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## **Title:** Political Geographical Perspectives on Settler Colonialism

### **Abstract:**

Given the centrality of land, territory, and sovereignty to settler colonial formations, it is unsurprising that geographers and other scholars working on such topics are increasingly finding settler colonial studies fruitful in their research agendas. However, work on settler polities in political geography has historically been marked by the *present absence* of this framework, which has been consequential in terms of circumscribing the kinds of political analysis that geographers can offer. It also limits the nature, depth, and scope of radical critique of violent domination by skirting certain questions about the core drivers of dispossession and responsibility for them. This article examines political geographical engagement (or lack thereof) across each of four themes: population management/governance, territory/sovereignty, consciousness, and narrative, paying particular attention to works which challenge the present absence of settler colonial theory in political geography. We argue that analyzing settler colonial formations as such is essential to conceptualizing their workings and linkages or disjunctures with other forms of empire. Yet this focus has broader political stakes related to geography's complicity with racialized state power, violence, and empire and efforts to decolonize the discipline.

**Key words:** political geography; settler colonialism; present absence; decolonizing geography; biopolitics; territory; consciousness; narrative

### **1 Introduction**

2       The field of settler colonial studies investigates the replacement of an indigenous  
3 population with an exogenous one *on the land* as a category analytically distinct from  
4 colonialism, which involves domination from afar (Veracini, 2010; Wolfe, 1999, 2006). The  
5 centrality of land, territory, and sovereignty within settler colonial studies partially explains why  
6 geographers and other scholars, particularly in political ecology and indigenous studies, have  
7 found this literature increasingly fruitful in their research agendas (e.g. Alatout, 2006, 2009;  
8 Cattelino, 2008, 2010; Curley, 2018, 2019; Day, 2015; Farrales, 2019; Fix, 2018; Getzoff, 2019;  
9 Kirk, 2018; Kauanui, 2016; Pasternak, 2014, 2017; Pulido, 2018; A. Simpson, 2014; Shoffner,  
10 2018; Smiles, 2018; Tomiak, 2017)—albeit not without challenging some of its premises and  
11 disciplinary dominance relative to indigenous studies (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel,  
12 2014). Until fairly recently, however, political geographers have been reticent to fully take up the  
13 settler colonial framework, often avoiding explicit reference to the settler colonial designation in  
14 researching these polities (see Bhungalia, 2018, p. 314). Other political geographers have applied  
15 the signifier “settler colonial” to specific cases without actively theorizing its influence as an  
16 active process and structure. In this article, we argue that all of these phenomena, taken together,  
17 constitute the *present absence* of settler colonialism that has historically characterized political  
18 geography.

19       Despite this longstanding present absence, which endures in contemporary political  
20 geography, recent works by political geographers are engaging with the field of settler  
21 colonialism much more directly (Hawari, Plonski, & Weizman, 2019a, Hughes, 2016,  
22 forthcoming; Machold, 2018; Naylor et al., 2018; de Leeuw and Hunt, 2018), focusing  
23 particularly on biopolitics, planning, urban geopolitics, and gendered and racialized foundations  
24 of settler colonialism (Farrales, 2019; Naylor et. al., 2018). Indeed, Coleman and Agnew (2018)

25 argue that the settler colonial framework is of rising importance to the field of political  
26 geography. This growing engagement with settler colonial theory is highly significant in terms of  
27 how geographers study settler colonial formations and their linkages or disjunctures with other  
28 forms of empire. Yet it also has broader political stakes as well. Indeed, geographers’  
29 engagement with settler colonial studies is reinvigorating considerations of the discipline’s  
30 complicity with racialized state power, violence and empire (Coleman & Kocher, 2019, p. 31;  
31 Bonds & Inwood 2016; Inwood & Bonds 2016) and in doing so the very terms of what it might  
32 mean to ‘decolonize’ geography (de Leeuw and Hunt, 2018). In this article, we seek to  
33 foreground what we see as the most productive engagements with the settler colonial framework  
34 by political geographers and others. Highlighting indigenous approaches to these frameworks,  
35 we hope that as political geographers take up settler colonial theory, we can avoid inheriting its  
36 shortcomings.

37       Though settler colonial formations are not all the same, they share a morphological  
38 continuity and an imaginative coherence that distinguishes them from other colonial formations  
39 despite their diverse contexts and outcomes. Veracini (2010) outlines four areas in which this  
40 morphological continuity manifests: population economy/biopolitics, sovereignty/territory,  
41 consciousness, and narrative form. The remainder of this article will be structured around these  
42 four themes.

43       First, settler sovereignty depends on settlers’ capacity to biopolitically manage the  
44 population economy of the settlers’ “domestic domains” in the face of recurring settler anxieties  
45 (Veracini, 2010, p. 16). “Management” of this domain typically entails a circumstance whereby  
46 indigenous and exogenous Others progressively disappear in a variety of ways—what Wolfe  
47 (1999) calls settler colonialism’s “logic of elimination” (Veracini, 2010, p. 16). Second, settlers  
48 claim a special type of sovereign entitlement—an *animus manendi*—that derives from their  
49 intention to stay permanently, and which is manifested by residency, suitable reproduction, and  
50 possession (Veracini, 2010, p. 53). In other words, settlers “come to stay” and “to establish new  
51 political orders for themselves” (Veracini, 2013, p. 313). As Wolfe (1999) articulated:  
52 territoriality is settler colonialism’s irreducible element. Third and fourth are the particular state  
53 of mind and specific narrative form of settler colonial polities, which are accompanied by  
54 recurring settler anxieties about indigenous presence and resurgence (Veracini, 2010). We think  
55 of consciousness here as settlers’ ongoing practice of managing the inconsistencies inherent in  
56 settler colonization, including the need to disavow the ongoing violent expropriation from which  
57 they continuously benefit (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2014; Tuck & Gaztambide-  
58 Fernández, 2013; Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013; Nagy, 2012), the significance of indigenous  
59 peoples’ self-determination practices (Hunt, 2014a, 2014b; Coombes, 2006; Cattelino, 2010),  
60 and the incommensurabilities between settler and indigenous epistemologies (Tuck and Yang,  
61 2012; Cattelino, 2010). This complex of disavowals enables settlers to rationalize the colonial  
62 order in the face of ongoing settler failures and non-alignments by indigenous and other  
63 marginalized people. Because of the unidirectional, linear trajectory of the settler colonial project  
64 across physical and temporal frontiers, settler colonial narratives are defined through a  
65 “teleological expectation of irreversible transformation” (Veracini, 2010, p. 99), which, in turn,  
66 shapes settler colonial stories of development, progress, and modernity (Escobar, 1995; Quijano,  
67 2007), thereby circumscribing possibilities for decolonization. A number of additional elements  
68 characterize settler narratives in various contexts: these include stories about the exceptionalism  
69 of a particular settler society relative to all other societies (Adas, 2001; Lloyd, 2012; Salamanca,  
70 Qato, Rabie, & Samour, 2012) and the inevitable disappearance of indigenous peoples (Macoun

71 & Strakosch, 2013; Schwarz & Ray, 2000; Wolfe, 2006, Byrd, 2011). Settler narratives  
72 rationalize territorial seizure and genocide as two sides of the same coin: in the settler imaginary,  
73 as frontiers disappear, so do indigenous people (Byrd, 2011).

74 In this article we examine political geographical engagement (or lack thereof) across each  
75 of these four themes: population management/governance, territory/sovereignty, consciousness,  
76 and narrative, paying particular attention to the present absence of settler colonial theory in  
77 political geography. Like others before us, we argue that studying settler states as such is  
78 essential because the settler relation structures all life, society, and politics within the settler  
79 polity (Cattelino, 2010, p. 282). As an analytic, settler colonialism illuminates structures,  
80 practices, ideological formations, and challenges at work in settler colonial formations,  
81 including, but not limited to, “the dilemmas that indigenous peoples’ everyday practices of  
82 citizenship pose to settler states, distinctive epistemologies and disciplinary formations, settler  
83 quandaries of how to claim national histories and territories when these are laced with traces of  
84 invasion, and pressure on the crafting of shared futures” (Cattelino, 2010, pp. 285-286). By  
85 highlighting works which actively theorize settler colonialism, we hope to advance the active  
86 presence of settler colonialism as an analytic within political geography.

87

### 88 **Population Management/Biopolitics**

89 Geographers have long made significant contributions to understandings of population  
90 management in settler colonial contexts. Often engaging with literature on necropolitics  
91 (Mbembe, 2003) and thanatopolitics (Ghanim, 2008; Murray, 2006; Weizman, 2008), this work  
92 has addressed overtly violent forms of dispossession and war (Graham, 2004; Gregory, 2004;  
93 Gregory and Pred 2017; Joronen, 2016), humanitarian violence (Bhungalia, 2015; Smith, 2016)  
94 and spatial planning (Tzfadia & Yacobi, 2011; Yacobi & Pullan, 2014), with a keen focus on the  
95 politics that enable the stigmatization, sorting and removal of populations deemed as radical  
96 others (Falah & Newman, 1995; MacLaughlin, 1998). Yiftachel's (1999, 2002, 2006) work on  
97 “ethnocracy” has been particularly central here, focusing on how settler regimes promote the  
98 expansion of dominant groups in contested territories under the pretense of democracy. Yet this  
99 literature’s analysis of the rationalization, execution, and contestation of violence, war,  
100 settlement, and territorial control elides a theorization of the modalities of settler colonial  
101 biopolitics as such, reflecting the present absence identified above.

102 Though some geographers continue to challenge aspects of it (e.g. Amir, 2017), the  
103 settler colonial framework is becoming increasingly present in geographical thinking on  
104 biopolitics and debates on biopolitics more broadly (Morgensen, 2011; Lafleur and Schuller  
105 2019). These discussions have begun to interrogate how Foucault’s conception of biopolitics is  
106 responsible for “whitewashing” the coloniality and raciality of modern violence and power  
107 (Howell and Richer-Montpetit 2019). Geographical work on biopolitics remains focused on overt  
108 physical forms of violence, confinement, bordering and erasure (Plonski, 2008; Schofield, 2018;  
109 Smith & Isleem, 2017) as well as the political technologies they rely on like security and  
110 surveillance practices (Bastos, 2008; Machold, 2018; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015; Zureik, Lyon,  
111 & Abu-Laban, 2011), risk and supply chain management (Pasternak & Dafnos, 2018) and  
112 juridical innovations (Gordon & Ram, 2016; Pasternak, 2014, 2017; Tawil-Souri 2012; Hunt  
113 2015). Here studies focus centrally on theorizing the connections between race, white supremacy  
114 and settler colonialism (Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Clarno, 2017; Eastwood, 2019a; Inwood &  
115 Bonds, 2016; Mott, 2016, 2019; Tatour, 2019). In addition to linking the growth of borderings in  
116 settler contexts with biopolitical imperatives (Dodds, 2013; Topak, Bracken-Roche, Saulnier, &

117 Lyon, 2015), studies link the rise of new border regimes and “internal colonialisms” in non-  
118 settler contexts with settler logics (Giglioli, 2017).

119 Building on geographers’ longstanding interrogation of planning in territorial  
120 dispossession and geopolitics, recent infrastructure and planning literature has considerably  
121 radicalized this focus through engagement with settler colonial studies (Braier and Yacobi, 2017;  
122 Cowen, 2018; Curley, 2018, 2019; Salamanca, 2015, 2016; Porter & Yiftachel, 2019, p. 177;  
123 Yacobi & Tzfadia 2019). Rutland (2018, p. 1) situates urban planning as a “world-altering  
124 instrument of power and race,” showing how settlement and planning practices are predicated on  
125 large-scale violence against and displacement of indigenous peoples and other racialized  
126 populations and how their presence is erased from the historical record. This work is prompting  
127 reconsiderations about the empirical links between cities and empire and spurring efforts to re-  
128 theorize the urban itself by locating indigeneity within it (Blatman-Thomas, 2017, 2019,  
129 Blatman-Thomas and Porter 2019b; Huberman and Nasser 2019; Hugill, 2017; Porter &  
130 Yiftachel, 2019; Tomiak, 2017).

131 Through closely interrogating the techniques at work in settler colonial biopolitics,  
132 geographers have increasingly challenged the equation of settler colonial governance with mere  
133 violence (e.g. Joronen, 2017). Focusing on the “biopolitics of settler manageability” in  
134 Israel/Palestine, Bhungalia, (2018, p. 314–315) argues that the “Indian problem” is governed not  
135 simply through physical annihilation but rather through social death, as indigenous bodies are  
136 managed toward elimination. Smiles (2018, p. 141) similarly foregrounds “the stark totality of  
137 quotidian settler violence towards indigenous bodies,” yet emphasizes that this violence need not  
138 always be overt. de Leeuw (2016) stresses that geography’s prevailing focus in the study of  
139 colonialism on natural resources and territory problematically overlooks the ways in which  
140 settler colonial violence takes place through geographies of homes, families and bodies, calling  
141 for greater attention to these intimate domestic spaces (also see Farrales, 2019; Holmes et al.  
142 2014; Plonski, 2018). Griffiths & Repo (2018) challenge a purely thanatopolitical framework for  
143 understanding settler colonial biopolitics, situating checkpoints in the West Bank as regulatory  
144 sites that (re)produce sexual divisions of labor.

145 By engaging with settler colonial theory and indigenous studies, geographical thinking on  
146 settler colonial population management is thus helping to advance thinking on biopolitics in  
147 geography (Rutherford & Rutherford, 2013) by addressing how modalities of biopower outlined  
148 by Foucault are combined with other forms in ways that objectify and geographically segregate  
149 indigenous populations (Salamanca, 2011, p. 27; Alatout, 2009). The impulse to challenge the  
150 equation of settler colonial biopolitics with mere death and discipline has also been borne out of  
151 a methodological and political commitment to foregrounding the experiences of indigenous  
152 peoples (Joronen, 2017; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015, 2009). Engagements with settler colonial  
153 theory in planning debates, for instance, not only locate the roles of discipline and practice of  
154 planning in dispossessing indigenous peoples; they also seek to reclaim indigenous histories and  
155 open up space for addressing how indigenous peoples seek to re-make place and build alternative  
156 futures (Jackson, Porter, & Johnson, 2017; Rutland, 2018). Geographers’ close attention to the  
157 actual workings of settler colonial biopolitics, moreover, usefully draws attention to the limits  
158 and fragilities of settler colonial formations (e.g. Bhungalia 2018, p. 329; Smiles 2018, p. 141)  
159 and challenges their supposedly ‘high-tech’ or even novel character (Tawil-Souri 2012;  
160 Machold, 2018).

161 Some of the most productive conversations in re-thinking settler colonial biopolitics have  
162 been in relation to race. While discussions about race and racism by geographers have engaged

163 with settler colonial theory for some time (Lloyd and Pulido, 2010; Pulido, 2015), more recent  
164 work has much more centrally theorized the connections between white supremacy and settler  
165 colonialism both spatially and temporally. The concept of settler colonialism as an ongoing  
166 modality of empire is highly instructive to the geographical study of race and racialized  
167 geographies because it draws attention to the material conditions underpinning white supremacy,  
168 but also attends to how white supremacy and settler colonialism work together in practice  
169 (Quijano, 2000; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Bhandar, 2018; Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Mott, 2016)  
170 and how multiple colonial histories and racialized subjects intersect (Trask, 2000; TallBear,  
171 2013; Kauanui, 2016; Farrales 2019; Pulido, 2018). The linkage of white supremacy with settler  
172 colonialism further enables geographical thinking on race and racism to re-locate the idea of  
173 white supremacy as lurking in the past and contend with how it is continuously remade in the  
174 present (McKittrick, 2011; Bonds & Inwood, 2016; also see Mott, 2016, 2019). In this vein, a  
175 number of recent works theorize settler colonialism as it intersects with racial capitalism to  
176 produce regimes of racialized appropriation, extraction, and confinement (Clarno, 2017; Day,  
177 2016; Hernández, 2017; Toews, 2018). Thinking white supremacy together with settler  
178 colonialism further enables a more comprehensive theorization of the contemporary geographies  
179 of race and militarism and the relations between violence domestically and internationally  
180 (Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Eastwood, 2019b; Cowen & Lewis, 2016; Loyd & Bonds, 2018; Loyd,  
181 Mitchelson, & Burridge, 2012; Howell 2018).

182

### 183 **Territory/Sovereignty**

184 Common to both political geography and settler colonial studies is a central interest in  
185 sovereignty, territory/territoriality, jurisdiction, nationalism, and the “frontier.” Geographers,  
186 particularly political geographers, have long examined questions of sovereignty, territoriality,  
187 and power (Agnew, 1994; Delaney, 2005; Elden, 2009; Newman, 1999; Ó Tuathail, 1999; Paasi,  
188 2009; Sassen, 2013), but political geographical work on settler polities is marked, again, by the  
189 present absence of the settler colonial framework. Though work on territory, sovereignty, and  
190 citizenship often references “settlers” and “settlement”—or even the “indigenization of the  
191 settlers” (Yacobi & Pullan, 2014, p. 9)—often these take a postcolonial, colonial, or ethno-  
192 national approach rather than an explicitly settler-colonial one (e.g. Blomley, 2003, 2008, 2017;  
193 Braverman, 2009, 2011; Coddington, 2017; Cowen, 2014; Cowen & Gilbert, 2008; Fields, 2017;  
194 MacLaughlin, 1998; Tzfadia & Yacobi, 2011). While the “settler colonial” signifier categorizes  
195 the foundational history of these polities, it does not attend the specific ways that settler  
196 colonialism, as ongoing structure, continues to shape territoriality, sovereignty, and (national)  
197 belonging/citizenship.

198 This theoretical, empirical, and comparative present absence is surprising given that the  
199 settler formation is specifically territorial (Bhungalia, 2018, p. 314; Wolfe, 1999). The settler  
200 colonial signifier, as well as general references to “settlement,” “settlers,” and “occupation,”  
201 appears most frequently in analysis of Israel/Palestine (Allegra, 2013; Falah & Newman, 1995;  
202 Gregory, 2004; Handel, 2014; Newman, 1985; Pullan, 2013; Reuveny, 2003; Rosen & Razin,  
203 2008, 2009; Weizman, 2012; Yiftachel, 2002), but even here the structuring contrast between  
204 settlers and indigenous peoples is often painted as a struggle between two competing  
205 nationalisms, obscuring the continuation of settler colonization both within and beyond the  
206 Green Line (Azoulay & Ophir, 2012; Hughes, 2017). And the tendency to refer to Israel as a  
207 settler polity, but not other settler states, reifies the (misleading) assumption of Israeli  
208 exceptionalism: a belief that the Israeli state and society “still constitute an active immigrant

209 settler sociopolitical entity (perhaps the last of its kind in the world), lacking a finalized and  
210 consensual geopolitical and social identity, boundaries, and location” (Kimmerling, 2001, p. 3),  
211 whereas other settler colonies are case studies with “known closure” (Pappé, 2014, p. 312). In  
212 skirting the settler colonial designation, and, more significantly, the framework and theory,  
213 political geographers run the risk of rendering ongoing anti-colonial struggles invisible, denying  
214 the possibility of decolonization, and smoothing over ruptures within the settler project itself  
215 (Hughes, forthcoming; Machold, 2018; Rouhana & Sabbagh-Khoury, 2015). While he conflates  
216 settler and ethnocratic societies, Yiftachel (2002) hits the nail on the head in stressing that neither  
217 “can [ever] be treated as static political communities, but rather as *arenas of constant struggles*  
218 *over the very geography of the polity in question*” (p. 222, emphasis added).

219 Over the years, political geographers have done an excellent job of “unsettling” territory  
220 and sovereignty—for example, challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about the connections  
221 between nations and states, territory and sovereignty, place and identity (Alatout, 2006; Agnew,  
222 1994; Blomley, 2017; Delaney, 2005; Elden, 2009; Paasi, 2009; Painter, 2010; Sassen, 2013)—  
223 but again, seldom through the lens of settler colonialism. As an example of how thinking  
224 geographical concepts in relation with settler colonialism can be mutually productive, Hughes  
225 (forthcoming) argues that the form of territorial control operating in settler colonial contexts runs  
226 counter to traditional conceptions of territoriality; settlers exercise *unbounded territoriality*, a  
227 strategy of territorial control best exercised by *not* delimiting boundaries, by not making clear the  
228 extent of sovereign authority. Further insights could be made into the workings of territory,  
229 territoriality, and bordering through engagement across these two fields.

230 One area in which political geographers are engaging with settler colonial theory and  
231 concepts around territory and power is through an examination of urban geopolitics (see, for  
232 example, Fincher et. al., 2019; Hugill, 2017; Tomiak, 2017). A recent critique argues that  
233 geographers are not explicitly addressing the links between urbanism and geopolitics: they are  
234 using the “urban” as a scale of analysis for studying traditional (statist) geopolitics, rather  
235 analyzing how geopolitics and urbanism interpenetrate and shape one another (Antonsich &  
236 Hoyer, 2018). Growing engagement with settler colonialism in urban planning offers a  
237 corrective of this tendency, prompting a reimagination and re-theorization of the urban itself.  
238 While urban scholarship has long drawn attention to how indigenous and non-indigenous spaces  
239 are policed and reified in cities, more recent work situates forms of violent transformation of  
240 indigenous lands and associated struggles within cities to develop urban theory itself. Tomiak  
241 (2017, p. 928) argues that the ongoing dispossession and displacement that takes place in settler  
242 contexts is vital to understanding the production of urban space, coining the term “settler city” to  
243 address the multiple and contested socio-spatial formations and specific urban types that settler  
244 colonialism has given rise to. Hugill (2017) notes that scholarship on urbanism has long taken on  
245 questions about colonialism, but with limited concern for the ways that urban governance differs  
246 where settlers are permanently situated. He argues that it is fruitful to unpack the distinctions  
247 between colonial and settler colonial cities and begin to try and define the “settler-colonial city”  
248 as a specific socio-spatial form (Ibid., p. 7). And Yiftachel (1998; 2000; Tzfadia & Yiftachel,  
249 2004) has long stressed the overlap of urban geography, political geography, and settler  
250 colonialism, including in his recent special issue with Libby Porter, “Urbanizing settler-colonial  
251 studies” (2019).

252 But as Naylor, Daigle, Zaragocin, Ramírez, and Gilmartin (2018) note, although political  
253 geography (and in particular feminist geopolitics) focuses on global inequalities, this work is still  
254 based in western paradigms of territory, land, and sovereignty. It is still, in other words, marked

255 by the present absence of settler colonial and indigenous theorization. In order to avoid reifying  
256 dominant (white settler) frameworks, both political geography and settler colonial studies can  
257 engage with indigenous frameworks, particularly in ways that acknowledge their heterogeneity  
258 (Boutet, 2014). A growing body of work in indigenous studies challenges settler colonial  
259 meanings of land (L.B. Simpson, 2011; 2014), sovereignty and jurisdiction (Bruyneel, 2007;  
260 Pasternak, 2014, 2017), and citizenship and personhood (Gombay, 2015; Radcliffe, 2017).  
261 Political geographers engaging with these topics can better understand how sovereignty and  
262 territory are produced through both physical and ontological struggles (see, for example, Daigle,  
263 2016 on the connections between indigenous ontologies of territorial sovereignty, relationality,  
264 and kinship). Recognizing indigenous approaches not simply as ways of knowing but also as  
265 ways of being will enrich political geographies of settler governance (McCreary and Milligan,  
266 2014) and indigenous contestation alike (Smiles, 2018).

## 267 268 **Consciousness**

269 'Consciousness' as such is not a central discussion within political geography, but  
270 political geographers have long been concerned with concepts related to "geographic  
271 imagination" (see Agnew & Duncan, 2014; Anderson, 2006; Bonnet, 2003; Giesecking, 2017;  
272 Gregory 1994, 1995, 2004; Massey, 2006; Massey & Allen, 1984; Said 1978; Sharp, 2008), and  
273 in so doing examine consciousness to varying degrees. Scholars have also critiqued conceptions  
274 of geographic imagination, challenging its normative assumptions of territory (Rose, 1993;  
275 Giesecking 2017, p. 4) and advocating instead for more heterogeneous, pluralistic alternatives  
276 (Closs Stephens, 2011). While most literature in political geography has been focused on the role  
277 of geographical imaginations in underwriting forms of empire, violence, and dispossession, this  
278 work has long attended to the limits and contradictions within these forms of spatial reasoning  
279 (Gregory 1995, p.475; Bonnett 2003, p.61) as well as how patriarchal and racialized models of  
280 imagination might be undone (Rose 1993; Closs Stephens 2011) and how imagination opens up  
281 possibilities for radical emancipatory futures (Giesecking, 2017, p. 2; Thomas, 2019, p.155). In  
282 spite of this engagement, few political geographers have analyzed the specific, ongoing  
283 influences of settler land appropriation and indigenous erasure on the consciousness of settlers or  
284 indigenous people (Hughes, 2017; Daigle, 2019; Naylor et al., 2018; Farrales, 2019),  
285 demonstrating the present absence of settler colonial frameworks in the field.

286 Political geographers do not theorize settler disavowal explicitly (which, in some cases,  
287 is itself symptomatic of settler disavowal). However, their analyses of settler states' attempted  
288 reconciliation with indigenous communities (Daigle, 2019) and normalization of settler relations  
289 (Hughes, 2017; Farrales, 2019) can add to broader discussions of disavowal within settler  
290 consciousness (see Hixson, 2016's work on representation; see also Haebich, 2011, and Thomas,  
291 2019 on forgetting). Resonating with indigenous studies scholarship on "settler moves to  
292 innocence" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10), Daigle (2019) describes how the truth and reconciliation  
293 process in Canadian universities offers white settler society an opportunity to (re)claim  
294 innocence through cathartic spectacle while preserving the violent relations of settler  
295 colonialism. Settlers take for granted the property relations and legal structures of dispossession  
296 that underpin settler colonialism through the logics of "settler common sense" (Rifkin, 2013;  
297 Hughes, 2017, p. 99-100). Farrales (2019) further explores how the reproduction and  
298 transmission of settler common-sense values normalizes the white liberal settler state while  
299 preserving its colonial logics.



300 A number of political geographers highlight the consciousness(es) of indigenous people,  
301 particularly as they shape indigenous peoples' strategies for challenging settler assumptions,  
302 logics, and practices. Within their scholarship on indigenous representational practices, Hunt  
303 (2014a) explores Kwagiulth witnessing as a methodology for examining violence against  
304 indigenous women and girls, and de Leeuw (2016) highlights how indigenous women and  
305 children reframe Canadian legal texts and actions by articulating them in terms of their violent  
306 effects. Indigenous peoples' heterogeneous ontologies and experiences with settler colonialism  
307 shape a multiplicity of strategies for survivance, resurgence, resistance, and refusal (Alfred &  
308 Corntassel, 2005; Alkhalili, 2017; Coulthard, 2014; Daigle, 2016; Santos, 2016; Shalhoub-  
309 Kevorkian, 2008; Smiles, 2018; Whyte, 2016). For instance, Smiles (2018) discusses how  
310 Anishinaabe resistance to Minnesota's autopsy practices draws on indigenous ontologies to  
311 protect indigenous relationships with the deceased. Bhungalia (2018) frames Palestinians'  
312 attitude and practice of *sumud* as a refusal and non-recognition of colonial domination in place of  
313 the opposition 'from below' commonly associated with indigenous resistance. Expanding the  
314 scope of these conversations, Daigle argues that non-indigenous people must also participate in  
315 the responsibilities of resurgence, resistance, and refusal (Naylor et al., 2018), and Ramírez  
316 emphasizes that this requires individuals to acknowledge the differential positions from which  
317 they approach the project of decolonization (Naylor et al., 2018).

318 Political geographers can continue to engage settler consciousness in order to understand  
319 how settlers sustain their contradictory beliefs and self-identifications. This insight can help  
320 political geographers to re-problematize the contradictions—and thereby help unsettle the  
321 logics—that structure settler colonial rationality. However, settler consciousness does not  
322 develop in a vacuum: it evolves together with the violent materialities of dispossession and  
323 erasure, and as a result, continues to be structured by the "native repressed" (Wolfe, 2006;  
324 Cattellino, 2010). Focusing on a coherent, unified settler consciousness to the exclusion of all  
325 others can privilege settlers' lived experiences and worldviews, marginalizing the experiences of  
326 indigenous people. Moreover, this move risks representing settler society through a settler-  
327 indigenous binary (Kauanui, 2016), sidelining the narratives of displaced indigenous people  
328 (Nájera and Maldonado, 2017), arrivants whose ancestors settled against their will (Byrd, 2011;  
329 Vimalassery, Pegues, & Goldstein, 2016), and those who claim multiple ancestries within the  
330 settler/indigenous/arrivant triad. Troubling the settler-indigenous binary and centering the  
331 workings of race, class, gender, religion, ability, nationality, and other axes of power will help  
332 scholars to account for the co-articulations of embodied difference and settler strategies for  
333 seizing land, erasing/appropriating indigenous communities, and maintaining racialized regimes  
334 of governance (Snelgrove et al., 2014). Political geographers can theorize the consciousnesses of  
335 people variously positioned within the (non-exclusive) categories of settler, indigenous, and  
336 arrivant as they operate on the basis of variegated gendered, racialized, and otherwise-embodied  
337 logics. Political geographers can challenge the present absence of settler colonialism by actively  
338 theorizing it as a condition that shapes the consciousness of everyone who lives in a settler state.

339

#### 340 **Narrative**

341 Settler polities share several narrative features. Within these, settlers are moving  
342 ("returning") to a place that is already their home; theirs is an irreversible and predestined march  
343 toward progress; and the land they are settling is empty (or will be) and therefore open to  
344 settlement (Kedar, Amara, & Yiftachel, 2018; Veracini, 2010). Settlers also deny that the  
345 encounter with indigenous people has in any way shaped settler society, despite the fact that "the

346 colonisers' dealings with indigenous peoples—through resistance, containment, appropriation,  
347 assimilation, miscegenation or attempted destruction—is the historical factor which has  
348 ultimately shaped the cultural and political character of the new nations, mediating in highly  
349 significant ways their shared colonial roots/routes" (Coombes, 2006, p. 1; see also Cattelino,  
350 2010). In spite of the pervasive presence and influence of indigenous communities, settler  
351 mythologies represent indigenous people as extinct or disappearing, reinforcing the stories  
352 settlers tell themselves about themselves to sustain settler regimes. Political geographers have a  
353 history of challenging hegemonic discourses; for example, scholars of critical geopolitics have  
354 analyzed how the narratives of geopolitical "experts" enable state authorities to naturalize power  
355 dynamics (Dalby, 1991; Ó Tuathail, 1996, p. 52; Sharp, 2008; Dowler and Sharp, 2001) and  
356 drive militarism (Hyndman, 2003; Boyce and Williams, 2012). In recent years, several political  
357 geographers have also written about settler geopolitical narratives, focusing on how settler  
358 narratives legitimate, justify, and advance settler colonial governance.

359 While settler colonial theory as such has, for the most part, been absent in political  
360 geography, several projects highlight the indigenous erasure at the heart of settler land narratives.  
361 Giesecking (2017, p. 4) argues that within the geographical imagination, "[t]he seemingly self-  
362 explanatory "territorial" narratives of popular nationalist geographies override those who came  
363 before, erasing indigeneity" (also see Gregory, 1994). West Bank settlers invoke the inevitable  
364 disappearance of indigenous people to justify their presence on the land (Hughes, 2017). And in  
365 the New Zealand context, Thomas (2019, p. 156) notes that white settlers' "national imaginaries"  
366 come into being through "the active forgetting" of how they came to live there: "[n]amely, a  
367 white utopian imagination was violently imposed on Indigenous Māori, as land was stolen and  
368 sovereignty ignored" (Thomas 2019, p. 156). These narratives don't just work to reassure  
369 settlers, they also shape dominant beliefs that affect the lives of indigenous people. Hunt  
370 (2014a), for instance, describes how Canadian denials of pre-colonial indigenous self-  
371 governance and self-determination reinforce representations of indigenous people as colonial  
372 subjects who belong on reserves.

373 In addition to describing indigenous people as disappearing, settlers also narrate their  
374 histories and values in ways that promote a progressive image of the settler state. The resulting  
375 liberal narratives mask the foundational violence of settler colonialism, producing the present  
376 absence of settler colonial relations. Farrales (2019) highlights the ways in which Filipina beauty  
377 pageants reproduce notions of multiculturalism and settler state benevolence by emphasizing  
378 patriotism and philanthropy as key qualities of winning contestants and Daigle (2016) has  
379 challenged seemingly-benign Canadian narratives of "nation-to-nation" relationship-building  
380 with indigenous peoples. While all settler narratives ultimately work to reinforce settler land  
381 claims, some are particularly explicit in advancing settler interests in land and resources. Proulx  
382 and Crane's (2019) work analyzes the seemingly universal ideologies of productivity and  
383 development which mask elite interests in indigenous land appropriation and white supremacy.  
384 In analyzing the narrative that West Bank settlements are built to commemorate the Israeli dead,  
385 Hughes (2016) writes that this discourse represents construction as a form of (justified)  
386 mourning that legitimates continued settlement. Several other, related tropes depict Israeli  
387 colonization in the West Bank as a progressive project; the idea of settlers as people who are  
388 divinely chosen and destined for colonization, the romanticization of a rugged frontier that must  
389 be conquered, and a teleological sense of progress and superiority (Hughes, 2017). As a rule,  
390 settler nationalist narratives advance colonial projects by highlighting their liberal elements,  
391 justifying their actions, and denying their costs.

392           Settler authorities must also continuously resolve challenges to the coherency of their  
393 regimes, including those posed by indigenous (and) activist contestations of settler narratives  
394 (Daigle, 2016; Davis Matthews, 2019; Kartal, 2019). Within the context of political geography,  
395 national narratives constitute an essential component of statecraft, since they allow statespersons  
396 to resolve “ambiguities inherent in the multiple identities of modern nation-states” (Whittaker,  
397 2017, p 958). Given the indeterminacy of settler projects, whose aspirations to totalizing  
398 authority are undermined by the persistent survivance, refusal, and/or sovereignty claims of  
399 indigenous people, settler colonial authorities produce narratives that deny indigenous agency  
400 while giving shape and substance to settler regimes (Cattelino, 2010). One such narrative is the  
401 “laboratory thesis,” taken up by critics and supporters of Israel alike, which posits that Israel’s  
402 military industrial complex uses the occupation to refine and develop technologies for the  
403 international market. In his critique of the laboratory thesis, Machold (2018, p. 89) argues that  
404 uncritical reliance on the concept reinforces the misleading ideological tropes at the core of  
405 Israel’s settler colonial project, such as the suggestion that Israel’s position as a global security  
406 leader stems from the self-declared exceptionality and universality of Israeli violence, that Israel  
407 triumphs against the odds, and that Israel’s development is part of an inevitable progressive  
408 history (see also Tawil-Souri, 2012). In other words, in explicitly theorizing Israel as engaged in  
409 an ongoing project of settler colonization, Machold avoids “accept[ing] the permanence of settler  
410 colonialism as an unmovable reality” (L.B. Simpson, 2014, p. 8), and instead attunes to the  
411 ongoing (and not always successful) work and (re)production of Israeli territorial control over  
412 Palestine. This work demonstrates how political and analytical imperatives driving political  
413 geographers’ engagements with settler colonialism are deeply entwined. It also signals how  
414 political geography’s engagement with settler colonial studies can be mutually productive.  
415 National narratives like these allow settler states to mask their constitutive violence (by framing  
416 it as defensive in nature), and to maintain the legitimacy of their regimes of governance.  
417 Considering the common tropes of settler colonial narratives, political geographers can identify  
418 and challenge the colonial subtexts of sympathetic and critical narratives alike.

419

## 420 **Conclusion**

421           In this article we have shown that settler colonial studies is becoming increasingly  
422 present in geographical thinking. This reflects the growing prominence of settler colonial studies  
423 as a field in its own right, but also makes visible the longstanding present absence of settler  
424 colonialism in geography. By this we mean that although geographers have long attended to  
425 many of the issues at the core of settler colonial studies (biopolitics, territoriality/sovereignty,  
426 geographic imagination/consciousness, and narrative/discourse), until recently they have done so  
427 whilst avoiding explicit engagement with settler colonial theory. While we will not reflect on the  
428 reasons for this present absence here, we want to identify it and emphasize that it has been  
429 consequential in terms of circumscribing the kinds of political analysis that geographers can  
430 offer, as well as the nature, depth, and scope of radical critique of violent domination, by skirting  
431 certain questions about the core drivers of dispossession and responsibility for them. As others  
432 have recently emphasized, the production and dissemination of knowledge is central to settler  
433 colonial projects but also a key battleground in anti-colonial struggles (Hawari, Plonski and  
434 Weizman 2019b). Recognizing this requires that scholars actively center anti-colonial  
435 approaches that link intellectual analysis of settler colonialism with political struggles centered  
436 on liberation and decolonization (Hawari, Plonski and Weizman 2019). In this spirit, as we have  
437 argued, the development to engage more meaningfully with the settler colonial framework is

438 welcome and significant both analytically and politically, particularly alongside radical  
439 geographers' broader efforts to consider the terms and consequences of academic complicity  
440 with forms of empire, war, state violence, and militarism both past and present (Koopman, 2016,  
441 Wainwright, 2013, 2016). In doing so we have emphasized the mutually productive nature of  
442 engagements between political geography and settler colonial studies, showing how these have  
443 changed some key terms of debate on particular topics. While we have focused on the  
444 relationships between these two fields, we by no means seek to reify disciplinary boundaries, but  
445 rather welcome this exchange. At the same time, political geographers' engagement with settler  
446 colonial theory is not without some potential dangers and pitfalls. While reflecting a growing  
447 willingness to foreground material dispossession and the political technologies and logics that  
448 accompany it, there is a risk of the term being used loosely and polemically in ways that elide  
449 specificity, much in the way that the uses of "neoliberalism" became analytically and politically  
450 counterproductive (see Ferguson 2009, Peck 2013). In light of such concerns, then, we wish to  
451 reiterate that simply applying the label "settler colonial" to certain types of relations is not only  
452 superficial but potentially counter-productive in that it runs up directly against settler colonial  
453 theory's imperative to emphasize that different colonial forms should not only be understood as  
454 separate but also as potentially "antithetical" (Veracini 2010,11-12). By advocating for a more  
455 explicit analysis, we hope to contribute to a more active presence of settler colonial theorization  
456 within political geography.

457

458

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