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SETTLER COLONIALISM PRIMER

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SETTLER COLONIALISM PRIMER

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BOURQUE

- Remember that decolonization is a process for both the colonizer and the colonized.

Colonialism and Settler Colonialism

Colonialism is a system that occupies and usurps labor/land/resources from one group of people for the benefit of another. Colonialism is derived from the Latin word Colonia. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, in the Roman Empire, “Colonia” was a “farm,” “landed estate,” or “settlement” granted to Roman soldiers in hostile or newly conquered territories.

There are different types of colonial projects. Exploitation colonialism involves a small amount of colonists whose main objective is to profit from the colonies resources and exploit Indigenous labor, usual exported to the metropole or “mother city” (think of the British in India). Plantation colonies utilize a mix of exploitation and settler colonialism in different regions and areas. In

- We need strong, solid individuals who are not floundering with their own spiritual struggles.
- This is not a struggle for those people who believe it's trendy to support Indigenous causes—we are in it for the long haul.
- You can find Indigenous individuals who will support any position you want them to support—that is a direct result of the colonial experience.
- Those indigenous individuals who encourage non-Indigenous participation in ceremonies are often (not always) those who are attempting to curry favor with white women, or white people for their own purposes.
- Because this is a political struggle, it is essential to work in solidarity with critically minded and politically engaged Indigenous individuals.

settler colonialism land, not labor, is key. In this system, Indigenous Peoples are literally replaced by settlers. As Patrick Wolfe puts it:

Land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be—indeed, often are—contests for life.

Indigenous Peoples are erased through out right genocide, assimilation and interbreeding (including rape). In this process, racialized categories become important for perpetuating the system (see “Racial Formulation” section below). Settlers are also different from other colonizers in that they are there to stay, unlike in other colonial systems where the colonizer returns to their home country after profiting. Here, the land itself is the profit. Another important concept in understanding this system is the idea that in settler colonialism, “invasion is a structure not an event.” This means that settler colonialism is not

just a vicious thing of the past, such as the gold rush, but exists as long as settlers are living on appropriated land and thus exists today.

Who is a Settler?

“There are no good settlers .
 . . There are no bad settlers
 . . . There are settlers.”
—*Corey Snelgrove*

Anyone not Indigenous, living in a settler colonial situation is a settler. Therefore all non-Indigenous people living in what is today called the “U.S.” are settlers living on stolen land. Settlers do not all benefit equally from settler colonialism. Many people were brought to settler states as slaves, indentured servants, refugees, etc. Race and class largely prefigure which settlers benefit the most from usurped Indigenous homelands. But as the Unsettling Minnesota Source Book proclaims, “it is all of our responsibilities as settlers, especially

when doing so could jeopardize one’s own position of relative comfort and security.” In his article, “On Refusal,” Corey Snelgrove urges settler allies to move beyond the paralysis that can come from being a self-refusing settler: “Destroying settler society, and allowing the rise of ethical relations, requires a two-fold active response: destroy the material and discursive foundations of settler colonialism and actively engage with Indigenous resurgence.” Another important point is that, “allies cannot self-define as such, but must be claimed by the group one strives to be an ally to.”

Points to Remember for Indigenous Solidarity Activists from Waziyatawin:

- The movement for Indigenous liberation is a radical political struggle.
- Being an ally does not mean signing up for Indigenous spirituality.

rejecting settler in Indigenous liberation struggles:

I think ally support of Dakota [Indigenous] liberation will help facilitate the liberation of everyone from a perverse society. Not only do I believe that we need non-Dakota [non-Indigenous] allies in our struggle, I also believe it is possible to have colonizer allies, including those who are willing to kill or die for our struggle.

Allyship

In regards to decolonization, an ally can be seen as a settler engaged in working to support Indigenous People's struggles. As Ancestral Pride points out, the word ally is a verb, which necessitates action not just theoretical support. "Allies actively seek" according the Unsettling Minnesota, "to interrupt and dismantle oppression in all its forms, even

those of us who descended from European colonizers, to challenge the systems of domination from which we benefit."

Primitive Accumulation and Capitalism

We have seen how money is changed into capital; how through capital surplus-value is made, and from surplus-value more capital... The whole movement, therefore, seems to turn in a vicious circle, out of which we can only get by supposing a primitive accumulation (previous accumulation of Adam Smith) preceding capitalistic accumulation; an accumulation not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its starting point.

Marx's theory of "primitive accumulation" helps shine light on settler colonialism and places it in the context of capitalism. Primitive accumulation, according to Marx, is the entry point into capitalism. This involves dispossessing people from their land, ways of life and economics

and relocating and repositioning them as wage laborers in relation to capital. As Marx writes, “the expropriation of the great mass of the people from the soil, from the means of subsistence, and from the means of labor, this fearful and painful expropriation of the mass of the people forms the prelude to the history of capital.”

The classic example given by Marx is that of the enclosure in England where peasant’s common land was taken away from them and they were forced to migrate to urban areas and work in the emerging factories. However, in settler colonialism Indigenous People’s are to be dispossessed and then disappear. An example of this process was the removal of Cherokee, Choctaw and other tribes during the trail of tears. Their land was taken away and settlers took possession of the land and farms. Africans, taken as slaves (slavery is another example of primitive accumulation), were forced into the plantation system and the U.S. settler state started to amass capital. As Wolfe writes, “the application of enslaved Black people’s

If you support Dakota [Indigenous] liberation, what are the implications of Dakota [Indigenous] liberation for you? What is your vision of the future? If you are an anarchist, for example, what is your anarchist vision of the future? How might this differ from our vision of Dakota [Indigenous] liberation? If we realize Dakota [Indigenous] liberation, what will your role be? Many self-rejecting colonizers maintain fantasies, at least for a while, about their incorporation into Indigenous societies post liberation. These fantasies need to be shed quickly. Most colonizers will not be incorporated into our cultures post-liberation. Can you accept this?

Yet Waziyatawin does see a role for the self-

land and every natural resource claimed by the United States was taken at Indigenous expense, anyone who occupies that land and benefits from our resources is experiencing colonial privilege.” In a settler society, just maintaining the status quo makes one a self-accepting settler. As Waziyatawin writes:

In the United States, nearly everyone has agreed to be a colonizer. Every day they engage in activities that continue to justify the theft of Indigenous lands, the killing and subjugation of Indigenous Peoples, and the ruthless exploitation of Indigenous resources.

For the self-rejecting settler, who chooses to resist this system of death, Waziyatawin has some tough questions:

labor to evacuated Indian land produced the White man’s property, a primitive accumulation if ever there was one.”

For settlers, the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their land is a reversal of the enclosure; land for the landless European is opened up. Settler colonialism both creates capital accumulation through theft of Indigenous homelands and gives settlers an escape from the brutalities of industrialization.

As Harris writes,

In settler colonies, as Marx knew, the availability of agricultural land could turn wage laborers back into independent producers who worked for themselves instead of for capital (they vanished, Marx said, “from the labor market, but not into the workhouse”) (1967,

pt.8, ch. 33). As such, they were unavailable to capital, and resisted its incursions, the source, Marx thought, of the prosperity and vitality of colonial societies.

The contradiction lies in the fact that stolen Indian land creates the ability for rebels, outcasts, surplus populations, immigrants, and refugees of capitalism to have a place to escape to; a pressure valve for the system and a better life for the settler at the cost of genocide.

Racial Formation

You will unite yourselves
with us and we shall all be
Americans. You will mix with
us by marriage. Your blood will
run in our veins and will spread
with us over this great Island.
—*President Thomas Jefferson, 1808,*

(consciously or unconsciously) consent to their role as a colonizer and, “by making his[/her] position explicit, he[/she] seeks to legitimize colonization.” The Self-rejecting colonizer refuses colonization and its injustices. Their options are, “withdrawing physically from those conditions [the colony] or remaining to fight and change them.” Those that stay and fight live a life of torment and contradictions, simultaneously benefiting from and fighting against colonialism and not fully apart of the colonizer or the colonized society. The self-rejecting colonizer fights for a world that they have no place in and, as Memmi writes, possible helping to create a society which might not match up with their politics.

Although Memmi was writing about exploitive colonialism, we can extend the self-accepting and self-rejecting colonist to the settler colonial situation.

“Because” as Waziyatawin writes, “every bit of

to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity.

The Self-Rejecting Settler and Settler Status

It is not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live with its actual relationship. From now on, he[*/she*] lives his[*/her*] life under the sign of a contradiction which looms at every step, depriving him of all coherence and all tranquility.
–*Memmi*

In his book, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Albert Memmi maps out two approaches to the colonial situation: the self-accepting and the self-rejecting colonizer. The self-accepting colonizer

to visiting Indian delegation

Under settler colonialism, different groups are racialized in different ways according to the needs of the settler society. Wolfe distinguishes between race as a doctrine and, “racialization as a variety of practices that have been applied to colonized populations under particular circumstances and to different (albeit coordinated) ends.” Requiring Indigenous Peoples to have a certain percentage of native blood to be deemed a tribal member (and the idea of “half breeds”) forwards the goal of elimination of the Indigenous population. On the other hand, as more slaves meant more wealth for the slave-owner, the “one drop rule” in the United States declared that individuals were black if they had a trace of African blood. These stark differences in blood requirements to racially define people are profitable to the colonizer and strategically implemented at the expense of African and Indigenous Peoples. Wolfe argues that, “racialization represents a response to the crisis occasioned when colonizers are threatened

to share social space with the colonized.”

White Supremacism and White Privilege

The most common mistake people make when they talk about racism is to think it is a collection of prejudices and individual acts of discrimination. They do not see that it is a system, a web of interlocking, reinforcing institutions: economic, military, legal, educational, religious, and cultural. As a system, racism affects every aspect of life in a country.
–*Elizabeth Martinez*

Another aspect of racial formation is the ideas of “whiteness,” and that white people are superior to other racialized groups. This system of white supremacy justifies the denial of basic human rights, and many times life itself, upon people of

land where you live. It means reexamining premises and stories the dominant culture handed down to you. It means seeing the harm the dominant culture does to other cultures, and to the planet. If you are a member of settler society, it means recognizing that you are living on stolen land and it means working to return that land to the humans whose blood has forever mixed with the soil.

In the context of settler colonialism, decolonization necessarily involves the literal unsettling of settlers and ultimately the complete repatriation of land. For the settler, decolonization means facing that there is not necessarily a place for them and that settler destiny no longer takes center stage. Tuck and Yang state this clearly:

Decolonization is not accountable

oneself, adapt to or survive oppressive conditions; it means restoring cultural practices, thinking, beliefs, and values that were taken away or abandoned but are still relevant and necessary to survival; and it means the birthing of new ideas, thinking, technologies and lifestyles that contribute to the advancement and empowerment of Indigenous Peoples.

Derrick Jensen suggests decolonization requires:

The process of breaking your identity with and loyalty to this culture—industrial capitalism, and more broadly civilization—and remembering your identification with and loyalty to the real physical world, including the

color, while entitling white people to unearned privilege. White supremacy is also a way of thinking and “knowing” that assumes an inherent superiority upon white people. Despite that the history of invasion and genocide wrought by settlers and colonization is well known, images of white purity and superiority are engrained in settler consciousness. These beliefs have permeated and distorted reality so deeply that white people who benefit from these structures are permitted to elude their existence. White supremacy is not just a manifestation of the Klu Klux Klan or racist skinheads but is a pillar of the U.S. settler colonial system and is inherent in everyday thinking. Andrea Smith relates white supremacy to the foundations of settler colonialism in the United States, “the three primary logics of white supremacy in the US context include: (1) slaveability/anti-black racism, which anchors capitalism; (2) genocide, which anchors colonialism; and (3) orientalism, which anchors war.”

White people live with an unearned privilege. Peggy McIntosh explains:

I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools , and blank checks . . . My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself, as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will.

act of cultural revitalization, it also requires the dismantling of the colonial government and the entire social system upon which control and exploitation are based.

Michael Yellowbird offers a two-fold definition of decolonization, both as an event and as a process:

As an event decolonization concerns reaching a critical level of consciousness, an active understanding that you are (or have been) colonized and are thus responding to life’s circumstances in ways that are limited, destructive and externally controlled. As a process, decolonization means engaging in the activities of creating, restoring and birthing. It means creating and consciously using various strategies to liberate

at transforming the entire social system and reestablishing the sovereignty of tribal peoples. In political terms, this means a radical de-centralization of national power (i.e., the dismantling of the nation-state) and the establishment of local autonomy (community & region, traditionally the village and tribal nation).

The Unsettling Minnesota Source Book identifies decolonization as involving:

The ending of colonialism and the liberation of the colonized. In order to be liberated from the oppressive state, the process of colonization must be reversed – beginning with the mental aspects and moving towards the physical. While decolonization can be an

McIntosh's articulate analysis of white privilege begins to carve a path towards responsibility for white people, but sadly discourse and actions beyond recognizing white privilege remain sorely lacking. Professions of white privilege from settlers without actions for change are not enough. Andrea Smith maintains that, "the undoing of privilege occurs not by individuals confessing their privileges or trying to think themselves into a new subject position, but through the creation of collective structures that dismantle the systems that enable these privileges."

In a settler colonial context, narratives that demean and demonize people of color and discourse that assume the superiority of white people are infused into settler psyche from birth, through children's books, schools, social discourse and the media. The non-Indigenous might state that, "all people are the same," but underneath this proclamation lies an indoctrinated belief that settlers are entitled to the land, lest the settler would have relinquished land, power and privilege long ago.

For the benefactors of white supremacy and white privilege, acknowledging is a first step. This must be followed up with the creation of a collective ethic of accountability designed to take these systems apart.

Settler Moves to Innocence

Settler identity has been built on a denial of settlers as non-Indigenous and a rejection of Indigenous Peoples rights to the land. The initial theft of land was often justified by *terra nullius*, that is viewing the land as empty and virgin, or at least not used to its fullest potential by Indigenous Peoples. Another complexity to settler identity is explained by Wolfe:

On the one hand, settler society required the practical elimination of the natives in order to establish itself on their territory. On the symbolic level, however, settler

such activities together.

Decolonization

There is not a blue print for decolonization, and decolonization means different things for different people. Like all liberatory re-makings of political and social life, it is a step into the unknown. To give a deeper perspective on decolonization, from a multiplicity of viewpoints, we quote several definitions at length. Zig-Zag defines decolonization as:

Decolonization is the ending of colonialism and the liberation of the colonized. This requires the dismantling of the colonial government and its entire social system upon which control & exploitation are based. Decolonization, then, is a revolutionary struggle aimed

liberation on Indigenous lands, all people are going to have to practice Indigenous ways of being in some form. We will all need to engage in sustainable living practices and Indigenous cultures, including Dakota culture, offer excellent models for all people. That does not mean former-colonizers can appropriate our spirituality and ceremonial life, but it will mean they need to embrace Indigenous values such as balance and reciprocity. In the meantime, it is far more appropriate for colonizers to work to ensure that Dakota people are able to practice Dakota ways of being. If you believe sugar-bushing and wild-ricing are important, than help Dakota people recover lands so that we can engage that practice. Perhaps, we can eventually engage

society subsequently sought to recuperate indigeneity in order to express its difference—and, accordingly, its independence—from the mother country.

A product of this schizo settler identity; simultaneously denying Indigenous Peoples rights, claiming to be “native” and also wanting to be morally absolved of responsibility for the known atrocities that settler sovereignty rests upon, have been referred to as “moves to innocence.” As Tuck and Yang write,

There is a long and bumbled history of non-Indigenous peoples making moves to alleviate the impacts of colonization. We think of the enactment of these tropes as a series of moves to innocence (Malwhinney, 1998), which problematically attempt

to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity.

Some of these moves to innocence include:

Settler Nativism

“In this move to innocence, settlers locate or invent a long-lost ancestor who is rumored to have had “Indian blood,” and they use this claim to mark themselves as blameless in the attempted eradications of Indigenous peoples.” As Vine Deloria points out, the relative is almost always an Indian grandmother. Tuck and Yang explain that the claiming of an Indian grandmother not a grandfather fits into the history of rape and sexual assault against Indian women and the racilization and assimilation practices of settler society.

Fantasizing Adoption

practices by new agers and others is often justified by whites claiming that they have a deep need for it but as Smith writes, “the practice of taking without asking, and the assumptions that the needs of the taker are paramount and the needs of others are irrelevant, mirrors the rape culture of the dominant society.” It is precisely this sense of “entitlement” that Waziyatawin points out that settlers attending Native ceremonies come with, “they consider themselves cultural ambassadors and under the guise of creating peace between all peoples, they believe it is righteous to exploit our most sacred teachings.” But how do we undo settler thinking, learn to live better on the planet, support Indigenous resurgence, and avoid cultural appropriation all at the same time? Waziyatawin gives some clues, from a Dakota perspective, to these perplexities:

Does this mean that others should never engage Indigenous ways of being? Not necessarily. If we are struggling for Indigenous

In the context of settler colonialism, where settlers are appropriating culture and spirituality from Indigenous Peoples whose lands they/we are also occupying, a long history of colonization reverberates. This acculturation is founded on Indians being a thing of the past and settlers being the torch bears of Indigenous culture, thus legitimizing settler claims to Indigenous land.

Andrea Smith, in her book *Conquest*, unites settler appropriation of Indigenous spirituality with sexual violence. As she writes, “to fully understand, to ‘know’ Native peoples is the manner in which the dominant society gains a sense of mastery and control over them.” She disputes the claim that the reason Indians are exploited is that whites are ignorant of them and need to know more about them, and claims the causes of oppression are material i.e. settlers want Native resources and land. The situation is sexualized along the lines of settler patriarchal society and, “Native exist to meet the needs of non-Native peoples.” The appropriation of Indigenous Peoples’ religious

“These fantasies can mean the adoption of Indigenous practices and knowledge, but more, refer to those narratives in the settler colonial imagination in which the Native (understanding that he is becoming extinct) hands over his land, his claim to the land, his very Indian-ness to the settler for safe-keeping.” Often settlers see being adopted as a way out of guilt and creating a place for themselves on the land absolved from settler status, which as Tuck and Yang point out, “is a reaffirmation of what the settler project has been all along.”

Colonial Equivocation

In this move to innocence, settler colonialism and oppression/exploitation are conflated which, “creates a convenient ambiguity between decolonization and social justice work.” As they put it, “‘We are all colonized,’ may be a true statement but is deceptively embrative and vague, its inference: ‘None of us are settlers.’”

Conscientization or Free Your Mind and the Rest Will Follow

This is the idea if we change our thinking social conditions will transform.

Although we all do need to decolonize our minds, this is just a start. It is more comfortable for settlers to focus on consciousness raising then confront the more unsettling undertaking of handing over stolen land and material privilege.

Other Observed Moves to Innocence

There are as many moves to innocence as there are settlers. Here we present a non-exhaustive list of observed examples.

Indians are Drunk and Violent

This move to Innocence is born of both the

this course, assuming they know what Indigenous Peoples' need. This usually follows settler myths and stereotypes about Indians and imposes settler values as to how Indigenous people should live and what is best for them, continuing the project of assimilation. While all along, material conditions are maintained. Bluntly said, settlers might do best to look at how to "save" themselves/ourselves and get there/our own selves together before worrying about Indians. The colonizer is in the most need of decolonizing.

Cultural Appropriation

The general definition of cultural appropriation is the mimicking of the cultural practices of one group by an outside culture. More insidiously, it refers to a dominant cultures theft of material and spiritual customs from an oppressed culture. It involves, "taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else's culture without permission."

that they are a good person doing the “best they can” and this is all a person can do in this life. Taking responsibility for our role as settlers must entail working collective for material changes to settler colonialism.

“Helping” Indians

As the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. While many settlers have the intention of “helping” Indians, which makes them feel good about themselves, these efforts often end up as colonial projects. Historically, many of the worst things that have happened to Indigenous People’s came from the “help” of settlers. The group “Friends of the Indian” instituted boarding schools, the Dawes Act claimed to be “helping” Indians (leading to a “paper-trail of tears,” and creating, “a faster method of land transference than the cavalry”) and missionaries prided themselves on “saving” Indians. Today researchers, activists, and nonprofits continue

“Natives as savages” myth and the “degenerating/disappearing Native” myth. Settlers can justify their place by viewing Indigenous peoples as not Indigenous enough nor productive enough to deserve their land. Here Indigenous peoples become the scapegoat and the system of settler colonialism is left unquestioned. Often this move extrapolates that settlers are also more suitable stewards of the land, justifying their ownership and occupation.

One Love/One People

This is similar to the “colonial equivocation” move, yet it has been depoliticized. Settlers attest to their lack of regard for the race, creed or color of people and belief that all of humanity is one people. How could the idea of equality and unity among people be a settler move to innocence? These sweeping claims of a “color blind” world are easy to assert from a position of power and privilege. Distinct rights of Indigenous sovereignty and claims to

the land are glossed over. Despite the fact that all people belong to the human family we cannot all be one people while settler colonial systems remain intact.

Land Bridge/Migration

In this move settlers use a historical “out” describing how people have always migrated around the planet and how Indigenous people’s themselves migrated here. What this fails to take into account—besides Indigenous accounts of their own origin—is the vast time that Indigenous Peoples have inhabited, managed and coexisted with their homelands. Not to mention the silencing of violence which has displaced Indigenous peoples; migrants join a culture, settlers eradicate them.

Indians are not Indians anymore

Here settlers turn to blood quantum as a measure

of Indigeneity and attest to the fact that both settlers and Indian societies contain mixed heritage. Another aspect of this move to innocence is that Indigenous people do not know much of their own cultures anymore and in fact at times settlers claim to know more. The throw backs to racialization, assimilation and cultural appropriation flushed out elsewhere in this paper are clear. This move masks the fact that Indigenous Peoples do still exist and have retained their cultural practices despite every attempt that could be thrown at them by colonization.

Doing My Best as an Individual

Often, when settlers are faced with the reality that settler colonialism is an ongoing system of oppression from which they benefit, they fall back to a safe place that claims a person’s role in society is limited to what they can do as an individual. This allows settlers to continue to remain complicit to settler colonialism while declaring