

# Reversing the Gaze onto my Queer Settler-Canadian-ness: A Dialogical Encounter with my Other

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**Abstract:** Using critical autoethnography, informed by Critical Race Theory and Marxist theory, as the research methodology, I explore my dual existence both as a disruptor and facilitator of settler-colonialism mediated by neoliberal capitalism. I realize that my racialized and sexualized existence as a settler immigrant, in a land that centralizes whiteness, is implicated in the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples. Even my activist drive to support Indigenous struggles stems from my settler desires to succeed, while my frontline work in queer refugee resettlement leads to homonationalist citizenship. My education in social work only stamps settler-colonialism. This is the story of many settlers, from the marginalized to those who think and act progressively: The market absorbs us to maximize profit. The question that permeated this engagement is: How does capitalism spectacularly put everybody to work, reaping its harvests? I propose that settlers—queer and straight—learn from Indigenous worldviews in working against capitalism.

**Keywords:** Queer/LGBTQ+ refugee resettlement, homonationalism, settler-colonialism, Indigenous Peoples, racism, homophobia, social work

This is my memoir of pain, resilience, and hope. It embodies my everyday existence. Life takes some most unexpected turns and I have captured a tiny part of it in this narrative. I have been called many names: “faggot,” “girly boy,” “a waste of life,” “smart,” “an exception,” “dirty Paki,” “f\*\*king Jane ‘n’ Finch guy.” Many years have passed since I faced physical and emotional violence in my home country and homophobic violence at an institution of higher education in Canada, but the pain is indelible. Through my body I voice my memory and experiences. Accumulated over time, they are like things in a bag. When the bag becomes your body, its weight wears you down (Ahmed, 2017). Nobody, at times not even you, can notice it.

Like a deer running towards a mirage looking for water, I ran away, from one country to another and landed on a land that claimed to be a “safe haven” for queers. But it was in this land that I understood what it meant to be racialized—second-rated and not fully human—and where came the final blow in the form of homophobia that shattered my dreams of success and made me sick. At a centre that supported teaching, my presentation on homosexuality and inclusiveness was deemed “sensitive,” “controversial,” “inappropriate,” and “immoral.” I have reclaimed these as my “death by four words,” which I will revisit in my narrative analysis. This death and my newly acclaimed status as a “dirty Paki” led to my new birth.

In embracing my agonizing pain at the intersection of racism and homophobia I have questioned my existence as a displaced, racialized gay man from a former British colony, as well as its paradox, being a sexualized and racialized citizen on the stolen and being-stolen land of Indigenous Peoples. It is through this pain that I have realized how I have become the necessary glitter for the homonationalist queer spectacle and how I have ended up being both a disruptor and a facilitator of settler-colonialism. This is where I finally met my Other, the shadow in the

depth of darkness that is hidden, slippery, dubious, and enigmatic. It symbolizes my paradoxical existence that is commodified and fostered by the neoliberal market. Learning from Foucault's approach of "making the familiar visible," (Chambon, 1999, p. 1) this is an attempt to capture my Other, not merely as an individual or individualizing entity, but as an intersecting process and a product of social, political, cultural, and economic forces. I have employed critical autoethnography as my research methodology in this soul-probing endeavour to scan a) my expectations and experiences of Canada as a safe haven, and b) the reinventing of myself through my work with LGBTQ+ newcomers that propagates settler-colonialism, thus dispossessing Indigenous Peoples.

This is the story of the many settlers—the marginalized and made invisible—yet at the forefront of the Hunger Games (Collins, 2008), in a violent market that commodifies their bodies. There are others who perform "diversity dances" in this "land of opportunity." Most of these, vanquished and victors, are unaware that they are uninvited guests on stolen land (Palmater, 2015). This is also the story of a third category, who believe that they act "progressively"—from queer to anti-capitalist—at the grassroots and in social work spaces, taking for granted the fact that their work can add to the legitimization of settler-colonial citizenship. I swing through all these categories, both as a pawn and a benefactor of the insidious operatives of market capitalism.

### **Critical Autoethnography (CA)**

I have used CA as my research methodology because of its allowance for transformative disruptions that are "moments of discomfort and disquiet that provide hidden wisdom or access to complicated truths" (Friedman, 2017, p. 100). I have reflected on such complicated and buried truths through my dialogical encounter with my Other, as I see CA as having the potential to transform personal experiences into universal human experiences (Mendez, 2013). Drawing upon multiple layers of consciousness and identities within the self (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010), CA has helped me look reflexively at myself as a continuum being fed by, as well as feeding, the system. My experiences of racism and homophobia, and of multiple identities and roles, are revisited in the context of my presence on Indigenous land.

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

CRT has been relevant to my theorizing of re-queering the refugee other in the settler-colony of Canada, as it positions race as imperative in understanding, theorizing, and deconstructing the discourses of exclusion and oppression in the white supremacist world (Gillborn, 2006). Crenshaw (1989) introduced the concept of intersectionality and added gender into race and class analysis. Based on her interview with Crenshaw, Omokha (2021) stressed that race becomes *real* through such social constructions. CRT also allows me to understand whiteness and white supremacy as a dominant social construct, and as a hegemonic discourse, working on racialized bodies to align them for capitalist accumulation. Canadian citizenship as the pinnacle of the queer refugee journey of resettlement is perceived as synonymous with whiteness. Queer refugees are permitted to achieve this feat under a strictly regulated refugee determination process that keeps checking their credibility, identity, and criminal records. I call this process

“re-queering the already queer.” Mulé (2020) named the effect of this re-queering as recolonization, questioning Canada’s claim to be a safe haven. Both this sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) based refugee process and its end product, the sexual citizenship, are then re-used to legitimize settler-colonialism that recolonizes the re-queered queer other, who are at the same time implicated in colonizing Indigenous Peoples. This is indeed a “Hunger Game” (Collins, 2008) in which I am implicated through my roles as a frontline worker, as a researcher and as an activist.

### **Marxist Theory**

That the exploitation of labour underscores the machinery of Canada’s safe haven branding (Murray, 2016) and its underlying luring of the racialized queer-other into the country makes Marxist theory imperative in this study. Wolf (2009) situated queer oppression as one of modern capitalism’s numerous contradictions. Capitalism, creating material grounds for people to live independent sexual lives, regulates economic, social, and sexual order with heteronormative criteria. Commodified labour is bought and sold for profit. Social relations are determined by the market, which fosters racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and many other social divisions to manipulate the working classes. Marxist theory sheds light on the intrinsic connection between social relations and the means of production. It explains why skyrocketing social and economic disparities are the inevitable result of class privilege and the exploitation of labour.

Carlin (2007) explained that as a social institution, the family has always been utilized to integrate sexuality into classed societies in which rigid sex norms were established. Even though gender and sexuality are fluid phenomena, cis-heteropatriarchal norms make them appear to be fixed and pushed aside as the “deviant other,” with the advent of the morally coded nuclear family. With Marxist theory, I have critiqued the commodification of the refugee-queer-other so they may be unleashed into the market using the regulatory mechanisms of settler-homonationalism.

### **Data Collection and Contextualization**

The data for this research were gathered from my personal records and memories. The data about racism are two disparaging remarks hurled at me by complete strangers. The data about homophobia were derived from a homophobic incident that took place at an institution of higher education. Even though these incidents took place over a decade ago, racism and homophobia are common everyday experiences for myself and the queer refugees I work with. I tried to situate my experiences within the pertinent social, economic and political contexts.

### **The Disappearing Honeymoon**

I had a lot to catch up with on my journey of Canadianization. I remember being pleasantly surprised by the politeness of my new acquaintances. Those I met at the institution of higher education chose their words carefully—they were so politically correct. I had to learn how to speak in a monotone even when I got passionate. Questions about my country of origin often came up: Some were relieved that I was not a “Tamil Tiger,” for during the time of the Sri

Lankan civil war, Tamil people in Toronto organized mass protests against the oppression of Tamils back home. After a brief period of feeling good about such compliments, I questioned them, “does it matter?” adding that I am a Sinhalese who supported the Tamil liberation struggle.

“People of colour” were deployed to celebrate multiculturalism while national holidays and grand celebrations followed the Christian calendar, reminding me of the substructure of Canadian settler-colonial identity. Watching Canada Day celebrations, I learned that Columbus “discovered” North America and that early white settlers were “explorers” and “founding fathers.” I got used to such pomposity as I was integrating into Canadian society. The booklet that I studied for my citizenship test (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005) highlighted that “Canadian values include freedom, respect for cultural differences and a commitment to social justice. We are proud of the fact that we are a peaceful nation” (p. 7). I wondered whether there was any commitment to justice for the First Peoples. The erasure of Indigenous history and their enduring presence was evident: “Throughout Canada’s history, millions of immigrants have helped build our country” (p. 8). Such empty rhetoric evaporated as I *discovered* Canada, like judiciously peeling an onion. When did counting history begin? Whose land is this anyway? How can Canada claim to be a peaceful nation while exerting so much violence in dispossessing the Indigenous Peoples who have been the guardians of this land for millennia?

It was shocking to see how some of my new white gay friends portrayed Indigenous Peoples with varied negative stereotyping. I quickly learned how Black people were brutalized and labelled as dangerous, while South Asians were characterized as smelly. I took extra showers, just in case my South Asian-ness had given me some endemic body odors. Advised by Sri Lankan friends, I dared not fry sprats or dried fish, or cook certain curries, fearing that the smells would antagonize my neighbours. At a blood donation event my blood was refused when I said I was gay. By default, my gay blood was deemed dangerous. It was the same for those who were born and lived in any African country, or even married to someone who lived or travelled in Africa. I had to work extra hard and prove myself to be considered on par with Canadian-born, and especially white, colleagues. Uninvited volunteers tried to correct my English pronunciation and accent. Sometimes I received compliments:

“Wow you are smart!”

“We need people like you to come to this country!”

“Your English is very good!”

I beamed with happiness and pride at such compliments, only realizing when re-reading them what they really meant. I was an exception to the people of my kind, who are not as smart as white people, and a burden on White Canada. These compliments were in fact micro-insults, which are forms of microaggression. When I responded they would get angry, accusing me of not being “grateful” and being “too sensitive”: I was expected to correct my “hyper-sensitivity.” These situations led to so many self-doubts, and my seriously questioning who I was, what I was, and why I was here. I had nowhere else to go, but I could not be fully myself here either. What was the mirage I was running after? In subsequent years, battling with depression, I

pondered my eternal in-between-ness. Then my inner voice commanded, “STOP running away!”

### **Racist Attacks**

“You dirty Paki.”

Once a white man almost jabbed me, when I asked him to stop making derogatory remarks against a woman who was perceived to be Asian. She and I, among others, were waiting for a bus. “Go back to China,” he was yelling at her. I shielded her until the bus arrived and his anger turned towards me. I was shocked, scared, and upset, not only by these remarks being aimed first at the woman and next at me, but also by the golden silence of the bystanders.

“You f\*\*king Jane ‘n’ Finch guy!”

Another white male, screaming, started chasing me at a subway station in Toronto. It was late at night and he appeared to be tipsy. I managed to run quicker than he to save myself. Again, bystanders remained silent as if nothing was happening. Eizadirad (2017) reminded me of the negative racial stereotypes that defined Toronto’s Jane and Finch neighbourhood. Urban planners and policymakers characterized it as a “priority neighbourhood,” a sanitized tag that alerts one to urban geographies of poverty and destitution leading to crime and violence. Jane and Finch is often portrayed as a “diverse” neighbourhood—a leftover spatiality occupied largely by Black and racialized people, including immigrants. Interlocking systems of domination, oppression, and surveillance are stamped and fortified by the uneven geographies of white supremacist violence, while constantly casting the gaze onto its victims.

Some of my Black LGBTQ+ newcomer clients had much worse experiences of racism. A Black gay male client once told me that a white man cursed him while spitting on him three times in the presence of onlookers. Another Black male client ended up in hospital with a broken arm and leg when he was attacked at the shelter where he was staying. A Black female client was asked to leave her shelter within two hours because she was deemed “dangerous to others,” having had a meltdown after being repeatedly abused because of her skin colour and accent.

My self-doubt led to a form of “double consciousness,” which Du Bois (1903/2007, p. xiii) theorized with reference to the racial oppression faced by African American people and the devaluation of their humanity in a white-dominant society. I felt I *am* and yet I am *not*. How hurt I was when my long and “unpronounceable” name brought laughter, even in “progressive” academic spaces! A white gay friend freely renamed me “Randy,” because he could not be bothered to pronounce my name. Only later did I find out that this re-naming also had a sexualized connotation. Racial violence was so pervasive that for my safety, I developed a fortified self and behaviour, while accepting a second-rate life in the multicultural paradise of Canada.

## **Homophobia in the Safe Haven**

While my dreams of the “free life” were being shattered one by one, I still clung to the hope and excitement of living my life legally as a gay man. I no longer had to wear a straight mask. I became gay—inside out. My early visits to the Gay Village in Toronto—to be with kindred spirits—quickly wakened me from my fantasy. At the gay bars I felt and was treated as a stranger. I did not know what to do or how to mix and mingle in the very white gay scene. Some said that they could not understand my English accent. I was also exoticized for and by the gay white gaze, while having racist and patronizing remarks hurled at me, and receiving unfriendly stares at gay bars, restaurants, and queer social events. Still, I enjoyed browsing gay websites and chatting online without the fear I had back home. These little moments in which I could express my desires about sex and intimacy were incredibly important in my self-acceptance as a gay man. There was a lot of internalized homophobia to be undone. Yet, it was not an all-accepting gay scene—at times I was rejected because of my skin colour and South Asian racial identity. My name sounded Indian for some. I was often asked why rice and curries were so spicy, whether Sri Lanka had been part of India, or whether I spoke any Indian languages.

My attempts to connect with my own ethno-racial community became futile as I was laughed at and questioned for being such an “eligible” bachelor. Some even promised to find me a fine bride. In such ghettoized enclaves there was no space to be my gay self. I cut them off completely and opted to live in isolation.

The most horrific homophobic attack happened at the most unlikely place, at the centre for support of teaching at the institution of higher education where I was a PhD student. A presentation on sexuality and inclusiveness, to which I brought my lived experiences using storytelling as a pedagogy, ended with homosexuality being portrayed as

“Sensitive,”  
“Controversial,”  
“Inappropriate,” and  
“Immoral.”

Their justification was forthcoming: A safe and respectful environment had to be ensured, as some of those in that audience may have come from cultures in which homosexuality was taboo. A clause was added to the teaching centre’s website, dictating the steps to be taken to obtain prior approval for presenting such topics. I collapsed, mentally and physically, as my core identity was dehumanized. The subsequent fight for some justice ended with me having to quit my doctoral studies. Agonizing epistemic violence ensued in the subsequent months and years, when trying to access the cis-heteronormative mental health system. My life and career plans were shattered. From once being an acclaimed yet deeply closeted university teacher I became a nobody in this grandiose “safe haven” for queers.

### **The Interstice: The In-Between Niche**

In what I term this *lost world*, with my legality as a gay man as my sole possession, I went searching for social connections through community work. I studied mental health counselling at a college and reinvented myself as a frontline worker with LGBTQ+ refugees and newcomers at a community health centre. This program became popular and I became heavily involved in the LGBTQ+ refugee resettlement sector. I organized group and individual resettlement support sessions, providing clients with information and referrals.

The key components of my work included assisting those who were in their refugee claim processes to become convention refugees, and then permanent residents and Canadian citizens. I presented at numerous venues and organized Pride celebrations and Pride marches with my client population. I was recognized for my work. I went back to university to study social work formally and also assisted another social service agency in setting up a new program for LGBTQ+ refugees.

In my new full circle of life, I repositioned myself as an activist and service provider. In activist and academic spaces, I questioned the violence and duplicity in the Canadian queer refugee processes and Canada's safe haven rhetoric. Yet, in my frontline work, I championed the same processes that I kept questioning. I realized that as long as I was in the system as a service provider whose work was funded by the state, I had no escape from living a dual life. My existential crisis stemmed from the realization of how my work, including my desire for justice, only ended up legitimizing settler-colonialism, leading to the genocide of Indigenous Peoples.

Who am I? What am I doing? Where am I going? How does the market swallow my desires for justice, and reproduce them in humanistic-sounding, zombie sequels to maximize profit? As our entire existence is spatial, how can I re-cast my multiple settler-selves—disruptor, promoter, and anywhere in between—in any way that does not harm Indigenous Peoples?

### **Analysis: The Dialogue with My Other**

“You dirty Paki!” How and why have I become particularly “dirty,” or dirtier than a white body? Why was I seen as a “Paki”? How does the white gaze terrorize and consume my brown and male (non-disabled) body in its loud white supremacist devouring and moving to innocence?

Said (1993) helped me unpack some of these questions, also in relation to CRT, writing that both imperialism and colonialism are driven by ideological formations—ideas that certain geographies and their people “*require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination” (p. 9). Thus, the English vocabulary included such terms as “‘inferior’ or ‘subject races,’ ‘subordinate peoples,’ ‘dependency,’ ‘expansion,’ and ‘authority’” in re-establishing imperial experiences; in so doing, “notions about culture were clarified, reinforced, criticized, or rejected” (p. 9). My gut response to the white male's hateful racist violence against the “Asian-looking” female unleashed his anger. When I challenged him over the enjoyment of his privilege, I became dirty and a *Paki*—a derogatory term that originated in

the UK to attack Muslim Pakistani people which has been imported to Canada to attack South Asians (Khan, 2012). In his re-naming of myself and bodies like mine, the white man cleansed himself and his kind with such ease. The dirty whiteness moved to innocence, became invisible, while its pervasive yardstick that ensured its gaze was always cast on the other—Indigenous, Black, and racialized.

In subordinating, othering, re-labelling, and violating me so authoritatively and publicly, the perpetrator reiterated the supremacy of his white race. In succumbing to inferiority, numbness and subordination, I did not (or could not?) think, even in my most daring dreams, of screaming at the “Master”: “you dirty Whitee.” Fanon (1963/2004) aptly reminded me that “confronted with the world configured by the colonizer, the colonized subject is always presumed guilty” (p. 16). Deep down in my psyche I found my internalized white supremacy which I needed to dismantle.

The violence embedded in yet another racist attack, “you f\*\*king Jane ‘n’ Finch guy,” and my response—flight—falls into the same analysis. I chose only to flee and save my “dirty Paki”-ed and ghettoized, “Jane ‘n’ Finch” body from a shaming public exhibition. My constant flight from violence, and my fortified self and behaviour leading to a second-rate life in this (un)civilized, white Canada, sheds lights on the double-consciousness of myself and other Black and racialized bodies. Racial segregation under surveillance, from Jane and Finch to Indigenous reserves and residential schools, are essential spatial denominators of accumulation by dispossession, which Harvey (2003) explained as integral to material, ideological, social, and spiritual denigration. They make racialized bodies both invisible and visible as needed. My dirty Paki self, f\*\*kingly ghettoized in Jane ‘n’ Finch, is thus integral not only to my race and racialization through white supremacy, but also to the capitalist mode of production. While racist police hunt for “dangerous” Black and racialized bodies, strategically positioned multinational corporate outlets prey on their easily disposable labour.

Those racist screams denote the invincible hegemonic power of whiteness, which at the same time becomes invisible or unmarked through the workings of the system. Those who swiftly corrected my accent and renamed me Randy reminded me that I am a dangerous or exotic outsider in their colonial space, thus the urgency to assimilate. The frequent remark, “If you don’t like it here, go back to your home country!” warned me to obey, accept, and adhere to their ways, i.e., join the settler-colonial genocide of Indigenous Peoples in legitimizing the “peaceful” and “peace-loving” white supremacist nation. Those who praised me for being smart are actually telling me that I am not only an exception among the less smart people of my kind, but also on the “right path” to align queer refugees to hunt down Indigenous land as they resettle.

Weaving along the same precincts of Marxist theory and CRT, Dua et al. (2005) shed light on racist violence, such as I have faced. They adopted Canada as a unique site to investigate race, racism, and empire for two reasons. The first is Canada’s history of conquest, genocidal settler-colonialism, and white settlement policies deployed to settle people of colour through racialized immigration policies within free market capitalism. The second is that Canada propagates a national mythology of a nation devoid of racism, under the pretext of multiculturalism and

global peacekeeping, while being a peripheral site within the western hegemony. Bringing in Foucault's concepts of power, identity, and discourse, Dua et al. (2005) explained how locations of race and racism in culture, modernity, and whiteness often concealed kinship of race and racism with capitalism. Canada plays its role in maintaining the global racial order of white dominance, which provides the grounds for the flow of capital and extraction of labour and resources. In the same vein, Bannerji (2005) helped me understand how race and class are interlaced through the embodiment of the racialized other, stating that race represented in whiteness is colonial, racist, and capitalist. Hence, the constant pushing to the margins characterized the necessary venom being injected to make Indigenous, Black, and racialized bodies numb—and stay numb—for the easy extraction of their labour, through colour-coded jobs. Yet, it does not stop there. I will next explain what happens when these bodies disrupt cis-heteropatriarchal genders and sexualities.

### **What is in the Codifying? Theorizing the Homophobic Violence**

“Sensitive.” “Controversial.” “Inappropriate.” “Immoral.” As I revisit these, the most haunting and daunting four words of my life that symbolically killed me, I glance through the necrology Janoff (2005) has provided in his book *Pink Blood: Homophobic Violence in Canada*. “Stabbed 146 times ... Throat slashed ... Strangled/stabbed in the heart with a butcher knife” (p. xii). “Bludgeoned with branches and a baseball bat ... Beaten/thrown off a high rise” (p. xiii). These are some of the ways in which murderers ravaged the 112 queer bodies listed there. Numbers do matter, and yet they do not. These were precious lives. Just one kill is already one too many. Where does this unfathomable rage come from? *Why?*

Providing a Marxist analysis of sexual capitalism, Reynolds (2018) began by remarking that fundamentally social relations are formed, in contemporary capitalist societies, by class struggles in which the flow of capital over labour dominates. Structures and discourses that promote and constrain sexuality and sexual politics situate unequal institutional pedagogies, power, and knowledge dynamics not merely as key drivers, but “as the hegemonizing strategies by which class power is retained, consent is manufactured and new opportunities for capitalist markets are produced” (p. 700). This is simply because “the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society” (Marx & Engels, 1848/1992, p. 6). The cis-heteropatriarchal family as the basic unit not only of (settler) social relations but also of labour, authenticated by intertwined social, legal, economic, and religious apparatuses, which perpetually dictate socio-sexual and gender-ed behaviours, stemmed from this inherent binding to capital. Hence the “normal”—from social conduct to sexualities—are marketed and should always be marketable. Furthermore, the institutional industrial academic complex in the 21st century “safe haven,” like all other systems at work, must ensure the free flow of the market, barring “sensitive,” “controversial,” “inappropriate” and “immoral” sexualities from even being discussed.

Dee (2010) stressed the need to look at the family as an institution rooted in class societies in order to understand how discourses on sexuality, gender, and sex are constructed and how they impose what is “normal.” For example, colonizers treated two-spirit people among the

Karankawa Nation in Texas with sheer disgust. Gender was coded as male and female, sexualities surveilled to be monogamous and male-centred across colonial empires. Mbembe (2003) coined the term “necropolitics” to explain that “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (p. 11). This explains precisely how and why Janoff’s (2005) necrology of *Pink Blood*, and my symbolic *death-by-four-words* are tied to, produced by, and intensify the capitalist market.

### **Violence: From Codifying to Commodified...**

In my much-hyped role as a settlement worker, my reincarnated life does exactly the same—by accelerating the “integration” of the queer refugee-other. I sold my death and reaped profit. I maximized my profit with a pseudo-activist twist. I created new programs, luring Black and racialized LGBTQ+ refugee people from far and wide. My resume swelled, leading to more prospects, not surprisingly, including graduate studies in social work, with a state-funded scholarship. Here I envelop myself in Reynolds’ (2018) exposition of Marxist analysis of sexual capitalism. In my journey of being a closeted sissy-boy-faggot to an out-and-proud ardent promoter of settler-homonationalism, I have reused my sexuality and lived experiences for “commodification and consumption, reification, cultural production and meaning-making that compose contemporary subjectivities” (p. 696) in order to both decode and recode social, political, and legal regulatory apparatuses that legitimize the genocide of Indigenous Peoples.

In this neoliberally capitalist *Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 1983), the intensity of commodification reaches a point where commodification becomes life itself, hence all our social relations. The spectacle absorbs humanity so that humans, like zombies, are entirely subjugated by the economy. “It is the true reflection of the production of things, and the false objectification of the producers” (Debord, 1983, para. 16). From bottled water to oxygen boosters, to packeted soil, to rainbow flags, to dogs, cats, snakes, crocodiles and tigers, to kidneys, plasma and wombs, to our labour—racialized, re-queered, and re-civilized—all are sucked into this black hole, propelling it ever onwards. This is my work. I am a zombie breeding zombies. This is where I meet and *meat* my other.

### **Situating my Settler-Self on Stolen Land**

“It’s always all about the land,” stated Lowman and Barker (2015, pp. 48–68), explaining that land is at the root of any issue involving Indigenous guardians and settler-thieves. They highlighted that “Canada, as a nation and a state, is dependent on the land taken away from Indigenous nations, land that those nations still contest, and colonialism is all about the need to secure those lands at all costs” (p. 3). This includes the elimination of Indigenous Peoples. Without the long history of treaty-making and the massive land masses the treaties covered, Canadian geographical borders would not have materialized (Morin, 2005).

For settlers, land is a commodity that is personally owned, to be consumed, built on, dismantled, sold on, reduced to individual ownership and properties, while for Indigenous Peoples land is existential and sacred, evoking multiple and profound meanings. Soils, waterways, minerals, trees, animals, sky, moon, sun, humans, connect with Mother Earth in a shared continuum.

Quoting Kimmerer (2017), Borrows (2018) stated that in Potawatomi language the list of inanimate things is much smaller: “Rocks are animate, as are mountains and water and fire and places. Beings that are imbued with spirit, our sacred medicines, our songs, drums, and even stories, are all animate” (p. 52), making the perception of time multi-dimensional, animate, sacred, and *spatial*. On the contrary, for settlers, time is money and is measured in linear segments. As Anishnaabe Elder Fried Kelly expounded, “to take the territorial lands away from a people whose very spirit is so intrinsically connected to Mother Earth was to actually dispossess them of their very soul and being” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 225). The country that I have landed in has been built by ridding the custodians not only of their sacred land, but also of *time*. Only when considering space and time in their intrinsic unity and multi-dimensionality can I begin to realize the collective trauma of this dispossession.

One of my first positioning steps should be to undo my colonial understanding of land as a commodity, which is at once a resistance to capitalism. Giving back land for the guardianship of Indigenous Peoples requires a fight to take back humanity beyond capitalism. Leons (1984) provided a profound worldview that Indigenous Peoples’ responsibility is to see to the welfare of the land and all its life. Once the equality of all the elements of life on this land is recognized and respected, we should not take anything more than is needed for our sustenance.

Corntassel (2008) underscored the importance of the guardianship of land as being integral to *sustainable* self-determination. He warned of the Indigenous rights-based discourse in which global organizations and states including Canada have vigorously contested Indigenous claims to self-determination. The desire for state recognition of political and legal rights, without giving back land, without asserting community-based powers of sustainable self-determination, has only exacerbated the collective trauma of some Indigenous Peoples. Sustainable self-determination restores Indigenous ways of life that include spirituality as the highest pillar of politics and interdependence as the base, responsibilities to the natural world, evolving Indigenous livelihoods, food security, ceremonies of healing, and community governance.

This is primarily working against and beyond capitalism; a struggle from inside out. Wood (1995), referring to the thriving western liberal democracies, exposed how all our actions, even our thinking, are hard-wired to the market. “We cannot think of freedom from the market as a kind of empowerment, a liberation from compulsion, and emancipation from coercion and domination” (p. 235). This is my plight and my fight: How do I liberate myself from being a zombie while creating zombies through my work, in a zombie-breeding nursery? It is only possible by nourishing my zombie-resistant cell in the hope of keeping it alive.

I take into account Coulthard’s (2014) analysis of both Fanon and Marx to explicitly reject the liberal politics of recognition embedded in Indigenous rights discourses in settler-colonial Canada. I now know that dispossession within settler-colonialism and exploitation under capitalism are not isolated factors or events but unending and evolving social relations. Of particular relevance is Coulthard’s (2014) re-reading of Fanon’s analysis of colonial rule and its hegemonic upkeep, not as reproduced merely through force, but also through “the production of the specific modes of colonial thought, desire and behaviour, that implicitly or explicitly commit the colonized to the types of practices and subject positions that are required for their continued

domination” (p. 16). Tuck and Yang (2012) urged that any metaphorization of decolonization evasively moves settlers to innocence, reconciles settler guilt and complicity, and salvages settler futurity. This is exactly how the zombie nursery continues to from “‘elimination by elimination’ to ‘elimination by assimilation’ to ‘elimination by recognition’” (Hallenbeck et al., 2016, p. 114).

Coulthard (2014) provided an ethical framework as “grounded normativity,” (p. 60) which has situated Indigenous struggles against capitalist imperialism, not merely for land but also by being profoundly informed by what land teaches us through a plethora of interlaced living relationships. This framework is built upon, and in a way extends, critical theory and Marxist analysis by contextualizing them with Indigenous Peoples’ intrinsic connections to land across time and space. I am inspired by Coulthard’s (2014) famous words, “for Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die. And for capitalism to die, we must actively participate in the construction of Indigenous alternatives to it” (p. 73). The task is to invite, gather, and nourish as many settlers as possible—including the steadily being re-queered queer-other in the many occupied spaces of exploitation—to actively support weaving the fabric of Indigenous workings against and beyond capitalism.

### **Intercepting Queer Identities**

This study revealed not only multiple queer identities but also the way they are enmeshed in colonial, neo-colonial, and settler-colonial systems. Queer struggles, leading to queer (settler) liberation movements and winning queer (settler) rights have often re-centred queer settlers while seeing two-spirit people as addenda, or others (Morgansen, 2010). Only when meeting my Other reflexively did I realize how, even with my very progressive activisms, similar to queer-settler activisms and scholarship, my actions only legitimize settler-colonialism. The next important point concerns the way in which many scholarship and practices have been entrenched in identity politics. Through a Marxist analysis supplemented by Critical Race Theory, I tried to contextualize how capital permeates every facet of our lives and social relations. I hope that this initial foray will generate further discussion and research.

### **Situating the Settler-Selves, Activisms, and Research on Stolen Land**

This dialogical encounter with my Other convinced me of the need to situate my multiple, interlocking, and contradicting selves on stolen and being-stolen lands as a racialized, gay, immigrant, and uninvited settler: In my activist work as an anti-capitalist, as an advocate for queer refugee resettlement, as a co-conspirator of Indigenous self-determination movements, and as a facilitator of settler-colonialism through my frontline resettlement support work with queer refugee people. Only then can I begin to comprehend how much I, as a system, am implicated in perpetuating the same oppressions that I think I am trying to eradicate. Taking to task such selves of mine revealed my hypocrisies, which in fact stem from the gross contradictions of the settler-colonial, neo-colonial, and imperialist ideologies.

I take from Fortier (2017) who unsettled the progressive settler-led grassroots organizing by asking, “whose land are we on?” He proclaimed that such activist movements must *centre*

Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty, in their commitment to “dismantling the state, heteropatriarchy, capitalism and imperialism by also divesting from the logics of settler colonialism” (p. 50). This is precisely where my desperate soul-searching through my hidden, devious, yet omnipresent Other can add to progressive platforms. Yet the question remains: How or *can* social work provide such a platform?

### **Conclusions as Envisioning ... Abolitionist Futurities**

Social work’s historic and ongoing role in trying to systematically annihilate Indigenous Peoples from their land is well researched and documented (e.g., Cardinal, 1969/1999; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Fortier & Wong, 2018; Shewell, 2004; Sinclair, 2009). Social workers executed the elimination policies, including smallpox blankets, forced sterilizations of Indigenous women and girls, torture, neglect, experimentation on and murder of Indigenous children in residential institutions, forceful removal of Indigenous children from families, policing, and surveillance (Palmater, 2015). As a hegemonic arm, every microfibre of social work reciprocally inflames settler-colonialism. The concepts of individuality, independence, family, nation-state, and governance are settler-colonial constructs that have formed social work. Social work has emerged to mediate and manage poverty in favour of the market over labour.

Neoliberalism has given rise to managerialist business models of social work in which government, instead of the service provider, becomes the manager of its ever-diminishing social capital. Social work agencies become competitors for funding, rebranding their work as business models (Healy, 2014). Client numbers, glossy reports to keep funders happy come what may, and increasing administration work occupy a large segment of social work. My frontline work has championed this model, reporting generous client numbers and documenting “success stories.” In social work spaces, I am entrenched in this regimented structure, which is closely monitored by a top-heavy management. My success is correlated to my skills and ability to resettle, i.e., to unleash LGBTQ+ newcomer clients into an extremely violent market.

Can social work be a catalyst for social change by moving away from its clinging on to capitalism in its mutually beneficial co-habitation? It is this dialectic that I exposed that had been obliterated in my disruptor and facilitator roles. Can social work, with a lineage liberally smeared with the blood of Indigenous Peoples—spilled thanks to traders with the Hudson’s Bay company, Christian missionaries, Indian agents, and past and current social workers with settler-colonial brainwashing—be redeemed? My answer would be “hardly,” because social work does not recognize Indigenous Peoples, as well as Black and racialized bodies, as being fully human. It is inherently racist. It continues to thrive on the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples while at the same time preparing Black and racialized bodies for easy disposal to the market. This study revealed to me that social work provides congenial climates for zombie nurseries, being parasitic of capitalism, no matter what it claims. What implications would this exhuming have on social work practice?

Where does this lead in my ongoing and future engagements with social work? I sense that it will be outside formal and formalized social work spaces. Still, I doubt whether I can ever relinquish the field as it is symptomatic of a larger sick system. Hence, what should I do?

The sci-fi movie trilogy *The Matrix* (Watchowski & Watchowski, 1999) provides me with a classic analogy to envision a possibility. This movie shows a futuristic scenario in which human lives have turned into pre-formulated algorithms that fuel and expand an uncontrollable machine. Neo, the main character, has only one option left—to destroy the machine that produces human-like agents who absorb any remaining human into becoming an agent. During the prolonged final battle, Neo allows the agent-machine to suck him in to the agent himself—the zombie generator—only in order to explode himself to salvage humanity. Envisioning such an abolitionist future by utilizing social work as the medium could be my redemption. Yet, this is not a self-gratifying or an individual end, but a process of self-evaporation, only a means to a collective struggle for a just world beyond capitalism in order to sustain life.

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