

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *DE-COLONIZING JOURNEYS*

“De-colonizing Journeys: Confronting Colonialism Through Circle Work is a timely and deep work that centres the circle as a living, relational methodology for transformation, healing, and truth-telling. Through the practice of circle work, this collection models a way of learning that honours wholeness, bringing together mind, body, heart, and spirit. At the same time, this collection unsettles the hierarchies and linear logics of colonialism.”

The contributors remind us that decolonizing work is not only hard work, it is deep heart work and a lived, collective process that takes place in relationality. It reminds us that when difficult truths are confronted, we can move through our grief and vulnerability and emerge looking at new possibilities for transformation. This book offers readers an invitation and calls us to enter the circle with humility and care, to listen deeply, and to recognize that the work of decolonizing is ongoing, dynamic, and fundamentally relational.”

— SHEILA COTE-MEEK, author of *Colonized Classrooms: Racism, Trauma and Resistance in Post-Secondary Education*

“As I sat reading this book, engulfed in storywork, I had to stop and make Noya cookies (my family bakes ours). I rolled out the sweet and spicy dough on the table — the same table I sat at to participate in modules for the Centre for Indigegogy. I thought about how my children would be so excited to come home to the cookies. I sat down after the cookies came out of the oven with a cup of tea and a still-warm cookie, and it hit me like “Holy Shit! This is why we do the work we do!” These are personal stories that become the new political narrative. These are the awakenings from the colonial coma. This is the impact of real heart work. This is the start of repair for the next generation!”

— RUTH GREEN, co-author of *Unravelling Research: The Ethics and Politics of Research in the Social Sciences*

“I love stories where I feel like I’m in the circle, in the moments, and in the conversations. And this is one of those books. Just as entering the circle asks us to show up as our whole selves, there is a beautiful modelling of generosity and vulnerability in these pages offering us a glimpse of the kinds of questions, intentionality, and relationships needed to transform the futures we are living into.”

— GLADYS ROWE, founder of Indigenous Insights Collective

“De-colonizing Journeys is a generous offering that beautifully shares the transformative work of several people involved in the Centre for Indigegogy’s Decolonizing Education Certificate. By honouring Indigenous co-creative, embodied, and arts-based methodologies, the book opens up a sacred circle of dialogue that becomes a powerful act of relational decolonization and in turn disrupts Western academic paradigms. This book is a required reading for all educators and change makers genuinely interested in moving from theory to a holistic embodied practice.”

— CANDACE BRUNETTE-DEBASSIGE (Mushkego Cree), Laurentian University

“This book is a must-read for folks like me in the health sciences who want to “wake up from the colonial coma.” As a white settler scholar/educator/leader, I understand that my work is to advance social transformation through these healthcare roles, but how do I turn this intention into impact? What might this look and feel like? I’ve long been on the lookout for role models embodying the complex, beautiful, fraught, and freeing work of breaking colonial ties within health care and the health academy. I found them in this book.”

— STEPHANIE NIXON, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences, Queens' University

DE-COLONIZING JOURNEYS

Confronting Colonialism
through Circle Work

Edited by

**Giselle Dias, Julia Janes,
Kathy Absolon, Jessica Hutchison,
Jennifer Poole, and Carla Rice**



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INTRODUCTORY NOTES

A Note About Language

We editors had many rich, roving conversations about language in this collection. We, predictably and desirably, do not hold consensus in our approaches but we do share a respect for the power of words to harm and heal. We understand language ecologies as evolving, dynamic, relational, place/space and temporally specific, and always political, ethical, social, cultural, and spiritual. Language eradication and suppression are weapons of cultural genocide. Reclamation and revitalization of Indigenous languages are, therefore, crucial to resistance and resurgence. Throughout this book we lift up the various linguistic traditions of Indigenous authors as a commitment to our de-colonizing praxes.

Recognizing that language is a site of harm and accountability, we attune to the adverse impacts of white supremacist, racist, anti-Jewish, anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, fatmistic, classist, ableist, ageist, sanist, cis-heteropatriarchal, anthropocentric, and, knowing that the list is long and ever growing, other interlocking oppressive language. We commit to lessening the harms and hate of intersecting oppressive terminologies through all of the complexities and contestations. Alongside linguistic harm reduction is our commitment to story sovereignty, which is discussed in several chapters. In Part 2 of this book, the storyteller chapters, we lean into the sovereignty of the authors' voices and choices, acknowledging that all voices are both individual and social simultaneously, while suggesting but not imposing alternatives when possible.

We reject the imposition of standardized terminologies across a polyvocal text as a colonial move to sameness that threatens the diverse positionalities and place-ness of the twenty-plus authors. Inevitably, editors, authors, reviewers, and readers will identify where we could do better. We welcome that conversation and others this collection will inspire.

We anticipate that we will have erred and harms will emerge from the words (and images in the companion digital stories) in this book, and we are accountable. We also hope that there will be other words that amplify readers' experiences and activate decolonial conversations, movements, and futures.

A Note About the Companion Digital Stories and Documentary

De-colonizing Journeys is more than a book!

The book also invites readers to view a beautiful archive of intimate digital stories and a full-length documentary. The digital stories and documentary offer a multi-sensory entry point into how decolonizing looks, sounds, and feels. They are available through the QR code and URL below. Grab a cup of tea and enjoy!



<https://worldindifference.ca/projects/decolonizing-journeys/>

PART I

OPENING THE CIRCLE

Excerpt

ONE

THE BEGINNING BEFORE THE BEGINNING

by Kathy Absolon and Giselle Dias

Boozhoo! Greetings from my spirit to yours. My name is Kathy Absolon and I am Anishinaabekwe and a member of Flying Post First Nation Treaty 9 in Ontario. My Anishinaabe name is Minogiizhigokwe and translates to Shining Day Woman, The One That Brings Goodness and Beauty to the Day. My relationship with the Land has intimately informed my practice. De-colonization of my practice and social work education is informed by the Land and has been intentional over the last thirty-five years. As a mother and kokum I am most concerned with ensuring the future generations too understand that Land is life.

Aanii, my name is Giselle Dias. My Spirit Name is Niigaanii Zhaawshko Giizhigokwe (Leading Blue Sky Woman). I am Métis from the Red River (Hodgson, Fiddler, Davis, Pruden). My ancestors were boat makers, fur traders, language speakers, teachers, and surveyors. I often talk about how my ancestors travelled the globe (England, Ireland, India, Seychelles Islands/France) to ensure my presence at this time and place. I am both Indigenous and a settler. In my de-colonizing journey, I grapple with these parts of my identity and my responsibilities associated with them. Along the way, these teachings you will read have guided my way.

Holy Shit Moments

Have you ever had a holy shit moment in life that significantly altered your perceptions and changed how you see, feel, think, and act? And

have you ever been in learning spaces based on relationality, knowledge, and processes that transformed your way of being in the world? Holy shit moments are transformative moments where our unconscious ideas, values, and beliefs become conscious. There is an alignment in both experience and knowledge. These are moments where awareness, understanding, and thoughtful integration occur and then — BAM! — new knowledge lands in a way that forever changes how you see, feel, think, and are. Through our de-colonizing work, we have learned that openness to rethinking, unlearning, and relearning are key to these moments of awakening. This book contains stories of folks who sought out holy shit moments where knowledge, information, and relational ways of learning changed lives.

This book, this labour of love, occurred as a result of a multi-year re-research spanning eight years, rooted in the Centre for Indigegogy.¹ The De-colonizing Education Certificate (DEC) was designed to address colonial ignorance and illiteracy in social work education by bringing forward Indigenous people's truths and knowledges. I (Kathy) came up with eight two-day training modules in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action in 2015. Then, we invited two groups of fifteen people who completed the DEC to engage in circle work to create a three-to-five-minute digital story about their de-colonizing journeys, which we called the Decolonizing Journeys Project (DJs). Detailed information about our process is shared in Chapter 2.

We hyphenate *decolonizing* into *de-colonizing* to reflect the embodied process of detoxing and clearing out “the colonizing knowledge and practices we have ingested and adopted” (Absolon 2019, 9). The hyphen is intentional — it causes pause, invites reflection, and reminds us that colonization has seeped into our spirits, minds, bodies, and communities. De-colonizing is a lived, wholistic process that requires us to remove what is not ours and create space for what is. This practice calls us into

1 During the writing of this book, the Centre for Indigegogy closed its doors permanently. With fiscal cutbacks, the university not resourcing faculty positions, and the erosion of Indigenous programming through attrition, the Indigenous Field of Study needed to reprioritize its energy towards its Masters of Social Work program, which has been threatened with closure. See Aastha Shetty, “Wilfrid Laurier University’s Centre for Indigegogy has Permanently Closed,” *CBC News*, July 3, 2025. [cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/centre-for-indigegogy-laurier-closed-why-1.7575076](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/centre-for-indigegogy-laurier-closed-why-1.7575076).

relationship with ourselves, our communities, and Creation, asking us to unlearn the colonial teachings we've internalized and to relearn different ways of knowing and being. The hyphen, then, becomes more than a grammatical mark — it signals a moment of rupture, a breath, a shift, and a return.

Pre-colonization, Indigenous nations were self-governing with rich deep roots of wholistic knowledge and ways of life. We ought to begin with the history and background of colonization, and that would be a book in itself. We ought to also begin discussing ideologies that can lead us out of colonialism's oppressive makeup. We also ought to talk about the beauty and strength in Indigenous people's cultural histories that continue to exist in contemporary contexts. We will get to all of that, plus stories of people who have and are working on unpacking colonialism in their lives and professional practices.

We also ought to situate *De-colonizing Journeys* within the global context of genocidal projects, including the one we have collectively witnessed against the Palestinian people. There are many more genocides that we bear witness to, past and present, as the violence of settler colonialism is persistent and proliferates across temporal and geopolitical landscapes. Although colonialism globally and temporally shares common logics of extinction, eugenics, and extraction, each genocidal event is distinct to the specific place-based assemblages and assaults on humans, other kin, and Land. This edited collection is focused on the colonial genocide in the northern lands of Turtle Island, although some storytellers make connections to historic and contemporary genocides elsewhere. Circle work teaches us that everyone takes their place and shares from where their feet are. For this book, our feet are grounded in what is colonially known as canada.² As we reflect in the book's closing circle, when we dream of decolonial movements and futures, we envision global solidarities in ending colonial genocides everywhere.

The storytellers in our circle work are made up of a diverse group of Indigenous women/Two-Spirit folks, white settler women, and two white settler men. Our identities speak to our experiences as racialized Indigenous folks, white-passing Indigenous folks, queer, Two-Spirit,

2 Some authors in this edited collection have chosen a "lowercase politics" to challenge the continued colonial violence of the nation state.

cis-gendered, fat, neuro-spicy, and disabled folks. Our intention is not to create a pan-Indigenous experience; as many of you know, the processes and structures of colonization vary based on time, place, and the differing colonial tactics of European nations. For example, for Inuinnait, colonial genocide began in the last century, while other nations (i.e., Anishinaabe, Lenape) have been subjects of colonial violence and genocide for over five hundred years. The diversity of colonial tactics and timelines is reflected in the varied experiences of de-colonizing stories represented in this book. Each Indigenous storyteller shares their experience of colonization based on their own Nation, reflected in their personal stories. Settlers, too, are not monolithic in their diverse positionalities to Indigenous people and the Land, which may be layered with histories of slavery, violence, displacement, and genocide prior to arrival on Turtle Island and tempered by ongoing structures of oppression. While it is essential to attend to these complexities to disrupt the binary homogeneity implied by Indigenous and non-Indigenous, there remain core truths of colonial genocide that must be known, tended to, and reckoned with.

The Colonial Coma

Wake up! Wake up! Wake up from the colonial coma that numbs the spirit, dulls the senses, and disconnects us from truth, Land, and relationship. I (Kathy) first began using this language — colonial coma — to describe the unconsciousness people live in due to colonial education systems. Education systems have historically erased Indigenous truths, distorted histories, and produced generations of people, especially settlers, conditioned into denial, ignorance, and disconnection (Absolon 2019). But this coma is not accidental; it is the product of systemic colonial conditioning. It is also not permanent. We've seen what happens when people begin to stir, when a teaching lands in the heart, when a circle holds space for truth, when someone feels the weight of history and refuses to turn away. That's the moment the fog lifts. That's the beginning of waking up from the colonial coma.

As we engaged in the Decolonizing Journeys Project, one of the overarching questions we held was: How does Indigegogy disrupt epistemologies of ignorance? We wanted to explore how Indigenous-centred knowledge and circle work build consciousness within relationships committed to unpacking internalized colonialism. What emerged again and again in the circles were the patterns of unknowing;

how ignorance is not a gap in knowledge, but something cultivated and protected. As Sullivan and Tuana (2007) explain, epistemologies of ignorance are active processes; they are mechanisms that maintain colonial comfort, denial, and innocence. When settlers say things like “we didn’t know” or “we don’t know what to teach,” they are often drawing on dominant national narratives that position Canada as a place of fairness, peacekeeping, and justice (Battell Lowman and Barker 2015; Dion 2009; Regan 2010). These narratives make it hard for people to see the truth, let alone act on it. During our project, we saw how the combination of truthful knowledge, Indigenous perspectives, circle work, and relational accountability opened the door for insight, disruption, and action (Regan 2010; Tuck and Yang 2012; Wilson and Schellhammer 2021). These are those holy shit moments!

So, we offer this book as an invitation. To sit with these stories. To feel what they stir. To notice where resistance lives in your body. And if you begin to feel something shift, if the fog begins to lift, if you find yourself seeing differently, then we invite you to keep going. This is your moment to wake up from your colonial coma. And when you do, know that you are not alone — we are in this together.

In the Decolonizing Journeys Project, we set out to capture how people experienced de-colonizing. We wanted to understand what it meant to wake from a colonial coma and to witness the ways people were engaging in this waking — spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and in action. Early in the process, we realized we couldn’t reduce what we learned into neat themes or categories. We couldn’t extract and synthesize people’s stories into a tidy list of de-colonizing attributes without compromising the integrity of their truths. Each voice in this project, each moment shared in circle, mattered too much. So, we listened, we followed our Spirits and the Spirits of the stories. We honoured what came forward. And slowly, over time, we realized what we were creating was not just a re-search project or a digital archive — it was a book, a living story holding many stories.

Book Structure

This book begins by rooting the reader in the foundational philosophies, practices, and commitments that shaped the Decolonizing Journeys Project. In Part 1, Kathy Absolon and Giselle Dias trace the origins of the De-colonizing Education Certificate (DEC) and the Centre for

Indigegogy, both of which emerged as responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action and the persistent colonial ignorance in social work and education. These first three chapters introduce readers to Indigegogy, a term coined by Cree Elder Stan Wilson, which grounds education in relational, wholistic, Land-based, and spirit-centred ways of knowing (Absolon 2019; Absolon and Dias 2020; Hill and Wilkinson 2014; Wilson and Schellhammer 2021). These chapters illuminate how Indigegogy and circle work serve as sacred, pedagogical processes that invite vulnerability, reflexivity, and truth-telling. Through storywork, ceremony, and relational accountability, facilitators and participants learned to unpack internalized colonialism and to "wake up" to the personal and systemic dimensions of settler colonialism. In Chapter 4, Naty Tremblay, Hannah Fowlie, Calla Evans, and Carla Rice share how digital storywork is a deeply relational, affective, and embodied method for unsettling colonial logics and making space for truth. They share that digital stories challenge dominant discourse and engage in a decolonial methodology (Rice and Mündel 2018). Crucially, the storywork that emerged in DJs was relationally accountable to experiences of de-colonizing for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous storytellers. The Re•Vision team supported storytellers through their ability to build trust, honouring personalities and positionalities, as well as creating space for what Naty Tremblay and co-authors call "decolonial intimacy." This first section, Chapters 1–4, lays the spiritual and methodological groundwork for the stories that follow.

Part 2 is where a lot of the good stuff lives. Here, we introduce the Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in the DEC who courageously reflected on their own de-colonizing journeys. These chapters include stories that are personal, raw, and grounded in truth. They emerged through circle processes that foregrounded the digital storywork. You will find a link to the digital stories in Chapter 5. The digital stories and storyteller chapters together offer an interwoven, unique multi-media sensory engagement with storytellers' experiences and insights into de-colonizing. We invite you to watch the stories as you read people's accounts of creating them in Part 2. If you are a teacher, organizer, community leader, or otherwise an influencer, we encourage you to use the stories in your work, by assigning, sharing, and screening them as entry points to deepening understandings of de-colonizing journeys.

The first written stories come from Indigenous storytellers: Kathy Absolon, Giselle Dias, Jerri-Lynn Orr, Jacinta Shawanda, Shawno Binesek, Gae Ho Hwako Norma Jacobs, and Tim Leduc share their experiences of decolonial teaching, learning, reclaiming identity, language, culture, and connection with Creation. These are followed by the settler stories of Jessica Hutchison, Cheryl-Anne Cait, Shelley Rempel, Christine Mayor, Jaqueline Briggs, Katka Hrcic-Lipovic, Simone Weil Davis, Julia E. Janes, Jennifer Poole, and Ben Carniol, who are confronting their own complicity in colonial systems, sitting with discomfort, and taking up responsibility.

The DEC created a space where truths about colonization were shared plainly and factually, enabling non-Indigenous learners to understand Indigenous realities with more clarity and heart. Each storyteller in this section speaks from a distinct location, shaped by their histories, identities, and relationships. Together, these narratives affirm that de-colonization is not a one-size-fits-all formula; it is a dynamic, ongoing practice of waking, unlearning, and becoming and then starting over again. Readers are invited to witness these journeys and to consider where their own paths might begin or deepen.

In Part 3, we slow down. After the vulnerability and truth-telling of Part 2, we needed to return to circle, to breathe, and to reflect. Our last chapters bring us into collective meaning-making, not to summarize or conclude, but to honour what was shared and to deepen our learning. We begin with a chapter that reflects on how meaning was made across the span of the project through story, through Land, through dreamwork, and through conversation. Rooted in Indigenous storywork and guided by Kathy's dream, Chapter 22 reminds us that de-colonizing is not a linear path, but a series of stumps, pauses, and waypoints that ask us to return to ourselves and to one another. From there, Carla Rice, Susan Dion, and Hannah Fowlie draw on the concept of decolonial moodwork in Chapter 23 to explore how feeling, sensing, and being with one another across differences becomes a method of unsettling colonial logics and cultivating new relational possibilities. We close this section, and this book, by returning to the re-search circle, where we come together one last time to reflect on what we've learned, how we've changed, and what we are carrying forward. These chapters are not endings. They are offerings of gratitude, emotion, vision, and commitment. This is where we gather again around the fire to ask: What are you carrying forward?

What needs to be left behind? What seeds are being planted? Let these final pages be both a grounding and an opening.

So, make yourself a cup of tea, find a quiet place, and dip your toes into the sea of stories and knowledges presented herein. *De-colonizing Journeys* is a book rich in diversity, process, bravery, humility, transformation, and truth. It's a rare and honest account of intimate circle work and storytelling — of the transformative journeys that forever changed those who dared to unpack their internalized colonialism.