

A Review of *Settler Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada*, by Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker

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In keeping with the theme of this special issue of power and identity in education, *Settler Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada* is a must-read, especially for Settler Canadians like me. In their book, Battell Lowman and Barker (2015) advocate that “active identification as a *Settler Canadian* can signal to others that we are ready and committed to honestly addressing settler colonialism in Canada” (p. 123). Though condensed to 123 pages in length, the book draws from a valuable list of works cited to challenge settler colonial normalizations such as relationships with the land and with Indigenous nations. In the end, the reader is encouraged to understand that “ethical and decolonial futures are possible,” especially through collective power to re-imagine the settlers we are and our relationships with all that surround us (p. 123).

Battell Lowman and Barker move the reader through six chapters to an understanding of Settler Canadian identity as an *interrogative* identity that can “make space...for thinking beyond this present colonial conflict, to a future defined by reciprocity, responsibility, and restitution” (p. 23). Chapter 1 reflects an understanding of identities as complex, shifting, multiple, lived and embodied, “as something that can be mobilized to shape everything from states to systems of capital, for better or for worse” (p. 14). With this understanding in mind, the authors recognize that, “the words we use to name ourselves are important” (p. 1). In introducing the reader to Settler Canadian identity (or Settler identity in Canada), terms such as newcomer, non-Aboriginal, non-Indigenous, White, Canadian, and ally are also discussed. The authors argue that “for Canada to exist as it does, the disciplining and control of Indigenous lives is required to open and preserve space for newcomer people” (p. 6) and that “Canada essentially has no legal grounds for its own sovereignty” (p. 3). The authors suggest that there is a refusal to recognize that colonization persists even in multicultural and inclusive approaches and that this refusal exemplifies a “*Settler problem*,” rather than an “Indian problem”^[1] in Canada (p. 13).

Chapter 2 explores three pillars of settler colonialism and the notion of colonization as “an ongoing ideology and practice” in Canada (p. 35). The authors argue that settler colonizers and Settler Canadians need not be synonymous terms if Settler Canadians can learn to work against, rather than be recruited to support, Canadian colonization by engaging in processes such as normalization, extraction, appropriation, racism, violence, and national mythologizing. Chapter 3 focuses on Settler versus Indigenous relationships with land and asks, “Are there ways for Settler people to ‘belong’ on Indigenous lands that are not reliant on settler colonialism?” (p. 63). In exploring this question, the authors turn to Indigenous onto-epistemological discussions and challenge the reader to learn understandings of Indigenous place-thought, reciprocity, sovereignty and treaty relationships. Chapter 4 acknowledges that Settler Canadian identity, “while strongly shaped by whiteness” is racially, politically, and economically diverse but also flexibly manifested in that contradictory or conflicting identity subsets, such as class, may form in response to various social practices (p. 70). In this chapter, Battell Lowman and Barker remind the reader that “settler colonialism structures all lives in Canada, not just Indigenous ones” and that it is necessary to re-imagine how life might be re-structured without it (p. 89). Chapter 5 draws from personal stories to discuss fears and “moves to comfort” that are often enacted

regularly by “good Canadians,” thereby maintaining Settler Canadians as settler colonizers (p. 99).

In the final chapter of the book, the authors remind the reader that it was not their intention to “prescribe a simplistic antidote to the fundamental problems in Canada today that arise from ongoing settler colonialism and its disavowal” nor was it to provide “a guide to being an ‘ally’” (p. 23). Rather, *Settler Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century in Canada* is a call to ally with Indigenous peoples through constant action such as that of decolonization. Here, decolonization is understood as “an intensely political transformative process” moving from awareness to responsibility “with the goal of regenerating Indigenous nationhood and place-relationships while dismantling structures of settler colonialism” (p. 111). In the end, I reflected on my reinforced understanding that if I were willing to identify as a Settler Canadian, then similarly I must be ready for the process of decolonization.

As a doctoral student studying the possibilities of decolonization, I have been working on disrupting my Euro-Western onto-epistemologies by learning through Indigenous knowledges so that I might thoughtfully and respectfully engage in complicated conversations and re-imaginings of mathematics education. As part of this learning process, I have begun to re-imagine a possible subjectivity as a *decolo(indige)nist* educator. I refer to decolonization first within the decolo(indige)nist term as a reminder of my primary focus on disrupting the dominant Euro-Western worldview through which I have been raised. For me, *Indigenism* (Amadahy & Lawrence, 2009) must remain within said term rather than placed first for multiple reasons including: (a) I am not an Indigenous person, and thus much Indigenous knowledge that I learn is not for me to share, and (b) I do not know an Indigenous language and I remain aware that language is key to understanding and fully living Indigenous knowledges. The action of placing Indigenist within this subjectivity term symbolizes my desire and ability to make space for Indigenous ways of knowing and being, even if this means replacing settler colonial ways.

In moving beyond the academy, I think that a grand question prompted by this book is whether I can think differently about my Canadian identity and power—whether I can be other than that of a settler colonizer with a controlling and exploitive relationship to land. With this question in mind, I recall an understanding that I learned from a grandmother I met at a National Treaty Meeting in October, 2015. She shared with me an understanding that we cannot actually *own* anything, especially the land, because it is not as though we can take it with us to our graves. With her understanding, I look up from writing this book review and out a window of my house to see the voles eating *my* grass and I realize that I don’t actually possess that grass. At one time, I would have killed those voles in order to maintain the manicured lawn. These days, I hesitate as I realize that I prefer to re-imagine other possibilities with respect to my relationships, possessions, and ownership. I am ready to identify as Settler Canadian—are you?

References

- Amadahy, Z., & Lawrence, B. (2009). Indigenous peoples and black people in Canada: Settlers or allies? In A. Kempf (Ed.), *Breaching the colonial contract: Anti-colonialism in the US and Canada* (pp.105-136). Dordrecht, NL: Springer
- Battell Lowman, E., & Barker, A. J. (2015). *Settler identity and colonialism in 21st century Canada*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.

Endnote

^[1] In considering Canadian conservative or liberal and progressive approaches “to Indigenous rights and issues,” the authors acknowledge that these governmental approaches assume that “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” (p. 6).