

A Glossary of Indigenous Studies/Settler Colonial Studies

This is a collaborative Indigenous studies glossary. It offers basic definitions of foundational concepts, and offers suggestions for further reading. Because the stakes of our intellectual work include the survival of our peoples (and also our friends and family and relations), we do not have time to teach you about the basic conditions of our structural oppression. We have urgent, difficult work to do, yet we are still stuck doing settler colonialism 101. We offer this document as a way for you to catch up, so we are all on the same page, so we can move forward. If these concepts and readings are new to you, you will have work to do after we are done. Education, and the academy in particular, have not done justice to Indigenous scholarship, so we would not be surprised if much of this is new. Because Indigenous peoples are meant to disappear, our presence, voices, struggles, and scholarship has been structurally disappeared from the curricula. You are not supposed to learn about us or the colonial present.

In this sense, the marginalization of Indigenous scholarship precedes you, though your positions offer the opportunity to reproduce or disrupt this marginalization. We have always been scholars. We have been thinking and writing and theorizing and acting since the beginning. If you are behind, this is not our fault. Our writing has been available and we have engaged a multitude of other intellectual traditions in our work. We hope that this document is a starting point for a new level of engagement and respect for Indigenous studies. We hope it takes some of the burden from other Indigenous scholars as we struggle to make ourselves legible in ways that benefit our peoples. We hope it helps provide an entry point into our work.

The entries in this glossary are related but not reducible to other concepts you may have seen in critical theory -- from the Frankfurt school to contemporary affect theory. These schools of thought have often puzzled over the construction and limits of the humanist tradition, seeking to move beyond the anthropocentrism of liberalism while using Indigenous peoples as Others against which to define progress or barbarism. It is not that this tradition has not provided useful analytical frameworks and tools; it is that it is fundamentally insufficient because it ignores the basis of capitalism, environmental devastation, white supremacy, and heteronormativity in settler colonialism.

Table of Contents

[Settler Colonialism](#)

[Indigenous Feminisms](#)

["Two-Spirit"/Queer](#)

[Sovereignty](#)

[Environmental Racism](#)

[Recognition](#)

[Resurgence](#)

[Indigenous Methodologies](#)

[Solidarities and Decolonization](#)

[Further basic terms](#)

Settler Colonialism

Settlement is a distinct form of colonialism. Under settler colonialism, those who move to an already-inhabited area disrupt and supplant existing political, legal, economic, social, and environmental systems. In what we (for now) call North America, settler colonialism took many different forms through European empires: from Columbus attempting to expropriate gold and enslave the Taino; the British use of debt and speculation to claim large tracts of Indigenous land; to the French establishment of military outposts and vast global commodity chains for beaver furs. At issue is always *land*, whether configured as territory, resource, or accessible terrain. Therefore, settler colonialism requires supplanting existing Indigenous modes of governing, using, and caring for land with *settler* governing principles and structures that justify the asymmetrical, unjust, and violent dispossession of Indigenous people. A settler, then, is not in the first place an identity, but a position within a political-economic order. See also **sovereignty**.

Originally peripheral colonies in the British empire (especially considering the profits of the Caribbean plantation colonies and the Atlantic Slave Trade), the United States and Canada became independent settler nation-states, which then developed their own settler colonial national myths and projects in the 18th and 19th century. The United States and Canada developed economies based on the debt-fueled accumulation of land for financial capital, land development and agriculture, control of waterways for transportation and energy, while also extracting precious metals and energy resources from coal to fracked oil. Through ongoing encroachment of sovereign Native treaty lands across Turtle Island and the unceasing degradation of the land, settler colonialism as defined above remains in full force today.

The origins of settler colonialism in European nation-states bound its implementation to foundational structures of capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy-- particularly the violent marginalization of women and the enslavement of Indigenous Africans for plantation colonies. Indigenous resurgence thereby entails an undoing of systems of capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and anti-Blackness that are imposed on Indigenous lands. See also **solidarities**.

Citations

- Barker, Joanne, ed. 2005. *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestations and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Coulthard, Glen. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deloria Jr, Vine. 1998. "Intellectual Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Looking at the Windmills in our Minds." *Wicazo Sa Review* 13(1): 25-31
- Goldstein, Alyosha, Toward a Genealogy of the U.S. Colonial Present (September 19, 2014). Introduction to Formations of United States Colonialism, A. Goldstein, ed., Duke University Press, 2014. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2498679>
- Kauanui, J. Kehaulani and Patrick Wolfe. 2012. "Settler Colonialism Then and Now." *Politics and Society* 1(2): 235-258.

- Nakano Glenn, Evelyn. 2015. "Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*. Vol 1, #1: 52-72
- Povinelli, Elizabeth. 2011. *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Wolfe, Patrick. 2006. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4): 387-409.

Indigenous Feminisms

Settler states have historically attempted to impose their own vision of gender and sexuality on indigenous people in an attempt to eliminate indigenous lifeways and forms of governance. Women specifically have been targets of state violence because female centered governance was intrinsic to the functioning of many indigenous societies and was incompatible with colonial regimes. Indigenous feminisms centers how colonialism and the imposition of patriarchy worked as simultaneous and reinforcing processes. Together, these processes have often diminished Native women's power, status, and material wealth in North America. Settler regimes also acted to impose Euroamerican ideas about gender identity and sexuality on to indigenous people through heteropatriarchal structures. Native feminism and activism is a flexible rubric under which political and social organizing can and should take place. This rubric must remain flexible because Native women face a variety of connected but distinct issues throughout North America. Indigenous feminisms are linked to a profound reverence for all forms of life—a foundational principle in indigenous societies. As a result, indigenous feminists work for social justice for all forms of life by organizing around multiple axes, such as gender, sexuality, race, and class.

"Indigenous feminist theories mean to free Native people from extending the power relations required by colonial regimes--which include heteropatriarchy--and to frame gender and sexuality as central to work for sovereignty and decolonization" (Driskill et al. 9).

Citations

- Macgillivray, Emily. 2016. "Women's/Feminist Activism, Native North America," *Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality*, edited by Angela Wong, Maithree Wickramasinghe, and Renee C. Hoogland, Wiley-Blackwell Press.
- Huhndorf, Shari M., and Cheryl Suzack. "Indigenous Feminism: Theorizing the Issues." In *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*, edited by Cheryl Suzack, Shari M. Huhndorf, Jeanne Perreault, and Jean Barman, 1-20. Vancouver & Toronto: University of British Columbia, 2010.
- Wicazo Sa Review* 24(2). Special Edition on Indigenous Feminisms
- Barker, Joanne, ed. 2017. *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- TallBear, Kim. 2016. "Badass (Indigenous) Women Caretake Relations: #NoDAPL, #IdleNoMore, and #BlackLivesMatter." *Hot Spots Cultural Anthropology*. December 22.

Goeman, Mishuana. 2013. *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

“Two-Spirit”/Queer (2SQ)

The term “two-spirit” was introduced by Cree activist Albert McLeod at the Third Annual Inter-tribal Native American, First Nation, Gay and Lesbian American Conference in 1990 as a pan-Indigenous replacement of the derogatory, colonial term ‘berdache.’ “Two-spirit” remains a widely-used term to denote a diversity of gender and sexual Indigenous identities and relationalities now positioned as ‘queer’ as a product of the imperial expansion of Christian heteronormative gender and sexual ideologies. Due to the hegemony of European colonial scholarship, white settler anthropologists and historians have unaccountably published work on queer Indigeneity completely devoid of Indigenous knowledge and context for centuries. “Two-spirit,” then, operates not only as a contemporary queer identity marker, but as a symbolic reclamation of captured and mistold stories—a reorientation towards decolonized relations beyond the confines of colonial gender and sexual expressions. The term “two-spirit” is mainly used to translate non-colonial cultural traditions to be legible to settler academia, but many queer Native folks more personally identify with longstanding or reclaimed queer identity markers in their Native tongue; i.e. nadleeh (Navajo), bote (Crow), winkte (Lakota), aayahkweew (Crow), ‘aqi (Chumash), etc.

Queer Native scholar Chris Finley reminds us that the presence and veneration of gender and sexual fluidity among a large number of Indigenous nations upon initial contact was quickly weaponized as religious justification for proselytization, removal, and genocide of peoples and their ‘savage’ traditions. Chumash “two-spirit” writer Deborah Miranda refers to this initial violence—followed by decades of federally-funded residential schools that sought to force Indigenous children to unlearn this fluidity—as the *gendercide* of Turtle Island. Today, a movement of Indigenous queer youth are forcing a resurgence that labors to excavate these stories, reclaim queer cultural identities and roles, and (re)orient us towards an ontology beyond the confines of white, colonial cis-heteronormative gender and sexual possibilities.

Citations

Belcourt, Billy Ray. 2017 *This Wound is a World*. Calgary: Frontenac House.

Driskill, Q.-L. (2010) "DOUBLEWEAVING TWO-SPIRIT CRITIQUES: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16.1-2 (2010): 69-92. Web.

Queer indigenous studies: Critical interventions in theory, politics, and literature. Tucson: University of Arizona Press

Finley, Chris. 2011. "Decolonizing the Queer Native Body (and Recovering the Native Bull-Dyke): Bringing "Sexy Back" and "Out of Native Studies' Closet." *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*. Tucson: U of Arizona, 31-42.

- Miranda, Deborah A. 2014. *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*. Berkeley, ca: Heyday Books. 2016.
- EXTERMINATION OF THE JOYAS: Gendercide in Spanish California." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16.1-2 (2010): 253-84.
- Wilson, Alex, (2015) Our Coming In Stories: Cree Identity, Body Sovereignty and Gender Self-Determination, *Journal of Global Indigeneity*, 1(1).

Sovereignty

Sovereignty has been a key term for settler colonial studies as well as critical studies of liberalism as the foundation of Western political orders. Vine Deloria traces the term's origins from East Indian theology into the Christian Reformation, converging with the first colonial expeditions into the so-called "New World." The concept and contests over sovereignty brought into reality the political subjects 'nation,' 'citizen,' 'rights,' and 'jurisdiction,' tightly coupled to the idea of Christian civilization. As fledgling European nation-states developed their claims to the continent, they also began developing frameworks for sovereignty over territories occupied by those deemed outside Christian civilization. Sovereignty then morphs into a liberal political-economic regime that forms the basis of modern nation-states. As sovereignty has been defined in United States and Canadian courts, it has been the primary legal mechanism whereby settler nation-states claim the land bases of Indigenous peoples, whether claiming *terra nullius*, right of conquest, or the legitimate exchange of private property. Yet these claims to settler sovereignty have always been framed as voluntary, excluding from view the colonial structures of imperialism, debt, and resource extraction through which settlers seek to increase their land holdings.

Through treaties, sovereignty has also been enforced as the political order of Native Nations in Canada and the United States. While both the United States and Canada nominally acknowledge the 'sovereignty' of Native Nations, legislation like the Indian Act (Canada, 1876) and the Marshall trilogy of legal decisions (1823-1832) have worked to circumscribe the sovereignty of Native Nations as subservient to the settler state. Therefore while sovereignty provides a discursive and legal framework for Native Nations, it is a contested political terrain that has been imposed on, and defined in relation to, already-existing Indigenous political and social orders/ontologies.

Citations

- Barker, Joanne (Lenape). 2005. "For Whom Sovereignty Matters" in *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. Pp: 1-31.
- Bruyneel, Kevin. 2007. *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cattellino, Jessica. 2008. *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Karuka, Manu. 2017. "Black and Native Visions of Self-Determination." *Critical Ethnic Studies* 3(2): 77-98.

- Lyons, Scott Richards. 2010. *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. 2015. *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Vimalassery, Manu. 2014. "The Prose of Counter-Sovereignty" in *Colonial Formations of the United States*. Alyosha Goldstein, ed, pp. 87-109. Durham: Duke University Press.

Environmental Racism

Environmental racism is a constitutive feature of racial capitalism. From resource extraction to landfills, the global supply chains of capitalism are unevenly distributed along the color line and colonial boundaries. Looking at cases in the United States, Laura Pulido theorizes environmental racism as state-sanctioned violence, as the state actively resists being accountable to poor communities of color. Traci Voyles shows further how settler colonial resource extraction on Navajo Nation utilizes a racialized discourse of "wastelanding," in which Indigenous land is first framed as empty or unvaluable space, often because of Indigenous occupation, which can only be made valuable through state projects. In the case of Navajo Nation, coal, water, and uranium were the targets of state extraction to benefit urban development and Cold War militarization, while the negative effects were contained within the Navajo Nation. Wastelanding as a strategy of accumulating land and ruining it is not unique to the Navajo Nation; as Kristen Simmons notes, there are 532 EPA superfund sites on Native reservations, one for nearly every federally recognized tribe in the United States, while

Citations

- Pulido, Laura. 2016. "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity: Environmental Racism, Racial Capitalism, and State Sanctioned Violence." *Progress in Human Geography*.
- Simmons, Kristen. 2017. "Settler Atmospherics." *Dispatches, Cultural Anthropology*.
- Voyles, Traci. 2015. *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Recognition

Indigenous studies has identified a new era of North American Indigenous politics in the wake of decolonization and globalization, which has provoked crises in the white supremacist ordering of settler nation-states. Indigenous movements responding to global decolonization movements pushed settler states to return land, honor treaties, and dismantle colonial institutions. Instead, settler states sought ways to reformulate their policies of colonial governance while continuing to rely on resource extraction and land development on Indigenous land. The settler strategy of recognition allows for the participation of Indigenous peoples in settler society as one facet of a 'mosaic' of cultural-ethnic differences. Thus, if attempts to incorporate Indigenous people further into the colonial state as citizens, rather than members of their own Nations that predate colonialism, while at the same time providing cover for the state's need to continuously acquire Indigenous lands for resource extraction and development.

Recognition has been theorized as a deeply affective mode of politics, relying on liberal gestures of apology or good intention. It is connected to state programs meant to aid Indigenous communities, though it relies on pathologizing Indigenous people as wards of the state, incapable of caring for themselves. Indigenous youth, sex workers, and survivors of residential schools especially have become targets for settler state intervention. This “psychic life of biopolitics” (Stevenson 2014), however, is often experienced as murderous because it perpetuates or holds in place institutions of colonial governance.

Citations

- Coulthard, Glen Sean. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dhillon, Jaskiran. 2017. *Prairie Rising: Indigenous Youth, Decolonization, and the Politics of Intervention*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Million, Dian. 2012. *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Simpson, Audra. 2014. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Durham: Duke University Press.
2016. “Consent’s Revenge.” *Cultural Anthropology* 31(3): 326-333.
- Stevenson, Lisa. 2014. *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Resurgence

Glen Coulthard writes how resurgence “draws critically on the past with an eye to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present” (Coulthard 157). More specifically, Siku Alloloo describes Indigenous resurgence as strictly about Indigenous nationhood and directing energy “toward the revitalization of our nations, our homelands, ways of life, systems of governance and values, the restoration of healthy families and communities, and the restoration of our respective nations’ autonomy” (Alloloo 198). Leanne Simpson further examines how resurgence does not “literally mean returning to the past, but rather re-creating the cultural and political flourishing of the past to support the well being of our contemporary citizens;” it means reclaiming “the fluidity of our traditions, not the rigidity of colonialism” (Simpson 52).

Citations

- Alloloo, Siku, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. “‘I Have Waited 40 Years for This. Keep It Going and Don’t Stop!’” *The Winter We Danced: Voices From the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2014. 193-99. Print.
- Coulthard, Glen Sean. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Pub., 2011. Print.

Indigenous Methodologies

Indigenous methodologies' represent the intellectual work Indigenous people can take up in order to decolonize both knowledge and the methods producing it. A methodological turn to Indigenous knowledges opens up accounts to the multiplicity, complexity, contestation, and change among knowledge claims by Indigenous people" (Driskill et al. 4). It also speaks to the ethical relations undertaken in conducting research; of how knowledge is gathered, codified and made available. It also demands reimagining pedagogical assumptions and engaging in anti-colonial educational practices.

Citations

- Driskill, Q.-L. 2011. *Queer indigenous studies: Critical interventions in theory, politics, and literature*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press
- Grande, Sandy. 2014. 10th Anniversary Edition: *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield
- Kovach, Margaret. *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*.
- Leanne Simpson. 2017. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: ZED Books.

Solidarities and Decolonization

It is frequently assumed that Indigenous people's liberation or decolonization comes at the expense of other subjugated groups. In particular, claims to re-occupy or heal the land are taken as movements to evict white settlers as well as racially oppressed peoples. This interpretation of decolonization obscures the deep histories and powerful contemporary social movements that seek to undo all oppressions by centering the logics of capitalist extraction and exploitation on Indigenous land. These social movements work to acknowledge and end all structures of oppression and identify their common roots in white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy in North America and its imperial-colonial projects.

Citations

- Morgensen, Scott. "A Politics Not Yet Known: Imagining Relationality within Solidarity." *American Quarterly*. Vol. 67, no.2 (2015) 309-315.
- Simpson, Leanne. "Indict the System: Indigenous and Black Connected Resistance"
<https://www.leannesimpson.ca/writings/indict-the-system-indigenous-black-connected-resistance>
- Vimalassery, Manu. 2014. "The Prose of Counter-Sovereignty" in *Colonial Formations of the United States*. Alyosha Goldstein, ed, pp. 87-109. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Walia, Harsha 2014. "Decolonizing together: Moving Beyond a Politics of Solidarity Toward a Practice of Decolonization" in *The Winter we Danced: Voices From the Past, The Future, and the Idle No More Movement*, 44-50. The Kino-nda-niimi Collective.

(Basic terms written for the inter-racial dynamics cluster contribution by Mishuana Goeman)

Biological determinism

Doctrine of biological inheritance asserting that some racial groups inherit specific characteristics that make them 'inferior' or 'superior' compared to other racial groups. Biological explanations are at the root of racist thinking/doctrine/ideology and believed to explain differences in intellectual and temperamental between racial groups. When the belief in biological inheritance fuses with, and is reinforced by, racial prejudice, the result is racism.

Cult of domesticity/True Womanhood

An ideal that defines what it means to be a woman according to one's capacity for piety, purity, and domesticity. It is a gender convention most strongly associated with white, middle-class women. Historians date its origins at least as far back as the 19th century but it continues to be relevant to current notions of femininity. (See also domestic feminism).

Doctrine of discovery

Doctrine of Discovery was used in the colonial period to claim land already occupied by Indigenous, read non-Christians and deemed soulless, to pass title only among European nations. Doctrine of Discovery developed from the earlier Terra Nullius, which literally translates as empty land, ignoring the presence of Indigenous peoples (see definition below).

Domestic feminism

A term used by American historians to describe how women's authority, beginning the mid-19th century, was situated within the "separate sphere" of the home. This emerging discourse allowed (primarily) northern, middle class, white women to connect new ideas about gender roles within the family to their growing participation in abolitionism. (See Cult of domesticity/True Womanhood).

Terra Nuillus

Terra Nuillus literally translates from Latin and Roman Law as nobody's land which ignored the presence of Indigenous peoples and their systems of governance. The concept was used in the 1095 Papal bull to allow Christian states to claim the land of non-Christians in the first crusades. At the moment "of discovery" however, the European Nations treated to agree that acquisition and title would also be done through first Christian contact. In the early 1800's, Chief Justice John Marshall would use the premise of the discovery doctrine in his Marshall trilogy to lay claim to land belonging to American Indians.

White nationalism

A type of nationalism which holds that white people, as a race, develop and maintain a white national identity and identify with and are attached to a white nation. White nationalists seek to: ensure the survival of the white race, maintain their majority in majority-white places, uphold their political and economic dominance, and make their culture dominant. (In addition: Many white nationalists believe that miscegenation, multiculturalism, immigration of nonwhites and low birth rates among whites are threatening the white race, and some argue that it amounts to white genocide.) See nationalism.

Whiteness

According to Lipsitz, an unmarked category against which racial difference is constructed, and a structured advantage that produces unfair gains and unearned rewards for whites.

White supremacy

A racist ideology based upon the belief that white people are superior to people of other races and that therefore white people should be dominant over other races. White supremacy has roots in scientific racism and often relies on pseudo-scientific arguments. Like similar movements (such as neo-Nazism), white supremacists typically oppose people of color as well as people who are members of most religions.