

# **Decolonizing (for settlers):**

A pedagogical framework for enacting responsibilities

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Nothing of worth is ever done alone...

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This portfolio is dedicated to all those I love from Eabametoong.  
I wouldn't know how to do this work from a place of love if it wasn't for you.

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## Letter to the Reader

Dear Reader,

I came to the work of learning about and wanting to enact settler responsibilities in decolonization as a White settler woman grappling with what it means to do the work of decolonizing from a place of respectful authenticity. When I first began this graduate research, I approached wanting to deepen my understanding from a place of fear and uncertainty — fear that I would say or do the wrong thing and how this would reflect on me as a person, and uncertainty that I even knew what it was I needed or was expected to do. I became committed to learning more about my decolonizing responsibilities through personal relationships with Indigenous peoples that I love, working with and alongside Indigenous communities in education and community development work, and the long slow process of unlearning and consciousness raising as a White settler person. While there is much that I have learned from reading the works of Indigenous scholars, Knowledge Keepers, and activists, my greatest learning has come from talking about settler colonialism and decolonization in open-hearted ways with both Indigenous and settler peoples to whom I am in relationship with.

What has resulted from my unlearning process to date is within this portfolio in the form of a pedagogical framework, or learning tool, for enacting settler responsibilities in decolonization. This framework is intended to be used as an accessible point for deeper engagement with decolonization for settler peoples who have identified the need to decolonize and have chosen to put thoughtful energy into taking action, yet are grappling with what it means to actually *do* the difficult work of decolonizing. This framework is a response to the calls for settler people to engage in critical dialogue with one another about our status on this Land and to educate and challenge other settlers about the ongoing realities and impacts of settler colonialism, especially the prejudice and supremacy that exists within White communities. This framework is not intended to teach settler peoples about Indigenous peoples, but rather contribute to the much needed “reversing of the gaze” by settler society, particularly in investigating Western norms and ideologies that shape the ongoing colonial structures at play in contemporary Canada.

This framework is not without limitations. For one, it has taken shape from within the colonial academy in the form of Masters portfolio, with specific requirements around time, length, and format. A portfolio does not require primary research, and thus this work ultimately centres my own internal analysis of what I have read and informal discussions with those in my life who are also engaged in this work. Another limitation is my positionality and the inherent bias this creates. Decolonization discourse stems from Indigenous thinkers, Knowledge Keepers, and communities and while it is these perspectives that have informed this work (alongside settler scholar allies), the content presented is still sifted through the lens of a White settler woman. I also recognize that there are many nuances to claiming ‘settler’ as a component of ones identity, yet my insight has been guided by my own experiences as a White European settler, ancestrally and through modern era immigration. Given these limitations, I do not profess that this is a fully comprehensive look at decolonization for settlers; rather I hope that it can serve as a launch point for critical dialogue and that it can evolve through its use in lived contexts.

I hope that the significance of this work lies in its ability to support settler peoples who wonder what it means to 'do the work', on their own or in a group, including myself. I hope that it can support settler peoples to better understand settler responsibilities in decolonization and empower people to take another step in their own decolonizing journey. I don't see this work as 'complete'; while this iteration may become static, I hope that those who engage with this work are open to strengthening it by offering critique on what is missing, what could be said better, what else should be considered, and how this tool could be more effective at starting dialogue, consciousness raising, and calling to action.

I must also acknowledge that "studying the processes of decolonization among non-Indigenous people can easily centralize the role of the settler as the primary actor in anti-colonial and decolonizing actions" (Fortier, 2017). This outcome would reverse the aims of this framework, which seeks to support settler peoples in unpacking what it means to act alongside Indigenous peoples in pursuit of a decolonial future. I know that there will be difficult moments, missed opportunities, and unavoidable blindspots that I will need to be accountable for. This emergent iteration of how to take steps in action, individually and collectively, makes clear that this is a lifelong, intergenerational journey requiring humility, honesty, and courage.

As you read, I invite you to view this as an imperfect contribution, one way to express a common framework for analysis centred on grappling with the necessary realities of settler presence and identity upon stolen land. It is a starting point, not a checklist or a step-by-step guide. Explore where you are called and reflect, critically. Talk about your emotions and what you are learning with others who can safely hold that space for you. Help build that space. Let this begin a discussion, deepen thinking, bring forth more questions, prompt action, and inspire co-creation.

Let's do the work, together and from the heart.

## 1.0 Introduction

In 21<sup>st</sup> century Canada, the logics and ideologies of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism have formed an entangled web of wicked problems that are inherently about Land. Specifically, stolen Land. As a settler colonial state, Canada's foundation as a nation rests on illegitimate claims to sovereignty through decrees such as the Doctrine of Discovery and the Papal Bulls and ideologies such as *terra nullius* and the Christianizing of 'heathen' people (Manuel & Derrickson, 2017). For more than 400 years, people from around the world (initially European) have been arriving on, making claims to, and altering this Land with their worldviews, assumptions and systems, entrenching the status of 'settlers' upon themselves. In contemporary Canada, citizens live in a modern day colonial state, that is to say, a state governed by racist policies and systems aimed at the elimination and erasure of Indigenous peoples. These policies and systems have been weaponized to create dispossession, dependence, assimilation, and genocide of Indigenous peoples on their own lands through the ideologies of settler colonial capitalism.

As a consequence, relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples in Canada have been founded on a myth of separation that implies the occupation of separate realities based on racial and cultural distinctions (Donald, 2009). Despite the presence of historic and social relationality between these identities (Ermine, 2007), this myth becomes entrenched through markedly different worldviews. Vine Deloria Jr. (1992) speaks of the most significant metaphysical distinction between Indigenous and contemporary Euro-Western ideologies as their orienting narratives — for Indigenous peoples this is their lands and places, whereas Euro-Western societies place time and property, in relation to historical and developmental terms, as having central importance. When the Euro-Western worldview becomes embedded in the beliefs and practice of Western universality, there is no room for other ways of knowing (Ermine, 2007), laying the foundation for a settler colonial state based on racist ideologies and notions of white supremacy (Lowman & Barker, 2015; Manuel & Derrickson, 2017). With white supremacy firmly lodged in the mass consciousness of settler society (Fitzmaurice, 2010), the norms of white supremacist culture dictate the ordering of society. Characteristics such as protection of and indiscriminate use of power; individualism as a guiding mantra; linear thinking in regards to goals, successes, and what is valued; limited scope of what is considered valid knowledge; and pressure and competition to 'succeed' (Okun, n.d.; Racism Defined, 2021) permeate the social and political fabric of settler society. The status quo presence of white supremacist norms create challenges for interrogating whiteness and the logics of settler colonialism due to fear, fragility, and discomfort on the part of White settlers (DiAngelo, 2011; Lowman & Barker, 2015; Saad, 2018).

As a White settler scholar who has worked at the nexus of Indigenous and settler relationships within community development spaces, the question of solidarity amongst these two broad identities (as they relate to status on this Land) has driven my graduate research. While my

initial research interest lay in exploring increased intersectionality and solidarity for transformative change within a local climate action movement, the more I learned about climate justice, the more I began to understand how intertwined climate change (and climate action) are with Indigenous sovereignty. Through deeper theoretical pursuits of what meaningful collaboration between Indigenous and settler peoples could look like, the transformative praxis of decolonization emerged as a pathway forward. As a theory, decolonization turns away from settler capitalist ideologies, structures, and dispossession, centring its transformative process around Land, specifically the repatriation of Indigenous Land and life (Tuck & Yang, 2012). It is also grounded in the practice of building and maintaining relationships — between and within Indigenous peoples; between Indigenous and settler peoples; with the Land — in order to be enacted.

It was from this understanding of decolonization that I began to see how the idea of collaboration or solidarity between Indigenous and settler peoples must be rooted in settler peoples understanding and enacting of their own responsibilities within decolonization. I also found that much of the literature and thinking on settler roles and responsibilities within decolonization were fragmented and scattered across academic texts and progressive media sources, contributing to the confusion and apprehension on how to act meaningfully and respectfully in lived social spaces. As a community development practitioner with a keen interest in creating collective learning spaces based in critical introspective thinking, this Masters of Education portfolio articulates a pedagogical framework for enacting settler responsibilities in decolonization. The framework investigates what settler roles and responsibilities in decolonization are and how one can enact these responsibilities through the creation of a learning tool that offers an entry point into critical dialogue centred on personal accountability and collective action. Inspired by the format of Layla Saad's *Me & White Supremacy Workbook* (see her [website](#)), the framework locates settler responsibilities across five broad elements that are interconnected and occurring simultaneously on many scales. Each element is broken into more specific pieces, offering a brief description followed by critical prompts to encourage introspection and personal accountability.

## **Description of this portfolio**

The first section of this portfolio offers a grounding of core concepts central to the framework, specifically an explanation of settler colonialism, why use the terms Indigenous and settler, and what decolonization seeks and requires. The second section uses the transformative theory of decolonization — with its valid criticisms, unwavering demands, and ethic of relationality — to create a pedagogical framework for settler responsibilities in decolonization. Through compiling and analyzing the knowledge and insight of Indigenous scholars, Knowledge Keepers, and activists on decolonization, alongside settler scholar allies, the framework offers a starting point into the complex web of ideas and approaches to settler responsibilities by viewing this process as a dynamic whole comprised of key elements. Through the use of a critically reflexive lens that grounds me, and my worldview, as the constructor of this pedagogical framework, this portfolio is a

way for the exploration of these ideas to expand not only my learning and growth, but also the learning and growth of other settler peoples. The final section offers a personally interrogative conclusion that investigates my own critical consciousness raising experience through engagement in the elements of the framework.

## Introducing the pedagogical framework

This pedagogical framework for enacting settler responsibilities in decolonization is an expression of a dynamic process, occurring across multiple scales simultaneously. In order to reflect its complex nature, the framework has been grounded in the image of a *Decolonizing (for settlers) Mandala* (Figure 1). In working to understand and synthesize settler responsibilities in decolonization, I have yet to discover an English term or idea that encapsulates and grounds these responsibilities in a holistic way. Instead, I have tried to bring these ideas to life through a visual representation of the “critical uncrippling process”<sup>1</sup> involved in decolonizing that captures the fluidity, agency, and intent within which the movement of this process occurs. Thus the symbol of a mandala was chosen, an artistic representation used in spiritual, emotional, and psychological work to focus one’s attention, encourage introspection, and build an awareness of one’s place and purpose in the world (Mark, 2020). While the mandala first appeared in Hindu text in India hundreds of years ago, it has been used in cultures around the world as a tool to direct the mind of the observer inwards, from the outer rim towards deeper reflection (Mark, 2020). Given the inherent nature of critical reflection within this work, not only does the symbol of a mandala support introspection, but it’s layers of geometric shapes also offer a medium to reflect on the interconnectedness and movement of this process and the many different ways people may experience it. Decolonization is not static; enacting it won’t be either.

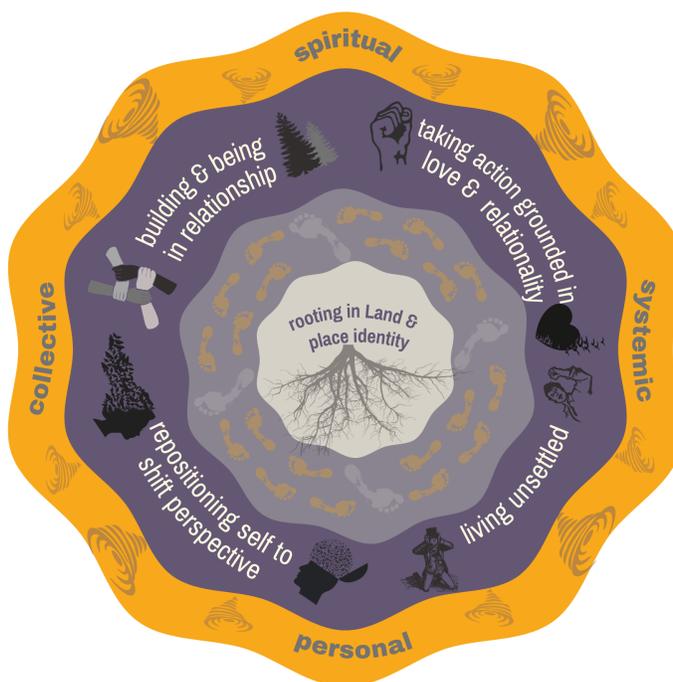


Fig. 1 — Decolonizing (for settlers) Mandala (Strutt, 2021);  
Icons credit of Canva and Pixabay

<sup>1</sup> Term used by Jessica McLaughlin, Anishnaabe food sovereignty activist, to describe the process of decolonization through personal communication in the summer of 2021

If this image could move, all four circular layers would be in motion, traveling in opposite directions from the circle next to it. Breaking down the meanings in this image begins with the yellow **outer circle**, which represents the multiple scales at which decolonization is occurring, simultaneously. The changes made at smaller scales (ie. personal) affects change at larger scales (ie. systemic) and vice versa. In this way, the image attempts to depict both complexity and relationality between people, systems, and the world. The position of the words are not intended to indicate any particular sequence of connection, but rather signify the importance of that scale to the whole. In this context:

- ▶ *Personal* refers to the level of the self, emotionally and in relationship with the world.
- ▶ *Collective* refers to groups of people who are acting through a shared set of values, beliefs, and behaviours.
- ▶ *Systemic* refers to the structures and ideologies that signify and form culture and society.
- ▶ *Spiritual* refers to the deeper, intangible connections that exist in the world, both within and beyond human experience.

The outer circle also depicts sets of **spirals** which portray the various portals, or entry points, that may bring someone into decolonizing work. The placement of these spirals is loosely connected to each of the interior elements, as it is through any of these personal experiences or explorations that one may find themselves learning about and taking action towards decolonization.

The purple **middle circle** represents the core elements of settler responsibilities that one may find themselves engaging with at any given time. While the written format means having to assign positions to these elements, the placement of each element is not intended to indicate any particular sequence of action. Each element offers both an entrance to this work and ways to deepen it through (re)engagement. Reflective of decolonization theory, these elements are:

- ▶ *Repositioning self to shift perspective* — reversing the gaze from the Other by investigating settler colonial capitalism and ones role within these systems from the lens of relative privilege and complicity.
- ▶ *Living unsettled* — continuing to interrogate, grapple with, and acknowledge the tensions and contradictions inherent in enacting settler responsibilities within a settler colonial state.
- ▶ *Taking action grounded in love & relationality* — taking direct anti-colonial actions, grounded in an ethic of love, reciprocity, and interconnection.
- ▶ *Building & being in relationship* — investigating what it will take for settler people to build trust, respect, and ultimately love in service of reciprocal relationships with this Land and Indigenous peoples.

The inner trail of **footprints** represents the fluidity with which a person (or a group) moves through these elements of decolonizing. This is not a linear path, there is no ‘right’ way; while we can use a shared framework for discussion and learning, everyone will experience this work in their own way. You may have come into this process through a relationship or a new learning that shifted your perspective; engaging with that element may bounce your consciousness into another space — maybe you occupy all elements at once. Participation is an ongoing, shifting, and lifelong choice.

The cream **inner circle** represents both an element of the work and the grounding that is needed in order to walk this path. Heeding calls from Indigenous scholars such as Sakej Ward (2015) to “find the connection to your own Indigenous teachings”, rooting in Land and place identity is intended for the individuals involved to continually come back to the effort of remembering who they are, the connections they hold to place, and what they bring to the path being walked. The image of rooting implies movement and growth, a deepening of understanding and knowing about ones connection to Land and place and how this shapes identity. Each of the five elements in the framework are explored in greater depth in *Section 3.0 Decolonizing (for settlers): A pedagogical framework for enacting responsibilities*.

## Positioning self-as-scholar

*“When we locate, we are saying ‘This is just my view.’ It’s not the view of the Anishnabe nation because I’m not Anishnabe. It’s not the view of the Coastal nations. It’s not the view of a 100 percent, full-blooded Cree. It’s not the view of women. It’s just my view and this is who I am. This is my mother. This is my father. These are my ancestors. This is where I grew up geographically. This was my experience as I grew up. And based on all of those things, this is what I think.”*

— Absolon & Willett, 2005, p. 105 – 106

As the author of this work, I take my cue from Absolon & Willett to locate what I have written from an understanding of who I am and how I have come to my worldview. Complex and layered, my social, cultural, and political identities (see Figure 2) have given shape to my assumptions and perceptions of the world, as well as my experiences within it. As someone who identifies as a White European settler, both ancestrally and within modern era immigration, my status on this land is one of occupier, working towards being a guest. I have ancestral connections to Irish, British, and Portuguese homelands, as viewed through a contemporary nation state lens. In some of these places I have living relations, but I have never lived in these lands, nor have I learned to speak their languages, verbal and in relation to the Land herself. Today I live on the lands of the Anishnaabe people in the Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850, specifically that of the Ojibway people of Fort William First Nation, in the city of Thunder Bay. Ancestrally however, settlement of my Irish ancestors occurred upon the unceded territories of the Algonquin people in Kana:tso Gichi-Ziibi<sup>2</sup>, renamed by settlers as the Ottawa Valley. I grew up in what is today the city of Ottawa, where my British and Portuguese maternal grandparents settled upon their arrival in Canada and where my Irish ancestors eventually moved to. I was born a disconnected settler of places — paternally, I can remember the proud Irish Catholic invocations of my Nana and recall stories transmitted of my descendants who worked the land of the Ottawa Valley; maternally, I had a vague notion of my grandmother’s Portuguese heritage, though overshadowed by the prevailing British Canadian

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<sup>2</sup> See Canadian-American Centre (2017), *Coming Home to Indigenous Place Names in Canada*

sentiments of both my grandfather and the settler socialization process. Upon reflection, I can see that an absence of deep connection to land forms a crucial part of my heritage.

As such, my worldview is one born of generational displacement and deep disconnection from land in which opportunity to see differently was offered, received, and slowly brought into a way of being. I grew up in a culture that distanced me from the Land and the nonhuman beings that shape this Earth's intricate, dynamic nature. I grew up without an understanding that my existence depends on my relationships with all that lives. I grew up ignorant of the knowledge that there are peoples whose cultures and languages are deeply intertwined with these lands, who have stewarded them for time immemorial, and that myself and my ancestors live on these lands as guests (or occupiers), not as owners. As a young person my worldview was narrow, shaped as it was by paved roads and cookie cutter houses, by clean streets and Whiteness, by notions of fitting in and centring self. The world I inhabited was built on a series of disconnected necessities – my food came from a store, the water from a tap, animals were to be feared, and the ground merely 'dirt' beneath me. I can recall brief moments of acquaintance making – playing in the wilds of the cedar trees in our suburban backyard, time spent on the lakes and rivers of Algonquin park with my father, learning the ways of paddling on Christie Lake – moments where the world was defined by dappled sunlight, cool lakes, and an endless expanse of trees. While powerful moments of early connection, their fleeting nature and detachment from cultural guidance did not serve to help me understand that I was OF the land in which I stood upon. I do not remember being taught to ask questions about the life force of Mother Earth, to question where my sustenance came from, to learn about my responsibilities for living in reciprocity with the living world.

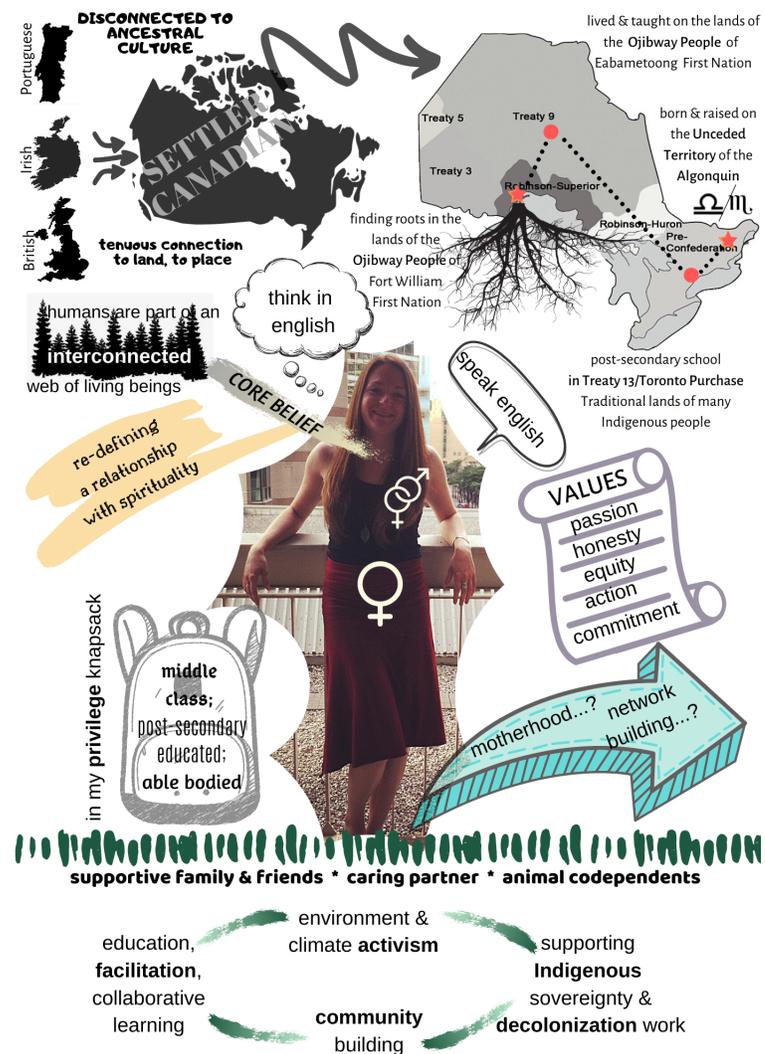


Fig. 2 – Strutt, C. (2019). Social Justice Education course assignment.

As I transitioned into adulthood, earning post-secondary degrees and embarking on several lived experiences as a young professional that had me living and working in Indigenous and communities of colour in Canada and abroad, I began gaining revelatory insights of the world that my suburban White upbringing and education had left veiled. I slowly became aware that I lived in a world where the violent dispossession of Indigenous Land and life is an ongoing reality, underpinned by the subconscious ideologies of white supremacy that kept settlers like me and my family asleep to, yet complicit in, these systems of oppression. Even learning how to position myself (and that I, in fact, have a responsibility to do so) has been a fairly recent process. I do not feel 'othered' in my whiteness, not even in spaces where that makes me the minority, because in those circumstances my skin colour still provides me with power. My identity is 'normative' within the dominant worldview; it does not need an explanation.

It is important for me to acknowledge that the experiences and relationships that led me to this point in my journey of critical consciousness raising were awkward and unsettling, full of the blindspots and bumbling attempts that it takes to shift ones perspective while also living in the world. I entered into Indigenous and Black communities as a White person uneducated in my privilege and how the history of obtaining this privilege has been born out on the bodies and lands of racialized people. I held no notion of my complicity nor my ignorance and the ways in which this led me to enact white saviourism over and over again; a form of "helping" that in the end was all about me, my white guilt, and my ability to leave when things became too hard (Saad, 2018). I took on jobs I shouldn't have and contributed thoughts and ideas that were steeped in my unevaluated worldview. I jumped into activism with limited understanding of the necessity of intersectional approaches to issues of justice. Looking back, it is hard to refuse that my actions caused harm.

As I continue in the work of raising my critical consciousness, the more I have come to understand that I have relational responsibilities in the process of decolonization, which means being accountable to and enacting this work within the places and spaces where I am already engaged in relationships. As a disconnected settler of places — I am not from the Land in which I live and work, ancestrally or within my own lifetime — I have much work to do in the building and maintenance of my relationships with the Indigenous peoples whose land this is, as well as with the Land herself and all beings who sustain me. Knowing that the process of decolonization will take all of us who are engaged in the settler colonial project, as a White settler woman I must consciously work to address the power and privilege that I hold in settler-capitalist structures, as well as taking action to unlearn my white supremacist conditioning. As I deepen my understanding of decolonization, I have been pushed to question why it is that I do this work; what stakes do I have that will forge the long term commitment required of decolonization? While at the outset of this research I would have rested solely on the notion of moral responsibility, I am reminded of the words of Erin Freeland-Ballantyne (2014) — that settler colonialism hurts people that I love, and that I don't have an excuse or a way of being in this identity "better" than anyone else; what I have are responsibilities, driven by love and the knowledge that I can do better.

## Positioning research methodologies

The overarching conceptual framework for the pedagogical tool created in this portfolio is grounded in critical research practices, influenced by the praxis of anti-oppression, anti-colonialism, and decolonization. A critical framework seeks to situate research within its political environment for pedagogical, moral, and ethical purposes with a commitment to praxis and justice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In applying a critical framework, this portfolio makes room for validating other ways of knowing and doing that expand beyond traditional Eurocentric conceptions of knowledge production. In reflecting on the pursuit of knowledge, Irish scholar John O'Donohue shares that:

“The attainment of knowledge could never be an end in itself. It should never be hijacked by elitism or paraded by the powerful. It is only a doorway. Its main ambition is to seduce towards new horizons of possibility in thought and then praxis. In this way we can increase the quality of our own existence and enrich the lives of others” (O'Donohue, 2010, p. xxii).

In ascribing to a critical research framework, a particular method at play throughout the portfolio is that of **critical reflexivity**, or a promotion of self and critical awareness. Reflexivity is a practice that acknowledges the existence of bias and embracing of subjectivity, engaging one in an explicit, ongoing analysis of self in relation to others (Pillow, 2003; Finlay, 2002; Strega & Brown, 2015). Critical reflexivity is an ongoing process, an active and ongoing analysis of how positionality and ideology shape ones decisions, relationships and interpretations, rather than a static, formulaic declaration of who we are or what we believe (Strega & Brown, 2015). Critical reflexivity requires consideration of how elements of power and privilege are at play within research processes and in the self of those structuring the research (Strega & Brown, 2015).

An explicit element of critical awareness that has deeply informed this research is attuning to an anti-oppressive practice Strega & Brown (2015) call “reversing the gaze” as “it is only when we reverse the gaze and investigate and problematize the other side of the question – that is, the behaviours, discourses, and perceptions of the dominant – that we create possibilities for change that are transformative rather than incremental” (p. 6). This portfolio makes steps towards reversing the gaze by naming White supremacy and colonialism as racist ideologies that underpin life in the settler-colonial nation of Canada . It also offers a pathway for engaging in active opposition of settler complicity, both in thought and action. It is my intention to take the knowledge I gain from this research to continue my own process of conscientization and anti-colonial action taking, as well as co-create collective spaces to support settler (un)learning at a community level.

In stating that my portfolio research is influenced by the praxis of **anti-oppression**, I am making a commitment to social justice and taking an active role in change, which inherently means attending to issues of power. According to Potts & Brown (2015), anti-oppressive research is more of an epistemological distinction, identified through three key principles (p. 19 - 20):

- Action-based social justice, in process and outcomes;
- Contention that all knowledge is socially constructed and political, and seeks meaning and insights that can enable resistance and change; and

- Foregrounds relationships and power relations at play amongst people, with care to shift the balance of power to those with lived experience

The goal of anti-oppressive research is not only to produce a report, but is part of an ongoing community building enterprise that prioritizes relationships and activating interventions for change (Potts & Brown, 2015). Anti-oppressive values and outcomes ground this portfolio in its intention to be used in community learning spaces to support efforts toward transformative change.

As this portfolio seeks to critically examine settler colonialism, anti-oppressive praxis cannot be fully enacted without attending to the power relations inherent in colonialism. **Anti-colonialism** and **decolonization** offer grounding theories for action through their resistance to the processes and structures of colonialism, as well as their focus on Indigenous resurgence. These theories are discussed together throughout this portfolio due to their parallels and interwoven nature. Anti-colonialism can be understood as political strategies and actions that resist and disrupt colonial ideologies and oppressions (Hart, 2009; Dei, 2006; Simpson, 2004), often more connected to the resistance of colonialism than in building alternatives (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). Decolonization on the other hand can be understood as the process of shedding and resisting the oppressive structures and practices of colonization, at a multitude of levels, alongside the regeneration or resurgence of Indigenous epistemology and nationhood directed at liberation (Alfred, 2005; Coulthard, 2014; Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2012). Both anti-colonialism and decolonization include elements of resistance and resurgence, born out of the experience of being colonized (Dei, 2006), creating challenges for people in the colonizing group to be anti-colonial without being in relationship and dialogue with Indigenous people (Carlson, 2017).

The use of decolonization as a conceptual framework for this research is a necessary reminder of the inherent contradictions of working to attend to power relations as someone who holds, and benefits from holding, power in the current system. I recognize that when applied in community contexts, this work will face challenges in being truly decolonial and acknowledge the risk that “projects can re-inscribe and retrench unjust relations in the very pursuit of opposite aims” (de Leeuw et al, 2012, p. 185). I take heart in the discourse around decolonization by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars that emphasize the role of settler people in decolonial processes (Carlson, 2017; Walia, 2012; Palmater, 2020; Manuel & Derrickson, 2017; Fitzmaurice, 2010). As with any action towards transformative change, social conflict will likely occur given that the work must begin from the current place in which the collective conscious of settler society exists (Palmater, 2020). Therefore, my intention in the creation of a pedagogical framework for enacting settler responsibilities in decolonization is for whatever learning and actions that may flow from it will continue to build the capacity of all those ensnared within the trappings of colonialism to forge an “elsewhere” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 36). *Section 2.0 Grounding of Core Concepts* explores the nuances of decolonization and settler roles within it more fulsomely, as this forms the central site of critical thought in this portfolio.

While this portfolio does not require the same **ethics** review process as a primary research project, this does not mean there are not risks and benefits that must be considered in order to conduct this work in a respectful and ethical way. Castellano (2004) reminds scholars that ethics are not simply a set of rules to guide researcher behaviours, but rather are “the rules of right behaviour... intimately related to who you are, the deep values you subscribe to, and your understanding of your place in the spiritual order of reality.” (p. 103). In reflecting on how I wish to behave as a scholar, the ethics guiding my behaviour in this work will center relationships, as decolonial discourse dictates. Donald (2009) defines ethical relationality as “an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other” (p. 6). As a settler considering the roles and responsibilities of settler peoples in decolonization, it is imperative that my work occurs within the context of Indigenous sovereignty and relational accountability to Indigenous peoples. This means centering Indigenous resistance, knowledges, and scholarship; maintaining relationships and engaging in dialogue with Indigenous peoples; and explicitly acknowledging the Indigenous traditions and scholarship that have provided the foundation for settlers like myself to engage in anti-colonial practices (Carlson, 2017). While the bulk of the research in this portfolio is through secondary sources, I have maintained informal dialogue with settler and Indigenous members of my community about decolonization throughout this portfolio, which has been instrumental in sculpting the shape of my thoughts and approach.

Ethical consideration must also be given to how this pedagogical framework is intended to be used within community spaces. There is no doubt that engaging in openhearted dialogue across identity divides can be risky and difficult work that is deeply political in nature. I recognize that as a White academic I have the ability to explore and discuss radical ideas with relative freedom. When applied in community contexts however, there is more at stake. Ermine (2007) speaks of “ethical space” as a meeting place where the contrasting perspectives in cross-cultural relations can find a refuge of possibility, a neutral zone where “new currents of thought... flow in different directions and overrun the old ways of thinking” (p. 203). In laying out the pedagogical framework, considerations for using this work in groups and the ways in which the creation of ethical space can be attended to are explored. While the difficult work required of decolonial practices such as acknowledging and working through issues of power, privilege, and harmful ideologies are grounded in hard truths, uncertainty, conflict and discomfort, when engaged through an ethic of relational accountability, I believe that the potential for transformation can be ethically found.

## 2.0 Grounding of core concepts

This section grounds the pedagogical framework in its core concepts and theories, beginning with identifying what settler colonialism is and why the terms Indigenous and settler are being used. An explanation of decolonization follows, including what it seeks and requires, as well as who participates and how. The section concludes with considerations of “why decolonize?” as an imperative in the contemporary settler state of Canada.

### What is settler colonialism?

Discussing settler colonialism first begins with describing colonialism as “an attempt to control territory or resources beyond the official boundaries of a state or empire” (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 3). Colonialism is largely concerned with building power and wealth for imperial nations through the extraction of natural resources and/or controlling people and land, a system of domination that has occurred in many forms throughout human history each with their own irreversible impacts over the peoples involved. Settler colonialism is unique in that settlers come with the intention of staying and asserting sovereignty in order to make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital (Tuck & Yang, 2012). At its core, settler colonialism is an ongoing land-based settlement process, what Wolfe (2006) has termed a “structure of invasion”, in which acquiring (and maintaining) Indigenous land and resources is the central objective (Wolfe, 2006; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Coulthard, 2015; Manuel & Derrickson, 2017). In order to acquire land without obstruction, settler colonialism needs Indigenous people and presence to disappear; in other words, the elimination of Indigenous peoples is an intrinsic part of settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006).

In Canada, settler colonialism is underpinned by ideologies and justifications rooted in racial superiority, namely that of white supremacy and Christian notions of saviourism, conversion, and conquest, which manifested through decrees such as the Doctrine of Discovery and the Papal Bulls (Manuel & Derrickson, 2017). The narrative of *terra nullius*, that settlement occurred on empty land, is also demonstrative of racial superiority. It conveys that, through the eyes of European colonizers, land was not occupied or used in ways that were worthy of respect or legal recognition thereby was ‘free land’ for Europeans to take as they would use the land better than Indigenous peoples (Lowman & Barker, 2015; Wolfe, 2006). While Indigenous sovereignty was recognized, as evidenced by treaty making (Wolfe, 2006), these rationales provided an ideological stance that justified settler sovereignty and refused to acknowledge Indigenous title.

In order to function, settler colonialism requires engaged practices that stem from these racist and oppressive narratives and justifications. Firstly, settler colonialism requires the dispossession of Indigenous Land and life, described by Flowers (2015) as “the removal of bodies from the land, but also the disappearance of Indigenous peoples as free peoples” (p. 34). Through removing both the physical presence and self-determination of Indigenous peoples on their lands,

settlers begin the process of claiming (contested) sovereignty over these same lands. Stolen land and illegitimate claims of sovereignty then require racist policies and laws to justify and enforce theft and dispossession. These justifications aid elimination objectives through the use of genocidal (ie. starvation; Daschuk, 2013) and assimilation (ie. residential schools; TRC, 2015) policies that are implemented by government officials and enforced by police, military forces and legal systems (Palmater, 2020). Violent oppression and removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands is not where the line is drawn in settler colonialism, however. In order to achieve, or transcend (Lowman & Barker, 2015) the settler colonial project, the full erasure of Indigenous people as a *people* is required, because Indigenous sovereignty cannot be assimilated into settler society (Tuck & Yang, 2012) thus posing an existential threat to claims of settler sovereignty. Erasure can take many forms, from eliminating native title to land (Wolfe, 2006) and re-naming places that disregard Indigenous relationships, history, and connections (Lowman & Barker, 2015), to using sand from an ancient Algonquin burial ground in the construction of the Parliament Buildings (Boswell & Pilon, 2015, p. 296). These are but a few examples of the destructive forms of erasure that are embedded into the very foundation of Settler Canadian society, highlighting Wolfe's (2006) point that "settler colonialism destroys to replace" (p. 388). These violences must not be thought of in the past tense, for they continue today through a living intergenerational structure of invasion — a collective project — the achievement of whose objectives rely on the continued embodiment of settler society and identity.

While colonial governments and their military might are important institutional components of the settler colonial project, Wolfe (2006) argues that "its operations are not dependent on the presence or absence of formal state institutions" (p. 393). The construction of a new people — settler society — is what becomes the violent foundational roots of settler colonialism and allows its structures to be enacted and upheld over time (Lowman & Barker, 2015). Lowman & Barker (2015) state that settler colonial structures of invasion in Canada are currently at work through settler spaces, systems, and stories. They define spaces as the ways in which settlers ignore Indigenous spaces and replace them with imposed, secular spaces that say nothing about who might have rightful claim to that land or anything about the land itself; indeed land becomes an entity in which to conquer. Systems refers to the tools of colonial state governance — courts, legal system, police, funding, etc. — that are used to maintain and uphold the colonial state today. These systems are utilized and made real by the everyday citizens who occupy positions within them, underscoring the fact that "settler colonialism is not monolithic. Rather, it is the result of a multitude of acts, from exceptional power imposed by elites, to banal and everyday lived dynamics of average Settler peoples" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 116). Stories, the authors posit, underpin the other structures of invasion and are arguably the most powerful and persuasive because they turn violent colonization into stories of heroic struggle that normalize and justify settler presence while ignoring and eliminating Indigenous presence and stories (p. 58 - 61). Settler society brings with it a sense of permanency through occupation of land (ie. agriculture; Wolfe, 2006) and an

identity formed by connection to the new homeland, in which settlers carry their own sovereignties and lifestyles with them (Snelgrove et al., 2014; Lowman & Barker, 2015). Tuck & Yang (2012) state that settlers become the law, supplanting Indigenous laws and epistemologies, particularly about land, which becomes remade into property, and Indigenous “epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, made pre-modern and backward” (p. 6). Through the creation of a distinct settler society and identity, settler people are given a way to forge new histories and thus become invested in the process of acquiring and maintaining land, with little regard for Indigenous rights and title.

The ongoing process of settler colonialism unequivocally harms and impacts Indigenous peoples. Whether through the socialized wielding of violent tools like White supremacy and racism and the stripping away of self-determination, or forced assimilation through the colonial education system and the severance and disruption of Indigenous relationships to Land, there is no denying that settler colonialism has caused intergenerational trauma and the deaths of millions of Indigenous peoples. Despite the revelations of these harms in the contemporary world and a rising number of settler people willing to acknowledge complicity in these systems, the ideologies, worldview, justifications, privileges, socialization, settler nationalism and vested interest in settler futures makes settler colonialism “remarkably resistant to decolonization” (Veracini, 2007, p. 8). The goal of settler colonialism is to evolve beyond colonialism, or “transcend colonialism” (Lowman & Barker, 2015) through the elimination of Indigenous people and revisionist history, positioning settlers as the rightful claimants to the land while ignoring the inherent violence behind this goal and deliberately forgetting what the foundation of settler colonial nation states are built on. If Settler Canadian’s want a society that is not based on violence, racism, and genocidal practices, then collectively we must look this ugly truth head on and choose to abandon the settler colonial project, working instead towards a decolonized future.

## **Why use Indigenous and settler?**

Throughout the course of this portfolio, it has become clear there are no set of terms that are free of complexity or disagreement, however there are commonly used terms that serve a purpose in relation to critically engaging with the core issue of decolonization — Land. Within this work, the terms ‘Indigenous’ and ‘settler’ are used to define broad politically-based identities, born out of relation to one’s status on *this* Land. Land is at the crux of what motivates both colonization and decolonization and in regards to human identity, these terms signify different kinds of relationships with this Land. The term Indigenous denotes holding “Creation stories, not colonization stories about how they came to be in a particular place; indeed how they came to be a place” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 6). In other words, the people are *of* the lands which they inhabit (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). The term settler, on the other hand, denotes stories of movement, migration, and colonization upon these lands. Thus, the terms ‘Indigenous’ and ‘settler’ position people differently in relation to the land and serve to politicize

and denaturalize the presence of non-Indigenous people on Indigenous lands (Flowers, 2015). Ward (2015) states that when you acknowledge the land and your status on the land, you are stating who you are and informing the people around you about your limits. If you're a guest (or occupier, as Ward argues), you do not have a right to be on that land and thus there are limits to your behaviour. In other words, acknowledging your status on the land demonstrates a crucial recognition of your connection to *this* land and the ways in which you (and your ancestors) have experienced settler colonialism, lending direction to what your responsibilities are within contemporary contexts.

I have chosen to use these terms throughout this portfolio not only for their common usage in contemporary discussions of settler colonialism and decolonization, but also because of their political nature, which implies both a stance and the need for action. The term 'Indigenous peoples' in this context refers to Inuit, Métis, and First Nations living in Canada, a term "constructed, shaped and living in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism" (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 597). Indigenous is an umbrella term that is not intended to create a pan-Indigenous identity, but rather to distinguish between those who have always been on these lands and those who have been transported. There are hundreds of distinct cultural and linguistic groups among Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island and when using the term Indigenous one must be conscious to avoid speaking about people as a homogenous whole, asking what name people would prefer when possible (Vowel, 2016). When speaking about specific peoples or nations in this portfolio, I will use preferred names to the best of my knowledge.

The term 'settler' also denotes a politicized identity, one that can only be understood through the rise of the Indigenous resurgence movement (Alfred in Lowman & Baker, 2015, p. 7), while simultaneously being avoided as a component of identity (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Settler serves to situate non-Indigenous people in a set of behaviours and a structural relationship to dispossession of Indigenous land (Snelgrove et al., 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012) while bringing critical power relations of settler colonialism into view (Flowers, 2015). That is to say, it is a relational term as opposed to a racial category (Vowel, 2016). Flowers (2015) discusses settler as a position of privilege, signifying the settler's relationship to colonialism through structural location and the social relations that produce privilege. She warns, however, that settler becomes an empty signifier if used synonymously with 'non-Indigenous' as "this reduces a set of privileges and practices" — such as occupation of and benefits from land and resources — "to fit within a binary of Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities rather than thinking through the term 'settler' as a set of responsibilities and action" (p. 33). It is attending to these responsibilities of settler identity that mark its politicized nature.

Through these understandings, I have come to use the term settler to refer to myself and others who are complicit in and benefit from settler colonialism in a myriad of ways, with a focus on the attending responsibilities of settler identity, individually and collectively. I must be clear, however, that I do not intend the term settler to stand in as the totality of someone's identity. Rather

I view it as an intersectional component, a way of understanding how ones social and political identities overlap and intersect to create different modes of discrimination, oppression and privilege (“Intersectionality”, 2021). Through this lens, the term settler is defining, yet partial — settlers are also more than colonizers (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). Within the intersections of ones identity, some pieces carry more power than others and the term settler attempts to signify power in relation to status on the Land and the structures of settler colonialism.

The inherent intersectionality of identity also highlights the nuances and complexities of using an umbrella term like ‘settler’ based on social histories. Beenash Jafri articulates that we should “think about settlerhood not as an object that we possess, but as a field of operations into which we become socially positioned and implicated” (2012). The nuances that arise through this understanding means that the relationships settlers hold, individually and in community, to Indigenous peoples and colonial history in Canada will be different. This becomes particularly sticky in relation to people who do not share the Western European history of early settlement and its ensuing political structures of colonization, such as those who come to this land with more recent migration or refugee stories or those whose ancestors were forced into the Atlantic slave trade. Several scholars unequivocally state that those who came through the slave trade can hardly be thought of in the same terms as those who came with the clear intention of exploitation for profit (Haig-Brown, 2009; Vowels, 2016). Haig-Brown (2009) says that while it is important to understand the trauma and stories of forced dispersal from homelands, diaspora communities must also pay attention to the stories of the places to which they come, for “to ignore the trauma of those people who have been displaced here... is to re-inscribe the erasure of Indigenous peoples from the lands and from the histories in ways similar to those of dominant colonizers” (p. 16). Unraveling these histories and what how they play out in ones relationships with Land and Indigenous peoples are the work of individuals and the communities to which we belong.

These nuances also give rise to the complexities within settler identity, especially in relation to people of colour. Grappling with these complexities addresses both the oppression of people of colour in relation to structures of White supremacy in Canada, and the complicity of people of colour who may also participate in and benefit from colonization (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021; p. 34 - 35). Patel (2010) and Walia (2012) argue that while people of colour do not share European stories of conquest and may have their own stories of oppression (colonial and otherwise), that does not mean that people of colour are innocent of the harms of the settler colonial project given that “all non-Native peoples are promised the ability to join in the colonial project of settling Indigenous lands” (Smith, in Walia, 2012, p. 4). Therefore, they state that within social justice movement spaces, people of colour also need to ensure that their aspirations, strategies, and models of liberation do not contribute to the erasure or oppression of Indigenous peoples.

While the cited scholars all acknowledge the complicated reality of complicity within settler colonial structures and identities, they do not attempt to equate the experiences of people of colour,

who also face systemic oppression within White supremacist states, with that of White people. Snelgrove et al. (2014) acknowledge that settlers are “variously and systemically positioned according to the shifting terms of state hegemonies” (p. 14) such that people of colour do not hold the same kind of power as White people in North American settler colonial contexts (Patel, 2010). This brings up an additional criticism of the term settler in relation to its synonymous affiliation to whiteness, which lends vagueness to the term in regards to who is included. While scholars offer varying interpretations of who is included or not in the broad term settler, often making distinctions between the circumstances and time period of ones arrival in these lands as to whether words like migrant or immigrant would be more appropriate (Vowel, 2016; Gilio-Whitaker, 2018a), I do not use the word settler to inherently mean “White”. Carlson-Manathara (2021) states that whiteness remains closely tied to settler colonialism in Canada, and thus while explicitly using the term *White settler* may make some people uncomfortable, the terms White and whiteness are important because they are indicators of the ongoing social relations of racial categorization and marginalization in settler colonial Canada. She uses the term *White settler* when this is her specific meaning and settler to refer to this identifier more broadly (p. 34). In this work, I share Carlson-Manathara’s distinction between using the term settler more broadly when referring to status on the land and when White should be used as a signifier of a specific component of colonizer identity.

On a final note about terminology, Snelgrove et al. (2014) contend that while investigating who is a settler is an important question and way to build relationships, debating types and degrees of settler is a distraction from the larger critiques of settler colonialism and the energies and actions needed to address it. In this vein, Elizabeth Carlson-Manathara (2021) posits:

“In some ways, I suspect that the function of our word choices may be more important than the words themselves. What do our terminology choices prompt us to do? How do they help us move through our process? How do they impact our relationships with Indigenous peoples?” (p. 36)

In this portfolio, I recognize that the term settler can be controversial, for a whole host of reasons ranging from personal discomfort and its use as an empty signifier to criticism that it does not do enough to unsettle colonial structures. Yet I see claiming settler identity not as a punishment or a statement of guilt, but rather as a political stance that offers awareness about one’s status on the Land and its adherent set of responsibilities. Settler, while distinct in certain ways, is also a myriad of identities each offering connection to a long line of places. In today’s increasingly interconnected world, how do we come to know, and claim, our identities and the inherent responsibilities that follow suit? For myself, I have seen this process reflected in how I introduce myself. While in the past, this was a brief, bland affair — a hollowed out identity consisting of my name and my profession — today a component of how I identify is as a Settler Canadian with ancestral roots in Ireland, England, and Portugal because, to date, this signifies a more complete location of my identity in relation to place. While I no longer heed the nationalist pride in Canadian identity that I grew up with, nor can I reject the presence of my Settler Canadian identity. Through seven

generations of ancestral settlement, it is an undeniable aspect. The words we use matter and yet they are also flawed, existing and being used in moments of time across an always changing social landscape. Our choice comes in how we wield them.

## What is decolonization?

*“Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding. Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and context.”*

— Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963, p. 36

Central to an understanding of decolonization is that it is a process — a process of disruption, resistance, disentanglement, renewal, and creation out of the ashes of colonialism. Many scholars have discussed the process of decolonization as grounded in the transformation of colonial relationships and structures, which occur simultaneously at multiple levels — personal, collective, and systemic (Calderson, 2014; Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021; Lowman & Barker, 2015; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Michael Yellow Bird (2012) offers a conceptual model of decolonization that makes explicit the role of personal transformation and collective action, describing decolonization as both an event and a process. As an event, Yellow Bird describes decolonization as reaching a level of critical consciousness to the nature and reality of being colonized and how this mindset influences ones limited or destructive responses to the world around them. Building on Yellow Bird’s idea of the event of decolonization, Veracini (2007) suggests that “if settler colonialism is an ambivalent circumstance where the settler is colonized and colonizing at once, decolonization requires at least two moments: the moment of settler independence and the moment of Indigenous self-determination.”(p. 5). These moments or events then enact a decolonization process, which Yellow Bird describes as engaging in activities of creating liberation strategies, restoring Indigenous cultural practices, and birthing new ideas that contribute to the advancement and empowerment of Indigenous peoples. Inherent in an understanding of decolonization is its transformative potential for the future, grounded in the actions of both anti-colonial resistance and Indigenous resurgence, imagined and led by Indigenous peoples. At its core, decolonization seeks:

- ▶ To undo and resist the ongoing invasion, occupation, destruction, and influences of colonialism (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Ward, 2020; Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2012)
- ▶ The repatriation of Indigenous land and life, through the relinquishing of and reparations for stolen land (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Alfred, 2017; Manuel & Derrickson, 2017; Palmater, 2021; Snelgrove et al., 2014)
- ▶ The regeneration or resurgence of Indigenous nationhood and life ways (Simpson, 2011; Alfred, 2005; Ward, 2020; Palmater, 2017; Snelgrove, et al., 2014)
- ▶ The creation of a new social order that is just to everyone, including the land and all the beings of the land (Waziyatawin, in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021; Belcourt, 2020)

In a seminal article on decolonization, Tuck & Yang (2012) describe decolonization as incommensurable with other forms of civil and human-rights based justice projects because at its core lies *Land* — specifically the repatriation of Indigenous land, along with the recognition that land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted. The authors do not attempt to create a clear vision of decolonization. Rather they unequivocally state that decolonization is unclear and unsettling — we cannot know what decolonization will lead to, look like, or require of people and systems because “the answers will not emerge from friendly understanding, and indeed require dangerous understanding of uncommonality” (p. 35). As an ethic and guiding principle for collective struggle, Lowman & Barker (2015) state that decolonization is not simply opposition to colonial imposition, or even endless resistance, but that it is both the ending of colonialism and the act of “becoming something other than colonial” (p. 111). Through these depictions, decolonization can be viewed as a messy process with no right or easy answers, instead requiring confrontation, critical engagement, (un)learning, and action, through which new modes of being will materialize.

### **What decolonization requires**

Fundamentally, decolonization requires Indigenous liberation — liberation from the oppressive and violent structures of settler colonialism and into Indigenous self-determination. In a discussion on what decolonization entails in order to occur, Ward (2020) describes two broad spectrums of action — anti-colonial and cultural resurgence. He defines anti-colonial actions as those taken to disempower or eradicate colonialism. Anti-colonial actions include examples such as repatriation of Indigenous land and life, which requires the elimination of settler property rights and sovereignty, abolishing land as property, and upholding the sovereignty of Native land and people (Tuck & Yang, 2012); and resistance to colonial subjugation and exploitation of Indigenous peoples and land, as well as to colonial structures and worldviews/assumptions about the world (Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2012; Lowman & Barker, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012). These actions also take into account more consciousness-based acts such as the decolonizing of ones mind, such as questioning the legitimacy of colonization and then determining how to resist and challenge colonial institutions and ideologies (Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2012); and a “settler reckoning” (Wildcat, et al., 2014) that sees a decentering and unsettling of settler people in relation to land and Indigenous peoples (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021; Lowman & Barker, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

The second spectrum of actions Ward (2020) labels cultural resurgence, defined as actions taken to rebuild Indigenous nations. Cultural resurgence actions include examples such as the regeneration of Indigenous cultural, spiritual, and political practices (Alfred, 2005; Simpson, 2011; Ward, 2020); reconnection to relationship with and responsibility to the Land (Alfred, in Simpson, 2008; Coulthard, 2014; Ward, 2020; gkisedtanamoogk, in Hager et al., 2021); and Indigenous education through Indigenous contexts, using Indigenous processes (Simpson, 2017). It is

important to note that the vast majority of cultural resurgence actions spoken about and advocated for by Indigenous scholars and Knowledge Keepers are intended to be engaged in by Indigenous peoples, nations, and communities.

It is here that one must attend to who participates in this spectrum of decolonizing actions and what that participation might look like. The words of many scholars and Knowledge Keepers make clear that decolonization requires both Indigenous and settler peoples to participate. The oppressive structures and systems of settler colonialism were created by a powerful class of White European settlers, upheld over the years by the compliance of settlers from all walks of life. The dismantling of these structures, and the oppressive relationships created through them, require the involvement of settler society in order to defeat colonial systems and support movements of resurgence (Alfred, 2005; Hart & Rowe, 2014; Ward, 2020; Manuel & Derrickson, 2017; TRC, 2015). Lowman & Barker (2015) state that while the focus of all decolonization is clearly on regenerating Indigenous nationhood, decolonization is a process that affects everyone — Indigenous, Settler, and Others — who are currently living on lands under settler colonial domination. Within this process, there are different roles for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to enact their sovereignties, each requiring different efforts and producing different outcomes while pursued along intersectional lines (Lowman & Barker, 2015; Walia, 2012). As an Indigenous constructed and led praxis, decolonization nonetheless requires settler participation, attuned to the unique responsibilities this identity bestows.

Perhaps the most impactful example of the layered responsibilities for decolonization is the Seventh Fire Prophecy of the Anishnaabe people. Originally recounted in *The Mishomis Book* (1988) by Edward Benton-Benai an Ojibway educator and spiritual leader, the Seven Fires Prophecy warns of the coming of the Light-skinned race, which if they come wearing the face of death will mean that hardship will follow for the Anishnaabe people. Profound for today's world, the final fire in the prophecy tells of the Seventh Fire and the emergence of the Oshkibimadizeeg (New People) who will begin to “retrace their steps to find what was left by the trail” (Benton-Benai, 1988, p. 92). The Oshkibimadizeeg’s “sacred purpose is to walk back along the red road of our ancestors and to gather up all the fragments that lay scattered along the trail. Fragments of land, tatters of language, bits of song, stories, sacred teachings - all that was dropped along the way” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 367). Kimmerer (2013) and Simpson (2008) share that today the Elders say we are living in the time of the Seventh Fire and that it is the Oshkibimadizeeg who are responsible for rebuilding the Anishnaabe nation, for putting back together all that has been lost, and for forging new relationships with other nations through returning to an Anishnaabe worldview.

The summation of the Seventh Fire Prophecy is the arrival at a crossroads, wherein the people of today must make a choice about a divided path to the future, which if chosen correctly “will light the Eighth and final Fire — an eternal Fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood” (Benton-Benai, 1988, p. 93). Simpson’s (2008) recounting of the prophecy states that it is the work of the Oshkibimadizeeg that will bring about the possibility of the Eighth Fire, but that “in order for

the Eighth Fire to be lit, settler society must also choose to change their ways, to decolonize their relationships with the land and Indigenous nations, and to join with us in building a sustainable future based upon mutual recognition, justice, and respect” (p. 14). Benton-Benai (1988) warns however, that “if the Light-skinned Race makes the wrong choice of roads, then the destruction which they brought with them in coming to this country will come back to them and cause much suffering and death to all the Earth’s people” (p. 93). It cannot be more clearly laid out that the responsibility for finding the path and sharing its possibility lies with the Indigenous peoples of this Land, while the responsibility of settler people is to be open to listen and make an active choice for a different future, one freed of the settler colonial project and its endless stream of losses. The stakes of decolonization are high, with the march towards the crossroads unfolding in our lifetimes — the Oshkibimadizeeg learning and carrying their responsibilities, settlers learning and carrying theirs.

While the participation of everyone within the settler colonial project is necessary for decolonization, it cannot be overstated that the responsibilities within decolonization for Indigenous and settler peoples are distinct and separate. This portfolio responds to that reality by investigating the distinct elements of settler responsibilities in the process of decolonization, in order to contribute to the much needed critical discussion and action on the part of settler peoples. Sakej Ward (2020) talks about responsibility as an obligation or a duty that entails conscious action. One’s duties or responsibilities are what keep the balance of being in right relation, with other humans, the Land, and all non-human beings. I complete my framing of decolonization by briefly addressing Indigenous and settler responsibilities in the bigger picture, in order to help distinguish and give context to the nuances of settler obligations as explored in this portfolio.

### **Addressing Indigenous responsibilities**

As a settler person, it is not within my purview, nor is it my intent, to analyze or offer an exhaustive list of Indigenous responsibilities in decolonization. It is important to touch on a big picture view of these responsibilities, however, in order to contextualize the distinct nature of settler roles within the broader tapestry of decolonization. It is fitting to first discuss Indigenous responsibilities in decolonization through the Anishnaabemowin verb *biskaabiiyang*, as recounted by Leanne Simpson (2011), which means “returning to ourselves”. Aligned with the Seventh Fire Prophecy, she states that *biskaabiiyang* means “to pick up the things we were forced to leave behind, whether they are songs, dances, values, or philosophies, and bring them into existence in the future” (p. 50), thus offering an important way to ground Nishnaabeg resurgence or decolonization as a “new emergence” (p. 51). Similar to how Indigenous scholars use the term decolonizing, Simpson shares that *biskaabiiyang* is understood as a process in which Nishnaabeg can learn to live in the contemporary world by using the teachings given to the people to build a Nishnaabeg renaissance. As a process, *biskaabiiyang* encompasses the need to eviscerate colonial thinking in individuals and communities, alongside a visioning process for new realities and the action needed to create these visioned spaces. Simpson makes clear that *biskaabiiyang* does not mean a return to the past, but

rather reclaiming and allowing to flourish the ways of the past in order to support contemporary Nishnaabeg well-being; grounding for a world beyond colonialism. Through biskaabiiyang, a reconnection to Indigenous lifeways can be seen as the connective and guiding thread of Indigenous decolonization responsibilities.

Stemming from a process of biskaabiiyang, Simpson (2011) shares that “our responsibilities for resurgence pre-existed before we were present on the earth. In our greatest period of destruction our Grandparents resisted by planting the seeds of resurgence... For Nishnaabeg thinkers, resistance and resurgence are not only our response to colonialism, they are our only responsibility in the face of colonialism” (p. 66). Crucial to Indigenous decolonizing responsibilities are what Ward (2020) terms cultural resurgence actions — those taken to rebuild Indigenous nations. Many cultural resurgence actions are also inherently anti-colonial, as the act of participating in cultural resurgence is to reject colonial notions and objectives of assimilation, elimination, and erasure. Michael Hart notes that “Indigenous resurgence is the centre of anti-colonialism, pushing outwards from this centre and reclaiming space that had been occupied by settler colonialism” (in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 140). From these understandings, Indigenous decolonizing actions that imbue both resistance and resurgence may include rebuilding or reconnecting with the land and land-based practices (Alfred, 2008; Coulthard, 2014; gkisedtanamoogk, in Hager et al., 2021; Ward, 2020); resurgence and regeneration of Indigenous ways of being (Alfred, 2005; Simpson, 2011; Ward, 2020); healing from the internalized oppressions of colonialism (Yerxa, 2015; Freeland Ballantyne, 2014; Alfred, 2017); the political fight for Indigenous liberation and contemporary warrior life (Palmater, 2020; Alfred, 2005; Ward, 2020); asserting Indigenous nationhood, governance, and sovereignty (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 136 - 140); theorizing pathways of decolonial action (Alfred, 2008); critical consciousness raising or decolonizing the mind (Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2012).... the embodiment of responsibilities continues on. What can be seen as a common thread throughout these duties is the centering of Indigenous liberation, self-determination, and sovereignty — as individuals, families, and nations.

In such a brief space it is impossible to do justice to the vast and varied understandings, experiences, and enactments of Indigenous responsibilities in decolonization. Thus it is fitting to end with Leanne Simpson’s (2011) reflections on an Anishnaabe social movement inspired by a spiritual vision — the great migration of the Anishnaabe people in response to the First Fire of the Seven Fires Prophecy, which forewarned of the need to protect themselves against the coming colonizers. The enactment of this movement is encapsulated in the Anishnaabemowin word *chibimoodaywin*, which conveys that “mobilization, resistance and resurgence involves sacrifice, persistence, patience and slow painful movement” (p. 67). This migration was ultimately carried out by ten generations of Nishnaabeg people, demonstrating commitment, persistence, solidarity, and determination that resulted in a community procession lasting the span of five hundred years. Simpson reflects that:

"chibimoodaywin tells me that spiritual visioning, followed by individual commitment and action, is a cornerstone of Nishnaabeg mobilization, resistance and now, resurgence... Imagine what we could accomplish with a committed, strategic, persistent resurgence movement over the next ten generations. Chibimoodaywin inspires me to begin to try and reclaim the community-based processes that inspired *generations* of Nishnaabeg people to mobilize and to carry out this prophecy." (p. 67).

It is through this reflection that it becomes clear Indigenous responsibilities lie with both the individual and the collective, in the present moment, but also with duties to ones ancestors, future generations, and the Land herself.

### **Contextualizing settler responsibilities**

In contrast to the resurgence and resistance based Indigenous responsibilities in decolonization, the majority of Settler Canadian responsibilities are anti-colonial in nature; that is to say they lie in the disempowering, disrupting, and dismantling of settler colonialism from within (Fortier, 2017; Ward, 2020; Freeland Ballantyne, 2014; Barker, 2021). Given that Canadian colonial structures and systems have been created by settler governments and held in place by the compliance of settler people for hundreds of years, resistance on the part of its settler citizens poses a significant threat to the state and can weaken the cracks in the foundation began by Indigenous resistance. The idea of weakening cracks illustrates the importance of ensuring any settler anti-colonial action(s) take leadership from Indigenous people, which means being "accountable and responsive to [their] experiences, voices, needs and political perspectives" (Walia, 2012).

While some Indigenous scholars contend there is a role for settler people to learn about their own ancestral identity as a form of cultural reclamation beyond the impacts of Western imperialism (Ward, 2015) and to understand ourselves as "more than colonizers" (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021), the cultural resurgence of Indigenous peoples of this Land does not involve settler people. Rather, "Settler people need to find our own ways of building decolonizing practices, engaging in transformative struggle, and supporting the resurgence of Indigenous nationhood without claiming or pretending to possess a connection to the spiritual and material practices of Indigenous identity" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 113). Baring no eloquent English word that connects settler responsibility to something more intrinsic and intergenerational, I offer a summary of the key elements of settler responsibilities that are required in the bigger picture of decolonization: engaging in critical consciousness raising, awareness, and unlearning; being in relationship with Indigenous peoples and the Land; and taking action in support of repatriating Indigenous life and Land.

Engaging in critical consciousness raising, awareness, and unlearning speaks to Yellow Bird's (2012) "event" element of decolonization — moments that are necessary to understanding the realities of colonization, including the ways in which our minds have been colonized by its underpinning ideologies, values, and systems. Irlbacher-Fox (2014a) states that "to get to a place of decolonizing action, the privileged must self-consciously first think oneself (or self-actualize

oneself) to a place of action, the getting-there process being one of decolonization” (p. 152). Thus, it is through hard work, and often a painful process of self-education, critical self-reflection and questioning that one can begin to decolonize their mind (Lowman & Barker, 2015; McCrea-McGovern, 2021). Critical consciousness raising permits increased awareness of the ongoing nature of colonialism, a centering of Indigenous worldviews, the ability to denounce racist justifications for settlement and ongoing oppression, and a recognition of Indigenous right to self-determination (Palmater, 2020; Manuel & Derrickson, 2017; Walia, 2012). This process of knowing differently, at a personal level, is essential for the other aspects of decolonizing to occur because we need to know how colonial structures work and our relationship to them in order to make conscious choices about how we engage (or disengage) with them (Lowman & Barker, 2015). While engaging in consciousness raising, settlers must take responsibility for our own learning about the realities and harms caused by colonialism and how the machinery of colonialism runs (Ward, 2020; Barker, 2021; Irlbacher-Fox, 2014a). We cannot expect Indigenous peoples, who have their own struggles and responsibilities to engage in, to teach us or hold our hands in learning basic concepts and truths that we are capable of learning for ourselves (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021; Lowman & Barker, 2015).

While seemingly a personal process, critical consciousness raising must also be done collectively. Lowman & Barker (2015) state that while the individual processes of questioning and interrogating ones own life are important, this learning must go beyond personal conscientization because the changes needed are systemic. They say that in order to be meaningful, consciousness raising must reach out to larger groups and movements, mobilizing a critical mass of people willing to admit they are complicit in settler colonialism and who are willing to do something about it. As a collective step in conscientization, educating and challenging other settlers is also a responsibility (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021) that can involve one-to-one conversations based on relationships of care (Barker, 2021), outreach to others struggling to navigate their own decolonization (McCrea-McGovern, 2021), or more broadly working to break down the prejudice in White settler communities (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). In this process of settler education, we must be careful to avoid the pitfall of the singular focus of learning about the Other as standing in for decolonization (Reagan, 2010). This can be interpreted as a settler move to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012) that “blinds us from seeing how settler history, myth, and identity have shaped and continue to shape our attitudes in highly problematic ways” and allows us to “avoid looking too closely at ourselves and the collective responsibility we bear for the colonial status quo” (Reagan, 2010, p. 11). Yerxa & Lee (2016) call for the necessity of pointing the lens at settler colonialism and whiteness as opposed to learning about the Other because this “presents a guise of meaningful work when the work needed — dismantling settler colonialism and ending settler colonial violence — is not actually being done”. In other words, if our awareness raising process is centred on understanding Indigenous history and struggles without a critical lens towards the systems and structures that underpin this history, then we are not attempting to understand the ways in which

settler society and people are implicated and complicit in the ongoing harms of colonialism. Without critical self-reflection that leads to this recognition and understanding it becomes difficult, or perhaps impossible, to build relationships of solidarity with Indigenous peoples (Ward, 2015; Fortier, 2017; Walia, 2012) and thus challenging to fully enact settler responsibilities.

Another element of settler responsibility is being in relationship, with Indigenous peoples and with this Land, in ways that are outside of settler colonial ideologies and structures. In the introduction, I spoke about the disconnect between Indigenous and settler peoples in contemporary Canada, born of discordant epistemologies about the world, particularly Euro-Western notions of individualism, private property, and engrained notions of hierarchy. If the discord and disconnect between Indigenous and settler peoples, and between settler peoples and the Land, has been grounds for the creation and continuance of settler colonialism, then it stands that reimagining a new relationship and taking steps towards that becomes a fundamental responsibility of settler people who are working towards decolonization. If we are to truly see decolonial relationships emerge, these must be built on honesty through acknowledgement of colonialism's impacts and history in this nation (Ward, 2015); navigated outside of and not governed by the state (Walia, 2012; Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021); and require a preparedness for discomfort and social conflict (Palmater, 2020; Walia, 2012). Lowman & Barker (2015) offer that "the key guiding principle for Settler Canadians is that decolonization is and must be 'Always in Relationship'." Remember that Settler and Indigenous identities are related in complex and multiple ways and we can only fully make sense of them in relationship to each other, to settler colonialism and to the land" (p. 117). Perhaps a first step in building relationships outside the purview of colonial structures is to break out of the spaces that we are comfortable in and learn what it means to be in relation with Indigenous peoples, not just through political contexts, but also through the heart connection of personal relationship.

A final element of settler responsibility is taking action in support of repatriating Indigenous land and life, arguably the most important responsibility as this is ultimately what decolonization requires. It is here where our attention is drawn to moving away from thinking and talking and into taking action (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021) so as to not allow "conscientization to stand in for the more uncomfortable task of relinquishing land" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 19). Paramount in the anti-colonial actions of Settlers is that actions taken are in service of Indigenous-led anti-colonial resistance and decolonizing visions (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021; Lowman & Barker, 2015) and that they support various expressions of Indigenous nationhood (Simpson, 2013). This is tantamount to constantly checking in with oneself or movement spaces to think critically about where calls to action are coming from and ensuring that action doesn't fall into the trap of saviourism or paternalism. This also means needing to ask, listen, and understand what action means for the peoples whose Land you are actually on in order to avoid falling into pan-Indigenous notions and skirting the important (and difficult) work of building authentic relationships in the places where we live. Grounding action in relationships also ensures that steps

taken are accountable to Indigenous lives, futures, and perspectives (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021); this is after all, where the impetus, theory, and vision beyond colonization originates from and grows within.

Taking action also means engaging in direct actions, in their many forms and iterations. In Ward's article *What is Decolonization? Anti-Colonial and Cultural Resurgence Actions* (2020), he defines anti-colonial actions as those we take to disempower or eradicate colonialism and discusses these actions across three broad categories — dismantling colonial economy (ie. preventing the extraction of resources to be used for profit); dismantling colonial culture (ie. challenging colonial assertions of sovereignty); and dismantling the philosophy of colonization (ie. capitalism, Christianity). Fundamentally, actions must work towards transferring land and power to Indigenous people's through policy reform, respecting the Indigenous right to say 'no', and establishing nation-to-nation relationships (Palmer, 2020; Manuel & Derrickson, 2017). While we are complicit in these structures, we must also recognize that "though we cannot change the past, neither are we held prisoner by it" (Reagan, 2010, p. 22). We are individuals, acting within a violent system, who have personal agency, gifts, and resources that we can contribute to the fight for Indigenous liberation, indeed that we must, for these structures harm us all.

### **Why decolonize?**

After all of this, the question of "why pursue decolonization" may be top of mind — colonialism has been a constant presence in human history and it seems overwhelmingly complex to address, not to mention a scary, uncomfortable, and painful process of identity confrontation. The most obvious and likely widespread rationale by those benefiting from the privileges of settler colonialism is that of moral responsibility or a sense of justice. If action is a question of morality, Reagan (2010) argues that "it is necessary to link the individual's sense of personal responsibility to the collective socio-political, moral, and ethical responsibility that we carry." (p. 32) When one comes to understand the depths of violence, pain, and oppression wrought upon Indigenous peoples by the same systems that have given settlers wealth and prosperity, there is little question that we have incurred both a moral and ethical debt. It is this debt that undergirds our obligations to Indigenous peoples — at a collective, systemic level — and participating in decolonization is the only ethical way that I can see to uphold our obligations and push back against complicity.

This still does not answer the niggling piece of ones conscious locked in the ideologies of individualism that may say but what — beyond guilt, shame, fear, responsibility, and morality — motivates *me* to do this difficult work in such a way that I too will benefit? From this stems a rationale born of self-interest, whether that is towards meeting the goals of other agendas that can benefit from decolonization discourse or the idea that as settler people, our liberation is bound up in the liberation of Indigenous peoples, for when Indigenous liberation takes hold, we too can be freed from the structures that have led us to the precipice of our own extinction. While stating that both moral responsibility and self-interest are legitimate bases from which to act, Irlbacher-Fox

(2014a) is skeptical about the willingness of settlers to support a decolonization movement in a sustained way from either of these positions as she has “found that even the most supportive settlers have a privilege line they refuse to cross. It is the existence of that line and the refusal to cross it which requires long-term effort. Erasing the line is predicated on personal transformation” (p. 223). Self-interest can only bring one so far in transformative work, when the goal is to transcend the barriers within us that prevent transformation in the first place.

Overcoming the boundaries of moral responsibility and self interest as reasons to participate in the personal and collective transformation needed of decolonization perhaps requires rooting in an ethic of love. Much of what makes the world hollow today can be traced back to the wicked and interconnected problems of settler colonial capitalism and the ways in which these systems have so effectively eviscerated human values of love and interconnectedness, leaving us craving that which we do not know we are missing. Carlson-Manathara (2021) and Dawnis Kennedy (in Carlson-Manthara & Rowe, 2021) speak of the transformative power of love in connection to Mother Earth as ultimately being able to shift one from a position of responsibility or justice to that which brings ones heart into the work. While we may not know what a liberated world will look like or what our place in that world will be, it feels more reassuring to fight for an unknown future premised on love and respect then the alternative predicted in the Eighth Fire; a road of destruction, suffering, and death..<sup>3</sup>

*“Keep hope alive that all things are possible.  
We live on a ball of water, circling a ball of fire, in an endless universe.  
All things remain possible.”*

— Christi Belcourt, 2020

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for additional pedagogical tools to accompany Section 2.0.

### 3.0 Decolonizing (for settlers): A pedagogical framework for enacting responsibilities

Education has long been used as an assimilationist tool, most profoundly and with devastating costs for Indigenous peoples. Yet settler people have also been socialized into the narrative of settler colonialism; we have been conditioned to know this set of privileges and worldview as 'normal' and desirable. The responsibility to address this conditioning and teach what settler colonialism has done lies beyond just public education institutions. This must also happen within our society at large — in our homes, at our workplaces, in collective spaces. As my own learning crystallized around the understanding of decolonization as a process, I began finding common themes and patterns to the elements involved in enacting settler responsibilities and wanted to devise a way to share these understandings in an accessible way. Through that lens this framework emerged with the intention of:

- Consolidating the work of many brilliant thinkers on the roles and responsibilities of decolonizing (for settlers) as an action, an occurrence, a state of being.
- Offering a pedagogical tool that could be used as a starting point for critical dialogue, reflection, (un)learning, and relationship building.
- Encouraging people to come together in their shared places to build relationships and begin to talk openly about the realities of living as an occupier in an illegitimate settler colonial state and the decolonizing responsibilities that come with that identity.

The pedagogical framework for enacting settler responsibilities in decolonization has been grounded in a *Decolonizing (for settlers) Mandala* (Figure 2), which presents the multiple scales of this work and the five main elements that encompass settler responsibilities. While there are many ways that one could choose to use this tool — for personal reflection to deepen critical reflexivity; to give ideas for language and concepts to use with other

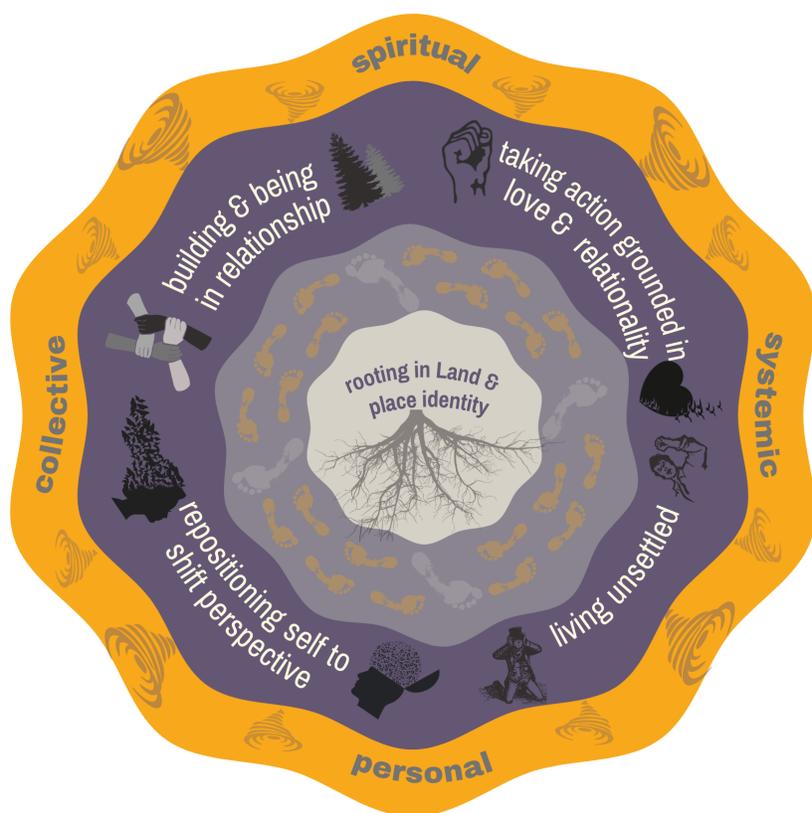


Fig. 1 — Decolonizing (for settlers) Mandala (Strutt, 2021); Icons credit of Canva and Pixabay)

settler people at different stages in their own decolonizing journey; as an entry point into analyzing an organization or a group's decolonizing process — there is power in doing this work with other people. The collective nature of decolonial struggles means that building networks and communities of practice as settler peoples who can learn together is an advantage (Lowman & Barker, 2015). Lowman & Barker (2015) share that “groups, self-consciously in struggle together, can be vital for providing sounding boards and caring critical perspectives on our very personal work” and are able to help us “reflect on what we have done, and see our own successes and also our own failings” (p. 118). Creating collective spaces where settlers can learn, share and mobilize, without harming or placing undue responsibility on Indigenous peoples, can play a crucial role in keeping us accountable to the difficult work of this path.

### Using the pedagogical framework

Each of the following sections of the framework begins with a visual that captures the significant actions of that element, followed by a deeper dive into each action using written context and critical prompts to deepen thinking and understanding. The actions presented under each element are not intended to encapsulate all that is involved within that component of settler responsibility, but rather what I have been able to deduce thus far from my research (which has its own limitations — see *Letter to the Reader*). There is no one or ‘right’ way to engage with this tool. This is not envisioned as a linear process, but rather as one that is constantly evolving and dynamic, unique to everyone. Start with the prompts or elements you are called too and go at your own pace through them, recognizing that engaging in one idea may push you to an unexpected next step.

At an **individual** level, this framework is not intended to be a theoretical exercise, but rather a deeply personal call to action. To truly engage with the work, consider intentional reflection practices on the critical prompts provided (ie. journaling, art, music, voice memos, stream of consciousness writing, etc.). When engaging with the critical prompts, be careful not to generalize your statements — speak to your own experience, not that of all settler people. Let yourself go down streams and see where it leads, all the while posing questions that push you to dig deeper.

If engaging with this framework as a **group**, I follow Saad's recommendation to use the principles and structures of *The Circle Way*, a methodology for deep conversation designed by Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea in 1992. As a methodology, The Circle Way offers a social structure that helps conversation arrive at a deeper, more intentional place by allowing people to hold complexity, work through conflict, discover possibilities for collaboration, and honour diversity (The Circle Way, 2021). In practice, The Circle Way gathers people into a circular shape with participants at the rim and purpose in the centre, making space to create social agreements and practices to facilitate respectful conversation that gives everyone a voice. For more information on The Circle Way and how to use this methodology to structure group dialogue, you can read Baldwin & Linnea's book *The Circle Way: A Leader in Every Chair* (2010) or find free guidelines online at their website. Having used The Circle Way to go through Saad's (2018) *Me & White Supremacy Workbook*

with a group of white-privileged women, I can attest to its usefulness in guiding challenging, critical discussion while contending with issues of power and hierarchy through its collaborative nature, ultimately allowing for conversation to get to the deep places needed for transformative work.

When engaging in this work with others, it's important to consider how to **create a shared critical discussion space** that is both accountable to the intention of the work and done with love. Decolonizing work requires critical reflexivity about oneself and the systems we are embedded in. It will also inevitably come with bumbled attempts to express oneself and harmful words or actions. Given these realities, Loretta Ross (2019) speaks about calling in versus calling out, a technique that allows all parties to move forward past harmful language or mistakes and expand perspectives. She likens it to "speaking up without tearing down", an agreement between people who are in dialogue together to encourage recognition for growth, admit our mistakes, and commit to doing better. Calling in is also part of creating a "shared heart space", what facilitator and settler researcher Kelsey Jones-Casey describes as the need to center relationships at the heart of difficult discussions. She shares that through this approach, shared values become a baseline for engaging with others who are at a different place in their learning journey. While shared analysis or frameworks can be useful for discussion, everyone will have their own experiences and finding the humanity in one another may open more opportunity for change (personal communication, July 28 2021).

In navigating the tensions and discomfort inherent in this work, Robin Faye, a fellow settler scholar activist and restorative yoga teacher speaks of the need to foster "ease within the effort". In other words, creating shared space also means helping people nourish and integrate the natural changes that comes from deep personal and systemic change work. She shares that while many people want to grow and improve, constantly pushing into discomfort doesn't allow people the space needed for change to emerge in a holistic way and on a deeper, more sustainable level. She doesn't advocate for ignoring or pushing away discomfort, but rather allowing time to pause and take a breath so that in the long term, there is more space and stamina to engage (personal communication, July 2021).

A final note on creating shared critical discussion space comes from Saad's (2018) workbook in regards to staying accountable to this work without the presence of people of colour, or in this case, Indigenous peoples. She states that as powerful as the critical reflection involved in this type of work can be, there is no way to ensure that one is going deep enough without the accountability of those who live with the impacts of that oppression every day. As people with privilege in a given context, she notes that we can't see our complicity in oppression because this is what we know as 'normal'. Thus, it requires self-responsibility, self-accountability, and truth telling to go as deep as we can and to stay accountable to the essence of the work. Creating shared space for critical discussion may not be what you are seeking at this time, however being open to working alongside other settler privileged people in unpacking this component of identity and the responsibilities inherent in it will inevitably help you go deeper and avoid the moves to innocence that can keep this work from being truly transformative.

### 3.1 Rooting in Land & place identity

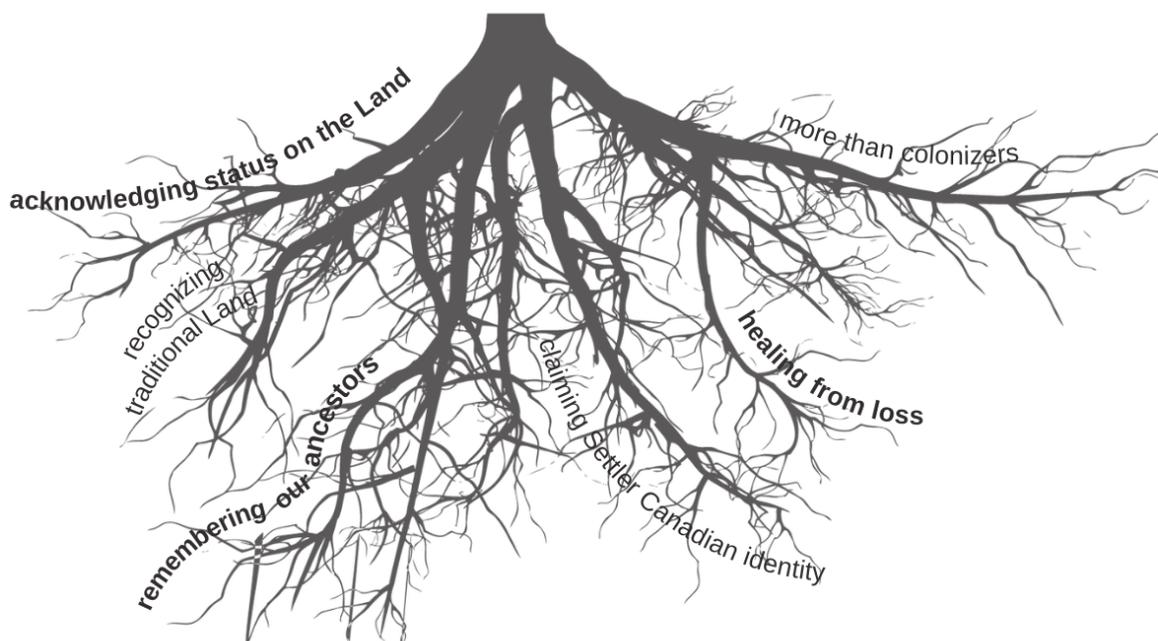


Fig. 3 - Rooting in Land & place identity

Heeding calls from Indigenous scholars such as Sakej Ward (2015) to “find the connection to your own Indigenous teachings”, rooting in Land and place identity is intended for the individuals involved to continually come back to the effort of remembering who they are, the connections they hold to place, and what they bring to the path being walked. The image of rooting implies movement and growth, a deepening of understanding and knowing about connection to Land and place and how this shapes ones identity. This section will explore status and connection to *this* Land, the importance of tracing back ancestral stories and connection, and the healing needed to be more than a colonizer.

#### FURTHER RESOURCES

- Coming Home to Indigenous Place Names in Canada [Website]
- Native Land digital map [Website]
- *My Grandmother's Hands* by Resmaa Menakem [Book]
- *Critical Family History, Identity, and Historical Memory* by Christine Sleeter [Article]
- *Decolonizing the Colonizer* by Sakej Ward [Video]
- Chap. 1 *Why Say Settler?* in Lowman & Barker [Book chapter]
- Chap. 3 *It's Always All About the Land* by Lowman & Barker [Book chapter]
- Chap. 1 *Introductions* by Elizabeth Carlson-Manathara & Gladys Rowe [Book chapter]
- *Willie Ermine on Reconciliation* [Youtube Video by Nat'l Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education]

## Acknowledging status on the Land

*“The words around the idea of status have been pacified. For instance, when people speak about xwelítem, a lot of times you hear ‘guests’. Guests, they’re newcomers. That’s a nice way to put it. Let’s look at that for a minute... Guests don’t invade your lands. Guests don’t declare sovereignty, absolute control, over your nations. Guests don’t come in with gunboats, armed personnel, and the first things they construct are forts. Guests don’t settle the land for the sake of gaining your resources and displacing you from your own territory. Guests don’t bring in their family, friends, and their slaves to take over your land and take those resources. Guests don’t disrupt and destabilize your society or political institutions. Guests don’t forcibly change your religion. Guests don’t usurp your traditional government. Guests don’t replace it with a puppet regime. I hope that’s clear enough that your status is not a guest.”*

— Ward, 2015, 17:22 - 18:55

A common way in recent years that settler people acknowledge Land is through a territorial or land acknowledgement, which often serves to merely recognize Indigenous presence without interrogation or implication (Vowel, 2016). While knowing who are the stewards of the Land you occupy is a necessary part of acknowledging status, it is not enough because it says nothing about your position and your responsibilities to the Land and its people (Ward, 2015; Vowel, 2016). As a settler researcher, Haig-Brown (2009) speaks about making herself conscious of whose land she is on as a first step towards decolonizing, while recognizing that it does not allow her to “escape being fully implicated in the continuing colonizing narrative that support this nation of Canada” (p. 14). Ward (2015) states that when you acknowledge the Land and your status on the Land, you are stating who you are and informing the people around you about your limits. If you’re a guest (or occupier, as Ward uses), you do not have a right to be on that land and there are limits to your behaviour. He goes on to say that acknowledging status allows one to take a critical step back and provide an important filter before speaking and acting, demonstrating respect through the restraining of personal power in ones behaviour. Acknowledging your status on the land can offer an opportunity to demonstrate recognition of complicity in the impacts of settler colonialism and that your relationship to the people of the Land, and the Land herself, is shaped by your status as a guest/settler/occupier/outsider.

Vowel (2016) stresses that the action which comes from this acknowledgement or recognition is in learning about your obligations as an outsider in those territories. This will be different for everyone; the protocols and responsibilities of your self and those of the host, and whether or not there is space for those responsibilities to be executed. This connects to the broader theme of needing to ask, listen, and be guided by Indigenous peoples about their protocols and laws, stepping away from the colonial legacy of imposing behaviours, ideas, or conduct (Ward, 2015; Vowel, 2016). Ward is clear that “we cannot build relationships on illusions” and that occupiers need to own their status as a part of our history and identity and a defining interaction with Indigenous peoples. Acknowledging ones identity and the status that confers on this Land is an essential starting place, not only in building relationships with Indigenous peoples, but also in rooting decolonizing work within your own story.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ◆ How do you define your status on this Land?
- ◆ What terms make you uncomfortable? Why?
- ◆ How do you acknowledge your status on the Land to others?
- ◆ How does your status on the Land benefit you?
- ◆ What are your obligations in the territory in which you live? How do you know this, or why do you not?

## Whose traditional Land do you occupy?

*“I consider the possibility of decolonizing discourses of diaspora, by asking the central question not only where do people of the diaspora come from, but where have they come to? In North America, nations have been superimposed on Indigenous lands and peoples through colonization and domination... I ask each reader to respond to the question, “Whose traditional land are you on?” as a step in our long processes of decolonizing our countries and our lives.”*

— Haig-Brown, 2009, p. 5

Bound up in acknowledging ones status on the Land is also knowing whose traditional Land you occupy — that is to say, knowing who the stewards of the Land are. Recognition of Land as the original home of various Indigenous peoples has not been common practice within the Canadian psyche, as it directly counters notions of settler sovereignty. While territorial land acknowledgements have helped push settler people to begin this important recognition, Haig-Brown (2009) challenges settlers of all backgrounds and circumstances to go deeper to not only acknowledge whose land(s) they moved onto, but also the stories that have been displaced and erased as a result. She argues that the omission in settler consciousness of how we came to be here — from our diasporic stories to how these merged with Indigenous peoples — allows for a blindness of history to set in that takes away the possibility of being in good relation. Knowing the Land you are on goes beyond simply reciting names, and includes learning about the people(s) whose homeland this is (and the treaties made there) by asking your own questions and building relationships in the places that you live (Vowel, 2016).

Knowing about the Land you are on also means peeling away the layers of settler colonial naming (or “settler colonial reterritorialization”), an ideological tool used to rename and repurpose Indigenous lands and resources for use in settler society (Hay, 2019). A look at the modern maps we use to orient ourselves in Canada today can be viewed as a Euro-Western overlay to the ways in which Indigenous peoples knew about and oriented to the Land. A poignant example of this can be found in Thunder Bay, Ontario where the sacred Ojibway site of Anemki-Wajiw was renamed Mount McKay, in honour of a mythic Scottish fur trader who would use it to look out for the lover of his Ojibway wife, murdered at his hands (Hay, 2019). Hay’s framework critiques “settler colonial place names as socially mnemonic devices that celebrate, sanction, organize, and reinscribe violent social relations that are by definition rooted in dislocating violence” (p. 286). Settler renaming is a mechanism to further an erasure of Indigenous peoples.

Knowing whose traditional Land you occupy has many layers. Not only is it recognition of the peoples who have been there since time immemorial, but it is also coming to understand what that means to the people and the ways in which settler stories and notions of place are marred by a violent past. The names that we give places matter. In seeking to overcome this dislocation of consciousness, two modern day resources offer a starting place for deeper inquiry into the Indigenous names and stories of places we know by different tales:

- *Coming Home to Indigenous Place Names in Canada* is a collective mapping project that removes settler colonial borders, replacing them with original place names in Indigenous languages that demonstrates deeply held relationships of peoples with place and land.
- *Native Land* is a collaborative digital mapping project that seeks to “bring awareness of the real lived history of Indigenous peoples and nations” through a removal of settler colonial borders, instead mapping Indigenous traditional territories in a vast overlaid web.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ What are the name(s) of the Nations whose Land you live on? What treaties exist there?
- ✦ What do you know of the story of settlement, historical and contemporary, of the place you live? How do you know this, or why do you not?
- ✦ What are some place names where you live that demonstrate settler renaming? What is the story behind that name? What is it replacing?
- ✦ Check out the two resources mentioned above. What was new information?

## Claiming Settler Canadian identity

*“Settler identity... is interrogative. It asks questions that may have a vast possible array of answers. The fundamental question is always, how do you come to be on these lands and by what right do you claim legitimate residency here?... The answer for almost all Settler Canadians today is that we are here as part of the project of settler colonization that has brought so many millions of people to these lands, and our legitimacy is attached to the institutions of the Canadian state and the stories of Canadian exceptionalism.”*

— Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 109

The notion of “Canadian” identity always felt lacking to me, like it was missing crucial grounding in a shared identity. Looking at the above quote, this rings true. The identity Lowman & Barker have illustrated does not hold a creation story or an ancestral connection to Land. It ties settlers to illegitimate justifications for claims of sovereignty created by the need for increased access to land and resources. These circumstances, however unjust and horrific, do not exclude settler peoples forming identities shaped by settler places constructed on Indigenous lands. Place can be defined as an understanding of one's location grounded in the ways that social, political, cultural, and environmental factors interact with the Land, creating a unique and situated context built through relationships, at once individual and collective (Coulthard, 2010; Gruenewald, 2003; Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016). Understanding place as constructed by and for humans, I feel it is fair to say that I am of this *place*; given my White European ancestry and seven generations of settling on the lands of the Algonquin people, my identity is inescapably tied to the narratives and myths of settler society. Lowman & Barker (2015) say that “To choose to identify as Settler Canadian today is as good as declaring, ‘I am aware that I am illegitimate on this land, and I know that I am complicit with and benefit from settler colonialism.’” (p. 109). For me, a part of claiming Settler Canadian identity means acknowledging the connections that I have to settler notions of nationhood.

Settler nationhood is constructed on myths and ideological narratives, and cemented through the benefits we receive and the structures we abide by in claiming Canadian citizenship. This citizenship also comes with a form of collective forgetting, an ‘assimilation amnesia’ if you will. To succeed, the settler colonial project needed to both erase Indigenous peoples and their stories from the land, and replace them with a narrative that justified and unified settler society. Being forced out of a prior homeland and the ensuing dislocation of identity is one of the most common and historically important Settler Canadian narratives (Lowman & Barker, 2015). In order to create a sense of belonging and ‘rightful’ occupation in a new place, settler people often stop identifying with their ancestral cultures and languages. Through physical and emotional distancing from homeland, settlers begin to experience a collective forgetting intertwined with the formation of a new identity, one born out of colonial stories and structures with a vested interest in its continuance.

Lowman & Barker (2015) say that “choosing to identify as Settler and choosing how one will act on that identity are two different concerns” because settler is not a foreclosed identity, but rather one that exists because “we, as Settler people, choose en masse to act as settler colonizers” (p. 109). Settler Canadian, then, can stand as a signifier for many different things all at once — a complicit actor in settler colonialism; a person who is place-connected yet ancestrally dislocated; a citizen of the settler state who is represented by a colonial government. Haig-Brown (2009) reflects that what it means to be part of a colonizing country must be taken up by each person in relation to their own coming to or being in this place. The nuances of how one claims settler identity, or Settler Canadian identity, are varied and complex, but none escape the effects of colonization.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ Do you claim Settler Canadian identity? Why or why not?
- ✦ What are the places that ground your identity? How do you claim belonging there?
- ✦ How does assimilation amnesia appear for you and in your family?
- ✦ What are the migration/movement/diasporic stories of your ancestors?

## Remembering our ancestors

*“I am a Cree person. My mother and my father, I can name them, my grandmother, my grandfather, my great grandfather and so forth. And which land I come from and what my Cree name is, what my attachment to the universe is... and then I ask the students, I want you to do the same thing. I want you to tell me where you are from, where your parents came from, where your grandparents came from, and then at the end I want you to speak your language... usually no one can do that. I tell them, ‘Well whose poor in this equation? Who needs help?’. I can do all these identity things about me but you can’t do the same.”*

— Willie Ermine, 2019, 2:30 - 3:28

Returning to and remembering our ancestors is a fundamental action of rooting in Land and place identity. In the book *Living in Indigenous Sovereignty*, the authors share that remembering who we are is an element of what Indigenous peoples have asked of settlers, particularly that effective allies need to be fully grounded in their own ancestral stories with the ability to confidently sit in that knowledge (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). Willie Ermine (2019) and Sakej Ward (2015) say that we need to find our people, our languages, our own Indigenous identities because this discovery can form the basis of discussion and relationship building with Indigenous peoples on new grounds of understanding. Not only does this remembering and learning serve to deepen our own understandings of the stories that make us who we are, but it allows for the kinds of relational transformations required of decolonization.

Ward (2015) emphasizes that for settler European people, finding our true ethnic or indigenous identity means going back to our teachings before Roman and Christian imperialism altered our own indigenous cultures and ways of knowing. European descended people weren’t always spiritually disconnected from the land. Celtic culture offers strong evidence of this, and there are still Celtic people today who live the beliefs of the ancient traditions that say the land is sacred and the people are the stewards (Twilight of the Celtic Gods by David Clarke, in Starhawk, 2004, p. 6). The disruption of indigenous worldview in Europe can be attributed to the ideological shifts that took place through Roman imperialism, Christianity, and the rise of capitalism. One of the most brutal and well-documented examples of this purposeful interruption were the Witch hunts that began in the 16th century. These persecutions saw knowledge that was derived from an animate, interconnected worldview considered as suspect and a form of devil worship, worthy of being killed (Starhawk, 2004). Starhawk (2004) shares that the impacts of the Witch persecutions were to break peoples ties to land through trauma and fear and undermine the solidarity of the peasant class in order to pave the way for the privatization of land that had once been held in common. These newly entrenched systems of private land ownership and the legacy of trauma in the working or peasant class forms the foundation of settler colonial states like Canada.

How one actually engages in a process of remembering is challenging and complicated. We must be wary of “Indigenous to somewhere” statements that can be used by settlers to claim an inauthentic sense of Indigeneity and avoid implication in colonialism (Barker, 2021, p. 159). We may also feel at a loss as to how to begin this massive undertaking. While many people have found grounding and a sense of connection in returning to ancestral homelands (JoAnn Hughes, in Hager et al., 2021), others have felt an even deeper sense of disconnection (Barker, 2021) or have not been able to trace the origins of their ancestors. Ward says this will no doubt be a daunting, difficult task, yet it is part of our responsibility in becoming more authentic people, grounded in our own teachings of interconnectedness, respect, reciprocity, and reverence for the land.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ Where are your ancestral homelands? How do you know this, or why do you not?
- ✦ What stories or teachings do you carry from your ancestors? How do you know these, or why do you not?
- ✦ Have you ever returned to ancestral homelands? Why or why not? What was this experience like?

## Healing from loss

*“There is a kind of separation between heart and mind [of White people]... When they’re in a Talking Circle, they start out talking from the head, but...when they get into the heart stuff, it’s really emotional for them, but it’s a different kind of emotion than what we feel... I think it comes from emptiness... I think the root of all that emotion that White people feel in the Circle is their wanting to belong. You can see that they crave something...When you separate the heart and the mind you create a wound. And that wound feels like emptiness.”* — Barb Martin, p. 53 - in Hager et al, 2021

An important component of settler self-identity work is healing from the emotions and experiences born of loss from homeland. In a talk on reconciliation in Canada, Willie Ermine (2019) shares that “the systems we are talking about are impacting not only Indigenous people, but more so all the non-Indigenous people of this country whose memory have been erased about who they are, what their identity is, what their connections are to the land, what their knowledge systems is... everything about them has been erased” (3:30 - 3:52). Unacknowledged pain and loss caused by erasure of ancestral identity and place and Land connection can create “wounds of separation” (Hager, in Hager et al., 2021, p. 66) that distort our understandings of self and belonging. Barb Martin ascribes living with a separation of heart and mind as equated to living in a culturally created state of denial, where disconnection from other parts of identity, like Land and family, will naturally follow (in Hager et al., 2021, p. 53). While not comparable with the genocide felt by Indigenous peoples (as a well as the material advantages and privileges of settler identity), wandering in a state of permanent dislocation too is a form of suffering (Carlson-Manathara, 2021).

The act of engaging in a healing process both personal and collective is complex, dynamic, and may at times feel near impossible. One aspect of healing can be found in being able to see a more complete truth of our own stories. Haig-Brown (2009) discusses how students who have come to know a more complete truth about the history of the places they now live helps them to express a deeper understanding of the complexities of their own situation and location in these lands. In the book *The Gatherings* (2021), settler participant JoAnn Hughes reflects on the presence of settler intergenerational wounds born out of disconnection and the challenge of coming to terms with what it means to care for a wound so full of sorrow. It is through such processes of coming to know a more complete truth that the possibility for healing within a colonized country can occur. Without recognizing there is a wound and learning how it came to be, how can healing truly begin? Through our own healing we understand ourselves better and we create opportunities to forge new relationships with the world around us.

Another element of the healing process is remembering that what we seek is not dead, just buried. Ermine (2019) reminds settler people it is us who need an awakening about who we are and the knowledge systems we need to study under to learn about our own people, nationalities, knowledge, and inherent rights. In order to find this knowledge, settler scholar Kelsey Jones-Casey shared her interpretations of Indigenous discussions on healing as coming through a reconnection with land, language, and lineage; more specifically, through seeking ancestral connection, land-based connection, and thinking more deeply about ancestral language. She shared that — as many activists and scholars have theorized before — white settlers traded these relations with their unique lands, languages and lineages for the privileges and power of whiteness, with the loss of these relations making it easier for white settlers to oppress others.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps healing comes through a renewed understanding of one’s own story, in connection to Land and place, and learning how to live that story with pride, honesty, and openness.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ How does identity loss manifest for you? In what ways is this related to place and Land?
- ✦ What does the idea of healing from loss (in the context of settler identity) mean to you?
- ✦ In what ways have you sought learning about ancestral connection, land-based connection, and/or ancestral language? How did you go about this, or why haven’t you?

<sup>4</sup> Personal conversation on decolonization with settler scholar and facilitator of critical dialogue spaces Jones-Casey, July 2021

## More than colonizers

*“Because of the way Euro-Canadians are taught by the dominant culture around them to think and behave in colonizing ways, and due to participation in European-based governmental, medical, legal, and educational systems operating on the Indigenous Lands occupied by Canada, Euro-Canadians currently cannot be other than colonizers. At the same time, we are more than colonizers.”*

— Elizabeth Carlson-Manathara, 2021, p. 26

Despite the difficult realities that surround claiming and rooting into one’s settler identity, learning the depths of our own stories also allows for recognition that we are more than colonizers. This sentiment arises from understanding the complicated nature of the histories that have brought us to confronting ‘settler’ as a component of identity. Within this process, we must also acknowledge that we are human beings who are more than the sum total of our colonial parts and leave room for the humanity in this understanding (LaRoque, 2010 and Kennedy, 2016 in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). While settlers must listen to, take direction from, and be accountable to Indigenous peoples, Carlson-Manathara & Rowe (2021) point out that this does not mean that we are robots taking orders — we have spirits, a purpose, and our own work to do that does not require permission from other people.

No where have I read that Indigenous peoples wish for settler peoples to not be autonomous, as individuals or even collectively. If we are to truly engage in this work from a place of solidarity, we must also begin to learn and recognize what gifts we have that can contribute to the work ahead of us on this long road of decolonization. Mills (2016) shares that the most radical thing anyone can do with respect to decolonization is to allow that he or she is a sacred person, has gifts others need and is worthy of receiving others gifts, and is part of creation” (p. 27, in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). From these musings and the thoughts of Sakej Ward (2015) about settlers needing to “find the connection to your own Indigenous teachings” in order to give us common ground in which to redefine relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples, I have come to wonder — can we too be Seventh Fire people?

In the Seventh Fire prophecy as told by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) she shares that:

*“The people of the Seventh Fire do not yet walk forward; rather they are told to turn around and retrace the steps of the ones who brought us here. Their sacred purpose is to walk back along the red road path of our ancestors and to gather up all the fragments that lay scattered along the trail. Fragments of land, tatters of language, bits of song, stories, sacred teachings - all that was dropped along the way.”* (p. 367)

Kimmerer writes that “the path is lined with all the world’s people, in all colours of the medicine wheel - red, white, black, yellow - who understand the choice ahead, who share a vision of respect and reciprocity, of fellowship with the more-than-human world” (p. 369). In the blood memory of settler people and the shared teachings of our ancestry, can we too contribute to the people of the Seventh Fire? Are there also those of us who are walking towards the crossroads of our shared existence, carrying our own “precious seeds for a change of worldview” (p. 369)? It is these sentiments that give me both a sense of hope and purpose — there are ways that we can act, indeed that we must, in order to conceive of an identity that is beyond colonizer. I see this as fundamentally different from being concerned with the future of settler identity, because this exploration doesn’t seek to maintain the settler colonial system (and its inherent privileges), but rather is looking to find a way forward embedded in a shared humanity, transcending the settler colonial project.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ How are you more than a colonizer?
- ✦ What gifts can you offer in service of decolonization?
- ✦ What gives you hope in the face of the enormity of decolonization?

### 3.2 Repositioning self to shift perspective

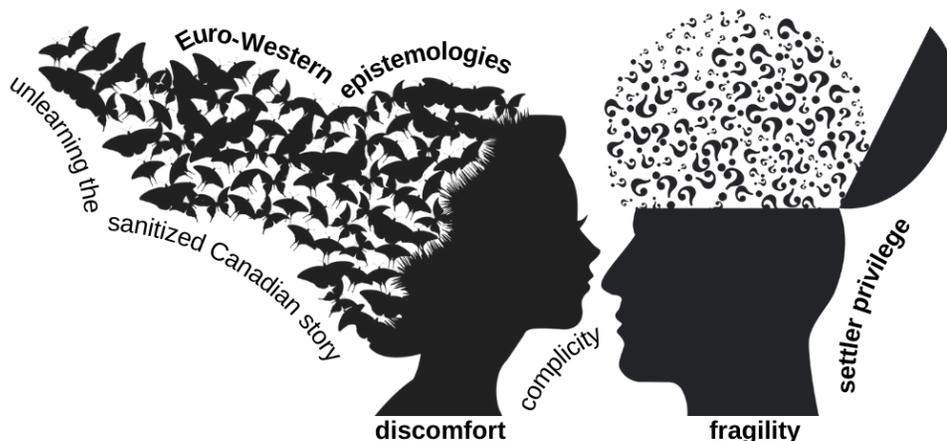


Fig. 4 - Repositioning self to shift perspective

This section explores crucial elements of critical consciousness raising, namely personal interrogation of ideologies and worldview. A part of this interrogation is coming to see a more complete truth about the history of Canada, one that does away with myths of settler nationalism and the obscuring of violent oppression. Through deeper investigation into what it means to have settler privilege and the complicity of anyone residing on stolen land, repositioning self acknowledges the range of emotions that can surface and encourages facing head on the feelings of discomfort that will follow suit. While in many ways a deeply personal element, what we know to be 'normal' is shaped through our interactions with a collective identity that requires equal interrogation in regards to shifting perspective.

#### FURTHER RESOURCES

- ▶ *Me & White Supremacy Workbook* by Layla Saad
- ▶ *Canada in the World: Settler Capitalism and the Colonial Imagination* by Tyler Shipley [Book]
- ▶ *Reconciliation Manifesto* by Arthur Manuel & Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson [Book]
- ▶ *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation & the Loss of Aboriginal Life* by James Daschuk [Book]
- ▶ Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996)
- ▶ Truth & Reconciliation Commission Report (2015)
- ▶ *Reclaiming Power & Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry on Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls* (2018)
- ▶ *We Were Children*, National Film Board Documentary [Film]
- ▶ *First Contact* by Aboriginal Peoples Television Network [TV show]
- ▶ *1491* by Aboriginal Peoples Television Network [TV show]
- ▶ *Privilege vs. Complicity: People of Colour and Settler Colonialism* by Beenash Jafri [Article]

## Investigating Euro-Western epistemologies

*“White supremacy ideology perpetuated within settler societies was (and continues to be) used to affirm the idea that the new settler societies were superior to the ‘old societies’ settlers left behind in Europe. This racialized ideology informs the belief that settler expansion is thus, in some sense, ‘inevitable’ and ‘necessary’, in order for the flourishing of this morally, culturally, politically, and economically superior society.”*

– Calderon, 2014, p. 31

Epistemology refers to understanding how we know what we know and what constitutes knowledge or truth; Euro-Western epistemology attempts to capture that which is known to be the true or valid knowledge that shapes the ideologies of European dominated cultures. Identifying, acknowledging and unpacking Euro-Western values, beliefs, and worldview sheds light on the ideologies that are considered “normal” in Euro-Western society. For example, intrinsic ideologies of contemporary Euro-Western society include notions of private property ownership, rights of the individual over the collective, and hierarchy and superiority based on attributes such as race and gender (ie. white supremacy, patriarchy). While merely one perspective in which to see relationships to Land and people, this is what is known to be a true or valid way of structuring society by people socialized in a Euro-Western perspective.

In Settler Canadian society today, Euro-Western epistemology has cemented ideologies such as White supremacy and capitalism as justifications for systems of settler colonial oppression. Saad (2018) defines white supremacy as a racist ideology that is based on the belief that white people are inherently superior to people of other races, therefore should be dominant over them. She states that white supremacy becomes systemically institutionalized and a worldview and societal conditioning that one is born into by virtue of ones whiteness. This socialization leads to discrimination, marginalization, abuse, and killing of Black, Indigenous, and “people of colour”. Settler colonial society is also dominated by the social and economic system of capitalism, which sees land and labour become commodities, production undertaken for profit instead of direct use, and the market as the central mechanism for distributing wealth in society (Shiple, 2020). Together, these ideologies served to both justify and structure the systems of settler colonialism in order to benefit both the metropole (in this case, England) and the emerging White settler society.

Euro-Western epistemologies are specifically referenced in this section given the historic and ongoing structures of the colonial state that rest on this worldview. Investigating one’s cultural epistemologies about the world is a crucial step in shifting perspective, particularly when you occupy a dominant position in society where your truths about the world are the norm. This is how oppressive systems operate and how we become socialized in them without realizing it. White settlers need to specifically investigate their white supremacist conditioning, which is challenging given that “Whiteness, and the socialization of white people, is known for its ontological expansiveness, the tendency to ‘act and think as if all spaces... are or should be available for them to move in and out of as they wish’ “(Sullivan, in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 115; see also *Me & White Supremacy Workbook* by Layla Saad). It takes intentional, critical, hard work to awaken to the ways in which we are socialized in the ideologies that underpin settler colonialism and raise our consciousness. Without understanding our socialization and the way we uphold systems of oppression (consciously or unconsciously), our ways of seeing and being in the world can become stuck in rigid human constructed philosophies that stall all other actions towards decolonization. Willingness to acknowledge there are more truths in the universe than the ones we know is the first step in shifting perspective, the doorway of which can be found through investigating ones own epistemologies.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ Think of a time you awakened to a new truth. How did that shift your perspective?
- ✦ How has your worldview shifted over time? In what ways? How did this happen?
- ✦ What are some ways you have experienced or observed white supremacy in action?

## Unlearning the sanitized Canadian story

*“In 2017, the Complete Canadian Curriculum for third graders claimed that ‘the First Nations peoples moved to areas called reserves, where they could live undisturbed by the hustle and bustle of the settlers.’ This was a radical and absurd misrepresentation of Canadian history, but it was reflective of a longstanding ideological project to convince Canadians that their country was a well-intentioned contributor to the greater good of the world.”*

— Tyler Shipley, 2020, p. 1

Unlearning the sanitized Canadian story means getting beneath white washed layers of narrative that have created an image of Canada as benign, diverse, and peaceful. It means getting beneath the “official” history told to us in our public school textbooks about this country. Learning a more complete truth of this nation in the context of decolonization involves laying bare the realities of Canada’s perspectives, relationships, and violent actions towards Indigenous peoples. In the 21st century, the existence of this dark history is less obfuscated than it has been in the past due to visible forms of Indigenous resistance and awareness raising (see *Idle No More, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Every Child Matters, Indigenous land defence, etc.*) and numerous national level inquiries and reports (see the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Truth & Reconciliation Commission, 2015; National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2018*), however intentional (and critical) engagement is still required.

Familiarizing ourselves with the historic and contemporary manifestations of colonial oppression and violence is one important avenue of exploration, which can find a strong starting place in the movements and reports indicated above. Another component of this unlearning is gaining a deeper understanding of the colonial agenda and the foundations that uphold it including illegal claims to sovereignty (ie. doctrine of discovery, terra nullius); the starvation and removal of Indigenous peoples from their land; theft of this same land and its resources for the economic gain of settler society at the exclusion of Indigenous peoples; genocidal and assimilation policies of the Canadian government, such as residential schools and the Indian Act; and the creation of poverty and dependency of Indigenous peoples upon the Canadian state (see Manuel & Derrickson, 2015 & 2017; Daschuk, 2013; Regan, 2010; Shipley, 2020). Sadly, the list of racist underpinnings and contemporary manifestations of violence continues beyond the space I have here, making it all the more pressing that as individuals, families, and organizations and groups we make the time and space to investigate the depths of our Canadian stories.

Lowman & Barker (2015) share that “as Settler people, we are conditioned to love our triumphant stories, the kind where, if we work hard and play by the rules, we will be rewarded. The pursuit of decolonization means... rejecting stories of nationalism and progress, peacemaker myths, and terra nullius, and the notion that Canada, as it is, is all there is” (p. 120). A slow awakening within settler communities has begun, creating a juncture where settlers can decide to remain colonizer-perpetrators bearing the token gift of false reconciliation or choose to engage in an unsettling process that involves learning from the teachings of history (Regan, 2010). One option results in quickly and band-aiding a gaping wound, while the other opens the possibility for healing and transformative pathways to a different future. Ward (2015) reminds us, however, that “we cannot build relationships on illusions” and that acknowledging the truth of our history is a necessary barrier to overcome in building good relationships with Indigenous peoples. We cannot ignore the wounds of history, still festering and being created today, if we wish to seek a different future.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ What common conceptions do you or your family hold about the history of Canada? Why?
- ✦ Reflect on a moment when you saw beneath Canada’s sanitized story. What did you learn? How did this make you feel? What did you do with that information?
- ✦ When have you chosen to look away from the truth of Canada’s historic or contemporary reality regarding Indigenous people? Why? How did this benefit you?
- ✦ Choose one of the movements or reports mentioned above and dig deeper. What did you learn? How does this make you feel? What can you do with this information?

## Examining privilege and complicity

*“The settler does not think through her privilege. She lives it. No thinking required. Of course, my expectation was that the moose would have white skin — so completely ingrained that I did not realize myself what my expectations, assumptions, presumptions, were. And are. It’s a process. Insidious. Embarrassing. Troubling. This points to the reality that subconscious/conscious privilege can trap well-meaning allies at the unlikeliest of moments. However, overcoming that is possible and the responsibility of each person: we are what we do.”*  
 — Irlbacher-Fox, 2014, p. 152

Another component of shifting one’s perspective is understanding settler privilege and complicity in order to refocus attention and energy on the ways in which one’s social location can contribute to dismantling colonialism. Privilege describes relations of power based on social location(s) and has been defined as an invisible package of unearned benefits or material, structural advantages that the person holding them is meant to remain oblivious to (McIntosh, 1989; Jafri, 2012). While privilege in relation to social location comes in many different forms (ie. gender, race, class, etc.), settler privilege refers to “the unearned benefits to live and work on Indigenous lands, and to the unequal benefits accrued through citizenship rights within the settler state” (Jafri, 2012). Gilio-Whittaker (2018b) deepens this definition by stating that settler privilege is “similar to white privilege in that it is systemic, structural, and based on white supremacy, making it difficult to identify”. She adds that settler privilege however “simultaneously implicates and is beyond racism, which is one reason why, paradoxically, even non-Native people of colour can experience a type of privilege.” Privilege is an inherent component of hierarchical societies and is best understood in relation to the way this plays out on an individual level.

Complicity, on the other hand, demands that “we think about settlerhood not as an object we possess, but as a field of operations into which we become socially positioned and implicated” (Jafri, 2012). Beenash Jafri suggests that thinking in terms of complicity shifts attention away from the self (and ideas of moral reformation of the individual with privilege) and instead turns to a reformulation of strategies and relations that reproduce the social and institutional hierarchies that contribute to privilege in the first place. She shares the critique that simply recognizing privilege can allow for consciousness raising (which sometimes translates into actions in personal spaces), however it doesn’t create any change in systemic inequities. Jafri’s thinking on privilege and complicity is in relation to the complexities of how “people of colour” identify with being a settler. She states that for “people of colour”, the benefits of being a settler are accrued unevenly and that the language of ‘privilege’ fails to account for an intersecting analysis of oppression.

Irlbacher-Fox (2014) addresses the need for non-Indigenous people to examine their own settler privilege in order to not thwart the intention of respectful Indigenous inclusion or shared power dynamics. While essential for personal consciousness raising, it is through interacting with complicity that productive action can be taken to dismantle the systems and structures of colonialism. In the context of “people of colour” and their relationship to settler colonialism, complicity may open up spaces for thinking about tangible ways that colonial relationships are supported, reproduced and reinforced, which can lead to recognizing Indigenous sovereignty (Jafri, 2012). Fortier (2017) views Jafri’s definition of settlerhood as a way to acknowledge that one doesn’t need to be privileged by the social conditions of a settler state to be complicit in the ongoing process of colonization, thereby allowing for the possibility of collective liberation through defying social relations and developing relationships of solidarity with Indigenous struggles for sovereignty. At the end of the day, “the only way to escape complicity with settlement is active opposition to it” (Singh, in Walia, 2012). At its crux, understanding and accepting ones privilege and complicity means moving beyond recognition and into collective action.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ How does settler privilege show up for you? How does it benefit you?
- ✦ What have you learned about settler privilege and complicity that makes you uncomfortable?
- ✦ How does a complicity lens urge you to look at settler colonialism differently?

## Allowing feelings of discomfort

*“It can be an uncomfortable, emotional thing to learn to listen to people really deeply, especially when they are critiquing us or telling us that our basic process is wrong, that our assumptions are wrong, that the things we care about and value are wrong... not in an evaluative sense, but rather wrong in that they hurt people... No one likes being told what you’ve done has caused harm, especially when we have been trying to help, and one of the things that we carry with us – as privileged, Settler people – is insulation from the harms that we have caused.”*

– Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 117

Sitting with the sharp and newly formed edges of one's identity is bound to bring up a range of emotionally based responses that put settlers firmly in the realm of discomfort. Responses can range from those reflected inwards and those reflected out. Inward facing responses might include emotions like shame, guilt, fear, feeling alone or isolated, maybe even grief. More outward facing responses might include expressions such as awkwardness, tension, defensiveness or self-justification, physical separation, shutting down, or the inability to talk about difficult topics or emotions (Hager et al., 2021; Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021).

A common response to discomfort, particularly for White settlers, is fragility. The idea of White fragility was originally put forward by Robin DiAngelo (2011) in reference to White people's inability to withstand racial stress and the thought of being implicated in racism as a 'bad person'. Building from that analysis, Gilio-Whittaker (2018b) says that settler fragility stems from both the impulse to distance oneself from complicity in settler colonialism and the inability to talk about that complicity, as well as the privileges that stem from it. She states that (para. 5):

*“The good-bad binary is part of this distancing impulse, because like racism, nobody wants to be associated with genocide and injustice, especially in a country that touts its democracy and equality, and especially for people who have been oppressed by it in other ways. But compared to white privilege, this is what makes settler privilege so much more beguiling and difficult: it cuts to the core of American identity in all its iterations, subtly calling into question the legitimacy of the US and the sense of belonging on the land.”*

Given this impulse to distance, it seems that a natural antidote to settler fragility is to engage in the discomfort. Rather than defending oneself or turning away, sitting with and working through feelings of discomfort promotes a shift in perspective in that it allows for recognition of emotions, processing of new learning, and building stamina to engage in unsettled feelings in the future (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). Our ability to acknowledge these responses and make an active choice in how we choose to respond is an important component of repositioning self.

We must also remember however, that allowing and working through feelings of discomfort is not decolonization work in and of itself. Allowing discomfort is more like honing the ability or stamina to address difficult components of our identity. This also means not equating our self-worth to our complicity, thus allowing an investigation of a more complete truth. We must recognize that we are a part of racist systems, underpinned by notions of superiority buffered by privilege; we are not 'bad people' inherently. We do, however, have a responsibility as individuals who benefit from these systems to actively work to deprogram ourselves from these ideologies and the ways in which they manifest in our thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours. The system needs us to play our role for it to function, and thus it is in refusing that position that we contribute to subverting the system.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ What feelings of discomfort have you experienced in relation to your privilege and/or complicity in settler colonialism?
- ✦ What does it feel like to actively sit in discomfort in relation to your settler privilege?
- ✦ Reflect on a time when you displayed settler fragility. What would you do differently now?
- ✦ How have you worked on honing your ability or stamina to address discomfort? What has been helpful?

### 3.3 Living unsettled

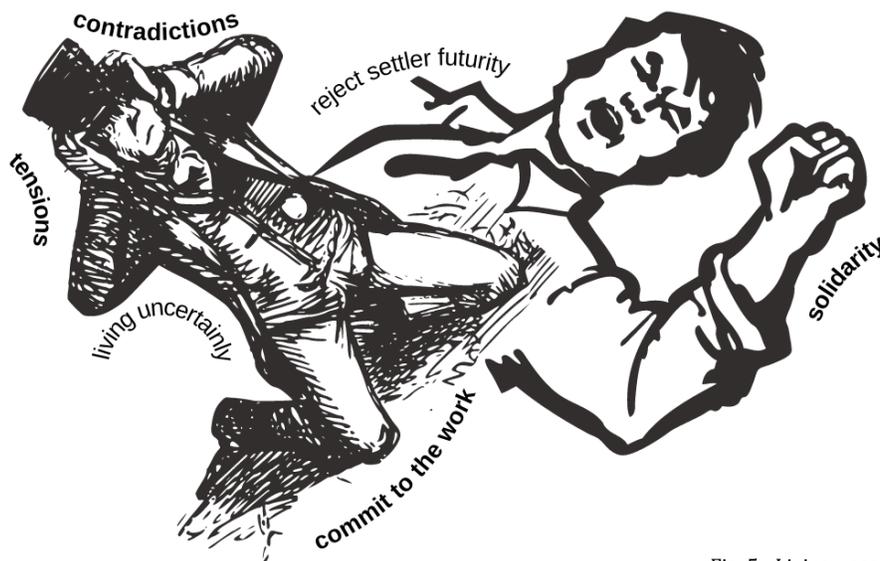


Fig. 5 - Living unsettled

*“Naming and living the edges of paradox is the only way for those of us who are white to move into justice work with authenticity, competency, and ground-under-our-feet. On the flip side, I’m convinced that failure to see, understand, and wrestle with paradoxes is why many of us who are white and well-intentioned, justice-loving, and longing to be counted against racism stay stuck.”*

— Harvey, 2013 cited in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 26

Living unsettled refers to the ongoing work of acknowledging and grappling with the tensions and contradictions of being a settler person on Indigenous lands. As Harvey’s quote implies, we must name these paradoxes while at the same time living within them. The more we come to know about colonization and colonial complicity, we are changed, an experience that many settler scholars have reflected on contributing to ongoing feelings of being unsettled (Watson & Jeppesen, 2021; Carlson-Manathar, 2021; Fortier, 2017). Carlson-Manthara (2021) acknowledges that settlers will do this work in limited and imperfect ways, yet we must try, or else we signal an acceptance of our role as colonizers that reproduce colonial harms. This section will dive into what it means to live uncertainly through exploring a rejection of settler futurity, commitment to this work through solidarity, and some of the every day contradictions settlers may be faced with.

#### FURTHER RESOURCES

- *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor* by Eve Tuck & Wayne Yang [Article]
- *Xhopakelxhit and her Ocean Wolves* by Xhopakelxhit [Blog writings]
- *Decolonizing together: Moving beyond a politics of solidarity toward a practice of decolonization* by Harsha Walia [Magazine article]
- *Dechinta Bush University: Mobilizing a knowledge economy of reciprocity, resurgence and decolonization* by Erin Freeland Ballantyne [Article]

## Settler futurity

*“To fully enact an ethic of incommensurability means relinquishing settler futurity, abandoning the hope that settlers may one day be commensurable to Native peoples. It means removing the asterisks, periods, commas, apostrophes, the whereas’s, buts, and conditional clauses that punctuate decolonization and underwrite settler innocence. The Native futures, the lives to be lived once the settler nation is gone - these are the unwritten possibilities made possible by an ethic of incommensurability.”*

— Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 36

I first came across the language of settler futurity through Tuck & Yang’s formative article *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor* (2012). In it, Tuck & Yang make clear there is no room for concerns about a settler future in the work of decolonization. They speak about how non-Indigenous people have tried to alleviate the impacts of colonization through the adoption of settler moves to innocence, thus making decolonization into a metaphor. The article outlines six moves to innocence: settler nativism; fantasizing adoption; colonial equivocation; conscientization; at risk-ing/asterisk-ing Indigenous peoples; and re-occupation and urban homesteading. They deconstruct these moves to innocence as problematic attempts to reconcile settler guilt and complicity in order to rescue settler futurity — in other words, concerns about what the future holds for settler people.

Counter to settler moves to innocence, Tuck & Yang speak of the necessity of an ethic of incommensurability, a guiding tool that unsettles the idea of settler innocence. The authors contrast this ethic against the aims of reconciliation, which they say is focused on rescuing settler normalcy and a settler future. Incommensurability, on the other hand, acknowledges that the questions settlers have about decolonization and their future within it (such as what it will look like, what might happen after, what the consequences will be for settlers) do not need to be answered, and perhaps can’t be, in order for decolonization to exist as a framework. They powerfully sum up that decolonization is not accountable to settlers or settler futurity and that to fully enact an ethic of incommensurability, settlers must leave behind their concerns over a settler future. Lowman & Barker (2015) interpret this to mean that settler people must accept that embarking on the transformative process of decolonization may mean our eventual elimination as settler people (p. 121). Not elimination as *people*, but the elimination of our identity as structured by settler colonial values and objectives.

Elimination can feel like a daunting and scary word, implying death, destruction, and erasure (indeed, what the settler state has attempted to do to Indigenous peoples). Waziyatawin contextualizes this by framing decolonization as the creation of a new social order, one that is just to all beings that White people need not fear as Indigenous peoples are not interested in turning the tables and claiming a position as oppressor (in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). Instead, decolonization becomes “an invitation to reimagine the future in common terms, ‘when we do not presume that [settler colonial states] should or will always continue to exist’” thus creating “the space to reflect on what might be more just forms of governance, not only for Native peoples, but for the rest of the world” (Smith, in Flowers, 2015, p. 35). To me, rejecting notions of settler futurity means willingness to let go of settler systems, structures, and status and the harms perpetrated by these ways of being, and step instead into an unknown future premised on love, respect, and justice. Letting go of anything can be scary; letting go to step into the unknown even more so. For me though, stepping into a future born of love in which I cannot be sure of where I will land feels much less terrifying than remaining in a world premised on separation, violence, and hatred.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ◆ How are you concerned with settler futurity?
- ◆ What is unsettling for you about stepping into a transformative process that requires letting go of the narratives that shape Settler Canadian identity?

## Commitment to the work through solidarity

*“Are you willing to do whatever is necessary to assist in our liberation struggle, including killing, dying, or life imprisonment?... Are you willing to take on a lifetime of ambiguity, uncertainty, and moral torment?”*

— Waziyatawin, in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 207

This is one of the most powerful quotes I have come across throughout this work on settler responsibilities in decolonization because it directly challenged me to think about what I am willing to risk, sacrifice, and ultimately do in service of a transformative future. This question is both deeply personal and inherently relational because a liberation struggle is a collective experience. The work of this portfolio has demonstrated that decolonization is Indigenous led and yet all those living on this Land have responsibilities in its transformative process. Solidarity can be seen as a form of standing alongside, building alliances and trust that are grounded in a shared vision and premised on the willingness for risk and long term commitment. bell hooks writes that “solidarity is not the same as support. To experience solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around which to unite... Support can be occasional. It can be given and just as easily withdrawn. Solidarity requires sustained, ongoing commitment” (in Walia, 2012).

Throughout this research, I have come to better understand there is a shared responsibility in anti-colonial resistance. A component of this shared responsibility is having long term commitment to the work. Xhopakelxhit shares that Indigenous activists don’t have the luxury to “give up and joining the mainstream culture” because “we are by our very heritage and birth born political and into a lifetime of racism, oppression, and hard times” (in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 216). A part of settler privilege is being able to choose whether or not to become engaged and how deeply we want this commitment to go. Xhopakelxhit says “If you commit to this path then ensure you are on board for the long haul. Breaks are of course good and needed for mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well being for all of us but never forget we live in a terrorist state bent on destroying our lands and waters and the future of us all for profit” (in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 216). Xhopakelxhit’s statements clearly demonstrate the need for solidarity and shared responsibility because the risks of remaining in the status quo, while felt differently by Indigenous people, are a threat to us all.

In a subsection of her book entitled *Being Willing to Risk & Give*, Carlson-Manathara’s writing shares that solidarity asks settlers to give up and risk as Indigenous peoples do, considering the privilege that we have within settler systems. While some think it is not fully possible to risk at the same level as Indigenous peoples because socially privileged people can never share the same vulnerabilities as those who are marginalized, we still must try (McCrea McGovern, 2021). One example of how to use this privilege, especially in relation to the justice system, is to step in front of Indigenous peoples on the frontline. What it means to risk and give as Indigenous peoples do is a deeply personal question, albeit tied to the aims of collective action. The personal reflections of other settler scholars and activists acting in solidarity in Carlson-Manathara’s book brings to light tensions and struggles of what it means to give and risk as Indigenous peoples do. Many share that they significantly give up their time, resources, and skills towards anti-colonial actions, including speaking out when that could mean being in a vulnerable position or even losing one’s job. When it comes to tough actions like facing arrest and giving up land however, contributors share that determining their level of action is more challenging, their willingness to do so resting on the strength of their convictions and how they feel that act may advance the movement. Committing to the work of decolonization through solidarity is life long, evolving, and filled with the endless grappling of difficult choices.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ How do you act in solidarity with Indigenous peoples? How can you deepen this?
- ✦ What are you willing to give up or risk? Why?
- ✦ Reflect on Waziyatawin’s words in the beginning quote. What responses arose for you?

## Living uncertainly: inherent contradictions of decolonizing

*“While I have always been invited into the Indigenous learning spaces I find myself in, and my settler positionality is known, I continue to feel a tension related to my positionality: as a beneficiary of colonization, how do I engage with learning from Indigenous knowledges?... How can I respectfully incorporate these new understandings of land, relationships, and community into my own worldview, without appropriating Indigenous knowledges?”*

— Watson, in Watson & Jeppesen, 2021, p. 89

Given the complexities involved in decolonization — the scale of collective action needed, the transformation of powerful systems, the fluid and intersectional nature of identity — uncertainty and contradiction will be an inevitable part of this work. In learning to live unsettled, conflict of interest analysis can be a way to sit with uncertainty while thinking critically about a system, an institution, or an action. Stemming from a drive to keep present Tuck & Yang’s (2012) “ethic of incommensurability”, Dave Cryderman, a facilitator of critical dialogues with White settler people as a White settler man, uses a conflict of interest analysis as a form of critical interrogation. This analysis looks at the objective, goal, or mission of a settler-dominated space and tries to determine what inherent contradictions exist for that goal to be met by the people proposing to meet it, which he often finds presents a paradox thus making it incommensurable with decolonization (April 19, 2021, personal communication). Some examples of inherent contradictions to decolonizing include:

- **Decolonizing research from within the colonial academy** when that work is being funded by extractive industries that prop up settler colonialism, yet these interrogations must be undertaken to find alternatives (Watson & Jeppesen, 2021; Freeland Ballantyne, 2014)
- **Appropriation of Indigenous knowledge and practices** while attempting a relational responsibility to Indigenous struggles for decolonization (Fortier, 2017; Watson & Jeppesen)
- **Decolonization must happen through capitalism** due to its pervasiveness even though “decolonization vis-a-vie capitalism is fundamentally antithetical” and the “paradoxical tension exists: if not from within capitalism, then from where?” (Freeland Ballantyne, 2014, p. 68)
- **Relating to this Land as a settler person** is necessary for transformative relationship building and action, yet settler presence on the land interrupts Indigenous ways of being in the world (Simpson, 2017); can seem contradictory to making steps towards land back (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021), especially when these relationships are still being actively denied to Indigenous peoples on their own land (Barker, 2021)
- **Reconciliation is incommensurable with decolonization** because it seeks to reconcile and repair relationships within existing colonial structures through centring settler narratives, power, and control, rather than seeking to transform these systems (Watson, 2020)
- **Trying to reduce the harm or create “safe spaces”** for Indigenous peoples in settler-dominated spaces because efforts to do so often aren’t situated in decolonial critiques, have more to do with protecting the space from criticism, and can actually produce more harm through painful colonial gaslighting through protecting the benefits of settlers (Dave Cryderman, personal communication, April 19, 2021; see also Lee, 2015)

This kind of interrogation should make us uncomfortable, in large part because of how little control we have over the circumstances of contradictions and the fact that even with acknowledgement we are still required to act within their presence. This kind of thinking can motivate action, but sustained engagement can also lead to feelings of hopelessness or disengagement. Regardless of the emotions it brings up, grappling with these contradictions is part of enacting settler responsibilities because “naming and living the edges of paradox is the only way... to move into justice work with authenticity, competency, and ground-under-our-feet” (in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 26).

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ What contradictions have you grappled with in your own decolonizing work? What course of action did you decide on? How did you arrive there?
- ✦ How can you engage with and move through contradictions in order to still take action?
- ✦ Choose a contradiction from above. What are the implications of the conflict of interest?

### 3.4 Taking action grounded in love & relationality



Fig. 6 - Taking action grounded in love & relationality

The heart of decolonizing lies in the difficult work of repatriating Indigenous Land and life. This is what is meant by “taking action” — tangible, collective acts that move towards making this possibility a reality.

While the notion of taking action can seem straight forward — determine an objective, decide on a strategy, enact — throughout the course of this research I have come to understand that the way we bring ourselves into this work matters. What motivates people into action shapes our behaviours, commitment, and interactions. Grounding action in love and relationality is a way to orient from a place that represents the future envisioned by decolonization.

Relationality (or the act of being in relationship) comes from an understanding that as human beings, we are all connected — to each other, to all things living and nonliving, and especially to the Earth. We are of the world, a part of the circle in which life happens (Hodgson-Smith, in Haig-Brown, 2009; Shawn Wilson, in Wilson, 2008). Wilson discusses Indigenous relationality as the relationships one holds with people, with the land, with ancestors, with the cosmos, and with ideas (2008). When we truly understand this idea of always being in connected relationship — when we stop overthinking it and learn to feel that from the heart — then we know that what we do affects all others in the system that we live in (Lowman & Barker, 2015). The weight of that reality can inspire actions from a place of reciprocity and the honouring of all life.

Love is what you give to that which you care deeply about, a powerful emotion that gives us a sense of belonging and meaning. Dawniss Kennedy speaks about how any true relationship has to be about more than responsibility; it has to be about love. She says that Anishnaabe people love their mother [Earth] and she loves the people in return, which creates “connection to each other through our mother, the Earth. And that’s where the heart comes. That’s where the love comes” (in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 119). This connection to something bigger than ourselves — the Earth herself, our collective identity through shared culture and beliefs — gives us a sense of belonging in which love can root. This love, born from connection, can then push us to go beyond ourselves, to sacrifice for that which we consider to be sacred. Starhawk (2004) says that “aligning ourselves with what is truly sacred means serving those things that also feed and renew us, that give us the greatest joy and pleasure, that evoke our deepest love” (p. 34). When it comes to movements for transformative change, when we act out of a place of serving that which evokes our deepest love, we can grow into moving away from action born out of “frustrated anger to empowered loving action” (Irlbacher-Fox, 2014).

In this section we will look more deeply at acting out of relationality, using the lens of treaty, as well as contextualizing forms of direct action needed to repatriate Indigenous Land and life — dismantling colonial structures, Land back, and frontline solidarity.

### FURTHER RESOURCES

- *The Winter We Danced* by The Kino-nda-niimi Collective [Book of short essays]
- *Land Back: A Yellowhead Institute Red Paper* by Yellowhead Institute [Report]
- Community Tools & Resources, Yellowhead Institute [Website]
- *Warrior Life* by Pam Palmater [Book + Podcast]
- *Decolonizing together: Moving beyond a politics of solidarity toward a practice of decolonization* by Harsha Walia [Magazine article]
- *To Be a Water Protector* by Winona LaDuke [Book]
- Unist’ot’en Camp [Website]
- *Invasion* [Film] \*\* short, free documentary on Unist’ot’en website

## On the basis of Treaty

*“The critical difference between treaties as respectful bases for co-existence, or colonial frameworks that justify Settler Canadian claims to land resides in which comes first. Either Indigenous relationships to land are centralized and Settler social structures must be developed respective of those place-relationships, or settler colonial structures of invasion such as constitutions and state boundaries are prioritized and Indigenous place-relationships are treated as a problem to be managed. This is, of course, the basis of Indigenous and Settler Canadian political conflicts, and the root of Indigenous struggles for sovereignty.”*

— Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 67 - 68

A treaty is an agreement between nations that sets down parameters for political control. In Canada, there have been many treaties agreed to between Indigenous and settler peoples over time, and yet Canada has been (and continues to be) governed in a way that disregards these treaties. Rollo (2014) states that “instead of taking responsibility and recognizing the foundational status of its treaties, Canada continues to enforce a form of colonial rule over Indigenous peoples” (p. 229), as evidenced by the fact that today we stand in violation of our original agreements, our own proclamations and Constitution, and key international agreements (such as UNDRIP). He draws attention to the fact that through original treaties, Canada did acknowledge Indigenous political and legal autonomy, yet settler society today exists in transparent disregard of these treaties despite the fact that Canada’s legitimacy as a nation state must derive from these founding treaties.

This discord manifests through the differences between Indigenous and settler perspectives of treaty. Indigenous perspectives see treaties as living agreements that establish and describe an ongoing relationship, rather than one time political documents that cede land or agree to the extinguishment of title to their Traditional Territories (Lowman & Barker, 2015; Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). History shows that settler perspectives of treaties with Indigenous peoples have been used as a strategy to extend sovereign control of the settler state by extinguishing Indigenous title and claim (Lowman & Barker, 2015).

The spirit of treaty, as understood by Indigenous peoples, can be used to embody contemporary relationality between Indigenous and settler peoples when their foundational intent is understood. While treaties are high level political agreements used to structure relationships between nation states, treaties also require active participation at the level of the citizen (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). Rollo (2014) reminds us that legitimizing one’s identity as a Canadian (as opposed to being an illegitimate occupier or colonizer) comes from abiding by the conditions of Canadian citizenship, including the obligations to others, that stem from these historical agreements. In the present day, recognition of this sentiment can be heard through the calls of “we are all treaty people”. Lowman & Barker (2015) define the idea of treaty people as “accepting and practicing a dynamic set of responsibilities that will be specific to a given treaty, or the territory of a given nation, determined in an open-ended fashion through dialogue with that host nation” (p. 67).

As treaty people our responsibilities at a citizen level are varied and can include: honouring Indigenous sovereignty and nationhood (as laid out in the original treaties and our own Constitution); developing awareness of the original treaties signed with Indigenous peoples and the responsibilities this bestows on all sides; deep critique of one’s own relationship with Settler Canadian society and present-day settler colonialism; holding the Canadian state accountable to enacting treaty responsibilities at a nation-to-nation level; and returning to the spirit of the original treaties to find solutions for moving forward (Rollo, 2014; Lowman & Barker, 2015).

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ What treaty do you currently live under? How did you learn this information?
- ✦ What do you know about the responsibilities involved in this treaty, at the level of citizen and state?
- ✦ What do you know about the Indigenous perspectives of this treaty?

## Dismantling colonial structures

*“The disruption of settler colonialism necessitates the disruption of intersecting forces of power such as colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism.”*

— Snelgrove et al., 2014, p. 2

Settler peoples hold varying degrees of power and privilege within the settler state, and it is through this status that our shared responsibility in anti-colonial resistance can be best leveraged — making changes in colonial systems of power. While one may have an urge to turn away or reject the privilege of social location, Indigenous Action Media urges settler accomplices and activists to “find creative ways to weaponize their privilege (or more clearly, their rewards of being part of an oppressor class) as an expression of social war” rather than “resigning their agency, or capabilities as an act of ‘support’” (in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, p. 210). While determining how to take action is not without its challenges, tensions, and grey areas, settler peoples do have agency in anti-colonial action taking that doesn’t require having our hands held by Indigenous people.

Dismantling colonial structures is one such place where there are many points of obvious entry for anti-colonial actions by settler peoples. Ward (2020) defines anti-colonial actions as those taken to disempower or eradicate colonialism, and in an interview entitled *What is Decolonization? Anti-Colonial and Cultural Resurgence Actions* he lays out a few helpful categories for these actions — dismantling the colonial economy, dismantling colonial culture, and dismantling the philosophy of colonization. Using these categories, tangible actions are captured by a various thinkers.

### ▶ Dismantling the colonial economy

- Oppose anti-industrial initiatives (ie. pipelines, logging, commercial fishing, mining, etc.) that prevent the extraction of resources to be used as profit by corporations (Ward, 2020)
- Oppose colonial political authority (ie. illegitimate assertions of sovereignty) (Ward, 2020)
- Break down the addiction to money through relationship with Land (Freeland Ballantyne, 2014)
- Engage in the recirculation of capital into conscious exchange relationships (Freeland Ballantyne, 2014)
- Realign, repurpose and reorganize the distribution of capital to disrupt the flow of settler capitalism (ie. Dechinta Bush University) (Freeland Ballantyne, 2014, p. 82)
- Challenge partners and allies to give time, money, efforts and networks to building a sustainable knowledge economy that counters the narrative of “resource extraction or nothing” (Freeland Ballantyne, 2014, p. 83)
- Support Indigenous land reclamation efforts (Palmater, 2021; Pasternak & King, 2019)

### ▶ Dismantling colonial culture

- Oppose dominant Eurocentric-based culture and ideologies as normative (Ward, 2020)
- Fight white supremacy (Belcourt, 2020)
- Dismantle colonial institutions of power from within by running for government or taking on positions of power (ie. police) and standing up when in those positions (Belcourt, 2020)
- Unsettling education practices, curriculums, and spaces (Freeland Ballantyne, 2014)

### ▶ Dismantling the philosophy of colonization

- Opposing capitalisms endless cycle of profit & debt (Ward, 2020; Freeland Ballantyne, 2014)
- Push back against rights-based thinking, as derived from the state or Crown (Ward, 2020)
- Build relationships with Land (Freeland Ballantyne, 2014)
- Recognize and protect the rights of Mother Earth (ie. rights of water) (Belcourt, 2020)

## CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ What does the word “dismantle” as an action invoke for you?
- ✦ What forms of anti-colonial actions have you engaged with? How?
- ✦ What makes you uncomfortable or unsure about anti-colonial actions? Why?

## Land back

*“Imagine what Canada could look like if we started returning so-called Crown Lands back to First Nations. Who would you rather control these enormous areas? Corporations who only see in the land dollar signs over the next financial quarter? Or First Nations who have been taking care of the lands for generations?”*

— Pam Palmater, 2021

Land back is a form of direct resistance to the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their Land and its ensuing harms, from dependency and impoverishment to a present day jurisdiction over just 0.2% of land in Canada (Manuel & Derrickson, 2017; Palmater, 2021). Calls for land back rest on a long history of theft, false promises and resistance in which “[Native people] have never accepted Canada’s theft of our lands or the genocide of our peoples and for generations we’ve demanded our land rights be respected” (Palmater, 2021). Presently, nearly all of Canada is considered Crown land, claimed through a “racist legal fiction” (Palmater, 2021) and controlled by Canadian federal and provincial governments for profit making through resource extraction (Pasternak & King, 2019). Land theft is still happening today and even though parts of Canada’s own governing and legal systems have supported this call for land back, “the Canadian government has time and again refused to respect and implement these court decisions, breaking its own laws” (Palmater, 2021).

Indigenous jurisdiction over traditional territory also has deeply relational implications. As the effects of rampant capitalism devour Mother Earth, through Indigenous jurisdictions over their lands, Indigenous ways of knowing can help to mitigate the losses of biodiversity and climate change (Pasternak & King, 2019). This speaks to the connection with Land herself as a crucial part of Indigenous resurgence; as Simpson says “Indigenous people cannot survive as Indigenous Peoples without homelands” (in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 214). In regards to relationships with settler peoples, who will continue to exist on Indigenous lands, land back is also how nation-to-nation relationships gets built (Palmater, 2021). The impacts of colonialism are tied to land theft, and therefore colonialism “cannot be addressed in any other way than through the return of those lands to us” (Alfred, 2009, p. 182).

The contemporary slogan #LandBack is effective at conveying the heart of this Indigenous reclamation action — giving all the land back to Indigenous peoples. This is a powerful form of anti-colonial resistance that undermines the Canadian state’s control of and claim to these same lands, leading to questions of what this looks like in practice. In the Yellowhead Institute’s *Land Back Red Paper*, Pasternak & King (2019) contend that while it appears there is progress towards land back through various channels with the Canadian government today (ie. \_\_\_\_\_), there is no real ceding of jurisdiction occurring. They state that the Canadian government still insists they own the land, and thus the processes for consent that are relied on by the government fall into the categories of denial or recognition, not jurisdiction.

Due to the legal obstacles and obstinate position of the Canadian state, Indigenous reclamation efforts have sought to enact their own consent-based jurisdiction. Pasternak & King (2019) define reclamation as an “assertion of jurisdiction beyond reserve boundaries and corresponding efforts to enforce that assertion” (p. 11), actions that are predominantly initiated outside of state structures. The opening quote by Palmater asks for people to imagine what Canada could look like if land was returned, which she follows in her article by painting a picture of responsible, sustainable land use practices and requirements that protect biodiversity and considers all beings in decisions about how to manage and use resources. While land back can be a disruptive idea for many settlers, it doesn’t need to come with fear or defensiveness. Calls for land back doesn’t mean that non-Indigenous people have to leave these lands (Alfred, 2009; Palmater, 2021), but rather that settlers need to demonstrate respect for shared lands and resources and return “enough of our power and land for us to be self-sufficient” (Alfred, 2009, p. 182). It can also be the beginning of a beautiful future, predicated on a different worldview.

How land back gets implemented at a nation-to-nation level is complex, however there has been lots of research to generate ideas for solutions, the two major ones being the recommendations from Canada's own Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). Key among these ideas are for the Canadian state to cede jurisdiction (especially over the 89% of land "owned" by the Crown); reparations for lands and resources that have been irreparably damaged or sold to third parties (Palmater, 2021); restitution of land to Indigenous peoples, individually or collectively (Alfred, 2009); and respecting and honouring Aboriginal title and Indigenous right to free, prior and informed consent along with the right to say 'No' (Palmater, 2020; Manuel & Derrickson, 2017).

From the standpoint of individual settler allies/accomplices who are looking to participate in land back, this largely rests on advocacy and personal land return. Advocacy can look like applying pressure to settler government to cede legal and constitutional jurisdiction over publicly held lands (ie. parks) or fundraising to buy land to give it back (Belcourt, 2020). At a personal level, this can mean transfer of private land ownership, like gifting an estate. Many personal level or small scale transactions are fraught with tensions such as having land transactions occur within a capitalist framework or grappling with whether and where to buy property. None of this is simple, but neither is it impossible or even something to fear. Palmater's visioning statement draws a clear picture of a world oriented in ways unfathomable under current systems of settler capitalist rule.

### **CRITICAL PROMPTS**

- ◆ What is your gut reaction to the idea of Land back? Why?
- ◆ What settler privileges do you stand to lose from Land back?
- ◆ Consider the power that settler people/settler governments have in relation to Land back being framed as a choice that settlers have. How is this incommensurable with Indigenous struggles for Land and life?
- ◆ Look at some of the recommendations from RCAP and/or UNDRIP in relation to Land back. What was new information?
- ◆ What vision can you imagine for a Canada in which so-called Crown Lands are returned to Indigenous peoples?
- ◆ What gives you hope in that vision? What is fearful about it?

## Frontline solidarity

*“We are calling on non-Indigenous people to join Indigenous communities in coordinated non-violent direct actions... Alternatives will only come to life if we escalate our actions, taking bold non-violent direct action that challenges the illegitimate power of corporations who dictate government policy.”*

— Idle No More & Defenders of the Land, 2014, p. 358

As was discussed in the section on “Living unsettled”, solidarity can be seen as a form of standing alongside, building alliances and trust that are grounded in a shared vision and premised on the long term commitment of those involved. One term that expresses an ideal form of this relationship is “accomplice”, which Carlson-Manathara (2021) describes as “accountable relationships built of trust and mutual consent in which non-Indigenous activists are at the side of Indigenous activists, complicit in their work, taking the same risks on the front lines” (p. 125). Acting in frontline solidarity is ultimately about supporting direct action Indigenous resistance work in the many forms it can take, from blockades and rallies to legal advocacy and public education.

Actions in recent years, such as Idle No More and the long list of land defence movements (ie. Wet’suwet’en, 1492 Land Back Lane, Grassy Narrows, Elsipotog, etc.), have all seen support from settler allies and accomplices. Xhopakelxhit calls for settlers to put to good use our privilege and do “what is necessary to ensure that those who are working hard on the front lines are being supported” (in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 210). While by no means exhaustive, the following list captures ideas for engaging in frontline solidarity, compiled from Indigenous activists and land defenders and settler accomplices.

- ▶ **Engage in direct actions** by physically putting your body on the frontline, in ways that move beyond state sanctioned actions to directly occupy and challenge power, led by Indigenous peoples (Carlson-Manathara, 2021; Idle No More & Defenders of the Land, 2014)
- ▶ **Support, don’t speak for Indigenous peoples**; instead speak for yourself as a settler working to undo settler colonialism (Lee, 2014)
- ▶ **Provide practical or logistical support** such as offering travel support to Indigenous peoples to get to events; lending or donating vehicles, equipment, electronics, and tools; providing access to office equipment; providing childcare to radical Indigenous parents so they can attend events; support with event promotion; offering food and drink, etc. (Walia, 2021; Xhopakelxhit)
- ▶ **Offer protection** in the face of racist law enforcement (McCrea McGovern, 2021; Barker, 2021)
- ▶ **Organize our own communities** in support of Indigenous led resistance (Belcourt, 2020; Lowman & Barker, 2015; Lee, 2014)
- ▶ **Organize with a mandate from the community** you are looking to support and an understanding of the parameters of support being sought, while at the same time not waiting for Indigenous peoples to tell you what to do each step of the way (Walia, 2012; Lowman & Barker, 2015; Irlbacher-Fox, 2014)
- ▶ **Fundraise** for frontline land defenders to amplify their voices and support legal fees (Belcourt, 2020; Franklin, in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021)
- ▶ Maintain **clear lines of communication** with those are you working to support (Walia, 2012)

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ◆ What resources, skills, or contributions can you make to Indigenous direct actions?
- ◆ How have you engaged in actions of frontline solidarity?
- ◆ How did this support come about?
- ◆ What can you add to this list of frontline solidarity actions?
- ◆ What concerns do you have about supporting direct action? What is incommensurable about these challenges compared to those faced by Indigenous peoples?

### 3.5 Building & being in place-based relationships



Fig 7 - Building & being in place-based relationships

This section addresses the need to build and be in place-based relationships — that is to say reimagined relationships with Indigenous peoples and the Land herself. Place and Land in settler colonial contexts are contested notions, defined as they are by the juxtaposed epistemologies of Indigenous ways of knowing and dominant Euro-Western views. Place can be defined as an understanding of one's location grounded in the ways that social, political, environmental, and cultural factors interact to create a unique and situated context (Gruenewald, 2013; Coulthard, 2010; Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016). Place is at once individual and collective, and also inherently in relationship with Land, as the situated space where human relationships are built.

Land, in the context of Indigenous epistemologies, is seen as a sentient, living entity that is innately spiritual and animate, encompassing all aspects of creation, from the water, rocks, people, trees, air and beyond in their dynamic and ever-changing forms and relationships (Styres et al., 2013; Haig-Brown, 2009; Coulthard, 2010; Simpson, 2017; Kimmerer, 2017). In Anishnaabe, the word “Aki” encompasses this (Simpson, 2017; Kimmerer, 2017), which Simpson (2017) goes on to say:

*“Aki includes all aspects of creation: landforms, elements, plants, animals, spirits, sounds, thoughts, feelings, and energies and all of the emergent systems, ecologies, and networks that connect these elements.”* (p. 161)

Land offers both the grounding of particular places as well as a living reciprocal relation of both human and nonhuman beings, formed as it is by a “system of reciprocal social relations and ethical practices” (Wildcat et al, 2014, p. II). While Land encompasses all that is alive and created through

these energies and relationships, place is linked to the uniquely human way in which we experience the interactions between human society and the Land itself.

It is from a human-centric Euro-Western lens that Land is defined within settler colonial contexts. Lowman & Barker (2015) say that in these contexts, Land “refers to something akin to ‘place’: territories imbued with social meaning that form the basis of social life” (p. 48), understood through filters like property and ownership, and treated like “objects, not as alive.” (p. 53). Participating in settler colonialism demonstrates upholding these values about Land — not as a being alive in its own right, but as something that can be possessed and owned. Understandings of place and Land in settler colonial contexts are contested notions because “it’s always all about the land” (Chaw-win-is, in Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 52). The conflicts between Indigenous and settler peoples over land can be seen as a “clash of sovereignties”, where Indigenous sovereignty is bound by sacred responsibilities to particular places while settler sovereignties are “carried with us” until we decide to root them somewhere (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 55). These differing understandings of and connections to Land today shape Indigenous and settler responsibilities in profound ways.

Building and being in place-based relationships also refers to reimagining and enacting new relationships between settler and Indigenous peoples. Irlbacher-Fox (2014b), a settler scholar activist, asserts that the responsibility for creating these reimagined relationships lies with settler people. She states that “relationship is fundamental to meaningful co-existence and an antecedent to motivating change within settler society over the long term” as it “creates accountability and responsibility for sustained supportive action” (p. 223). As someone whose work is grounded in relationship, Irlbacher-Fox shares that “for settler allies, having a place to land relationally creates a stronger rationale for unsettling established systems: knowing and being with Indigenous peoples, even if it just to be welcomed to stand alongside at marches and rallies, or to join the drum dance circle, creates a tangible bond” (p. 223). The bonds that being in relationship creates — with people and/or the Land — can be powerful mechanisms for transformation. Gladys Rowe shares that she sees transformation taking place in connected to the work of “living in Indigenous sovereignty – of being in relationship with one another and the land in ways that centre Indigenous knowledge systems, governance structures, and priorities” (in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 21 – 23). While complex to enact, it is in this most basic and fundamental tool that we have as human beings — to form connection, reciprocity, and understanding with other living beings — that has the greatest chance of forging new pathways into the future.

This element digs deeper into what is required of settler people to build new relationships with Indigenous peoples, as well as with the Land. Much of this section is spent unpacking the current state of settler peoples relationship to land, generally and specifically within Turtle Island, in order to consider why a relationship is needed and what a reimagined relationship could look like.

### FURTHER RESOURCES

- ▶ *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall-Kimmerer [Book]
- ▶ *Speaking of Nature* by Robin Wall-Kimmerer in Orion Magazine [Article + Recording]
- ▶ *The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance* by Robin Wall-Kimmerer [Story + Recording]
- ▶ *The Earth Path* by Starhawk
- ▶ Ch. 8 “Orienting Toward Indigenous Sovereignty” in *Living in Indigenous Sovereignty* by Carlson-Manathara & Rowe [Book]
- ▶ Ch. 3 “It’s Always All About the Land” in *Settler Identity & Colonialism* by Lowman & Barker [Book]
- ▶ *Dechinta Bush University: Mobilizing a knowledge economy of reciprocity, resurgence and decolonization* by Erin Freeland Ballantyne [Article]

## What is required to build new relationships with Indigenous peoples?

*“I have been encouraged to think of human interconnectedness and kinship in building alliances with Indigenous communities. Black-Cherokee writer Zainab Amadahy uses the term “relationship framework” to describe how our activism should be grounded. “Understanding the world through a Relationship Framework ... we don’t see ourselves, our communities, or our species as inherently superior to any other, but rather see our roles and responsibilities to each other as inherent to enjoying our life experiences,” says Amadahy. From Turtle Island to Palestine, striving toward decolonization and walking together toward transformation requires us to challenge a dehumanizing social organization that perpetuates our isolation from each other and normalizes a lack of responsibility to one another and the Earth.”* — Walia, 2012

The bulk of this portfolio provides the rationale for why a new relationship between settler and Indigenous peoples is needed, particularly with White settlers. This process is bound to be difficult as it requires settlers to challenge notions of who we are, our place in the world, and the reorienting of our social structures. As Pam Palmater (2020) says, social conflict will be inevitable. Yet the transformation we seek requires us to challenge the foundations our current relationships are built on and take responsibility for our actions and behaviours. New relationships will require settlers to:

- Face personal discomfort and fear (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021; Hager et al., 2021)
- Open up and be vulnerable (gkisedtanamoogk and Wayne, in Hager et al., 2021)
- Sit with others pain and anger (Shirley Bowen, in Hager et al., 2021)
- Engage in deep listening to and learning from Indigenous peoples (Belcourt, 2020; Carlson-Manathara, 2021; Hager et al., 2021)
- Take guidance from Indigenous peoples on anti-colonial thinking and actions (Dei, 2006; Alfred, 2008; Carlson, 2017)
- Take on the shared responsibility of anti-colonial resistance (Flowers, 2015; Hager et al, 2021)
- Know the boundaries of the relationship so as to avoid seeking to take control of Indigenous peoples and Lands (Lowman & Barker, 2015)
- Be accountable to Indigenous peoples (Carlson-Manathar & Rowe, 2021)
- Be willing to accept Indigenous refusal as a possibility (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021)
- Refuse the role of colonizer/occupier and its supremacist ideologies (Ward, 2015)
- Decentre ourselves and learn to live in Indigenous sovereignty (Carlson-Manthara, 2021)
- Follow Indigenous laws & protocols where you live (Belcourt, 2020; Carlson-Manathara, 2021)
- Acting, choosing, thinking, and feeling that what Indigenous voices say about this land and how to be on it really matter (Mills, in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021)

On top of all these ways we need to challenge and reorient our behaviours within relationships with Indigenous peoples, we also need to see these relationships being built on a personal level outside of the state or other institutions. We know that decolonization will not come from within the state; nor will the social relations we imagine (Walia, 2012). The “labor of settlers should be to imagine alternative ways to be in relation with Indigenous peoples” says Flowers (2015, p. 34), which means creating living, human-to-human, heart connection relationships, grounded in the places in which we live with the peoples whose Lands we live upon. Ultimately, what is required by settler peoples is to live in Indigenous sovereignty, meaning “living in an awareness that we are on Indigenous Lands, containing their own stories, relationships, laws, Protocols, obligations, and opportunities, which have been understood and practiced by Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial” (Carlson-Manthara & Rowe, 2021, p. 25).

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ◆ How are you in relationship with Indigenous peoples?
- ◆ Which of the above changes to actions and behaviours would you find easy to adopt? Which would you find challenging? Why?
- ◆ What does the idea of *living in Indigenous sovereignty* mean to you?

## Settler relationships to *this* Land

*“There is a difference between a relationship with the land, in the case of Indigenous peoples, and a relationship to the land, in the case of settler societies.”*

— Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 53

The ties of individual settler people to the land of Turtle Island (*this* Land) is one of inherent disconnection, fundamentally because our ancestors knew another homeland. What it means to feel the legacy of inherently being from and intimately knowing the Land is not an experience I have had in my life. While I am fortunate to know where my ancestors homelands are, there is no expectation that I would feel an inherent connectedness to those lands if I were to go there, given that I would be merely a visitor who has not learned to speak its language through my life.

Settler disconnection to this Land is also born out of the ways in which Land, and our relationships to land, are perceived through the dominant Euro-Western worldview. As opposed to being acknowledged as alive, Lowman & Barker (2015) posit that settler society understands Land in relation to how it can serve human needs — as property, territory, resource, profit, or simply an object that can produce. They say that Settlers see land as the site in which their human society is built, as told through narratives that seek a basis for security, opportunity, and identity as a new people. My relationship to land growing up was certainly one of invisibility, aesthetic, and inevitability, with no attending to a spiritual or emotional connection to the Land herself. In this, Lowman & Barker’s analysis reflects the majority of my lived experience.

Settler identities related to land are generally also grounded in the reality that ancestral connections to land, as built in homelands, has been severed through the condition of settler identity as the intent to stay. Lowman & Barker (2015) state that settlers have actual or remembered roots of some sort in other countries, however they don’t have a homeland that they expect to return to, resulting in a severing from those land relations and its connection to ones sense of identity.

Beyond these personal dislocations, collective settler relationship to this Land is mediated by the settler state through political, legal, and economic structures designed to affirm the legitimacy of settler society (Lowman & Barker, 2015). Resting under a guise of legitimate sovereignty over these lands through European decrees, a powerful tool in the creation of settler legitimacy and privilege is the Canadian Constitution. Lowman & Barker (2015) explain that the Constitution provides legitimacy to Indigenous peoples through recognition of aboriginal and treaty rights under Section 35, while at the same time providing settlers with citizenship rights that allow one to claim entrance to, belonging in, and even control over any territory within the state. They point out that “the Constitution of Canada exists not to balance Indigenous and Settler relationships, but to ensure Settler Canadian sovereignty over the land, and subsume Indigenous belonging within that sovereignty” (p. 62). In other words, this powerful tool of the state grants privileges to Settler people in regards to use of and access to the Land, while systemically eroding Indigenous inherent (and treaty) rights and sovereignty over their own lands. Collective settler identity in relation to *this* Land, then, is fraught with violence and theft, dislocation, systemic racism and willful ignorance making the act of being in relationship with this Land fraught with tension and contradictions.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ What beliefs or teachings about land did you experience growing up? How were these beliefs or teachings tied to the specific land of Turtle Island?
- ✦ How are you in relationship with land in Turtle Island today?
- ✦ What ties do you have to ancestral land?
- ✦ How do you benefit from settler sovereignty and laws over the land as a settler person?

## Territoriality & deterritorialization

*“Settler colonial capitalism feeds off of people’s disconnection from their territory. The settler is the ultimate signifier of the deterritorialized being. We do not, for the most part, know our own languages, ceremonies or practices. We have become so far removed from our own territories we often don’t even know where we come from. Our relationships with land were replaced with our relationship to capital. Our bodies colonized by capitalism, we wander, hungry ghosts on the lands of others, frantically feeding to fill the void.”*

— Freeland Ballantyne, 2014, p. 81

A crucial step in any relationship building process mired in estrangement is being able to understand your blindspots in order to see a more complete truth. In regards to contemporary collective settler relationship with Land, settler people need to be able to forthright name the land ethic of Euro-Western settler society — that of territoriality. To be territorial is defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.) as “relating to a territory... or relating to private property”; territoriality, then, refers to the ownership of land which rests at the heart of settler capitalism. Ward (2015) contends that a significant part of the colonial conquest is the capturing of peoples hearts and minds through an assimilation process that transforms ones relationship to the Land. He says that once you learn to see land as private property, you have fallen into Euro-Western colonial notions of private ownership and possession. Countering these notions has been at the core of Indigenous and imperial fights for centuries, as Indigenous peoples continuously advocate that one should not be that of possessor but of guardian, stewards and protectors for the next generations (Ward, 2015). Settler peoples must also contend with the impacts of a territorial land ethic globally, such as human-caused climate change. Calderon (2014) contends that territoriality can help maintain a settler land ethic in support of “mindsets that enable environmentally bankrupt land use practices” (p. 30). For too long, settler society has been held hostage in this way of viewing and using the land as a commodity for human gain, disregarding relationship and responsibility.

A natural progression from individual possession of a collective living entity is deterritorialization — the severing of people from their land even while they still physically live upon it. Defined as the “process whereby colonization leads not just to the loss of territory but also to the destruction of the ontological conditions of the colonized culture’s territoriality” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972 in Freeland-Ballantyne, 2014, p. 77), deterritorialization can be understood as the severing of relationship with land, both generally and in reference to specific places. Freeland Ballantyne (2014) speaks of deterritorialization as a process of separating people from the practices on the land that keep them healthy. Through her work at Dechinta Bush University, Freeland-Ballantyne takes note of how effective dispossession has been at deterritorializing Indigenous youth from their own lands. She also posits that settlers are “the ultimate deterritorialized being” (p. 81) due to our intense dislocation from Land and the ways in which this rootlessness allow us to participate in the subjugating of Land and other beings.

For Settlers to walk forward in building and being in relationship with Land, in general and specifically to the places in which we live, there is much reconciling and new relationship building to do with the human AND non-human world.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ◆ How have you seen or experienced a territorial worldview at play?
- ◆ How do you understand Freeland Ballantyne’s quote about settlers as deterritorialized beings? Why do you agree or disagree?
- ◆ How does the sentiment of being a deterritorialized make you feel?
- ◆ How is this feeling incommensurable to the ways in which Indigenous peoples experience deterritorialization today?

## Why seek to be in relationship with Land?

*“Our relationships with land are central to the great unsettling.”*

— Freeland Ballantyne, 2014, p. 77

One reason for forming a relationship with Land is to make space to contest settler colonialism and the values that underpin it. As settler people who are both complicit in the ongoing structures of settler colonialism and responsible for disrupting them, learning to listen, to be present together, and accept teachings from the Land is antithetical to settler capitalism itself, as the power of settler colonization relies on the total deterritorialization of people’s relationship with land (Freeland Ballantyne, 2014). Wildcat et al. (2014) and Coulthard (2014) express that being physically present on the land — re-learning practices and re-embedding self into social relationships with place — allows for powerful new ways to see one’s relationships to the Land and other-than-human beings, which ultimately makes space to disrupt the structures of settler colonialism. Many Indigenous people are calling on settlers to form their own connection to Land in order to be able “to more effectively support Indigenous efforts to defend the land” (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2012, p. 118). While being a protector or a guardian of the Land is a fundamental responsibility of Indigenous peoples, as people who live on these Lands, settlers must also share in this responsibility. Sharing in stewardship means understanding the need to defend land and to use our settler privilege and resources to ensure Indigenous peoples can fulfill their sacred responsibilities.

Another reason for settlers to create or deepen a relationship with the Land are the ways in which this can offer healing and an opportunity for spiritual connection (Wildcat et al, 2014; Starhawk, 2004). An authentic relationship with the natural world is vital for our spiritual health and development and is also “a vital base for any work we do to heal the earth and transform the social and political systems that are assaulting her daily” (Starhawk, 2004, p. 5). We cannot expect to flip a switch and be able to walk in good relation with Land overnight; engaging in a process of healing our conditioned understandings of Land, non-human beings and our role within this living world is a necessary first step. This change in consciousness allows us to listen, hear, and understand what the Earth is saying to us and asking of us, creating space for reciprocal relationships that will also bring us healing, expanded awareness, and intensified life (Starhawk, 2004).

Despite our best intentions however, as peoples who experience feelings of disconnection and dislocation with the natural world, forging this relationship challenges notions of spirituality and our epistemological understandings of our human place in the world. Through the creation of an intercultural relational space, Indigenous participant Alma Brooks (Zapawey-Kwey) reflects on observing the process of non-Native participants sensing that their longing was for the spiritual component with the living world that the Indigenous participants had (in Hager et al, 2021, p. 43). As many settler people experience, when there are no teachings to ground you or communities in which to learn from within, understanding how to connect on a spiritual level with Land can be overwhelming, bewildering, and heartbreaking.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ◆ Why do you think it is important to have a relationship with Land?
- ◆ How would you describe your relationship with Land, generally?
- ◆ What beliefs ground you in this relationship?
- ◆ How do you seek to have a relationship with Land?
- ◆ How does this relationship benefit you? How does it benefit the Land?

## Coming to be in relationship with this contested Land

*“Maybe the task assigned to Second Man is to unlearn the model of kudzu and follow the teaching of White Man’s Footstep, to strive to become naturalized to place, to throw off the mind-set of the immigrant. Being naturalized to place means to live as if this is the land that feeds you, as if these are the streams from which you drink, that build your body and fill your spirit. To become naturalized is to know that your ancestors lie in this ground. Here you will give your gifts and meet your responsibilities. To become naturalized is to live as if your children’s future matters, to take care of the land as if our lives and the lives of all our relatives depend on it. Because they do.”*

— Kimmerer, 2013, p. 215

It is fitting to start this section with the words of Robin Wall Kimmerer, taken from an essay in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* entitled “In the Footsteps of Nanabozho: Becoming Indigenous to Place”. In this essay, Kimmerer weaves the story of Nanabozho’s instructions as Original Man into her contemplations of what it would mean for Settler people to enter into the kind of deep reciprocity that renews the world; the kind of reciprocity that being indigenous to place gives rise to. Looking around, she can see the scars of Second Man (settlers) upon the land, for they did not learn the teachings of Original Man — to never damage Creation and never interfere with the sacred purpose of another being. She knows that something in Settler relationships to the natural world must shift, but she has difficulty envisioning how an immigrant society can become indigenous to place because “Indigenous is a birthright word. No amount of time or caring change the history or substitutes for soul-deep fusion with the land. Following Nanabozho’s footsteps doesn’t guarantee transformation of Second Man to First” (p. 213). Just as Nanabozho did, Kimmerer turns to the Land as teacher, specifically to immigrant plant teachers who offer many different models for how not to make themselves welcome in a new place. Some poison the soil or use up all the water, some take over the homes of native species and grow without regard to limits. She alights on Plantain or White Man’s Footsteps, an immigrant plant that did not use these colonizing strategies but rather aimed to be useful and coexist with the beings native to place. She describes Plantain not as indigenous but as ‘naturalized’ — “the same term we use for the foreign-born when they become citizens in our country. They pledge to uphold the laws of the state. They might well uphold Nanabozho’s Original Instructions, too” (p. 214). Perhaps through a reframing of settler-Land relations, we too can become naturalized — useful and in harmonious coexistence with the beings of this place.

If Settlers wish to become naturalized to place and Land as a basis for relationship, there are layers of action required. A first step is acknowledging the shifts in perspectives that are needed to be able to reorient relations to Land that exist outside of settler colonial structures. Mills (2019) reminds us that relationship with Land is personal and is not dictated by the state because the “nation state isn’t living and isn’t capable of earth connection, mutual aid, or kinship... however, the same cannot be said of its settler” (in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 113). This is an important reminder that settler identity and settler colonialism are not the same thing (Lowman & Barker, 2015) and that there are ways in which settlers can learn to belong to Land beyond colonialism. Lowman & Barker (2015) posit that one element of this shift in perspective is to look at the core features of settler colonial place-relationships that must change, which at a minimum must include:

- Assertion of Canadian sovereignty in its present form cannot stand;
- Settler Canadians must exist in a system that does not perpetuate narratives that marginalize or erase Indigenous presence;
- Spaces occupied by Settle people must move away from their “imagined geographies” of place and instead correspond to spaces of Indigenous political and social life on the land (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 63)

This shift in perspective also requires withdrawing from underlying assumptions of our culture that harm our relationship with Land — primarily assumptions that view humans as separate from and above nature, as well as the compartmentalization of knowledge (scientific thinking) as the only or ‘right’ way in which to view the world (Starhawk, 2004). In place of these assumptions, we must

reorient to the idea of the earth as alive and accept our non-hierarchical place within the “complex inter relational network of all of creation” (Little Bear, 1994, in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 113). Without these fundamental shifts in the ways in which we understand and relate to place and Land, the following steps of learning to connect and enact our responsibilities are not possible.

A further step for settlers to take in this relationship building process is to be open to learning how to experientially, spiritually, and emotionally connect with the Land (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). For settler people who identify with the experience of disconnection from the natural world, learning how to have this connection with Land is far from intuitive. It can feel like a cruel joke of knowing you are missing an important part of yourself, yet attempting to find it looks like play acting — hollow, performative, and mired in uncertainty. Carlson-Manathara (2021) reflects that it can be difficult for settlers to go beyond an intellectual understanding of relating to the Land, which may not go deep enough to instill the transformational change that is needed. She offers that learning to connect needs to happen alongside relationship with Indigenous people from a place of recognizing their sovereignty and seeking guidance from them. Indigenous epistemologies emphasize kinship with other beings, human and non-human, which makes up a fundamentally different identity in relation to Land (Coulthard, 2010; Simpson, 2017; Kimmerer, 2017). For Indigenous peoples who live this connection with specific Land and places, the foundation for identity is different, a foundation which settler people now occupy.

Relationship building with Land also requires us to inquire about and enact our responsibilities to the Land. Seeking to live in a decolonial way on Turtle Island means to take seriously our treaty obligations to connect with and protect the living world, and to think about our relatives and to care for their well-being (Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021). In practice, this can mean:

- Abiding by Natural Laws, the “laws that are woven into the fabric of Creation and written upon the Earth. We call this Okichitibakonikaywin — The Great Binding Law” (Nii gain Aki Inini (Dave Courchene), in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 131)
- Living sustainably by “taking as little as possible and giving up as much as possible” in order to be gentle with our Mother and ensure our survival (Elder Robin Greene, in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021, p. 121)
- Moving away from the idea of owning land as license to do whatever you want with it and ask instead “What does the land want me to do with it?” (Barker, 2021)
- Listening to the Land, for “once we have learned to hear, then we can begin to understand. And only after we understand do we begin to speak, to intervene.” (Starhawk, 2004, p. 12)
- Participating in acts of gratitude and reciprocity with the Land because “the natural world relies on us to do good things. You don’t show your love and care by putting what you love behind a fence...You have to contribute to the well-being of the world” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 363)
- Being present, looking around, and seeking connection through personal experiences such as: offering prayers; being quiet; practicing the Earth-based spirituality of your own ancestors; introducing yourself to place; walking and talking with other beings; talking about these relationships with other earth people (Alma in Hager et al, 2020; settler contributors in Carlson-Manathara & Rowe, 2021; personal communication with settler colleagues)

For many settlers, we have a long way to go in coming to be in relationship and connection with Land in authentic and embodied ways. But as this section has shown, it is not beyond us, nor is it outside of our prerogative as human beings who seek belonging and reciprocity with our wider relatives in the places in which we live.

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ What do you see as your responsibilities to the Land, personally and collectively?
- ✦ How do you currently enact these responsibilities?
- ✦ How do you understand Kimmerer’s words about settlers naturalizing themselves?
- ✦ What about being in relationship with Land makes you hopeful?

## 4.0 "Relational in-the-world becoming": Reflections on my personal decolonization journey

While inherently collective, decolonization is also deeply personal work. The creation of this pedagogical framework was as much about sharing knowledge with other settler peoples as it was about pushing myself to better understand my personal responsibilities and investigate how I have (or haven't been) enacting these, thus it feels fitting to end with a critically reflexive look at my own decolonizing journey to date. My portal into this process was through relationships that began as a young adult. In 2009, a fresh university graduate, I made my way to Eabametoong First Nation, an Ojibway community in the heart of Treaty 9 territory. By this point, I had lived in Ghana, West Africa for a year and was accustomed to being one of a few white people and to the feelings of culture shock. When the plane landed in the community and I hopped into the open bed of a pick-up truck however, I wasn't expecting to feel the same kinds of shocks I had experienced overseas. In Eabametoong the shocks were linked on the one hand to the overt expressions of poverty in my own country, and on the other connected to the expansive feeling of living in a community in the embraces of the Land. I stayed in Eabametoong as an educator until 2013 and it was through the relationships of love that I established in the community that my education into the true history of Canada began. This understanding began at first through the stories of those I was in relationship with, supplemented over time by engaging with Indigenous thinkers, writers, musicians, and Knowledge Keepers.

At this time in my life, my worldview was that of an affluent White settler woman whose lived experiences with oppression were gender related and minimal. Critical engagement with my own privilege and racial identity was a newly forming process. Before moving to Eabametoong, I have no recollection of having had any relationships with, or even knew, any Indigenous people personally. The truth of my story is that I wasn't prepared for what I was beginning to learn about the dark side of Canada's stories, while at the same time experiencing the violence of these stories born out in a community that I had grown to love. I didn't have the knowledge or the stamina to stay in the very lived and visceral reality of colonial oppression. I didn't know or call it that at the time, but what I did know was that life on an isolated reserve, where combatting daily the challenges of poverty, lateral violence, and addiction were the reality, and despite all the ways that love and care also shaped life in Eabametoong, it was more than I could handle. I knew that I was choosing to leave because it was too hard and thus, as my plane took off at the end June five years after I had first landed in the community, my journey through White guilt truly began.

Despite the ways my time living in Eabametoong profoundly changed me, it took another six years of working with Indigenous communities, building and maintaining relationships with Indigenous friends, getting involved in activist spaces, and seeking out intentional learning through books and critical media to gain a vocabulary and understanding of settler colonialism and eventually, decolonization. Significant shifts in the ways I understood my identity in relation to Land

and place and my worldview occurred throughout my time in graduate school. During my first year in the Masters of Education program, the courses I took repeatedly asked me to situate myself. When I look back on these papers, I can see the progression from first understanding that I have a responsibility to situate and then practicing this through the use of predominantly social location markers; in other words, declarations or acknowledgments of my privilege, with little else behind those statements. As I moved through the exercise of learning to situate myself, I came to understand that positionality is built on layers, and the context in which we are introducing ourselves will have a bearing on how many layers we reveal at once, and how many are slowly peeled away over the course of relationship building. Through this exploration, I also began to understand that I needed to know where I come from in order to more deeply, and appropriately, situate myself. I took the opportunity to dig into the migration stories of my ancestors — 19th century Ireland and post-WWII European immigrants — which led to a deeper understanding of how my ancestors stories have impacted my identity and relationship to place. Particularly, how I, and my ancestors and living family, have come to identify as Canadian. As I progressed through the process of my research, this shifted again to situating as a Settler Canadian.

Exploring what it means to be Settler Canadian and coming to terms with this part of my identity has been a part of the grappling involved in my living unsettled. So has investigating my White privilege and complicity in white supremacy through the personal interrogative process laid out by Layla Saad's workbook, and learning what it means to feel grief for Mother Earth and still be able to move forward in action through collective immersion into the work of Joanna Macy. I name these as some of the most transformational learning experiences of the last few years, alongside the individual and shared critical learning of graduate school and the ways in which Indigenous friends and colleagues in my life have kept me accountable. These experiences and relationships have helped me to move through and beyond feelings of guilt, shame, fear, apathy, and overwhelm. This process so far has been slow and painful, but also one I know I have the privilege to step outside of whenever it gets too intense, a privilege that I have used and one that Indigenous peoples do not have. With every new layer exposed, I have been faced with contradictions in trying to take action towards transformative change as a settler person, which has led me to understand that change can be supported, but not led, by me. There is no one way, no perfect way to do this work. I will make mistakes. My goal is to act anyways, with an awareness (always growing) of how to not cause harm and how to take responsibility when I do.

In creating this tool, I have deepened my own learning which has shaped a long list of next steps in my decolonizing journey, particularly as they relate to being in place-based relationships and taking direct, anti-colonial actions. In the spirit of accountability and continued sharing, at the time of writing I will be guided forward in my decolonizing journey by taking steps towards:

- ▶ **Learning about my ancestral connections** before the time of Roman and Christian imperialism, so as to enact the responsibilities of a Seventh Fire person, walking back the trails of my lineage and picking up the pieces that have been left along the way. I will do this

through personal learning (books, documentaries, genealogy explorations) as well as collectively by starting a learning group for those of Celtic ancestry.

- ▶ **Supporting the development of collective learning spaces** for settlers to engage in critical dialogues about decolonizing. I will do this by co-creating shared learning spaces that use the work of this portfolio as a starting place and hopefully, publish a user friendly version (updated with feedback from being used in practice) for free online.
- ▶ **Deepening the relationships** that have brought me thus far in my decolonizing journey, as it is these connections that ground me and have given me fundamental teachings in what it means to respectfully show up. I will do this by considering what I have learned about solidarity and long term commitment and how I can demonstrate this through my actions.
- ▶ **Creating relationships** with the Ojibway people whose territory I live on, particularly Fort William First Nation. I will do this by taking any opportunities that are presented to me to support or get to know individuals or groups in the community and go from there.
- ▶ **Reading the Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850** in order to understand how this agreement lays out the responsibilities of settler people, both historically and contemporarily. I will deepen this action by trying to engage with the treaty through the perspective of the Indigenous nations who are signatory to it.
- ▶ **Being more engaged in the Western democracy** that guides the colonial state. I recognize that the Canadian government represents me at a nation-to-nation level, which is not reflective of my values, beliefs, or vision for this world. As such, I need to better understand this system in order to contribute to disruption and dismantling from within the system itself.
- ▶ **Learning what Land back means** through dialogue with Indigenous peoples in the Robinson-Superior Treaty area about what this could look like in *this* place and then working to support that through actions of frontline solidarity, including protection of land.

This isn't an exhaustive list, or even a particularly radical one. I question after all this writing whether I am an accomplice, or still residing in the shadows of allyship. While I consciously work towards building and maintaining relationships of trust with the Indigenous people who have shaped my journey thus far, I have yet to embody taking the same risks they do on the frontlines, whether those frontlines are physical protest or in the realm of the ideological fight for decolonization. This list is intended to share a reflection of where my decolonizing journey is at, in this moment of time, and what I am being called to do — embody commitment, give my skills and resources in support of resistance, and learning how to risk as Indigenous peoples do. I'm not sure exactly what shape this will take, nor how long or where these intentions will take me, but as I conclude this offering, I am left feeling more open and hopeful than when I began.

As Irlbacher-Fox (2014a) says “Decolonization is not an act of isolated self-creation. It is a messy process of relational in-the-world becoming.” Here's to enacting responsibilities from a place of love and connectivity and all the unexpected places that will bring us along the way.

Let's keep doing the work.

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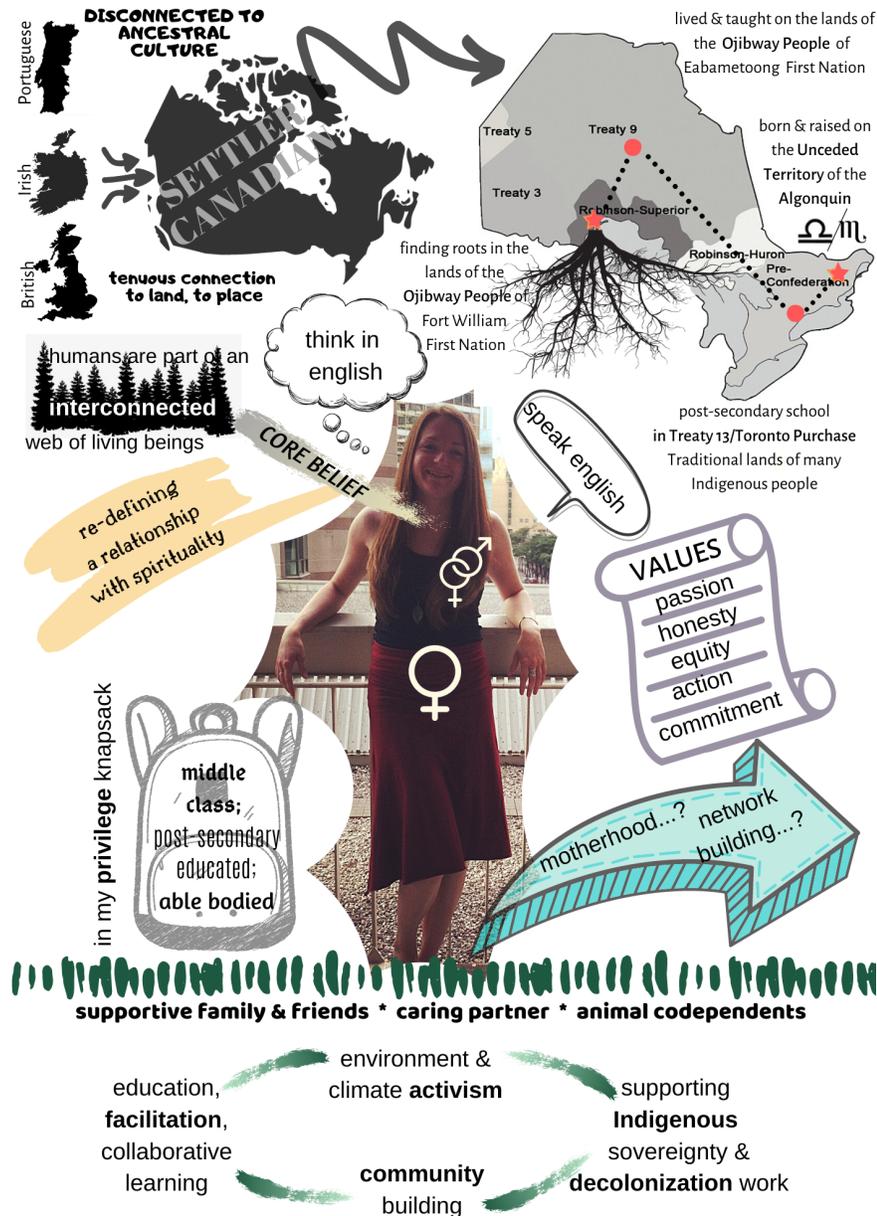
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## Appendix A – Additional Pedagogical Tools

### Positioning Self



### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ How do you currently situate yourself when introducing yourself?
- ✦ Consider the above image. How would you situate yourself in this way?
- ✦ How is this process different when you are in a group of predominantly settler peoples versus Indigenous peoples? Why?

## Critical Prompts for Section 2.0 - Grounding Core Concepts

### What is settler colonialism?

- ✦ When did you begin to learn about settler colonialism? How did this happen?
- ✦ How would you describe the defining characteristics of settler colonialism?
- ✦ How would you describe the impacts of settler colonialism?

### Why use Indigenous and settler?

- ✦ What does the term settler mean to you?
- ✦ Do you use this term to define yourself? Why or why not?
- ✦ If you do not use the term settler, how do you acknowledge your status on the land?
- ✦ Flowers (2015) warns that settler becomes an empty signifier if used synonymously with 'non-Indigenous' as "this reduces a set of privileges and practices to fit within a binary of Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities rather than thinking through the term 'settler' as a set of responsibilities and action" (p. 33).
  - What privileges and practices do you think she is referring to?
  - How does the term

### What is decolonization?

- ✦ What does decolonization mean to you?
- ✦ What is missing, or unaddressed, in the way decolonization is described in this section?
- ✦ What further distinctions are there between Indigenous and settler responsibilities in decolonization?
- ✦ What challenges could you foresee settler people facing — individually or collectively — by engaging in decolonizing actions?
- ✦ What additional responsibilities do you think there are of settler people?
- ✦ What motivates you to participate in decolonization?

### Introducing the Framework

- ✦ Which element(s) in the framework resonate most with you? Why?
- ✦ Which element(s) was your "entrance" into engaging with decolonization?
- ✦ What did that look like for you? Where did it lead you next?

## Statement of Place Poem

### A statement of place in juxtaposition

*By Courtney Strutt (2021); written as part of a course assignment for Place & Land in Education*

A statement of place in juxtaposition  
 overlaid and occupied, Anishnaabe if you listen.  
 Canada, the Canadian state  
 Turtle Island, seven generations lie in wait.  
 Ontario, provincial political borders  
 Land of the Anishinaabe, stewards not owners.  
 Lake Superior, abundance of fresh water  
 Anishinaabewi-Gichigami, responsibility of mothers and daughters.  
 Boreal forest, natural resource in trees  
 Aki, the spirit of thee.  
 Thunder Bay, uneasy frontier hub  
 Animikii-wajiw, sacred thunder mountain.  
 English, lingua franca from the colonizer's tongue  
 Anishnaabemowin, of this place and Land are sung.

A statement of place in juxtaposition  
 overlaid and occupied, Alive if you listen.  
 Jack Pine, White Pine, Birch, and Spruce  
 connected through pheromones and roots lay loose.  
 Great River flowing into great Lake  
 the lifeblood of it all at stake.  
 Pickerel, Pike, Trout, and Bass  
 swimming and life giving en masse.  
 Winged ones, hoofed ones, crafty small beings  
 awake and clear calling us into feeling.  
 Yarrow, Strawberries, Sweetgrass, and Sage  
 giving health and medicine whenever we engage.  
 Wind and rain, whispers from the sky above  
 wrapping us all in Earth's love.

This place has lived, is living.  
 Full of stories and lived memories of all in co-creation.  
 This Land is always present, forever giving.  
 What are our responsibilities, as part of this nation?

### CRITICAL PROMPTS

- ✦ What message is being conveyed through this poem?
- ✦ In what ways are the places you live “overlaid and occupied”?
- ✦ What commentary is this poem making about settler impact and responsibility?

## Appendix B – Enlarged Figures

All of the images featured in this portfolio were made on Canva by the author, Courtney Strutt, using icons from Canva and Pixabay. The compilation of icons and words are original images.

Figure 1 – Decolonizing (for settlers) Mandala

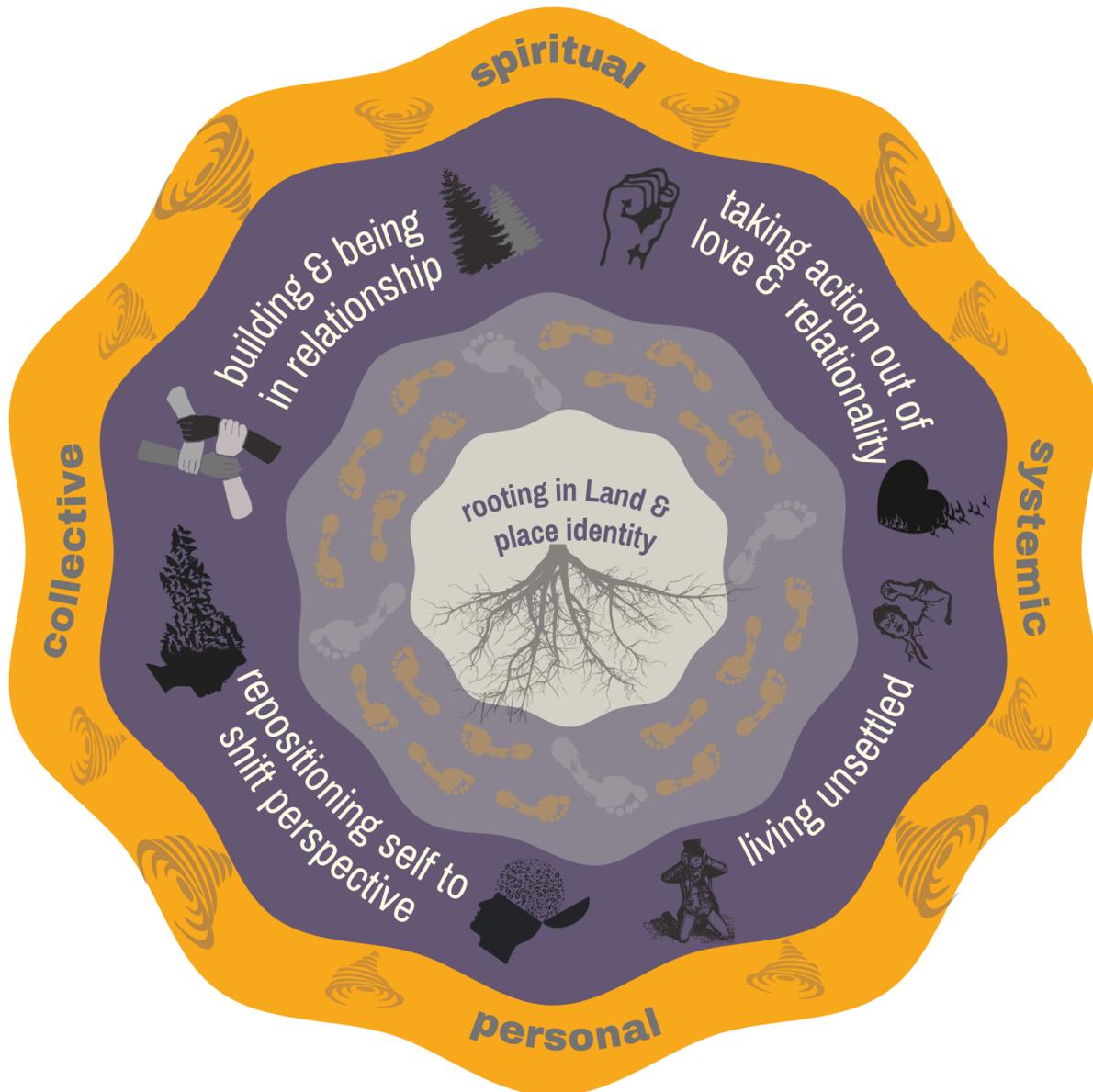
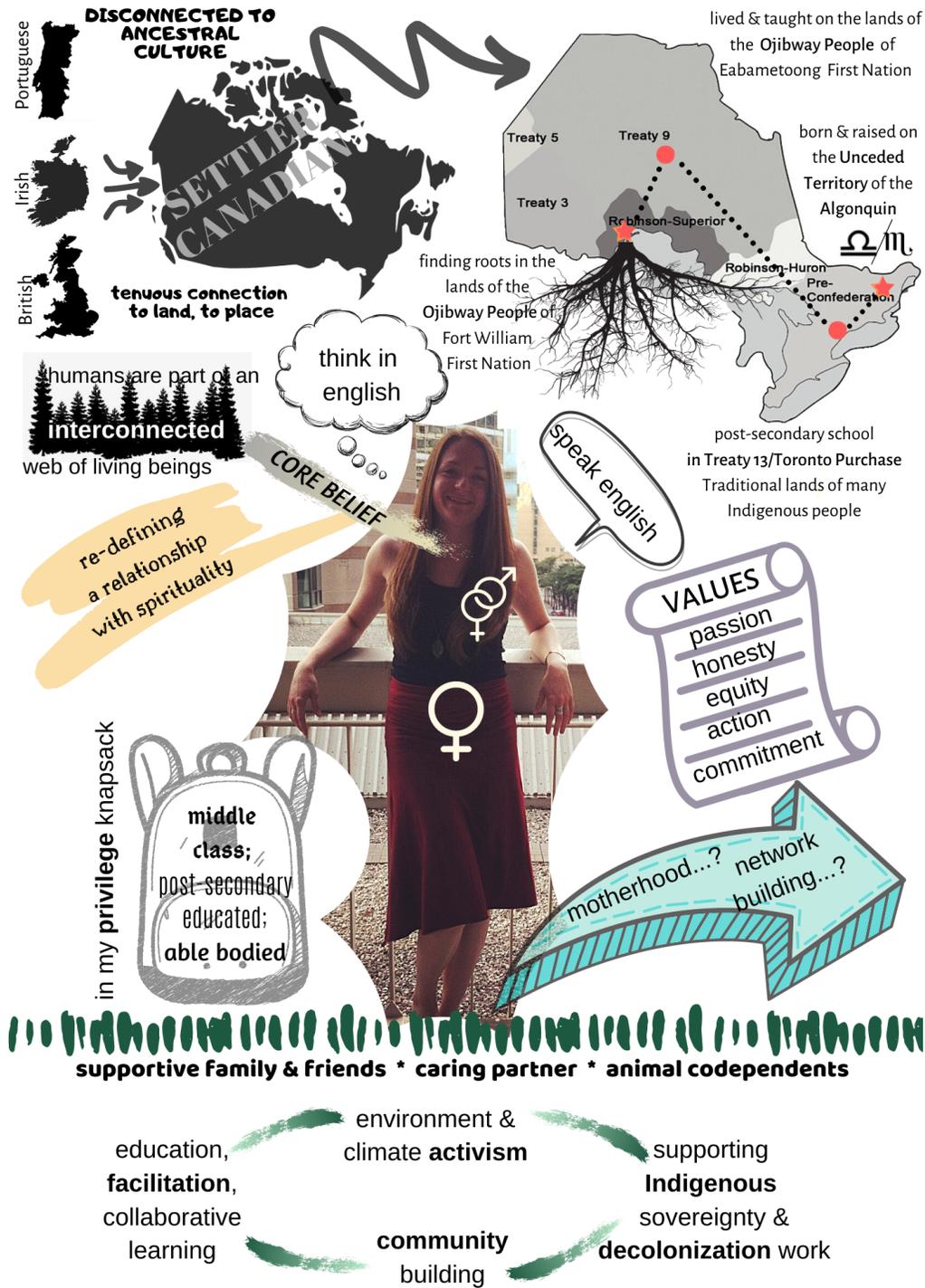
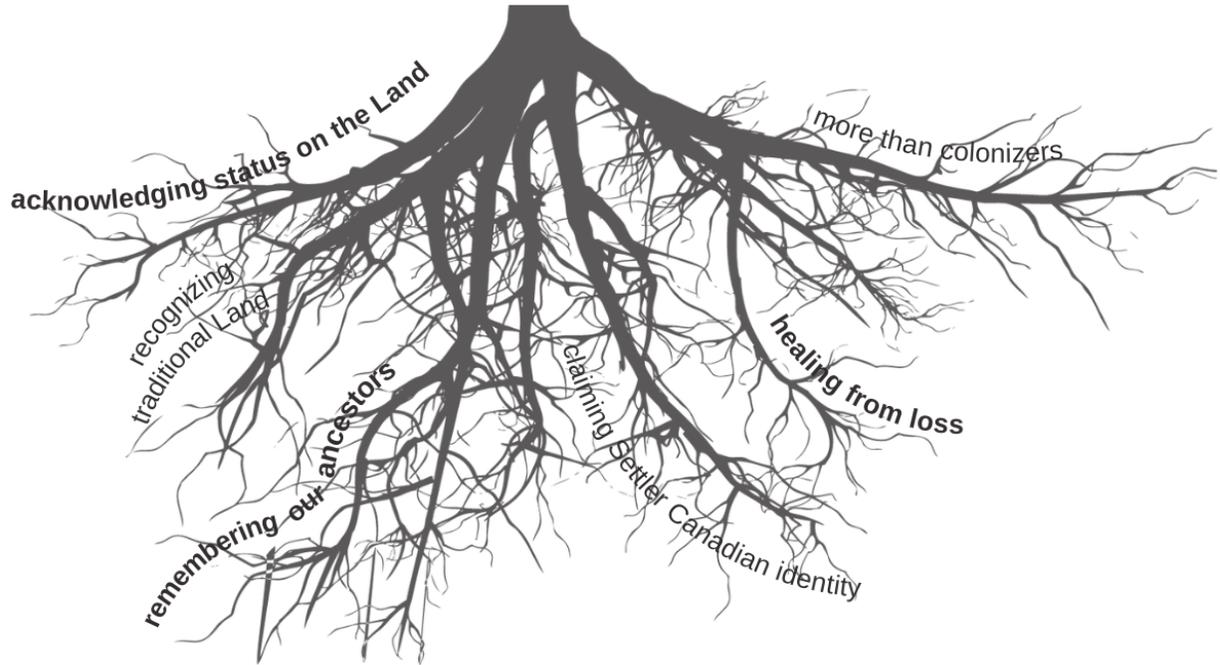


Figure 2 – Positionality image



**Figure 3 – Rooting in Land & place identity**



**Figure 4 – Repositioning self to shift perspective**

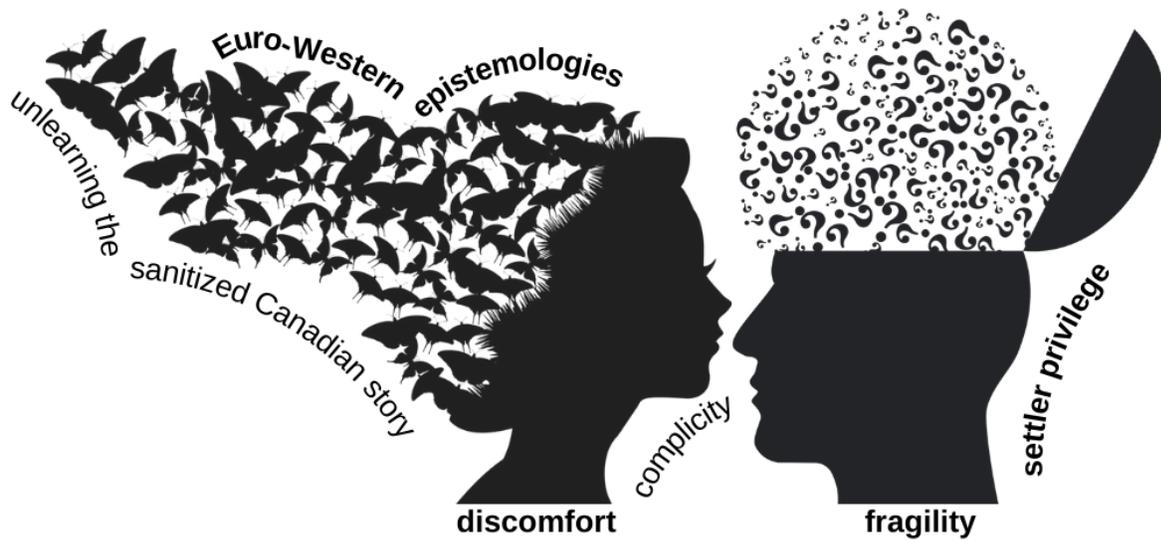


Figure 5 – Living unsettled

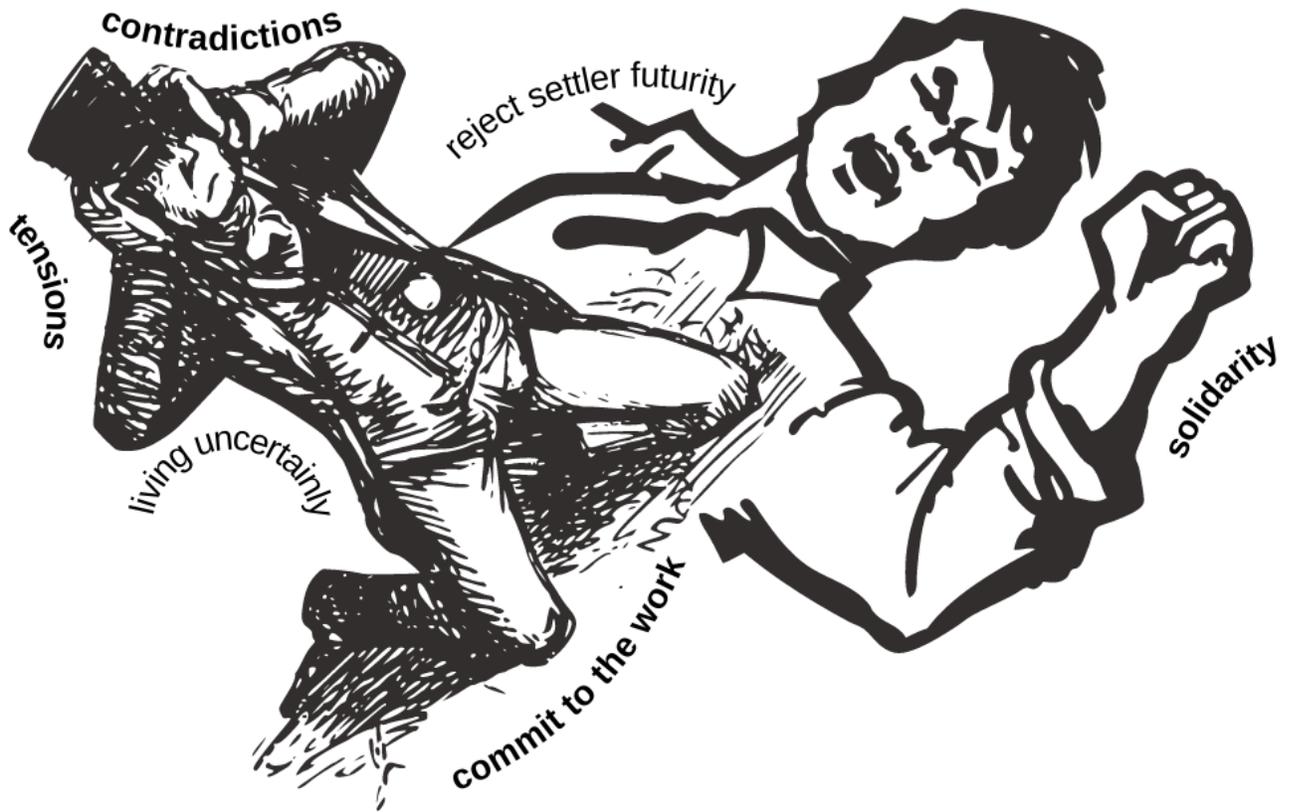


Figure 6 — Taking action out of love & relationality



Figure 7 – Building & being in place-based relationships

