

Is China a Settler State? The Critique and Expansion of Settler Colonial Theory

by

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Abstract

In this thesis, I critique extant theories of settler colonialism to find one that can be applied to the Chinese state. As most settler colonial theories emerge from Anglo-settler states, they contain specificities that do not work when applied to China. Furthermore, extant theories are produced within the historical and ongoing conditions of empire and, thus, may obfuscate settler colonial phenomenon rather than illuminate. I argue that for settler colonial theory to expand, it must confront its imperial trace. This can be done by focusing on the analytic of *colonial effect* (what the colonised experience) over that of *colonial intent* (what colonisers intend to do). Using this analytic, I critique the theories of Patrick Wolfe, Glen Coulthard, and Caroline Elkins & Susan Pedersen. I find that although Wolfe's theory derives from the experience of the colonised, it maintains an imperial trace due to indistinction in his definition of genocide and the grammar of intent he uses to describe settler colonialism. Conversely, Coulthard's theory transcends the grammar of intent, and emerges solely from the analytic of colonial effect. I further find that Coulthard's theory heuristically combines Wolfe's concepts of *territoriality* and *elimination*, and comparative analysis between the two theorists reveals settler colonialism to be *fractal* in nature. Lastly, I find Elkins and Pedersen's theory to elide the experience of the colonised, thus obfuscating settler colonial phenomenon. In the final chapter of this thesis, I use Coulthard's theory to analyze Uyghur-state relations in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. I argue that Chinese state practices regarding land dispossession, Han settlement, and Uyghur assimilation show that China is a settler state.

Dedication

*For my family of co-conspirators,
especially the women and queers.*

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In Dante's Divine Comedy, Virgil lovingly guides Dante through the hell of denial and the purgatory of illusion, up to a passage of fire that Dante must cross alone, beyond which he becomes authentic. Earlier in history, Aaron guides his brother Moses off Mount Sinai back into the world, where the prophet must live what God has shown him. Even in Eden, if we can get past the punitive tellings we have heard so often, God ushers

Adam and Eve to the threshold of the world, offering them the bruised and wondrous life of genuine experience...

These are deep examples of spiritual hospitality, of helping kindred spirits further into their living. Truly, the most we can ask of others is for their guidance and comfort on the way without imposition, design, or thought of reward. This is the hospitality of relationship: for family to help us manifest who we are in the world, for friends to bring us to thresholds of realness, for loved ones to encourage us to cross barriers of our own making into moments of full aliveness.

This is the honest welcoming to table, without judgment of what we eat. Often the purpose of love is for others to guide us, without expectation or interference, as far as they can go, so that we might begin...(2011, 397-398).

Lastly, I will be ever grateful for the generations of critical scholars in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta who have, through their tireless labour and love, created a space for folks like me to have a voice. I hope that what I have written in this thesis, in some way, does justice to your legacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Black Legends and Yellow Perils

As the British were colonising Turtle Island, they deployed the myth of the Black Legend against their imperial competitors in Latin America. The Spanish, according to the myth, were “unusually cruel, avaricious, treacherous, fanatical...cowardly, corrupt...and authoritarian” (Weber 1992, 336). In the showdown between empires, the Black Legend constituted a form of militant “propaganda against Spain’s...highly successful imperialism” (Ibid.). This was a battle of representation at the highest order. In the quest for global hegemony, the British deployed the discourse of civilization to depict the Spanish as both moral and racial inferiors. As Eric Griffin notes, the Black Legend was intimately linked to Britain’s fear of the Black and Moorish “heart” of Spain (2009). A similar battle is at work today. Increasingly anxious about China’s expanding presence in the international sphere, the West has deployed another myth, that of the Yellow Peril. Like Spain, China and Chinese peoples have been portrayed as authoritarian, corrupt, treacherous, and cruel. Like Imperial Britain, contemporary Euro-American states have valorized themselves as moral and racial superiors, in the process disavowing their own histories of violence and their ongoing domination over colonised peoples.

This thesis is written from within this global order of white supremacy. Thus, I am pre-eminently concerned that its animating question – Is China a settler state? – will be taken up to reproduce the very conditions of empire it seeks to address. I fear, in the process of documenting injustice, I provide ammunition to those who wish to assimilate my argumentation into the myth of the Yellow Peril. Being of Chinese descent, and as someone committed to dismantling empire and white supremacy, this is unacceptable to me. Alas, how texts are interpreted and deployed do

not comport to the desires of the writer (Hall 2007). In this light, an academic disclaimer will have to do.

While my question in this thesis - Is China a settler state? – bears a normative condemnation of Chinese governance, it is *equally* sustained by a commitment to anti-imperialism and to challenging anti-Chinese racism in all its chimeric forms. I am opposed to the belligerent orientalism that underpins much academic inquiry of the Chinese state and peoples. To this end, my project is guided by Indigenous theorists and their allies on Turtle Island who critique the portrayal of Indigeneity as morally and racially inferior. Confronting the imperial gaze, scholars like Audra Simpson, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang assert that “refusal” is integral to academic inquiry (A. Simpson 2007; Tuck and Yang 2014) . While, ultimately, I cannot control how this thesis will be interpreted, I want to state, unreservedly, that I *reject* and *refuse* how it may be taken up to construct Chinese peoples and the Chinese state as morally and racially inferior. This is not to say that China has not done terrible, violent things. It has. However, the moral-racial order of white supremacy can only exacerbate the conditions of global injustice. It cannot be allowed to exploit the suffering of some to dominate others. It is this I refuse.

Is China a Settler State?

International media coverage of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) erupted in 2018 with reports that a million Uyghurs had been incarcerated extra-judicially by the Chinese state (Kuo 2018; Samuel 2018; Sudworth 2018). The XUAR is China’s largest administrative region, and for most of the 20th century, the Uyghurs, who consider themselves the Indigenous peoples of the territory, had comprised its predominant population (Gladney 2004). However, over the course of the last seven decades, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has directed and

incentivised successive waves of mass Han settlement in the XUAR. Today, the Han population rivals that of the Uyghurs. This reality, alongside reports that incarcerated Uyghurs were being subject to “re-education” campaigns (Zenz 2019), prompted the research question for this thesis – is China a settler state?

Answering this question is not an objective endeavour. The study of colonialism is always inflected by struggle over history and its meaning. In research on state-Uyghur relations, scholars have variedly defined phenomenon in the XUAR as modern colonialism (Dibyesh 2019), internal colonialism (Chung 2018; Gladney 1998; Hasmath 2019; Rudelson 1997), or not colonial at all (Sautman 2000). This discrepancy demonstrates the dynamic interplay between history and theory. When scholars come to different, sometimes antagonistic, conclusions about the same historical phenomenon, it reveals the fundamentally *political* nature of inquiry. Not only does theory make sense of the world, but it also constitutes the very world it perceives (Butler 1990). Theorizing is not an autonomous, universal, or objective endeavour. Rather, it is intimately connected to the politics and position from where one theorizes.

Thesis Overview

This thesis proceeds through three chapters. In the first, I set my terms of engagement with settler colonial studies and theory. I situate the field in the “turn towards empire,” an academic tradition that confronts how claims of universality and objectivity in traditional political theory have constrained the study of empire and colonialism. Despite its universalist claims, political theorizing in the West emerged from, and was constitutive of, specific European imperial projects (Marwah et al. 2020). As such, traditional theories of colonisation centre the experience of the coloniser and ignore the experience of the colonised (Ibid.). While the field of settler colonial studies, as part of the turn towards empire, critiques this form of imperial theorizing, its

own theories are nevertheless embedded within the historical and ongoing conditions of imperial expansion. Thus, the field must critically engage its own knowledge production. I suggest that this should be done through the analytic of positionality. That is, settler colonial theory should be critiqued through the question: what standpoint, the coloniser or the colonised, does the theory speak from?

In the second chapter, I use the analytic of positionality to critique the settler colonial theories of Patrick Wolfe, Glen Coulthard, and Susan Elkins & Caroline Pedersen. While I find that Wolfe's theory derives from the position of the colonised, this standpoint is threatened by indistinction in his definition of genocide, and by the grammar of intent he uses to describe settler colonialism. Thus, his theory maintains an imperial trace. Conversely, I find Coulthard's theory to transcend the imperial trace, and to resolutely centre the standpoint of the colonised. Instead of using a grammar of intent, Coulthard's theory eschews the grammatical subject/object relation where settler colonialism *does* something to Indigenous peoples who are constructed as passive objects. As for Elkins and Pedersen, I argue that their theory emerges exclusively from the coloniser's standpoint. As such, it constitutes a different trajectory in settler colonial studies distinct from Wolfe's and Coulthard's and should not be included in the turn towards empire. At the end of the chapter, I set out the definitions of settler colonialism and the settler state I will apply to phenomenon in the XUAR.

In the final chapter, I present a constellation of Chinese policies and practices in the XUAR from 1949 to present. The notion of the "constellation" is grounded in Walter Benjamin's theory that history cannot be sedimented into objective events and teleological processes. Instead, history and its interpretation are constructed through "constellations" of phenomenon compiled and arranged in the present. Using this method, which recognizes academic inquiry's

inherently political nature, I analyze policies and practices regarding land dispossession, Han settlement, and Uyghur assimilation in the XUAR. I argue that, taken together, they reveal China to be a settler state.

CHAPTER 1: KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN POLITICAL THEORY

Introduction

The query of this thesis - is China a settler state? – is a political question. First, it is political because it asks how *power* operates in China. Does the Chinese state *do* what other settler states do? Do political relationships between Indigenous peoples and states like Canada, the USA, or Australia yield insights into the relationship between the Chinese state and Uyghurs? To answer the surface question, a theorist needs only to define what a settler state is and then demonstrate whether China fits the definition. This thesis, in part, is dedicated to this task. However, it is also dedicated to a prior theoretical reflection. It will perform a critical analysis of the categories and concepts used for theorizing within the field of settler colonial studies itself. Beyond simply defining what a settler state is, I will tease out the political choices made through the process of definition. Just like any other field, settler colonial studies constructs and deploys a variety of analytical concepts and categories. Some of them converge, and others conflict. In this light, whether one considers China a settler state is not an objective endeavour. Rather, it reveals something about the politics and position from where one theorizes. There are, thus, two objects of analysis in this project, the first being settler colonial theory itself and the second being the relationship between the Chinese state and Uyghurs.

In this chapter, I set out my framework of engagement with settler colonial studies and theory. I situate the field in the “turn towards empire,” an academic tradition that critically engages the question of how theory and knowledge is produced. Unlike the traditional canon of political theory that presents itself in ahistorical and universalist terms, theorizing within the turn reflects on how concepts of the “political” and “universal” in Euro-American thought are, in fact, *particular* social constructions made under *specific* historical circumstances. As its use of the

term “empire” suggests, the turn has investigated how Western political theory is produced within, and constitutive of, imperial expansion through variegated modes of colonisation. Uday Mehta, for instance, has documented the historical connection between liberal thinkers and the British Empire. Rather than being an autonomous ideology, Mehta argued that

the liberal involvement with the British Empire is broadly coeval with liberalism itself.

With scarcely any exceptions, every British political thinker of note wrote on the empire and most of them wrote on the British Empire in India (1999, 4).

Liberalism, thus, was an ideology constituted from the specific relations of British imperialism. Below, I discuss the turn towards empire’s scholarly contributions before articulating its implications for the field of political theory. I then show how settler colonial theory is situated within the turn towards empire. While settler colonial studies is constitutively engaged in an antagonistic critique of European imperial projects, its scholarly contributions are nevertheless produced within the ongoing conditions of Euro-American hegemony. As such, knowledge and theory production within the field must be critically engaged to identify extant imperial legacies that threaten its analytical and political promise. To do so, political theorists must deploy the methodological contributions of the turn towards empire upon the field of settler colonial studies itself.

The Turn towards Empire

For much of its history in the Western academy, political theory has been limited to a canon of thinkers. Even in the contemporary context, this canon is confined to a splattering of European theorists and their immediate (i.e. white and/or Euro-American) interlocutors. A survey of introductory political theory courses and textbooks inevitably reveals the discipline to be constituted through a predictable trajectory that begins in ancient Greece (e.g. Plato, Aristotle),

moves onto the Romano-Christian world (e.g. Aquinas, Augustine) before settling into modern liberal thought (e.g. Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill, etc.). In this trajectory, the “radical” edge begins and ends with thinkers known more to be “social” theorists than political theorists proper (e.g. Marx, Durkheim, Weber). Ultimately, both the centre and peripheries of political thought remain occupied by the West.

However, in recent decades, scholars in political science and adjacent disciplines have unsettled the Eurocentrism of political theorizing. A shift in scholarly analysis termed the “turn towards empire” has reoriented the epistemological foundations of the field. Taking its cue from the Cambridge School of History and melding insights from a range of disciplines including anthropology, literary studies, postcolonial studies, gender studies, and critical race studies, the turn towards empire has shaken political theory from its golden perch (Marwah et al. 2020). Once “a discipline that long indulged the obscurantist fantasy of emanating from Europeans talking among and about themselves,” political theory in the West now appears, in a few lonely places, to be taking intellectual trajectories from beyond the pale seriously (Ibid., 2). Through revelation and critique of the racialized, gendered, capitalist and imperial machinations at work within Western political thought, the turn towards empire has transformed the discipline.

A key intervention of this change is the claim that political theory does not emerge from an autonomous sphere. It critiques Western political thought’s objectivist, universalist, and teleological assertions about human nature and historical development. From Aristotle to Locke to Marx, European political theorizing has projected itself from an almost godly subjectivity (Haraway 1988) from where it made totalizing claims about what humans are, where we come from, and how we should live. Through rhetorical strategies that masked the theorizing European subject behind a veil of truth, objectivity, and civilizational supremacy, Western theorists

collapsed human life and history into neat narratives that portrayed European normative worlds as both natural and inevitable. In other words, the normativity of Western political theory has presented itself as radically non-normative. Here, we can cite any number of theorists - ancient, modern, or contemporary – that perform the myth of Western objectivity. Whether Aristotle’s natural teleology, Locke’s proprietary theory of labor, Marx’s historical materialism, or Rawls’ roadmap for justice, political thought in the West has asserted itself as universally applicable, indeed representative of the totality of human experience.

Scholars within the turn towards empire reject the objectivist, universalist, and ahistorical assumptions that underlie traditional political thought. Instead, they proceed from the assumption that all theory and knowledge is embedded in, and constitutive of social, historical, and material power relations. From this vantage point, theorists within the turn have illuminated traditional political theory’s entanglement with empire. For instance, Jennifer Pitts has argued that “nineteenth century liberals, including most prominently Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill...supported the expansion and consolidation of European rule over non-European subjects” (2005, 1). Pitt’s argument, however, moves beyond the simple fact that certain liberal thinkers supported imperial endeavours. More importantly, she asserts that liberalism itself was “was constituted by its engagement in politics” and that “the creation and consolidation of empires was central to that process” (Ibid., 5). Following Pitts, Vicki Hsueh (2006) has demonstrated how Locke’s *Second Treatise* acted as an ideological foil to the violent and often haphazard founding of British colonies in the new world. Tracing Locke’s professional involvement in the founding of Carolina, Hsueh shows how his claims about Indigenous peoples and their “uncivilized” land use directly contravened his knowledge of thriving and “civilized” Indigenous economies. Furthermore, British colonizers were often dependent on Indigenous knowledge and

trade in the initial phase of colonization. In this light, the *Second Treatise* becomes a rhetorical ploy, a cynical act that self-justifies British imperial violence through a foundational lie. In another critique of political theory's imperial entanglements, Glen Coulthard has problematized the "normative developmentalism" at work in Marxist thought (2014). While Marx eventually changed his assertion that all societies must pass through the apex of capitalism to achieve socialism, a significant portion of Marxism remains structured on teleological understandings of political and economic development. Within this trajectory, Indigenous politics are relegated to the pre-political or "undeveloped" sphere of human life. Despite Marxist critiques of empire and capitalist expansion, the body of theorizing remains embedded in a philosophy that posits European imperialism as "a historically *inevitable* process that would ultimately have a *beneficial* effect on those violently drawn into the capitalist circuit" [original emphasis] (Coulthard 2014, 10). Interventions like Pitt's, Hsueh's, and Coulthard's fundamentally challenge the assumptions which underlie traditional political theory. They reveal how European modes of theorizing have been conditioned by the exigencies of empire and, in so doing, present radical implications for the discipline.

Implications for the Discipline of Political Theory

In their recent retrospective on the turn towards empire, Marwah et. al argue that:

taking empire seriously doesn't just add a subject to the roster of political theory's concerns, but transforms it altogether. Taking empire seriously is to question the structures of our discipline, uproot the conditions configuring its theoretical presumptions, widen our methodological lenses, and scrutinize what, whom and how we read – and why. It's to shift our vantage point so as to expose the historically false and normatively pernicious visions of domestic and global order underpinning it." (Marwah et al. 2020. 5).

In other words, to take empire seriously means to unsettle, epistemologically, the constitution of political theory as a category and discipline. Western political thought's sovereign territory has been founded upon universalist claims to truth, racist assertions about what is properly political, and the assumption that Euro-American thought represents the height of human progress. Its reification *as political theory* is subtended by the *theoretical presumption* that Western imperialism represents a "good" in human history. The condition configuring this presumption is imperial expansion itself, both historical and contemporary. Against this, the turn towards empire upends the epistemological terrain of Western political thought by inverting its logic, positing, instead, imperial expansion as "bad." The implications of this inversion are two-fold. First, the boundaries of what counts as political theory dissolve. The revelation that the field has been constituted through a prior and unjust normative exclusion, born through the crucible of empire, necessitates the undoing of its intellectual boundaries. Political theories from anywhere but the West then emerge into view, indeed have always been there. They show us new visions of what human life has been and can be. Second, political theorizing necessarily adopts a reflexive and critical character. Gone are the days when theorists can simply claim to know the world and express absolute ways to solve political problems. Proper political theorizing must now always reflect upon its embeddedness in social, historical and material power relations. Every theory has a social history and intellectual rigour requires us, as theorists, to acknowledge and confront this reality. In this way, the turn towards empire has transformed the *structure* of the discipline by implementing the imperative to engage critically the social, historical and material power relations that undergird theory and knowledge production.

Beyond changes to political theory's intellectual structure and theoretical presumptions, the turn towards empire has also instituted new methodological instruments for theorizing, most

notably adding *positionality* to the roster of analytical tools. Engagement between feminist and black radical traditions has illuminated the constitutive effect of a theorist's social location in knowledge production. For instance, Bell Hooks famously wrote in 1984 that

Much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the center whose perspective on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live at the margin. As a consequence, feminist theory lacks wholeness, lacks the broad analysis that would encompass a variety of human experiences (Hooks 2015, xvii).

Hook's argument is that the social location of the theorists themselves, or their positionality, affects the kinds of intellectual contributions produced. The lived experiences taken by theorists into consideration necessarily constrains what their theories can explain and make legible.

Following this argument, Hooks asserts that feminist theory is incomplete because it historically derived from experiences of relationally privileged women, and thus "lack[ed] the broad analysis that would encompass a variety of human experiences." Scholars within the turn toward empire adopted this analytic of positionality by modifying the relationship between "women at the centre" and "women at the margins" to the relationship between the "coloniser" and the "colonised." Just as feminist theory lacked wholeness because it derived from the perspective of privileged women, theories of empire and colonisation lacked wholeness by eliding the experience of the colonized. Engaging with this reality, theoretical production within the turn towards empire pays more attention "to the perspective of the governed rather than merely the governors of the imperial world" (Marwah et al. 2020, 22).

The methodological adoption of positionality also reveals the driving force behind the change from "empire as good" to "empire as bad." The inversion does not emerge from armchair theorizing that produces knowledge through the formalism of analytic philosophy, but rather

through the “imperatives of non-domination,” that is, through anti-imperialism (Marwah et al. 2020, 5). The inversion arises specifically from the lived experiences of the colonised and not from some autonomous, idealist, theoretical process. Thus, the challenge presented to political theory is fundamentally an epistemological one. By centering the experience and knowledge of the colonised, the driving logic of Western political thought – empire as good – dissolves. This dissolution not only has the first order effect of expanding the boundaries of what constitutes political theory proper, but also changes the structure of political theorising by necessitating sustained intellectual confrontation with the conditions of its own production.

Settler Colonial Studies and the Turn Towards Empire

According to Alex Trimble Young, “settler colonialism” emerged as a distinct analytic in the Australian academy in the mid-1990s (2017). In prior study of European colonisation, conceptual terms like “settlement colony” had emerged as early as the 1960s, but the 1990s saw the use of “settler colonialism to name a specific form of imperial domination” as opposed to simply a colony with a settler presence (Ibid., 1036). While previous research on European imperialism investigated the content of colonial governance, focusing “narrowly within the technical perspective of colonial power” (Vimalasery, Pegues, and Goldstein 2016, n.p.), the emergent analytic of settler colonialism sought, instead, operating *logics* beneath colonial governance. Put differently, in addition to documenting the variegated history of colonial policies and practices, settler colonialism, as an analytic, sought to distinguish forms of colonialism by excavating underlying patterns. Here, the work of Patrick Wolfe is foundational. In his inaugural article on settler colonialism, *Nation and MiscegeNation*, Wolfe proclaimed that he sought to “analyze the deep structures of the Australian colonial project” (1994, 93). This was followed in 1999 by his monograph, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, and in 2006 by the

article, *Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native*. The latter works both theorised that a logic of elimination differentiates settler colonialism from other colonial forms. Unlike older works that took the mere presence of settlers as the defining characteristic of the “settler colony”, Wolfe argued that “settler colonialism” is additionally defined by a specific relation in which settlers eliminate native peoples and societies. The mere presence of settlers is not sufficient to distinguish colonialism as *settler colonialism*. Rather, the actions of settlers must also exhibit a tendency, or a drive, towards erasing Indigenous peoples and social worlds. In the wake of Wolfe’s work, the field of settler colonial studies was institutionalized through the founding of the eponymous journal in 2010 by Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini. In the same year, Veracini also published his monograph *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. Today, “settler colonial studies as an analytic continues to flourish” (Young 2017, 1036).

Wolfe’s focus on elimination as the central characteristic of settler colonialism, when viewed through the lens of positionality, demonstrates a distinct sensitivity to the experience of the colonised. Who is it that experiences elimination but the peoples subject to settler colonisation? As Wolfe writes, “positionality is not just central to the issue – it *is* the issue” [original emphasis] (1999, 3). While Wolfe identified as an Australian settler (Kehaulani and Wolfe 2012), his theoretical analysis nevertheless adopts the colonised’s standpoint. This, I will demonstrate in chapter two. Following Wolfe, Veracini has argued that settler colonial studies, as a field of inquiry, originates from Indigenous experience (Veracini 2017, 9). Thus, both Wolfe and Veracini, two central scholars in the field, adopt an explicit positioning against imperial expansion and colonisation. The field appears to be constitutively defined by a normative critique of empire, and as such, it can be situated within the academic turn thus far discussed.

Despite settler colonial studies' embeddedness in the turn towards empire, my engagement with the field and its theories will be a critical one. To take empire seriously, I will proceed from the assumption that all theory and knowledge production is embedded in social, historical, and material power relations. Given this reality, I assume that knowledge production in settler colonial studies is just as vulnerable to the legacies and extant conditions of empire. We thus cannot assert, a priori, that scholarly contributions within the field will necessarily be anti-imperial and produce knowledge that works to make legible settler colonial phenomenon. Indeed, in a pointed critique, Vimalasery, Pegues and Goldstein have argued that "the particular ways in which settler colonialism has assumed predominance as an analytic risks obscuring or eliding as much as it does to distinguish [settler colonialism's] significant features" (2016, n.p.). In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how certain concepts and categories deployed in settler colonial studies embody this exact problematic. Furthermore, just because a scholar claims to take the experience of the colonised seriously does not mean they do. Veracini, for instance, is engaged in an ongoing debate with various Indigenous and person-of-colour scholars regarding the field's constitutive whiteness. Critical intellectuals like Tiffany Lethabo King have demonstrated how settler colonial studies is dominated by white men both institutionally and in its citational practices (2016). In response, Veracini sought to redeem the field by arguing that its scholarly contributions are "necessarily predicated on the previous achievements of indigenous scholars" (2017, 6). Despite this claim, he consistently fails to cite Indigenous scholars in his own work choosing instead, almost exclusively, to "credit white historians" (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel 2014, 11). While one does not have to identify as Indigenous or as a colonised subject to undertake the critique of empire, engagement with the intellectual traditions

and experiences of the colonised is necessary to take empire seriously. Without taking their experiences into account, theories of empire and colonisation inevitably lack wholeness.

In the next chapter, I will review a range of literature in settler colonial studies through an analytical framework that explicitly engages the question of positionality. That is, I will ask: “from which position, the coloniser or the colonised, does the theory speak from?” I will pay special attention to how theories of settler colonisation might skew towards the coloniser’s perspective (Marwah et al. 2020, 28). Furthermore, I will draw upon Critical Indigenous Theory to challenge the field’s constitutive whiteness and, more importantly, to investigate the how the knowledge of the colonised changes canonical texts in settler colonial studies.

Because I do not identify as Indigenous or as a colonised person in the context of this project, my engagement with settler colonial theory and critical Indigenous theory will proceed with sustained self-reflection vis-à-vis my own positionality as a settler on Turtle Island. As someone who continues to benefit from the settler state called Canada, I have undoubtedly inherited the violent ideological and affective colonialities endemic to the time and place I write from. To confront my own embeddedness, my analysis of settler colonial theory will be grounded through the question of *colonial intent* versus *colonial effect*. While theories of colonisation have historically focused on the *intentions* of colonial governors and governance, thereby centering the standpoint of the coloniser, the turn towards empire necessitates an inverse focus on colonial effect, or what the colonised *experience* (Marwah et al. 2020). While colonisers have sought to eliminate colonised peoples and societies explicitly, historical and contemporary colonial governance may not clearly express the desire to eliminate. However, to the colonised, it matters very little whether colonisers *intend* to eliminate their societies. It matters critically, though, if the effects of policies and practices function as such. Reading

theories of settler colonisation through the lens of *effect* will assist me in transcending my own socialized tendency to identify with the position of the coloniser, or as Vimalssery et al. may put it, my drive to reproduce the conditions of “colonial unknowing” (2016, n.p.). Rooting my analysis in the analytic of colonial effect and the experience of the colonised, my engagement with settler colonial theory in the next chapter is designed to extricate theory production from its embeddedness in the social, historical and material conditions of empire. It will provide a rooted analytical frame with which I can evaluate which position – the coloniser or colonised – any given theory proceeds from.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify that I do not consider the subject positions of coloniser and colonised to be ontological. Rather, they are categories deployed for the purpose of analysis. Though I am certainly a settler, that is not all that I am. Though I undoubtedly contribute to, and benefit from, the colonial project called Canada, I also seek to understand and challenge my own implication in it. Likewise, the next chapter does not treat the scholars it engages as ontological subjects. It does not construct them as knowledge producers grounded in the either-or of coloniser/colonised. Rather, I approach their work as the intellectual labor of people authentically engaged with, and living within, the struggle against empire. Earlier in this chapter, I critiqued the work of Lorenzo Veracini and his failure to substantively engage Indigenous intellectual traditions in his writing. While I remain critical of his citational practice, I will nevertheless use aspects of his theory to think about Chinese settler colonialism in the third chapter. By doing so, I deploy one of the critical methodologies of the turn towards empire – the refusal to limit scholarship to totalizing critiques, boundaries, and methods. I identify with Marwah et. al’s assertion that:

Political theorists of empire have...exercised a willful and principled disregard for the gatekeeping tendencies delimiting the field's borders, taking the concepts, methods and concerns of surrounding disciplines as useful – necessary, even – tools for theorizing a constitutionally imperial world (2020, 3).

In the next chapter, following a selective review and critique of the literature in settler colonial studies, I will posit a theory of *settler colonialism* and the *settler state* that will be used to analyze phenomenon in the XUAR.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS SETTLER COLONIALISM AND THE SETTLER STATE?

Introduction

Since the inception of this project in 2018, numerous scholars I have spoken to expressed surprised that settler colonial theory had not already been applied substantively to the Chinese case. It surprised me too. Reading Chinese history and policy through the lens of settler colonialism appeared, *prima facie*, both appropriate and obvious, so much so that in the fall of 2019, a teaching assistant for an introductory sociology class at the University of Alberta told me that one of his students had written a paper doing exactly this. Moreover, the student had used the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) as their case study.

In 2019, the first academic text to explicitly link the analytic of settler colonialism to the Chinese state was published in the edited volume, *Frontier Tibet: Patterns of Change in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands* (Gros ed., 2019). In the book, Carole McGranahan's afterword, entitled *Chinese Settler Colonialism*, argued that the theories of Patrick Wolfe, Glen Coulthard, and Audra Simpson could be applied to understand social relations between the Chinese state and Tibetans in the Kham region of eastern Tibet (2019). However, despite McGranahan's expressed objective to theorize "Settler colonialism with Chinese Communist Characteristics" (Ibid., 521), her analysis is better described as *notes toward* a theory of Chinese settler colonialism rather than a systematic and methodical analysis of what settler colonialism is, and what the Chinese state has done to bear the conceptual label. While the afterword provides an adequate review of the literature in settler colonial studies, it fails noticeably in linking theory and evidence. Despite articulating that settler colonialism "consists of settling of the 'others' land by the colonizers with the intention of displacing, replacing, or otherwise eliminating the natives of the colonized territory" (Ibid.), McGranahan ultimately fails to establish how the Chinese state

has *displaced, replaced, and eliminated* Tibetan peoples. Indeed, when addressing the question of what exactly constitutes Chinese settler colonialism, McGranahan states the following:

What then does current Chinese settler colonialism look like? Instructions on how to be civilized. Exclusions from certain programmes and possibilities. Inclusions in other programmes and possibilities. Requirements to perform gratitude, to embrace aspects of socialism, to reject local beliefs and practices, including religious ones – Buddhism in Tibet and Islam in Xinjiang. A visible security presence, and invisible but known surveillance methods. State policies based on misunderstandings of native peoples, such as nomadic pastoralists. (McGranahan 2019, 534).

Her description of “Chinese settler colonialism” encompasses a litany of policies and practices, but it remains undertheorized how exactly they constitute *settler* colonialism. Later, McGranahan elaborates on Chinese education policy, religious policy, language policy, cultural policy, and state discourses of development in Kham. However, all her descriptions ultimately center around the practice of Chinese state *domination* over Tibetan peoples and society. They do not clearly establish how this domination enacts the concepts of *displacement, replacement*, and most importantly, *elimination*. In other words, McGranahan fails to do what settler colonial theory explicitly sets out to do, which is to theorize how settler colonisation constitutes a distinct form of colonialism (Veracini 2010; Tuck and Yang 2014). Domination, by itself, is not a sufficient condition to identify *settler* colonialism. Rather, domination is a necessary condition, common to all forms of colonialism (Osterhammel 1997). Settler colonial theory must delineate the specific “mode of domination” that makes it a distinct form of analysis (Veracini 2017, 7-8).

This chapter is dedicated to finding a theory of settler colonialism, and furthermore, a theory of the settler state that can be applied to the Chinese case. Since colonialism is variegated

across geographies and time periods, settler colonial theories, which have mostly arisen in the Anglo-settler states of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA contain within them specificities that do not work when applied to China. To remedy this problem, I will deploy two modes of critique to expand the aegis of settler colonial theory. First, I will read extant theories through the lens of *positionality*. As noted in the previous chapter, this analytic will be grounded through the question of *colonial intent* versus *colonial effect*. If a theory focuses on colonial intent, it privileges the standpoint of the coloniser, and thus can work to obfuscate the perspective of the colonised. While this standpoint can illuminate certain processes within settler colonial contexts, it ultimately lacks wholeness. This presents an obstacle to developing an expansive and holistic theory of settler colonialism. For settler colonial theory to travel, its abstractions must illuminate commonalities in what the colonised experience. The analytic limitations of colonial intent can be remedied by centering the question of colonial effect. Doing so adopts standpoint of the colonised, and this inverse focus on what the colonised experience extricates settler colonial theory from its imperial trace. Only by engaging the diverse and global epistemologies of the colonised can settler colonial theory truly enact the political possibilities of the turn towards empire. In addition to deploying the analytic of positionality upon theories of settler colonialism, I will use the XUAR as an empirical case study to refine extant theories of the settler state. Through these two modes of critique, I will establish a theory of *settler colonialism* and the *settler state* that make legible political phenomenon in the XUAR as settler colonial.

In the following sections, I critique the settler colonial theories of Patrick Wolfe, Glen Coulthard, and Caroline Elkins & Susan Pedersen using the analytic of positionality. I then move on to establish a definition of the settler state that expands beyond the specificity of European

empire. Extant definitions of the settler state derive from the historical processes of Anglo-settler colonisation and the subsequent independence movements which established the states of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. As this process is inapplicable to the Chinese case, I will constitute a new theory which allows the concept to expand.

What is Settler Colonialism?

Patrick Wolfe

In settler colonial studies, Patrick Wolfe's theory of settler colonialism is foundational. His corpus of work is central to the field. In this section, I first explicate his theory before critiquing its core constituents—the concepts of territoriality, elimination, and genocide – through the lens of positionality. While I ultimately find his theory to derive from the experience of the colonised, this positionality is threatened by indistinctions in his definition of genocide, and by the grammar of intent he uses to describe settler colonialism.

Territoriality, Elimination, Genocide

In *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, Patrick Wolfe writes that despite “all the homage paid to heterogeneity and difference, the bulk of ‘post’-colonial theorizing is disabled by an oddly monolithic, and surprisingly unexamined, notion of colonialism” (1999, 1). The monolith he refers to is a concept of colonialism where the exploitation of Indigenous labour constitutes the core attribute. This totalizing fusion of colonialism with the extraction of native labour negates the possibility of recognizing *settler* colonialism, where colonisers are not primarily interested in Indigenous labour; instead, settler colonies are “premised on displacing indigenes from (or *replacing* them on) the land” [original emphasis] (Ibid.).

Wolfe ascribes the inability of colonial and post-colonial studies to recognize settler colonialism to two sources. First, the Eurocentrism of the academy had figured colonialism as an

abstract projection of Western power (Wolfe 1999,1). In this process, theories of colonialism did not take the experience of the colonised into account. Thus, academic theorizations had failed to see that, in some cases, the extraction of native labour did not, in fact, drive the colonial project. Second, the bulk of post-colonial theorizing had arisen from decolonisation movements from “franchise or dependent...colonies” on the African continent, where colonial projects were, in fact, driven by the extraction of Indigenous labour (Ibid.). The monolith Wolfe critiques is thus attributable to two epistemological positions, the first arising from abstract Eurocentric navel-gazing, and the second from the geographic and historical specificity of extant decolonial theory.

In contrast to the labour theory of colonialism, Wolfe posits that settler colonialism is defined through the core attributes of *territoriality* and *elimination* (2006; 2016). The driving logic of settler colonisation is “access to territory” and not the surplus value extracted from Indigenous labour (Wolfe 2006, 2). To realize this project of territorial acquisition, colonisers work to eliminate the inhabitants of the land they seek to settle. Key to Wolfe’s theory is the idea that elimination is “a structure” rather than “a one-off (and super-seded) occurrence” (Ibid., 388). Succinctly, elimination is a “structure rather than an event” (Ibid., 390). From this angle, though settler colonisation can, and often does, include events which recognizably intend to eliminate native inhabitants, which Wolfe analytically refers to as the ‘negative’ dimension of settler colonialism, the process also deploys a host of other ‘positive’ eliminatory techniques. In Wolfe’s own words:

The logic of elimination not only refers to the summary liquidation of Indigenous people though it includes that. In common with genocide as Raphael Lemkin characterized it, settler colonialism has both negative and positive dimensions. Negatively, it strives for the dissolution of native societies...In its positive aspect...the logic of elimination can

include officially encouraged miscegenation, the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate, biocultural assimilations (2006, 388).

Thus, elimination occurs through a “structure of processes” (L. Simpson 2017, 35) that, through time, dissolves native societies while concomitantly “erect[ing] a new colonial society on the expropriated land base” (Wolfe 2006, 388). The negative dimension – dissolving native society – does not sit in binary contradiction to the positive dimension. Rather, they constitute two sides of the singular process of elimination, which core impetus is the acquisition of already-inhabited territory.

Genocide, and the Negative/Positive Dimensions of Settler Colonialism

The distinction between negative and positive dimensions of settler colonialism is a key contribution of Wolfe’s theory. In layman’s terms, settler colonialism’s drive to eliminate can work through techniques which are obvious, such as targeted killing (a negative dimension), but often they do not (Wolfe 2006). In scholarly terms, “Settler colonialism obscures the conditions of its own production” (Veracini 2010, 14). The granting of colonial or state citizenship to native inhabitants, for instance, is often construed as an inclusive project beneficial to Indigenous communities. Through the lens of Wolfe’s theory, however, it is an assimilative technique designed to erase the political claims of Indigenous peoples that synchronously conceals the violence of elimination (Coulthard 2014). In similar fashion, colonial institutions such as residential schools have been, and sometimes continue to be, portrayed as benevolent and civilizing projects. It is this “positive” dimension, in which the establishment of new colonial

societies obfuscates the eliminatory logic undergirding territorial acquisition, where Wolfe's theory presents its most innovative theoretical implications. Whereas previous analyses of colonisation focused on what colonisers *intend* to do in order to analyze colonial forms (Marwah et al. 2020), Wolfe highlights that settler colonial phenomenon is often concealed behind practices where intention is obfuscated by "positive" techniques. Here, "positive" can refer to both the analytical category, where new colonial societies are erected, and a discursive one, where colonisation is portrayed as a benevolent and beneficent act.

Wolfe's oft-cited article, *Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native*, emphasizes the importance of maintaining focus on settler colonialism's positive dimension (2006, 399). This is grounded in his argument that "elimination" and "genocide" should be differentiated concepts. Whereas elimination capaciously includes both positive and negative dimensions, genocide overemphasizes the negative dimension. Wolfe argues this important difference is flattened through conflation of settler colonialism with genocide. Thus, he stresses the importance of defining settler colonialism as elimination rather than settler colonialism as genocide:

I contend that, though the two have converged – which is to say, the settler-colonial logic of elimination has manifested as genocidal – they should be distinguished. *Settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal* [my emphasis](Wolfe 2006, 387).

Expanding on this argument, Wolfe posits that elimination and genocide should be partitioned for the following reasons. Settler colonialism, he states, is "not helpful for understanding the mass killings of...Tutsis in Rwanda, enemies of the people in Cambodia, or Jews in the Nazi fatherland...[and] By the same token...these mass killings would seem to have little to tell us

about the long-run structural consistency of settler colonizers' attempt to eliminate native societies" (Wolfe 2006, 401-402). The argument here is that conflating the two concepts results in analytical under-inclusion of phenomenon that are genocidal but not settler colonial. It also results in semantic erasure in the opposite direction. Genocide often invokes temporally-bound events where killing has a distinct beginning and end, and where the intent to kill is obvious (e.g. Rwanda, Cambodia, Nazi Germany). In settler colonial contexts where the intent to kill is concealed, and where elimination is a "structuring principle....across time" (Wolfe 2006, 399), the discursive power of genocide-as-intentional-event muddles the legibility of settler colonial phenomenon. Lastly, Wolfe takes issue with the "diminutive" terms often used to describe settler colonialism, such as "cultural genocide" (2006, 402). Because "genocide" arises historically from the paradigmatic case of the holocaust, a hyphenated term like cultural genocide invokes a perception that the temporally-unbound and *not clearly* intentional destruction of Indigenous peoples and societies as "never quite the real thing" (Wolfe 2006, 402). To sum up, the conflation of "genocide" and "elimination" *through* the articulation of settler colonialism-as-genocide is problematic for the following reasons. Not only does it result in under-inclusion of genocidal phenomenon and semantic erasure of settler colonial phenomenon, the invocation of hyphenated genocides also diminishes the seriousness of settler colonialism. These problematics are rooted in the inability of "settler colonialism" to describe non-colonial genocides, the discursive ascription of genocide to temporally-bound/clearly-intentional events, and the discursive association of the holocaust as the paradigmatic case of genocide (itself a temporally-bound event).

Genocide and the Question of Positionality

In the present, where Indigenous struggles continue to fight for recognition of the historical and ongoing violence enacted upon their communities, Wolfe's argument is a contentious one. The term genocide carries with it affective and political weight not found in other descriptors. Not only have Indigenous peoples deployed this term to describe their experiences of settler colonisation, the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (NIMMIWG) found that Canadian state practices, both past and present do, in fact, meet the legal definition of genocide under international law ("A Legal Analysis of Genocide: Supplementary Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls" 2019). Critiquing Wolfe's call to cleave genocide from elimination and settler colonialism, Nehiyaw scholar Matthew Wildcat writes:

If an Indigenous person who continues to have constant experiences of trauma claims what happened to Indigenous peoples in the Americas is genocide, what is accomplished by denying their claim? Even if we can be fairly sure that Indigenous peoples in Canada are not going away, what does it mean to be sympathetic to the perspective that Indigenous peoples feel our communities are under attack? And if processes of group destruction directed against Indigenous peoples continue in the present, is this not a worthy definition of genocide? (2015, 393).

Here, Wildcat highlights the tension between how Indigenous communities articulate their experiences of settler colonisation, and Wolfe's concern with analytical clarity and semantic reception of the term genocide. This tension brings into relief the question of positionality. From which position does Wolfe declare the call for analytic partition?

Regarding the diminutive effect of terms like “cultural genocide,” Wolfe’s positionality is clearly a non-Indigenous one. While not completely adopting the standpoint of the coloniser, his argument is concerned with how non-colonised peoples interpret hyphenated genocides. Amongst Indigenous folks who have testified at the *Truth and Reconciliation on Residential Schools* or the *NIMMIWG*, it would be hard-pressed to find anyone who would claim that the genocide they describe is “not quite the real thing.” While their articulation of settler-colonialism-as-genocide does not equate their experiences to victims in Nazi Germany or Rwanda, it also does not present them as any less painful or destructive. It does, however, articulate that within the limits of extant language and meaning (legal or colloquial), genocide is, in fact, the most apt descriptor of their historical and ongoing experience. In this light, Wolfe’s argument does not arise from any concern that Indigenous peoples will diminish their own experiences by invoking the term genocide. Rather, he is concerned with how non-colonised peoples interpret the invocations.

Wolfe suggests that using the term “structural genocide” can resolve the discursive problems hyphenated genocides present. In his view, structural genocide “avoids the questions of degree – and, therefore, of hierarchy among victims – that are entailed in qualified genocides [i.e. hyphenated genocides], while retaining settler colonialism’s structural induration” (2006, 403). Put differently, structural genocide sidesteps the holocaust as the paradigmatic case while also extricating the temporality associated with it. While I agree that the term does, indeed, comprise a definition of genocide as temporally-unbound, I disagree with Wolfe’s assertion that it resolves the question of hierarchy and diminution. Is structural genocide not also a hyphenated genocide? Furthermore, as Stuart Hall tells us, how texts are interpreted by audiences are not subject to the intentions of the speaker (Hall 2007). Rather, the interpretation, or in Hall’s terms,

the “decoding”, of texts is determined by “maps of meaning” that “power and interest” constitute (Ibid., 394) . Despite Wolfe’s claim, in settler colonial contexts like Canada, invoking the term structural genocide and, perhaps, even of genocide proper (as the NIMMIWG has done), can nevertheless be interpreted as “not quite the real thing.” Thus, Wolfe’s intervention is premised on the false assumption that a textual change and analytical clarity can bring to the fore settler colonialism’s brutality. As such, “structural genocide” also does not adequately address Wildcat’s contention that Indigenous perspectives should be taken seriously.

For Wildcat, the elision of Indigenous experience can be remedied by “reading against the grain of Wolfe’s original thesis” (2015, 394). Rather than cleaving genocide from elimination, he posits elimination as a form of genocide:

I think of elimination as a type of genocide because settler colonialism seeks to undercut or destroy the collectivity of Indigenous peoples, even if it does not always want to destroy the individuals within the collective or the collective in its totality...Wolfe is correct to argue that elimination is distinct from forms of genocide that use mass murder to bring about the destruction of a group, but I find it more useful to think of elimination as a variant of genocide. Regardless of how elimination is enacted, the acts of violence, coercion, hegemony and duress needed to ensure settler ascendancy are inherently destructive to Indigenous collectivities (Ibid.).

In this conception, both the positive and negative dimensions of elimination fall under the broader term genocide. Beyond creating space for Indigenous perspectives, Wildcat’s theoretical move also highlights a certain spuriousness in Wolfe’s argument on analytical under-inclusion. To recapitulate, Wolfe argued that, because settler colonialism does not describe genocides in Nazi Germany, Rwanda, or Cambodia, it needed to be partitioned from genocide proper.

However, conflation of the two terms does not constitute an absolute melding. No one claimed they are absolutely the same. Furthermore, scholarship on settler colonialism does not prevent the study of genocide in places which are not settler colonial. There also does not exist significant amounts of scholarship (if any) that deploy “settler colonialism” to explain those forms of mass killing. In this light, the argument of under-inclusion appears extricated from extant trajectories of theory production, and, in my reading, belies the core impetus behind Wolfe’s original intervention – that settler colonialism is, in fact, invariably genocidal.

Taking away the spurious notion of under-inclusion, what remains in Wolfe’s theory is the concern with diminution, and furthermore, the emphasis on elimination’s positive aspect. The issue of diminution has been addressed earlier, and I now turn attention to the question of positivity. In my reading, when Wolfe states that “Settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal” (Wolfe 2006, 387), the definition of ‘genocide’ invoked here is one which constructs genocide as event. Wolfe’s concern is that this *specific reading* of genocide, with its discursive overemphasis on the negative dimension, conceals the legibility of settler colonial phenomenon. This intervention is a valuable one, because it shifts the question away from colonial intent to colonial effect. Only through the position of the colonised can settler colonial theory pierce through the obfuscation of elimination’s positive dimension. However, in light of Indigenous articulations, Wolfe’s contention to cleave genocide from settler colonialism threatens to undo the very positionality he writes from.

This disjuncture in Wolfe’s theory arises from the messy work of theory production on the terrain of history and meaning. Its core tension lies in attempting to deal with the semantic decoding of ‘genocide’ through a cleavage that not only erases Indigenous experience, but also belies his own understanding of settler colonialism. In his advancement of the term “structural

genocide,” Wolfe, in fact, articulates a concept of settler colonialism as invariably genocidal, just not in the way that genocides have traditionally been thought. In this light, his statement that “Settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal” is a rhetorical move meant to highlight genocide’s overemphasis on event and intent, and not a statement that settler colonialism *isn’t* always genocidal. Wildcat’s critique is thus instigated by a fundamental indistinction in Wolfe’s theory on the definition of genocide. In attempting to make settler colonialism’s genocidal logic legible “as the real thing,” Wolfe made a conceptual error by centering the discursive viewpoint of the non-colonised. Genocide’s semantic reception cannot be resolved by changing terms, especially through a process that erases Indigenous perspectives. Rather, the resolution lies in de-centering the standpoint of coloniser, and centering the colonised one, as Wildcat has done.

By interpreting elimination as a form of genocide, Wildcat gives space to Indigenous perspectives while, at the same time, capaciously including both negative and positive dimensions of settler colonialism’s genocidal logic. While his move does not address the semantic reception of settler colonialism as “not the real form of genocide”, it should not have to. The work to make non-colonised peoples understand the structural and concealed forms of genocide cannot be done through textual changes in settler colonial theory. That work must be done on the ground through living moments of resistance, contestation, and exchange. Here, the complexities and tensions of operating in both scholarly and public contexts is revealed. A truly holistic theory of settler colonialism must hold in tension both its public reception as well as its political impetus. That is, the tension does need to be resolved because the project, as I interpret it, is to communicate that elimination *is* genocidal in both negative and positive dimensions. In his very attempt to resolve the tension between semantic reception and phenomenon, Wolfe

undermines this objective. It is the tension that illuminates the discursive terrain empire has left us. Only by confronting it can settler colonial theory address its imperial trace, and move towards its emancipatory potential.

Elimination and Territoriality

Having critiqued the definition of genocide in Wolfe's theory, I now read the concepts of elimination and territoriality through the lens of positionality. As shown earlier, Nehiyaw scholar, Matthew Wildcat, considers elimination to be apt for describing Indigenous experiences of settler colonialism when formulated as a type of genocide. His conception, again, constitutes both the negative and positive dimensions of elimination as genocidal. Drawing on Benjamin Madley and Audra Simpson, Wildcat articulates that elimination can occur through both massacres (events) and a "legacy of death" (structure) (Wildcat 2015, 396).

On the surface, then, it appears that elimination takes the standpoint of the colonised. Put differently, the concept theorizes through the lens of colonial effect. Who is it that experiences elimination but the peoples subject to settler colonisation? However, the grammar of Wolfe's theory, in a certain light, still adopts the standpoint of the coloniser. For instance, take Wolfe's following statements (my emphases):

The primary *motive* for elimination...is access to territory (Wolfe 2006, 388).

Settler colonialism *destroys to replace* (Ibid.).

[S]ettler colonies...are *premised on displacing* indigenes from (or *replacing* them on) the land (Wolfe 1999, 1).

In these statements, the concept of elimination, and its attendant logic of territoriality, are structured around the *intentions* of the coloniser. To understand this tension between the

grammar of intent and the analytic of effect, it is necessary to tease apart how Wolfe's arguments differ from earlier formulations in the study of empire and colonialism.

Prior to the turn towards empire, political theories of colonisation centered analysis on the core concerns of a certain class of metropolitan administrators and theorists who, whether overtly or surreptitiously, promoted their own governments' rights to dominate over much of the rest of the world (Marwah et al. 2020, n.p.)

The method of analysis in these earlier theories was discursive reading of the writings of imperial administrators and theorists (Ibid.), and thus, intent was attributed to, and derived from, *individuals* operating within imperial contexts. These theories were thus characterized by a notion of imperial *agency*. In contrast, Wolfe's theory ascribes intent to *structure*. This inverse focus, again, highlights Wolfe's emphasis on the positive, and obfuscated, elements of elimination. While elimination can and has been enacted through clearly intentional events such as massacres, the emphasis on structure moves Wolfe's theory away from the original formulation of imperial, agential, and individual intent in research on colonialism. To see this structure, and to move away from the standpoint of imperial administrators, the turn towards empire centres analysis on the experience of the colonised (Ibid.).

Another way to interrogate whether Wolfe's articulation of elimination-as-structure theorizes from the standpoint of the colonised is to ask the question: how did he derive this theory? Like Veracini, Wolfe's citational practice demonstrates a stark lack of Indigenous theorists. However, a few passages suggest that his theorizing does, indeed, derive from Indigenous experience. In both *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* and *Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native*, Wolfe references the work of American

anthropologist Deborah Rose (1999, 1; 2006, 388). Using Rose's 1991 monograph, *Hidden Histories: Black Stories from Victoria, Humbert River and Wave Hill Stations*, Wolfe prefaces his theory thus: "As Deborah Rose has pointed out, to get in the way of settler colonization, all the native has to do is stay home" (2006, 388). This passage prefigures his later exposition on the territorial logic undergirding elimination, and its attribution to Rose's work reveals that his theory does, in part, arise from Indigenous experience. Rose's book is an anthropological account of colonisation in the Victoria River District of Australia's Northern Territory. Its content is derived from Indigenous oral histories, and Ken Mulvaney writes that, in *Hidden Histories*:

Aboriginal remembrances form the backbone...The author's writings are a change from the usual romance of European colonisation: the picture painted is brutal, often shocking, and shamefully presents the contact between white and black [i.e. Indigenous¹]
(Mulvaney 1992, 102).

Wolfe's repeated citation of Rose suggests the strong influence of Indigenous oral histories in building his concept of elimination. In this way, elimination can be said to derive from the experience of the colonised. In another passage telling passage, Wolfe references statistics as a building block for his concept of elimination:

Even in contemporary...Australia, Aboriginal life expectancy clings to a level some 25% below that enjoyed by mainstream society, with an infant mortality rates that are even worse. What species of sophistry does it take to separate a quarter "part" of the life of a group from the history of their elimination? (Wolfe 2006, 399).

¹ In Australia Indigenous peoples are often referred to as 'black' (Wolfe 2016).

This reference to a statistical account of Indigenous life (and premature death) shows that Wolfe's theory, at least in part, derives from the standpoint of the colonised.

While Wolfe's language of structural intent and its grounding in Indigenous experience is clearly different from earlier formulations of colonial intent rooted in individual agency, it begs the question whether a better organizing grammar can be deployed to extricate his theory further from the imperial trace. Like the indistinction found in his definition of genocide, there exists a fuzziness in the grammar of intent that threatens to elide the experience of the colonised. In the next section, I read Wolfe's theory alongside that of critical Indigenous scholar, Glen Coulthard. I argue that his articulation of settler colonialism as *dispossession* heuristically consolidates the concepts of elimination and territoriality while transcending the grammar of intent, thereby extricating settler colonial theory completely from its imperial trace.

Glen Coulthard

In 2014, the publication of *Red Skin, White Masks* by Dene scholar, Glen Coulthard, heralded a moment of ascension for Critical Indigenous Theory (CIT). While commensurate with critical race and ethnic studies in its perspective that state power is constituted intersectionally along axes of race, gender, sexuality, and political economy, CIT differentiates itself by centering questions of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. This stands in contradistinction to traditional theorizing in critical race and ethnic studies that centre the state as the primary site of liberatory struggle. In opposition to projects of racialized peoples that seek inclusion in the liberal multicultural state, CIT "affirm[s] the polity of the Indigenous *against*...state formations" [my emphasis] (Barker 2017, 18). Put differently, CIT seeks liberation in forms of political organization *beyond* the state.

Red Skin, White Masks attacks the narrative that state-Indigenous relations in Canada changed from “genocidal practices of forced *exclusion* and *assimilation*” to “mutual recognition” following the federal White Paper of 1969 (Coulthard 2014, 4). The common narrative has been that “before 1969 federal Indian policy was unapologetically assimilationist” (Ibid., 3). Since 1969, however, the Canadian state has deployed the “vernacular of ‘mutual recognition’” alongside “seemingly more conciliatory” institutional practices in its relations with Indigenous peoples (Ibid.). Despite this shift, it is argued that state-Indigenous relations remain settler colonial “to its foundation” (Ibid., 6). In light of this, Coulthard posits that Indigenous struggle must turn away from the politics of state recognition and, instead, generate itself from within Indigenous communities. In accordance with CIT, this form of struggle seeks liberation beyond the state.

Like Wolfe’s, Coulthard’s conception of colonial continuity is premised on a theory of settler colonialism as structure. Settler colonialism is a relationship...characterized by a particular form of *domination*; that is, it is a relationship where power – in this case, interrelated discursive and non-discursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power – has been *structured* [my emphasis] into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples of their land and self-determining authority (Coulthard 2014, 6-7).

In this section, I demonstrate how Coulthard’s theory of settler colonialism as a *structured relationship of dispossession* is both similar and different from Wolfe’s. While it is similar in conceiving of settler colonialism as a temporally unbound structure characterized by both obfuscated and obvious facets of elimination, they differ in the phenomenon they ascribe to the

obfuscated/obvious dichotomy. I contend that this differentiation illuminates the logic of elimination to be *fractal* in nature. Next, I establish how ‘dispossession’ encompasses both concepts of elimination and territoriality. Lastly, I show how Coulthard transcends the grammar of intent, thereby constituting a theory of settler colonialism extricated from the imperial trace.

Coulthard’s theory of structural dispossession and Wolfe’s theory of structural elimination find common ground in their view of settler colonialism as temporally unbound and as containing both obfuscated and obvious processes of elimination. For Coulthard, the periodization of state-Indigenous relations that constructs a temporal and transformational divide between the “genocidal practices of forced *exclusion* and *assimilation*” of the pre-1969 era and the mutual recognition of today is a false one. Instead, “in settler-colonial contexts like Canada...there is no formal period marking an explicit transition...[This] leaves the *present* structure of colonial rule largely unscathed” [original emphasis] (Coulthard 2014, 22). Coulthard also concedes that settler colonialism is characterized by the elimination of Indigenous peoples (Ibid., 4). However, what differentiates the two theorists is how they categorize the obfuscated and obvious facets of elimination. Unlike Wolfe, who considers colonial practices like residential schools as part of elimination’s obfuscated facet, Coulthard constitutes them as an *obvious* facet (Ibid., 4). This speaks to how the discursive terrain of settler colonial studies has changed. Perhaps, it can be said that settler colonial theory has pierced through settler colonialism’s beneficent face. The discourse of civilization can no longer construct assimilation as a benevolent and non-violent act. It is, in fact, a “genocidal practice” (Coulthard 2014, 4). This conception of assimilation and the once-concealed facets of settler colonialism *as genocidal* aligns with Wildcat’s position that elimination is a variant of genocide.

For Coulthard, settler colonialism's concealed aspect is deployed by the Canadian state through the discourse of recognition. Although this discourse is "seemingly more conciliatory," it nevertheless reproduces the eliminatory processes of settler colonialism (Ibid., 6). Coulthard's argument here is that despite the discursive shift in the state's engagement with Indigenous peoples, the material effects of state-Indigenous relations remain unchanged (2014). That is, these effects continue to be characterized by Indigenous "*dispossession* of their land and self-determining authority," an argument which I will elaborate on shortly.

The Fractal Nature of Settler Colonialism

The discrepancy between Coulthard and Wolfe's theories regarding the obfuscated/obvious facets illuminates settler colonialism's logic of elimination to be *fractal* in nature. Coined by French mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot, the term 'fractal' is deployed in various fields of mathematical and scientific inquiry to describe

Objects which are self-similar. Small parts of a fractal look like larger parts. For example, a tree is a fractal, since if you break off a branch of the tree, it resembles the entire tree in miniature (Feldman 2012, 4).

Additionally,

Fractals need not be natural objects; they can be human made and can unfold in time in addition to space (Ibid.).

I use the term 'fractal' to describe the logic of elimination because, despite changes in surface form and content, its logic and effects remain similar. As a social structure, elimination unfolds across time in the space of Indigenous land and life. The term thus succinctly captures the continuity of structure both Wolfe and Coulthard describe.

In addition to the fractal's descriptive utility, I want to suggest that the term also presents generative capacities for settler colonial theory and for political theory more generally.

Mandelbrot posits that fractals “tend to be *scaling*” [original emphasis] (1983, 1). No matter which “fragment” of the object (or in our case, the structure) you look at, it “is identical at all scales” (Ibid.). Applying this to political theory presents an analytic to think about how systems of domination are produced, indeed *scaled*, across *all* aspects of social relations. Whether between state and society, society and family, or between individuals, the fractal helps us to *think* how domination is reproduced ubiquitously. Of course, this is not a new idea. Any invocation of social structure references this point. For instance, the feminist adage – “the personal is political” – posits the inextricability of patriarchy from its diverse social incarnations and the logic of gender hierarchy. Critical race theorists have likewise articulated how racial hierarchy manifests across individual, national, and global levels (Agathangelou 2004; Razack 2004). Indigenous feminists have illuminated how gender and racial hierarchies are reproduced not only across human relations, but also in relations with the non-human world (Nelson 2017) What I want to contend, though, is that the concept of ‘fractal logic’ generates a way of thinking that transcends the categorizations of political thought altogether. That is, my invocations in this paragraph of “state”, “nation”, “society,” “individuals” and “levels” of social phenomenon reveal a disjuncture between Mandelbrot’s concept of scale and the categories I have deployed to explain it.

To elaborate, let us revisit the scalar nature of fractals. In Mandelbrot’s formulation:

[Fractals] tend to be *scaling*, implying that the degree of their...fragmentation is identical at all scales...Some fractal sets are curves or surfaces, others are disconnected “dusts,” yet others are so oddly shaped that *there are no good terms for them in either the sciences or the arts*” [my emphasis] (Mandelbrot 1983, 1).

In this passage, the key implication for political thought is that there *are no good terms* to describe *all* the variegated ways fractals appear in phenomenon. Even though they can be distinguished, they cannot be categorized. Put differently, while some fractals can be articulated within the extant limits of language and meaning (scientific or otherwise), others can not. This suggests that the concept of scale, when applied to social phenomenon, both encompasses and transcends extant categories deployed in theorizing. What this generates is a radical space of indetermination in how we describe and analyze the ways in which social structures operate. Yes, domination is enacted through multiple levels such as state, nation, individual etc., but it is the infinite space *between* and *across* the levels that has yet to be theorized. Furthermore, this implies that the descriptors themselves are social constructions, inflected by power, which determine the legibility of political phenomenon (Ellison 2015). Thus, the fractal prevents premature closure and opens possibility in thinking about the social world.

Relating this back to Coulthard and Wolfe's theories, what is illuminated by the discrepancy in the obfuscated/obvious divide is the potentially infinite regressions and scalar categorizations in which the logic of elimination can be identified. The line between obfuscated/obvious is constantly shifting and indeterminate. It is important to emphasize here that what this suggests is *not* that everything is settler colonial. Rather it highlights the complexity of eliminatory phenomenon and stresses the always-incomplete project of political inquiry, and how we understand both domination and liberation. In this way, the notion of fractal logic is not new. It builds upon the work of Coulthard, Wolfe and generations of other scholars who have tirelessly documented the history of injustice and struggle upon the shifting terrain of power and meaning. What I want to suggest, however, is that "fractal logics" describes and consolidates the conception of power these theorists work from. At the same time, it also

generates space and freedom for other, yet untheorized concepts and categories to come into being. In this way, the fractal is also a mode of thinking rooted in the ethic of solidarity-building across critical scholarships. The ways we theorize, while distinct, are not antithetical; they are sutured by fractal histories of domination and struggle. Thus, I contend that Mandelbrot's concept should be included in the methods of political theorizing.

Settler Colonialism as Dispossession

Moving on from the fractal implications of the obfuscated/obvious divide, I now explicate how Coulthard's concept of *dispossession* draws together Wolfe's concepts of elimination and territoriality and transcends the grammar of intent. To recapitulate, Coulthard defines settler colonialism as a

relationship...where power...has been structured...to facilitate the *dispossession* of

Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority (Coulthard 2014, 6-7).

In this definition, Wolfe's concept of territoriality is reinscribed as "land." While this translation clearly captures Wolfe's articulation of territoriality, it also heuristically comprises the concept of elimination. Here, the "land" Coulthard invokes is more than a material one, and it is more than the abstract version of "territory" invoked by Wolfe. Land is not just a "resource," but provides *both* the "material and spiritual sustenance of Indigenous societies" (Coulthard 2014, 7). Put differently, land is inseparable from Indigenous life. To dispossess land in the material sense is *also* to dispossess the very foundation of Indigenous societies and the possibility for Indigenous life to remain legible *as Indigenous* in any self-determining capacity (Barker 2017). Thus, in this articulation, elimination and territoriality are heuristically consolidated *within* the concept of dispossession. The dispossession of land produces the elimination of Indigenous societies.

For deeper insight into this analytic, we can turn to Simpson and Coulthard's argument that dispossession is enacted through the "strategic targeting of Indigenous peoples' relationship to land" (2019, 254). Prior to colonisation, Indigenous political orders operated within, and were generated from, a "system of reciprocal relations and obligations" between the human and non-human worlds (Coulthard 2014, 13). The social relations which constituted Indigenous lifeways comprised not only how human life is governed, but governance also accounted for, and was constituted *from*, reciprocal relationships between humans and non-humans, that is, between humans and the land (L. Simpson 2017). To access Indigenous territory, colonisers thus attacked the ways of life these reciprocal relations generated (Ibid.). This, in turn, provided colonisers deeper territorial access, which further denigrated Indigenous ways of life. Here, the linearity of Wolfe's original postulation – that elimination occurs *in order* to access territory – is reinscribed as a recursive one (Nichols 2020): This "recursion is not [a] simple tautology;" rather, "each iteration is...different from the last [and] builds upon" the prior ones (Nichols 2020, 9). As such, Nichols recursive logic also bears resemblance to the deployment of recursion in Mandelbrot's fractals, where the reproduction of structurally-alike fragments eventually produces a meta-structure that bears resemblance, but is not identical, to the original fragment (1983). While Nichols uses the metaphor of the helix (as opposed to the *circle* of simple tautology) to characterise his concept of recursion (2020, 9), I want to suggest that the more apt metaphor is, in fact, the fractal. Though the helix, most well-known in the molecular representation of DNA, demonstrates how dispossession feeds back on itself beyond simple tautology, it misses the structural complexity and variegation suggested by the fractal.

Coulthard's derivation of Indigenous dispossession from Marx's theory of primitive accumulation also provides insight into the heuristic. Coulthard summarizes Marx's theory thus:

In [the transition from feudalism to capitalism,] acts of violent *dispossession* set the stage for the emergence of capitalist accumulation....by tearing Indigenous societies, peasants, and other small-scale, self-sufficient agricultural producers from the source their livelihood – *the land* [original emphasis] (Coulthard 2014, 7).

This process, described by David Harvey as “accumulation by dispossession” (2004), severed feudal communities from the land to pave way for the “violent transformation of non-capitalist ways of life into capitalist ones” (Coulthard 2014, 8). Here, we see a process akin to Indigenous dispossession, where the dispossession of land eliminates ways of life that were generated *from the land* to erect a capitalist society. While Marx deployed his theory to describe how proletarianization occurred in the formation of capitalism, Coulthard applies this to settler colonialism by “*contextually shifting* [analysis] from an emphasis on the *capital relation* to the *colonial relation*” [original emphasis] (Ibid., 10). Put differently, Coulthard’s analysis emphasizes the relationship between coloniser and colonised rather than the bourgeois and proletariat (Ibid., 11).

Interestingly, the recursive nature of dispossession in the Critical Indigenous Theory of Simpson and Coulthard also reinscribes Marx’s linear concept, where violent dispossession is *followed* by enclosure (that is, by the privatization of collective land) (Ibid., 7). If we accept this re-inscription, it follows that enclosure did not eliminate, *tout court*, per-capitalist ways of life. Instead, the production of capitalism, like settler colonialism, requires processes beyond the *obvious* violence of primitive accumulation. Here, we find a theoretical link between Critical Indigenous Theory and the neo-Marxist thought of scholars like Althusser, Gramsci, and those of the Frankfurt School who have theorized the constitutive relationship between material base and social superstructure in the dynamic evolution of capitalist relations (for instance see Althusser

1971; Gramsci 1992; Horkheimer 1972). This linkage precisely illustrates the generative capacities of exchange between Marxist theory and CIT that Coulthard proposes (2014, 8).

Having explicated how Coulthard's theory of settler colonialism as dispossession comprises both territoriality and elimination, I now demonstrate how it transcends the grammar of intent. Notice in his formulation, settler colonialism is a "relationship...where power...has been structured...to facilitate...*dispossession*." Instead of assigning intent to the settler colonial structure, this formulation fully extricates the grammatical subject position deployed in Wolfe's theory. Whereas, in Wolfe's theory, the subject position of 'structure' *does* something to the object position of the colonised, in Coulthard's, the structure is a *relationship* that "facilitates" dispossession. In this way, not only does Coulthard's theory transcend the grammar of intent, it also constitutes the colonised as more than passive objects of this intent.

Grammatical choice is important in settler colonial theory because, as Miranda Johnson illuminates, the discourse of elimination has been interpreted to mean that Indigenous peoples were successfully eliminated by colonisers (2016, 169). In a telling passage, Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen interpret Wolfe's work to mean that "Indigenous peoples...were indeed brutally and even decisively defeated" (2018, 3). While I agree with Veracini's critique that Johnson fundamentally misinterprets Wolfe's theory of elimination – nowhere does Wolfe articulate that settler colonialism is a done deal – I contend that Johnson's argument, and Elkins & Pedersen's mischaracterization of Wolfe, illuminates something important about the discursive dangers in maintaining the imperial trace in theory's grammar. In contexts where Indigenous life is repeatedly portrayed as disappeared or disappearing (Byrd 2011), a grammatical change that shifts agency away from colonial intent provides important discursive openings, however small, for Indigenous resistance and resurgence to become legible. Rather than mere objects of a

totalizing structure, Indigenous communities have enacted, and continue to enact, vibrant strategies of resistance and refusal against the violent impositions of settler colonialism (Coulthard 2014; L. Simpson 2017; A. Simpson 2014). Making this legible is important in the presence of a structure that renders Indigenous disappearance both materially and discursively (Byrd 2011; Veracini 2010).

In this section, I have explicated how Coulthard's theory of settler colonialism as structural dispossession is both similar and different to Wolfe's theory of structural elimination. Furthermore, I have explicated how dispossession, as a concept, heuristically comprises both elimination and territoriality while transcending the grammar of intent. Next, I turn to the settler colonial theory of Caroline Elkins & Susan Pedersen (2018). As it will be seen, their theory forgoes the concepts of elimination and dispossession. Instead, they posit a theory of *settler colonialism as contestation*. I contend that this precludes their theory from the turn towards empire.

Caroline Elkins & Susan Pedersen

While the scholarship of Elkins & Pedersen maintains a noticeable presence in settler colonial studies, their theory constitutes a theoretical trajectory distinct from Wolfe's and Coulthard's. Put bluntly, it derives from the question of colonial intent. They center what settlers do rather than what the colonised experience. Here, Vimalassery et. al's argument that settler colonial studies "risks obscuring or eliding as much as it does to distinguish" by ignoring "geographies from below" appears in clear relief and begs the question of whether Elkins & Pedersen's theory can be conceived as part of the turn towards empire at all. (Ibid., n.p.).

In this section, I demonstrate how Elkins and Pedersen's theory of *settler colonialism as contestation* returns to the traditional definition of being simply a colony with a settler presence.

In this light, their scholarship should not be considered as part of the turn towards empire. As noted in chapter one, settler colonial theory within the turn towards empire articulates that the mere presence of settlers is insufficient to constitute settler colonialism. As settler presence can be found in all forms of colonialism, their theory fails to do exactly what settler colonial theory sets out to do, which is to “name a specific form of imperial domination” (Young 2017, 1036). They also forward the misguided notion that, in Wolfe’s conception, settler colonialism in the Anglo-settler states “brutally and even decisively defeated” Indigenous peoples (Elkins and Pedersen 2005, 3). This erasure of Indigenous presence and resistance emerges from their failure to encompass Indigenous experience. Instead, their theory of settler colonialism is generated exclusively from what settlers do, and ultimately *fail* to do. This figures their theory as precisely the abstract projection of Western power and academic navel-gazing described by Wolfe (1999, 1).

In a similar vein, Lorenzo Veracini’s theory in *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* is also predicated on a theory of settler colonialism based on the mere presence of settlers. Despite this, elements of his theory nevertheless illuminate certain specificities regarding the operation of settler colonialism. This is because Veracini analytically partitions his theorizations. Aspects of his theory derive from the experience of the colonized, and these are articulated separately from the ones that focus on colonial intent. This is understandable as his method is a meta-analysis of theories which have deployed the terms “settler” and “colonialism,” and not a systematic definition of settler colonialism (Veracini 2010, 12). *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, is thus situated on the border of the turn towards empire, bearing analysis characteristic of both colonial intent and colonial effect. I will deploy the aspects of his theory which derive from colonial effect in the next chapter on phenomenon in the XUAR.

The original intent of this section was to read Elkins and Pedersen alongside Veracini to further demonstrate how differential emphasis on intent and effect can produce radically different definitions of settler colonialism. Furthermore, I wanted to show how their theories are also determined by variation in their inductive methods. While the scholars all begin with empirical phenomenon to build their theories, their choice of case studies fundamentally alter their final theories. Elkins and Pedersen's failure to include the Anglo-settler colonies generates a theory divorced from that of Wolfe's and Coulthard's, while Veracini's inclusion of them provides a foundation for convergence. This shows, again, the constitutive relationship between positionality and theory. This comparative work, however, will have to be done at another time. Time is never quite what I expect it to be. In this section, I focus solely on Elkins and Pedersen.

Settler Colonialism as Contestation

Caroline Elkins & Susan Pedersen's introduction in their edited volume, *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practice, Legacies*, derives a theory of settler colonialism from a diverse group of global colonies including Japanese Korea and Taiwan, Mozambique, Nazi Poland, South Africa, Namibia, and Israel/Palestine (2005). For them, "settler colonialism is...rightly distinguished from imperial expansion for military advantage or trade," and is characterized by the "presence of settler populations intent on making a territory their permanent home" (Ibid., 2). In this characterization, they deploy a historical typology of colonialism like that of Osterhammel's (1997). This typology differentiates between colonies controlled solely by imperial militaries and administrators from those with sizeable and permanent settler populations who possess varying levels of independence from the imperial metropole ((Elkins and Pedersen 2005, 3; Osterhammel 1997, 11). Here, the core attribute of settler colonialism is the *presence of*

settlers who are, to different degrees, autonomous from metropolitan control. Proceeding from this premise, Elkins and Pedersen define settler colonialism thus:

Settler colonialism in the twentieth century is...marked by ongoing negotiation and struggle among four key groups: an imperial metropole where sovereignty formally resides, a local administration charged with maintaining order and authority, an indigenous population significant enough in size and tenacity to make its presence felt, and an often demanding and well-connected settler community... Yet settler colonialism is not defined merely by this four-way relationship but also by a particular structure of privilege...marked by pervasive inequalities, usually codified in law, between settler and indigenous populations (Elkins and Pedersen 2005, 4).

In this definition, contestation between four groups – the metropole, administrators, settlers, and Indigenous peoples – along with a structure of privilege (i.e. domination) define settler colonialism. Thus, it diverges noticeably from the theories thus far discussed which centre a two-way relationship between coloniser and colonised, and structures of elimination and dispossession. It has been articulated earlier in this chapter how domination is too abstract of a concept to describe the specific mode of domination settler colonialism enacts, and I now turn focus to Elkins & Pedersen's definition of *settler colonialism as contestation*. I contend that this difference vis-à-vis Wolfe's and Coulthard's theories emerges from two related theoretical moves: 1. The premise that settler colonialism is defined by the mere presence of settlers and 2. the centering of colonial intent.

Though the presence of settlers is a necessary condition in both Wolfe's and Coulthard's theories, their engagement with Indigenous experience posits elimination/dispossession as an additional condition necessary to identify settler colonialism. Elkins and Pedersen forgo these

conditions because their theory fails to encompass any analysis of what the colonised experience. Though they articulate that a tenacious Indigenous population *exists* in settler colonies, this existence is circumscribed by the question of colonial intent.

To derive their theory of *settler colonialism as contestation*, Elkins and Pedersen argue that settler colonies *intend* to “weaken (or even rid themselves of)...metropolitan control and indigenous populations” (Elkins and Pedersen 2005, 2). While their theory aligns with Wolfe’s in recognizing that colonisers seek to “rid themselves” of Indigenous peoples, this alignment is negated by their articulation that settler colonialism in places like Canada, Australia, and the U.S. are completed projects. Referencing Wolfe, they write that in these places, “Indigenous peoples...were...brutally and even decisively defeated” (Ibid., 3). Here, the elision of Indigenous experience circumscribes Indigenous peoples in Anglo-settler states as victims of successful elimination. We know this is not the case. Furthermore, it also circumscribes Indigenous existence in their own theory because “contestation” it is ultimately premised on the *failure* of settlers to eliminate. That is, settler colonialism, for Elkins and Pedersen, is defined by *contestation* because colonisers are *unable* to rid themselves of the Indigenous population. In this way, their theory is generated exclusively from the standpoint of the coloniser. It rests on an infrastructure of settler intent, and the failure to realize this intent. The colonial standpoint is further illustrated by the inclusion of metropole-settler contestation as a core aspect of their theory. From the standpoint of the colonised, it matters little how the imperial metropole engages with the colonising settlers. For the settler, it is central. The four-way relationship of contestation is, thus, a narrative of settler experience.

Elkins and Pedersen’s differentiation of settler colonies from settler states also illustrates the centrality of settler intent (and the failure of this intent) in their theory. In their words, “settler

states...may originate as...settler colonies [but] they have passed beyond that stage to independence” (2005, 4). In contrast, settler colonies were unable to successfully complete this process (Ibid., 8). In this distinction, we see that in addition to the failure of settlers to eliminate Indigenous peoples, the theory of contestation is also demarcated by the failure of settlers to become independent from the metropole. This move, again, demonstrates how their theory generates itself from the standpoint of the settler, what they intend to do, and how they have failed.

Elkins and Pedersen’s theory is additionally problematic in its assimilation of Wolfe’s theory in a way that annihilates Wolfe’s animating premise – that settler colonialism is a temporally unbound structure. As traditional historians, Elkins and Pedersen proceed from a method of periodization where history is narrated through recognizable *events* with beginnings and endings. In their case, the event is the “end of empire,” where settler colonies, unlike settler states, have failed to eliminate, become independent, and the empire retreats (Elkins and Pedersen 2005, 14-15). In contrast, Wolfe is concerned with colonial continuity in the “post-colonial” present. Noticeably lacking in Elkins and Pedersen’s analysis is how events themselves are discursively constituted by formations of power and meaning that work to conceal colonialism’s structural continuity. This lack emerges from their elision of Indigenous experience. Instead, their focus on colonial intent has constructed an artificial divide between settler colonialism and settler states, a theoretical move premised on the false assumption that Indigenous populations in the Anglo-settler colonies were decisively defeated. This is an act of epistemological violence. In the presence of ongoing Indigenous resistance and resurgence in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the U.S., this move is untenable.

Interestingly, Elkins and Pedersen appear nominally aware that their definition is fundamentally different from Wolfe's. In their conclusion, they write:

When political scientists have compared settler projects or states across regions and time, they have done so largely in order to develop hypotheses or theories about state expansion, regime structure, or political violence that might be of present-day use...As historians our ambitions have been different. What we have sought...is...to argue for the analytical usefulness of [the] term, *settler colonialism*, to offer a definition, to suggest some variables by which we might measure its applicability and strength, and to develop a typology within which we might plot particular historical cases [original emphasis] (2005, 16).

Despite its acknowledgement of the political impetus behind *other* theorizations of settler colonialism, this statement reproduces the very problematic the turn towards empire seeks to address. Implicit here is that "political" theorizations of settler colonialism bear a normative orientation that their historical (i.e. scientific) account transcends. As such, it replicates the notion that theory emerges from an autonomous sphere and can be rooted in an objective analysis of phenomenon. What they fail to see is that the legibility of colonial phenomenon can be circumscribed by discourses of objectivity and non-normativity. They fail to consider how their theory enacts a normative exclusion of Indigenous experience. Thus, Elkins and Pedersen's theory cannot be considered as part of the turn towards empire since it does not take into account the experience of the colonised.

Elkins and Pedersen's settler colonial theory constitutes a trajectory distinct from that of Wolfe's and Coulthard's. While one cannot contend that their scholarship be evacuated from the aegis of settler colonial studies, it is fair to say that the work their theory *does* is politically

antithetical to the turn towards empire. Rooted as it is in colonial intent and the erasure of Indigenous experience, its deployment of the term “settler colonialism” obscures the phenomena illuminated by Wolfe and Coulthard. This tension does not have to be resolved, for in the tension itself the terrain of imperial power and its trace are illuminated. As settler colonial studies is produced within the extant conditions of empire, both discursive and material, it is inevitable that some of its theories will reproduce conditions that “obscure and elide” settler colonial processes (Vimalassery, Pegues, and Goldstein 2016, n.p.).

In this section, I hope it has become clear why settler colonial studies must continually engage with the conditions of its own production. Despite the appearance that the field is constitutively engaged in a normative critique of empire, its embeddedness in social, historical, and material power relations means it will inevitably produce theories like Elkins and Pedersen’s. We cannot assume, a priori, that its contributions will render legible settler colonial phenomenon. While my engagement with Elkins and Pedersen has been critical, I do not consider them to be ontologically colonising subjects. Indeed, in their closing paragraph, they write:

There is...one final reason to insist on the usefulness of the term *settler colonialism* and the value of renewed attention to its character and dynamics. This is, of course, that the democratic new world states in which many of us work and live, were - and in ways we hardly appreciate, remain – settler colonial states (Elkins and Pedersen 2005, 18).

This statement shows potential for engagement with the historical and ongoing experience of Indigenous peoples. Within it lies a nascent awareness of colonial continuity in the places where they write. As an American and Canadian scholar based in the United States, Elkins and Pedersen have undoubtedly encountered the activism of Indigenous movements in both the

academy and beyond. Furthermore, as scholars of empire, they must also discern, to some degree, the uncanny similarities between the imperial past and the “post”-colonial present. At the same time, what function does their oblique acknowledgement play? Without real engagement with the experience of the colonised, is it what Tuck and Yang call a “settler move to innocence?” (2012, 1)? Is it simply an “attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity” (Ibid.)?

Settler Colonialism and the Settler State

In the final section of this chapter, I delineate the theory of settler colonialism and the settler state that will be applied to China and the XUAR. Based upon the critiques made thus far, I contend that Coulthard’s definition of settler colonialism is most appropriate. As for the settler state, I will define it as

A state in which settler colonialism is operating.

This definition differs from extant definitions which are historically specific to Anglo-settler colonisation and the subsequent independence movements that birthed the states of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. As articulated earlier, Elkins and Pedersen define the settler state as a colony which has become independent from the empire. Similarly, Veracini characterizes settler colonialism as a process where settlers are “ultimately, if not immediately, autonomous from the colonising metropole” (Veracini 2010, 53). While Veracini’s definition does not explicitly distinguish between a settler colony and a settler state, it does theorize that a political independence from the imperial metropole is necessary to delineate settler colonialism. Because the XUAR remains firmly situated within the Chinese state, and because Chinese settlers do not seek independence from China, this definition is untenable for application to the Chinese case. Reading Coulthard’s definition into my conception of the settler state, the theory I will apply to China is as follows:

A settler state is a state where power has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their land and self-determining authority.

In the next chapter, I present a constellation of Chinese state practices and policies in the XUAR which suggest that China is, indeed, a settler state.

CHAPTER 3: SETTLER COLONIALISM IN THE XUAR

Introduction

Located in the far northwest, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is China's "largest administrative unit [and] strategically located along a 5600 kilometer border with eight nations" (Zenz 2019, 2). As of 2008, its population numbered 21.3 million, 46.1 percent of which were Uyghur. The Han, who comprise 94 percent of China's total population, were the second most populous group with 39.2 percent (Howell and Fan 2011). These numbers contrast sharply with the census of 1953, which found Uyghurs to comprise 74.7% of the XUAR'S population and Han only 6% (Grbović 2019). Other sizeable ethnic groups living in the XUAR include Kazahk, Hui, and Kyrgyz, all of whom are predominantly Muslim (Ibid.).

In an uncanny echo of settler colonial discourse on Turtle Island, Xinjiang (新疆) in mandarin literally translates to "new frontier." While referred to as an "autonomous region," the territory, for all intents and purposes, is controlled by the central government in Beijing (Tyler 2004). Though the Chinese constitution articulates the principle of "self-government" for the XUAR (Wang 2002), this is limited to simple representation in the regional bureaucracy. The state makes efforts to recruit Uyghur civil servants and sometimes appoints a Uyghur to the top regional position, but precludes any opening for substantive political autonomy (Bachman 2004; Castets 2003; Gladney 1998).

In addition to the regional bureaucracy, the XUAR is also governed by a parallel state institution – the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) – whose members are 90% Han (Castets 2003). Described by David Bachman as a "state within a state," the XPCC "exercises economic, military, paramilitary and 'judicial' functions...has the equivalent of provincial status ...and is not under the control of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region"

(Bachman 2004., 156, 175). Within China’s internal governance, the XPCC is a military corps or *bingtuan* (兵团). Active in a variety of international markets, it presents itself externally as a state-owned enterprise or *gongsi* (公司).² Recently, the American Treasury Department sanctioned the XPCC, requiring domestic fashion retailers to remove XPCC cotton, which makes up 7% of the world’s supply, from their supply chains (Dou 2020). The XPCC is estimated to have around 2.4 million members, most of whom are not included in census data as military personnel under the direct control of the central government are not counted (Bachman 2004, 180; Castets 2003, 16). Doing the math, this means that over 2 million Han settlers are not counted in official XUAR demographics.

In this chapter, using Coulthard’s theory of settler colonialism, I analyze a constellation of policies and practices implemented in the XUAR since 1949. While the XUAR has a far longer history of engagement, first with Chinese imperial dynasties and later the Chinese republican state (1912-1949), it was not until the Communist victory of 1949 that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) fully asserted its sovereignty in the region (Bachman 2004; Kinzley 2018). The constellation I present is structured by the waypoints of land dispossession, Han settlement, and Uyghur assimilation policies, all of which recursively work to dispossess Uyghurs of their land and self-determining authority. The evidence presented is *not* a comprehensive analysis of all policies and practices. Thus, I describe it as a constellation. Drawing on the “astrological constellation, which simultaneously groups together and is revealed by [a] cluster of individual stars” (Osborne and Charles 2020, n.p.) the evidence presented can

² In China, the XPCC is known as the *Xinjiang Shengchan Jianshe Bingtuan* (新疆生产建设兵团), or the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. On the international market, it presents itself as the *Zhongguo Xinjiantuan Gongsi* (中国新建团公司) which translates to New Chinese Production Corporation.

likewise be considered a series of stars, or waypoints, that reveal a recognizable structure through the lens of settler colonial theory.

My invocation of “constellation” is rooted in Walter Benjamin’s theory of history, which deploys the term to challenge the notion of progress, or what Coulthard calls the “normative developmentalism,” in the work of Marx (Osborne and Charles 2020, n.p.). For Benjamin, history could not be sedimented into objective events and teleological processes. Rather, it is constructed through constellations of phenomenon compiled and arranged in the present (Ibid.). In this way, the constellation aligns methodologically with settler colonial theory’s dual emphases on structural continuity and positionality. It forecloses any artificial separation between past and present, such as the “end of empire” in Elkins and Pedersen’s theory, or the “end of genocide” in Coulthard’s characterization of Canadian state discourses. Rather, the reading of history is always conditioned by present circumstances. The constellation further implies that the interpretation of history is always a project inflected by power and the question of who is interpreting. Thus, it is a method that presents openings for Indigenous experience against the abstract, totalizing, and “objective” gaze of empire.

Chinese Policies and Practices in the XUAR

Land Dispossession

Land dispossession from Uyghurs in the XUAR began almost immediately following the Communist’s civil war victory of 1949. Described by Christian Tyler as a process of reform followed by collectivisation, the Communist Party quickly dismantled the traditional Uyghur system of land tenure (Tyler 2004, 132). Under the traditional Islamic system, land was held by either Muslim nobles or by mosques and comprised both land for sedentary agriculture and nomadic pastoralism (Ibid.). Portraying Islamic nobles as “feudal reactionaries” and “counter-

revolutionaries,” those with large landholdings were “automatically shot” (Ibid., 132-133). Those with smaller holdings could escape execution by “voluntarily” giving up their land. The landholdings and assets of mosques were also confiscated, at least in part, and clergy members were placed under the control of the China Islamic Association. Imams were then “appointed and paid by the state,” and clergy “were sent on ideology courses...ordered to hang pictures of Chairman Mao in their mosque and to give sermons on such topics as ‘the international solidarity of the working class’” (Ibid. 133). Indoctrination programs were likewise implemented for Uyghur peasants, who were educated by Communist party cadres on issues like “class struggle with...landlords” (Ibid., 134). Lastly, nomadic herders were asked to give up their livelihoods for agriculture. However, fearing that these herders would slaughter their livestock in protest, Chinese authorities did not, at this time, direct coercive policies against them (Ibid.).

This initial engagement between the newly established PRC and Uyghur peoples aptly illustrates how dispossession comprises Wolfe’s negative/positive dimensions of elimination. Frontier violence against Uyghur nobles constituted the negative dimension and was followed by the positive technique of assimilating Uyghur clergy and peasantry through ideological indoctrination. Both negative and positive dimensions are clearly implemented to dispossess Uyghur peoples of their land. They were enacted through precise attacks on nobles and mosques, which constituted essential elements of Uyghur society and governance (Holdstock 2015, 132). Dispossession, thus, was achieved through the co-constituted, and recursive, processes of land dispossession and the dispossession of the Uyghurs’ self-determining authority. That is, seizure of Uyghur land was achieved through, and facilitated by, attacks on Uyghur governance structures and ways of life. In this early phase, Wolfe’s delineation of the obvious/obfuscated applies. The obvious dimension is comprised of direct killing and violence. The obfuscated

dimension is comprised of Uyghur assimilation into Chinese state institutions. Of course, for Coulthard, both direct killing and assimilation would comprise the obvious dimension. Later in this chapter, I will exposit a policy which conforms to Coulthard's conceptualization of the obfuscated dimension.

Despite similarities in Wolfe's settler colonial theory and the early practices of the Chinese state, an interesting tension emerges when analyzing phenomenon in the XUAR against contemporary settler colonial theories. Under the Chinese constitution, "all the land and resources beneath it belong to the state" (Tyler 2004, 208). This form of socialist, collective land tenure is distinct from capitalist regimes of private property highlighted by contemporary settler colonial theorists. Writing from the Anglo-settler colonies, these theorists emphasize the transition from Indigenous, collective land tenure (and its attendant modes of relational governance and production) to private property (and its attendant forms of hierarchical sovereignty and capitalist production) as a core constituent of settler colonialism (Bhandar 2018; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Nichols 2020; Pasternak 2020; L. Simpson 2017). The shared language of "collectivity" in socialist and Indigenous political orders can obscure the settler colonial structure of Chinese state practices because the common anti-capitalist orientation in both appears more alike than different. It gives rise to the question: can socialist states be settler colonial?

To address this question, Coulthard draws upon the work of Peter Kropotkin, who uses the concept of "socialist primitive accumulation" to describe how socialist states, like capitalist states, can also violently dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land and self-determining authority (Coulthard 2014, 11-12). Sidestepping debates on whether China is, in practice, socialist or capitalist (Boer and Zhixiong 2015; Kolodko 2018; Zhao and Wu 2020), this

intervention reveals that settler colonialism is not so much delineated by capitalist transition as it is by *state formation*. In this light, contemporary settler colonial theory's emphasis on capitalist transition is provincialized. It becomes a function of its positionality in Anglo-settler states, and not an essential characteristic of settler colonialism. To expand the aegis of settler colonial theory, and to partition the socialist ethic of collectivity from the Indigenous, we can return to Coulthard's premise that the analytic of settler colonialism emphasizes the subject position of the colonised over that of the proletariat; it focuses on the *colonial relation* over the *capital relation* (Ibid., 10). We can also turn to Audra Simpson's articulation that settler colonialism is structured by state projects of "homogenizing heterogeneity," where the sovereignty of the state "proliferates at the...expense" of Indigenous sovereignty (2014, 12-18). In this light, the discursive affinity of "collectivity" between socialist states and Indigenous political orders can be partitioned as fundamentally antagonistic forms. Socialist states can be settler colonial if its form of collectivity eliminates the collectivity of the Indigenous.

State-Directed, State-Incentivised, and Voluntary Han Migration

Turning back to phenomenon in the XUAR, the initial reformation of Uyghur governance structures was followed by mass land collectivisation. In 1955, large collectives of a hundred to three hundred families each were established, and seven million acres of land was distributed to 2 million peasants (Tyler 2004, 134). To populate these collectives, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps was formed in 1954. Under its auspices, 150,000 demobilised Han soldiers from both the People's Liberation Army and the defeated Guomindang were settled in the XUAR (Ibid., 134-135). Over the next five decades, successive waves of state-directed, state-facilitated, and voluntary migration of Han settlers would drastically change the territory's demographic makeup. According to data gleaned from the government's Xinjiang Statistical

Yearbook, “between 1953 and 2010 the Han Chinese population increased their share of the region’s total population from 6.1% to 40.1%” (Hasmath 2019, 5). It is worthy to note, again, that this number does not include the XPCC’s current 2.4 million members. Han in-migration continues today with an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 settlers arriving in the XUAR each year (Bachman 2004, 180).

A large portion of Han migration to the XUAR during the Mao era (1949-1976) was conducted directly by the state. Following its establishment, the XPCC continued to settle Han soldiers and their families from the interior. In the decade between 1954 and 1966, the corps drastically increased in size from 150,000 to 1.48 million (Joniak-Luthi 2013). To address the gender imbalance created by non-married soldiers, the military recruited and settled 40,000 Han women, “mainly from Hunan and Shandong provinces” (Ibid., 37). While these women were described as voluntary recruits designated for border defense (Joniak-Luthi 2013, 159; Holdstock 2015, 37), they were, in reality, “forced into marriage[s] [with] Han soldiers” and prevented from returning to their hometowns (Holdstock 2015, 37). The women did not ultimately receive military designation “and were relegated to ‘housewife’ status, which lacked the same salary and pension as their male counterparts” (Ibid.). Over and above XPCC settlement, the government relocated over 6,000 Han youth to the XUAR in 1954 and this was followed by an additional 55,000 youths in 1956 (Joniak-Luthi 2013, 164). Between 1957 and 1960, “more than 800,000 [settlers]...were dispatched between [XPCC] farms and various government institutions, hospitals, educational institutions, enterprises and factories” (Joniak-Luthi 2013, 164). Another wave of directed migration would occur during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During this tumultuous period, over 400,000 youth from the metropolitan centres of Shanghai, Wuhan, Tianjin, and Hangzhou were settled in the XUAR (Joniak-Luthi 2013, 161).

In 1976, the year of Mao's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution, migration conducted directly by the state began to wane and increasingly took on incentivised and voluntary forms (Joniak-Luthi 2013). The central and regional governments instituted favorable regimes for industry in the XUAR, and the resulting influx of both state-owned and private enterprises led to increasing numbers of voluntary migrants in search of employment and profit (Ibid.). During the Mao era, to support the XUAR's extractive industries, the central government had invested heavily in transportation infrastructure (Kinzley 2018). Except for the period between 1971-1975, per-capita investment in the XUAR consistently outranked the majority of other provinces (Bachman 2004). Beginning in the 1980s, this infrastructure, alongside new incentives of low tax rates and cheap land leases, drew in both state-owned and private enterprise. In turn, voluntary migration by Han workers and entrepreneurs steadily increased. By the late 1980s, "economic, profit driven migration" had outflanked state-directed migration (Joniak-Luthi 2013, 167). During the 1990s, net migration to the XUAR increased by 160%, "making Xinjiang one of the top destinations for labor migrants following Beijing, Shanghai, and southern Guangdong province" (Ibid. 2013, 167; Ren and Yuan 2003, 97). Beijing and Shanghai are China's largest cities and southern Guangdong province hosts the metropolises of Guangzhou and Shenzhen, China's fifth and sixth largest urban centres. That one of China's most remote areas ranks amongst its most heavily populated places for in-migration speaks to the radical steps the state has taken to incentivise industry development and attendant voluntary migration to the XUAR.

For Lorenzo Veracini, the transfer of settlers to colonised territory is an ubiquitous technique of settler colonialism (2010, 49). The greater the number of settlers, the deeper the colonial claim to land. Overwhelming Indigenous populations also decreases the likelihood of

successful rebellion. Furthermore, Veracini has illuminated an insidious discursive dynamic that emerges through settler proliferation:

colonisers cease being colonisers if and when they become the majority of the population.

Conversely, and even more perplexingly, indigenous people only need to become a minority in order to cease being colonised (Veracini 2010, 5)

Continued demographic shift thus results in multiple outcomes. Beyond deepening territorial claims, settler colonialism is concealed when settlers outnumber the Indigenous population. When this happens, colonialism is often portrayed as a done deal, and Indigenous peoples become “entrapped within the analytics of ‘minoritization’” (A. Simpson 2014, 18). They become either wards of the state or citizens, and state-Indigenous relations become one of managing “ethnic” or “cultural” difference (Byrd 2011). Indigenous claims to self-determination are rendered governable and interior to the settler state, for instance, through discourses of multiculturalism and/or recognition (Coulthard 2014).

Uyghur Assimilation

China recognizes Uyghurs as one of its official 55 ethnic minorities, or *shaoshu minzu* (少数民族). Article 4 of the Chinese constitution articulates that the state “shall protect the lawful rights and interests of all ethnic minorities...[and] All ethnic groups shall have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages and to preserve their own traditions and customs.” Furthermore, Article 36 guarantees religious freedom for all (“Constitution of the People’s Republic of China” 2019). These freedoms, however, are circumscribed by the integrity of the state. The positive right to religion only goes so far as it does not “disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the state’s education system” (Ibid.). Additionally, both Article 4 and the constitution’s preamble makes multiple references to national “unity”

alongside its nod to ethnic difference, and clearly states that “All ethnic autonomous areas are inseparable parts of the People’s Republic of China” (Ibid.). Thus, recognition of Uyghurs in China, like the recognition of Indigenous peoples elsewhere, only goes as far as it can be managed *within* the auspices of state power (Barker 2017; Coulthard 2014; A. Simpson 2014). Here, *Uyghurness* is circumscribed by the sovereignty of the state and relegated to the so-called “non-political” realms of tradition, language, custom and culture (Rifkin 2011; 2019). This recognition is performed insofar as it does not challenge the state’s political-territorial integrity, which comprises the land inhabited by Uyghurs.

Uyghurs have resisted Han control since the establishment of the PRC. Ranging from peaceful protest to bombings and knife attacks, Uyghurs have continually fought against the expansion of Chinese state power and its assimilative policies and practices (Holdstock 2015). In response to this, and to what it interprets as the threat of Uyghur ethno-cultural consciousness, the state has deployed both “soft and hard policy approaches” to maintain its sovereignty (Hasmath 2019, 3). However, whether hard or soft, the explicit goal has always been to assimilate Uyghurs into the Chinese state and Han society. As Wang Enmao articulated in 1960 when he was the XUAR’s Party Secretary (the highest position in the regional bureaucracy), “the complete blending of all nationalities [is] necessary” (quoted in Holdstock 2015, 42). This perspective was animated by the “assumption...that if the minorities were sufficiently assimilated then their ethnic identity would fade away until there was only (Han) Chinese culture left” (Ibid.). In 1957, Zhou Enlai, the Premier of China (the country’s second highest political position), likewise expressed the necessity for assimilation, describing it as a

“progressive act if it means the natural merger of nations [i.e. ethnic groups] advancing towards prosperity. Assimilation as such has the significance of promoting progress” (quoted in Holdstock 2015, 42). Interestingly, in the same speech, Zhou referenced British colonisation of the America’s calling it “reactionary because it [involved] one nation destroying another by force” (quoted in Tyler 2004, 144). Chinese assimilation of ethnic minorities, according to Zhou, was “voluntary” in nature (Ibid.).

Zhou’s distinction between “forceful” and “voluntary” assimilation precisely demonstrates the impetus behind Wolfe’s emphasis on the positive dimension of settler colonialism. Through the discourse of progress and civilization, the Chinese state has concealed its assimilative acts as beneficent. These acts have comprised a variety of policies and practices.

Campaigns of re-education directed towards Uyghur clergy continued following their inception in 1949:

the state [continues] to ‘re-educate’ and ‘reform’ religious leaders to ensure that they do not advocate Islamic ‘extremism or ‘illegal religious activities’ *as defined by the state* [my emphasis] (Hasmath 2019, 3).

Like the early days, Uyghur religious governance is circumscribed by state interests. The nature of this control ebbs and flows in accordance with Uyghur resistance. In quieter times, the state funds the construction and maintenance of mosques (Ibid.). However, this quickly disappears during times of unrest. On April 5, 1990, a small protest of several hundred organized by Uyghur activists occurred during Ramadan in the township of Baren. The exact cause of the protest is unclear, but it was directed against Chinese authorities. By the end of day April 6th, multiple protestors and Chinese government officials had been killed (Debata 2007,144-147; Holdstock 2015, 72-75). In the wake of the protest,

authorities targeted ‘illegal religious activities,’ halted mosque construction, closed schools of religious instruction and increased state monitoring of Islamic clergy. Imams were required to undergo [further] religious instruction and some 10 per cent of the roughly 250,000 clergy the authorities examined were defrocked...

The following year, Xinjiang’s party secretary, Wang Lequan...said that the ‘major task’ facing the authorities in Xinjiang was to ‘manage religion and guide it in being subordinate to [...] the central task of economic construction, the unification of the motherland, and the objective of national unity (Holdstock 2015, 72-73).

While the government response to the Baren protest first appears divergent from its practice of building and maintaining mosques, it is important to remember that since 1949, the operation of Uyghur Islamic society has been subject to sustained assimilation into Chinese state structures. In this light, the response to Baren heralds not so much a change but rather an intensification of efforts to comport Uyghur society to Chinese state power.

Assimilation of Uyghur Islamic practices goes beyond the disciplining of clergy. While the constitution guarantees religious freedom, this only applies to those over the age of 18 (“Constitution of the People’s Republic of China” 2019). In practice, this not only means that Uyghurs under 18 are prohibited from entering mosques, the law also extends to “informal religious teachings” such as “storytelling and folksongs transmitted by community elders” and “folk cultural activities” (Holdstock 2015, 166).

Control of Islamic practices also extends to non-clergy adults. In 1994, burgeoning crises of drug abuse and HIV infection in Uyghur communities led young Uyghur men to organize *mashraps* (also known as *meshreps*), “an old [Islamic] form of social gathering that aimed to transmit social, moral and cultural education from older to younger generations” (Holdstock

2015, 102). What was designed as a grassroots initiative to address social malaise and suffering was interpreted by Chinese authorities as a breeding ground for separatism and illegal religious activities (Ibid., 194). The mashrap was banned, and to make the seriousness of the matter clear, authorities parked tanks on a soccer field where a mashrap fundraiser was to take place (Holdstock 2015, 105)

These forms of control go far beyond the state's initial circumscription of Uyghur governance in the upper echelons of Uyghur society. It transcends the colloquial political sphere. Here, we see that Chinese authorities recognize that Uyghur collectivity is generated from the most personal levels – the family and community. Assimilation, thus, has been instituted through a practice of prevention, that is, through preventing Uyghur collectivity from reproducing itself in those spaces. This has been facilitated by the state's categorization of Uyghur social practices as either legal or illegal, legitimate or illegitimate. Analogous processes has been described by critical Indigenous scholars writing from Turtle Island, who articulate that the state's delineation of legitimate and legal Indigeneity is constitutive of attacks on Indigenous self-determination (Barker 2017; Byrd 2011). For instance, the Canadian state's criminalization of the potlatch in the 1884 *Indian Act* was designed to eliminate Indigenous forms of governance and collective life (Bourgeois 2018).

Chinese assimilative practices are not only preventative in nature but also deploy generative (or positive) techniques. This is epitomized by education policy. While Article 12 of the constitution guarantees the choice for minorities to receive education in their own languages, the state has ramped up efforts to promote Mandarin-language education. Up until the late 1990s, most Uyghur and Han schools in XUAR were separate (Holdstock 2015, 148). However, the state had begun piloting bilingual schools in the early 1990s and in the 2000s, "Xinjiang

authorities aggressively sought to increase the amount of bilingual teaching in minority schools” (Ibid., 153).

I consider the expansion of mandarin-language teaching a generative assimilative practice because it does not actively prevent the transmission of Uyghur language. Of course, the line between generative and preventative is often unclear. Despite the availability of Uyghur-language education, at what point does the expansion of bilingual education functionally prevent Uyghur language transmission? By the end of the 2000s, “all senior high-school classes in Urumqi [the XUAR’s capital] were...taught exclusively in Chinese” except for ones on the Uyghur language itself (Holdstock 2015, 153-154). Here, the generative assimilation of Mandarin-language education begins to look more preventative. While the Uyghur language is still taught, it has been structurally overwhelmed. The “choice” for Uyghur education is still available, but the limited range of this choice functionally ensures the degradation of Uyghur language transmission in favour of Mandarin.

One of the most pernicious instantiations of “choice” in Chinese education policy is found in the boarding school program initiated by authorities in 2000. The program relocates ethnic minorities to Han urban areas such as Shanghai or Beijing where classes are taught exclusively in Mandarin (Chen 2008). Schools are comprised 80% by students from the XUAR, mostly Uyghur, and 20% Han from other parts of China. In its initial years, enrollment was around 1,000 students per year but by 2014, “the projected number of students...was around 10,000.” (Holdstock 2015, 155). Chinese authorities emphasize that the schools do not “attempt to sever any sense of ethnic identification” (Ibid.). However, the program clearly articulates the goal of Uyghur assimilation into Chinese state and society. Its expressed mandate is

To train a large group of minority talents, who firmly uphold national unity, closely affiliate with the masses, and possess strong enterprising revolutionary qualities and certain professional capabilities. The policy is significant for boosting economic development and social progress in Xinjiang, for enhancing unity and cohesion among all ethnic groups and for ensuring national and border security (quoted in Chen 2008).

Here, we find an echo of residential school discourse in Canada. The language of progress is deployed to justify a program which operationally, if not “intentionally,” deploys family separation to facilitate assimilation. However, this program is voluntary. Families choose to send their children to these schools and enrollment is competitive (Chen 2008). Thus, it is important not to erase the agency of Uyghur parents. Rather, critique of the program should occur at the structural level and focus on *effect*. In this light, its assimilative nature can be illuminated without depriving Uyghur parents of their agency.

Against Coulthard’s theory, the assimilative techniques thus far discussed – religious and educational – comprise the obvious dimension of settler colonialism. Indeed, Chinese authorities remain fairly conspicuous in their assimilative discourse, thus precluding any need for deeper analysis. The final policy I will present is different and demonstrates how a politics of recognition renders Uyghur elimination in China.

Chinese policy on ethnic identification of children from Han-minority intermarriage uniquely demonstrates how settler colonial processes can be obfuscated by state recognition. When children are born to inter-ethnic couples, parents are free to designate the child as either Han or as the ethnic minority of the non-Han parent (Jia and Persson 2020). Children also have the option to switch their ethnic identity once they turn 18, but changes must be made by age 20 (Ibid., 10). This choice is “more than a label” as “ethnic identity appears in almost every

context” of engagement with the state “including the birth certificate and all forms that have to be filled out at school” (Ibid., 10). Furthermore, ethnic minority status provides certain state benefits. Minority peoples are subject to less restrictive family-planning policies, affirmative action in employment, and more favourable educational policies, such as lower cut-offs for post-secondary admissions, bursaries, and scholarships (Ibid., 11; Hasmath 2019).

Preferential policies for ethnic minorities can be traced back to the civil war period: “Fighting for survival against both the GMD [Guomindang] and the Japanese, the communist party leaders...made promises of special treatment, *recognition*, and the establishment of autonomous regions for minorities” [my emphasis] (Maurer-Fazio and Hasmath 2015, 3). After the communist victory, this recognition was instituted through guaranteed representation in the National People’s Congress, and the preferential policies regarding reproduction, employment, and education thus far discussed (Ibid.). Discursively, the state also hails itself as a multiethnic nation founded equally between its diverse peoples (“Ibid.; Constitution of the People’s Republic of China” 2019). Thus, parental choice of their children’s ethnic designation occurs within a politics of recognition that actively valorizes ethnic difference through both discourse and policy benefits.

However, despite the benefits minority designation brings, a closer look at parental choice reveals it to be, in practice, a process that renders the elimination of minority peoples. Intermarriage between Han and ethnic minorities are skewed in favour of those between *Han men* and *minority women*. In 2000, these marriages comprised around 3.93 million and, in the same year, marriages between Han women and minority men numbered 3.37 million (Li 2004, 68). Building upon this imbalance, Jia and Persson have found that the “undisputed social norm in China’s patriarchal society is to choose the father’s ethnicity for the children” (Jia and Persson

2020, 2). Their research also found that “[t]he propensity to break the social norm...is much higher” in mixed marriages where the mother is Han (Ibid.). Let us rearticulate these statistics in simpler terms. Han-minority marriages skew, numerically, towards those with Han men. When children are born in these marriages, the norm dictates that the children adopt the father’s Han ethnicity. However, against this norm, children of intermarriage are more likely to adopt the mother’s ethnicity if the mother is Han. Thus, despite the policy benefits of minority designation, parents in mixed marriages are more likely to choose Han ethnic status for their children. Projecting this process through time, Han-minority marriage produces statistical reduction in the total number of minorities in China. This process then reproduces itself in the following generation since ethnic status cannot be changed after age 20. If children of intermarriage marry a Han person, they do not have the option to designate their own children as an ethnic minority if their parents designated them as Han (since designation must match one of the parents).

Critical Indigenous theorists in Anglo-settler states have repeatedly drawn attention to how laws delineating Indigeneity statistically eliminate Indigenous existence. For instance, J. Kehaulani Kaunui has argued that the definition of Indigeneity in the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act operated through a “reductive logic in both cultural and legal contexts” (2008, 3). Through a rule that defined as Indigenous those with at least 50% native blood, the Act “explicitly limit[ed] the number” of native Hawaiians who “could lay claim to the land” (Ibid., 9). Up until 1984, Indigenous women in Canada lost their native status if they married a non-Indigenous man. Her children, too, could not claim legal Indigeneity. Veracini has identified these processes as one where “indigenous peoples are counted out of existence (2010, 39).

Ethnic designation in China operates similarly to those in Anglo-settler states. Like the Canadian case, statistical elimination instantiates itself through patriarchal processes. Its

distinction rests in how blood quantum and identity are rendered through the additional layer of parental choice. This process has two effects. First, it facilitates the state's performance of recognition towards ethnic difference. Second, it obfuscates an eliminatory process where minorities are counted out of existence. This is precisely, in Coulthard's terms, a politics of recognition that conceals elimination.

The Constellation

The constellation of state policies and practices presented in this chapter illuminates a settler colonial structure that facilitates the dispossession of Uyghurs of their land and self-determining authority. Initial Chinese engagement with Uyghurs in the XUAR show a clear logic of territoriality, and China's territorial claim has been deepened by state-directed, state-incentivised, and voluntary Han migration. Chinese policies of assimilation further facilitate land dispossession by denigrating Uyghur collectivity, as in the case of religious policies. These policies attack Uyghur governance structures and prevent the transmission of Uyghur collective life in both the familial and communal spheres. Furthermore, assimilation has also been generative, structurally enabling the transmission of Mandarin-language education over Uyghur-language education. Lastly, ethnic designation policy for children of Han-minority marriages counts Uyghurs out of existence and operates within a politics of recognition that obfuscates elimination.

A constellation is only recognizable when all its stars are visible. Likewise, the Chinese state policies and practices presented in this chapter must be analyzed congruently. Only in this way can we see how the waypoints of land dispossession, Han settlement, and Uyghur assimilation operate recursively to produce the structure of settler colonisation. These processes are not separate, but rather feed back into each other to form the overarching structure of settler

colonialism. In this light, the relationship between the Chinese state can be defined as settler colonial. China is, indeed, a settler state.

CONCLUSION

The field of settler colonial studies is vast and growing. In this thesis, I have provided only a base sketch of settler colonialism in the XUAR. However, I hope that providing a foundation for expanding settler colonial theory to the Chinese case can give other scholars opportunities to take up its analytics to think about Chinese politics in new ways. At the same time, “Chinese settler colonialism” can also further extant trajectories in settler colonial theorizing by providing an additional case study to think through and refine the fields’ theoretical contributions. Indeed, the similarities between settler colonialism in China and elsewhere comprise far more than the policies and practices I have presented in this thesis. In this conclusion, I describe some of these similarities in hopes that they inspire paths for future research.

Chinese discourse about the XUAR is uncannily similar to ones in Anglo-settler states. In the Chinese imaginary, the XUAR is often portrayed as an exotic and empty land. For example, in a series of scenes in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the film’s Han protagonist falls in love with a Uyghur bandit in the sweeping deserts and verdant oases of Xinjiang. Noticeably absent are signs of human life. Such portrayals of ethnic minority regions as exotic and empty are common in Chinese film (Gladney 2004, 85-89), and echoes the discourses of *terra nullius* and pristine wilderness found in Anglo-settler discourses. Xinjiang has also been portrayed by Chinese authorities as wastelands in need of civilisation, especially through the development of agricultural and extractive industries (Kinzley 2018). Scholars like Traci Lynn Voyles (2015) and Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez (2020) have shown how this exact discourse of “wasteland” has been used to justify settler encroachment into Indigenous territory for the purpose of resource extraction. These discursive echoes illuminate that the relationship between land and its meaning play an integral role in settler colonial processes (Tuck and McKenzie, 2016). They provide an

opening for scholars grounded in this analytic to think through the similarities and differences between global settler colonialisms.

Like Anglo-settler discourse on Indigenous peoples, Chinese discourse has also constructed Uyghurs as primitive, backwards, and in need of civilizational intervention (Gladney 2004; Hasmath 2019; Holdstock 2015). Like Anglo-settler discourse, portrayals of Uyghurs also taken on specifically gendered and sexual forms. For instance, a book entitled *Sexual Customs* published in 1989 portrayed Islamic sexuality as especially deviant, leading to mass protests by Uyghurs and other Islamic ethnic groups throughout China (Gladney 2004, 352; Holdstock 2015, 69). Ethnic minority women in China have been constructed as sensual, sexual commodities (Gladney 2004, 64-68). China, too, has its own Pocahontas story. After 1949, Communist propaganda portrayed Xiang Fei (香妃), a Uyghur princess abducted into the Qing Emperor's harem, as a symbol of resistance against the old feudal order. As Christian Tyler argues, Xiang Fei (which literally translates to "Fragrant Concubine") became a "literary device for familiarizing China with its western empire" and to show how the primitive Uyghur could enter Chinese modernity by "reconcil[ing] to [its] superior civilization" (2004, 59). Thus, like Pocahontas (or Sacajawea), Xiang Fei (or Iparhan in Uyghur) plays the role of the "seductive though saintly Indian princess who helps" to establish the nation in its "colonial mythos" (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013, 26). These discursive analogs between Chinese and Anglo-settler discourses present profound opportunities for scholarship that theorize the constitutive relationships between gender, sexuality, and settler colonialism (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013; Barker 2017; Morgensen 2012; Rifkin 2011; L. Simpson 2017).

To end this thesis, I would like to admit that my final empirical chapter reproduced the very issues I critiqued throughout the rest of this work. Noticeably lacking are Uyghur voices.

While part of this was due the constraint of time, a more serious problem has to do with my own devotion to political science as a discipline and the very question this thesis was structured around. As Kevin Bruyneel has argued, the centrality of the state in political science research leads to an exclusionary focus “on the dominant nation’s state activities and institutions at the expense of forms of governance and politics that do not fit the model” (2014, 8). Political science, like its subfield political theory, is also engaged in a normative exclusion of what counts as political and worthy of its title. Despite a desire to challenge this, I have seemingly reproduced its very boundaries. Empire, it seems, can turn towards itself.

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