Unlearning by Learning to Dry Fish
Land-Based Pedagogy that Decolonizes

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Disclaimer:

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Contents

List of Figures *v*
List of Maps *v*
List of Appendices *v*
List of Acronyms *vi*
Abstract *vii*

Chapter 1 Introduction **1**
Research Questions 4
Learning Through Unlearning 4
Research Strategy and Methodology 6
Flow of the paper 7

Chapter 2 A Note on Identities and Onto/Epistemology **8**
Settler Identity 8
Indigenous Identity 10
Identities *in* Relation and Onto/Epistemological Shifts 10

Chapter 3 Settler Colonialism in Canada's Present **13**
Land and 'the Elimination of the Native' 13
'The Elimination of the Native' in Canada 15
Indigenous Resurgence and Decolonization 18
Idle No More 18
The Berger Inquiry and Dene Resistance 19
The Summer of 1990 20
Decolonization 21

Chapter 4 Dechinta: Bush University *in Resistance* **23**
Dechinta's Inception 24
Land-Based Learning at Dechinta 25

Chapter 5 Challenging Dominant Binaries **30**
Human/Nature 31
Universal/Local Knowledge 34
Mind/Body 37
Indigenous/Settler 38

Chapter 6 Conclusions **42**
References *45*

List of Figures

Figure 1 Watts' depiction of differences in Indigenous/western processes 12

List of Maps

Map 1 Map of Northwest Territories 24

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Dechinta Materials 50

List of Acronyms

ISS	Institute of Social Studies
NWT	Northwest Territories
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations

Abstract

This research paper delves into how settler colonialism is an ongoing structure of domination in Canada, and how it is being resisted. This includes an exploration of both settler and Indigenous identities as well as a discussion of differences in ontological and epistemological perspectives. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which settler colonialism is contested in learning/knowing spaces. This is achieved by asking how settler colonialism is challenged through land-based learning practices at Dechinta Bush University, a university accredited learning space in the Northwest Territories, Canada. This research found that four dominant binaries in particular are challenged at Dechinta: human and nature; universal and local knowledge; the mind and the body; and Indigenous and settler people.

Relevance to Development Studies

The paper contributes to conversations about decolonizing learning/knowing and offers an invitation to development thinkers and practitioners to lean *in* to the discomfort of asking difficult and self-implicating questions about our roles in injustice.

Keywords

Land-based learning, settler colonialism, Dechinta, decolonization, decolonizing learning, learning/knowing, settler, Indigenous, ontology, epistemology

Chapter 1
Introduction

> The ongoing attention that has been paid to colonialism as a situation that is always elsewhere, rather than here, and as a situation that is always in the before, rather than now has left the politics of the nations within North America largely unexamined and undertheorized.
> – *Audra Simpson, 2013*

This is how I learned to think about colonialism, growing up in the centre of Canada's largest city. Canada's colonial history would have, for my younger self, evoked images of pioneers clearing forests for agriculture. And decolonization would have brought to mind historical periods of independence movements, be it early 19th century in Latin America or mid 20th century in Africa – historical periods which, in my mind, had come to an end. I knew stories of pasts, of the fur trade and maple sugar bushes, but I knew far too little about Indigenous presence in North America. Only once I began to travel, through the teasing jokes of others, did it occur to me how strange it is that pictures of Queen Elizabeth II are to be found on our currency. Naïvely, the Queen was to me a symbol of ongoing colonialism in Canada, unmindful of ongoing settler colonial dynamics within Canada.

With a history of nearly half a millennium of resisting patterns of colonial domination, Indigenous peoples[1] of Turtle Island[2] have struggled for self-determination and decolonization. The work of resistance has more recently been spoken of in terms of Indigenous resurgence. Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamonsake Simpson speaks of resurgence as "significantly re-investing in our ways of being: regenerating our political and intellectual traditions; articulating and living our legal systems; language learning; ceremonial and spiritual pursuits; creating and using our artistic and performance-based traditions" (2011: 17-8). In some sense, this is a call to turn inwards, focusing on revitalizing and healing communities and ways of life for Indigenous peoples.

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[1] Used in the plural here as an attempt to acknowledge the immense diversity of both Indigeneity as well as these peoples' vastly different experiences of imperialism (Smith 2001, 6-7). Given the significant diversity amongst Indigenous peoples in Canada and in hoping to honour the specificity of particular nations and communities, I strive to use the names of the Indigenous nations and communal identities people are using to describe themselves.

[2] It is a name for North America that comes from the creation stories of many Indigenous peoples on the continent. I want to acknowledge that many Indigenous nations have been bisected by the Canada/US border, and thus Turtle Island, in addition to an enactment of the politics of naming, is an important spatial concept that speaks to the violence of colonialism past and present. However, I will be limiting myself to the Canadian context for this research.

Denial and erasure of both violence and responsibility can be seen in the Canadian government's refusal to support the United Nations' 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Despite this, some non-Indigenous Canadians are also working to challenge unjust power relations in the country in solidarity with Indigenous peoples. Indeed, within resurgence movements, collaboration is seen as necessary: "Resurgence cannot occur in isolation. A collective conversation and mobilization is critical to avoid reproducing the individualism and colonial isolation that settler colonialism fosters" (Simpson 2011: 69). Despite the necessity of working together, layers of historical power asymmetries complicate the potential for working together towards more equitable relationships.

One area where such work has been taking place, and has also been problematized, is within learning spaces. This can be seen in academic conversations within different social science and humanities disciplines in North America that call to '"decolonize our schools,' or use 'decolonizing methods,' or 'decolonize student thinking'" (Tuck and Yang 2012: 2). For example, this has been undertaken through the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges in curricula or more radical challenges to dominant ways of knowing, such as land-based learning models. While 'land-based learning' can mean a variety of things, when used in this paper, it refers to approaches to learning/knowing that position Indigenous understandings of land and relationships with land as central (Wildcat *et al.* 2014; Tuck *et al.* 2014; Johnson 2012). This research will focus on the challenges of decolonizing learning/knowing[3] in theory and action, paying particular attention to land-based learning informed by Indigenous knowledge, and how such learning spaces are transformative. In order to have this discussion, I will also explore how settler colonialism needs to be problematized in order for us to "take seriously the conceptual and empirical contributions of Indigenous epistemologies" (Tuck and McKenzie 2015: 20) to decolonizing learning/knowing.

In particular, the following research paper aims to better understand how land-based learning spaces, such as Dechinta Bush University in Northern Canada, challenge such patterns of domination. In the spirit of 'taking seriously' other ways of learning/knowing, I am inspired by Kwakwaka'wakw scholar Sarah Hunt:

> Ontology is, ironically, not a word that comes to mind when I think of Indigenous ontologies. What comes to mind, instead, are stories […] Looking to Indigenous epistemologies for ways to get beyond the ontological limits of what is legible as western scholarship, a number of Indigenous scholars have pointed to stories, art, and metaphor as important transmitters of Indigenous knowledge. Stories and storytelling are widely acknowledged as

[3] In using 'learning/knowing,' I aim to underscore the important co-constitutive relationship between what is knowledge and how it is learned.

> culturally nuanced ways of knowing, produced within networks of relational meaning-making.
>
> (2014: 27)

I therefore ground this inquiry by upfront presenting an 'educational' experience that contradicts the content and delivery of dominant education by sharing Mandee McDonald's story (2014: 182-3):

> Fish
>
> Therese Sangris taught me how to make dry fish. I had to try it a few times before I got it right. The first time I watched her do it was when I was a student in the Dechinta summer program in 2011, though I didn't actually try it with my own hands then. The first time I cut the fish decently under her supervision was just over a year ago, and each program after that I tried again and again, making slight mistakes or asking her questions as I worked. A few days before the 2014 summer course, Therese had an unexpected commitment arise, so she didn't end up instructing the summer program.
>
> "Disaster…" I thought. No Therese meant no dry fish, and a huge gap in the curriculum. She doesn't just teach practical skills like cutting fish, but she demonstrates teachings in her actions, patience, stories, and kindness.
>
> Fishing is the main land-based activity at Dechinta in the summer. It's an important part of the program. Now who will cut all the fish and teach the students to do so?
>
> "So you're doing the fish…?" Glen inquired out of the side of his mouth. I couldn't tell if that was a question, a suggestion, or an order.
>
> "Umm yep. I'll try."
>
> "Just do it. Don't act nervous."
>
> "Umm… okay."
>
> We were walking down the hill for a seminar led by Leanne. I forget how she began, but she ended up talking about how elders, in general, teach.
>
> "You watch and watch and listen and learn, because one day that elder's not going to be there, and that's when you'll know if you've been paying attention all that time."
>
> Is she talking about me? The fish demonstration was next. I'd never made dry fish without Therese nearby.
>
> Students, instructors and guests were all gathered around the fish table, some sitting in chairs as if they were settling in to watch an open air show. I picked up a fish, picked up a knife, and started cutting off the fins first. This is usually where Therese shares a teaching with us, about why it's important to cut the fins off as sign of respect to the fish. I mumble something about respect and fins, trying to sound profound, and ever so slowly, cut the fish into a piece of succulent art that I would soon savour with butter and salt. I showed the students how to do it, and they did it. We all made dry fish, and ate fish for days.

The importance of such learning spaces will be the focus of this research paper, and the significance of experiences such as this one will be situated and deepened.

Research Questions

Resurgence and decolonization are poignant criticisms of colonialism and the ideals of development Europeans brought with them. While a great deal of this work in Canada has included countering dominant narratives of peaceful pasts, it has also included creating, strengthening and living alternatives to assimilationist models of state imposed development. This research aims to tease out some of this complexity when it comes to creating alternatives to dominant ways of learning/knowing, and how these alternatives challenge dominant ways of learning/knowing. With this in mind, I ask:

- How does land-based learning (Dechinta) challenge settler colonialism in Canada?
  In exploring this question, it became clear that Dechinta challenges dominant perspectives on the dualistic separation between: human and nature; universal and local knowledge; the mind and the body; and Indigenous and settler people. Given the importance of these divisions to upholding and perpetuating settler colonialism,
  - How does land-based learning (Dechinta) challenge the separation between:
    - human and nature (the non-human)?
    - universal and local knowledge?
    - the mind and the body?
    - Indigenous and settler people?

By way of a conclusion, I would like to engage with what can we learn from these challenges in relation to development studies thinking and practice, and learning/knowing spaces (education).

Learning Through Unlearning

At the core of most 'development' issues are, in some way, asymmetries of power. Power is at play when discourses of 'how things came to be,' produced through widely held and often repeated narratives about collective histories, are contested and challenged. As a Canadian woman of European ancestry currently living in The Netherlands and studying development at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), I see many people within development focused on thinking through such questions in contexts other than their own – what Tsalagi scholar Jeff Corntassel (2006) has called the 'Free Tibet Syndrome.' This describes the increasing ease with which people (be it development scholars/professionals or settler) are more able to see injustice and violence, and more able to speak out against it, the further away it is. Because analyzing power within one's own context intimately implicates the person asking questions, it may be easier to think through power in less familiar places. This may most immediately be the case because an understanding of our complicity in injustice often requires us to take action against that injustice. Action can require deep unlearning that challenges our sense of self and can require us to

challenge the structures that privilege us. Unjust asymmetries of power are at play as much within my own context of Canada as anywhere else, and so this is where I will focus in the hopes of beginning to better understanding my role, my position and my responsibilities.

In parallel with the questions I am engaging with, the process of learning through unlearning has challenged me to consistently be questioning, and reflecting about, how the things I am learning affect me – 'not just "what do I think about this?" but "what does this mean to my life?"' (Freeland Ballantyne 2012). When thinking through what questions to ask in this research paper, I am challenged to be aware of how I am implicated in maintaining and reproducing settler colonial power dynamics. I began this chapter by describing my lack of awareness of ongoing settler colonialism in Canada. I was able to be unaware of the violence of colonialism in Canada because of my settler privilege; for some, it is not a choice to learn about this violence. As a settler asking these questions, I need to take to heart the ethics of silence and listening that comes through Mandee McDonald's story of drying fish.

With ancestors coming to what is now called Canada from France in the early 1700s on my mother's side, and Ireland and England shortly thereafter on my father's side, I am descendant from some of the continent's earlier European settlers. While I will continue to unpack my implication, as well as my privileges and benefits as a settler, I begin by drawing on settler scholars Emma Lowman and Adam Barker, who underscore that we as settlers are 'personally and collectively involved and responsible for indefensible acts of cruelty and greed, even if these acts occur at such a remove that most of us never perceive our connections to them' (2015: 21).

I see important parallels here for anyone engaging in development studies and/or practice. I have spent much of the past six years in majority world countries volunteering/studying/working, and, while aware of the messy and confusing contradictions at play in my engagement with development processes, it has been in the process of examining Canada that I have become intensely aware of the importance of digging deeper into such discomforts. Not only do I feel it is important for me to be engaging in this questioning within my own context, I feel such reflective, self-implicating analyses of power are necessary when engaging in development.

Within development studies, exploring what Indigenous or traditional knowledges have to offer the field is not new, be it in relation to ecology and environment, governance, health and wellness or gender for example. Often, however, these attempts 'remain specifically interested in knowledge that parallels' (Simpson 2001: 138) western knowledge systems, systems rooted in multiple forms of Indigenous subordination.

Leanne Simpson cautions: 'Unless academics, researchers, institutions, and Indigenous nations are prepared to name the forces that have threatened [Indigenous Knowledge] and threatened Indigenous Knowledge holders and challenge the colonizing forces currently within the academy, our attempts to use [Indigenous Knowledge] as a tool for decolonization will certainly fail' (Simpson 2004: 378). As the following exploration of Dechinta's learning

model will underscore, Dechinta *does* challenge colonizing forces, within the academy and beyond it. As a learning space that is given a great deal of importance, these challenges call on academia to unlearn.

Research Strategy and Methodology

This research will approach what Paulette Regan (2010), a settler Canadian scholar, calls 'unsettling the settler within' This research aims to provide counter-narratives "that disrupt and disturb discourse by exposing the complexities and contradictions that exist under official history" (Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 13) by challenging the settler colonial myths that make up Canada. Beyond this, I aim to take seriously the challenges that Dechinta poses to mainstream ways of learning and knowing, with the following in mind: 'If we want to change the conversation, Settler Canadians must come face to face with the fear of looking beyond the limits of settler colonialism, and consider what life could look like without it' (Lowman and Barker 2015: 89). I take to heart what Kwakwaka'wakw scholar Sarah Hunt says: 'for non-Indigenous people interested in engaging with Indigenous ontologies, this may involve becoming unhinged, uncomfortable, or stepping beyond the position of 'expert' in order to also be a witness or listener' (Hunt 2014: 31). I also hear what settler Canadian scholar Paulette Regan says: "reconnecting reason and emotion – head and heart – is integral to an unsettling pedagogy" (2010: 12).

In so far as the questions I am asking may fall outside of what is conventionally thought to be a research topic, within ISS as a development institute and perhaps more broadly within certain halls of academia, the challenges I speak to in this research also apply to development thinking and academia. 'Making ontological shifts in the types of […] knowledge that is legible within the [academy] requires destabilizing how we come to know Indigeneity and what representational strategies are used in engaging with Indigenous ontologies, as differentiated from western ontologies of Indigeneity' (Hunt 2014: 87).

This research paper is a discursive engagement with the questions of settler colonialism and learning/knowing in Canada. I have been inspired by and engaged with conversations taking place within and between the fields of Critical Anthropology, Indigenous/Native studies, Settler Colonial Studies and Education. Through a thorough and nuanced engagement with this literature, I tease out some of the tensions within discussions about decolonizing learning/knowing, as well as how Indigenous/settler identities are navigated in the Canadian context.

In particular, I draw on the experience of one land-based learning space, Dechinta University Centre for Research and Learning. Located in the Northwest Territories, Dechinta is a learning space that tackles the following question: 'How do we create a culture of knowing and of learning that is going to build a better future?' (Freeland Ballantyne 2012). This guiding question underscores the appropriateness of this land-based learning space for the questions I am asking. Rooted in its own territorial and social context, Dechinta speaks to the decolonizing and self-determining potential of land-based learning practices. We can see one layer of the complexity of these

challenges when seeing that Dechinta offers university accredited courses while simultaneously articulating a direct critique to mainstream learning strategies.

Primarily through internet searches I was able to collect a diversity of material about Dechinta (see Appendix 1). This included published research, public lectures by Dechinta instructors and administrators, participant videos and reflective blog entries as well as newspaper and blog entries by visitors to Dechinta. In earlier research plans, I had hoped to participate in a short course at Dechinta. However, given the rigorous, and understandable, ethical review process for research within the Northwest Territories, participating in a course as part of my research was not feasible. This has meant that I have engaged with Dechinta discursively, through texts and videos and, most importantly, stories. While this necessarily limits the depth of my understanding, the material I have been able to explore is profoundly rich. From the analysis of these materials emerged the binaries mentioned above in the research questions.

Flow of the paper

The logic of the paper is as follows: Chapter 2 aims to clarify and nuance what is meant by the two identities central to this research. In exploring how these identities are constructed in relation to each other and to land, I hope to open up an onto/epistemological discussion which continues throughout the paper. Chapter 3 theorizes settler colonialism and discusses how it plays out in Canada. The chapter also explores Indigenous resistances to settler colonialism in the form of resurgence and decolonization. Chapter 4 discusses Dechinta as a decolonizing land-based learning space. The learning/knowing practices enacted at Dechinta are taken up in Chapter 5 through an examination of how dominant binaries, foundational to settler colonialism in Canada, are challenged at Dechinta. This is followed by conclusions and final thoughts in Chapter 6.

Chapter 2
A Note on Identities and Onto/Epistemology

Thinking about identity is often intensely challenging because, though identity is often critically important, it is difficult to discuss without essentialising. Panamanian-American feminist and race theorist Linda Alcoff helps us avoid this:

> A realistic identity politics […] is one that recognized the dynamic, variable, and negotiated character of identity. […] Yet it is also one that recognizes that social categories of identity often helpfully name specific social locations from which individuals engage […].
>
> (2000: 341)

Speaking to the settler Canadian context, I draw inspiration from Lowman and Barker:

> We use identity to refer to *how* people recognize other members of a shared group, *how* people distinguish differences in perceived "Others," and *how* these complex belongings are expressed by individuals and groups in particular ways of living, discourses and narratives, and political relationships.
>
> (2015: 13, emphasis added)

To better understand the importance of this perspective on identities, I would like to discuss what it means to understand settler and Indigenous identities in relation to each other, as well as the onto/epistemological shirt that may be required to do so.

Settler Identity

> The mental acrobatics required to overlook oceans of evidence of systematic violence against Indigenous women, the intentional harm of the residential school system, assimilation agendas, and the marginalization of all manner of difference, and to continue to identify with a multicultural, peacemaker nation are incredible.
>
> *–Lowman and Barker 2015, 85*

The term settler is contested. Who is settler? And what do we learn from this question? Settler scholars Lowman and Barker offer powerful reasoning for the word's importance:

> *Settler*. This word voices relationships to structures and processes in Canada today, to the histories of our peoples on this land, to Indigenous peoples, and to our own day-to-day choices and actions. *Settler*. This word turns us towards uncomfortable realisations, difficult subjects, and potential complicity in systems of dispossession and violence. *Settler*. This word represents a tool, a way of understanding and choosing to act differently. A tool we can use to confront the fundamental problems and injustices in Canada today. *Settler*. It is analytical, personal, and

> uncomfortable. It can be an identity that we claim or deny, but that we inevitably live and embody. It is who we are as a people, on these lands.
>
> (2015: 2)

Importantly, Lowman and Barker speak of settler identity as being process-based, meaning it is not defined by a shared ancestry, culture or political system. 'Rather Settler people come to identify through ways of doing things – particular processes – that bind them to the lands on which they intend to stay, ways whose expression change over time while maintaining the same assumptions and end goals' (2015: 15). I will further discuss settler processes in Chapter 3.

In so far as Canadian wealth, inequitably distributed as it is, is a direct result of the benefits of exploiting Indigenous lands[4], settler Canadians benefit. Settlers also have, as my earlier story underscored, 'the option to remain conveniently ignorant of the harms of colonialism' (Lowman and Barker 2015: 99). British feminist and critical race theorist Sara Ahmed understands 'privilege as an energy saving device: less effort is required when a world has been assembled to meet your needs' (2015). Canada is a world assembled for settlers, where whiteness and class both play an important role.

Given the diversity of non-Indigenous people in Canada, understanding settler identity as process-based is important in order not to homogenize all settler identities or to deny other dimensions of oppression and inequality.

> Differentiating the Settler identity from racialized or class-based identities does not mean that the Settler Canadian identity is post-racial, or post-capitalist, or post-any other hierarchical power structure in Canadian identity […] How we experience the world as Settler people is also shaped by our experiences of race and racism, wealth and social mobility, gender and sexuality, and many other very real differences.
>
> (Lowman and Barker 2015: 70)

While differently situated, and benefitting differently from settler colonialism, settlers uphold the status-quo for fear of losing the privileges they do receive. In naming and unpacking what it means to be settler, we can begin to better understand our relationships with Indigenous peoples and with land.

---

[4] With Canada's current economic role in the global economy, Canadians also owe some of their wealth to the appropriation of 'third world wealth' (Tuck and Yang 2012: 7), which can most clearly be seen through the activity of Canadian mining companies operating abroad (Barker 2009).

Indigenous Identity

> Often only Western cultures are allowed to be diverse and contradictory, while Indigeneity is expected to be 'pure', of one mind and aesthetic, and easily identifiable.
>
> – *Sium et al. 2012, VIII*

Mirroring the above discussion, I would like to discuss an understanding of the political nature of Indigenous identities which inform the discussion of Indigenous resurgence in Canada. Indeed, '[a] rigorous definition [of Indigenous peoples] […] would be premature and, ultimately, futile. Debates over the problem of definition are actually more interesting than any definition in and of itself' (Niezen 2003, as cited in Alfred and Corntassel 2005: 607). Kahnawá:ke Mohawk scholar Taiaike Alfred and Tsalagi scholar Jeff Corntassel offer the following to open up this discussion:

> Indigenousness is an identity constructed, shaped and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism. The communities, clans, nations and tribes we call *Indigenous peoples* are just that: Indigenous to the lands they inhabit, in contrast to and in contention with the colonial societies and states that have spread out from Europe and other centres of empire. It is this oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples from other peoples of the world.
>
> (Alfred and Corntassel 2005: 597)

Unangax scholar Eve Tuck and settler scholar Wayne Yang echo this understanding of Indigeneity as integrally linked to land: 'Indigenous peoples are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how we/they came to be in a particular place – indeed how we/they came to *be a place*' (Tuck and Yang 2012: 6). This is the basis for reasserting Indigenous humanity in the face of settler colonialism.

Conversations about 'who is Indigenous' are sometimes greeted with cries that 'we are all Indigenous,' a Western humanist perspective that Sium *et al* (2012) argue, conflates Indigeneity with humanity. 'Colonialism and its concomitant project of white supremacy have always seen and understood Indigeneity as different and threatening, working overtime to marginalize and erase Indigenous existence. A claim to a shared humanity is not decolonizing and works to reinscribe a racist framework of 'color-blindness" (Sium *et al.* 2012: V). This line of thinking ignores and silences past and on-going colonial violence, while homogenizing the different locations in relation to power amongst Indigenous and settler peoples.

Identities *in* Relation and Onto/Epistemological Shifts

> There is power in questions and questioning, in being able to live in the understanding that not everything is known or knowable.

– Sium et al. 2012, XI

The above discussion of identities was indeed not meant to identify a clear line that separates Indigenous people from settlers.

> Indigenous and Settler peoples are not defined by their distances and differences, but rather their relationship to each other and to the land… Often, these relationships to the land have brought Indigenous and Settler peoples into conflict – a conflict that has played out as colonization, dispossession, and domination of Indigenous peoples by Settler colonizers – but we remain hopeful that there are other possibilities, other ways that this flexible and malleable duality can play out.
>
> (Lowman and Barker 2015: 17)

Contesting the tendency to classify things as either/or, Lowman and Barker draw on Indigenous philosopher[5] Anne Waters' concept of non-discrete, non-binary dualisms (2015: 16). This concept can help us make sense of the many ways in which these two identities are in relation with each other. Here, non-discrete means that they overlap, with

> […] many people caught between Settler and Indigenous identities, and therefore subject to conflicting social treatment based on how they are subjectively perceived and/or claimed by other Settlers or Indigenous people(s).
>
> (Lowman and Barker 2015: 17)

To think of these identities as non-binary is to see each identity as 'not exclusive or exclusionary' (*ibid.*). Simply put, this means that, while acknowledging the importance of these two identities in Canada, they are not the only two possible identities in Canada.

Moving away from binaries, by seeing Indigenous and settler identities in relation to each other and to land, is already an ontological step striving to take seriously Indigenous knowledges. But to continue in this direction, I would like to complicate what is usually understood as ontology and epistemology. Ontology can most basically ask the question 'what is *there*? what exists?' And Epistemology asks 'how do we know?' I see these questions as central to this research paper because by seeing how different traditions of thought (Indigenous/Western) approach these questions ('what is *there*?' and 'how do we know?') differently we, as settlers or non-Indigenous people, can begin to see what we can learn from and with other worldviews (Watts 2013; Hunt 2014; Lowman and Barker 2015).

> This is more than an effort to understand or respect difference. Rather, Indigenous peoples' relationships to land as alive […] need to be taken seriously, and the political, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual aspects of those relationships all matter.

---

[5] Anne Waters identifies as having Seminole, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee ancestry (Tanner 2015).

> We cannot start from the material and work outwards or we risk reading our own biases into Indigenous ways of being. For centuries, Indigenous peoples have had to learn to understand how settler people think and know the world as a matter of survival. In order to find new ways of living together respectfully on this land, Settler people need to take up the responsibility of learning about Indigenous ontologies.
>
> (Lowman and Barker 2015: 20)

This means tackling things that, as settlers/non-Indigenous people, do not, and perhaps never will, understand.

It is, however, as Haudenosaunee-Anishnaabe scholar Vanessa Watts[6] argues, precisely the settler/western/non-Indigenous tendency to see ontology and epistemology as separate thoughts that prevents us both form grasping the importance of Indigenous cosmologies and from taking them seriously. '[Theories] in a Euro-Western sense exist in the abstract. How they are articulated in action or behavior brings this abstraction into praxis; hence a division of epistemological/theoretical versus ontological/praxis' (Watts 2013: 22). Watts tells us that this division between *what* and *how* is not possible within many Indigenous understandings. Watts offers a diagram to demonstrate: 'On the left is a depiction of how an Anishnaabe and/or Haudenosaunee cosmology might be represented. On the right, the process by which a Euro-Western meta-understanding can contribute to colonization of these Indigenous cosmologies:' (2013: 22)

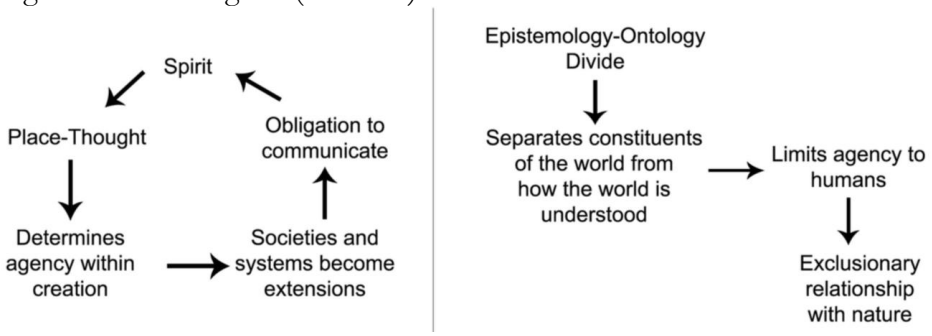


Figure 1 Watts' depiction of Indigenous/western processes

In proposing a possible interpretation of an Indigenous onto/epistemological thought process, Watts allows us to more clearly see how different processes produce different effects. As I move on to a discussion of settler colonialism, I underscore the importance of how settler and Indigenous onto/epistemologies understand land differently.

[6] I was inspired to engage with Watts' work while reading Lowman and Barker (2015) and seeing the influence of her thinking on them.

Chapter 3
Settler Colonialism in Canada's Present

In Canada, we like to think of ourselves as having a fairly inclusive society; we pride ourselves on being open and accepting of difference. We talk about being polite and respectful and peace loving. And we lie by omission, because we do not talk about our country being build on the attempted destruction of many other nations.

–Lowman and Barker 2015, 1

Settler colonialism as a concept emerged as a rejection of the 'salt-water thesis,' one of several proposals put forward in the late 1950s for how the United Nations (UN) would define decolonization and self-determination. The salt-water thesis, eventually passed by the UN, stated that: 'once overseas colonies such as Canada, Australia, or South Africa were freed from the control of European imperial powers they were considered "decolonised" even if imported populations remained in control of local government structures [i.e. settler colonies]' (Lowman and Barker 2015: 24). In effect, this meant that the UN would not see Indigenous peoples living within settler colonies as entitled to self-determination.

Meant to challenge the legitimacy of the salt-water thesis' interpretation of decolonization, the following chapter will unpack the concept of settler colonialism. This will be followed by an examination of what settler colonialism has looked like in Canada, and how Indigenous people have resisted and struggled against settler colonialism. Finally, alternate approaches to decolonization, emerging out of Indigenous resistances, will be discussed.

Land and 'the Elimination of the Native'

I begin by arguing that settler colonialism is distinct from colonialism in two important ways[7]: the colonial relationship to land and who was sent to the colony. First is the question of land. Colonialism, understood broadly as the conquest of peoples to control their resources (Loomba 1998: 2), has been a process through which imperial powers appropriate wealth. This wealth is largely extracted through the domination of people, indigenous or imported. Settler colonies, however, appropriate land. They envision establishing a new society in the image of their own (Wolfe 2006, 388). And those who inhabit the land in question, Indigenous peoples, stand in their way.

As a field of study that has focused on analysing the violences of settler colonialism, Settler Colonial Studies offers a useful theoretical underpinning

[7] While acknowledging that colonialism and settler colonialism are not necessarily or always distinctly separate, distinguishing between the two is useful for the purposes of understanding what power dynamics are at play.

for the following discussion. Patrick Wolfe (2006), Australian settler scholar writing within Settler Colonial Studies, speaks of the logic of elimination as a way of understanding settlers' relationship with the peoples whose lands they occupy. Elimination can be understood as settler colonial strategies that systematically ensure settler access to land through two broad strategies. Firstly, "frontier homicide" is Wolfe's way of describing the death of large numbers of Indigenous peoples brought on by early settler colonialism, often attributed to a combination of war, disease and starvation (2006: 388). Others have called this period in North American settler colonial history genocide (Churchill 2001).

Secondly, Wolfe identifies assimilation as a less bloody, though no less violent, manifestation of the logic of elimination. He offers the following examples of assimilation strategies:

> […] officially encouraged miscegenation, the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as mission or boarding schools, and a whole of cogent bicultural assimilations.
>
> (Wolfe 2006, 388)

In short, these are both tactics that disrupt Indigenous peoples' relationships to their ancestral territories, through displacement or otherwise, and undermine their claims to their land. "Indigenous North Americans were not killed, driven away, romanticized, assimilated, fenced in, bred White, and otherwise eliminated as the original owners of the land but as *Indians*" (Wolfe 2006, 388). This process of dehumanization attempted to undermine Indigenous people legitimate claim to land.

The second important distinction that sets settler colonialism apart is who arrived on the 'newly discovered' lands that became colonies. "[S]ettlers, by definitions, stay, in specific contradiction, colonial sojourners – administrators, missionaries, military personnel, entrepreneurs, and adventurers – return" (Veracini 2010, 6). This may seem too simplistic a distinction, given that "administrators, missionaries, military personnel, entrepreneurs, and adventurers" could be found in colonial and settler colonial contexts. While this is true, the majority of settlers have been (often landless) economic immigrants hoping to build a better (often agricultural) life (Wolfe 2006). Early settlers' interest in land should thus be underscored. Additionally, some such 'colonial sojourners' have remained in the now independent colony they were sent to. It is their relationship to this former colony's government, as a member of or descendent from the former colonial power, that sets 'colonial sojourners' apart from settlers. In settler colonies, settlers are the government.

According to settler logic, "colonisers cease being colonisers if and when they become the majority of the population. Conversely, and even more perplexingly, indigenous people only need to become a minority in order to cease being colonised" (Veracini 2010, 5). And in establishing settler governments, settlers distinguish themselves from immigrants. "Settlers are not immigrant, Immigrants are beholden to the Indigenous laws and epistemologies of the lands they migrate to. Settlers become the law,

supplanting Indigenous law and epistemologies. Therefore, settler nations are not immigrant nations" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 6-7).

Through the elimination and erasure of a territory's Indigenous peoples, "[s]ettler colonialism destroys to replace" (Wolfe 2006, 388). To counter the erasure and denial of former Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2009 claim that Canada has 'no history of colonialism' (Ljunggren 2009), an understanding settler colonialism as an ongoing structure in Canada is important.

'The Elimination of the Native' in Canada

> The most efficient way, of course, to embark on a wholesale cosmological, spiritual and social transformation of the ways people think about and interact with the land is to take them off the land, (re)educate them so that, even if they live on the land, they have been completely deterritorialized from their practices and ways of being on the land.
>
> –*Freeland Ballantyne, 2014, 72*

The version of history taught in Canadian schools and repeated in dominant cultural myths asserts that the Europeans who arrived on this land relied greatly on the generosity and knowledge of the people they encountered, people native to this land. Great friendships of mutual aid were established, so the story goes. Indeed, "the settling of Canada was relatively peaceful because our ancestors, unlike their more violently disposed American counterparts, made treaties rather than war with Native peoples, brought law and order to the frontier, and created well-intentioned (if ultimately misguided) policies designed to solve the Indian problem by civilizing and saving people seen as savage" (Regan 2010, 14). But, echoing Wolfe's analysis, Thomas King, a Cherokee scholar and storyteller, in his book entitled *The Inconvenient Indian*, says: "Throughout the history of Indian-White relations in North America, there have always been two impulses. Extermination and assimilation" (2012, 101).

To illustrate what King calls extermination, a look at population estimates is telling. The population of Indigenous peoples living in what would become Canada during the early 16th century, at the beginning of the fur trade, is contested with estimates ranging from 200,000 to over 2 million (Aylsworth and Trovato 2012). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples accepts the estimate of 500,000 people (RCAP *n.d.*). At confederation, in 1867, the Indigenous population of Canada had fallen to an estimated 100,000 to 125,000 people (Aylsworth and Trovato 2012). "The Aboriginal population of Canada continued to decline until the early 20th century. This dramatic population decline is attributed to disease, starvation and warfare directly stemming from European settlement and practices" (*ibid.*).

While such drastic declines in population necessarily had devastating effects on Indigenous communities, resistance to colonialism has continued. Canada's attempts at assimilation have been common, with justifications ranging from outright racist to more subtly concealed racism. We need not look far into the past to see assimilation policies and their scars. The history of

Indian Residential Schools (IRS) in Canada predates confederation by roughly four decades, with the first schools being established in the 1830s (Miller 2015). Run by religious and state institutions, IRSs were created to convert Indigenous children to Christianity and educate them to succeed in Euro-Canadian society. The overarching assumption that was meant to legitimize assimilation is the presumed inferiority of Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices. Children were forcibly removed from their families and prohibited from speaking their language or practicing their culture. This practice was made into official government policy in 1883, when Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald said this in support of residential schools:

> When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.
>
> (Canada 1883, as cited in TRC 2015: 2)

"Kill the Indian, save the man," as the expression went (King 2012: 108). The last IRS closed in 1996, by which time an estimated 150,000 Native students had gone through the system (Miller 2015). In addition to the violence of being taken from familiar surroundings at a young age and taken to boarding schools that had been created for the purpose of assimilation and acculturation, the conditions in residential schools included widespread neglect, malnutrition and disease as well as other forms of physical, psychological and sexual abuse (), with death rates over three times higher than the national averages to children of the same age during the same period (TRC 2015: 93).

With an estimated 80,000 IRS survivors[8] alive today (Regan 2010: 4), a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established for residential school survivors, their families and their communities as a truth telling and healing process, as well as bringing awareness of the horrors of IRSs to the Canadian public. Culminating a six-year process, wherein thousands of hours of testimony were collected, the TRC released its findings on June 2nd 2015. Echoing the more general discussion of settler colonialism above, the report begins as follows: "For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada" (TRC 2015: 1). The Commission found that the Indian

[8] Wab Kinew, prominent Anishinaabe writer and broadcaster whose father survived residential school, fought for his employers, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, to use the term 'survivor' rather than 'student' to draw public attention to the extreme violence of the IRSs (Shea 2015).

Residential School system played a central role in the "cultural genocide" perpetrated by Canada on Indigenous peoples (*ibid.*), defined as follows:

> *Physical genocide* is the mass killing of the members of a targeted group, and *biological genocide* is the destruction of the group's reproductive capacity. *Cultural genocide* is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.
>
> In its dealing with Aboriginal people, Canada did all these things.
>
> (*ibid.*)

As a hugely damning and largely publicized document, the TRC's findings openly challenge dominant myths about Canada's past and current treatment of Indigenous peoples. Calling attention to problems that are often silenced and ignored, there is hope that this report will allow for critical reflection and action. In using the language of genocide the TRC's report has the potential of opening up, amongst the Canadian public, conversations about silences within dominant narratives of the country's history and present.

The IRS system has been a mechanism through which Indigenous children have been forcibly removed from their families and their land. While official policies speak of wanting to offer Indigenous children an opportunity for a better life – a view rooted in racist beliefs of white superiority – the above analysis of settler colonialism reminds us that attempts at assimilation are always linked to the acquisition of land.

While a critique of settler colonial injustices is important to understanding the Canadian context today, "the fact that settler colonisation is still ongoing in Canada is telling: despite centuries of concerted and evolving efforts, the settler colonial project has never succeeded, evidence of powerful, multifaceted, and enduring Indigenous resistances" (Barker 2015, 44). In short, while settler colonialism in Canada has had horrifying effects, it has never succeeded in its project to kill or assimilate Indigenous peoples. In short, 'there is no "Indian problem" in Canada, and in fact there has never been one. In asserting the need to discuss and understand who and what Canadians really are, instead we have a *Settler problem*, and that problem is woven into the very fabric of Canadian society, culture, and everyday life' (Lowman and Barker 2015: 13). To better understand how settler colonialism has been survived and resisted, I now turn to a discussion of Indigenous resurgence and decolonization.

Indigenous Resurgence and Decolonization

> This conflict between Canada and Indigenous nations […] started at the moment the colonizers stopped seeing us as sovereign nations and started seeing us as an obstacle to lands and resources, obstacles they could legislate out of existence.
>
> – *Simpson 2012*

The language of Indigenous resurgence has, over the past decade, been mobilized to understand the transformational potential of 'a shift in the consciousness of Indigenous peoples, away from reconciliation and towards decolonization' (Wildcat *et al.* 2014: III). This shift has manifested in a diversity of practices intended to regenerate Indigenous cultural, economic spiritual and political lifeways (Snelgrove *et al.* 2014: 1-32). In part, this shift represents a disenchantment with what Dene scholar Glen Coulthard has called the 'politics of recognition,' namely:

> […] the now expansive range of recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that seek to reconcile Indigenous claims to nationhood with Crown sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identities in some form of renewed relationship with the Canadian state. Although these models tend to vary in both theory and practice, most involve the delegation of land, capital and political power from the state to Indigenous communities through land claims, economic development initiatives, and self-government processes.
>
> (Coulthard 2006: 438)

Indeed, within Canada, platforms at various levels of government have been established to manage and govern the Indigenous peoples of this land. The inherent problem with the politics of recognition, as Coulthard and others have underscored, is the power imbalance inherent in Indigenous peoples' appeals to the Canadian government. An important aspect of what has been called Indigenous resurgence in Canada has been a shift away from struggling against the state for recognition (be it in the form of granting land through land claims, or government sanctioned governance structures), as this means struggling for inclusion in colonial institutions that aim to assimilate. Instead, resurgence means that energy is directed towards practicing self-recognition. 'Colonized people are self-governed. Free people are self-determined,' (T'hohahoken 2005: 157, as cited in Sium *et al.* 2012: IV) and in struggling for self-determination, Indigenous communities affirm that colonization is not the only lens through which their existence can be understood. "Living within such political and cultural contexts [settler colonial Canada], it is remembering ceremony, returning to homelands and liberation from the myths of colonialism that are the decolonizing imperatives" (Alfred and Corntassel 2005: 601).

Idle No More

The epitome of Indigenous resurgence within the public imaginary in Canada today is the Idle No More movement. The spark came in late November 2012 by four Saskatchewan women who hosted a teach-in, entitled Idle No More, to

discuss the impacts of the government's proposed Bill C-45, an omnibus bill meant to lift the majority of Canada's environmental protections that had been in place to keep waterways and fish habitats healthy (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014: 21).

> With the help of social media and grassroots Indigenous activists, this meeting inspired a continent-wide movement of hundreds of thousands of people from Indigenous communities and urban centres participating in sharing sessions, protests, blockades and round dances in public spaces and on the land.
>
> (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014: 21-2).

The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, a group of five Indigenous authors and artists who edited/curated a collection of writing and art that emerged alongside the movement, offer a synthesis of Idle No More's three broad objectives: the abolishment of legislation that did away with significant environmental protections; the immediate necessity to address water and housing crises in Indigenous communities; and, overarching, 'a commitment to a mutually beneficial nation-to-nation relationship between Canada and First Nations (status and non-status), Inuit and Metis communities based on the spirit and intent of treaties' (2014: 22). The relationship between Indigenous people and the Canadian state is currently mediated through structures built solely by the Canadian state. Idle No More's call for restoring nation-to-nation relations with the Canadian state is thus an important part of Indigenous resurgence.

But, as Simpson writes, 'Indigenous struggle rarely makes it into the minds of the Canadian mainstream, and when it does surface it is often without proper historical context' (2015). While Idle No More may be what comes to mind for most Canadians when talking about Indigenous resurgence, it was a long time in the making.

The Berger Inquiry and Dene Resistance

Though the language of resurgence is somewhat recent, the sequence of events that led to this shift go back at least to the mid-1970s. To better understand the historical context of Indigenous resurgence, we focus on Denendeh, the territory of the Dene First Nation and the home of Dechinta. The inquiry was initiated because of widespread opposition to the proposed construction of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline, a natural gas pipeline project meant to cross over 1000 kilometers of the Northwest Territories. Throughout the inquiry's hearings, Dene critiques of capitalism and industrialization in the North were repeatedly voiced. Glen Coulthard describes these critiques as expressing:

> […] not only how significant the land is to us, but how significant the social relations that are encompassed by the land were for informing what we thought political relations would look like, or what we thought economic relations would look like.'
>
> (Coulthard and Freeland Ballantyne 2011)

Resistance was fundamentally rooted in a different ontological understanding of what the land is, what the land means. When land is understood as a relationship, pipeline development is completely illogical.

Named after Justice Thomas Berger and published in 1977, the inquiry found that areas along the proposed pipeline were 'too susceptible to environmental harm,' community acceptance of the project was nearly non-existent (not to mention the land claims processes about the land in question which had yet to be resolved), while finding little economic benefit for the region (Gamble 1978). Concluding that the risks associated with the Mackenzie pipeline far outweighed the benefits, the inquiry was able to respect Dene opposition.

The success of Dene resistance to pipeline development within a government inquiry could be understood as in line with the 'politics of recognition,' rather than resurgence. However, the powerful criticisms of colonialism voiced through the Berger Inquiry have continued to greatly influence Indigenous resistance in Canada.

The Summer of 1990

Five years after the Berger Inquiry released its findings, the Canadian constitution was rewritten in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, where section 35(I) guarantees the constitutional rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada: 'The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed' (*Constitution Act 1982,* s 35). With the precedent set by the Berger Inquiry and the protections offered by the new constitution, there seemed to be hope amongst some Indigenous peoples for better relationships with government. But 'a near decade-long escalation of Native frustration with a colonial state that steadfastly refused to uphold the rights' (Coulthard 2014: 33) guaranteed by the new constitution culminated in two national crises in the summer of 1990, what amounted to a 'rude awakening' for most Canadians (Lowman and Barker 2015: 8). The first of these crises was the collapse of the Meech Lake Accord, a constitutional amendment meant to persuade the province of Quebec to sign the 1982 constitution. Protesting the total lack of consultation with Indigenous peoples in the accord negotiations, Manitoba Cree Member of Legislative Assembly Elijah Harper initiated a filibuster days before the agreement deadline, putting an end to the accord and drawing national attention to Indigenous peoples' frustrations with the Canadian government (Coulthard 2014: 33).

The second crisis was a 78-day armed standoff between the Mohawk nation of Kanesatake and the Quebec provincial police, who were joined by the Canadian Armed Forces. Called the 'Oka Crisis,' the conflict began because the town of Oka had approved development plans to expand an existing golf course onto a Kanasatake sacred burial ground (*ibid.*).

> Galvanized by the Mohawk resistance, Indigenous peoples from across the continent followed suit, engaging in a diverse array of solidarity actions that ranged from leafleting to the establishment of peace encampments to the erection of blockades on several major Canadian transport corridors, both road and rail.
>
> (Coulthard 2014: 33)

All of this activity was a clear and very public reminder of how broken the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government and public has been. With the Oka standoff challenging Canada's sovereign right to a monopoly of force, and blockades disrupting economic activity, the –brokenness– of this relationship became impossible to ignore. The government's proposed solution was a *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP).

> Published two years behind schedule in November 1996, the 58 million dollar, five-volume, approximately 4,000-page [report] includes 440 recommendations which call for a renewed relationship based on the core principles of "mutual recognition, mutual respect, sharing and mutual responsibility."
>
> (Coulthard 2014: 35-6)

The RCAP report spoke at length of the mistrust and abuse that has permeated Indigenous peoples' dealings with the Canadian state. While a few of the RCAP recommendations did come to fruition, the ethic of mutuality that runs through the report's several hundred recommendations has yet to be taken seriously by the Canadian government. In addition to the the factors discussed above, frustration with the government's cavalier attitude towards implementing RCAP's recommendations was a part of what galvanized Idle No More. In response to such frustrations with the Canadian state, some Indigenous peoples have perused decolonization, which is the topic I turn to next as a central concept within Indigenous resurgence.

Decolonization

> Decolonization has to be about changing relationships and making them healthy, supportive, and safe, not just in spite of colonial power, but actively against it. This is inherently a prefigurative act – an instance where the pursuing of an end goal and the actual end goal are the same.
>
> *–Lowman and Barker 2015, 117*

In settler colonial contexts, conversations about decolonization often require a broadening of what the term generally evokes: "Decolonization is generally understood as a global transition of states and societies from foreign rule to sovereign status; in the case of Indigenous groups achieving a degree of self-determination, however, sovereignty was and is negotiated *within* a polity rather than *between* polities" (Veracini 2007). Within such contexts, decolonization:

> is a messy, dynamic, and a contradictory process […]. Decolonization, and the Indigenous knowledges that sustain it, are diverse and, due to the embedded nature, unique to particular contexts and geographies. […] [Likewise,] the desired outcomes of decolonization are diverse and located at multiple sites in multiple forms, represented by and reflected in Indigenous sovereignty over land and sea, as well as over ideas and epistemologies.
>
> (Sium *et al.* 2012: II)

The importance of place/context in decolonial projects is echoed by Tuck and McKenzie (2015: 11): 'Like colonization, which has shared components and instruments across sites but is uniquely implemented in each setting,

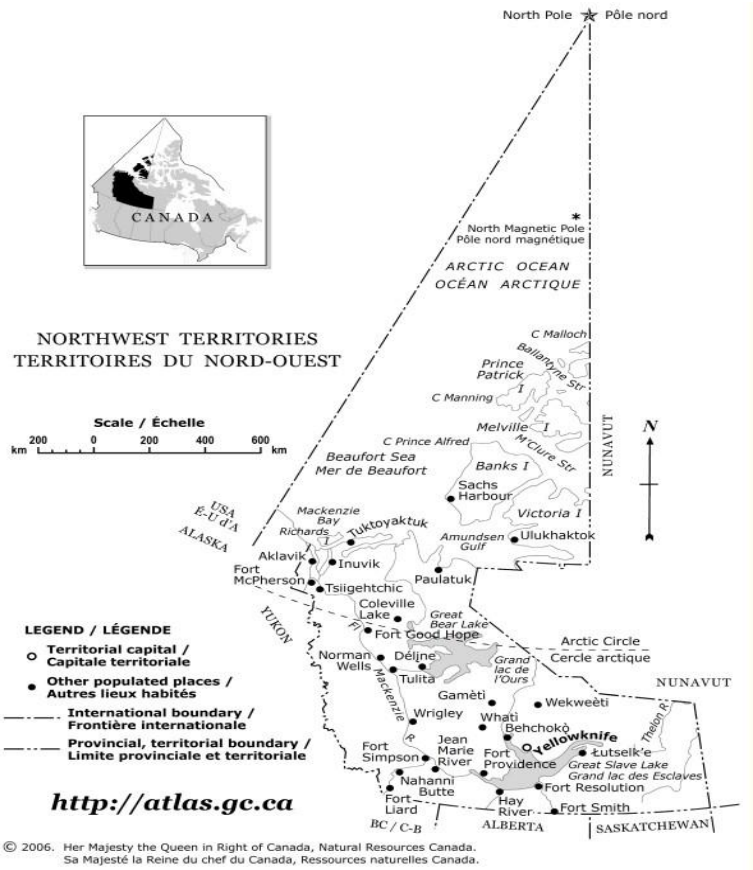
decolonization requires unique theories and enactments across sites. Thus, decolonization is always historically specific, contest specific, and place specific.' While acknowledging the above-stated importance of diverse understandings of decolonization (dictating the shape decolonization takes), the following speaks to the broad goal: 'the decolonizing project seeks to reimagine and rearticulate power, change, and knowledge through a multiplicity of epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies' (Sium *et al.* 2012: III). While these branches of philosophy have western linguistic roots, recalling the discussion on onto/epistemology in Chapter 2, I aim to unpack how we can relate differently to these 'ologies.'

Leanne Simpson says: "We cannot just think, write or imagine our way to a decolonized future. Answers on how to re-build and how to resurge are therefore derived from a web of consensual relationships that is infused with movement (kinetic) through lived experience and embodiment" (2014: 16). Decolonization is thus action, action which allows for healing (Wildcat *et al.* 2014: VII) from colonial violences.

Chapter 4
Dechinta: Bush University *in Resistance*

Dechinta University Centre for Research and Learning is situated on the shore of Blachford Lake, on unceded[9] Yellowknives Dene First Nation territory, in Canada's Northwest Territories (NWT). As 'a land-based university that address[es] critical northern issues rooted in Indigenous knowledge and values' (Freeland Ballantyne 2014: 75), Dechinta's focus is on decolonization and self-determination. Dechinta has been offering university accredited semester-long programming since 2010, in partnership first with University of Alberta and later also with McGill University. Dechinta is currently in negotiations with the Government of the NWT to become a degree-granting institution (Mothe 2015).

[9] Early traditions of treaty-making between Europeans and Indigenous people were founded on reciprocity and friendship (though, 'in Indigenous political and legal traditions, treaties are living documents describing an ongoing relationship rather than one-time political agreements that cede land' (Lowman and Barker 2015: 63)). But as the British colony and later the Canadian state began to rely less on Indigenous peoples, a new form of treaty-making emerged, which were 'negotiate[d] as land-purchase agreements- designed to provide certainty of title for mass settlement' (*ibid.*: 12). Where even these types of treaties seemed too onerous to negotiate, land was illegally annexed (*ibid.*). These illegal annexations are referred to as unceded territory.



Map 1 Map of Northwest Territories[10] (NRC 2006)

Accessible by float plane in the summer and skidoo or dogsled in the winter, Dechinta is just more than 100 kilometers away from Yellowknife, the territory's capital (Sterrit 2013). Yellowknife is in turn some 5,000 kilometers from Canada's capital of Ottawa. The NWT's distance from Canada's political and economic centres is perhaps part of what distinguishes the territory from most of the rest of Canada. For one, while Indigenous people make up between 1% and 15% per cent of the population in other regions of Canada, half of the NWT's population is Indigenous – only surpassed in proportion of Indigenous people by Nunavut (Statistics Canada 2006).

Dechinta's Inception

The establishment of a higher learning institution in the North is a product of multiple social struggles, briefly discussed in the previous chapter, over the past four decades in the NWT. Indeed, the territory's struggle for northern higher learning institution goes back least fifty years (Graham 2015). A product of this broader context of struggle for a Northern university, Dechinta emerged out of Erin Freeland Ballantyne's doctoral research. A settler Canadian woman who

[10] Note the phrasing of the Ministry of Natural Resources' copyright.

was born and raised in the northern context of Yellowknife, doing her PhD at Oxford as a 'community-directed investigation into the colliding impacts of petro-capitalism, climate change and health' in the Canadian Arctic Circle (Freeland Ballantyne 2014: 75), Freeland Ballantyne was inspired to action from having learnt the following:

> […] the schools were dampening rather than igniting the inherent burning desire of youth to learn, and that when Elders and youth gathered to learn together, the conversation always led to grappling with settler colonization and sharing ways to become stronger, to become more Dene and more healthy in resistance to these complex intrusions.
>
> (*ibid.*)

A circle of Elders, Indigenous leaders and academics came together to turn this vision into reality, founded on 'collaborative teaching between academics and Elders, and core areas critical to community well-being in the north: self-determination, sustainability, health and well-being and the processes of colonization and decolonization' (*ibid.*: 76). Needing a space to house Dechinta, Freeland Ballantyne re-envisioned the use of her family's eco-lodge 'into a community controlled space where the important theoretical work that was happening within the confines of the mainstream university could breathe new life, and perhaps new ideas, out on the land' (2014: 75).

In naming this learning space Dechinta University, Dechinta being the 'Dene word for bush or being in the bush' (*ibid.*), the choice expressly challenges dominant ideas of higher education: 'The word university was used specifically to speak back to the settler notion of 'higher' learning, as an assertion that learning on and with the land held the significance, that it 'packed weight" (*ibid.*: 75-6).

Land-Based Learning at Dechinta

At Dechinta, learning 'has at its very core the fundamental teachings that, if we take care of the land, the land takes care of us' (Freeland Ballantyne 2014: 77). Dechinta is centred around connecting theoretical and experiential land-based knowledge, with Elders being recognized and valued alongside academics as being important knowledge holders. The semester-long, 12-week, programme consists of five courses and runs for a fall, a winter and a summer semester (Dechinta *n.d.*). All students participate in a core course on community governance, offering a foundation of principles and skills that are then modeled, experimented with and reflected upon while living in community at Dechinta. Students then choose four more courses. As of the winter of 2015, the courses to choose from are:

- Sustainable Communities: Indigenous Strategies for Sustainable Self-Determination
- Communicating Denendeh
- Indigenous Law and Legal Traditions
- Contemporary Indigenous Art
- Writing from the Land

- Community Health Promotion/Popular Education/Community-Based Research
- "Our Land, Our Life" Dene Self-Determination: In Theory and In Practice 200/300
- Dene Chanie: The Path That We Walk – Traditional Leadership
- Boreal Ecology
- Boreal Field Studies
- Innovations and Perspectives for Northern Educators

(Dechinta *n.d.*)

By rooting courses within Dechinta's context, and putting different systems of knowledge in conversation with each other, abstract ideas are lived.

> We can read decolonization theory, but when we read decolonization theory while living in groups on the land, experimenting daily with self-governance and self-determination and what that means in a real way, in a safe space, decolonization can move from metaphor into something we can taste and that we can feel.
>
> (Freeland Ballantyne 2014: 84)

Theory and practice of decolonization thus co-exist and mutually inform each other.

While spending some time sitting in classrooms or around campfires, the majority of Dechinta's programming takes place outside and on the land. These land-based practices include catching and drying fish, as spoken to by Mandee McDonald's story above, tanning and beading moose hides, hunting, setting traps, preparing dry meat, learning about traditional/medicinal plant use. Yellowknives Dene scholar and Dechinta instructor Glen Coulthard calls this a 'crash course in the ethics of reciprocity' (Coulthard and Freeland Ballantyne 2011). While the layered significance of creating learning/knowing spaces that are centred around land-based practices may not be immediately clear, Freeland Ballantyne offers us the following:

> A lot of people look at what we do at Dechinta and [ask] what does moose hunting or duck hunting have to do with governance, but there is so much that goes into getting people together to look for food and how you do that and how you have to communicate and cooperate in different ways and make decisions about what direction the boat's gonna go or whether it's a good bay and you're sort of working together in this little floating microcosm and so its this really gentle way to think about what the land teaches you.
>
> (Living Out Loud 2011)

Learning/knowing is thus understood as experiential as well as theoretical, all of which is informed by the land on which learning/knowing takes place.

As integral to *what* is learned at Dechinta is *how* it is learned. As mentioned above, Dechinta challenges academia's hierarchical valuing of different forms of knowledge by having Elders and community leaders with important experiential knowledge teaching alongside scholars with PhDs. Jennifer Kingsley, a settler Canadian scholar and journalist, led a writing course

during Dechinta's pilot session. When she wasn't leading a session, she participated in Dechinta's programming alongside others and offers the following reflection on the importance of listening and of observing when learning from Elders:

> Mary seemed quiet at first. She spoke some English – and understood most things – but usually spoke North Slavey with her daughter who translated when need be. If you wanted to learn from her, you simply had to watch. And maybe follow her when she slipped off into the woods.
>
> (Kingsley 2011: 42)

Participants and instructors are thus all called upon to broaden their understandings of what it means to learn and what it means to teach.

Hierarchies within dominant education institutions are also being contested by intentionally opening Dechinta up to participants from all educational backgrounds, regardless of whether they completed secondary or primary school. Dechinta welcomes all who have a love for learning and a love for the land, whether they are Dene or not, whether they are Indigenous or not (Freeland Ballantyne 2012).

Relatedly, Dechinta students are encouraged to have their families accompany them. Alongside the central teaching role of Elders, the inclusion of families at Dechinta breaks down ageist assumptions that neither the old nor the young belong in 'academic' spaces. The principle of learning in community/with children honours the contributions of the young to learning processes. Nishnaabeg scholar and Dechinta instructor, Leanne Simpson says: 'I think that kids at Dechinta are co-learners and co-instructors; I always learn a tremendous amount from the kids there! And from watching the community paren.' (Coulthard and Simpson 2014). Including families at Dechinta also removes one of the biggest barriers in the NWT in to higher education, the distance between communities and learning institutions, at least two ways. Firstly, Dechinta combats the intergenerational legacies of the residential school system (which was discussed in Chapter 3), where schools are so intimately linked to trauma and physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Secondly, given demographic trends in the NWT, namely that women often have kids young, families are often large, and single-parenting is common, it is often not possible and/or not worth the sacrifice of leaving family and community to pursue a degree (Freeland Ballantyne 2012). In this way, Dechinta is creating learning spaces that are intentionally culturally relevant and at the same time decolonizing, because Dechinta creates a different context for learning where institutionalized education has been a prime cite of colonial violences.

As the above discussion should make clear, at Dechinta the land-based practices through which they teach give a great deal of importance to context specific knowledge. But Dechinta also draws from theory rooted in local context. Indeed, from the perspective that theoretical knowledge is most useful and potentially transformative when it can be grounded somehow in context, Dechinta programming focuses on situating learning within the history and struggles of the territory's peoples. This means learning from a diversity of

intellectual traditions. On the importance of drawing on Dene intellectual traditions, Glen Coulthard, says:

> This is political theory at its best. It's home-grown. Its not Lock or Marx. Its Dene, and that's important to start to gain pride in who you are and the sophistication of your own philosophies rather than just being forced in school to read a very European-based, white, male canon.
>
> (Living Out Loud 2011)

Thought that emerges within context and in relation with land and community is thus valued.

Central to Dechinta's learning model is the need to live theory, rather than just think about it. While tackling theories of self-determination and decolonization, Dechinta also enacts such theories by the daily collaborations involved in negotiating communal life. For instance, holding consensus-based governance circles every evening with everyone present at Dechinta creates space to work through how people are being affected by what they are learning. Dechinta instructor Glen Coulthard reflects on this:

> Part of what added to the intensity of [Dechinta] […] was that there wasn't any escaping this. The things we are asking are having an effect on you, you're learning about the effects of colonialism on your community, these things might seem pretty formidable at times but you're also thinking about alternatives. There was no […] going to the bar. There was no going home or leaving.
>
> (Coulthard and Freeland Ballantyne 2011)

When instructors and learners and their families are all living together with the purpose of learning about alternatives to colonialism, everyone involved is pushed to live, with all the tensions and contradictions that this entails, these alternatives. Dechinta alumni Siku Alloloo says: "class doesn't really end when it ends, you still get to talk to your processors after dinner, or whenever you need to, or talk to elders" (Alloloo and Hernandez 2011). Because many of these learnings are multi-layered and take time to digest, Dechinta has also incorporated a support network for students after they leave Dechinta to continue having a space to work through the implications of what the programme teaches. On living theory, Freeland Ballantyne says:

> Through the building of relationships we have a growing cohort of faculty dedicated to not just teaching but sharing in the creation of safe spaces, where the hard mental work of decolonizing in theory is met with the even harder work of decolonizing as practice. When students and faculty create a community where their relationships are ordered through their relationships with land, the work of decolonization move from a discussion in theory to practice of being and becoming a source of decolonial power. At Dechinta we debate this, and experiment with its meaning in tangible ways. Here, skills categorized as 'subsistence' or 'arts and crafts' are fundamental in forming and understanding theory. Such practices are themselves theory in action.
>
> (2014: 77-8)

Dechinta challenges dominant understandings of learning and knowing in multiple and intimately connected ways. In order to unpack how Dechinta approaches learning/knowing differently, the next chapter will address these challenges by looking at how Dechinta contests and negates binary divisions which are foundational to dominant thinking about knowledge production and learning processes in settler colonial Canada.

Chapter 5
Challenging Dominant Binaries

To situate the relevance of understanding Dechinta in terms of challenging dominant binaries, I would like to recall the discussion from Chapter 2 of Anne Waters' concept of non-discrete, non-binary dualisms. By way of deepening that discussion, Waters writes:

> Many American Indigenous nondiscreet notions of nonbinary, complementary dualist constructs of the cosmos have been diminished and obscured by colonization. A nonbinary, complementary dualist construct would distinguish two things: (1) a dualism, eg. male/female that may appear (in a binary ontology) as opposites or different from one another in some important respect; and (2) a nonbinary (complementary) syntax that puts together these two constructs without maintaining sharp and clear boundary distinctions (unlike a binary system). The maintenance of the rigid distinct boundaries of binary logic enable[s] (though may not necessitate) an hierarchical value judgment to take place (eg., mind over body or male over female) precisely because of the sharp bifurcation. A nonbinary (complementary) dualism would place the two constructs together in such a way that one would remain itself, and be also a part of the other. […] Organizing, complimentary ideas of an indigenous ontology, still survive within the ontological horizon of nonbinary, nondiscreet, dualist languages.
>
> (2002: 6)

Waters helps us situate the importance of challenging dominant hierarchical boundaries, as others have done in much feminist (Rigby 2001), postmodern (Taylor and Winquist 2001) and decolonial (Blaser 2014) thinking.

With this in mind, the following chapter will discuss how Dechinta challenges settler colonial patterns of violence and domination in Canada. It was through analysing a range of material about Dechinta, from participants and instructors, that four dominant binaries emerged as being significantly challenged by the learning/knowing practices at Dechinta. Each of the following four sections will address what is meant by the binary separation being discussed and how it perpetuates settler colonialism (What is the divide and why is it a problem? How is colonialism intimately linked to how this divide takes place?). This will be followed by a discussion of how Dechinta challenges this separation. Finally, drawing on relevant theoretical literature, the importance of challenging these binaries, within broader challenges of both settler colonialism and learning/knowing, are discussed.

Human/Nature

> The land is not only something that is under your feet, it is a relationship of mutual obligation that governs human and non-human actors over time, in a given geographical location.
>
> –*Coulthard and Freeland Ballantyne 2011*

The assumption that humanity is separate from the rest of the natural world has been at the basis of much western thinking since the Enlightenment (Santos 2007:17). The distinguishing feature that is often described as human beings' ability to reason. The ability to reason suggests not only that human beings are separate from the rest of the living and non-living world, but that humans are also superior and therefore entitled to use the rest of the world as they like (Watts 2013: 24).

> [I]n modern science the separation between nature and human beings is total. Nature is mere extension and movement. It is passive, eternal, and reversible. It is a mechanism whose elements can be disassembled and then put back together again in the form of laws. It possesses no quality or dignity, which impedes us from unveiling its mysteries. Furthermore, such unveiling is not contemplative, but quite active, since it aims at knowing nature in order to dominate and control it.
>
> (Santos 2007: 17)

By understanding humans as apart from and superior to nature, domination is not only made possible but legitimised and celebrated. Extractive capitalism is a clear example of knowledge generation for the purpose of domination and exploitation (Santos 2007). Canada is a country that relies heavily on the exploitation of natural resources for economic development (Barker 2009). Such extraction takes place in places where its effects are felt primarily by Indigenous peoples. '[Settler relationships to land] are human-centric relationships: they are about what the land can be made to give and how it can be made to give it' (Lowman and Barker 2015: 56).

Additionally, in studying European colonial history, we see that 'natives' were often considered to more closely resemble the rest of the natural world than white Europeans (Smith 2014: 2). Indeed, 'colonial dehumanization and racism […] positions Indigenous peoples as simply features *of* the landscape rather than autonomous peoples *on* the land (like the image of the noble savage, an admirable animal but not a complex human being)' (Lowman and Barker 2015: 50).

Freeland Ballantyne draws on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of deterritorialization, 'the process whereby colonization leads not just to the loss of territory but also to the destruction of the ontological conditions of the colonized culture's territoriality,' to understand how settler colonialism has disrupted Indigenous peoples' relationships with land in Canada (2014: 77). Deterritorialization, however, is being resisted at Dechinta.

By giving central importance to land-based practices, Dechinta embodies a different ontological understanding of land. The Dene understanding that

informs Dechinta's learning model responds to the basic ontological question 'what is *there* for us to know about land?' by affirming that land is much more than the ground we stand on; the land is multiple social relationships of reciprocity. Glen Coulthard describes this understanding as follows:

> Land [is], of course, identity and [is] a material means from which to subsist over time. But it was also an ethical relationship that informed what we thought good governance would look like, what we thought a good economic system would look like […] [All of which encompasses] the essence of what the land meant and this was embodied in the practices, traditional or otherwise, of being on the land, of the ethics of reciprocity that are involved in human-non-human actions in hunting, in fishing, in virtually everything you did on the land.
>
> (Coulthard and Freeland Ballantyne 2011)

He goes on to describe reciprocity as the relationships within an ecosystem, if we can remove its anthropocentric connotation, where 'the obligations you have to other actors in [the ecosystem] transcend the human/non-human binary' (*ibid.*).

The difference between teaching reciprocity while sitting at a desk in a classroom and learning reciprocity through land-based practices is the active element of building reciprocal relationships.

> Building strong relationships of reciprocity with the land results in the crumbling of settler capitalism because it fundamentally shifts the relationships people experience and what they believe about who they are, how they are in relation to and with land, and what they believe to be true. Being together on the land, learning with the land, and having a strong relationship with the land is antithetical to settler capitalism itself.
>
> (Freeland Ballantyne 2014: 76-7)

By positioning reciprocal relationships as the foundation of learning/knowing, Dechinta rejects understandings of the environment that allow for unchecked exploitation.

The importance of such challenges rooted in contextual histories and struggles is underscored by many, writing from different perspectives. Within the context of this discussion, it seems fitting to first draw on Indigenous scholars who engage in conversations about how to create space for Indigenous Knowledge within academic spaces. Echoing what has been said above about the intricate relational meanings of land that don't allow for a vision of human beings as separate or superior to the rest of the natural world from a Dene, Tuck and McKenzie affirm: 'Indigenous conceptualizations of land are diverse, specific, and particular' (2015, 11). And while the diversity of these understandings are important, they usually agree on the inseparability of humans from nature, as spoken to by Yup'ik elder Oscar Kawagley:

> The cold defines my place. Mamterilleq (now known as Bethel, Alaska) made me who I am. The cold made my language, my worldview, my culture, my technology… I grew up as an

> inseparable part of Nature. It was not my place to "own" land, nor to domesticate plants and animals that often have more power than I as a human being.
> (Kawagley 2010: xviii, as cited in Tuck and McKenzie 2015: 56)

This is also echoed by Wildcat *et al.*: 'Being present on the land provides powerful ways of seeing one's relationships to the land and other-than-humans, as well as new ways in contesting settler colonialism and its sense making mechanisms' (2014: V). From such perspectives, the division between humans and nature, which legitimises the study of land/nature in order to dominate it, looses meaning. Indeed, 'a serious engagement with Indigenous place-based ways of being exposes by contrast the destructive and profoundly unequal nature of Settler Canadian society' (Lowman and Barker 2015: 93). And beyond this, fostering reciprocal relationships with non-human actors is understood as a direct challenge to settler colonialism.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos speaks to the challenges currently facing this legitimacy of the human/nature divide within the natural sciences as well. Though a foundational principle to modern science, new research questions the rigour of this division:

> The newest findings of physics and biology question the distinction between the organic and the inorganic, between living beings and inert matter, and even between the human and the nonhuman. The characteristics of self-organization, of metabolism, and of self-reproduction, which were previously thought to be specific to living beings, are nowadays ascribed as well to pre-cellular system of molecules. Furthermore, they are ascribed traits and behaviors that were previously believed to be specific to human beings and social relations.
> (Santos 2007: 30)

This speaks to a lack of western scientific evidence to justify the definitive distinction between humans and non-humans. Dechinta, and other learning/knowing spaces that maintain the relational connections between living and non-living things, may not seek legitimation from the scientific community. Nonetheless, the above advancements in science do endorse such perspectives.

When thinking about the consequences of the dominant division between humans and nature on social inquiry, nature and place, as geographer Doreen Massey describes, is often understood as the benign and ahistorical surface where what is being researched occurs (as cited in Tuck and McKenzie 2015, 11).

> In imagining [place] as a surface upon which human life happens, it becomes possible to view other variations of human life as simply phenomena atop this benign surface; this may not at first appear to be problematic, but it is insofar as phenomena on the surface may be seen to be waiting to be discovered, conquered, but also managed, exploited, rescued, pathologized.
> (Tuck and McKenzie 2015, 13)

The importance of thinking about place is thus intimately linked to questions of how some knowledges, some perspectives came to be seen as universal, as existing outside of and detached from, the places from which they originated. This brings us to the second binary, the division between universal and local knowledge.

Universal/Local Knowledge

> The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.
>
> — *Adichie 2009*

Rooted in the Enlightenment, the scientific rationality that emerged became, through conquest and colonialism, the dominant mode of knowledge production (Mignolo 2007). 'The civilizing transformation justified the colonization of memory, and thus of people's senses of self, of intersubjective relation, of their relation to the spirit world, to land, to the very fabric of their conception of reality, identity, and social, ecological, and cosmological organization' (Lugones 2010: 745). This processed has subjugated common sense or local knowledge through the establishment of the 'positional superiority of Western knowledge,' (2012: 62) as Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith calls it.

In Canada as elsewhere, institutionalised and standardised education as the dominant learning space is a prime location for the (re)production of patterns of domination within society – intimately linked, in this case, to settler colonialism. This is so both in terms of what content is taught and how this content is taught. Deeply rooted in Western consciousness, education models in Canada have had two important effects:

> On the one hand, the pairing of colonial domination with western education has had a devastating effect on Indigenous students, contributing to a contemporary educational deficit that expresses itself in lower academic success rates and experiences of racism and alienation in the classroom. On the other, institutions of mainstream education have fostered high levels of ignorance regarding Indigenous issues within the non-Native student and educator community.
>
> (Wildcat *et al.* 2014: III)

As echoed by Mi'kmaq educator Marie Battiste (2013: 161), the 'monocultural foundation of knowledge,' on which public education in Canada is built, limits the learning potential of settler students while inflicting epistemic violence on Indigenous students.

In addition, used as a primary tool of assimilation, recalling in particular the earlier discussion of Canada's history of residential schools, institutionalised education has coincided with the removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities, as well as from the land.

It is broadly within this educational climate that Dechinta offers an understanding of what it means to learn and what it means to know that is critical of colonialism. And it is with an awareness of 'education as a largely colonial project of dispossession' (Coulthard and Freeland Ballantyne 2011) that Dechinta offers alternatives for learning.

> Weaving and articulating a process where land based education, rooted in Indigenous values, teachings and teachers, and simultaneously accredited by the university, has been and continues to be a journey which simultaneously disrupts settlers and settler colonial enclosures of 'education' while carving out space where practices which build self-determination strengthen.
>
> (Freeland Ballantyne 2014: 68)

To return to a phrase used above, Dechinta is a learning space *in resistance*, as it struggles in conversation with conventional universities elsewhere in Canada to have land-based, context-specific knowledge accepted and accredited. This takes place while simultaneously criticising such formal learning institutions for their role in upholding the notion that knowledge from certain places (articulated in certain ways) are considered universal, while maintaining the local (and thus only partial) character of other knowledges.

As was spoken to in the previous chapter, valuing the context in which ideas and knowledges are produced has by no means meant a rejection of the utility of such ideas and knowledges when they are outside of their context of origin. Instead,

> […] meaning […] is derived not through content or data, or even theory in a western context, which by nature is decontextualized knowledge, but through a compassionate web of interdependent relationships that are different and valuable because of that difference.
>
> (Simpson 2014, 11)

An understanding of these contexts of origin allow for a better understanding of what can be learned, adapted, and ultimately contextualized from knowledges that emerge elsewhere.

In creating a learning environment that blurs the distinction between local and universal knowledge, Dechinta challenges patterns of colonial domination in Canada.

> Coming back to the land is a battle. 'Education' on the land is a direct hit to the exoskeleton of continued colonial power. By specifically disrupting education as a domain of settler colonial control to be deconstructed and re-imagined, Dechinta has challenged the most comprehensive, yet skilfully cloaked machine of settler colonial capitalism - the prescriptive education process, which produces more settler colonial bodies, thinkers, and believers.
>
> (Freeland Ballantyne 2014: 76)

In this way Dechinta is reclaiming learning, in community and on the land. At Dechinta, we see that learning *need not* reproduce colonialism.

> Reconnection, and the exchange of skills, knowledge and practice with land, thus directly threaten the settler colonial project. It removes bodies from the forces designed to encode the body *as* capital. The foremost space of enclosure, of encoding, is the 'school'. The ongoing trend in Indigenous and Northern settler education since its earliest colonial intrusion has been to train Indigenous bodies to serve the needs of industry.
>
> (Freeland Ballantyne 2014: 77)

Given the importance of 'universal' knowledge within mainstream education in Canada, and the role that these learning contexts play in perpetuating colonial relationships of power, Dechinta presents a fierce and direct challenge. Succinctly, as Simpson says, 'learning changes when the relational context changes' (2014: 18).

This speaks more broadly to the underlying motivation for land-based learning, namely the 'aim to *sever* the historical and contemporary relationship between education and the reproduction of settler-colonial power and associated forms of knowledge' (Wildcat *et al.* 2014: III, emphasis added).

Simpson speaks of what learning from and with the land looks like from within Nishnaabeg worldviews. Through a land-based course she teaches as part of Trent University's PhD in Indigenous Studies, Simpson teaches manoomin (sacred wild rice) harvesting and maple sap collection for maple syrup (Coulthard and Simpson 2014). In teaching and practicing wild rice cultivation and harvesting, this learning context is intensely and intentionally linked to place. As an ancestral crop, diet staple, as well as a sacred food, the cosmological importance of this food is learned while embodying its practices. In this sense, 'the *context is the curriculum* and land, aki, is the context' (Simpson 2014: 10).

> What often gets twisted in this conception, and where possibility of failure lies, is when we fail to recognize that land, spirit, and mind are inherently connected – creating sharp separations has been an important part of the colonial project. Indigenous connections to the land are spiritual. Relationship to the land, and not in a romanticized or fetishized 'noble savage' sort of way, generates the knowledge (and theory) that is required for survival. The spiritual is not absent from theory or day-to-day decisions. Each of these (mental, spiritual, material) are wrapped up, entangled, and enmeshed in one another. Decolonization demands the valuing of Indigenous sovereignty in its material, psychological, epistemological, and spiritual forms.
>
> (Sium *et al.* 2012: V)

In short, '[dominant ways of knowing] are incredibly narrow because they are rooted in worldviews that only encompass a tiny spectrum of the possible' (Freeland Ballantyne 2012).

Mind/Body

René Descartes' famous 'I think, therefore I am' argument has no doubt had a profound effect on western thought (Hatfield 2014: 24), though perhaps this binary division has not gone as widely unquestioned as the binaries of human/nature and universal/local knowledge. At its most simple, Descartes argues that the mind and the body are distinctly separate. As Waters says at the beginning of this chapter, many of the binaries foundational to western thinking not only construct distinct divisions but also hierarchically value them. In Descartes' case, he argued for superiority of the mind over the body. Descartes' debates about 'the ontological status of mental phenomena' (*ibid.*: 334) are no doubt ongoing, though few today would adhere to the strict Cartesian mind-body binary (*ibid.*: 36). The ramifications of this division, and its contribution to the Enlightenment (Santos 2007), can be seen within mainstream thinking about education and learning, in Canada as elsewhere.

The basis of the Canadian education system distinguishes between learning that is intellectual and learning that is manual. Students often have to make choices between different educational streams as early as middle or high school. This choice is often at the exclusion of the other, meaning that choosing to pursue both intellectual and manual learning is rarely an option. This division is accompanied by dominant value judgments that position intellectual work as more important, more respected, while stigmatizing physical or manual learning (Lyons *et al.* 1991).

At Dechinta, the distinction between intellectual work and physical or manual work is blurred. This can be seen through the land-based learning activities in that a physical experience or activity, hunting for example, serves as more than simply the material result of that activity, eating in this case hunting. Hunting is the basis of so much more:

> Hunting was how you learned to read weather, it was how you learn to identify snow and plants, which animals to hunt and which to leave behind. In many ways the process of hunting was not just about getting meat but it was how governance, leadership and consensus were taught and how practices of sustainability and taking care of your community were shared. […] Here, meat was not just meat but a complex relationship that created health and wellness, taught resource management, a love of the land, animals and respect for each other.
>
> (Freeland Ballantyne 2012)

Hunting is thus both a manual learning experience, in so far as skills involved in hunting are learned, and an intellectual or theoretical learning experience, whereby governance is learning through observing and participating in the collective act of hunting.

A diversity of specialised knowledge-skills are required in many of the land-based practices at Dechinta. Settler journalist Jennifer Kingsley, who has participated in Dechinta programming and led some writing workshops at Dechinta, reflects the following:

> Moose-hide tanning is a complex procedure. Over days and weeks, the hides are scraped, stretched, soaked, wrung out, rescraped, soaked again and subjected to different types of smoking. Each of the dozens of steps is steeped in thousands of years of practice. There are no short cuts. It would take years of apprenticeship, or growing up with it, to be able to duplicate the process on your own. But that's part of what we were about to learn: you can't do it on your own. The multi-week community routine involves hunting, knife-sharpening, wood-gathering, fire-building and so on. You need someone to sharpen the knives to a scalpel edge. Others must be able to recognize the special rotted wood, called dahshaa, that gives the hide its golden colour during the final smoking. Not to mention skill in chemistry and physics to balance soap, grease, brain, water, smoke, time and hard work to turn the hide, by degrees, from white flesh into brown leather.
>
> (2011: 42-3)

The distinction between intellectual work and manual work is less easy to argue in such contexts.

In challenging the dominant perspective in which learning/education consists of a uniform transmission of 'universal' knowledge, Nishnaabe scholar Leanne Simpson writes:

> Within [the Nishnaabe learning] system there is no standard curriculum because it is impossible to generate a curriculum for "that which is given to us lovingly from the spirits" [referring to Nishnaabeg knowledge, which originates in the spiritual realm], and because it doesn't make sense for everyone to master the same body of factual information. Nishnaabeg society, in its fullest realization, requires a diversity of excellence to continue to produce an abundance of supportive relationships.
>
> (Simpson 2014: 10)

This expressly challenges the principle of standardised curriculums which dominate mainstream education.

This challenges dominant perspectives in two ways. Firstly, Dechinta's land-based learning practices challenge the widespread valuing of intellectual learning and work over manual learning and work by presenting both as foundationally important. Second, the division itself is questioned, given the importance of both manual and intellectual aspects of land-based learning. These are holistic experiences. 'Coming to know is the pursuit of whole body intelligence practiced in the context of freedom, and when realized collectively it generates generations of loving, creative, innovative, self-determining, inter-dependent and self-regulating community minded individuals' (Simpson 2014: 7). Whole body intelligence blurs the division between the mind and the body.

Indigenous/Settler

I begin this discussion of the division between Indigenous and settler people in Canada aware that this division is multifaceted and intensely emotionally

charged, given the violent nature of ongoing colonialism in Canada. While I am sure there are many aspects of this division worthy of exploration, in engaging with material about Dechinta, I have been struck by two ways in which the division between Indigenous and settler people is challenged there, both of which will first be explained. First, the Canadian government's legal interpretation of who is considered Indigenous draws the line between Indigenous and non-Indigenous in such a way that many self-identified Indigenous people are legally considered non-Indigenous. Second, Indigenous and settler people are seen as antithetical in Canada. I will unpack each of these before discussion how Dechinta challenges both aspects of this division and why it is important.

The *Indian Act*, since it was passed in 1876, has regulated the government's interpretation of its responsibilities to Indigenous peoples in the form of meager benefits, as well as unilaterally arbitrated who is entitled access to these benefits (Mann 2007). This 'status' system defines people's membership based on blood percentages, despite overwhelming evidence that understandings of community membership often have a much more fluid understanding of belonging (Gehl 2013). Over the past century and a half, the government's definition of who is Indigenous has indeed narrowed, making it more difficult for parents (and especially mothers given the gender discrimination within the *Indian Act*) to pass on legal status to their children and grandchildren. Connected to the earlier discussion of settler colonialism's 'logic of elimination,' many have criticised the narrowing of the *Indian Act's* technical definition of who is Indigenous as a way of discharging the Canadian government's already narrow interpretation of its obligations (Mann 2007).

More broadly, Indigenous and settler identities are often understood as mutually exclusive and oppositional. This evokes of the colonizer/colonized dichotomy theorised by Albert Memmi (2003), French-Tunisian considered a classical theorist of colonialism. This division 'assert[s] that identity groups are bounded by rigid behavioural or familial structures' (Lowman and Barker 2015: 17), contrary to the more nuanced discussion of identities above. This is so, returning to the discussion on settler colonialism in Chapter 3, in large part because settlers and Indigenous peoples have competing claims on the lands that make up Canada. More precisely, Indigenous claims to land directly question the legitimacy of the Canadian state. For this reason, settler colonialism's end goal is the elimination of Indigenous peoples in order to legitimately claim land. The settler colonial structure (Wolfe 2006) manifests itself at a personal level:

> Indigenous relationships to land are so profoundly challenging to Settler Canadian claims to land that the Settler reaction to being exposed to Indigenous calls for justice is to worry almost exclusively about "rescuing a settler future" and re-establishing Settler normalcy.
>
> (Lowman and Barker 2015: 93)

It is both at a structural and a personal level that settler colonialism creates this settler/Indigenous division.

At Dechinta, this division is challenged. Firstly, the vision of self-determination that is taught and lived at Dechinta challenges the *Indian Act's* authority over community membership. Recalling the above discussion of Indigenous resurgence, the act of rejecting the Canadian government's authority to determine Indigenous membership is a rejection of what Glen Coulthard calls the politics of recognition. In so doing, space is given back to communities to regulate their own understandings of membership. Through Dechinta course work, two participants, Siku Alloloo and Moses Hernandez, interviewed each other and a part of their discussion speaks to this:

> Hernandez: We're neither Dene, but we're northern. Do you see the Dechinta programme as being able to […] accommodate students that are not Dene?
>
> Alloloo: From everything I've known and experienced, the Dene people have never been exclusionary. It's always open and welcoming and making everybody a part of, and sharing. We talk about the treaties as something that was directed towards coexistence. I feel like there is a fundamental not just expectation but obligation to respect. […] I don't think you need to be Dene to appreciate this land and appreciate all the things that we're learning.
>
> (Alloloo and Hernandez 2011)

In creating space for communities to determine their own membership, an essential part of self-determination, settler colonialism is challenged.

In relation to more broad antithetical understanding of settlers and Indigenous people, Dechinta provides a context in which this oppositional division can perhaps being to be worked out *in relation* with each other. Kyla Kakfwi Scott, of Dene/settler, was Dechinta's programme manager for the first years of the bush university's existence (Gordon Foundation *n.d.*). She sees this space for being in relation as follows:

> Every time we run a programme, the community just gets bigger and bigger. Its not drawn on racial lines or territorial lines or tribal lines or any of those things, it's its own little new tribe and I feel very privileged to be a part of that, and to build that new tribe.
>
> (Living Out Loud 2011)

This is in no way implying that Dechinta erases differences that come from existing on the receiving or perpetrating end of colonial violence, or somewhere in between. It does, however, speak to Dechinta's ability to bring people into relationships with each other across those differences in ways that would elsewhere be unlikely. Settler journalist Jennifer Kingsley offers the following: 'I am still a newcomer and a southerner, but this year [at Dechinta] I feel less defined by labels and more like a person that others are coming to know' (Kingsley 2011: 44).

Perhaps indicative of navigating these relational complexities is the way in which Erin Freeland Ballanyne approaches her own layered identity as a key member of the Dechinta team.

> Raised alongside Dene siblings (both blood related and through marriage) and within a largely Indigenous community, my formative teachings of values and spiritual practice are rooted in the Dene-settler mash-up definitive of my childhood. I grew up being taught by Dene Elders to both pay the land and say my Hail Mary's in Dene. […] I learned early what white privilege was by watching how my friends and family where treated differently than I was, in a store, in school, and I continue to live that privilege daily. My familial connections do not in anyway make me 'less' of a settler. In fact, they make the ugly demarcations of class, white supremacy, hetropatriarchy – and the role of the settler in continuing to build these realities – urgently present and personal.
>
> (2014: 69)

Dechinta allows for the deep and meaningful building of relationships where the complexities of identities can be worked through in ways that embody responsibility.

The ways in which Dechinta blurs the strict division between Indigenous people and settlers in Canada challenges settler colonialism because it offers people the opportunity to relate to one another outside of the colonizer/colonized binary. This challenge is so important because it underscores the agency of settler people to choose to relate differently to Indigenous peoples and land.

> Settler, because it is a situated and process-based identity, is not foreclosed. It is not biologically determined, culturally circumscribed, or structured by a single political or economic system. It is because we, as Settler people, choose *en masse* to act as settler colonizers, to invest in peacemaker myths and narratives of pioneering frontiersmen and *terra nullius*, to believe in the multicultural promise of the Canadian identity, that settler colonizer and Settler Canadian become synonymous. These choices are swayed by the perception of great benefits in belonging to Settler Canadian society, and great few of what we might have to be if Settler Canadian society ceased to exist, but they remain choices. So, we have to power to choose to be something else.
>
> (Lowman and Barker 2015: 109)

We, as settlers, need not be colonizers. But it is in our choices, in our actions to decolonize that we have this possibility.

Chapter 6
Conclusions

My purpose in this research paper has been to explore how settler colonialism, at personal as well as structural levels, plays out in Canada. It is not about the repatriation of the constitution in 1982 or even about severing any visceral relationship to England, like having the Queen on our currency. It was about a relationship to the people on this land when settlers arrived. This analysis of settler colonialism allows us situate and better understand the criticisms presented by Indigenous resurgence and decolonization movements. I tackled this by gaining an understanding of *how* land-based learning at Dechinta challenges settler colonialism, and, more broadly, *how* we can take seriously Indigenous understandings of learning/knowing. 'Taking seriously' has meant questioning onto/epistemological differences between Indigenous and settler/western thought processes. This questioning led me to binary divisions, foundational to dominant thought, which are being challenged by the understandings of learning/knowing enacted at Dechinta. I would like to return to Mandee McDonald's story of learning to dry fish as an entry into a synthesis of how dominant binaries are challenged at Dechinta.

McDonald recounts: 'I picked up a fish, picked up a knife, and started cutting off the fins first. This is usually where Therese shares a teaching with us, about why it's important to cut the fins off as sign of respect to the fish' (2014). This is the description of a protocol that ensures respect for fish. To nurture and maintain an ethic of respectful relations with fish would seem nonsensical from a perspective that see humans as separate from and superior to the rest of the natural world. However, at Dechinta, as with many Indigenous cosmologies, relationships to land and with nature are founded on reciprocity and respect. In resisting colonial violence and assimilation that attempt to sever Indigenous peoples' relationships with land/nature, Dechinta decolonizes.

In valuing and centering a diversity of knowledges, by for example having professors teaching alongside elders, the division between universal and local knowledge is challenged at Dechinta. In its approach to learning/knowing, Dechinta demonstrates how education need not reproduce patterns of colonialism on students, be they Indigenous or settler. For Indigenous people, who have largely experienced institutionalised education as an acute form of colonial violence, being able to learn in culturally relevant contexts can also provide a healing space.

As a land-based programme, Dechinta also blurs the line between physical and mental work through teaching hunting, for example, as a subsistence activity as well as an avenue into understanding reciprocal relationships with land and other living beings.

Dechinta also creates a space where deep and meaningful relationships can be built across complex identities and in community in such a way that

people, Indigenous people and settlers and other non-Indigenous people, can begin to relate to each other differently, with responsibility and respect. 'For Settler Canadians trying to decolonize, the fundamental, difficult, necessary, and likely life-long challenge is to figure out how to *stop colonizing*' (Lowman and Barker 2015: 114).

For me, this has been a process of unlearning, of wanting to better understand, in the hope of more responsibly and respectfully engaging in the relationships that this research has underscored as so important. Through this engagement with Dechinta, albeit from a distance, I have learned that we can relate to each other and to the land differently. But learning how to step out of inherited patterns of domination means we need to unlearn. And for this task, Indigenous cosmologies and worldviews like the Dene perspectives that inform learning/knowing at Dechinta have a great deal to teach us.

In reading an earlier version, my father's comment to me was that this paper had shifted his thinking about Canada. On one level, this has been my goal, to be opening up difficult conversations that break through the silences of settler colonialism.

In development thinking and practice, we are often faced with many of the same complexities I have tried to nuance here in the Canadian context. How does a questioning of relational identities challenge those of us 'in' development? In both theory and practice, development often reproduces the dominant binaries I have begun to unpack above. But perhaps too often, we shy away from messy questions. We are comfortable in our 'Free Tibet Syndrome.'

Erin Freeland Ballantyne speaks to what can be learned in relation to learning/knowing processes (educational spaces): 'Raising academic standards [means] really pushing the boundaries of what we consider to matter in terms of knowledge' (2012). Environmental educator David Orr writes:

> Toward the natural world [our education] emphasizes theories, not values; abstractions rather than consciousness; neat answers instead of questions; and technical efficiency over conscience. It is a matter of no small consequence that the only people who have lived sustainably on the planet for any length of time […] do not make a fetish of reading. My point is simply that education is no guarantee of decency, prudence, or wisdom. More of the same kind of education will only compound our problems. This is not an argument for ignorance, but rather a statement that the worth of education must now be measured against the standards of decency and human survival – the issues now looming so large before us in the decade of the twenty-first century. It is not education that will save us, but education of a certain kind.
>
> (David Orr 2004: 8)

What kind of learning/knowing can allow us to better live together? To decolonize? I see these musings as invitations to lean *in* to the discomfort of asking difficult and self-implicating questions, as development

thinker/practitioner, as educator, as settler. I believe here we have something important to learn from Dechinta.

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Appendix 1: Dechinta Materials

Dechinta materials for analysis:

Author/ Speaker (relation to Dechinta)	**Date**	**Title**	**Format**	**Link**
Siku Alloloo & Moses Hernandez (Participants)	2011	Dechinta Student Series	Video: Participant interviews at Dechinta	https://vimeo.com/25205315
Glen Coulthard & Erin Freeland Ballantyne (Instructors)	2011	Education, Community Initiatives and Mainstream Institutions	Video recorded lecture: Critical Issues in Aboriginal Life and Thought Lecture Series, University of British Columbia	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laAKxd2ZFjI
Glen Coulthard & Leanne Simpson (Instructors)	2014	Dechinta Bush University, Indigenous land-based education and embodied resurgence	Audio recorded interview with Eric Ritskes: *Decolonization Journal Blog*	https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2014/11/26/leanne-simpson-and-glen-coulthard-on-dechinta-bush-university-indigenous-land-based-education-and-embodied-resurgence/
Glen Coulthard (Instructors)	2015	'Land is a Relationship': In conversation with Glen Coulthard on Indigenous nationhood	Recorded Interview with Harsha Walia: *Rabble.ca*	http://rabble.ca/columnists/2015/01/land-relationship-conversation-glen-coulthard-on-indigenous-nationhood
Dechinta	n.d.	Dechinta Website		http://dechinta.ca/

Participants' blog	Various	Blog	Reflective participant blogs	http://dechinta.tumblr.com/
Erin Freeland Ballantyne (Instructor)	2014	Dechinta Bush University: Mobilizing a knowledge economy of reciprocity, resurgence and decolonization	Published academic article: *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*	
Erin Freeland Ballantyne (Instructor)	2012	Intergenerational Equity & Decolonization: An argument for Love in an Era of Rapid Environmental Change	Audio recorded lecture: *18th International Symposium on Society and Resource Management*, University of Alberta	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEa_gV86jfc
Jennifer Kingsley (Journalist/workshop leader)	2011	What I Learned at Bush U	Magazine article: *Up Here Magazine*	http://www.jenniferkingsley.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/up-here-dechinta-sept2011-pdf.pdf
Various Dechinta Participant and Instructors	2011	Living Out Loud	Radio Show: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation	http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2173701581
Mandee McDonald (Programme Manager)	2014	ácimostawin	Published creative nonfiction: *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*	
Peter Mothe (Journalist – non-visitor)	2015	Dechinta makes expansion "an election issue"	Newspaper article: *Edge*	https://edgeyk.com/article/dechinta-makes-expansion-an-election-issue/
Angela Sterrit (Journalist – non-visitor)	2013	Dechinta Bush University: Learning off the Land	Newspaper article: *The Tyee*	http://thetyee.ca/News/2013/10/22/Dechinta-Bush-University/>

Matthew Wildcat, Mandee McDonald, Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox and Glen Coulthard (Instructors)	2014	Learning from the land: Indigenous land based pedagogy and decolonization	Published academic article: *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*	
Spring semester 2015 participants	2015	Stories from the land	Podcast series created by Dechinta participants: *Indians and Cowboys*	http://www.indianandcowboy.com/episodes/dechinta?rq=dechinta