

SETTLER

IDENTITY AND COLONIALISM IN 21ST CENTURY CANADA

**Emma Battell Lowman
and Adam J. Barker**

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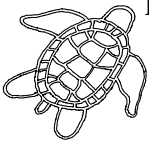
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Excerpt

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This book was primarily written on the lands of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Coast Salish peoples. It is our hope that it contributes in some small way towards decolonization and Indigenous resurgence in their territories and across Turtle Island.

Forever

by Janet Marie Rogers

as long as the sun shines upon the earth
as long as the water still flows
as long as the grass grows at a certain time each year
Forever
as long as Mother Earth is still in motion
still in motion, still in motion

It's hard work to maintain the middle row
one line makes I separating sides
they navigate a boat down a similar river
we paddle a canoe packing values
never touching, forever separate
maintaining the course
step by step laws of RESPECT
intended to protect sacred relationships

Words from good minds
Guswenta, Two Row Wampum
not treaty like it was told but a non-apology
canoe and Boat Ever Flowing Large Water River
buoyancy beyond democracy
boundaries not borders
the law was not authored in an angry house
of disputes but rather inspired from witness
to cause and effect of free will resulting in greed
and corruption and un-lawful things

Protection of our relationship to our mother
not better than the other but something necessary
to exercise caution
Careful!
Steady!
Carry on....
Your side
Our side
Maintaining the middle
is most difficult

x Settler

I is for Indian Affairs
I is for Indigenous
I is for Imperialism
I is for Identity
I is for Iroquois/Haudenosaunee
I is for Incident
I is for Initiation

A league of nations
corresponding by beads on a belt
and anyone thinking beads to be insignificant
should try getting them back from a museum
Crime Minister/Prime Minister
simultaneous colonization and decolonization
relational trade quasi-kin two sides kept equal
This is Women's work

Those mountains didn't build themselves

Forever
As long as the sun shines upon the earth
As long as the water still flows
As long as the grass grows at a certain time each year
Forever
as long as Mother Earth is still in motion
still in motion, still in motion

It's about balance and focus
it's about commitment and loyalty
hard things, put in place
speaking the language of agreement
being included from a distance
peace and respect and prosperity

Do NOT Cross that Line
we said
DO NOT CROSS THAT LINE

Disruption results in consequences
remember Kanenhstaton Caladonia
remember Gustafsen Lake
remember Ipperwash
remember Oka
remember Alcatraz and Eagle Bay
remember Wounded Knee
everyday is remembrance day
everyday

Ongwehonwe Original
a national fabric forming
blessing and protecting
something spiritual
not material but a difficult journey
staying the course better or worse
leaving nothing to debate
constitutional consensus overflowing with intelligence
Peacemaker would be proud

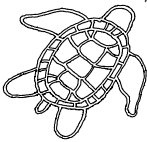
Forever
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still in motion, still in motion
Forever

Janet Marie Rogers

Victoria Poet Laureate 2012–2015

Janet is a Mohawk/Tuscarora writer from the Six Nations band in southern Ontario. She was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, and has been living on the traditional lands of the Coast Salish people (Victoria, British Columbia) since 1994. Janet works in the genres of poetry, spoken word performance poetry, video poetry and recorded poetry with music and script writing. Janet has four published poetry collections to date: *Splitting the Heart* (Ekstasis Editions, 2007), *Red Erotic* (Ojstah Publishing 2010), *Unearthed* (Leaf Press 2011), and her newest collection, *Peace in Duress*, released with Talonbooks in September 2014. Her poetry CDs *Firewater* (2009), *Got Your Back* (2012), and *6 Directions* (2013) all received nominations for Best Spoken Word Recording at the Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards, the Aboriginal Peoples Choice Music Awards and the Native American Music Awards. You can hear Janet on the radio as she hosts Native Waves Radio on CFUV FM and Tribal Clefs on CBC Radio One FM in Victoria B.C. Her radio documentaries “Bring Your Drum” (exploring fifty years of indigenous protest music) and “Resonating Reconciliation” won Best Radio at the imagineNATIVE Film and Media festival in 2011 and 2013 respectively. Ikkwenyes, or Dare to Do, is the name of the collective Mohawk poet Alex Jacobs and Janet created in 2011. Ikkwenyes won the Canada Council for the Arts Collaborative Exchange award 2012 and a Loft Literary Prize in 2013. Janet joined talents with Mohawk media artist Jackson Twobears in the Blood Collective, winners of a National Screen Institutes Aboriginal Documentary Residency for their media project NDNS on the Airwaves 2015.

WHY SAY SETTLER?



The words we use to name ourselves are important. How we conceive of ourselves collectively is a part of wider, more complicated discussions about who is included and who is excluded from our society. In Canada, we like to think of ourselves as having a fairly inclusive society; we pride ourselves on being open and accepting of difference. We talk about being polite and respectful and peace loving. And we lie by omission, because we do not talk about our country being built on the attempted destruction of many other nations. We do not talk about the questionable legal and political basis of our country, our history of profiting from invasion and dispossession. “Canadian,” a notoriously hard-to-pin-down concept, may not have a clear definition, but for some it refers to an invasive people, a nation that violently displaces others for its own wants and desires, a state that breaks treaties and uses police and starvation to clear the land. We need a name that can help us see ourselves for who we are, not just who we claim to be. For that we need a term that shifts the frame of reference away from our nation, our claimed territory, and onto our relationships with systems of power, land, and the peoples on whose territory our country exists.

As round-dance protests, teach-ins, and marches under the banner of Idle No More and the fast of Chief Theresa Spence galvanized activist communities across Canada in the winter of 2012–13, it became apparent that something had changed. As we watched internet broadcasts of teach-ins and speeches at rallies, and as friends and family sent questions about the ongoing protests, we heard more and more people using the term “settler” to refer to non-indigenous peoples, communities,

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states, and governments. Some were Indigenous people, referring to “settler states” or “would-be settler allies”; others were Canadians claiming the term as an identifier, baggage and all. Often, there were debates over the term. Some claimed the term was racist. Others rejected it as divisive. Some argued about whether “settler” was the “right” word, and turned to dictionary definitions for confirmation or clarification. However, this debated and debatable term, until then all but unknown and unused in Canada outside of a small circle of academics and activists, stuck.

Settler. This word voices relationships to structures and processes in Canada today, to the histories of our peoples on this land, to Indigenous peoples, and to our own day-to-day choices and actions. *Settler.* This word turns us toward uncomfortable realisations, difficult subjects, and potential complicity in systems of dispossession and violence. *Settler.* This word represents a tool, a way of understanding and choosing to act differently. A tool we can use to confront the fundamental problems and injustices in Canada today. *Settler.* It is analytical, personal, and uncomfortable. It can be an identity that we claim or deny, but that we inevitably live and embody. It is who we are, as a people, on these lands.

We are Settler Canadians. And this is a book about us.

Understanding and Avoidance

This book is an examination of the Settler identity in Canada, an identity shared by many but claimed by few. This Settler Canadian identity is entangled both historically and in the present with the process of settler colonization, the means through which our state and nation have wrested their land base from Indigenous peoples. Our construction of “Settler” as an identity mirrors the construction of “Indigenous” in contemporary terms: a broad collective of peoples with commonalities through particular connections to land and place. For Settler people, however, those connections are forged through violence and displacement of Indigenous communities and nations. We examine what it means to be a Settler person in Canada, how we constitute our national narratives and social structures, why Settler Canadians react as we do to Indigenous communities in resistance, and how we can begin finding more ethical, just ways of being together on the lands we call home.

Part of the reason that there has been an increase in attention to and use of the term “settler” is because of a curious double vision in Canada today. We stand at a crossroads where there is at least some willingness to admit that colonization happened, that it had devastating impacts on Indigenous nations and communities, and that a colonial legacy persists into the present in the form of socio-economic inequality, racism and discrimination, and political marginalization of Indigenous communities. However, colonialism continues: Indigenous nations are still losing

their land base, facing infringement from resource extraction and mining companies, property developers, and the pressures of urbanization. These nations struggle for self-determination against governments seemingly bound to the notion that Indigenous peoples should be constantly monitored and managed. And Indigenous peoples face constant racism and violence: from the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW),¹ to discrimination by social services, to incidents of brutality at the hands of police, Indigenous people confront the reality every single day that colonialism is far from a legacy. Even the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996 pointed out ways that Canadian society remains colonial — dishonouring treaties, systemically discriminating against Indigenous peoples, maintaining reserves as economically marginalized and politically disempowered, and not doing nearly enough to address the present-day effects of historical warfare, murder, and policies of assimilation — and little enough has changed in the past two decades to suggest that we have reached an era of post-colonial tranquillity.²

There is simultaneously a deep refusal to see colonization as occurring in the present, and blindness to the realities of how the distinct kind of colonialism operating in Canada today targets Indigenous peoples, and continues to define the lives of Canadians. Colonialism is commonly understood as an attempt to control territory or resources beyond the official boundaries of a state or empire. Colonies are founded in unsecured territories as a foothold for trade, military excursions, diplomatic contact, and to otherwise serve as an extension of the central power. However, as we shall discuss, in the Canadian context, there are no distant footholds because it is the country's land base itself that has been and continues to be the target of colonial power. Canada, as a nation and a state, is dependent on the land taken from Indigenous nations, land that those nations still contest, and colonialism is about the need to secure those lands at all costs. This positions Canada and Canadians directly at odds with Indigenous peoples, who have not just prior, but competing claims to the land. And despite what most Canadians would like to think, those claims are valid. Canada essentially has no legal grounds for its own sovereignty, which is to say, no reason in law as to why Canadian territory should be Canada's to govern.³ It should be no wonder that Indigenous claims to land — especially when asserted with force — cause great concern for both political leaders and many other Canadians: Indigenous protests, blockades, acts of civil disobedience, and community teach-ins must all be understood as acts of resistance against the ongoing efforts of Settler Canada, as a collective entity, to eliminate Indigenous peoples' claims to the land, and permanently settle the land question.

The colonial history and the ways the legacies of colonial institutions and practices continue to disadvantage Indigenous people are not uncontested or commonly understood in Canada today. With residential school abuse scandals making front-page news, and the government issuing apologies and funding a high-profile

Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is impossible to ignore the history and genocidal intent of the Indian Residential School system.⁴ Yet, some Canadians continue to argue that the harms experienced by Indigenous children were the fault of “a few bad apples,” not part of systemic abuse. Or they contend that the intent of the system (education) was good even if in reality it failed. It is equally impossible to ignore the striking poverty and lack of infrastructure in Indigenous communities, with the housing crisis of the Attawapiskat First Nation — a key motivator for Chief Theresa Spence’s fast and protest in 2012–3 — achieving a high profile in Canada and in international media, and communities like Shoal Lake 40 First Nation revealing a sixteen-year-long boil-water advisory. But Canadians often insist on seeing these crises as the fault of negligent band governments or inadequate economic development. Finally, even when Indigenous peoples’ concerns are acknowledged as legitimate, there is very little public impetus to act. This is how we can have major cities like Vancouver and Victoria, both with high urban Indigenous populations, publically acknowledging that they are on “unceded” Musqueam or Coast Salish lands, but refusing to do anything to support those nations in their struggles for land and life. Broadly, Canadian discourses on Indigenous peoples, rights, and concerns tend to fall into two camps that align roughly with Canadian politics more generally: the conservative, and the liberal and progressive.

Popular works by scholar and political advisor Tom Flanagan and media mogul Conrad Black have been formative to the conservative discourse on Indigenous peoples in Canada. Flanagan’s work, in particular *First Nations? Second Thoughts*, while dated, still holds a powerful sway over the conservative imagination. His ideas are predicated on the assertion that Indigenous cultures and societies before the arrival of Europeans were primitive, undeveloped, and lacking significant culture. According to Flanagan, colonization was essentially inevitable: Indigenous peoples formed small, backward tribes occupying vast spaces; they were bound to be replaced by more advanced, organized and numerous migrants. Black’s re-telling of the story of Canada’s past, *Rise to Greatness*, does not focus on Indigenous peoples at all. Rather, it reinforces Flanagan’s story by repeating old refrains of European explorers, pioneers, and fortune-seekers as “great men” hacking a new, civilized country out of a hostile and largely empty wilderness. Both of these positions are mirrored by attitudes within the Conservative government of Stephen Harper; Harper himself, at a meeting of the G20 in Pittsburgh in 2010, declared that Canada has “no history of colonialism.” Meanwhile, Governor General David Johnston’s Speech from the Throne that opened Parliament in October 2013 lauded the history of pioneers bravely venturing out into empty wilderness and the enduring spirit of adventure and hard work that this has instilled in Canada society. All of this reinforces a belief that colonization was an inevitable process, tied to the march of progress and civilization; that settlers and colonizers were doing unquestionably

good things by reshaping the land; and that even if colonial crimes were committed, they were both inevitable and in the past, and so do not merit redress.

The liberal and progressive discourse is somewhat different in that it tends to acknowledge Canada's colonial past, portrays Indigenous peoples as possessing sophisticated, vibrant societies and cultures, and recognizes that early settlers and Canadian society in general could not have become established without the aid of Indigenous peoples. Books like John Ralston Saul's *A Fair Country* tend to focus on the technological achievement and cultural complexity of Indigenous peoples, applauding the "contributions" that Indigenous people(s) have made to Canadian society. Saul calls Canada a "métis nation," not formed of conquest like the United States and not a distillation of European traditions, but rather a mix of Indigenous, European, and more recently, global cultures. Adrienne Clarkson's most recent book, *Belonging: The Paradox of Citizenship*, is an examination of the struggles of diverse communities to find belonging in Canada — linked to legal recognition of status — especially new immigrant communities that frequently experience racism, inequality, or face loss of identity and culture in joining a new society. Paralleling Black's book, Clarkson's subject is a Canadian society that focuses less on Indigenous peoples and more on the project of imagining a unified narrative of what it means — or could mean — to be Canadian. In this case, Clarkson identifies the negotiation of immigrant roots and Canadian "belonging" as a common experience that can bind Canadians together. Clarkson constructs this social inclusion as following from Indigenous ideas of welcoming newcomers, one of the many "gifts" of Indigenous peoples to Canadians. Such popular ideas are backed by the work of well-known liberal academics like Will Kymlicka, who ultimately argue for a kind of Canadian exceptionalism based on liberalism, pluralism, and multicultural values. In his work, Kymlicka constructs Indigenous people as a "minority nation" present at the founding of the Canadian state, and therefore deserving of some special rights and treatments in the name of cultural preservation, which are balanced by the universal nature of human rights and the Canadian Constitution.⁵ However, when push comes to shove he says that Indigenous nations have to reconcile to the reality of Canadian sovereignty; that is, to be subsumed within the Canadian state.

Some differences between these two broadly sketched positions are easy to spot. The Flanagan-Black-Harper discourse is rooted in assertions of primitive Indigenous under-development, the inevitability of European conquest, and the fiction that Indigenous lands were empty and therefore free to be claimed by newcomers. Overwhelming evidence and research has demonstrated that each of those ideas is both false and deeply racist, and they have all been rejected by international organizations like the United Nations. The conservative camp's belief that Canada was an unproblematic improvement over whatever Indigenous societies

existed requires that the massive depopulation accomplished through disease, warfare, starvation, and other tactics of removal be ignored in favour of narratives that say the lands that would become Canadian territory were empty, open, and simply waiting for occupation, settlement, and development. The conservative view demands that we ignore the complexity of Indigenous politics, economics, international relationships, kinship and social structures, technologies and traditional knowledges, and oral and written histories and cultures.

The liberal and progressive approach to Indigenous rights and issues, however, is based on an appreciation and recognition of just those features. Indigenous peoples are held up as key national contributors — part of what makes Canada such a distinct, successful, and special country. The liberal and progressive view sees the wrongs of the past, and is shamed by the stain on Canadian “honour.” It proposes that the harms suffered by Indigenous people and communities because of colonial pasts should be addressed by striving to fully include Indigenous communities in the benefits of citizenship in the multicultural state of Canada, perhaps as “citizens plus” or through economic development partnerships. Identifying Indigenous peoples as deserving of “recognition,” appreciation, and special rights, the Saul-Clarkson-Kymlicka position seems to confront the ignorance and racism of the conservative discourse.⁶

There is much dividing these two approaches but they are not without common ground. Both are concerned with understanding and improving Canadian society, and ensuring that in Canada, the playing field is even for Indigenous people and Canadians alike. To do so, they both rely on the same assumption, whether with hostility and arrogance, or with admiration and regret: Indigenous peoples pose a “problem” to Canada, one to be managed, accounted for, and ultimately dealt with so that Canadians can get on with the business of being Canadian.

Historically, one of the ways that Canada has been forged is through assertions of the right to control Indigenous people’s lives: making them wards of the state, attempting to “civilize” Indigenous individuals through enfranchisement and residential schools, and more recently, to teach economic self-sufficiency through the break-up of reserve land into fee simple private property. For Canada to exist as it does, the disciplining and control of Indigenous lives is required to open and preserve space for newcomer people. This has left a legacy of attempts to fix the “Indian problem,” as it was called for much of the twentieth century, but the Canadian gaze is so rarely turned back on ourselves to see that problems facing Indigenous communities originate with us.

There is a large and growing body of literature that reveals the ongoing and overwhelming impact of colonial ideologies at work in Canadian society. For example, Taiaiake Alfred argues that discourses of inclusion and multiculturalism in Canada are directed at Indigenous peoples with the express intent of separating them from

their traditional lands as sources of both physical and spiritual strength.⁷ This is part of larger strategies that have evolved over time, designed to deny self-governance to Indigenous nations, and often to deny basic freedoms to Indigenous people. When Indigenous people protest against colonial domination, as for example during the heights of Idle No More in the winter of 2012–2013, or many times before that, they are ignored — as Stephen Harper continually ignored the hunger strike of Chief Theresa Spence — while media, policy makers, and other activists lecture Indigenous protesters that they should stop angering average Canadians with their roadblocks and militant language. Indigenous protests — against environmental destruction, against police violence and mass imprisonment, against the murder or disappearance of thousands of women, against lack of basic services, against an unequal education system, systemic discrimination, and so many other ills — are constructed as the problem, taking the focus away from the systems and society that they are protesting *against*.⁸

Indigenous people are and have been vocal in the media, active in the streets, and engaged in government offices and around negotiating tables throughout Canada's history. These engagements are not about dredging up past conflict; they are often centred on continuing conflicts over land, governmental authority, economic disparities, and legal and treaty obligations. So why do Canadians insist on treating colonialism as a thing of the past? The denial and obfuscation of Canada's colonial present, and the unwillingness to even consider the involvement of everyday Canadians in creating or perpetuating harm against Indigenous peoples is a problem, but it is also a feature of the particular kind of colonialism at work in Canada today. It is in trying to come to grips with the historical legacy and present-day impacts of this form of colonialism — settler colonialism — that the use of “settler” as a term to refer to many non-Indigenous Canadians has gained traction.

The rise in use of the term “settler” can only be understood through the rise of Indigenous resurgence. By this, we refer to what Taiaiake Alfred has called a set of diverse movements:

dedicated to recasting the identity and image of Indigenous people in terms that are authentic and meaningful, to regenerating and organizing a radical political consciousness, to reoccupying land and gaining restitution, to protecting the natural environment, and to restoring the Nation-to-Nation relationship between Indigenous nations and Settlers.⁹

These movements reveal most clearly the pernicious colonial dynamics at work in Canada because they challenge illusions that Indigenous peoples are or have been “vanishing.”

As recently as the late twentieth century, the pronouncements of many early

anthropologists, ethnologists, and political authorities who confidently predicted that Indigenous peoples were destined to disappear, left behind by the modern world, rang true for many Canadians. The possibility of Indigenous peoples existing as distinct nations — which early settlers understood and which motivated the initial “peace and friendship” treaties between Indigenous and European nations — had disappeared from the imagination of most Canadians by the 1960s and ’70s. The 1969 “White Paper,” a statement of intent by the federal government to legally terminate financial and legal obligations to “Indians,” was a clear signal that Indigenous politics held little meaning or import for Canadian political leaders except as an obstacle to be cleared. Following this, the drive to ameliorate the rift between Anglo- and French Canadians — the “two solitudes” — dominated the political stage leading up to the 1982 patriation of the Constitution. Indigenous leaders had to fight to make their voices heard in the negotiations. To be sure, there were Canadians who were aware that Indigenous people existed, but they rarely saw them as *peoples*: that is, as nations with sovereignty and territory, self-determining communities, and with distinct, living cultures. Indigenous history was not generally taught in schools, Indigenous cultures and languages were viewed as anachronisms or “quaint,” and in the minds of most Canadians, “Indians” were exiled to the plains of the past. For most Canadians, then, the highly publicized events of 1990 came as a rude awakening.

The Oka “Crisis” or “Standoff” of 1990 — the label applied to the conflict between Mohawks attempting to defend a cemetery from development and provincial police and the Canadian military who were deployed to subdue them — was not nearly so surprising for Indigenous communities. Their struggles with Canadian people, police, and governments had never ended, so the violence of colonialism was ever-present, from police harassment to attacks by non-Indigenous Canadians. But the wider perception of Canada as a successful post-colonial society was badly shaken by the conflicts at Kahnawake and Kanesatake. The government and police response to the occupation of a small road in rural Québec and the blockade of the Mercier Bridge in Montréal, which eventually included the deployment of armoured vehicles and military helicopters against Mohawk community members, was a shambles. It was clear to everyone that no government officials expected that the Mohawks, or any Indigenous nation, could or would be able to disrupt the will of Canadian developers or defy the force of the police and military. But the Mohawks of Kanesatake *did* resist and they *did* defy the incursions into their lands. While Canadians were shocked by the events at Oka, it was just the most recent moment in over two centuries of Mohawk resistance to settler colonialism. Over the next decade, Oka ceased being seen as an isolated incident and instead became understood as among the most well-known of an increasingly powerful phenomena: Indigenous people standing up for nationhood, defying

colonial erasure, and demanding that Canada — and Canadians — account for their actions.¹⁰

The responses of Canadians to such actions have been striking. During the Oka Crisis, over five hundred “average” citizens lined up and pelted cars full of Mohawk community members with rocks — cars leaving the conflict site, many removing children and elders — resulting in the death of Mohawk elder Joe Armstrong, who was hit in the chest with a large rock and died of heart failure a week later. This is not an isolated incident, and as we will discuss in Chapter 2, it is important to see that when Indigenous people refuse to be marginalized and displaced on their own lands and take action in unavoidably visible ways, Canadians have responded with both anger and violence. This is in part a contest over sovereignty, and when Indigenous peoples contend for control of their own lands, it is seen as a threat to the very foundation of Canadian society.

The Idle No More movement, characterized by peaceful marches and flash-mob round dances, was dogged by acts of violence perpetuated by otherwise “average” Canadians. Two white men abducted, beat, brutalized, raped, and strangled an Anishinaabe woman in Thunder Bay, Ontario. During the attack, the men invoked racial slurs, telling the victim “You Indians don’t deserve treaty rights.” At a protest on a highway near Edmonton, a man drove a truck through a line of Idle No More demonstrators, deliberately endangering the lives of several people. And a video went viral on the internet showing a woman in London, Ontario, calmly walking out of an apartment building, up to an Idle No More convoy travelling slowly down an urban street, and attacking one of the cars with a hammer, before equally calmly turning and walking back inside.¹¹

The hostility shown by individual Canadians and in government responses to Indigenous people’s calls for justice and redress speaks to a society that sees being Indigenous as incommensurate with modern, Canadian nationhood. Events and moments when Indigenous peoples have insisted on protecting their lands, cultures, histories, and bodies against incursion, elimination, or theft are not the cause of these conflicts. Rather, it is the society that takes domination of Indigenous peoples for granted that is the root issue.

All across the continent, Indigenous peoples have a long history of welcoming newcomers. Indigenous peoples moved around their own territories and into each other’s long before European imperial colonization. These new relationships were not accidental or haphazard and ranged from individual adoptions into Indigenous nations, to the incorporation of whole societies into political confederacies.¹² In many situations, some of these “foreigners” stayed, settling and living either with or alongside the local Indigenous communities. Protocols for acceptance or engagement with outsiders were extended to the odd arrivals from Europe who began to appear in what would become Canada in the late sixteenth and early

seventeenth centuries. Dutch and English farmers in the Hudson River Valley, one of the most fertile places on Earth, could not figure out how to farm in such a strange, new environment. It was the Lenape and Mohawk peoples who showed them how and helped them survive. Later, when Irish individuals and families were expelled from British colonies along the Atlantic, the Cherokee (Tsalagi) nations took them in, adopting them into their families and political structures. Despite massive social pressures brought on by the devastation of the diseases that both preceded and accompanied the arrival of European newcomers, the history of these early encounters is marked by many instances of cooperation and compassion extending from Indigenous communities.¹³ Were that not the case, permanent settlements in North America would undoubtedly have taken much longer to establish and grow, and it is possible that the English, French, and Dutch would never have established a firm foothold.

What changed from an arrangement where Indigenous nations held the balance of power, and small settlements were reliant on multiple alliances just to sustain themselves? The first important shift in Canada took place between 1763 and 1813. Wary of the growing size, power, and independent attitude of settlers in the Thirteen Colonies, the British Crown issued a Royal Proclamation (1763) that set new terms for how colonists could legally interact with Indigenous nations. In an attempt to curb expansion of the colonies without Crown control, the Proclamation drew a line — one of the many imaginary colonial and imperial lines drawn to divide Turtle Island — that separated “New England” and “Indian Territory.” No colonist was allowed to occupy or purchase land in Indian Territory without the consent of the Crown, and the Crown would only purchase lands it deemed necessary to support imperial interests. The ambitions of colonial settlers increasingly did not correspond to those of the British Crown. The British Empire was not particularly interested in further westward expansion and, as such, the Royal Proclamation line became the *de facto* border of the American colonies.¹⁴ It squeezed the American colonies geographically, while needling secessionists politically and economically. Following American independence, major changes began to occur in settlement patterns and pace. The emergent American state, reluctant to raise taxes but in need of funds to build a navy, raise and equip an army, and build state infrastructure, turned to land sales. Ignoring the Proclamation, the American government made huge pre-emptive claims on whole territories, then sold them in pieces to land speculators. Settlers pushed westward, attracted by the relatively low cost of land.

In the Canadian colonies, settlement and expansion remained restrained by the British Crown, now even warier than before about uncontrolled growth of settlement colonies. By the early 1800s, in Upper Canada, settlement was also slowed by the economic monopolies of several merchant families, mostly of Scottish origin, who held tightly the reins of patronage and used bureaucratic and

economic clout to stifle the growth of potential rivals. The future city of Toronto remained a relatively small port; the Niagara peninsula was covered by scattered farms and homesteads; the largest power in the area remained the Haudenosaunee Confederacy community that had relocated to the Grand River, having been forced to abandon their homelands in New York State because of their alliance with the British against the Americans in the War of Secession. So it was that by 1812, the population of the American state — spurred by the availability of cheap land that prompted an immigration boom — was much larger than in the settlements on the north of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.¹⁵

When the United States attacked Britain's northern American colonies in 1812, it was assumed by many that between the small number of British troops defending the settlements, and the settlers themselves rising up against "Imperial tyranny" and throwing in with their American "brothers," the fighting would be short and the British driven out within weeks. The War of 1812 was not, as it turned out, either short or particularly decisive. The Americans took Detroit and shattered the military strength of the Shawnee Confederacy under Tecumseh, further opening the west for expansion and settlement. But they were unable to gain a foothold across the Niagara River, and unwilling to attempt another push northward to try and claim Montréal and the Québec settlements. Warriors from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy community on the Grand River, who fought alongside the British, terrified American troops and, despite small numbers, loomed large in many engagements. British troops under a variety of commanders often outmatched their American counterparts through superior training and morale, as the largely volunteer American units lacked the discipline to withstand bayonet charges and were often commanded by political hopefuls with poor military backgrounds, though by the end of the war they had become much more professional and disciplined. In the end, the result of the war was mainly a hardening and formalizing of borders that had already existed: the British north of the Great Lakes and the 49th parallel, Americans to the south.

This period, though, also marks the end of effective restraint upon settlement and the rapid rise of settler colonization as the predominant form of colonialism on the continent. The British commercial empire carried on, in the form of fur traders who remained among the few Europeans to regularly move through the northern reaches of the continent. But the setting of a boundary — the present-day Canada–U.S. border — limiting north- or southward expansion of the American and British, respectively, prompted increased and more energetic interest in expanding across the continent. America turned to an even more aggressive program of westward expansion. The "Indian Wars" followed, as even Indigenous nations that signed treaties were eventually encroached upon by wave after wave of settlers chasing the next boom commodity or looking to stake out their own plot of "free land."

The British, fearing that Americans might try and claim territories free of British settlements, began to relax restrictions on westward and northward settlement.

By the 1850s, this pattern of competitive settlement had taken on a life of its own. In the Pacific Northwest, an exemplary form of this drama played out. James Douglas, a Hudson's Bay Company man, founded the colony of Fort Victoria on what is today known as Vancouver Island. Not long afterwards, settlers were encouraged — in a massive change from British policy of the previous century — to simply claim fertile lands in the Cowichan Valley, just north of Fort Victoria, as their own. Predictably, the Cowichan objected, and their expulsion of several homesteaders prompted the Royal Navy to respond. They attacked a number of villages, threatened violence and even hanged local Indigenous men after show trials.¹⁶ Then, gold was discovered in the interior: huge numbers of American miners, bouncing from one gold rush to the next, flooded north of the 49th parallel, warring with the Nlaka7kápmx and other local Indigenous nations, and — worst of all for the British — forming their own camp counsels, which acted as *ad hoc* governments. In a move calculated to pre-empt potential American claims to lands occupied by increasing numbers of American miners, the Crown simply laid claim to the entirety of what is today mainland British Columbia, declaring it a colony in 1858. The Crown made no pretence of acquiring these lands legally — no treaties were signed or even pursued — but simply annexed a swath of land bigger than most European states.

This brought an end to what vestiges of respect remained in the British Crown for Indigenous tenure on the land. Far from the policy of 1763 that actively restrained settlement, the Crown now undertook a series of “treaties” called the Numbered Treaties — approached by the colonial governments and negotiators as land-purchase agreements — designed to provide certainty of title for mass settlement. The burgeoning Canadian government began openly targeting Indigenous peoples for posing a threat to settlement and sovereignty now that they were no longer needed to maintain a balance of power. Among the earliest policies of the Dominion of Canada were the starvation and forced confinement of Indigenous peoples across the prairies, the military invasion of Indigenous communities beginning with the Red River Métis, who were attacked by the Northwest Mounted Police, and the increasing confinement of Indigenous communities on “reserve land.” Larger tracts of land claimed by Indigenous communities — such as the Haldimand Grant to the Confederacy of the Grand River — were sold off piecemeal. The government partnered with churches to encourage the spread of residential schools, designed to eliminate Indigenous languages and cultures and facilitate the assimilation of Indigenous individuals into the developing Canadian nation state. They became a key mechanism in settler colonial dispossession in that they served as factories for “disappearing” Indigenous peoples from the land. Many administrators and

teachers are known to have used their positions of almost unquestioned power over the students to abuse and degrade them, preying on the lack of parental oversight within a system that saw Indigenous students as less than human. Many schools “disciplined” students for the most banal infractions or perceived misconduct with severe beatings, starvation, isolation, and forced labour. Meanwhile, reserve communities were put under increasing surveillance by government agents (known as “Indian Agents”), and Indigenous people living off-reserve were increasingly criminalized. Violent race-based attacks by members of settler communities became more common and less punished. Disease and malnutrition wracked Indigenous communities, forcing even further break-up and dispersal of social structures and increasing dependence on a hostile government.¹⁷ By the beginning of the twentieth century, the last of the “numbered treaties” were being signed, formalizing what was already reality in the minds of many: virtually all land north of the Rio Grande was claimed by either the United States of America or the Dominion of Canada.

The contemporary conflicts between Canadian society and Indigenous peoples that we have mentioned are evidence that the process of land theft and Indigenous dispossession has not ended yet. This is where we depart from the conservative or liberal positions on Indigenous peoples: there is no “Indian problem” in Canada, and in fact there has never been one. In asserting the need to discuss and understand who and what Canadians really are, instead we have a *Settler problem*, and that problem is woven into the very fabric of Canadian society, culture, and everyday life.

Introducing the Settler Identity

Identities are complex, shifting, and multiple. To speak of identity is to speak of the point at which we make assumptions and pre-cognitive decisions. It is to speak of the part of our selves where the individual meets society and says “I belong here,” while internalizing important lessons for *how* to belong. Identities are deeply rooted, but also potential sites of challenge. An identity that is obscured or ignored now can also be centralized and acted on in the future. Because identities are shifting and multiple, we believe it is important to interrogate some of the common ways the Settler identity¹⁸ functions in order to very intentionally try to shift how we think about ourselves and our relationships with the wider world. We use identity to refer to how people recognize other members of shared groups, how people distinguish differences in perceived “Others,” and how these complex belongings are expressed by individuals and groups in particular ways of living, discourses and narratives, and political relationships. In academic literature, it is perhaps more common to discuss settler “subjectivities” in Canada: that is, the way that people think and act as settlers in relationship with a pre-existing settler colonial society. We prefer to position our work with respect to Settler identities to foreground issues of agency,

responsibility, and accountability with respect to Indigenous nations that is in part pursued through how we identify. Further, this parallels important work on “Indigenous” as a lived and embodied identity, which has inspired much of this work. We also encourage people to identify with and as Settler people as part of a process of transformative change. We want to focus on identity as something lived and embodied, as something that can be mobilized to shape everything from states to systems of capital, for better or for worse.

Internationally, Indigenous identity (collective and individual) has gained traction as a way of strategically articulating commonalities between a vast number of peoples and nations whose cultural, geographical, and historical differences might seem to defy collective terms. Especially with the rise of international forums, such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, communities that identify and are identified as Indigenous have recognized common features that form the core of a broad group identification. Deep relational attachments to particular places, ecological knowledge and environmental technologies, and territorial politics that do not form state structures are among the key articulated features of Indigenous identity. Mobilization around Indigenous identity has proven useful in the international arena in providing a forum for many stateless peoples to help communities with common challenges and struggles come together in collective action, and in generating a critical mass, making Indigenous challenges to contemporary nation states that much harder to ignore.¹⁹

In Canada, identifying as Indigenous is often a rejection of the right of the government or others to define and limit who counts as “Aboriginal” — that is, who is officially “recognized” as an Indian, Métis, or Inuit by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. In contrast to these practices of official identification and recognition within the state, Indigenous identity is based on the experience of struggling to live an “oppositional, place-based existence.” We discuss place in much greater detail in Chapter 3, but it is important to emphasize here that being Indigenous means being “oppositional” to colonization. Indigenous peoples are extremely diverse, comprising many nations and cultural traditions. Identifying as Indigenous does not replace an identification with a specific nation or community, but is rather a deliberate way of emphasizing commonalities between different peoples and the much greater differences with Canada and other colonizing societies.

We need a parallel conversation around who the “we” is who is colonizing. There are terms that have been used as stand-ins — more or less accurate — for colonizers in this context. “White,” “newcomer,” “non-Aboriginal,” “non-indigenous,” or simply “Canadian.” If we try these on, some are uncomfortable and the fit is poor. Some are too comfortable, and tell us little we do not already know. We are not homogeneously “white,” many of our families have been on the lands called Canada

for generations so we are not “new,” and describing us by what we are *not* says little about what we *are*.

Throughout this book, our terms of choice and analysis are “Settler Canadians” and “Settler people.” It might be surprising to some to see Settler — with a capital “S” — deployed in this way. Like Indigenous, we are using Settler as an identity that connects a group of people with common practices, a group to which people have affinity, and can belong either through individual identification or recognition by the group (or some combination). The first person either of us ever heard use the word “settler” in a personal, present-day sense was historian Paulette Regan. In 2005, when we heard Paulette refer to herself as a settler person, the term resonated. This sparked us to rethink how we understood colonization in Canada. Given conclusive evidence that colonization had not ended, logically, colonizers persisted. If colonization had changed form, then maybe what a colonizer looked like was different now, too. If Canada remained a nation in the act of colonizing, then we ourselves were implicated. This book is an attempt to articulate our efforts to understand ourselves as Settler Canadians, as colonizers, and as people with deep moral and ethical responsibilities to change our relationships to the lands that we call home.

We develop the Settler identity as situated, process-based, and pervasive in Canada but also in the United States, Australia, and other settler societies worldwide. Our focus is, then, on the community to which we most closely belong, that being Settler people whose identities intersect with Canadian national and state boundaries. When we say that the Settler identity is situated, we mean that Settler identity is based on location-specific relationships to the lands we occupy and in relation to Indigenous peoples. Settler people, as we shall discuss, live on lands that have a pre-existing and undisputable claim upon them. When we say that the Settler identity is process-based, we acknowledge that Settler people do not strictly identify with one codifiable set of cultural practices, political or economic institutions, embodied expressions, or even particular languages or religions. Rather, Settler people come to identify through ways of doing things — particular processes — that bind them to the lands on which they intend to stay, ways whose expression changes over time while maintaining the same assumptions and end goals. As we will show in Chapter 2, this aspect of the Settler identity is rooted in the processes and practices of settler colonialism.

As we have already mentioned, there is significant resistance and reluctance to acknowledging Canada’s colonial present. In addition to being situated and process-based, the Settler identity is often disavowed. The specific type of colonialism at work in Canada that structures relationships between Indigenous peoples and others on these lands specifically seeks invisibility in order to achieve its end goals (see Chapter 2). As such, disavowal is a key part of the Settler identity and

marks Settler people as benefitting from the dispossession and destruction of Indigenous peoples while at the same time vehemently denying complicity in the events and processes that make that happen. In this, Settler identity operates differently to Indigenous identity. Indigenous identity has been the subject of struggle for many years to articulate an empowering identity against attempts to eliminate Indigenous practices, communities, and people. Settler identity, rather, is denied even as people attach themselves to the processes of becoming and being Settler.

We build on Paulette Regan's use of the term in order to construct Settler as an identity that, when claimed, fore-grounded, and interrogated, can bring to light the effects of the relationships that Canadians forge with the territories on which we live and the Indigenous peoples who hold prior and continuing claims to (and relationships with) those lands. Settler Canadian identity, as we will show, is reliant on the ongoing exercise of colonial power to provide attachment to and legitimacy on the land; however, we also argue that while most Settler people in Canada participate in colonial domination, their involvement is not guaranteed. At least theoretically, there are many different ways to be a Settler. Those various ways of being are often foreclosed by powerful structures and systems, whether officially recognized powers of the capitalist state or more diffuse structures like whiteness and individualism.

To be sure, while we focus on identity in this book, we do not expect (or believe it is possible for) any individual Settler Canadian to successfully transcend these structures on their own.²⁰ Rather, individual choices and efforts building to collective action are required to create change. All the same, systems and structures should never be abstracted from society. All of these systems and structures are occupied and operated by people, and they function because of many people operating in concert, agreeing actively or passively on certain principles (such as who owns the land and as such who has the right to make decisions over what kind of society should exist on the land). No one — including us — can simply step outside of these structures and systems, but we can begin to become aware of our own surroundings, our own complicity, and to make choices about how and why we will struggle against them (or not).

We position Indigenous and Settler as identities “always in relationship.” We articulate this relationship through a concept philosopher Anne Waters has drawn from Indigenous linguistic traditions. Indigenous languages often define concepts and meanings by establishing relationships and relationality across difference. Waters draws from these linguistic traditions to create a conceptual framework for how we can understand entities in relationship through “non-discrete, non-binary dualism.”²¹ Indigenous and Settler, as identities, function in this relational way. What this means is that Indigenous and Settler identities exist in tension between each other, even as these identities interpenetrate each other, and with other identities

that cannot be accounted for within the Indigenous-Settler construct. The groups are non-discrete in the sense that they overlap with each other and there are many people caught between Settler and Indigenous identities, and therefore subject to conflicting social treatment based on how they are subjectively perceived and/or claimed by other Settler or Indigenous people(s). They are also non-binary in a number of ways. First and most obvious, is the existence of people living on the lands of Indigenous nations, but not doing so as settler colonizers or in a way recognisable to the Settler identity, and most importantly, not in opposition to indigeneity. In practice, this is often similar to the “heretical binarism” deployed by Patrick Wolfe, or the intractable “Indigenous-colonizer” dichotomy of scholars of classical colonialism such as Franz Fanon and Albert Memmi, but with a greater degree of flexibility and nuance.²² As we discuss throughout the book, Indigenous and Settler peoples are not defined by their distances and differences, but rather their relationships to each other and to the land.

Unpacking the meaning of this concept is worthwhile because it helps to confront the possibility of essentialism or the establishment of “Manichean duals” or “master-slave dialectics,”²³ or in other words, the assertion that identity groups are bounded by rigid behavioural or familial structures, never to meet or interact. In point of fact, “Indigenous people” is an extremely heterogeneous and diverse group, as is “Settler people.” There are many people who have a foot in both worlds, and more besides, because Indigenous and Settler identity do not account for all peoples living in Canada, nor the massive diversity of peoples around the world whom Indigenous or Settler peoples might encounter, interact with, and relate to. So, we use this philosophical construct to provide a glimpse of the multiple possible alternatives and variations.

By positioning Indigenous and Settler identities as non-discrete, we are first acknowledging that Indigenous and Settler peoples interact constantly with each other, and that all cultures and communities within those broad identity categories are impacted by the actions of the others. For example, consider the Métis people of the Red River: while undoubtedly an Indigenous people, their heritage includes both Settlers and colonial sojourners, traders, and explorers.²⁴ Métis languages draw from several different languages, but are much more than simply bits and pieces of the others. The Métis, in their history and development as peoples, cultures, and communities, are a demonstration of how Settler and Indigenous intercourse and interaction can create change without assimilation or one identity disappearing into the other. This is part of what it means to position these identities as non-discrete: they overlap in frequent and often surprising ways.

To say that Indigenous and Settler identities are non-binary is to take into account the complexity around these identities. Canada does not exist as a container, with Indigenous and Settler Canadians within, and the world without. There

are many people who do not quite fit either category. Consider refugees, driven to Canada by forces beyond their control, who would return to a distant home if only they could, who are often marginalized by or living precariously within Canadian society. These recent arrivals are certainly not Indigenous, but are they Settler? What about the many visitors who come to Canada, for work, for recreation, for family or personal reasons? What of enslaved people and indentured workers brought to Canada but prevented from accessing education and having the right to safe working conditions, and not allowed to choose to remain or not? Certainly these peoples are not Settlers, though their descendants might be. All of this is to say that in non-binary relationships Indigenous and Settler identities are not exclusive or exclusionary. There remains a tremendous and changing variety of other peoples who will pass through these lands and come into contact with Indigenous and Settler communities, and all of them relate to both Indigenous and Settler peoples in multiple and dynamic ways.

So what then does it mean to position Indigenous and Settler as dualistic? Overwhelmingly these two identities coalesce around an observable, general, and crucial difference: relationship to the land. Often, these relationships to the land have brought Indigenous and Settler peoples into conflict — a conflict that has played out as colonization, dispossession, and domination of Indigenous peoples by Settler colonizers — but we remain hopeful that there are other possibilities, other ways that this flexible and malleable duality can play out. We return to this theme in Chapter 3.

Let us also be clear that “Settler” should not be assumed to be pejorative or an insult. When we say Settler we recognize that being a Settler Canadian in the present is inherently bound up with the settler colonization of these lands. However, we also recognize that settler colonialism is collective in nature. We identify ourselves as Settler Canadians and understand that, in so doing, we are declaring that we benefit from and are complicit with settler colonialism and therefore are responsible, as individuals and in collectives, for its continued functioning. Though it would be unproductive and incorrect to hold any individual Settler Canadians *solely* responsible, recognizing that settler colonialism is a shared burden means that it is only through collective action that we can make the choice to be colonizers, or to be something else. This choice can only be made if we are honest about who we are, collectively, and how we mutually contribute to each other’s sense of belonging on the land.

So if the Settler identity is not derogatory, what is it? Consider Settler an *interrogative* identity. When people identify as Indigenous, they identify with entire histories and creation stories of how they belong on certain lands, with cultural, spiritual, and political practices that are embodied in those stories that connect them to those lands. When we say we are Settler people, we are recognizing that

our stories are different, and when we ask others to identify as Settler people, we are likewise asking them: How do you come to be here? How do you claim belonging here? And, most importantly, can we belong in a way that doesn't reproduce colonial dispossession and harm?

Our hope is that, by addressing individual complicity and responsibility in our work, Settler people will come to see opportunities for making positive and decolonizing change. When colonialism and oppression are understood only as powerful structures, it can be difficult to perceive how any one of us can make a difference, leading to apathy and cynical disengagement. There has been a noted tendency among some researchers to treat settler colonialism as inevitable, a trend we wish to avoid.²⁵ Instead, we hope to provoke and energize — we want people to understand that things are how they are only because we do not collectively organize to challenge and change them. We are inspired here by some of the lessons learned from studies of social movements, both their successes and failures, as well as the deeper considerations of what it means to be a successful social movement. As scholars Alex Khasnabish and Max Haiven have shown in their study of progressive and radical leftist organizing in Halifax, movements that aim to change society in broad and drastic ways rarely see their “goals” come to fruition as such.²⁶ This does not mean that they have failed, however. Often the relationships built through common struggle, the lessons learned from confrontations with powerful structures of oppression, or the creative tactics generated on the fly or in the context of an energized and vibrant challenge to power that opens up space for the “radical imagination,” are all more valuable — and more realistic — successes than what activists envision might be possible.

On Being and Knowing: Notes on Ontology and Relationship

In conjunction with our reasons for focusing on identity rather than subjectivity, in this book we also take a different tack for approaching conflicts between Indigenous and Settler peoples. While we engage with economic inequality, structural racism, state violence, and other material effects of settler colonialism, and their effects on the conditions and aspirations of both Indigenous and Settler communities, there is another preoccupation in this book. We take up the metaphysical or ontological questions of what it means to be Settler because, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos has argued, “social injustice is grounded in cognitive injustice.” How we think about the world and our place in it must change as part of our efforts to change our material conditions and cultural conditioning.

By “ontology” we refer to ways of being and knowing in the world. It has long been argued, especially by Indigenous scholars, that Indigenous and Western (newcomer or Settler) peoples have vastly different ontological frameworks and philosophies. As geographer Sarah Hunt has noted, these ontological differences

“are difficult to explain yet that is where their power lies — in the spaces between intellectual and lived expressions of Indigeneity.” As such, Hunt proposes, “these gaps in regimes of knowledge provide sites where ontological shifts are possible.”²⁷ We must grapple with things that we do not understand — perhaps things that we cannot understand — as part of challenging taken-for-granted colonial “truths.”

This is more than an effort to understand or respect difference. Rather, Indigenous peoples’ relationships to land as alive (evident in what Daniel Wildcat and Vine Deloria, Jr. have called “personality of place”²⁸) need to be taken seriously, and the political, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual aspects of those relationships all matter. We cannot start from the material and work outwards or we risk reading our own biases into Indigenous ways of being. For centuries, Indigenous people have had to learn to understand how Settler people think and know the world as a matter of survival. In order to find new ways of living together respectfully on this land, Settler people need to take up the responsibility of learning about Indigenous ontologies. This means broad-based understandings of Indigenous worldviews, but also the understandings and worldviews of the specific peoples on whose lands Settlers live. This is how we can create respectful spaces of knowing, and as Settlers, learn how we might relate in non-dominating, non-colonial relationships.

Understanding the disjuncture between Indigenous and Settler worldviews is not easy. It is also not likely something that can happen alone. We continue to struggle with concepts and unpack ideas that challenge and change how we think after over a decade of work in this field as our primary preoccupation. Our work is informed by our experiences with and learning from Indigenous communities, and especially Indigenous scholars and academics who have made important inroads in challenging the innate colonial functions of universities and educational systems.²⁹ We have had the privilege of working with Indigenous academics in Haudenosaunee territories, especially around Six Nations Reserve in southern Ontario, and in Coast Salish territories on Vancouver Island. Our mentors have come from diverse traditions and backgrounds, from anthropologists to political scientists to historians, all under the broad umbrella of what is probably best described as critical Indigenous studies. We are heavily influenced by scholarship on Indigenous resurgence, especially as it has been articulated by Taiaiake Alfred, Jeff Corntassel, and Leanne Simpson, and before them, Vine Deloria, Jr., Patricia Monture, Leroy Little Bear, and many others. Some of these scholars are friends and teachers; others we know through their texts.³⁰ Certainly, their work is present in this book. We are also intellectually indebted to a wider community of Indigenous activists, practitioners, and community leaders who deserve respect and thanks for developing articulations of Indigenous thought alongside movements for social change. Our friends include former members of the West Coast Warriors, activists