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**Book Review: *Racism, Colonialism, and Indigeneity in Canada: A Reader***

Edited by Martin J. Cannon and Lina Sunseri.  
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*Racism, Colonialism, and Indigeneity in Canada: A Reader* is, as the name suggests, an edited collection of 27 essays providing an overview of the present issues critical to Canadian indigenous studies. The collection is broken into nine parts, with each part containing three chapters. After each part the book provides references to additional readings, relevant websites, films, key terms, several discussion questions on the themes of the three chapters, and a number of activities. In this way, the text is very much set as a university learning resource, and possibly a secondary school educational tool, although most of the text would be too advanced for high-school students.

Part 1 “Theoretical Foundations” confirms my view that the discipline of indigenous studies in general has failed to define its theoretical underpinnings. Certainly, in a collection entitled “Racism, Colonialism and Indigeneity” some effort should have been made to theoretically coalesce what I consider (see below) the incompatible concepts of race and indigeneity. Whilst Taiaiake Alfred’s chapter in particular is engaging, none of the chapters provide the kind of historicity of the field needed to reveal its philosophical basis. Having said this, Marie Battiste and Sakej Henderson’s chapter on

Eurocentrism does highlight the reliance of the field since before and after Linda Smith’s 1999 *Decolonising Methodologies*, on the coloniser/colonised binary. That is, the chapter inadvertently demonstrates that indigeneity is often, in academic scholarship at least, defined allegorically via the tyranny of the coloniser. In contrast, Alfred’s chapter has some challenging notions for the field of indigenous studies, specifically the call to move beyond how indigenous peoples have constructed themselves within the colonised/coloniser binary, or as he puts it “...an abandonment of our rooted identities” (p. 7) and to think about decolonisation in terms of “transcendence” as opposed to “recovery”. In Chapter 3, Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua proffer that “people of colour are settlers too” (p. 22) and question why dominant antiracist scholarship typically excludes indigeneity from its analysis. Evidently such scholarship works within its own binary, and thus develops a valid disruption, yet I question its strategic importance and relevance to ‘theoretical underpinnings’.

Part 2 “Nation-Building and the Deeply Racialized Other” sets out to deconstruct the romantic, authenticating practices of neo-colonialism that make possible “a caricature of indigenous identities” (p. 30). As I discuss below, however, the nomenclature of the part (i.e., “the Deeply Racialized Other”) is problematic and born out in the fact that only Thomas King in a seemingly obligatory way actually discusses racism. Nonetheless, this is a strong part and should have been given the title of King’s chapter, “You’re not the Indian I had in mind” which speaks to a set of conditions that the colonial imagination is subject to, that are different to those of race. King’s chapter puts the early twentieth century photography of ‘authentic Indians’ by Edward Curtis to the sword, juxtaposed with satirical personal accounts of various interactions with people struck by King’s ‘un-Indianness’, leading to his own attempts at bona fide indigeneity in the 1970s, that is, “an Indian who has to dress up like an Indian in order to be recognized as an

Indian” (p. 39). With the same goal as King in mind, Deborah Doxtator provides an excellent overview of stereotypical ‘Indians’, clearly demonstrating that the imagined Indian was a necessary precursor to the colonial apparatus in order to secure the illusory morality of settler invasion. Lastly, in this part, Winona Stevenson, in similar sentiment to King and Doxtator, provides an overview of the imperial ideologies forced on indigenous women, where colonists were “[c]onfronted by women who were almost the exact counter-image of their own culture’s ideal” (p. 46).

Race, space and territoriality are the themes of Part 3, which contends that Canadian national identity has been largely forged by erasing historical and contemporary indigenous dispossession. In this part each chapter in its own way opposes such erasure and, as a consequence, disrupts the national imaginary. Chris Andersen and Claude Denis’s chapter on urban Native communities is important because it provides a uniquely critical analysis of the productive relationship between the colonial state and indigenous groupings that led to the popularisation of the indigenous ‘Nation’ as the accepted face of Canadian indigeneity within the politics of recognition. Here Andersen and Denis say that since the early 1970s “certain kinds of Aboriginal political claims have been legitimized [while others] have not gained the same visibility. Specifically, the needs and aspirations of urban aboriginals have remained marginal” (pp. 60-1). In Chapter 8 Bonita Lawrence re-writes the historical works of “contemporary non-Native ‘experts’” (p. 69) so as to reassert a “silenced history” (p. 77). In doing so, the author provides an excellent historical overview of colonisation in the North East. Martha Montour, in the following chapter, clearly shows the devaluation of Iroquois women’s rights from a pre-contact matrilineal society to today.

Part 4 “Racialization, Sexism and Indigenous Identities” investigates the juridification of gender, and its effects on indigenous women in Canada. Martin Cannon’s chapter focuses on

the injustices levied out by the 1985 *Indian Act* amendments and, again, provides an excellent overview of the problematics inherent within. He concludes that indigenous peoples need to move beyond colonial juridical definitions, that is, “by refusing to acknowledge the *Indian Act* as the source of determining Aboriginal citizenship” (p.94), if they are to grow communities based on indigenous worldviews. In her third chapter in this collection, Bonita Lawrence examines the notion of authentic self-definition that blights postcolonial indigeneity via interviews focused on ‘urban Indianness’ in contrast to ‘reserve Indianness’. Lawrence argues that contemporary formed ‘nations’ “are groupings primarily organized around specific territorial treaties, which in most instances follow the logic of the colonizer with respect to who was included or excluded in the process” (p 101). In a much more personal narrative style, Beverly Little Thunder accounts for the frailties of the colonial definition process that has demarcated what is authentic, specifically in relation to sexuality in indigenous communities.

Part 5 “Family, Belonging and Displacement” relays the effects of colonisation in Canada (including the residential school system) on indigenous family structures, communities and, in particular, the disempowerment of women via colonial violence refracted through indigenous male violence and the patriarchy that came to be normalised and, thereafter, imagined as traditional. Kim Anderson starts from the premise that while pre-colonial native attitudes to marriage practices, sex and sexuality varied from peoples to peoples, nonetheless, they were markedly different from the ideals of Christian marriage mores and monogamous heterosexuality. Both, she argues, subjugated indigenous women and limited the boundaries of sexuality. Similarly, Rosalind Ing discusses the intergenerational impacts of residential schools particularly on mothering, while Shandra Spears relates from personal experience the issues of experiencing transracial adoption as a native child.

Part 6 “Indigenous Rights, Citizenship and Nationalism” discusses these themes in relation to the imagined Canadian nation, and membership within indigenous ‘nations’. which importantly includes self-critical analysis of indigenous governance structures indoctrinated by colonial assimilatory policy. In Chapter 16 Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel argue that indigenous peoples continue to be defined by state policy and are often complicit with such tactics merely to survive. To alleviate the crisis the authors propose a Fanonian-like conscientisation: “the battle is a spiritual and physical one fought against the political manipulation of the people’s own innate fears and the embedding of complacency, that metastasising weakness, into their psyches” (p. 141), assuming that transformation begins with the individual. Audra Simpson’s chapter, “Ethnographic Refusal,” sets up a conceptual leap in terms of thinking about ‘culture’, where “difference is not the unit of analysis, when culture is disaggregated into narratives rather than wholes, when proximity to the territory that one is engaging in is as immediate as the self, and what this then does to questions of ‘voice’” (p. 147). Here, via her methodology of giving voice to the indigenous individual, Simpson refuses the allegorical construction of culture, typical of colonial representations, where the Other was constructed as divergent to the civilised Self. Interrogating membership inclusion/exclusion in relation to the *Indian Act* amendments with her own people of Kahnawake, far from the political correctness of victim-based qualitative interviews, Simpson understood the interview process as one of “being pushed and pushing back, a kind of discursive wrestling” (p. 149). In the last chapter of this part, Lina Sunseri unpacks the ideologies of nationalism and feminism in an indigenous context, two gendered discourses of resistance that have become seemingly incompatible in their opposition to and complicity with neo-colonialism.

In Part 7 “Decolonizing Indigenous Education” Canadian State education is asked “[f]or whom

are we teaching and about what?” Decolonial education is described as “exposing the violence engendered in privileged ways of knowing” (p. 164). In her second chapter of this collection, Marie Battiste coins the phrase ‘cognitive imperialism’ to describe the epistemological warfare waged on indigenous peoples at the neo-colonial coal-face, the state school, particularly in relation to literacy described as the battering ram of modernity. “Killing the Indian in the Child”, the chapter by Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Crey, recounts the colonial imperative of education to assimilate via a narrative of the horrors of residential schooling. In Chapter 21 Verna St Denis argues that the typical remedial framing of decolonial education calls for the inclusion/recognition of “Aboriginal culture, history, societal and family structures”, suggesting the approach to be inadequate, and advocating for a curriculum that teaches students to interpret through a critical lens how race and class function to recreate colonial power.

Part 8, “Poverty, Economic Marginality and Community Development” scrutinises the fraught marriage between modernity’s capitalist endeavours and indigenous epistemologies in three ways; the degradation of indigenous economies via colonisation; the economic marginalisation (i.e., poverty) of indigenous communities; and the attempts by indigenous communities to conceive of ‘development’ via their own worldviews. In the first chapter of this part Cyndy Baskin demonstrates indigenous homelessness to be a legacy of colonisation, and for indigenous youth a symptom of neo-colonialism institutionalised via Canada’s child protection system. Interviewing homeless indigenous youth, the author looked to the medicine wheel as a research methodology, finding that those interviewed were fully cognisant of why they were homeless and were able to view homelessness via a critical lens. Beginning their chapter by asserting that “the Canadian state’s institutionalised and oppressive economic and legal structures have played a key role in Aboriginal community underdevelopment, which

has resulted in the increasing dependency of some Aboriginal peoples on the state” (p. 203), Cora Voyageur and Brian Calliou propose that indigenous peoples have attempted to resist structural discrimination in order to gain some semblance of self-governance via a number of avenues, including treaty rights discourses, legal challenges to state imposition, political insurrection, militant resistance, and civil disobedience. Further, the authors list a number of key factors in native economic development, including political control, resources, and strategy. In Chapter 24 Jim Silver and his colleagues foreground a rudimentary binary between late capitalism and indigenous ‘development’. That is, the malevolent individualism of late capitalism versus the collectivism, holistic healing, sharing, and hope of ‘aboriginal community development’. Importantly, the authors argue that the incommensurability of such worldviews calls for mobilisation and confrontation in terms of collective and militant action.

In the final Part of this collection “Violence and the Construction of Criminality”, the authors attack the Canadian legal system’s maxim that ‘everyone is equal under the law’ by demonstrating that the law’s claim to impartiality is based on the normative subject (i.e., the white heterosexual) and thus is set up to discriminate against difference and epistemologically dissimilar conceptions of law, punishment and resolution. Joyce Green illustrates the colonial ideology of institutionalised treatment of indigenous people as less than human, via the poignant example of a 17-year-old indigenous youth Neil Stonechild who froze to death when taken into custody by Saskatoon police. Sickeningly referred to as ‘Starlight Tours’, the practice of taking into custody and then releasing indigenous men to fend for themselves on the ‘outskirts of town’ has by all accounts led to countless deaths. Green follows the case to bring Stonechild’s killers to justice, the subsequent police cover-ups, and an ensuing federal inquiry. Importantly, Green brings to the reader’s attention the spatialised component of the violence against indigenous

peoples; a space where codes of morality are waived, and violent acts of murder and rape become acceptable. The “mpartiality” of state justice is demonstrated by Patricia Monture-Okanee and Mary Ellen Turpel, who show that Canadian child welfare workers removed indigenous children from their communities based on non-indigenous perceptions of family, neglect, and what is in the best interest of the child. In the final chapter, Andrea Smith forcefully articulates that the colonial imperative (i.e., the right to usurp) was based upon the configuration of indigenous peoples as less than human and thus, absent of moral rights, dirty and deserving of sexual violence.

As a ‘reader’, the text has been compiled to provide a snapshot of the current scholarship in this particular field. For those familiar with the field it is obvious that the collection includes several of the most prominent indigenous scholars across North America and, thus, largely successfully achieves its goal as a ‘reader’. One of the myths that Māori academics like to perpetuate is that we are years (and sometimes said to be ‘light-years’) ahead of other indigenous peoples. Two things are striking about this collection; firstly, regardless of the settler context, whether that be New Zealand, Australia, the US or Canada, the issues arising in indigenous studies are remarkably similar and the discourses used to examine these issues have a temporal omnipresence. Secondly, and in relation to my own people’s superiority complex, the scholarship of those in Canadian indigenous studies that this collection highlights is for the most part exceedingly robust. As an overview of indigenous studies in Canada, the collection will serve as an important text for an introductory undergraduate paper that delves into some of the field’s most pressing contemporary issues. Accordingly, the reader could be very important, as indigeneity, indigenous history and indigenous issues become less marginalised and increasingly to the fore in all Canadian academic disciplines.

My only criticism of the collection as a whole is the centrality ‘racism’ is given in defining the

processes of colonialism and neo-colonialism. The editors employ Wendy Cornet's 2003 definition of race: "[a]rbitrary elements of physical appearance or arbitrary descent criteria typically form the basis of race..." (cited p. xviii). While it is apparent that vision and physiognomic features were important factors of colonialism, I suggest that the power produced by colonisation and the power produced by racism operated on very different criteria and, similarly, anti-racism and decolonial discourses are incompatible. The central dilemma with interrogating indigeneity via the concept of race is due to the fact that indigeneity itself is founded on genealogical lineage, which inherently includes biological and physiological determinism. While challenging the precepts, and resisting dominant discourses through anti-racist sentiment is logical for Canadians of African descent, for example, given the racist processes that determined the material black body as signifier, and the centrality of anti-essentialism to anti-racism, the decolonial/indigenous movement has in contrast typically been strategically essentialist by locating the power of indigeneity through a spiritual connection to place and a genealogical tie to an indigenous ancestor, which under Cornet's definition could be considered arbitrary. More importantly, indigenous resistance is founded on exposing the moral corruption of colonialism and the continued moral corruption of neo-colonial ventures that have dispossessed indigenous peoples of their lands, resources and rights to comprehend their world via their epistemologies. Such resistance cannot be enacted via anti-racist discourses. Ironically, in this collection the illegitimacy of race to indigenous studies becomes clear, as most chapters do not discuss racism or only touch on it peripherally. In conclusion, beyond this one criticism the editors have compiled a fine collection comprised of stellar scholarship by important indigenous academics and have, therefore, produced a very important book.