



# Narrating Colonial Silences: Racialized Social Work Educators Unsettling our Settlerhood

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**ABSTRACT** *In this paper, three racialized social work educators unsettle our settled colonial silences as acts of self-decolonization and as a way of responding to the call to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). Hailing from the uneven manifestations of global capitalism and coloniality in Morocco, Vietnam, and Ethiopia, we draw on various critical theories to interrogate our unique entanglements with the imperial project of entwined settler colonialism and white supremacy. We narrate our embodied coloniality and how the virulent materiality of global processes of displacement and dispossession plays out in each of our personal stories, everyday encounters, and practices as educators.*

*With the aim of teaching for social justice by modeling, we share the processes of unsettling our colonial settlerhood and puncturing our racialized innocence. Each story addresses three themes: contact and colonial relations with Indigenous peoples of Canada, complicity in global coloniality, and responsibility in responding to the TRC call to action. The first story provides a broad outline of our struggles with the Indigenous/Settler binary created to perpetuate the various forms of displacement and dispossession in settler colonialism. The second story probes the complexities in the Settler category by engaging difference-making as a central technology of dispossession. The third story probes the complexities in the Indigenous category through interrogating the perils and promises of recognition and reconciliation in the context of global hierarchies of nation-states and global Indigenous resistance. We conclude by moving beyond our divergent trajectories and offering shared critical remarks on the human rights framework, the nation-state framework, and the coloniality of social work.*

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## **Introduction**

We acknowledge that we live and work in Ontario on the traditional territories of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, and Mississauga peoples of Canada. We are thankful for generations of Indigenous peoples who have cared for this land. We are three racialized social work educators whose pedagogy, research, and practice are primarily informed by various critical and antiracist frameworks.

We came to Canada as migrants and refugees, which makes us *de facto* Settlers within the grand scheme of the displacement and dispossession of global capitalism. Yet, it has been a long and difficult journey for us to identify as Settlers, as the global geopolitical processes of settler colonialism are insidious and often veiled. While claims of social justice and equity sit at the heart of our scholarship, Indigenous self-determination has been conspicuously absent from our critical antiracist analyses. If this was 15 years ago when Lawrence and Dua (2005) were just beginning to expose the colonial complicity of antiracist struggles, we might claim unawareness. There is no dearth of scholarship on the issue now. Scholars have produced significant bodies of literature (e.g., Amadahy & Lawrence, 2009; Chatterjee, 2018a, 2018b; Kennedy-Kish & Carniol, 2017; Murad, 2011; Simpson et al., 2018; Walia, 2015; Wane et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015). Also, Settler Colonial Studies has been established as a new field since (Veracini, 2011), and Settler scholars are producing critical scholarship (e.g., Davis et al., 2017). And we have scholarship on critical Indigenous studies (e.g., Absolon, 2011; Alfred, 2005, 2018; Blackstock, 2017; Coulthard, 2007; Daschuk, 2013; Kennedy-Kish, 2017; SFU's Vancity Office of Community Engagement [SFU], 2017).

Today we have no excuse because we are aware of the racialized colonial displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples in Canada (Coulthard, 2007; Daschuk, 2013; SFU, 2017) and around the world (Mignolo, 2011; Wolfe, 2006, 2016) as part of the imperial project establishing global capitalism and white supremacy. We are aware of the ongoing colonial violence and genocide against Indigenous peoples and the mounting Indigenous resistance. Despite awareness, however, colonial violence continues in many forms, including broken treaties, nonrecognition of land rights and sovereignty, stigmatization of treaty-protected hunting for livelihood, overrepresentation of Indigenous people in child welfare and prisons, nonattention to severe health and income disparities, denial of basic services, desecration of sacred grounds and ceremonies, pollution of the environment, poisoning of air, earth and water, and drilling of pipelines through the two percent of Indigenous territories that remain in Indigenous

hands. Indeed, we know of the horrors of residential schools and the ongoing transgenerational trauma. We understand these as specific strategies in the broader schemes of settler colonial elimination of Indigenous peoples (Daschuk, 2013; Wolfe, 2006).

In this paper, we weave together our critical analysis by drawing on critical antiracism, settler colonial studies, and critical Indigenous studies. From critical antiracism (e.g., Badwall, 2015; Bakan & Dua, 2014; Razack, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2012) we draw on both the macro processes of material political economy of white supremacy structured by global capitalism and neoliberalism, and the micro processes of how individuals embody white supremacy where it becomes a woven fabric of self-understanding enacted or resisted in everyday life. Similarly, from settler colonial studies (e.g., Davis et al., 2017; Rifkin, 2013; Wolfe, 2006, 2016), we draw on both the macro processes of displacement and dispossession by which Indigenous peoples are torn off their lands and livelihoods for the possession and inhabitation of Settlers, and the micro processes by which Indigenous and Settler individuals embody a self-understanding they enact or resist in everyday life. Finally, from critical Indigenous studies (e.g., Coulthard, 2007; Daschuk, 2013; SFU, 2017; TRC, 2015), we draw from both sides of the debate, where one side views decolonization and reconciliation as possible within the settler colonial nation-state, and the other side views these as impossible short of returning Indigenous land to its rightful stewards. We appreciate works that are already interweaving antiracism, Indigenous self-determination and settler colonial studies (e.g., Chatterjee, 2018a, 2018b; Murad, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

These theories play out through the uniqueness of our individual stories narrated from our shared field of practice as social work educators. In a powerful satirical question, Cindy Blackstock (2017) asks if social work has the guts for social justice and reconciliation. While honoring the longstanding Indigenous struggles for justice (Coulthard, 2007; SFU, 2017) and acknowledging the many recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) left unaddressed, in this paper, we focus on the TRC's call to action, particularly the articles on the education of social workers (Chatterjee, 2018b; TRC, 2015). Although both the TRC's call to action and social work are couched within the human rights framework (United Nations, 1994, 2007), as disillusioned scholars, we seek to critically engage the human rights framework as a mechanism of global coloniality.

We narrate our stories here as acts of self-decolonization and to educate by modeling as we wrestle with our innocence and unveil our colonial complicity. Each story engages three themes: our colonial relations with Indigenous peoples of Canada, our complicity in global coloniality, and our response to TRC's (2015) call to action. We position Abdel's story to provide a broad outline of our struggles with the Indigenous/Settler binary, Anh's story to probe the complexities of the Settler category, and Martha Kuwee's story to probe the complexities of the Indigenous category.

### **Abdel's Story: Complexifying the Indigenous/Settler Binary**

I am an immigrant to Canada. I am Muslim and originally from Morocco. I migrated to the US, became an ethnic graduate social work student, and moved to Canada for work. I was never trained to work with Indigenous clients. Nor did I ever take initiatives to educate myself on the struggles between Settlers and Indigenous peoples of this land. I didn't need to, because I was firmly ensconced in my ethnic space; or shall I say trapped in my ethnic space? I am displaced from my own people's place and thrown into the placeless space of the perpetual migrant. I am a placeless migrant whether in the US or Canada. I feel placelessness deep in my soul and deep in my body. I cannot relate to Indigenous/Settler struggles over place. That is not my struggle; it is theirs. I am neither Indigenous nor Settler. I am placeless.

No, I am not a Settler. Settlers are Europeans; I am not European. Settlers are colonizers; I am not. I know colonizers distinctly. They are French and Spanish in Morocco. They are primarily English and French in Canada, but they are all White; I am not. I am innocent of colonizers' guilt. I am colonized; my communities are colonized. I am not a Settler, period! I am not born here, so I'm not Indigenous either; that goes without saying. This Indigenous/Settler binary is a daunting rigid structure (Wolfe, 2013). I teach trauma-informed social work practice but the key issues of trauma (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016) that cut across the Indigenous/Settler binary remain silent in my work (e.g., Elkchirid, 2012). This Indigenous/Settler binary traps me into placelessness and undermines my social justice work. It blinds me to the profound interconnectedness of community struggles from across the divide (Chatterjee, 2018a)

So, am I being insincere in claiming innocence? In case you wondered, no, I'm not faking my innocence. I feel it profoundly. This innocence is my reality, my truth. I know I do not commit injustice intentionally. In fact, injustice is committed against me and my various communities. I fight injustice passionately wherever it rears its ugly head. My solid commitment to social justice is unshakable. But I also know that my claim to such innocence masks my complicity in the settler colonial project. This is also my truth, my reality. By positioning myself as innocent, I know I am disconnecting from my responsibility for Indigenous justice and undermining my own struggle (Davis et al., 2017). This is the everyday contradiction I wrestle with (Chatterjee, 2018a). Until I puncture my innocence, my silence will continue to perpetuate injustice even as I struggle to end it.

After years of reflecting, I find that my position within the Indigenous/Settler binary is politically illusive and intellectually restrictive. I now realize that this binary tension between immigrant and Indigenous communities is integral to settler colonial nationalism (Chatterjee, 2018a, 2018b; Murad, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2013). It is designed to keep me away from Indigenous struggles and prevent solidarity. I need to

acknowledge the depth of my embodied colonialism. For example, I often teach students how to work with “hard to reach” ethnic communities without questioning the concept of “hard to reach” and how it signifies colonial concepts of less civilized or non-developed countries or communities. My embodied colonization is much deeper and broader than I can imagine (Rifkin, 2013). It is as much local as it is global, and it sets me apart from the Indigenous peoples of my homeland too.

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I remember growing up in Morocco. My homeland thinks of itself in many ways as African, Amazigh/Berber, Arab, European, Islamic, Maghrebian, Mediterranean, etc., but the rich diversity of its peoples is seen through a singular homogenizing colonial lens. Its history is colonial even long after independence and Morocco’s achievement of sovereignty. Colonial legacy continues in subtle but utterly devastating ways (Zakhir & O’Brien, 2017).

At school, my peers and I used to value Moroccan scholars who studied in France, and we saw those who didn’t as having a lower quality education. So, even long after French colonizers left, we continued to value their language and culture and frown upon our Indigenous languages and cultural values. I remember taking pride in speaking French and teasing those who weren’t fluent in it. To me, speaking French was an expression of social status; it was being civilized (Fanon, 1967; Zakhir & O’Brien, 2017). I didn’t even consider that neither of my parents spoke French!

Looking back now and reflecting on my indigeneity, I realize how being born in my homeland doesn’t automatically make me Indigenous there. Even in my homeland, colonial epistemic violence had already displaced me from my indigeneity and integrated me into the global colonial system (Wolfe, 2016). My movement out of my homeland continues the displacement of my indigeneity and ushers in new colonial reintegration through the colonial and neoliberal structuring that places white supremacy as the dominant global system (Wolfe, 2016). I am a displaced person even in my own birthplace, a colonizer even as Indigenous. I realize how the human rights framework, which Indigenous peoples of my homeland claimed to fight for national self-determination, is itself a mechanism of incorporating nations into global colonial hierarchy of economic, social, and political power. As Tascón and Ife (2008) argue, it is a mechanism of maintaining white supremacy and trapping everyone else in a hierarchy of subordinate positions.

Migrating to North America, I bring these subtle embodiments of colonization. The colonizer’s language follows me into my social work practice (Elkchirid, 2012). In my cross-cultural work with clients from North African countries, we must speak French to overcome the differences in our local dialects. At the same time, enacting my embodied colonizer through speaking French aligns me with the bilingual Canadian state and sets me

apart from the Indigenous peoples of this land yet again. The ugliest face of the colonial game is that it centers itself among marginalized groups and becomes the glue holding us together, as it also simultaneously centers itself between migrants and Indigenous peoples, binding us together through colonial relations. This separation of Indigenous people from immigrants and immigrants from other precariously positioned immigrants is a testament to the sheer materiality of global processes of displacement and dispossession perpetuating the settler colonial project (Chatterjee, 2018b; Wolfe, 2016).

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Moving forward, how do I engage my ethical responsibility towards the TRC (2015) call to action as a social work educator? Following others (Chatterjee, 2018b; Murad, 2011), I seek to move my teaching beyond simplistic notions that the barrier to reconciliation is ignorance and can be resolved through education. Instead, I engage colonial structures of separation to decolonize my pedagogy without reducing decolonization to a metaphor (see Tuck & Yang, 2012). I draw from across the colonizing structures of national boundaries to link global and local colonial practices. I teach how social work itself is a colonial project designed to keep down racialized populations within the hierarchies of global coloniality and white supremacy (Badwall, 2015). I resist how Eurocentric models of social work (mental health, elder care, child welfare) are implemented in Indigenous communities and non-Western countries. Indigenous knowledge transmission across generations was interrupted by colonialism and dismissed from curricula. I counter this systemic dismissal both by advocating for institutional decolonization and by including Indigenous content from Canada and from around the world to indigenize the courses I teach.

As a further personal responsibility for my own decolonization, I follow my African role models like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) to decolonize my mind. I take the risk of publishing my works in African journals. For dissemination of knowledge and career advancement, the aim is to publish in Western journals. While this gives more credibility and visibility to my work, I feel uneasy that it reinforces colonial structures and perpetuates the perceived notion of Western academic superiority. I have also started to unsettle my colonization by publishing my works in Arabic. This is a return to who I am, as suggested by Indigenous scholars (Absolon, 2011; Alfred, 2018; wa Thiong'o, 1986). It took me two decades to connect to my Moroccan roots and write articles in my mother tongue. Although I can easily write in English or French, writing in Arabic is my attempt to inspire future Moroccan generations to decolonize.

I choose Arabic because it is the only language I can truly call mine. However, I cannot escape the coloniality of it, as Arabic came to my homeland through the Arab conquest of Morocco. I cannot escape that Morocco's Arabization policy is a colonial nation-building project closely

related to broader pan-Arab nationalism (Daoudi, 2018; Loutfi, 2017). Although I embrace my local Arabic mother tongue to resist the global colonization of French, I cannot deny the local colonization of Arabization that marginalizes other Indigenous mother tongues, especially the mother tongue of Indigenous Berber/Amazigh (CMA, 2016). These are the silences I am starting to unravel at the depth of my disconnection from Indigeneity in Morocco, Canada, and beyond. These are the complexities of decolonization I wrestle with every day.

### **Anh's Story: Probing the Complexity of the Settler**

I was born in Vietnam and came to Canada at an early age. I don't consider myself Indigenous to Vietnam nor a Settler to Canada. I am one of the in-betweens that fall right through the cracks of the Indigenous/Settler binary. Unlike other racialized people, however, I don't fall on jagged concrete. I fall on the illusive comfort of the discursive cushion of the model minority, the Vietnamese Canadians. I am a "Vietnamese boat person," one of many internationally displaced persons who beat the odds and survived, "resilient exiles" who thrived and made it in Canada, "hard-working refugees" who turned adversity into opportunity – or so the discourse goes. This praise extracts me from my humanness, my flesh and bones, and reduces me to a discourse – a productive discourse that holds me up as an example of the good refugee. In the colonial order, there is a use for me, a subjugated belonging as a good refugee turned model minority. I could even be proof of the state's goodness and morality in refugee rescue.

Critical scholars (Bauder, 2008; Dauvergne, 2005; Hyndman, 2000; Nyers, 2006) argue that the refugee protection enterprise serves both material and discursive functions required to support Canada's humanitarian discourse as the land of refuge. This humanitarianism is a core facet of the Canadian imperial project at home and abroad. Domestic and international actions in refugee rescue and support – such as the ideological construction of desirable refugees (Krishnamurti, 2013; Madokoro, 2016; Mountz, 2011), Canada's proud role as a peacekeeping nation (Razack, 2004; Regan, 2010), and the prominence of liberal humanitarianism as a tenet of national identity (Tascón & Ife, 2008; Wayland, 1997) – operate to secure the hegemony of both white settler society within Canada and Canada's place as a global humanitarian leader. Humanitarianism abroad remains central to national identity which veils the state's continued oppression of Indigenous peoples and precariously situated migrants at home (Chatterjee, 2018a; Hyndman, 2003; Mountz, 2004; Sharma, 2006; Zine, 2009).

As a Vietnamese Canadian, I continue to be known through my "refugeeness" and Canada's continued national identity building project is active in sustaining this flattened subjectivity (Bauder, 2008; Ngo, 2016a,

2016b). For Canada to be a refugee haven, there must be authentic refugees to rescue and shelter. I see a troubling ugliness of global coloniality in which I am inescapably entangled. The term “Vietnamese boat people” still circulates to serve Canadian national and international identity. The concept was recently evoked and reiterated to bolster Canada’s identity as a safe and peaceful haven for refugees in the Syrian refugee crisis. In an incredible colonial fantasy of reversal (Hage, 2016; Ngo, 2016a), Canada becomes the liberator and rescuer, when in practice it is the persecutor and oppressor. Canada discursively emerges as the rescuer and the peacekeeper, thus erasing its intimate complicity in global warfare, specifically, in my case, the war in Vietnam (CBC, 1975; Price, 2011; Ziedenberg, 1995). This misrecognition is an orchestrated technology of the state to further isolate and invalidate the belonging of Indigenous peoples to this land.

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I grew up next to the largest First Nation reserve in Canada. I had classmates who are Indigenous. They received similar poor treatment to me: the neglect, the derisive attitudes, and the racism from teachers and peers alike. How did I not see my struggles in solidarity with theirs? The answer is not as straightforward as the question, and I am careful in drawing similarities here. My move to draw connections between my experiences of oppression and my sense of Indigenous peoples’ oppression is a move to innocence. I want to think we are more similar than different. But this need for sameness is dangerous. When I seek commonality through shared hardships, I make a move to innocence (Razack, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2012). I decontextualize Indigenous hardships from the web of colonial power relations that position me favorably in relation to them, thus concealing our complex positioning in relation to the state. Contrary to the oppression of my Indigenous classmates, in a convoluted way, my oppression seems to have a way out, a redemption. It instills the false hope that I could elude colonial oppression by enacting the model minority (Pon, 2000) and playing the grateful refugee (Nguyen, 2013, 2019).

Such operations of misrecognition by the state are purposeful technologies of colonial division and dispossession. Indeed, the system is set up to set us apart (American University of Beirut, 2013; Chatterjee, 2018a, 2018b; Coleman, 2016; Coulthard, 2007; SFU, 2017). The closer I came into belonging to the state as the good refugee, the further my Indigenous classmates were alienated from it. By flaunting the good, integrated, multicultural subject, I was allowing myself to be co-opted and sucked into the settler colonial system of dispossession whereas many Indigenous communities had to hide their origins and cultural practices, or be particularly targeted like my classmates if they dared to identify as Indigenous.

Indeed, the system is also arranged to set immigrants apart from other immigrants and refugees as well (Chatterjee, 2018a; Snelgrove et al., 2014).

As if to resist this separation, I feel the burning desire to draw similarities from across hardships here too. If my desire for sameness with Indigenous peoples feeds my complicity in colonial dispossession, my desire for sameness with all those I see as Settlers is no less harmful. There are many who reject the Settler label, a label particularly traumatic for the descendants of Africans who were brought to Turtle Island in shackles (King, 2014; Morgan, 2019; Thomas, 2019). Collapsing differences and lumping together all non-Indigenous communities as Settlers is as dangerous as separating them. Indeed, the complexities within the Settler category also complexify decolonization and the building of solidarity among the various struggles (Tuck, & Yang, 2012). However contradictory and messy, the need for solidarity among colonized communities locally and globally cannot be emphasized enough (SFU, 2017; Simpson et al., 2018; Snelgrove et al., 2014).

And so, I find myself complicit in this cacophony of local and global colonial material and discursive practices. My struggles have a discursive narrative globally, a colonial progress narrative that people from the “Third World” should expect hardships, but with Western education and hard work, they will eventually do well in Canada (Bauder, 2008). This is also the integration narrative of immigration and multiculturalism: that hardship is expected in being new to the host country, but it will get better.

My father worked long hours of hard physical labor at local warehouses producing toxic housing materials, and weekend jobs at nearby farms extracting ginseng from the land for international export, just to earn several dollars an hour. He engaged in activities that deplete and pollute the soil, air, and waters traditionally protected and cared for by Indigenous peoples of this land. I remember how my father fished in the local, now polluted river to feed us. By the time I was ten, I knew how to gut, descale, and cook fish. These are not knowledges I shared growing up; my yearning to belong among my friends did not allow it. This has been my silence, the ugly underbelly of “hard-working resilient refugees” who survive through their inescapable entanglement in Canada’s colonial appropriation of Indigenous land and its devastation of the environment. I feel like a walking contradiction. While the strong intergenerational mark of the grateful rescued refugee feels deeply inscribed in my body and subjectivity, the various struggles within me to shed this and other colonized subjectivities are equally strong. My challenge is to steer these wrestling colonial narratives toward various struggles for justice.

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In my social work teaching, I respond to the TRC call to action by working to multiply my points of reference, and seeking out the voices of marginalized communities to disrupt and contest the discursive power of state policies and

practices (Chen, 2010; Ngo, 2016a, 2016b). I remind students that Canada's immigration policy and system, its lauded multiculturalism and humanitarianism, are part and parcel of an imperial project of colonization and dominance. I show students that the model minority discourse is part of the broader policy of multiculturalism designed to create a maligned relation among peoples and communities. However, pointing out external colonial structures in my pedagogy and critique is one thing; unveiling my own internalized colonial structures is more difficult. I demonstrate that even in my zest to critique Canadian multiculturalism for subgrouping Indigenous communities as just another cultural group, I participate in maintaining colonial hierarchy by paying singular attention to the colonizer rather than multiplying my points of reference (Chen, 2010).

Now, where do I go with this troubling awareness? Moving forward, in response to the TRC (2015) call to action, I challenge myself to do the work of decolonizing myself and my work. When I catch myself critiquing the racialization of minority communities as if racialization does not affect Indigenous peoples, I stop right there and take responsibility for my exclusion. I make sure that we collectively learn how to build inclusion and solidarity without collapsing differences. Teaching by example, I invite learners to think through contemporary policies and practices, and how crucial the consideration of Indigenous treaty rights and relations is to our reflective process (Burke, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Walia, 2012).

I start decolonizing myself by returning to who I am, as Indigenous scholars suggest (Absolon, 2011; Alfred, 2018; wa Thiong'o, 1986). When I suppress my worldviews and my teachings from my ancestors, I allow and even expect the suppression of Indigenous worldviews and teachings. When I say, "I am OK with being treated this way, it's not as bad as how I was treated before somewhere else; it could be worse," I am complicit. By standing up and saying, "I am not OK with being treated this way and I am not OK with Indigenous peoples being treated this way," I'm standing up for justice. It is from this point that we, refugees, subjugated and subjugating guests, colonizers and colonized, can start our work.

### **Martha Kuwee's Story: Probing the Complexity of Indigeneity**

I came to Canada as a refugee, fleeing from political violence in my homeland, Ethiopia. Like my colleagues, I critically engage the colonial fantasy of reversal (Hage, 2016) through which Canada becomes the rescuer of refugees. Like many, I wrestle with being named a Settler (King, 2014; Morgan, 2019; Thomas, 2019). I too fall through the cracks of the Indigenous/Settler binary. I didn't even choose to settle here. I certainly didn't come looking for the land of milk and honey; I was violently thrown out of one. How can I be a Settler when I am myself brutalized by Ethiopia's violent settler colonial displacement?

Arriving in Canada in the aftermath of the Oka Crisis,<sup>1</sup> I saw another face of the colonial violence that threw me out of my homeland. I strongly identified with the struggle of Indigenous peoples here. Their struggle echoed my own Oromo people's anticolonial struggle for self-determination, a struggle for national liberation in which I was deeply enmeshed. With Oka, I saw my struggle against colonial violence starting all over again – in a different face on a different land. I was already at war with Canada's White settler colonial state. I see the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples around the world as a racializing global capitalist colonial project of land grabbing and resource extraction, now continuing through neoliberal restructuring of the world (Dominelli, 2010; Razack, 2004; Wolfe, 2006).

I'm not a Settler! I asserted. I am Indigenous, just not Indigenous to this land. And I joined the fray on the Indigenous side, to steer clear from the Settler pole of the binary as my "race to innocence" took the whole of me (Tuck & Yang, 2012). After all, reclaiming my indigeneity is something I paid a hefty price for. My indigeneity was not simply a question of birth; it was and still is an active political process of reconstructing Indigenous subjecthood. But my relationship with Indigenous peoples of Canada remains ambivalent at best if I continue to claim innocent indigeneity. To many of my Indigenous friends, I am a Settler on the land stolen from them by the colonial state. There is another place I belong to and call my homeland; they have only this one. That's the bottom line. I'm a Settler alas! But a different kind of Settler from, say, the wealthy, able-bodied, heterosexual White male colonialist Settler.

What remains invisible is that this troubling sense of belonging to bounded homelands and sovereign nation-states is a highly emotionally charged and deeply embodied modernist discursive practice of global coloniality (Chatterjee, 2018b; Mignolo, 2011; Wolfe, 2016). Much like other boundaries of difference making, national boundaries present as natural and get deeply embodied. Indeed, we enact and resist them everyday. I remember having a strong visceral reaction to how migrants were constructed as wanting inclusion *into* Canada as opposed to Indigenous peoples' wanting *out* (Monture-Angus, 1995). I want *out* too, I wanted to scream, *out* not only of Canada but *out* of the entire global family of nation-states! Indigenous sovereignty in Canada and elsewhere is couched in this framework of self-determination within the global family of nation-states, thus reproducing instead of subverting hierarchies of racialized global capitalism and colonialism. This ambivalence is why I simultaneously resist and embrace the

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<sup>1</sup> The Oka Crisis was a showdown between Indigenous people, the provincial police, and the Canadian army in the small town of Oka, Quebec, in the summer of 1990. It was a crisis over a land dispute that drew worldwide attention to Indigenous land rights. For details, see CBC digital archives at <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/topic/the-oka-crisis>.

notion of self-determination in my engagement with Indigenous peoples' struggles here and elsewhere.

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This ambivalence has its roots in my entanglement with global coloniality. I was only 17 and in my first year of university when I found Fanon's (1963, 1967) works. I was just 19 when I translated the *Communist Manifesto* into my Indigenous Oromo language. To the utter chagrin of my devout protestant parents, I embraced the social gospel and turned away from their Christian Gospel because I found it stigmatizes Indigenous peoples as heathen/pagan and their spiritual ceremonies as devil worship. Although Protestant Christianity offered Oromos some relief from the land grabbing dispossession of the Ethiopian settler-colonial state, it also had a devastating effect on their Indigenous religion and their entire way of life economically and politically, socially and psychologically, materially and spiritually.

Forging its own consolidation, the Ethiopian settler-colonial state pursued assimilationist policies assaulting Indigenous history, culture, and language. The civilizing mission of global coloniality is fiercely at work here. Although unique in its own context, the Ethiopian colonizing process of displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples echoes the political economy of land grabbing and Indigenous elimination in other settler colonial nation-states. Although there were no White Settlers, a racial hierarchy of colonial domination echoes other nation-states like Rwanda (Wolfe, 2006) where one ethnic group is instated at the apex of the colonial state for its religious and historical ties to the West (Sorenson, 1993). Indeed, global capitalism and colonialism are deeply implicated in the invention and consolidation of Ethiopia as a dependent colonial state (Holcomb & Ibssa, 1990). Ethiopia is an invention of European colonialism, an empire of struggles and contestations, and a prison house of many Indigenous nations.

As a fired-up young revolutionary, I embraced Marxism passionately. When Marxist globality was put to praxis in my locality, however, Indigeneity was viewed as backward and uncivilized. Alas! My coveted worldview came with its own tag of the civilizing mission. Fanon's passionate plea grabbed me as he urged anti-colonial strugglers not to seek salvation from the West (capitalism) or the East (socialism/communism), but to look deep into our own indigeneity (Absolon, 2011; Coulthard, 2007; Fanon, 1963, 1967; SFU, 2017). Here I see the complexity of Fanon's piercing insights. No, decolonization is not a metaphor; I agree with Tuck and Yang (2012). Decolonization must cut deep into the social, cultural, economic, political, psychological, emotional, material and spiritual realms. It must simultaneously be personal and political, local and global.

The parallel between Indigenous peoples' struggles for self-determination in Canada and Ethiopia and the response of the settler-colonial states is overwhelming. For every step forward there have been several steps back,

raising the question whether recognition and reconciliation are at all possible within the settler-colonial nation-state. As Coulthard (2007; SFU, 2017) ardently argues, recognition doled out by the Canadian state cannot lead to Indigenous self-determination because true recognition requires reciprocity but there is no reciprocity when the playing field is steeply inclined. In Ethiopia, despite going through rounds of revolutions and gaining some grounds in Indigenous self-determination, currently Indigenous folks are painfully experiencing the skewed power of the settler-colonial state. State machination to perpetually defer self-determination is pushing more and more Indigenous movements toward radical alternatives. Moderate spaces are increasingly shrinking, although some continue the fight from within the state (Absolon, 2011; Blackstock, 2017; TRC, 2005).

I see both perils and promises in recognition in the context of global hierarchies of nation-states and global Indigenous resistance. Racialized hierarchies of colonial systems perpetuate themselves by using both brute force and the subtle power of internalized racism and colonialism (Bakan & Dua, 2014; Coulthard, 2007; Fanon, 1963, 1967; SFU, 2017; Wolfe, 2006, 2016). To me, strategies that attend to both objective structural and subjective psychological layers of colonialism promise to inch towards the recognition of Indigenous self-determination. Like my colleague Anh, I particularly appreciate Fanon's advice to take our eyes off colonial powers and focus on nurturing anti-colonial solidarity among Indigenous struggles (Chen, 2010; Fanon, 1963).

The perils are many. One is the damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don't catch-22 like possibility of self-determination. Struggles within the state must reckon with skewed power of the colonial nation-state, and struggles outside the state must reckon with skewed power of the global family of nation-states. Can we imagine a different formation of Indigenous nationhood and sovereignty? Internalized colonialism is another peril where Indigenous people turn colonial violence inward in lateral violence at the expense of Indigenous solidarity. As a disillusioned revolutionary, I have learned to look for salvation within Indigenous grassroots. As a disillusioned Indigenous activist also, I have learned to question Indigenous purity and homogeneity even at the grassroots. In the end, I take comfort that recognition is not an event, but a process constantly negotiated in multiple ways.

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Picking up my ethical responsibility in response to the TRC (2015) call to action in my social work teaching, I seek to engage students at all levels and complexities of colonization, from the deeply personal and emotional to the broadly political and global. I am astonished by how little we know about the connection between global and local colonialities, by how effective colonization has been in masking and naturalizing its devastating dividing

practices as benevolence. Cutting through centuries of discursive materiality, sedimented in history and in each of our bodies, requires the hardest work of excavation, often accompanied by high emotionality, anger, shame, guilt, and distancing from the learning. No, decolonization is not a metaphor. It is complex, excruciatingly painful, deeply transformative and arduous work of excavating, unlearning, and relearning that is ongoing.

I am also astonished by how little we know about social work's own history of "helping" Indigenous nations, communities, families, and individuals. Social work is regarded as a highly esteemed helping profession and students seek training on how to help effectively and improve the lives of vulnerable groups and individuals. Puncturing the innocence of such highly regarded notion of helping and connecting it to its colonialist function is a huge challenge. How social work helping scooped Indigenous children from their families and cultures and herded them into residential schools is out of reach to many even when it is so obvious. Many do not connect the dots between the residential schools and the over representation of Indigenous people in child protection and prisons. How colonization here and around the world happened behind the smokescreen of 'helping' to civilize the savage for their own good is another hidden colonial silence we attempt to narrate in our classrooms. The embodied experiences we each bring to our classrooms are invaluable learning resources, and we begin with our bodies in the classroom to make visible the stories, narratives, histories and historicities we embody.

### **Closing Remarks**

In an act of self-decolonization, each of us has unsettled our Settler subjectivities in very personal ways that we hope social work students will find meaningful and beneficial. Beyond our divergent stories of homeland, trajectories to Canada, approaches to analysis, and strategies of responding to the TRC's call to action, here we conclude by weaving together three interrelated themes of our shared critique. We offer brief critical remarks on the human rights framework, the nation-state framework, and the coloniality of social work.

The human rights framework is important for us to critically engage primarily because the TRC's call to action is framed by human rights, grounded in the United Nations (2007) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and affirmed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2018) Policy on Engaging Indigenous Peoples. We focus on the human rights framework also because it is the only international legal instrument, and because our own profession of social work is deeply rooted in it (United Nations, 1994). However, as disillusioned scholars coming from communities that embraced human rights and waged anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles for self-determination

and sovereignty, we seek briefly to critically engage its glaring limitations. The notion of human rights is the product of the European Enlightenment project where the reference point for what is human is the White man. It is designed to create and maintain global coloniality and white supremacy (Tascón & Ife, 2008). Human rights served as a smokescreen behind which colonial violence and Indigenous genocide happened around the world.

The human rights framework is but an instrument of the broader nation-state framework of capitalist liberal modernist organization of the global space. It creates racialized hierarchical power relations of colonial capitalist system locally, nationally and internationally. As disillusioned scholars coming from backgrounds rooted in the anti-colonial struggles of our various communities, we are profoundly skeptical of Eurocentric frameworks. Therefore, we align ourselves with aspects of decolonial scholarship (e.g., Fanon, 1963; Mignolo, 2011) to promote epistemic disobedience and shift the geopolitics of knowing. From this angle, we see the nation-state framework as a difference making project designed to curb people's mobility, pigeonhole populations within bounded nation-states, and naturalize these structures. It carries out the heinous acts of simultaneous dispossession in our homelands and our precarious positioning in our adopted lands (Chatterjee, 2018a; Ngo, 2016a). Indeed, it creates and regulates our deepest desires for homeland and belonging. It is within this critique that we position the questions of land rights and Indigenous sovereignty as issues of justice, although we see the implications as subverting itself and reinforcing capitalist colonial nation-state structure.

Within Canada, the nation-state evolves from white settlement to settled whiteness where the racialization of both indigenous and migrant Settlers intensifies at the same time as these groups are pitted against each other. We need to interrogate Canada's multiculturalism to understand the ways in which we can disrupt colonial relations, divisions, and separations. We need to make visible Canada's ongoing violence against Indigenous peoples and racialized persons as a colonial continuity (Heron, 2007; Razack, 2004; Regan, 2010) which now folds groups, such as Vietnamese-Canadians, into its project of national and global hegemony. When the hegemonic processes that veil our understanding of ourselves in entanglement with Canada and with one another are interrogated, there may be space made for mutual understanding, empathy, and ultimately mobilization for change.

It is within this space of mobilizing for change that social work can redeem itself from being a regulatory arm of the settler colonial nation-state to opening paths into relational solidarity among racialized communities. Chen (2010) urges us (racialized, marginalized people) to multiply our points of references, our objects of desire. Our views are obscured when we do not see one another in our struggles – when our frames of reference and with it, our objects of desire, are only directed back at the colonizer. He argues we have consistently looked to the center of power – the colonizer – for recognition

and affirmation. Instead, we should be multiplying our gaze. Rather than looking up, we must be looking over and across at one another, for strength and affirmation. This is a decolonial act social work can facilitate. By multiplying our gaze, we also follow others (Amadahy & Lawrence, 2009; Kennedy-Kish & Carniol, 2017; Simpson et al., 2018; Walia, 2012, 2015; Wane et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015) in seeking decolonial collaborations between our various racialized communities and the Indigenous communities of this land.

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