. See also Gordon, *Imperialist Canada*, 71–72.

Indigenous efforts to survive and resist it.<sup>66</sup> Since the core of settler colonialism is the relation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, we need to begin to ask questions that have not been posed: How has settler colonialism influenced the non-Indigenous working class in Canada? What would it mean to write the history of non-Indigenous workers in relation to Indigenous peoples under settler-colonial capitalism? What would it mean to investigate, for example, how industrial capitalist development and the growth of the working class in late 19th-century Canada corresponded with “clearing the plains,” widespread Indigenous death, and the ensuing spread of commodity wheat production by settler farmers who were themselves a crucial mass market for goods manufactured by Canadian proletarians?<sup>67</sup> Dispossession is, of course, a universal dimension of the spread of capitalism. Yet settler-colonial dispossession was distinctly different from dispossession in Europe; it involved “a far more elemental, polarized, and characteristically racialized juxtaposition of civilization and savagery,” as Cole Harris writes of what happened in British Columbia.<sup>68</sup> Dispossession in northern North America entailed the

66. There is much work to be done along these lines including the relationship of Indigenous people to the development of capitalist agriculture in northern North America, a process central to primitive accumulation and settler colonialism in which some Indigenous people were employed as farm labour. On settler colonialism and agriculture, and how this history has shaped the perceptions of Ontario grain farmers today, see Sarah Rotz, “They Took Our Beads, It Was a Fair Trade, Get Over It: Settler Colonial Logics, Racial Hierarchies and Material Dominance in Canadian Agriculture,” *Geoforum* 82 (2017): 158–169.

67. See the interesting use of the concept of correspondence, drawn from W. E. B. DuBois’ observation about the relationship between plantation slavery and “the modern factory in its ‘worst conceivable form,’” in Zach Sell, “Worst Conceivable Form: Race, Global Capital, and *The Making of the English Working Class*,” *Historical Reflections* 41, 1 (2015): 55. The overcoming of Indigenous resistance to dispossession as a precondition for the take-off of capitalism in Canada is a central theme of Simmons, “Against Capital.”

68. Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 268. To acknowledge this difference is not to deny that ruling classes denigrated those whom they violently expropriated in the course of primitive accumulation in Europe, some of whom ended up in North America. Nor does it preclude comparison and the identification of commonalities. For instance, Colin G. Calloway argues that both Scottish Highlanders and Indigenous peoples in North America were subjected to colonialism. Calloway, *White People, Indians, and Highlanders: Tribal Peoples and Colonial Encounters in Scotland and America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). However, this is a dubious claim. Calloway’s imprecise conceptualization of colonialism (p. 13), which does not distinguish settler colonialism from other forms, leaves much to be desired. Moreover, as Neil Davidson points out, “the Clearances were carried out at the behest of Scottish landowners, organised by their Scottish factors and, where necessary, enforced by Scottish police or Scottish regiments. ... The inhabitants of the Highlands suffered terrible oppression, as did peasantries across Europe in the transition to capitalism, but they no more suffered *colonial* oppression than did the English peasants who were dispossessed nearly 400 hundred [*sic*] years before the Clearances began.” Davidson, *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood* (London: Pluto, 2000), 105. Ireland did indeed experience settler colonialism. See S. J. Connolly, “Settler Colonialism in Ireland from the English Conquest to the Nineteenth Century,” in

cultural and sometimes physical elimination of Indigenous peoples. What did this mean for non-Indigenous workers, especially those who were classified as white?<sup>69</sup> Explorations of such questions have not yet been attempted. That said, Raibman's discussion of how curios, photographs, and other representations of Indigenous people influenced the identities of white middle-class women in the early 20th-century United States, as did tourist travel to observe Indigenous people, suggests one possible aspect of inquiry.<sup>70</sup>

Another issue that deserves investigation is the scope of non-Indigenous workers' settler-colonial privilege, its effects on processes of class formation, and the influence of settler-colonial ideology.<sup>71</sup> How, for example, have Indigenous peoples' exclusion from and marginalization within labour markets affected other workers historically? Clearly the exploration of this question would also need to attend carefully to how racial oppression made settler-colonial privilege trivial or non-existent for some who have laboured in Canada. In a rare attempt to probe the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous workers in a moment of class struggle in the second half of the 20th century, Julie Guard analyzed the treatment by striking white women workers, members of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, of women from the Six Nations reserve at Grand River who were employed as scabs during a 1964 strike in Dunnville, Ontario. The strikers "identified them as victims who were being used by a ruthless employer in ways they did not understand," treating them as ignorant "Indians" rather than as "workers."<sup>72</sup> The implications for non-Indigenous workers of this kind of exclusionary outlook would be worth pursuing throughout different industries across Canada. In order to uncover patterns of the practical and

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Cavanagh and Veracini, eds., *Routledge Handbook*, 49–64. However, comparisons between Ireland and North America must start by recognizing that there was no attempt to *eliminate* the Irish Catholic population culturally or physically in the manner of what was inflicted on the Indigenous peoples of North America. Although in the early 1650s some English ruling-class figures pushed for relocating the Catholic population to the west side of the Shannon River, "it was only the former Catholic elite and their households who were required to transplant." Connolly, "Settler Colonialism," 54. Irish history suggests Wolfe's argument about the effort to eliminate the colonized as the hallmark of settler colonialism needs to be slightly qualified.

69. Dissent among non-Indigenous people concerning settler-colonial dispossession was very rare. See Peter Campbell, "Not as a White Man, not as a Sojourner: James Teit and the Fight for Native Rights in British Columbia, 1884–1922," *Left History* 2, 2 (1994): 37–57; Donald Smith, *Honoré Jaxon: Prairie Visionary* (Regina: Coteau Books, 2007).

70. Raibman, "Everyday Colonialism," 40–44.

71. On class formation, see David Camfield, "Reorienting Class Analysis: Working Classes as Historical Formations," *Science and Society* 68, 4 (2004/2005): 421–446.

72. Julie Guard, "Authenticity on the Line: Women Workers, Native 'Scabs,' and the Multi-Ethnic Politics of Identity in a Left-Led Strike in Cold War Canada," *Journal of Women's History* 15, 4 (2004): 129. Adele Perry's work in progress on the Winnipeg General Strike and settler colonialism promises to make a significant contribution to this area of inquiry.

representational exclusion of Indigenous wage labourers by non-Indigenous workers it would also be useful to have more studies of strikes, union organizing drives, and other situations involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers. Historical case studies of paid employment in localities or regions in which there were significant numbers of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people would be another way of uncovering these patterns of labour-market exclusion and marginalization.

Another question worthy of attention is whether settler-colonial relations contributed in a significant way to binding non-Indigenous members of the working class to a capitalist status quo within which they were exploited, usually by fellow members of their “race,” while being conferred certain advantages by virtue of not being “Indians”? What has popular opposition to the claims and struggles of Indigenous people meant for the terrain of working-class politics in Canada? With what political forces have some workers aligned as a consequence of rallying around such opposition, from the time of Métis resistance through to more recent hostility to First Nations’ land claims, insistence on the right to free, prior and informed consent to development taking place on Indigenous territories, demands for recognition and redress, and critical stances to settler colonialism in public history? These are some of the questions opened up for historical investigation by the introduction of an analysis of settler colonialism into labour studies.

### **Settler Colonialism and Labour, Present**

INTEGRATING SETTLER COLONIALISM into theoretical perspectives in contemporary Canadian labour studies would foreground issues that have been neglected or ignored and change how we understand some familiar realities. Consistently introducing the fact that within Canada today the work of non-Indigenous people in all its forms is premised on ongoing settler-colonial dispossession – through the land on which work happens, many of the natural resources used, and so on – and that this continues to oppress Indigenous people, contributes to capitalist profitability, and confers privilege on non-Indigenous people would add an additional dimension to our thinking about the social reality of work.<sup>73</sup>

Integrating this analysis can also help counter the making invisible of the work of Indigenous people that happens as a consequence of settler colonialism. As in the historical study of work and labouring, we need to remind ourselves that the work of Indigenous people today takes many social forms. A case in point is given to us by Rebecca Jane Hall, who has recently drawn attention to what she calls the “non-capitalist subsistence labour performed

73. This claim about work in contemporary society being premised on settler-colonial dispossession does not trivialize the exploitation and oppression of non-Indigenous workers, but simply identifies one aspect of its conditions of possibility.

by Indigenous people in the NWT [Northwest Territories].” This she views as happening “in mixed Indigenous economies” that include value-producing labour for capital, subsistence production, and the paid and unpaid work of social reproduction; the second and third of these, Hall contends, “are not *necessarily* structured by the imperatives of capital, and are, indeed, sites of struggle and decolonizing resistance to capital.”<sup>74</sup> She emphasizes that in the Northwest Territories, Indigenous women’s activities such as beading, sewing, fishing, and berry-picking – which are sometimes thought of as “culture” rather than recognized as work – may be performed as unpaid labouring, which is simultaneously subsistence production and social reproduction, or as wage labour. “In sum, the labour of northern Indigenous people, which moves both inside and outside of capitalist relations in the mixed economy, points to the importance of theorizing the shifting, mutable relationship between social reproduction, non-capitalist subsistence production and capitalist production.”<sup>75</sup>

One can appreciate this insightful contribution even if one is not persuaded by Hall’s characterization of “labour that does not produce surplus value” as “non-capitalist labour”<sup>76</sup> and has concerns about the notion of a “mixed economy.”<sup>77</sup> Hall posits subsistence labour that does not produce surplus value as external to capital. In my view, subsistence labour happens fully outside capitalist relations of production only if those who perform it are able to reproduce themselves without also selling goods and/or their labour power in capitalist markets. In addition, there are other forms of labour in capitalist societies that do not themselves generate surplus value but that are required in order for value-producing labour to be done – for example, unpaid domestic labour in working-class households and a great deal of wage labour – and I find it unhelpful to conceive of these as “non-capitalist.” Our attention is also drawn to how the work of Indigenous people today is affected by settler colonialism. Rauna Kuokkanen has emphasized how residential schooling and federal and provincial laws and regulations, including wildlife conservation rules, have undermined “individual and collective” “opportunities ... to

74. Rebecca Jane Hall, “Reproduction and Resistance: An Anti-colonial Contribution to Social-Reproduction Feminism,” *Historical Materialism* 24, 2 (2016): 98.

75. Hall, “Reproduction and Resistance,” 102.

76. Hall, “Reproduction and Resistance,” 97.

77. Hall, “Reproduction and Resistance,” 102. Hall is right to highlight the importance of the fact that Indigenous people have long practised different kinds of labour, including subsistence labour. What I find unpersuasive, as with Lutz’s notion of a “moditional economy,” is the belief that in Canada today this fact demonstrates the presence of a “mixed economy” rather than the practice of a variety of forms of labour under the overarching dominance of the capitalist mode of production. In my view, once people are no longer able to reproduce themselves without engaging in some wage labour and/or commodity production for capitalist markets, they are at least formally subsumed under capital even if they continue to support themselves in part through subsistence activities. See Banaji, “Modes of Production” and footnote 51.



practice” Indigenous subsistence activities.<sup>78</sup> Thus, once again, the labouring of Indigenous peoples today cannot be understood without placing it in the context of settler-colonial dispossession. The same is true of poverty, poor health, and other forms of Indigenous suffering, whose taken-for-granted character in Canadian society constantly needs to be challenged. For example, Clifford Atleo, writing of the Nuu-chah-nulth people in British Columbia, describes a “near-complete alienation from our lands and waters.” He contends that “we have become dependent on cash, but our dependency on the cash economy is predicated on our alienation from our homelands and waters. ... Simply put, we have been starved into submission and must now compete in the wage economy to feed our families.” The drastic change in the relationship of the Nuu-chah-nulth to their territories has put “considerable strain” on their “values and principles.”<sup>79</sup> More broadly, making the ongoing reality of settler colonialism part of the analysis ought to change how Indigenous peoples’ experiences with labour markets in Canada today are studied. It is not just that Indigenous people seeking work for wages do so with, on average, lower levels of formal education and networks that are less advantageous for finding jobs than non-Indigenous workers, or that they often encounter racist treatment from employers and co-workers. If it is true that, as Alfred puts it, “the psychological landscape of contemporary colonialism is defined by extremes of self-hatred, fear and co-optation of the mind,” and that this has created “a reality and a culture in which people are unable to recognize, much less realize, their value as human beings,” then we need to attend to how these dimensions of social existence affect Indigenous people in relation to wage labour.<sup>80</sup>

Integrating an analysis of settler colonialism could also improve our understanding of relationships between Indigenous people and unions today. Some Indigenous workers have been reticent about, or hostile to, unions, for reasons rooted at least in part in negative experiences with these organizations. These experiences stem from a number of ways in which unions bear the imprint of settler colonialism. As Brock Pitawanakwat observes, “unions have not always served the immediate interests of their [Indigenous] communities. This has especially been the case in the resource extraction industry, which often pits the rights of non-native workers against indigenous nations whose lands continue to be stolen for capitalist development.”<sup>81</sup> Indigenous union members

78. Kuokkanen, “Indigenous Economies, Theories of Subsistence, and Women: Exploring the Social Economy Model for Indigenous Governance,” *American Indian Quarterly* 35, 2 (2011): 223.

79. Clifford (Kam’ayaam/Chachim’multhniii) Atleo, “Aboriginal Economic Development and Living Nuu-Chah-Nulth-Aht,” in Coburn (ed.), *More Will Sing*, 154.

80. Alfred, “Colonialism and State Dependency,” 53.

81. Brock Pitawanakwat, “Indigenous Labour Organizing in Saskatchewan: Red Baiting and Red Herrings,” *New Socialist* 58 (2006): 33.



have long encountered both interpersonal racism from other union members and systemic racism within union organizations. This helps explain situations in which unionized Indigenous workers are less interested in participating in union activity than their non-Indigenous co-workers. Mills and McCreary point out that “even in unions with a leadership professing social unionism, the belief that Aboriginal issues are tangential to workers’ struggles and only apply to Aboriginal workers slows the introduction of Aboriginal solidarity initiatives.”<sup>82</sup> This can contribute to the perception that unions are not relevant to the anticolonial concerns of many Indigenous people. Employers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have sometimes taken advantage of Indigenous workers’ reticent or hostile sentiments about unions to divide workers and defeat attempts to unionize. These issues can be illuminated when we appreciate how unions as they exist today have been shaped by non-Indigenous workers in a settler-colonial society.<sup>83</sup>

What of the impact of settler colonialism on the vast majority of the working class today that is not Indigenous? This question can be explored in a number of ways. One is the direct and immediate connection between the expansion of settler-colonial dispossession and the availability of many of the jobs in extractive industries. This also extends to construction and other kinds of work required for firms to extract natural resources and sell them as commodities. Pipeline projects connected to the Alberta tar sands would be an ideal case for uncovering the often-hidden ways in which settler colonialism shapes the conditions of possibility for wage work. Another is mining in the Far North.<sup>84</sup> Given the enormous overrepresentation of Indigenous people among the imprisoned in Canada – their incarceration rate is ten times that of non-Indigenous people<sup>85</sup> – and the growth of jobs in the carceral wing of the state, prison work would also be worth examining with settler colonialism in mind.<sup>86</sup> It would be interesting to study the actions and consciousness of people

82. Mills & McCreary, “Social Unionism,” 120.

83. Other publications that at least touch on these issues in 21st-century contexts include Yale D. Belanger, “Indigenous Workers, Casino Development and Union Organizing,” in John Peters, ed., *Boom Bust and Crisis: Labour, Corporate Power and Politics in Canada* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2012), 144–162; Mills & Clarke, “‘We Will Go’”; Lynne Fernandez & Jim Silver, *Indigenous People, Wage Labour and Trade Unions: The Historical Experience in Canada* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba Office, 2017); Lynne Fernandez & Jim Silver, *Indigenous Workers and Unions: The Case of Winnipeg’s CUPE 500* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba Office, 2018).

84. See Rebecca Jane Hall, “Diamond Mining in Canada’s Northwest Territories: A Colonial Continuity,” *Antipode* 45, 2 (2013): 376–393.

85. Office of the Correctional Investigator, “Aboriginal Offenders – A Critical Situation,” backgrounder, last modified 16 September 2013, <http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/oth-aut/oth-aut20121022info-eng.aspx>.

86. The relationship between the actions of unionized prison guards (mostly non-Indigenous) and the deaths of Indigenous prisoners is one aspect of this, as a recent controversy in

who work in these sectors (who are mostly but not entirely non-Indigenous) with respect to the politics of settler colonialism and how these compare with those of workers employed in other sectors. How settler colonialism influences the policies and activities of unions with members employed in extraction, extraction-related construction, and prisons is also worthy of examination. The relationship of unions to ongoing controversies about pipeline construction and organizing to reduce the threat of climate change could serve as a valuable case study.

Another promising angle for research would be settler-colonial privilege and its effects on non-Indigenous workers.<sup>87</sup> What are the material and psychological advantages conferred by settler colonialism on non-Indigenous members of the working class today? Is there a connection, for example, between the existence of settler colonialism and the fact that the average amount of housing space per person in Canada (and in Australia and the United States) is larger than in other advanced capitalist countries?<sup>88</sup> How is access to rural or northern cottages, whether owned or rented, connected to settler colonialism? To what extent does settler colonialism give non-Indigenous workers advantages in competition for jobs, housing, and other scarce goods? Is political activity and consciousness among non-Indigenous working-class people influenced by settler colonialism? In what ways does it divide the working class? To what degree is ideological opposition to Indigenous anticolonial demands among non-Indigenous workers a barrier to the spread of radical politics? How has it been used by right-wing political forces to bolster their support among non-Indigenous workers? Is it still the case that non-Indigenous people who experience racism are encouraged to identify with settler colonialism in order to gain a measure of inclusion within the Canadian nation, and, if so, what are the implications of this for politics that seek to transform Canadian society? How can the appeal of the poisoned bait on the hook that settler colonialism offers to the non-Indigenous majority of the working class be countered? These are some of the questions about non-Indigenous workers posed to labour studies by the critique of settler colonialism.

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Winnipeg reminds us. See “‘This Can’t Happen in Our Name’: Protesters Call on MGEU to Stand Firm on Remand Centre Deaths,” *CBCNews*, 8 December 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/prison-death-protest-mgeu-1.3888604>; Jennifer Bamford et al., “Solidarity against Racism Has to Go Deeper,” leaflet, Winnipeg, 2018.

87. The research with farmers in Rotz, “‘They Took Our Beads,’” could serve as inspiration for this kind of inquiry.

88. See Lindsay Wilson, “How Big Is a House? Average House Size by Country,” accessed 20 February 2019, <http://shrinkthatfootprint.com/how-big-is-a-house>.

## Conclusion

IF WE ACCEPT THAT SETTLER colonialism has long been a facet of the mutually mediating matrix of social relations in northern North America, it follows that research on historical and contemporary issues in labour studies that does not consider whether settler colonialism has influenced a given reality under examination is falling short of the attempt to grasp each particularity as part of a complex social totality to which we should aspire. Integrating settler colonialism into a reconstructed historical materialist approach to labour studies implies much more than paying more attention to how Indigenous people and their labour have been affected by the specific kind of oppression to which they have been subjected by settler-colonial capitalism and by their resistance to it, although there is a lot more of such research to be done. We also need to investigate how the non-Indigenous working class has been shaped by settler colonialism, from the earliest emergence of wage labour in northern North America through to the present.

By way of conclusion, we should recall the concern of Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel quoted earlier: "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?"<sup>89</sup> I believe that research that attempts to answer many of the questions raised in this essay will be useful for such anti-(or de-)colonial purposes. Another way in which the kind of labour studies for which this paper has argued can serve such purposes is by demonstrating the inadequacy of measures proposed to aid Indigenous workers that do not adequately reckon with the colonial dimension of their oppression and then drawing attention to anticolonial alternatives. For example, job training programs for Indigenous people that incorporate a "decolonizing pedagogy" can help some Indigenous people find paid work. So too can Indigenous labour-market intermediaries, non-governmental organizations that help link people who have little or no experience of wage labour and who are seeking employment with job training and employers.<sup>90</sup> However, although many Indigenous people need to find jobs in order to support themselves in Canada today, engaging in wage labour does not weaken settler colonialism. "Decolonization," as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue in an article widely read by researchers opposed to settler colonialism, "is not a metaphor." It "must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted."<sup>91</sup> Labour studies that integrates a critique

89. Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism," 27.

90. MacKinnon, *Decolonizing Employment*.

91. Tuck & Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, 1 (2012): 7. Here it is also worth recalling Alfred's earlier-cited attempt to specify minimal conditions for decolonization (see footnote 30) and to pose the question of whether

of settler colonialism will be attentive to how well the politics of workers' organizations reckon with this form of oppression. It will not make the mistake of suggesting that the liberation of Indigenous people from the specific form of oppression they face can ever be found within the world of work as it is organized by settler-colonial capitalism.<sup>92</sup> Yet perhaps such research can provide insights that will be useful for people whose aim is a transition to a society that is neither colonial nor capitalist.

*Thanks to Fred Burrill, Sean Carleton, Bronwyn Dobchuk-Land, Brian McDougall, Deborah Simmons, Owen Toews, and Monique Woroniak for encouraging me to think about issues discussed here, offering ideas, or commenting on a draft. Thanks also to Jillian Patterson and Garrett Williams for research assistance. Comments from Charles Smith and three reviewers for Labour/Le Travail aided me in revising a manuscript first presented at the annual meetings of the Canadian Association for Work and Labour Studies at Ryerson University in 2017.*

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these conditions could be satisfied without challenging the reproduction of capitalism.

92. For the view that capitalism and Indigenous flourishing are compatible, see, for example, David R. Newhouse, "Resistance Is Futile: Aboriginal Peoples Meet the Borg of Capitalism," in John Douglas Bishop, ed., *Ethics and Capitalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 141–155. Works challenging this view include Adams, *Prison of Grass*; Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*; Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*.