White Settler Dysconsciousness and Ethnicity – Constructing innocence and non-complicity among Mennonites and other white settlers in Canada

by

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Abstract

This thesis draws on the concept of white settler dysconsciousness, and explores how white settler dysconsciousness is complicated by ethnicity, with the goal of expanding on understandings of whiteness and settler colonialism in Canada. White settler dysconsciousness is an uncritical and dissonant form of consciousness. It is produced through a constant and complex dynamic of self-interested misunderstanding and rationalization, and functions to move white settlers to a position of innocence and non-complicity, regarding the benefits white settlers derive from the historical and ongoing oppression of Indigenous people and other people of colour. The central argument of the thesis is that ethnicity plays an important role in constructing the myriad forms of white settler dysconsciousness present among white settlers. I draw on literature in the fields of settler colonial studies, critical race and whiteness studies, and critical Indigenous studies, as well as the example of Mennonite settlers in the prairies in Canada, to support this work.

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Introduction

My ancestors are "Russian Mennonites" who arrived in the prairies in Canada in the 1920s and in the 1940s. I grew up with stories of Mennonites fleeing persecution in Europe and finding a home in Canada, stories of grandparents losing family and homes, fleeing horrible suffering and trauma in the USSR during the WW2 period, and stories of Mennonites being granted lands in Canada, and working hard to build successful farms and communities. These stories would often share a central message – of gratefulness towards Canada, of Canada as a good place where people are able to live in peace, raise a family, and be safe.

It was later in my life that I began to be exposed to other aspects of these histories – histories of Canada and of Mennonites that complicated these narratives. For example, in my first years of undergraduate studies I learned about the Indian Residential School System for the first time, and learned about the fraudulence and lawlessness through which the Métis were displaced from the area where I live – the Red River area and present-day Winnipeg. With these stories I started to understand more clearly that for other people, for Indigenous people, Canada has not always been a good place to live – for example, people have not always been able to live in peace, and have had children systematically removed from their families and communities, and have not always been able to be safe.

And later in my graduate studies I encountered for the first time accounts that demonstrated the direct connection between lands granted to Mennonites and lands dispossessed from Indigenous peoples, accounts of Mennonite advantage relative to Indigenous people, examples of Mennonites being allowed to successfully settle while Indigenous people were targeted by a concerted state effort to remove them from their lands and to make them disappear. I was exposed to the Mennonites' "long history of functioning as settler-invaders" (Zacharias in

Michael, 2017, p. 37) – in places like present-day Ukraine, Canada, and South America – that is the flip-side of Mennonite relocation and settlement. I understood for the first time that, for Mennonites, fleeing Ukraine during World War 2 meant fleeing to Nazi Germany, where Mennonites were welcomed, were considered "more Aryan than the average German" due to their German roots and long history of living in isolated communities (Goossen, 2019, p. 122), and that some Mennonites moved into the homes and farms of Jewish and Polish people who had recently been taken to concentration camps.

These aspects of Mennonite history are all true. Histories of struggle and advantage together make up the complex history of Mennonites, as they also do for other groups. My experience of learning about Mennonite history is a good example of how the stories we tell, and how complexity is known in particular ways, have drastic effects on how responsibility is understood today. For example, the responsibility of a person who is the descendant of people who have suffered persecution, arrived on empty lands, and worked hard to make good and virtuous lives, is very different from the responsibility of a person who has a long history of advantage through the oppression and displacement of others. These different understandings determine differently, for example, how inequality is understood, how inequality is addressed, and who receives redress.

I focus in this thesis on how knowledge, histories, and understandings of the world exist and are constructed in particular ways, focusing on white settlers in the context of settler colonialism in Canada. I am interested in how particular (selective, limited, and self-interested) ways of understanding the world function to avoid that which is troubling, to construct positions of innocence and non-complicity regarding the foundational and ongoing oppressions of settler colonialism, and to maintain advantage and benefits that are the product of these unjust

structures. I use the term *white settler dysconsciousness* to capture this dynamic. White settler dysconsciousness is an uncritical and dissonant form of consciousness. It is produced through a constant and complex dynamic of self-interested misunderstanding and rationalization, and functions to move white settlers to a position of innocence and non-complicity, regarding the benefits white settlers derive from the historical and ongoing oppression of Indigenous people and other people of colour. White settler dysconsciousness allows an understanding of an important contradictory position that I argue applies strongly to Canada and white settlers throughout the country – white settlers work to protect white settler advantage and the settler colonial world that has been constructed through foundational and ongoing oppression, while understanding themselves as good, not racist, and interested in justice.

Within this larger topic, this thesis focuses specifically on how ethnicity complicates white settler dysconsciousness, and as a result, complicates whiteness, white settler evasions, and settler colonialism in Canada. The central argument of the thesis is that ethnicity plays an important role in constructing the myriad forms of white settler dysconsciousness present among white settlers. In many cases ethnicity influences the forms of knowledge (ethnically-specific histories, characteristics) present, and the forms of evasions present. I draw on the example of Mennonites in the prairies in Canada as an example of how white settler dysconsciousness is influenced by ethnicity.

Importance of this research

This thesis offers insights into whiteness and settler colonialism in Canada that have a number of important applications, but I want to centre how this thesis supports the recent and very important work done by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and the National

Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). The TRC and MMIWG reports both highlight the need for non-Indigenous people to learn about the history and effects of colonization in Canada. For example, the final report of the TRC (2015) states that

> Too many Canadians know little or nothing about the deep historical roots of [the contemporary issues facing Indigenous people]. This lack of historical knowledge has serious consequences for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, and for Canada as a whole. In government circles, it makes for poor public policy decisions. In the public realm, it reinforces racist attitudes and fuels civic distrust between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians. (p. 8)

Both reports also highlight the need for reconciliation and redress, and that these would be large changes requiring the widespread and active support of the non-Indigenous public. I include here a Call to Action from the TRC that demonstrates what reconciliation would require, followed by Calls to Action and the MMIWG Calls for Justice that highlight the importance of knowing and learning about settler colonialism.

> <u>TRC Calls to Action:</u>
>
> 45. We call upon the Government of Canada, on behalf of all Canadians, to jointly develop with Aboriginal peoples a Royal Proclamation of Reconciliation to be issued by the Crown. The proclamation would build on the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Treaty of Niagara of 1764, and reaffirm the nation-to-nation relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Crown. The proclamation would include, but not be limited to, the following commitments:
>
> i. Repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius.
> ii. Adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.
> iii. Renew or establish Treaty relationships based on principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for maintaining those relationships into the future.
> iv. Reconcile Aboriginal and Crown constitutional and legal orders to ensure that Aboriginal peoples are full partners in Confederation, including the recognition and integration of Indigenous laws and legal traditions in negotiation and implementation processes involving Treaties, land claims, and other constructive agreements.

59. We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement to develop ongoing education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their church's role in colonization, the history and legacy of residential schools, and why apologies to former residential school students, their families, and communities were necessary.

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.

MMIWG Calls for Justice:

11.1 We call upon all elementary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions and education authorities to educate and provide awareness to the public about missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and about the issues and root causes of violence they experience. All curriculum development and programming should be done in partnership with Indigenous Peoples, especially Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Such education and awareness must include historical and current truths about the genocide against Indigenous Peoples through state laws, policies, and colonial practices. It should include, but not be limited to, teaching Indigenous history, law, and practices from Indigenous perspectives and the use of *Their Voices Will Guide Us* with children and youth.

We call on all Canadians to:

15.2 Decolonize by learning the true history of Canada and Indigenous history in your local area. Learn about and celebrate Indigenous Peoples' history, cultures, pride, and diversity, acknowledging the land you live on and its importance to local Indigenous communities, both historically and today.

15.3 Develop knowledge and read the Final Report. Listen to the truths shared, and acknowledge the burden of these human and Indigenous rights violations, and how they impact Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people today.

15.4 Using what you have learned and some of the resources suggested, become a strong ally. Being a strong ally involves more than just tolerance; it means actively working to break down barriers and to support others in every relationship and encounter in which you participate.

White settler dysconsciousness, and attention to how white settler dysconsciousness is complicated by ethnicity, provides important insights into how self-interested and inaccurate knowledge is constructed among Canadians, how understandings of white settler advantage and Indigenous oppression are avoided, and how understandings of non-complicity regarding the

injustices of settler colonialism are constructed among white settlers. The arguments presented in this thesis offer a way to understand, for example: how it is that troubling knowledge (of residential schools, or of colonialism and Indigenous genocide) is absent and is avoided; how it is that understandings of non-complicity and innocence regarding these things were/are constructed among white settlers; and how disavowal and opposition regarding reconciliation and redress is justified among Canada's white settler public today.

Outline

The thesis is structured as follows: chapter 1 provides an in-depth focus on the concepts of dysconsciousness and white settler dysconsciousness, and their interaction with ethnicity, and provides an overview of important relevant literature. I highlight the complex relationships between dysconsciousness, knowledge, and cognitive distortions. I argue that ethnicity plays an important role in determining the forms of white settler dysconsciousness present – ethnicity influences the forms of self-interested misunderstandings and rationalizations present, and is a site of evasions, of moves to innocence and non-complicity, for white settlers.

Chapter 2 draws on literature on settler colonialism and race to expand on the foundational and ongoing structures of advantage for white settlers and oppression of others, that white settler dysconsciousness and evasions based on ethnicity work to obscure and protect. I include a focus on the current period of "reconciliation", arguing that mainstream approaches to reconciliation are characterized by white settler dysconsciousness, and are part of a long history of white settler dysconsciousness in Canada. I also include a brief focus on decolonization and what decolonization would require of white settlers.

In chapter 3 I draw on the example of Mennonites in the prairies in Canada as an example of white settler dysconsciousness influenced by ethnicity. I give an overview of the history of Mennonite migration and settlement, and contrast this with the experiences of Métis people in the prairies, demonstrating extensive advantage for Mennonites as white settlers. I then draw on examples that illustrate how understandings of Mennonite innocence and non-complicity are constructed (based on suffering, and on virtue) and how this functions to avoid an understanding of Mennonite advantage, complicity, and also responsibility, as white settlers.

1. White Settler Dysconsciousness

The concept of dysconsciousness comes from the work of Joyce E. King. King (1991) writes that "dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given". King writes in particular about dysconsciousness and racism in the US, writing that dysconscious racism is a "form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges", that uncritically accepts "certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths, and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages White people have as a result of subordinating others" (p. 135). Dysconscious racism, although manifesting differently than other forms of racism (for example, the more overt racism of hierarchies and domination based on biological understandings of race), functions to achieve the same purpose: to allow systems of privilege and advantage relative to others to be established and maintained, and to maintain advantages that are the result of subordinating others. King's concept of dysconsciousness captures an uncritical acceptance of unequal social orders (for example, racialized marginalization and disadvantage, white advantage), as well as an uncritical acceptance of the particular forms of knowledge and understanding that have developed to justify or rationalize these orders. For example, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014) writes that most white people defend the racial status quo, and most subscribe to substantial portions of the logics of white supremacy, "in a casual, uncritical fashion that helps sustain the prevailing racial order" (p. 11).

Within dysconsciousness, I am particularly interested in the dynamic of consciousness as contradictory or dissonant. For example, how is it that ample evidence demonstrating unjust and unequal social orders is constantly dismissed or rationalized away by individuals, allowing uncritical consciousness and uncritical acceptance to be maintained? and how is it this selective,

and self-interested understanding occurs in an individual simultaneous to a seemingly genuine belief in the goodness, rightness, and justness, of the self? I argue that a central feature of dysconsciousness is this contradictory and dissonant consciousness – that contained in dysconsciousness is an inability or a refusal on the part of individuals and groups to fully acknowledge and reckon with unjust and unequal orders from which they derive benefit. This consciousness is contradictory or dissonant because, while sometimes completely unconscious, there is also a dynamic of conscious or semi-conscious work done to evade that which is troubling and threatening (to position, privilege, wealth, and comfort), through various cognitive distortions (for example, denial, rationalization, and avoidance).

W*hite settler dysconsciousness* is dysconsciousness – uncritical acceptance of social orders, and myths, rationalizations, and cognitive distortions that work to justify unequal social orders – modified for the specific context of settler colonialism in Canada. I define white settler dysconsciousness as an uncritical and dissonant consciousness. It is produced through a constant and complex dynamic of self-interested misunderstanding and rationalization, that functions to move white settlers to a position of innocence and non-complicity, regarding the benefits they derive from the historical and ongoing oppression of Indigenous people and other people of colour.

White settler dysconsciousness functions to protect the white settler world and the resulting structures of oppression that white settlers benefit from, that have been constructed in Canada. I expand on the characteristics and effects of this white settler world in chapter two, but provide a brief overview here: Canada is a settler colonial nation, where white sovereignty is asserted over Indigenous lands and peoples, and Euro-Canadian ways of knowing and being in the world have been imposed and entrenched. The result has been the creation of a white settler

world characterized by white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, Christianity, capitalism, and extractivism, in which the distribution of power and advantage, and of oppression and exclusion, is accordingly racialized, gendered, etc. In this thesis I focus on race – the white settler world is the product of foundational and ongoing subjugation and exploitation based on race. This includes: the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands, Indigenous genocide and attempts at forced assimilation; enslavement and labour exploitation of Black people and other people of colour; and imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, and other forms of undermining of the countries and people of colour of the Global South. The wealth, advantage, and comfort of white settlers in Canada have been produced through this subjugation and exploitation. It is important to note that this world is not natural or neutral, and was not inevitable, but was/is a project based in white settler domination that benefits whites settlers. Other worlds existed, still exist, and can exist in the future.

I argue that the scale of white settler benefit, and the scale of the injustices, associated with the white settler world, encourage white settler dysconsciousness and explain contradictory or dissonant consciousness. For example, white settlers come to expect the advantages and benefits (that are the product of oppression of others) that they receive, and oppose actions that might threaten these things (Harris, 1992; Mackey, 2016). The scale of the injustices of the white settler world – injustices that are foundational, compounding, ongoing – prevents an ability to fully acknowledge and reckon with these injustices and white settler complicity in these injustices. For example, Sheryl Lightfoot (2016) writes that the cost of committing to emerging Indigenous rights frameworks (for example, implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), for settler colonial states such as Canada, is very high and prevents meaningful implementation. Properly addressing the injustices of white settler worlds would

unsettle white settler wealth, property, identity, comfort, certainty over access to lands, economies, the sovereignty of settler nations, etc. These pressures for white settlers are reflected in Robert Jensen's work on white fear in the context of racial inequality. White fears include the fear of unsettling white innocence and merit, of acknowledging structural advantage and unfairness which would upset "the whole house of cards in which whiteness precariously lives"; and the fear of "anticipated retribution for systematic, historical and ongoing forms of racism directed against racialized peoples", for example, fear of the "loss of property, status, income, and the rewards of a social order if that order were to be restructured along the principles of equity and justice" (Jensen in Levine-Rasky, 2013, pp. 150-1). The scale of white settler benefit, injustice, and the associated fears, encourages white settler dysconsciousness and cognitive distortions – in other words, conscious/semi-conscious/unconscious misunderstandings and self-interested rationalizations.

Knowledge and dysconsciousness

Knowledge and dysconsciousness exist in a complex and mutually constitutive relationship. The white settler world has been, and still is, very dependent on seeing and knowing the world incorrectly in order to justify white domination, and very dependent on avoiding or erasing the scale of the resulting injustices that are foundational and ongoing. Tuck and Yang (2014) write that "settler colonialism must cover its tracks" and employs an "arrangement of justifications and unhistories to deny genocide and brutality" (p. 813). The result is knowledge – entire epistemologies, entire structures of knowing and understanding the world, and understanding fact and truth – that is deeply self-interested, selective, and inaccurate. In this

context, the functions of dysconsciousness become clearer. Self-interested and inaccurate structures of knowledge require dysconsciousness – they require the uncritical acceptance of this knowledge, and rationalization that works to dismiss undeniable evidence that contradicts this knowledge. This context also allows an understanding of how dysconsciousness is produced: individuals are brought into a world that is dependent on knowing incorrectly, and are accordingly mis-educated through the various systems of transmission of knowledge (including education systems, culture, and media). Individuals are constructed as individuals whose whole world – including their knowledge, identity, and culture – is constructed through knowing incorrectly, and who are threatened by a full acknowledgement of advantage and injustice. In this way, dysconsciousness is structurally produced in individuals.

The construction of self-interested knowledge in the context of Western colonialism, settler colonialism, and imperialism is a phenomenon that is well-documented and well-theorized in academic literature (for example: Mills, 2007; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Mackey, 2016; Vilmalassery et al., 2016). Particular white/Western ways of understanding and knowing the world, that allow and justify white/Western domination, are constructed, positioned as universal and as truth, and have been imposed throughout the world. In the following paragraphs I expand on examples of the constructed colonial forms of knowledge that have been central to construction of Canada's white settler world.

Race, as a classification system that places white people at the top of a racial hierarchy, has been asserted a 'universal' and 'natural'. Vickers and Isaac (2012) write that it is well-documented that the concept of race was "invented fairly recently by Europeans to make sense of their experiences of conquering, enslaving, and oppressing others different from them in terms of their faith, culture, and/or skin colour", and the "states that White Europeans built in the colonial

spaces of the British Empire have ruled through race regimes that have legitimized killing, dispossessing, enslaving, deporting, excluding, oppressing, and exploiting Indigenous peoples, Africans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders" (p. 48). Understandings of race are also flexible, depending on requirements. For example, in Canada and the US, understandings of the transmission of race have been constructed to meet the particular needs of settler colonialism – the transmission of Indigeneity is understood through the logic of hyperdescent (where Indigeneity is diluted through mixing with other groups), whereas the transmission of Blackness is understood through the logic of hypodescent (or the one-drop rule, where one drop of "Black blood" is enough for a person to be classified as Black). These logics function to reduce the number of Indigenous people with Indigenous rights and title to lands, and functioned to increase or maintain slave populations (for example, children conceived through the rape of slaves by slave-owners would remain Black and slaves, increasing the property of the slave-owner) (Harris, 1993; Leroux, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Another example is the construction of white sovereignty in settler colonial countries. Europeans and European settlers have defined the requirements to hold or claim sovereignty over lands (in their own interest) and asserted these understandings of sovereignty and possession as universal. In Canada, and in other settler colonial countries, the logic of *terra nullius* (lands understood by Europeans as legally vacant) was and still is central to the construction of white settler possession and sovereignty over Indigenous lands. Sovereignty was understood as requiring the "enclosure" (private property) and "improvement" (agriculture) of lands. Europeans ignored the many complex and sophisticated forms of relationship to land present among Indigenous peoples, justifying the dispossession and domination of Indigenous people based on narrow European conceptions. Mackey (2014) writes that "the colonial rationales and

supposedly legal frameworks for asserting and justifying control over the land in North America are, fundamentally, extremely complex and flexible fantasies" (p. 42).

Also central to the construction of knowledge is the revision of history: for example, the sanitizing of histories of slavery in the US (Mills, 2007) and in Canada (Maynard, 2017); the "strategic forgetting" and "chosen amnesia" in the construction of national histories in Canada (MacDonald, 2015); the construction of "collective useable histories" that disappear Indigenous presences, histories, and histories of Indigenous genocide and colonial violence (Logan, 2015); and the denial and sanitized myths present in Canadian schools (Vickers and Isaac, 2012). It is through this revision of history that histories of treaty-making with Indigenous peoples become understood as an example of Canada's fairness, generosity, and good intentions towards Indigenous peoples, despite the fact that "in almost every treaty negotiation one can detect dishonesty, trickery, deception, fraud, prevarication, and unconscionable behaviour on the part of the Crown" (Borrows, 2002, p. 113). Another example is the strategic forgetting in the context of Canada's residential school system. Regan (2010) writes that there was widespread social knowledge, and also approval, of the schools – thousands of people worked in the residential schools system, reports and news articles regularly detailed the conditions in schools, and argued for and against their existence – but through a concerted effort of "selective forgetting", a lack of knowledge of residential schools is constructed among Canadians. It was only through litigation by residential school survivors, resulting in the largest class action lawsuit settlement in Canadian history, that this history is again uncovered.

Paula Butler (2015) highlights what she calls the foundational lies, colonial imaginary, and (drawing on Achille Mbembe) the "immense cultural and ideological work" (Mbembe in

Butler, 2015, p. 36) required to sustain colonial domination – and how these produce certain subjectivities and pressures for white settlers:

> The foundational lies of racial states and settler-states – the lies of colonization as goodness, of seizure as philanthropy – so significantly structure and interpellate the subjectivity of privileged citizens that considerable anxiety and defensiveness is generated when these lies are threatened or challenged – that is, when the foundational lies are unmasked or named. Dominant subjects in racial/colonizer states thus can be theorized as psychologically insecure/defensive subjects who resist unmasking ("truth telling") and who compulsively rearticulate national scripts of goodness in order to alleviate or anesthetize their vaguely felt and successfully suppressed "cognitive dissonance" and discomfort associated with the knowledge of injustice. (p. 39)

Understanding cognitive distortions

How might we understand what is going on in the minds of white settlers, where this dynamic of cognitive distortion – of constant self-interested misunderstanding and rationalization that functions to dismiss that which is troubling, and to protect the white settler world and white settler advantage from structures of oppression of others – exists simultaneous to a seemingly genuine belief in the goodness, rightness, and justness of the self? Trudy Govier, writing in context of settler colonialism in Canada, indicates how this cognitive distortion manifests:

> As a result of our ignoring we know little. Then, if we are charged with responsibility, we are apt to protest that we did not know. But we did know something – enough to ignore the situation in the first place, to avoid paying attention to it. We knew enough to know we did not want to know more. We did not know because we did not want to know. We did not want to know because the truths we would face would be unpleasant and incompatible with our favoured picture of ourselves, and they imply a need for restitution and redress, threatening our rather comfortable way of life. (Govier in Regan, 2010, p. 35)

Stanley Cohen's (2013) overview of how denial is understood in Western scholarship offers useful insight into understanding how these two contradictory positions – protection of

advantage and structures of oppression simultaneous to a belief in your own goodness – are held in white settler minds. Cohen highlights the contributions of psychoanalysis – where denial is understood as an unconscious defence mechanism that protects an individual from that which is too troubling – and of Sartre's *bad faith* – where denial is understood as a more deliberate duplicity, deception, or fraud in order to save the self and to protect something understood as worth protecting. Cohen explains that these forms of denial exist in a continuum and are often both operating at the same time. This makes sense – in Canada, white settlers have varying understandings of the complex histories and structures of settler colonialism, and their implication in settler colonialism. Many people do not understand themselves as complicit, and many work (consciously or not) to not understand, and to not interrogate fully. Cohen also draws on more recent understandings of denial and cognitive distortion, where denial is understood as palliative, as diminishing awareness and reducing anxiety through avoidance, disavowal of meaning, numbness, and desensitization (pp. 44-45). This work on denial provides insight into the complex dynamic of white settler dysconsciousness – how cognitive distortions exist alongside knowledge, mis-education, colonial cultures, ideology, subjectivities, and identity, and function to construct innocence and non-complicity and to protect the white settler world and white settler advantage.

Ethnicity and white settler dysconsciousness

Attention to ethnicity is important in understanding white settler dysconsciousness. I argue that ethnicity plays an important role in the construction of the forms of white settler dysconsciousness present in Canada – specifically, ethnicity influences the form of (self-

interested, selective, and inaccurate) knowledge present for white settlers, and determines the evasions that are available to white settlers.

For many white settlers, knowledge is formed through ethnically-specific stories of immigration and settlement in what is now known as Canada – stories of struggle and stories of histories prior to arrival. Knowledge is formed through understandings ethnic groups have of the characteristics particular to their group (or other groups) as produced by their particular histories and cultures. These ethnically-specific stories, knowledges, and understandings of characteristics, determine: the white settler ethnic identities present, the understandings that exist of the history of settler colonialism in Canada and of unjust settler colonial structures present today, understandings of connection to and complicity in settler colonialism, and understandings of responsibility today to address the injustices that are the result of settler colonialism. Ethnically-specific stories and knowledge are transferred intergenerationally and through other sites of the transmission of knowledge and culture (for example, through books, songs, and other media).

Ethnicity also helps to determine the evasions, the moves to innocence, available to white settlers. Tuck and Yang (2012) describe the concept of settler moves to innocence as the "strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (p. 10), and as "excuses, distractions, and diversions from decolonization" (p. 21). Settler moves to innocence function to "rescue settler futurity" (p. 3). White settlers experience extensive advantage and benefit due to their whiteness and settlerness – but can often draw on ethnicity to construct positions of innocence and non-complicity, and to distance themselves from the injustices of the white settler world, and from the responsibility to act to address these injustices.

These evasions based on ethnicity take many forms. White ethnic groups understand themselves as, for example: particularly virtuous (particularly non-violent, or particularly cooperative with others); not colonizers (e.g. we are not part of the dominant Anglo Saxon / Protestant / British group); also victims of oppression by colonizers (e.g. also oppressed by the British), or otherwise victims of oppression before/after arrival in Canada. Evasions such as these occur across white settler ethnic groups, despite the fact that these groups all experience full inclusion in a world built for white settlers through historical and ongoing oppression of others.

In this way, ethnicity also has the effect of fragmenting whiteness and the category of white settler. The presence of many white settler groups distancing themselves from whiteness and settler colonialism obfuscates and dismantles the subject of the criticisms of settler colonialism, which has the effect of disappearing the target – the person complicit, the person responsible for oppression and responsible for redress and redistribution.

In the paragraphs that follow, I provide an overview of concepts and theoretical work important for understanding ethnicity and white settler dysconsciousness.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a complex category and concept. Levine-Rasky (2013) writes that traditional understandings of ethnicity – as referring to a set of shared features that distinguish a group (shared geographical territory, an ethnic culture and language, historical symbols, and shared ideology) – have been shown to be overly reductionist and deterministic.

> More than an attribute, [ethnicity] is a dynamic force molded and interpreted by self-determining agents as they respond to changing demands. It can be evoked in conditions

> of exclusion or inclusion, in power or powerlessness, as security or in threats to security, as solidarity or as a reaction against solidarity. It is no longer understood in an objective sense on the basis of the presence or absence of its component parts. In this subjective sense, ethnicity is voluntary not involuntary, multiple not discrete, individualistic not collective, chosen, defined, and negotiated not inherited, formulated in the present not established in the past, in flux not static, intersecting with other social markers of difference not independent from them. (Levine-Rasky, 2013, p. 123)

Also, in the context of white settler dysconsciousness, ethnicity interacts with the normative white "non-ethnic" Canadian settler world in complex ways. For example, there is a mutual influencing and interaction between the forms of knowledge, stories, histories, and evasions that are present (knowledge and evasions belonging to a particular white ethnic group take on aspects of normative white Canada's knowledge and evasions, and vice versa). There is also the complex issue of identification with particular ethnic groups – for example, to what extent does a person identify with a particular white ethnic group, and also with normative white Canadian identity? and what is the specific form of that normative white Canadian identity – close identification with the English or French colonial Canadian culture, or a more modern and less colonial Canadianness? The above quote from Levine-Rasky outlines how ethnicity is constructed based on different needs and contexts, which suggests that the demands of white settler dysconsciousness may encourage the presence, form, and mobilization of white settler ethnicities.

Whiteness and intersectionality

Whiteness indicates a position in society that is characterized by differential access to power, resources, rewards, status, futures, and the conveyance of power and privilege (Levine-Rasky, 2013, p. 18). Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) writes that whiteness confers advantage

and privilege, is normative, is not seen, and indicates a position within a global system of white domination – whiteness "is tied to power and dominance despite being fluid, vacuous, and invisible to white people" (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 52).

Intersectionality highlights the complex interaction of multiple interconnected systems of oppression, for example, race, gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity. From these multiple systems of oppression that frame everyone's lives, Patricia Hill Collins writes that "each individual derives varying amounts of penalties and privilege" (Collins in Levine-Rasky, 2013, p. 106). Individuals are members of multiple dominant and multiple subordinate groups, and have different experiences of penalty and privilege. These different positions and differential penalty and privilege also exist differently depending on time and place, as contexts and structures change – the specific privileges and penalties associated with race, gender, sexuality, class, etc., change in different contexts (Dhamoon in Levine-Rasky, 101).

Intersectionality provides a framework for understanding disadvantages experienced among white people, which is an important dynamic in white settler dysconsciousness and white settler evasions. For example, in the context of capitalism and neoliberalism, struggle and precarity for poor and working-class white people means that a person's whiteness might not translate to wealth and comfort – the "privileges, advantages of whiteness can be made marginal" due to class disadvantages (Levine-Rasky, 2013, p. 110). Discrimination and disadvantage based on gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or religion, occurs for white people in the context of patriarchal, heteronormative, Christian settler colonialism (for example, discrimination and disadvantage for women, LGBTQ people, people from non-dominant white groups, people who are not Christian). Attention to intersectionality allows insight into the complex interaction of these multiple systems of oppression, and also discourages disappearing

advantage – for example, marginalized groups such as white women, lower-class white people, white LGBTQ people, white people of non-dominant ethnic and religious groups, still receive considerable advantage in the context of white settler colonialism, and have benefitted from the foundational and ongoing structures of oppression based on race. White settlers do face disadvantage related to things like gender, sexuality, class, but have extensive privilege and advantage related to their whiteness and settlerness.

An intersectional approach to understanding whiteness also provides important insights into whiteness and white subjectivities as diverse, instead of more monolithic and static. Ruth Frankenburg's (1993) work on whiteness and white women demonstrates that the particular subjectivities and positions of individual white people vary and are in each case constructed through numerous determinants – for example, whiteness is constructed alongside gender, class, age, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion. Differences among these determinants together produce many different forms of white subjectivity and white life. The result is many different ways of living and experiencing whiteness, many different forms of 'knowledge' of race and racism, and many different evasions from complicity.

Becoming white

The phenomenon of white groups previously considered non-white "becoming white" (white groups, outside the white groups dominant in particular settler colonial contexts, gaining fuller access to white settler worlds) is a well-theorized and well-documented phenomenon. Many white groups experienced discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or race, in white (British, Anglo-American) settler states such as Canada and the US, before also becoming white

and disappearing into the dominant form of whiteness, gaining full access and inclusion into the white settler world. Examples include, Italians, Irish people, Jewish people, Portuguese people, and all others outside a particular period's dominant white groups. Despite experiences with discrimination, these groups can be understood as "white on arrival" (Guglielmo in Rasky, 2013, p. 126) or "provisionally white" (Jacobson in Rasky, 2013, p. 125) – these groups still had access to land ownership, the labour market, political rights, and the right to not be made a slave – things from which Indigenous people and other people of colour were excluded.

These groups quickly disappeared into whiteness, assimilating or claiming membership in the constructed category of the "Caucasian" race[1], in order to gain access to the full benefits of whiteness. This movement often involved white settler groups distinguishing and distancing themselves from Indigenous people, Black people, and other people of colour, instead of building solidarity with non-white groups based on shared experiences of marginalization and discrimination. For example, Roediger (1999) details how non-dominant white groups in the US claimed whiteness and the connected white right to not be subjected to labour exploitation – these groups worked to assert their whiteness, and construct particular understandings of race, whiteness, and the "other", in which they were positioned more favourably – in order to improve their class positions in a white, capitalist, settler colonial nation. Ignatiev (2012) documents the phenomenon of Irish settlers (experiencing indentured labour and marginalization in the US) becoming leaders in white supremacist movements – Irish settlers worked to ascend out of their position of labour exploitation and marginalization by asserting their whiteness and superiority to Black people. Becoming white, in these examples, meant also asserting that positions of labour

[1] the "Caucasian" race emerges out of groups sometimes regarded as racially (e.g. Jews) and ethnically different (e.g. Italians, Slavs) (Jacobson in Levine-Rasky, 2013, p. 125).

exploitation, marginalization, and enslavement, should be reserved for Black people and other people of colour.

The phenomenon of white settler groups "becoming white" documents an improvement in conditions and access to power and advantage for white settlers. This improvement in condition did not disrupt ongoing oppression for Indigenous people, Black people, and other people of colour, nor did it reckon with land theft, genocide, and racialized enslavement and exploitation of labour, through which white settler worlds are built. Today, these previously-marginalized white settler groups have full access to the white settler world (for example, wealth, advantage, and positions of power and decision-making). Structural discrimination no longer exists for these groups (Levine-Rasky, 2013, p. 137).

Approaching with care

It is important to approach a criticism of white settlers, and evasions based on ethnicity, with nuance and empathy. Many white settler groups did experience oppression and discrimination before and/or after arriving in Canada, many arrived in Canada as refugees, many individuals spent their lives in Canada struggling to live good lives and support themselves and their families and communities. Many of the white settlers arriving in Canada also experienced marginalization and occupied lower classes in Europe (Arneil, 2017). Many of these people have been educated into and called into white settler dysconsciousness, with a limited understanding of settler colonial histories and dynamics. And for many, white settler life in Canada has not always resulted in an absence of poverty and precarity. Nuance is required in understanding how various structures of oppression intersect, and how people are called-in to these structures.

However, it must be made clear that these structures of oppression exist and work to benefit certain people. In the case of settler colonialism in Canada, white settlers derive extensive benefit from the world constructed through foundational and ongoing structures of oppression based on race. As Alexis Shotwell (2018) writes, her family were "ordinary settlers just trying to make a life, often fleeing starvation in their own homelands" but that these "ordinary settlers just trying to make a life lived that life because of the immiseration and death of ordinary Indigenous people, because of the systematic and planned betrayal of treaty agreements and theft of land, and for a few settlers to extract money from the people and places they invaded. I, and other descendants of ordinary settlers, inherit this history" (p. 11).

2. Settler Colonialism

> [... A] very large number of Canadians will do everything they can to preserve the social, cultural, and economic systems of the country, even though this system is predicated on violence and dispossession of Indigenous lands and bodies. Therefore, we do not need the help of Canadians. We need Canadians to help themselves, to learn to struggle and to understand that their great country of Canada has been and is a death dance for Indigenous peoples. They must learn to stop themselves from plundering the land and the climate and using Indigenous people' bodies to fuel their economy, and to find a way of living in the world that is not based on violence and exploitation. (Simpson, 2017, p. 101)

> When race emerged in human history, it formed a social structure (a racialized social system) that awarded systemic privileges to Europeans (the peoples who became "white") over non-Europeans (the peoples who became "nonwhite"). Racialized social systems, or white supremacy for short, became global and affected all societies where Europeans extended their reach. (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 9, footnotes omitted)

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an expanded overview of the white settler world that has been constructed. I expand on the foundational and ongoing structures of oppression based on race, through which this world is constructed and maintained, as well as the connected structures of white settler benefit and advantage from this oppression. This focus on what it is that has been constructed allows a fuller understanding of white settler dysconsciousness – for example, what exactly is it that white settler dysconsciousness works to avoid fully acknowledging and reckoning with? what are the white benefits and advantages of the white settler world that are being protected? what is it that is associated with whiteness and settler colonialism, that moves to innocence and non-complicity based on ethnicity work to evade? I include a focus on the current period of "reconciliation", arguing that mainstream approaches to reconciliation are characterized by white settler dysconsciousness, and that this period is part of a long history of white settler dysconsciousness in Canada. I also include a brief focus on decolonization and what decolonization would require of white settlers.

This attention to what exactly it is that has been constructed is important. The white settler world that exists today exists through massive foundational and ongoing injustices, that, for many, have been obfuscated. Jennifer Hochschild (2005) writes that the "the drive of Whites to attain and retain moral, political, and economic supremacy has led them to conquer nonwhite areas of the world, invent structures that permit domination, and design an epistemology that hides their control from themselves as well as from most non-White subjects" (p. 108). For this reason it is important to make clear what has been done, and how white settlers are complicit, and have derived and continue to derive massive benefit. However, when addressing the form and effects of unjust structures such as settler colonialism it is important to be attentive to the effects of damage-centered analyses. Eve Tuck (2009) explains that analyses that focus on documenting damage often result in characterizations and understandings of a group where damage and oppression is the singular feature present, and that these analyses often flatten agency, resistance, and resilience, and often result in a pathologizing of that group. Even when giving context for damage, for example looking at "historical exploitation, domination, colonization to explain contemporary brokenness", these contexts are easily submerged or forgotten, and then "all we're left with is the damage" (p. 415). Instead, analyses might focus on interrogating structures of power and privilege, trying to unsettle structures of settler colonialism, for example, placing the focus on white settlers, the white settler world, the protection of white advantage and wealth – focusing on the "settler problem" rather than what is referred to as "Indigenous issues" or the "Indian problem" (Tuck, 2009; Tuck and Yang, 2014; Regan, 2010; Epp, 2008).

Settler colonialism and race

Settler colonialism can be understood as a form of colonization where the colonizers arrive in the lands of others, stay, work to assert settler possession and sovereignty over these lands, and work to form a settler nation. This requires the dispossession and removal or assimilation of the peoples indigenous to the lands colonized. In case of Canada, white European settlers arrived on Indigenous lands, constructed (a legally precarious and nonsensical) white settler possession and sovereignty, and constructed a white settler nation – specifically a white, white supremacist, Christian, patriarchal, heteronormative, capitalist nation – despite the prior presence of Indigenous peoples living in complex and sophisticated civilizations. Maria Lugones (2010) writes that the common justifications for colonialism in the Americas as a "civilizing mission" with the virtuous and just goal of conversion to Christianity, functioned/function as a "euphemistic mask" that obscures the brutal violence and unimaginable exploitation of colonialism (p. 744). European colonialism functioned to enrich colonizers and colonizer countries, unleash waves of European migration, and provide new sources of trade, markets, and resources – "colonies were established to be exploited economically" (TRC, 2015, p. 45). Lowman and Barker (2015) describe settler colonialism in Canada as a "protracted project of dispossession, elimination, and one of the largest land grabs in the history of humankind", and explain that Canada and settlers in the country work to avoid understanding and acknowledging this (p. 46).

I focus in this section on settler colonialism's racial structure in the context of Canada – which can be understood as a triad structure of white settler, Indigenous person, and Black person and other people of colour (Arvin et al., 2013). The white settler is the person who is fully included in the settler world, and receives the benefits and advantages associated with this world.

The Indigenous person is the person whose presence, and whose indigenous rights and title to lands, has to be made to disappear – they are removed, dispossessed, marginalized, and subjected to genocide and forced assimilation, in order to allow settler access to lands and resources. The Black person and other people of colour are those enslaved and otherwise exploited for their labour – brought to labour on the lands dispossessed from Indigenous people, in order to generate wealth for white settlers and the white settler world. For example, the works of Cheryl Harris (1999) and Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) outline how whiteness (and maleness) has been made the marker or determinant of property/possession – the white (male) person is the person able to own property; the Indigenous person is the person made propertyless, whose forms of possession and relationship to lands are deemed (by white people) inadequate and erasable; and the Black person is the person rendered into property, deemed (by white people as) less-than-human, as enslaveable, and as exploitable for labour. Not only is it the case that the effects of this foundational triad structure of oppression are still present (for example, wealth is concentrated among white people), but also, these frameworks have never actually been dismantled – for example, Canada is still a white, Euro-settler nation (as opposed to an Indigenous nation); most of the private land in Canada is still owned by white people (Rotz, 2017); Canada is still actively working to confine Indigenous sovereignty within a structure of overarching Canadian sovereignty; and there is an ongoing structural exploitation of the labour of people of colour to generate wealth (for example, in the case of temporary foreign workers).

Also important to an understanding of settler colonialism and race, and understanding the white settler world that has been constructed, is attention to Canada's colonialism and imperialism elsewhere. Canada has a long history, that continues today, of full participation and implication in domination, exploitation, undermining, and the extraction of wealth from

racialized others elsewhere in the world, for the benefit of white settlers and the white settler nation. The term "new imperialism" is used to describe Canada's actions today – the "vigorous and often violent imposition of neoliberal governance" on less powerful states in order create new spaces for capitalist profit and exploitation (Shipley, 2013, p. 45). The result of this historical and ongoing dynamic is a global distribution of power, advantage, wealth, and marginalization, poverty, and violence, that is racialized.

These structures of oppression based on race have been, and continue to be, central to Canada's white settler world – Canada, and Canada's wealth and power, have been built through these structures. White settlers are complicit in this, are in a position of advantage in this world, and have derived and continue to derive benefit, wealth, and comfort through these structures of oppression. These structures are taken up, entrenched, and institutionalized through the laws and institutions of Canada – in this way these foundational injustices become less visible to many, and the advantages and benefits that are the product of structures of oppression come to be expected (Harris, 1999).

In the following paragraphs I provide a brief overview of what this advantage/disadvantage and benefit/violence has looked like, in the context of Canada's white settler world, for Indigenous people, for Black people and other people of colour in Canada, and for people of colour in other countries.

The experience of Indigenous peoples with Canada's white settler world is characterized by the settler quest to secure access to Indigenous lands, to resources, and to deal with the "Indian problem": to disappear Indigenous peoples as peoples with Indigenous rights, sovereignty, and title to lands, and to reduce state expenditure related to Indigenous people. In

the centuries since white European settlement, there have been a number of different approaches to achieving this goal, for example: claiming possession of Indigenous lands based on the racist European doctrines of the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*; issuing scalping bounties against Indigenous people in Eastern Canada; the deliberate introduction of disease, or destruction of food sources, or other means of effecting starvation and community collapse; treaty dealings marked by fraud and coercion, and failure to fulfill treaty terms, on the part of the Crown (for example, fraudulent "cede, release, surrender" clauses); the creation of reserves, and confinement of First Nations people on reserves through the pass system; forcibly removing Indigenous children from their families and communities, and subjecting children to systemic abuse and neglect, through the residential school system – children were exposed to physical and sexual abuse, malnourishment and nutritional experimentation, long hours of hard labour, and died in very high numbers (see TRC, 2015; RCAP, 1996). More contemporary examples include: coercing Indigenous communities through disciplining and impoverishment to accept narrow self-governance and rights frameworks that limit their rights and sovereignty, and punishing communities that resist (Pasternak, 2017); and failing to provide Indigenous children with the same services available to other children – for example, the Canadian Government has been found guilty by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal of discriminating against First Nations children on reserve by failing to provide them with the same child welfare services available to other children, and as of March 2019, has been issued 7 non-compliance orders for failing to comply with the terms of the ruling. The TRC (2015) report states that Canada's

> policy of colonization suppressed Aboriginal culture and languages, disrupted Aboriginal government, destroyed Aboriginal economies, and confined Aboriginal people to marginal and often unproductive land. When that policy resulted in hunger, disease, and poverty, the federal government failed to meet its obligations to Aboriginal people. That policy was dedicated to eliminating Aboriginal peoples as distinct political and cultural entities [...]. (p. 133)

Canada's conduct towards Black people and other people of colour in the country has been characterized by exclusion, enslavement and exploitation of labour (in order to allow profits from low-wage labour), and a range of methods (such as over-policing and over-incarceration) of managing the effects of the resulting marginalization and impoverishment. For example, slavery of Black people existed in Canada for over 200 years (plantation-style slavery did not exist due to the unsuitable climate, but other forms of slavery did) (Bakan, 2008). There is a long history of anti-Black racism in the country, for example: segregated schools existed until 1983; there were widespread attempts to ban Black people from Canadian cities (for example, Edmonton's 1911 resolution completely banning Black people from the city); and in 1922 there were 25,000 KKK members in Canada (Maynard, 2017). The 1923 *Chinese Exclusion Act* banned Chinese immigration to Canada, and Chinese people were forced out of most areas of employment by racist laws and public hostility (Backhouse, 1996). This history of exclusion and exploitation continues today, despite official "multiculturalism" in Canada. For example, Black people suffer from discrimination in access to employment and face extreme exploitation in working conditions. Robyn Maynard (2017) writes that Black Canadians "receive lower income for doing the same work as white Canadians, and face significant discrimination in employment and promotion, even though many Black populations [have] comparatively higher levels of education than white Canadians" (p. 73). Black people are over-incarcerated, which functions to manage the effects of Black exclusion, marginalization, and impoverishment. Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program, where most workers are Black people and other people of colour from low-income countries, allows precarious and dangerous labour with few rights and protections, in "conditions that closely mirror the conditions of Black enslavement" (Maynard, 2017, p. 64).

Canada's imperialism/colonialism elsewhere mostly takes the form of interference in and undermining other countries (by the state or by international organizations) in order to create or maintain access to resources or labour, in order to produce wealth for Canadian businesses, investors, and by extension, Canadians. Canada's mining, oil and gas extraction, manufacturing, finance, real estate, and infrastructure industries are particularly visible sites of this activity. For example, Paula Butler (2015) writes that "Canada is exercising political and economic force in various African countries in order to obtain privileged access to lucrative minerals and metals at the expense of African populations' selfdetermination and development opportunities" (p. 59). Tyler Shipley (2013) writes of Canada's support for the 2009 coup d'état in Honduras – helping impose a "brutal, violent, and corrupt regime" in place of a popular and democratically-elected government deemed as too focused on improving living conditions for people (for example, increasing minimum wage, reducing energy costs for low-income families) – in order to improve the profits of Canadian companies. For example, in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, Canada offered a US$100 million aid package "tied to the rights of Canadian mining companies to acquire concessions and help establish a new set of mining codes". Since this time, "Canadian operations have been responsible for some of the country's worst environmental and public health crises" (Shipley, 2013, p. 53). The result of this interference and undermining is a general global inequality that is racialized. Butler (2015) writes that

> Global labour patterns show that racialized bodies are still found doing the most dangerous, tedious, health-threatening, insecure, and poorest paid work, whether as migrant agricultural labourers, construction workers, underground miners, sex workers (who include sex slaves), factory workers in free trade zones or sweatshops, domestic servants, elder caregivers, or child caregivers [...] The twenty-first century thus remains an era in which racialized and "Southern" or "Third World" bodies, in ever-increasing numbers, are materially deprived, denied rights, security, and dignity, and shut out of the apparent benefits of capitalist modernity [...] having been subjected to gross structural violence (absence or unaffordability of health care, insufficient food/nutrition, lack of

> adequate housing, chronic unemployment, destitution, chronic insecurity, etc.). (Butler, pp. 30-1)

Reconciliation

> Borrowing from the 1977 writing of David Wellman: the "concrete problem facing white people" is how to deal with the claims and demands of racialized people "while at the same time *avoiding* the possibility of institutional change and reorganization that might affect them". (Wellman in King, 1991, p. 135)

The current moment of "reconciliation", of "righting the relationship", between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people in Canada, is the latest period in a long history of white settler Canada managing the presence of Indigenous peoples with claims against the white settler world for the massive injustices they have been subjected to, and with claims to sovereignty, rights, and lands that continue to be denied. The actions of the mainstream white settler world (of white settlers, white settler governments, and white settler society) in the "reconciliation" period, just like in previous periods, is characterized by white settler dysconsciousness – evasions and self-interested misunderstandings and rationalizations, that function to protect the white settler world and associated advantage and benefits for white settlers, simultaneous to a framing of the actions of the white settler world as good and just.

This period of focus on reconciliation began with the 1996 *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) (a response to the failed Meech Lake Accord and the "Oka Crisis") and became more mainstream with the activities and final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (established following the 2006 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the product of a long and difficult period of litigation

by Indigenous people and survivors of the residential schools against the federal government and churches involved in the residential school system). According to the final report of the TRC, the term 'reconciliation' means establishing a new and respectful relationship between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canada in order to "restore what must be restored, repair what must be repaired, and return what must be returned" (TRC, 2015, p. 6). This would require significant actions and changes. For example, Call to Action #45 (included in full in the introduction), calls for a commitment from the Government of Canada, on behalf of all Canadians, to:

> i. Repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius.
> ii. Adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.
> iii. Renew or establish Treaty relationships based on principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for maintaining those relationships into the future.
> iv. Reconcile Aboriginal and Crown constitutional and legal orders to ensure that Aboriginal peoples are full partners in Confederation, including the recognition and integration of Indigenous laws and legal traditions in negotiation and implementation processes involving Treaties, land claims, and other constructive agreements.
>
> (p. 199)

There are many criticisms of how reconciliation is taken up in Canada. For example, criticisms have pointed to how reconciliation, in its mainstream form, seems to be more about absolving white settler guilt in order to return again to a happy status quo, or about asking Indigenous people to heal from traumas inflicted, while no reckoning is done on the part of white settler Canada. Glen Coulthard (2014) writes that Canada's approach to reconciliation situates "the abuses of settler colonization firmly in the past", and frames reconciliation as a "process of individually and collectively overcoming the harmful 'legacy' left in the wake of this past abuse, while leaving the present structure of colonial rule largely unscathed" (p. 22, emphasis removed). John Borrows (2017) writes that Canada's approach to reconciliation in effect asks that

"Indigenous peoples reconcile themselves to colonialism" (p. 33). Sheryl Lightfoot (2016) describes what she calls the "Canadian model of reconciliation", which has two primary goals: "absolution to Canada for its past actions related to Indigenous peoples", and "to create certainty for the future by securing land tenure and state sovereignty, keeping all groups equal within the existing power structure" (p. 181). Lightfoot also advances the concept of "over-compliance" within government responses to questions of Indigenous rights and reconciliation – over-compliance involves (a very public) government recognition of Indigenous rights above what the state is legally committed to, although only when the rights recognized are deemed sufficiently nonthreatening and in the interest of the state. For example, Lightfoot explains that the government grants "soft rights" such as rights related to culture, language, education, in order to avoid granting "hard rights" such as rights to land, sovereignty, and self-determination (p. 192).

The reasons for these approaches to reconciliation that leave "the present structure of colonial rule largely unscathed" are certainly complex – for example, reconciliation itself is a complex topic, many white settlers have limited knowledge and understanding of the topic, and many also understand reconciliation differently – as unnecessary, or as achieved through better inclusion or assimilation into the white settler world. There is also the issue of governments constrained in their options by public opinion, or by neoliberal disciplining. The topic is also deeply unsettling and threatening for white settler Canadians, as evidenced by the TRC's calculation to use the term "cultural genocide" instead of "genocide" in order to avoid backlash from and increase engagement with non-Indigenous people in Canada (MacDonald, 2015), and the very strong backlash to the use of the term "genocide" by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). However, mainstream approaches to reconciliation in Canada demonstrate white settler dysconsciousness in the avoidance of full

knowing and reckoning, the avoidance of meaningful redress and justice, the presence of self-interested misunderstandings and rationalizations, simultaneous to a framing of the self as good – that all functions to protect the white settler world and the ongoing structures of oppression from which white settlers benefit.

This same dynamic is present throughout Canada's history – a long history of work, taking many different forms depending on different contexts, done to protect the white settler world and structures of oppression, and in each case actions are framed (and understood) as necessary, good, and virtuous or beneficent on the part of settlers. For example: land theft and subjugation through fraud and coercion in Canada's historic treaties, framed as fair and virtuous dealings; the genocidal residential school system, framed as benevolence; the genocidal 60s scoop, framed as best intentions (Dolha, 2009); the "extinguishment policy", and coercion and manipulation, present in the modern treaties, framed as examples of cooperation, and a "new relationship" (Lightfoot, 2016, p. 191); the suppression of Indigenous rights and sovereignty in the Indigenous rights framework in development by Canada's Liberal government, labeled as "new and transformational" (King and Pasternak, 2018).

Decolonization

Tuck and Yang (2012) write that decolonization requires the returning of land and sovereignty to Indigenous people, as well as ending contemporary forms of slavery and labour exploitation, and anti-imperialism elsewhere. Leanne Simpson (2017) writes that decolonization requires "robust, ethical, and sustainable alternatives to settler colonialism" rooted in Indigenous knowledges and ways of being (p. 50) – an "extensive, rigorous, and profound reorganization of

things", and the restoration of Indigenous political, social, and economic systems, and Indigenous nationhood (p. 48). As a radical restructuring, decolonization is necessarily unpredictable and messy (Mackey, 2016), and there is no clear map, plan, or blueprint (Lowman and Barker, 2015). In fact, it will exist in various forms, giving rise to different resurgent Indigenous worlds that are not to be determined by settlers (Tuck and Yang, 2012). Lowman and Barker (2015) write that

> Settler Canadians, aware of complicity with and benefit from settler colonialism, aware of illegitimate residency on the land, and aware of roles in the ongoing violent displacement and attempted genocide of Indigenous peoples, must accept that among the possible end-points of decolonization is one in which everything we know changes. (p. 144)

Decolonization requires of white settlers to work to understand and to dismantle the structures of oppression of others from which they benefit. Better inclusion of Indigenous people and other people of colour into the white settler world will always be inadequate, will always only amount to partial inclusion into a world that is fundamentally racist, anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, anti-POC (people of colour). As quoted from Leanne Simpson (2017) at the beginning of this chapter,

> [a] very large number of Canadians will do everything they can to preserve the social, cultural, and economic systems of the country, even though this system is predicated on violence and dispossession of Indigenous lands and bodies. Therefore, we do not need the help of Canadians. We need Canadians to help themselves, to learn to struggle and to understand that their great country of Canada has been and is a death dance for Indigenous peoples. They must learn to stop themselves from plundering the land and the climate and using Indigenous people' bodies to fuel their economy, and to find a way of living in the world that is not based on violence and exploitation. (Simpson, 2017, p. 101)

Importantly, decolonization involves a rejection of dysconsciousness and an unsettling of the various knowledges, stories, and rationalizations, that justify settler colonialism, and justify

opposition to decolonization. For example, the idea of Indigenous life pre-colonization as brutal and difficult, as marked by starvation, cold, and suffering; or the idea of settler colonialism as beneficence, as ultimately having improved the lives of Indigenous people, and of Euro-American civilization and culture as superior to Indigenous ones – these ideas are still rooted deeply in the consciousness of the white settler world. Instead settlers need to understand settler colonialism as a large project of land theft, genocide, enslavement and exploitation, that has benefitted and continues to benefit white settlers at the expense of others. Ravi de Costa, writing about reconciliation Australia, highlights the "dangers of national efforts to shift [the] hearts and minds" of non-Indigenous people in settler colonial countries where, unlike the case of post-war Germany or post-apartheid South Africa, there has been no "rupture in the ideological conditions that make settler or national identity possible. That is, a widespread acceptance amongst both victims and perpetrators that the fundamental ideas underpinning social and political arrangements are untenable" (de Costa in Regan, 2010, p. 46).

White settlers also have the responsibility of working and organizing to help dismantle the structures of oppression of the white settler world. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014) writes that ultimately, racial structures and racial inequality exist, and are still intact, "because they benefit members of the dominant race" (p. 9) – since white settlers benefit from the white settler world, they work to protect it. It is not enough to just be critical of white settler advantage and the white settler world, settlers must actively work to help with their dismantling. Lowman and Barker (2015) write that settler colonialism is not inevitable – but that "things are how they are only because we do not collectively organize to challenge and change them" (p. 32).

3. Mennonites and White Settler Dysconsciousness

This chapter has two main sections. In the first, I expand on Mennonite advantage through structures of oppression of Indigenous peoples in Canada. I focus in particular on Mennonites and the Métis in southern Manitoba, giving a brief account of Mennonite settlement and advantage, and Métis oppression. This example is one of many examples of Mennonite advantage through Indigenous oppression throughout the province and country, and shows well the specific context and form of Mennonite complicity in this oppression.

In the second section, I focus on how Mennonite understanding and reckoning, regarding Mennonite advantage through the oppression of others, is avoided. I draw on examples that illustrate Mennonite dysconsciousness – examples of limited, selective, and self-interested understanding of histories and structures, based in understandings of ethnically-specific histories and characteristics, that construct a position of non-complicity and innocence.

Mennonite as ethnicity

The category of 'Mennonite', as an ethnic group, is a problematic category. The Mennonite church has its origins as a religious movement in 16th Germany and Netherlands, with followers subject to many subsequent divisions, and movements and immigrations within Europe and throughout the world. For example, the descendants of these early Mennonites can be found now in the largest numbers in the Americas (in countries such as Canada, the USA, Paraguay, Mexico, Bolivia), and range from more isolated and conservative communities to near total integration into the mainstream societies of these countries, and have to varying extents interacted and adopted elements of the local cultures. Mennonites also exist elsewhere in the

world in very large numbers as a result of Mennonite missionary work – countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, and Indonesia, each have hundreds of thousands of Mennonites. The result today is a large diversity of cultures, languages, religious practices, ethnicities, and many racialized peoples, that exist within the category of 'Mennonite'. The discussion of whether or not 'Mennonite' can be understood as an ethnicity has been present in Mennonite communities, and includes criticisms of the fact that a white person who has ancestry from early European Mennonites but is not a member of a church might be considered more Mennonite than practicing Mennonite people of colour.

However, I use Mennonite as an ethnic category, referring in particular to the white (descendent from early European Mennonites) Mennonite population in the prairies in Canada, with shared experience of structural advantage in Canada, and shared stories of migration and settlement that are characterized especially by the experience of the "Russian Mennonites". Julia Michael (2017), writes that the story of the Russian Mennonites, who "witnessed a socio-political change in Russia and were subjected to looting, torture and subsequent starvation during and after the Russian Revolution – has become one of the most important experiences in the collective memory of Canadian Mennonites" (p.31), and that this focus on an origins story "that in fact relates to the history of only a number of contemporary Mennonites in Canada tends to silence other experiences and narratives" (p. 10).

"Russian Mennonites" and settlement in Manitoba

Mennonites have their origins in the 1500s and 1600s as an Anabaptist religious group that was part of the Protestant Reformation. Early Mennonites moved throughout Europe in

response to persecution related to religious beliefs that included adult baptism and opposition to military service. The “Russian Mennonites”, one of the many different groups that resulted from these many divisions and migrations, left Germany and settled first in present-day Poland in the 16th century, then in present-day Ukraine starting in the 1760s, where they lived until leaving Europe in waves between 1870 and the WW2 period. Emigration in the 1870s was the result of the ending of special privileges enjoyed by these Mennonites, which included exemption from military service and control over their own German-language schools. Subsequent emigration was the result of the complex position of Mennonites as wealthy, foreign farmers in the time of the Bolshevik Revolution and the establishment of the USSR (Mennonites were positioned as ‘kulaks’, class enemies of poorer peasants and labourers) and as ethnic-Germans living in Soviet Ukraine in periods of conflict and war between Germany and the USSR. During this period these Mennonites experienced confiscation of lands and collectivization of farms, forced secularization and a ban on organized religion, long periods of struggle and starvation, violence, torture, purges of ethnic-Germans from the USSR, deportations to Siberia and Kazakhstan, and the sudden disappearance of family and community members. Many Mennonites fled towards Germany, enduring long and horrible experiences of flight and conflict, before migrating to the Americas, settling eventually in central Canada and the US, and in Central and South America.

Mennonite groups settling in the prairies in Canada in the 1870s were granted large tracts of land for collective use in what is now southern Manitoba, with the option of purchasing more land. Within years, these Mennonites were praised by then Governor General of Canada Lord Dufferin for converting land that was "absolutely bare, desolate [and] *untenanted* [emphasis added]" into a successful agricultural settlement (Dufferin in Giesbrecht, 2001, p. 104). Subsequent waves of migration (1910-40s) joined established Mennonite communities, or moved

further west across the prairies to find available lands. Early Mennonite settlers experienced some forms of discrimination from the dominant Anglo-Saxon settler society. For example, there were attempts, especially after WW2, to "make Canada more 'Anglo-Saxon' and strengthen the British Empire", and to take back land from "non-British religious minorities" like the Mennonites, Doukhobors, and Hutterites (Arneil, 2017, p. 77). However, Mennonites largely ascended to the mainstream white settler society – largely disappearing or integrating into the white settler mainstream – within one or two generations of arrival, and many Mennonite studies scholars are careful to emphasize that contemporary Canadian Mennonites are not subject to persecution or harassment, and are not socially outcast (Michael, 2017, p. 62).

Contemporary Mennonite life varies – more conservative Mennonites and conservative Mennonite communities still exist, while many have integrated and disappeared into the Canadian mainstream. Generally, Mennonites in Canada today are affluent and comfortable. Mennonites have low incidence of poverty, high employment, high education, with full access to positions of leadership and power (Grant and Rosenstock, 2011).[2] A common narrative among Mennonites in Canada is that Canada is a good place to live, and unlike the places Mennonites migrated from, here people are able to live in peace, practice their religion and culture, and make a life free of war, violence, dispossession of land, and interference.

[2] Rural, conservative Mennonites tend to have lower levels of education and income than the Canadian average, due to conservative gender roles, and conservative patriarchal attitudes to education and labour – otherwise, Mennonites score higher than the Canadian average in income, employment, and education (Grant and Rosenstock, 2011).

Settler colonialism, Mennonites, and the Métis

Mennonite settlement in the prairies has occupied a very specific role in the project of Canadian settler colonialism. Tricia Logan (2015) writes that regarding lands in the west of Canada, the Government had

> a large-scale scheme to populate and create living space for the new Dominion and immigrant populations, to stop annexation of territory from the United States, to complete a transnational railway and to achieve an agricultural transformation of the prairies. (p. 442)

This scheme involved the mass removal of Indigenous people, such as the Métis, from these lands, with the goal of disappearing Indigenous peoples, along with their rights to title and sovereignty over these lands. The project required a large influx of settlers, settler access to lands and resources, and large-scale agricultural settlement in order to support new settler populations. It is in this context that Canada's 'benevolence', and access to the country, was extended to white European groups that normally were considered less desirable, and that were seeking escape from conflict in Europe, such as the Mennonites. In this case, Mennonites were considered particularly useful – they were regarded as "ideal colonists" because of their self-sufficiency and their proven capabilities as settlers and farmers (Doell, 2001, p. 167), and their settlement in the prairies was to act as a "catalyst to mass conversion of 'unused' land to agricultural lands" (Logan, 2015, p. 443). For these reasons, the government used "Mennonites who were seeking safety and religious freedom and had proven capabilities as farmers, to advance their project of colonialism" (Braun in Michael, 2017, p. 40).

Comparing Mennonite settlement to Métis dispossession and attempted removal from the prairies, reveals drastically different experiences with structures of advantage and oppression.

Mennonite experiences with settlement, like the experiences of many settlers, can be broadly characterized by state advantage and support to settle and thrive. Métis experiences with settler colonialism, in these same periods and continuing largely to this day (and like the experiences of other Indigenous people in Canada), are broadly characterized by settler colonial attempts at removal and disappearance of Indigenous peoples to allow white settler access to and possession of Indigenous lands.

Logan (2015) outlines the interconnected system, or "colonial net", of colonial institutions and mechanisms of violence and dispossession that together attempt at "removing the Métis from Canada". For the Métis, the colonial net includes "the forced movement of Métis homes and communities, the slaughter of the buffalo, military incursions, racialization of the Halfbreed, the Indian residential school, the sexual exploitation and violence against Indigenous and Métis women, the child welfare system and the lawless administration of Métis lands and dispossession" (p. 447), as well as the "Reserve system, the Indian Act, the Reserve Pass system" (p. 443). In the following paragraphs, I expand on a few of these aspects of the "colonial net" as experienced by the Métis.

Dispossession through government legislation

The Métis organized to resist and oppose the pressures on the Métis people, and on their lands and ways of life, caused by encroaching non-Indigenous settlement. Logan (2015) writes that:

> Métis and First Nations were not passive observers to this process but rather agents amidst these changes who often led resistance against incursions into their territories while also building undeniable partnerships with incoming settlers. In order to protect

> their lands, rights and safety, provisional Métis governments were created and Métis attempted negotiations with the new Dominion to retain their rights. (p. 441)

One result of Métis resistance and negotiation was the Manitoba Act, agreed with Canada in 1870. According to the Act, Canada recognizes the Métis as a sovereign nation, with title to their homelands in the Red River area (title to lands already occupied by the Métis, and to an additional 1.4 million acres to be chosen by the Métis) and the right, as a sovereign nation, to self-government in these lands. But these protections secured by the Métis in this nation-to-nation agreement quickly disappeared through the deliberate violation of the Act by the Government of Canada. Prime Minister John A. MacDonald wrote in 1870, that "these impulsive half breeds have got spoilt by their émeute [riot] and must be kept down by a strong hand until they are swamped by the influx of settlers" (MacDonald Papers in Sprague, 1988, p. 89). MacDonald's strategy was to establish calm with the "wild people" of the Red River through "considerable management" until enough settlers had moved west, and predicted that this "first wave of new settlers could accomplish the informal work of establishing Canadian sovereignty" over the Métis and Métis lands (MacDonald Papers in Sprague, 1988, p. 30). The government encouraged a rapid influx of white settlement in Métis lands through invitations and free lands grants (extended exclusively to white settlers). By 1873, it had become "clear that the entire question of land claims under the Manitoba Act was in total chaos", and of the additional lands to be chosen by the Métis people, "not one of the 1.4 million acres was allotted" (Sprague, 1988, p. 106). Lands were granted instead to the large number of incoming settlers, such as the Mennonites.

The Métis also experienced dispossession of lands already occupied. Many Métis people were forced to leave their lands, and many Métis homesteads and communities were dismantled

and destroyed. For example, the 1934 Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act functioned to remove Métis homesteads to make space for farm land for white settlers. Under the Act, Métis homesteads and communities, such as the Métis town of Ste. Madeleine, were destroyed to create new farms:

> Houses were burned, dogs and animals were shot on site and the church was dismantled to create a piggery. Métis were offered only empty promises of relocation and support. Hundreds of residents and families were forcibly relocated to surrounding towns and road allowances. Métis families were never able to return or rebuild homes in Ste. Madeleine. (Logan, 2015, p. 443)

Dehumanization and violence

Métis people were also subject to more informal mechanisms of dispossession. Logan (2015) writes that "where the Métis were not forced out by legislation, they were socially compelled or intimidated out of their homes" (p. 443). Logan highlights the construction in the colonial imaginary of Métis people as degenerate. Métis men were constructed as 'naturally' rebels and as outlaws. Métis women were constructed as promiscuous, as "dissolute, dangerous and sinister", which "gave colonizers a moral 'permission' to reduce the value of Indigenous women's lives" (p. 439). This resulted, for example, in high rates of forced sterilization of Métis women. The construction of the Métis as degenerate resulted in severe racial discrimination against the Métis, and functioned to justify and encourage violence and attempts at removal from both the state and from settler individuals. Many Métis people were forced to leave their homes and the Red River area due to intimidation and pressure from settlers. For example, an account from an oral history of Métis migration from the Red River area details the level of hostility directed against the Métis:

> "all those Métis people that moved out of the Red River Settlement, they came out of there in groups, that was the reason why because they didn't dare come out by themselves because they knew damn well what was going to happen [...] if somebody was after me out there, I would not want to be alone". (Desjarlais in Logan, 2015, p. 442)

The residential school system

Métis history with Canada's residential schools system is made complex by jurisdictional disputes between the federal and provincial/territorial governments over responsibility for the Métis. This complexity is outlined in the final report of the TRC (2015a): the Métis were considered as part of "the 'dangerous classes,' whom the residential schools were intended to civilize and assimilate", and were among the many Indigenous children forcibly removed from their families and made to attend the schools, run by the federal government and by churches (p. 4). However, the federal government considered the responsibility for educating and assimilating the Métis to lie with the provincial and territorial governments, resulting in periods where Métis children were removed or were not allowed to attend the schools (although during these periods "church leaders continued to recruit Métis students") (p. 55). Provincial and territorial governments "were reluctant to provide services to Métis people" – they "were often unwilling to build schools in Métis communities or to allow Métis students to attend public schools" (p. 55) – although Métis children did attend the residential schools run or funded by provincial governments, that first appeared in the 1950s. The TRC (2015a) writes that the "history of these provincial schools and the experiences of Métis students in these schools remain to be written" (p. 4).

The residential school system was in operation for more than a hundred years, from the first schools in the late 1800s, until the last schools closed in 1996. The TRC final report (2015)

explains that the system was "an integral part of a conscious policy of cultural genocide" (p. 55)[3] – the purpose of the system was to "eliminate Aboriginal peoples as distinct peoples and to assimilate them into the Canadian mainstream against their will" (p. 3).

> Residential schools endangered the health and well-being of the children who attended them. Many students succumbed to infectious disease, particularly tuberculosis. Sexual and physical abuse, as well as separation from families and communities, caused lasting trauma for many others. The effects of this trauma were often passed on to the children of the residential school Survivors and sometimes to their grandchildren. Residential schools also posed a threat to the mental health of students through the pervasive assumptions and assertions they made about the inferiority of Aboriginal peoples, cultures, and languages. This disregard for Aboriginal health and well-being was consistent with the long-established patterns of colonialism: the introduction of new diseases, the disruption of traditional food sources, and the concentration of people on unproductive land and the housing of them in cramped, unsanitary dwellings. (TRC, 2015, p. 158)

Métis children "would have undergone the same experiences [as other Indigenous children] – the high death rates, limited diets, crowded and unsanitary housing, harsh discipline, heavy workloads, neglect, and abuse" (TRC, 2015a, p. 4). Despite this, the Métis were not part of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement that awarded (limited) compensation to survivors, and this is the subject of ongoing lawsuits against the Canadian government.

Mennonites were active participants in the residential school system, despite not being among the original churches involved in establishing the system and operating schools. From the 1940s to 1990s there were Mennonite-run residential schools, day schools, and boarding homes, and a large number of Mennonites taught in other residential schools (Heinrichs, 2012). In 2014, a group of denominations representing Mennonites in Canada issued a statement as part of the TRC, acknowledging Mennonite participation in the residential schools system, and

[3] Scholars argue that the residential school system was not just a system of 'cultural genocide', but that both the operation of the system and the effects of the system constitute genocide. MacDonald (2015) provides important context for understanding the TRC's calculation to not use the term 'genocide'.

acknowledging that paternalism and racism was and is still present, and that Mennonites need to work to address this in their communities and among the general public (TRC, 2015, p. 393).

Constructing non-complicity and innocence

White settler dysconsciousness is a large and complex dynamic. As outlined earlier, it exists in a constant dynamic of self-interested misunderstanding and rationalization, of particular self-interested and selective understandings of complexity that function to avoid that which is troubling. It produces and is produced by white settler structures of knowledge, and is disseminated through the various ways knowledge and culture are transmitted, and as a result, is present everywhere, deeply embedded in white settler society, knowledge, culture, and people. It explains inaccurate, incomplete, or absent understandings among white settlers of whiteness, race, and settler colonialism, and explains how good, well-educated, and otherwise critical people demonstrate an absence of critical consciousness in key moments, and a failure to interrogate power and advantage.

In this section I draw on examples that illustrate Mennonite dysconsciousness – examples of limited, selective, and self-interested understanding of histories and structures, based in understandings of ethnically-specific histories and characteristics, that construct a position of non-complicity and innocence. These examples are evidence of a story and a consciousness present among Mennonites that is characterized by dysconsciousness. The examples are organized around two themes: Mennonite suffering, and Mennonite virtue.

Mennonite suffering

> When we interrupt the story of Indigenous genocide, to complicate it with stories about the "original" hardship or oppression of the white settlers in Europe, we have to ask how this may work in the service of White supremacy and upholding the White settler mythology of innocence (Razack, 2002) regardless of whether this was the intention or not. (Hunt and Holmes, 2015, p. 170)

The trope of Mennonite suffering, constructed through stories of Mennonite martyrdom and victimization, has become "a constituent element for creating and sustaining Mennonite collective identities" (Michael, 2017, p. 31). This trope draws on important but also relatively brief periods of suffering, constructing suffering as a long-standing and defining feature of Mennonite life, and displacing an awareness of extended periods of advantage and benefit derived through the oppression of others. For example, Michael (2017) writes that scholars focus heavily on stories of Mennonite oppression, and that there is a near absence of focus on Mennonite advantage and complicity related to settler colonialism in Canada:

> scholars in the field of Mennonite Studies rarely focus on this aspect of Mennonite history, with only a few exceptions, of which even fewer explore Mennonites' responsibility as settler-invaders in Canada. (p. 88)

Michael explains that two periods of Mennonite suffering have become particularly central to collective memory and identity: that of the 16th century martyrs, and the Russian Mennonites after the Russian Revolution.

16th century martyrdom – Understandings of Mennonite martyrdom are informed mainly by the *Martyrs Mirror*[4] book, a 17th century compilation and retelling of accounts of

[4] Full title: *The Bloody Theatre or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized Only Upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus, Their Savior, from the Time of Christ to the Year A. D. 1660.*

Christian martyrdom, focusing in particular on the martyrdom in the 16th and 17th centuries of Anabaptist Christians in Europe. The book consists of stories of persecution for religious beliefs – of imprisonment, torture, and execution, for Anabaptist beliefs deemed heretical or dangerous, such as a rejection of infant baptism and defencelessness (nonviolence and nonresistance). The book details Anabaptist persecution occurring in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and other countries in Europe, at the hands of local administrations, both Catholic and Protestant. The stories in the book were first compiled by a Dutch Mennonite minister, and were published during the "Dutch Golden Age", reminding Mennonites (in a period where many Mennonites enjoyed wealth and self-indulgent lifestyles) of their martyr heritage and of those who had sacrificed not only comfort and wealth, but their lives, for their religious beliefs (Kasdorf, 2019).

Scholars of Mennonite studies explain that the descriptions of Mennonite martyrdom and suffering contained in the book have become a central part of Mennonite collective memory and identity, and that the book has been popular among Mennonites for a long time and can be found in many homes (Michael, 2017; Kasdorf, 2013; Roth, 2013). These scholars raise a number of issues with the book, and the resulting collective memory and identity based on suffering. For example, the book is criticized as presenting simplified and self-interested accounts of conflicts during a period of complex division and violence between Christian groups in Europe. The protagonists are positioned as virtuous, just, truthful, as demonstrating true Christian belief and actions, and persecuted by greed and corruption, and by distortions of Christianity. The accounts avoid an approach that captures the complexity of stories of martyrdom (for example, the idea that one person's martyr is another's criminal or terrorist). The book is criticized as informing the trope of long-standing Mennonite suffering, and the focus on this trope comes at the expense of knowledge about long-standing histories of Mennonite advantage, complicity in colonization

and oppression of others, and the long history of Mennonites functioning as "settler-invaders" (Zacharias in Michael, 2017, p. 37) – for example, first in present-day Ukraine, then in the Canadian prairies and in South and Central America (Michael 2017, Kasdorf 2013). The simplified, self-interested, and inaccurate understandings of history inform Mennonite identity and allow an inaccurate picture of long-standing suffering, and of exceptional innocence and virtue.

Russian Mennonites after the Russian Revolution – The stories of the experiences of the Russian Mennonites who suffered through the Russian Revolution and World Wars 1 and 2, as detailed earlier in the chapter, are also central to Mennonite understandings of their collective history and identity. Michael (2017) writes that these experiences have "become one of the most important experiences in the collective memory of Canadian Mennonites" (p. 31).

A tweet from the Conservative Manitoba MLA Kelvin Goertzen (a Mennonite), on May 26 2019, indicates the power and political usefulness that narratives of Mennonite victimization and the horrors suffered by Russian Mennonites in the USSR continue to have. In response to a picture of Manitoba NDP leader Wab Kinew and several other Manitoba NDP MLAs, at an event commemorating 1919 Winnipeg general strike, in which a flag of the USSR can be seen in the background, Goertzen shared the following statement and photo:

> Mennonites know all too well the cost of Communism and oppression. Shame on the NDP for standing with the #SovietFlag #MBPoli

(Goertzen, 2019)

Goertzen is drawing on the trope of Mennonite suffering and demonstrates that this trope has entered collective Mennonite (and Manitoban) consciousness and identity. Goertzen's statement is troubling for a number of reasons. Goertzen, the Manitoba Minister of Education, is tweeting a deliberately misleading statement (the NDP members are not standing with the Soviet flag, instead a Soviet flag can be seen in the background held by someone who appears to be walking by) for his and his party's political gain. The NDP politicians visible in the picture include Anishnaabe Manitoba NDP Leader and MLA Wab Kinew, and Anishnaabe MLA Nahanni Fontaine – Goertzen, a conservative white settler politician, in a country that is committing ongoing genocide against Indigenous peoples is (ironically, but not surprisingly) criticizing Indigenous people for standing with a flag that represents oppression. Goertzen's statement occurred ten days after a statement from the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, which is located in Winnipeg, in which the Museum acknowledges that Canada has committed genocide against Indigenous peoples, after long-standing criticism of the Museum for avoiding the term:

> We would like to share that the Museum does recognize the genocide against Indigenous people and considers the entire colonial experience in Canada, from first contact to today, as genocide. We are always learning and growing. (CMHR, 2019)

Goertzen's statement also occurred only one week before the release of the final report of the MMIWG (2019), which centres attention on settler colonialism and settler colonial genocide of Indigenous people, in its work on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Goertzen, a white settler Mennonite politician, is quick to mobilize the trope of the oppression of Mennonites, but is curiously silent on the issue of genocide, both historical and ongoing, against Indigenous people in Canada.

Mennonite virtue

The trope of Mennonite virtue is constructed through understandings that Mennonites were never oppressors and have been constant workers for justice. For example, Mennonites are pacifists, are not a colonizing or imperial people, have not participated in the violence and oppression associated with settler colonialism, and work hard to help marginalized people. It is important to note that the presumed history of non-participation in the more overt violence through which the white settler world was constructed, such as wars and other forms of violent conflict, does not mean that Mennonites are not complicit in violence. Mennonites, with their long history of acting as settler-invaders, have a long history of benefitting from the more overt forms of violence used by others, and also a long history of full participation in a world of white benefit and white settler benefit through racialized oppression and violence that is structural.

I focus in this section on how Mennonite justice and inclusion work functions to construct understandings of Mennonite innocence and non-complicity. This work is important, pragmatic, and has a real effect on the lives of marginalized people, but ultimately only achieves forms of justice and inclusion that are more superficial, partial, and inadequate. I argue that this work has the effect of displacing, in ways similar to the example of Mennonite suffering, a more radical and necessary acknowledgment of structures of oppression and the need to work to dismantle them. In other words, Mennonite justice and inclusion work aims to reduce suffering caused by the white settler world, but has the effect of preventing work to address the foundational and ongoing structures of oppression that cause this suffering, preserving white settler advantage. The lack of understanding of foundational and ongoing structures of oppression, suggests dysconsciousness – uncritical consciousness, uncritically accepting dominant rationalizations, and some level of avoidance of contradictory evidence and failure to interrogate that which is troubling. Is it through this failure to more fully understand oppression and Mennonite advantage and complicity, that more superficial attempts at justice can be understood as adequate.

There are a number of examples of this justice and inclusion work that carries these dynamics. One prominent example is the case of Mennonite refugee and newcomer settlement work. Here, Mennonites do work – mostly with people of colour who have experienced the effects of Western colonialism and imperialism elsewhere in the world – that has important positive effects, but does not address the still-present structures of oppression that affect people of colour and that benefit white settlers. When this work of including people into an unchanged white settler world is understood as adequate and just, this has the effect of entrenching the white

settler world and obfuscating structures of oppression. In the following paragraphs I focus on two other examples: international peace and aid work, and support for Indigenous communities.

International aid and peace work –

> Mennonites have contributed to global peace and the relief of suffering. We are quite gifted at loving people in far-off corners of the world. Peacebuilding experts in the United Nations, in governments around the world, rabbis in the US, imams in Muslim centers like Qom, Iran, and others regard Mennonite peacebuilding as exemplary. Mennonite peacebuilding is making noteworthy contributions to the wider field of peacebuilding. At the UN, more than a dozen high-level staff have degrees in conflict transformation from Mennonite-affiliated schools. In remote parts of the world, Mennonite-trained practitioners are hard at work protecting human rights and building relationships between conflicted groups […]
>
> Mennonites have solid roots. Our legacy of peacebuilding is strong. Pacifist theology can be, and has been, translated into practical actions. Mennonites have lived out the words of Menno Simons to clothe the naked, to comfort the sorrowful, to give food to the hungry, and to shelter the destitute. Mennonites today have added to that list of faithful activities. They protest in the streets for justice, mediate between warring groups, facilitate dialogue between haves and have-nots, teach the military alternatives to war, and educate children about peace. (Schirch, 2017)

The above quotes – a particularly extreme example – indicate the extent to which understandings of exceptional Mennonite virtue through aid and peace work exist among Mennonites, and are central to Mennonite identities. Tobin Miller Shearer (2017) highlights the "debilitating tension" that arises when white Mennonites, with these identities "based on self-sacrifice and humility", are asked to confront their structural power and privilege as white people. Shearer, a professor and anti-racism educator, writes that "by far the most dramatic" training meltdown experienced in a long career of conducting anti-racism trainings, occurred in a training for a group of 50 Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) staff and volunteers, mostly white Americans on their way to international service and aid positions in other countries (p. 259). In fact, in Shearer's experience, "whenever a critical mass of white North American

Mennonite peacemakers – those activists, pastors, educators, and theologians who claimed identities as peace and justice advocates – joined an anti-racism training", the "mood shifted, the intensity increased, and conflict erupted" (p. 259). Shearer highlights how offence and anger result when Mennonite individuals are asked to understand structures of advantage and oppression based on race, and to unsettle their own beliefs in their innocence and non-complicity. This dynamic demonstrates a lack of understanding among the Mennonites in this example of their power and privilege as white people, and demonstrates their deep investment in an identity of innocence and non-complicity. Shearer draws on the writing of James Perkinson, who writes of whiteness as a "social position of domination underwritten by a text of absolution" (p. 260).

Shearer's experience fits well with Robin DiAngelo's work on the concept of white fragility. DiAngelo (2011) argues that a lack of understanding of structures of advantage and oppression based on race, and of the impact these structures have on the lives of white people and the lives of racialized people, exists among white people. When white people are asked to confront the fact of structural racism and white implication and benefit in this, it often produces responses similar to those experienced by Shearer – evasions, dismissal, and a range of emotions connected to the unsettling of identities and the perception that they are being judged for being a bad and racist person.

Support for Indigenous communities in Canada – Understandings of Mennonite support of Indigenous people and peoples, that fail to acknowledge Mennonite advantage and complicity regarding ongoing structures of Indigenous dispossession and genocide, and Mennonite responsibility to address these things, is another example of justice and inclusion

work with important dynamics of dysconsciousness. I draw on quotes from two Mennonites studies scholars writing on this issue:

> While there has been a discourse on Mennonites' relationship with Indigenous people in Canada, which acknowledges their participation in the colonization process, it focuses mainly on Mennonites' seemingly charitable role towards Indigenous peoples in the context of missions and support programs by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and its local branches. (Michael, 2017, p. 36)

> It is quite common for Mennonites to perceive themselves as being both compassionate and generous towards Canada's Aboriginal people. In Manitoba, Mennonite Central Committee's recent solidarity with the Cree people of Cross Lake [in their long-standing advocacy regarding environmental and economic damage stemming from Manitoba hydroelectricity projects] provides further evidence of Mennonites being a people willing to speak out on behalf of the oppressed. While socially concerned Mennonites may readily acknowledge the devastating impact western colonialism has had on Aboriginal people in Canada, they seem to be less aware of the historical impact of their own arrival in Manitoba. (Giesbrecht, 2001, p. 103)

I draw here on the example of the Mennonites and the Young Chippewayan people in the area of Laird, Saskatchewan. Leonard Doell is a Mennonite and MCC employee who has spent a long career working to build relationships between Mennonites and First Nations people, and who has been involved in the Young Chippewayan Reserve No. 107 issue. I include some quotes from Doell's (2001) article:

> An injustice occurred in 1897 when the land belonging to the Young Chippewayan Band was taken from them without their consent. Mennonites became the beneficiaries of this transaction and acquired some of the best agricultural land in the province. The Mennonite people now have 103 years of history on this reserve where they have lived, worked, and raised their families - and have a legal right to do so. The government has erred and created this injustice [...]

> The one hope [the Young Chippewayan] have to begin again is that the government will honour their claim and that they will be given land somewhere as an economic base. The band would prefer to have its own land back but does not want to dispossess the Mennonites who now reside on this land [...]

> Mennonites have no legal obligation to intercede on the Native People's behalf - only a moral obligation. Mennonites also know the feeling of being dispossessed, a people without a home, pilgrims in many lands. (p. 167)

The people of the Young Chippewayan First Nation and the Laird Mennonites are grappling with a difficult situation and a difficult question of title to lands. The situation is an admirable example of relationship building between groups in a potentially antagonistic situation, of mutual acknowledgment of the other's position and humanity, and a mutual desire to "arrive at a peaceful and just solution, to a problem which both peoples did not choose" (Doell, 2001, p. 167). Roger Epp (2012) writes of an important moment in this history, where Laird Mennonites, other settlers from the area, and members of the First Nation gathered together to sign a Declaration of Harmony and Justice, and together "committed to work so that the Young Chippewayans' claim for a land base could be resolved and future generations could live in peace, justice, and sufficiency for all" (p. 131). The situation is also an example of how difficult it is to navigate problems this complex – for example, even the act of returning small amounts of land to Indigenous peoples is rarely easy or politically possible, and is often heavily contested by settler Canadians (see, for example, Mackey, 2014).

Despite the success in relationship building and confronting a difficult problem, an understanding of settler colonial dispossession and genocide of Indigenous people, and of Canada's fraudulence in treaty negotiations, makes it clear that simply returning reserve lands or agreeing a land claim agreement[5], is far from a just solution. The risk here is that a partial form

[5] The issue of manipulation and injustice for Indigenous nations in modern land claims agreements is well documented (e.g. Lightfoot, 2016; Pasternak, 2017; Coulthard, 2014). For example, Indigenous nations have been made to take on extensive debt, and to sign away Indigenous rights and title to lands, in order to receive limited control of lands and institutions, and limited relief from poverty imposed through settler colonialism.

of justice might allow an avoidance of deeper reflection on the injustices of settler colonialism, and Mennonite advantage, complicity, and responsibility.

Evading whiteness

This dynamic – of groups drawing on limited, selective, and self-interested understandings of history or characteristics, in order to construct positions of innocence and non-complicity regarding the injustices of settler colonialism – occurs among white settler ethnic groups throughout Canada. One prominent and recent example is that of the "new métis" or "eastern métis". Here, white settlers in eastern Canada evade complicity in settler colonialism by constructing themselves as "also Indigenous", drawing on distorted understandings of history and ethnic characteristics – for example, through a selective interpretation of ancestry, the construction of convenient origin stories, and whitewashing histories of brutal colonialism, positioning French colonialism in eastern Canada as a "gentler colonialism" and an example of extensive cooperation with Indigenous peoples (Gaudry and Leroux, 2017; Leroux, 2018; Vowel and Leroux, 2016). Claiming Indigeneity also functions in this case to gain Indigenous rights (for example, hunting rights and land rights), and to oppose the rights of Indigenous peoples in the area. This dynamic, referred to as "settler self-indigenization" or "settler nativism" is a move to innocence that is well-documented in North America (Tuck and Yang, 2012; TallBear, 2013; Sturm, 2011).

Constructing evasions in this way, where groups draw on self-interested and selective understandings of history and characteristics to avoid acknowledging and reckoning with extensive advantage, and to evade the claims against the white settler world, is something that is

available to white settlers throughout Canada. These evasions are often constructed through ethnicity, but may also often be constructed through other categories of identity – for example, class, gender, and sexuality. This functions to fragment the subject of the criticisms and claims against whiteness and against the white settler world. For example, if all white settlers are able to construct positions of innocence and non-complicity drawing on some aspect of their identity, then who is left to take responsibility for the foundational and still present structures of white settler advantage and oppression in Canada?

Limitations of this research

The research presented in this thesis is limited in two important ways that I would like to highlight. The first is the issue of representation and misrepresentation within the examples chosen to illustrate Mennonite dysconsciousness. It would have been possible, for example, to choose four examples that disprove Mennonite dysconsciousness, just as it would have been possible to draw on even more extreme examples of self-interested denial and evasion. The second issue is the lack of attention to intersectionality within the analysis of white settler dysconsciousness and Mennonite dysconsciousness. White settler dysconsciousness, for example, is also complicated by gender, sexuality, and class. Mennonite life and Mennonite dysconsciousness are also complicated by race, gender, sexuality, and class. In-depth attention to intersectionality is required to more fully understand white settler dysconsciousness and Mennonite dysconsciousness. This focus was outside the scope of this research, but is an important focus for future research.

These research decisions – the four examples chosen, and the lack of attention to intersectionality – reflect my position and my own experience. For example, the four examples chosen all resonate with me and my experience as a white person of Mennonite ancestry growing up with a community that is white, middle-class, well-educated, interested in justice, involved in aid and peace work, and understands itself as good, critical, and aware. I am less able to draw on personal experience to support how these dynamics are complicated by things such as patriarchy, sexism, and heteronormativity. Better interrogating and understanding these complications is an important next step.

Conclusion

I began my work on this thesis with an interest in the dynamics causing opposition to attempts at justice for Indigenous people and other people of colour, among white settlers in Canada. This interest stemmed from something I often observed – opposition expressed in different forms, often grounded in an understanding of the issue that was limited or uncritical in key moments, and occurring even among people otherwise very critical and interested in anti-racism and anti-oppression.

White settler dysconsciousness attempts to capture this dynamic of uncritical understanding and opposition. White settler dysconsciousness is an uncritical and dissonant consciousness, produced by a constant and complex dynamic of self-interested misunderstanding and rationalization, that functions to move white settlers to a position of innocence and non-complicity regarding the benefits they derive from the historical and ongoing oppression of Indigenous people and other people of colour. It functions to protect the white settler world that has been constructed in Canada, and allows insight into the dynamic whereby white settlers protect the racialized structures of advantage and oppression of this world, while understanding themselves as good, not racist, and interested in justice. I argue that the scale of white settler benefit and injustices associated with the white settler world, encourage white settler dysconsciousness: white settlers derive extensive benefit from this world and work to protect it; and the scale of injustices that are foundational, compounding, and ongoing, prevents an ability to fully acknowledge and reckon with these injustices. Properly addressing the injustices of the white settler world would unsettle almost everything – the wealth, identity, comfort, property, economy, and sovereignty of white settlers and the white settler nation. I highlight the long history of white settler dysconsciousness as a mechanism of management against threats to the

white settler world, providing a criticism of reconciliation as the latest iteration of this history. I argue that decolonization is required – that a dismantling of this world based on oppression is required, and importantly requires that white settlers refuse dysconsciousness.

Within white settler dysconsciousness, I focus attention on ethnicity. The central argument of the thesis is that ethnicity plays an important role in constructing the myriad forms of white settler dysconsciousness present among white settlers. White settlers experience extensive advantage and benefit due to their whiteness and settlerness – but draw on ethnicity to construct positions of innocence and non-complicity, and to distance themselves from the injustices of the white settler world, and from the responsibility to act to address these injustices. I draw on the example of Mennonites in the prairies in Canada as an example of how white settler dysconsciousness is influenced by ethnicity, focusing on Mennonite suffering and virtue. In the case of suffering, the examples chosen demonstrate, I argue, that important but relatively brief periods of suffering construct an understanding of suffering as a long-standing and defining feature of Mennonite life, displacing an awareness of extended periods of advantage and benefit derived through the oppression of others. In the case of Mennonite virtue, the examples chosen suggest that justice and inclusion work – work that is limited and that achieves partial forms of justice and inclusion – displaces a more radical and necessary acknowledgment of structures of oppression and the need to work to dismantle them, preserving Mennonite advantage.

This work on white settler dysconsciousness and ethnicity has important implications for how we understand whiteness, settler colonialism, and white settler opposition to justice for Indigenous people and other people of colour. For example, white settler dysconsciousness allows an understanding of the complex ways through which white settlers work to protect the white settler world and the structures of oppression from which they benefit. It provides insight

into the lack of knowledge of the histories and effects of settler colonialism in Canada, highlighted by the TRC and MMIWG reports, and how non-complicity in the injustices, and opposition to the calls for action and justice detailed in these documents, is constructed. Importantly, white settler ethnic groups across Canada are able to draw on understandings of ethnically-specific histories and characteristics, characterized by white settler dysconsciousness, to construct positions of non-complicity and innocence regarding the injustices of settler colonialism. These constructions of non-complicity and innocence characterized by dysconsciousness are also available to white settlers based on other aspects of identity, for example, class, gender, and sexuality. Ultimately, the effect is that the subject of the criticisms and claims against the white settler world is fragmented and obfuscated – white settlers evade whiteness and white settler colonialism in order to evade these criticisms and claims. This functions to protect the white settler world, to avoid dismantling the structures of oppression from which white settlers benefit.

In the introduction I highlight how responsibility changes depending on how stories are told and histories are known:

> the responsibility of a person who is the descendent of people who have suffered persecution, arrived on empty lands, and worked hard to make good and virtuous lives, is very different from the responsibility of a person who has a long history of advantage through the oppression and displacement of others. These different understandings determine differently, for example, how inequality is understood, how inequality is addressed, who receives redress.

White settler dysconsciousness offers a framework for understanding the construction of distorted, inaccurate, and self-interested understandings, and what these understandings allow. Through white settler dysconsciousness, white settler wealth and success in Canada becomes understood, for example, as the result of overcoming positions of struggle and persecution

through hard work, resourcefulness, and other characteristics. By avoiding an understanding of structures of advantage and oppression, a lack of wealth and success among others (for example, Indigenous people or people of colour) can be understood as the result of a lack of these same characteristics. When, through dysconsciousness, the injustices and structures of oppression from which white settlers benefit are disappeared, this functions to also disappear the need to address and dismantle these things. White settler dysconsciousness enables a dynamic of constant attempted disappearing of injustices and structures of oppression, and an attempted disappearing of the need correct them, allowing the continuation of white settler benefit from oppression with a good conscience.

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