Part I/Parte I

Decolonial Proposals/Propuestas Decoloniales
(An)Other Canada is Possible
Rethinking Canada’s Colonial Legacy
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Abstract in English
The authors interrogate the geo-political power negotiations that contributed to the ideological construction of Canada as a nation. This article focuses especially on the connection with the Western European colonial projects in the Americas initiated over 500 years ago, along the lines of Latin American decolonial thinkers. The myth of Canada as a benign, welcoming, generous, peace-keeping, multicultural nation and society is unsanitized and dismantled. Canada’s history is resituated in relation to the ideological organization of the world according to racialized, classist, and cultural Eurocentric colonial indicators, which have contributed to the historical realities of impoverishment, violent exploitation, racialized discrimination, and cultural genocide throughout the Americas.

Key words: Decolonizing, Canada, Multiculturalism, Decolonial Thinking, Racism, Colonial Desire

Abstract in Spanish
Los autores interrogan las negociaciones del poder geopolítico que contribuyeron a la construcción ideológica de Canadá como nación. Este artículo enfoca particularmente en la conexión con los proyectos coloniales de Europa Occidental en las Américas iniciados hace más de 500 años, en la línea de los pensadores decoloniales latinoamericanos. Se interroga y desconstruye el mito de Canadá como nación benigna, acogedora, generosa, pacificadora y multicultural. La historia de Canadá está resituada en relación con la organización ideológica del mundo según los indicadores coloniales de racialización, clase, y eurocentrismo epistemológico que han contribuido a las realidades históricas del empobrecimiento, la explotación violenta, la discriminación racial y el genocidio cultural en todas las Américas.

Key words: Decolonization, Canadá, Multiculturalismo, Pensamiento Decolonial, Racism, Deseo Colonial.
Os autores questionam as negociações do poder geopolítico que contribuíram para a construção ideológica do Canadá como nação. Este artigo enfoca especialmente a conexão com os projetos coloniais da Europa Ocidental nas Américas, iniciados há mais de 500 anos, na linha de pensadores decoloniais latino-americanos. Questiona e desconstrói o mito do Canadá como nação benéfica, acolhedora, generosa, pacificadora e multicultural. A história do Canadá é ressituada em relação à organização ideológica do mundo de acordo com os indicadores coloniais de racialização, classe e eurocentrismo epistemológico que contribuíram para as realidades históricas do empobrecimento, da exploração violenta, da discriminação racial e do genocídio cultural em todas as Américas.

Palavras-chave: descolonização, Canadá, multiculturalismo, pensamento decolonial, racismo, desejo colonial

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Present global migration crises, the volatile international environment of war and terrorism, growing tides of uninformed islamophobia, and the retrenchment of nationalist attitudes in the Global North signal a change in the seas in the ways peoples from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds relate to each other. Many in what is now Canada look to our neighbour south of the border and celebrate that the Canadian social context is not as politically or ethnoracially charged. Others contrast the history of Jim Crow law and segregation in the U.S.A. with the Multicultural Act, proudly and self-righteously claiming Canada’s attempt to incorporate ethnoracial cultural diversity as part of the nation’s identity and imaginary.

It is our argument, however, that Canada’s ability to build a more inclusive society will depend on its capacity to accept responsibility for the ways in which racism, xenophobia, and ethnocultural intolerance have shaped the national imaginary. We draw from the wisdom of decolonial scholars in the Global South, particularly from Latin America, in order to interrogate how racialization continues to shape the way current social, cultural, political, and religious structures privilege the Euro Anglo sectors of Canadian society. Their work unmasks the fact that the colonial imperial projects initiated by Western Europeans some five hundred years ago are responsible for the historical realities of impoverishment, violent exploitation, racialized discrimination, and cultural genocide throughout the Americas. Indigenous scholars in what is now Canada have also confronted ideologies of multiculturalism, for example, because of Canada’s failure to recognize the long-standing

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1 It is important to note that many decolonial scholars are Latin Americans who reside and work in the U.S.A. but who emphasize that their place of enunciation is Latin America. It is also important to note that decolonial theoretical currents are part of a long-standing line of critical theoretical articulations in Latin America which include critiques to notions of developmentalism, dependency theoretical frames, and liberation discourses.
history of colonialism which goes back five hundred years. Their work has already made significant contributions to exposing Canada’s racialized history of discrimination against Indigenous communities. Our approach is to also highlight how the European project of imperial expansion and colonialism has had direct implications for many of the communities that have made Canada their home since contact. Our intention here is to build on existing critical work by examining this history through the lens of this larger colonial project. We also acknowledge that Canada’s role as colonial power is complicated by the dual character of its colonial status; both as a colonial power, an extension of Europe, and as a colonized nation, an object of European and U.S.A. colonial desire.

At the outset, we argue that the complex and multiply diverse ethnoracial and cultural contexts of Canada do not easily fit into the paradigms of postcolonial scholars, but are better suited to decolonial frameworks. Let us consider why. Both intellectual currents display orientations which emphasize and discuss different locations, periodization, mechanisms, and expressions of colonial power. With few exceptions, postcolonial thinkers focus geographically on Asia as the object of the colonial imperial gaze and activity. In contrast, decolonial scholars focus on the Americas as the location for the colonial expressions with which they engage. Postcolonial scholars take the Enlightenment as the point of reference for analyzing both “modernity” and colonization, whereas decolonial thinkers trace modernity and the emergence of colonialism as far back as 1492. In other words, there is a difference of periodization.

Fernando Coronil is a good example of a postcolonial thinker whose work focuses on Latin America, specifically Venezuela. Similarly, Latina/o theologian Mayra Rivera uses postcolonial theory and continental philosophy to engage her Latina/o context. Others who have engaged postcolonial scholarship, especially in the theological realm, are really reconfiguring liberation philosophy and theology. See (Rivera, 2007) and (Coronil, 2004).
Methodologically speaking, postcolonial scholars focus their attention on the colonial gaze; it is the colonial subject that figures prominently in their writings. Meanwhile, decolonial thinkers look to those outside of the colonial centres of power. It is the colonized, the others of empire, that receive greater attention. In other words, there is a difference of orientation and directionality in each current. Similarly, postcolonial scholars, with notable exceptions, focus particularly on issues of representation and the imposition of Western imperial epistemologies. They draw from European post-structuralist thinkers, remaining circumscribed by the very European intellectual frames which they critique. In contrast, decolonial scholars aim at reclaiming the epistemic traditions of the colonized (See: Mignolo, 2009). They undertake a rejection of epistemic traditions rather than an interrogation of the epistemologies of the centre. Finally, and more fundamentally, postcolonial scholars zero-in on coloniality as encompassing cultural imperialism, while decolonial scholars emphasize coloniality as a force leading to: the violent genocidal eradication of the peoples and their cultures; the enslavement of entire communities; and enormous people movements (migration) as mechanisms for colonization (Quijano, 2000). Decolonial scholars also consider that coloniality is part and parcel of the present multiple globalizing forms of capitalism. Coloniality is then manifested not only as an imposed cultural force, but as encompassing all aspects of human existence for all those involved; it embodies a coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) and imposes a critical apparatus within which the European intellectual tradition is celebrated.

3 For example, it is commonly known that postcolonial scholars draw from the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, among others.

4 We are well aware of the Eurocentric character of the language of epistemologies. Among many decolonial scholars, there is a privileging of the notion of saberes which incorporates a wide range of approaches by which peoples construct knowledge that includes their wisdom traditions. See (Walsh, 2007).
as the highest expression of human advance/achievement and patterns of behaviour. These differences put on display a rich conversation between these two currents that needs to be had in greater detail at another time. But by contrasting postcolonial and decolonial thinking, and while recognizing their crucial points of intersection, we have begun to show how decolonial thinking is more appropriate for our purposes.

Indigenous intellectuals, scholars, artists, and activists in what is now Canada have already made enormous contributions to these debates.\(^5\) We are also well aware that there are many initiatives, movements, and projects in Canada and elsewhere that are not self-perceived as “decolonial” or self-described with decolonial language along the lines of Latin American decolonial thinking, but which follow in the spirit of this thematic direction.

In what follows, then, it is our intention to complement these perspectives by showing how decolonial thinking can bring crucial insights to the context of Canada. In alliance with Indigenous scholars and others, we begin by affirming that the construction of Canada as a nation is directly related to the events that began in 1492. The ways in which colonial forces engaged Indigenous communities encompassed: strategic attempts to dislocate them from their lands, orchestrated moves toward their eradication by way of military force (genocide), and organized attempts to destroy their cultures and religious traditions (culturalcide, e.g. residential schools). The history of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples is violently inscribed in Canada’s invader-settler history. Secondly, colonialism in Canada introduced complex power-plays beyond the moment of first contact, including in historical conflicts between English- and French-speaking sectors of the country as well as in subsequent waves of immigration, the effects of which we continue to feel even today. In other words, the construction of Canada as a nation is intrinsically connected to

\(^5\) A small list includes: (Coutlhard, 2014); (Manuel and Derrickson, 2015, 2017); (Simpson, 2011, 2015); (Battiste, 2013); (King, 2005).
the Western European colonial project in the Americas; Canada’s history and formation as a nation, in order to be understood properly, needs to be resituated within this American continental experience of colonialism. In the context of Canada, colonialism meant the domination of the colonized “other.” On one hand, Canada needs to come to terms with the very structures of colonization which continue to disproportionately benefit specific sectors of the Euro-Canadian population. On the other hand, Canada will also have to confront its multicultural façade which claims that official multiculturalism celebrates diversity without prejudice when in fact it actually excludes those who do not fit the dominant/normative Euro-Canadian frame.

Our work comes out of our experiences as a Latino-Canadian immigrant and a white Canadian settler. Our identities embody the complex strands of interwoven stories in relation to these histories and experiences of coloniality. Between us and in different yet interconnected ways we have experienced: the pervasiveness of colonialism in political, social and racialized realities; the destructive effects of colonialism as part of the long-standing history of the construction of Canada as a nation; and the hope of working across difference to build relationship and community. We have engaged these issues in the academy, in the churches, in various community settings, and in a variety of artistic collaborations. It thus rises out of our communities of engagement and reflects the ongoing conversation between us about these issues.

(Re) Situating Canada in the Context of (Global) Coloniality (and the Modern-Colonial World System)

Canada’s inability to deal with diverse cultural groups is certainly not new. There is a long-standing history of racialized and xenophobic attitudes in Canada. Such racialized attitudes, however, are part of a larger complex of international
and geopolitical colonializing power relations. To be able to understand present racialized configurations and their concrete structures and expressions in Canada, it is necessary to situate them within the context of the global colonial project. Such a move requires an unmasking of the geo-political power negotiations that have contributed both to the construction of the Canadian nation-state and the historical imaginary of Canada. These constructions have by-and-large contributed to the myth of Canada as a benign, welcoming, generous, peacekeeping, multicultural nation, almost a utopic example for the rest of the world to look towards. At the same time, Canada has functioned and has seen itself, in many ways, as an extension of Europe, as part of the British Empire. On both counts, Canada has succeeded in postponing having to deal with its own racist history, and, as a result, Canadians have not had to deal substantively with the underside of their colonial past.\(^6\) On the flip side, Canada’s trajectory as a nation may also be clearly understood as one of the locations for the realization of the colonial project. It is an object of colonial desire—its land to be extracted and settled and its peoples to be invaded and conquered as part of the story of the “discovery” and conquering of the Americas (Medina, 2017).

Latin American decolonial scholars describe the conceptual framework that subsumes the co-constitutive axes of colonialism, modernity and capitalism as coloniality. They understand “coloniality,” including the modern/colonial capitalist world-system, as the systemic residue of

\(^6\) One exceptional case which has taken centre stage recently is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process in relation to residential schools for Indigenous peoples in Canada. It remains to be seen, however, how many of the recommendations from the TRC will be implemented. Furthermore, the TRC and the processes that led up to it have not led to the recognition of the broader history of exercising colonial power over other ethnocultural groups.
colonialism and its ongoing manifestation in present globalizing, neoliberal systems.\(^7\) Decolonial scholars, along with some cultural theorists and anthropologists, insist that “modern” history, and especially the “success” and “superiority” of European culture/modernity, can only be understood if the conquest of the Americas, plantation slavery and the emergence of globalizing forms of capitalism are understood as co-constitutive.\(^8\) In addition, they argue that the claim of modernity’s success and the self-proclaimed superiority of Europe must be interrogated from the perspective of the peoples upon whom modernity was built and European “civilization” was imposed, in other words, from the perspective of the vanquished (Dussel, 1995).

\(^7\) Nelson Maldonado-Torres distinguishes between colonialism and coloniality, asserting that “colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations” (Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 70, 242).

\(^8\) Decolonial scholars use Immanuel Wallerstein’s notion of the modern world-system, expanding it to include the reality of coloniality, thus “the modern-colonial world-system.” (Mignolo, 2000, 18). Decolonial perspectives also put forth similar arguments to those by cultural theorists like scholars Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, but they differ radically in their focus. Paul Gilroy, for instance, in The Black Atlantic, argues that Anglo Euro-North American modernity and its capitalist systems and exploits cannot be accurately considered without acknowledging the essential centrality and barbarity of plantation slavery in modernity’s inception and fabric. (Gilroy, 1993) and (Hall, 2000, 184–227). By contrast, decolonial scholars emphasize the Indigenous underside of Western European “modernity” and underscore more broadly the colonial foundation and character of Western European epistemologies. (See Dussel, 1995).
We argue that Canada, as a settler colony/nation which emerged from the British and French invasions of the region, is a product of this modern-colonial world-system. Despite this reality, Canada remains largely outside theoretical post/decolonial discourses; the issues, concerns and social implications are still largely unengaged. The result has often been to view Canada as not having any negative colonial history, while Canada itself continues to perpetuate an ongoing “denial and marginalization of Native people’s experience of colonialism as well as of the invader-settler and immigrant experiences” (Brydon, 2004, 173). Indeed, cultural realities in a Canadian context are extremely complex, contested and fluid, shaped by a wide range of dynamic, shifting and multiple identities often within the same person or community. The resulting complexity is that the “inherited identities as First Nations, Métis, Québécois, invader-settler, immigrant, or ‘ethnic’” are intricately interwoven with the reality of coloniality (Brydon, 2004, 171).

Yet even these categories are problematic because they are framed within the colonial understanding of identities as finished products, which tends to undermine the complex processes involved in the historical encounters of peoples. Identity categories themselves function as mechanisms for population control, aimed at keeping people within their identity silos, which are organized hierarchically. Those people that stand in-between ethnocultural traditions, because of pervasive dominant colonial identity frameworks, are often forced to deny the fluid and ambivalent ways in which they understand themselves in public sphere. In the private sphere, however, they continue to carve and negotiate creative, celebratory, and often subversive social spaces which spill out into the public sphere as well (Medina, 2013).

Notions of national identity are no less contested, particularly in the context of Canada and its connections to the Western European colonial project. In the Canadian context, the dominant imaginary denies Canada’s complicity with
the colonial project. In fact, there is a long-standing history of complicity with colonialism by which Canada proudly imagines itself as an extension of Europe. Canada’s social, political and international imaginary exhibits a pride about its connection to this colonial legacy. The colonial umbilical cord with Europe has not been severed. At the same time, there is a sophisticated ideological apparatus at play, by which Canada intentionally conceals its own colonial complicity through the creation of national myths.

The preeminent myth that both perpetuates and hides Canada’s colonial legacy is the idea of multiculturalism, as a utopic society and nation, in which the diversity of ethnocultural identities is celebrated. Scholars range in the ways they understand-engage Canada’s policy of multiculturalism. For example, Charles Taylor critiques the universal application of the idea of “human dignity” along with the idea of the universal worth of cultural traditions in multiculturalism. He claims that behind the affirmation of the universal worth of cultural groups is their homogenization under North Atlantic criteria (Taylor, 1992, 71). In contrast, Himani Bannerji critiques the ideal of multiculturalism because it perpetuates the power differential between the official Euro-Canadian cultures and everyone else. As she puts it, multiculturalism advocating for “minorities” actually (re)inscribes their minoritized status (Bannerji, 2000). From an Indigenous perspective, Glen Coulthard critiques the very idea of recognition politics as the basis for a transformation of the “colonial relationship between Indigenous people and the Canadian nation state.” He writes that “instead of ushering in an era of peaceful coexistence grounded on the ideal of reciprocity or mutual recognition, the politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend (Coulthard, 2014, 3). Other scholars also highlight the character of
multiculturalism as a tool to manage the population and structure Canadian society.\(^9\)

By perpetuating the myth of multiculturalism and its attending politics of recognition, attempts at unmasking ongoing realities of racism, xenophobia, and white supremacy are seen as social maladies which Canadians have already overcome. As a result, people who raise concerns about these realities are stigmatized as disgruntled and are accused of unearthing issues that are part of a time long gone. Multiculturalism, then, functions as the governing social imaginary which promotes the idea that it is possible to construct a society where ethnocultural differences are welcome as long as minoritized people learn to function within the scope of the dominant “white” Euro Canadian (English- and French-speaking) culture(s), including Indigenous peoples and all other “others.” Whiteness remains the ubiquitous feature, framework, and point of reference—though it is absent from the official rhetoric—and is “synthesized into a national we,” which decides “on the terms of multiculturalism and the degree to which multicultural others should be tolerated or accommodated. This ‘we’ is an essentialized version of a colonial European turned into Canadian and the subject or the agent of Canadian nationalism” (Bannerji, 2000, 42–43). The implication is that coloniality is constitutive of Canada as a nation. Admittedly, Canada as a nation has made some strides towards becoming a more hospitable nation to Indigenous communities and diverse ethnocultural communities, including immigrants. Those changes, however, are not the result of a commitment to the inclusion of different peoples and cultures in the very fabric of Canadian culture, history, and imaginary. Rather, they have taken place because of the struggles of Indigenous peoples and other ethnocultural communities against the pervasive structures of discrimination.

\(^9\) See: (Mackey, 1999); (Fleras, 2014); (Fleras and Jean,1992); (Kymlicka, 1998).
Unsanitizing Canada’s Legacy

Re-situating Canada, along the lines of Latin American decolonial thinkers, within the broader colonial legacy affirms the fact that the British colonial impetus, English coloniality, is at the heart of the formation of Canada as a nation. The construction of a positive self-understanding of Canada as proudly part of the British Empire, part of the British colonial commonwealth, is unmasked. Reestablishing Canada’s long history of colonial connections names the multiplicity of issues that come with its birth as a nation-state. It is rooted in the initial encounters with original peoples in the Americas, post 1492, which became violent and resulted in the decimation of the Indigenous peoples, cultures, and traditions. Though first established as an outpost of colonial empire, Canada was subsequently built and continues to be built by diverse and complex waves of immigration. These waves which continue even today have significantly impacted the ongoing formation of the country. However, along with the attempted erasure of the narratives of Indigenous peoples, the contributions of many of these groups remain absent from the dominant narrative of the nation building history. The retrieval of the multiple stories of the various waves of immigrants helps us see that Canada was not built by “whites” alone. It was and continues to be built on the backs of the “others” of the colonial project. Recognizing Canada’s multiple histories unhinges the Canadian story from the monocultural narrative of empire.

Canada as a nation did not really begin in 1867 with the British North America Act. Rather, Canada is the result of long standing processes of colonization that date as far back as the arrival of the French and the British to the region and are connected to the larger Western European imperial projects initiated by the Spanish and Portuguese from 1492 on. Like the Spanish and Portuguese, although with marked differences, the French and the British imposed their ideas of civilization and cultural superiority upon Indigenous peoples.
On one hand, the Spanish and Portuguese used military violence as strategies to annihilate and to displace Indigenous peoples from their lands and to subdue Indigenous resistance. On the other, the French and British began by negotiating (though not without some acts of violence) and gradually turned to systematic methods of cultural subjugation, including but not limited to the violation of treaty agreements and the residential school system. The relationship that the French and British sought at first with Indigenous peoples was circumscribed by colonial structures. It was an uneven relationship; it imposed the Western European colonial rule-of-law to shape the nature of the relationship in the form of treaties, which the Canadian government violated by reneging on its commitment. Religion was a central part of the colonial project throughout the Americas as enculturated European versions of Christianity were forcefully imposed upon Indigenous communities. In Canada, the civilizing thrust of Christianity eventually contributed to the formation of the residential schools. The complicity of the Christian religious establishment with the government’s aim to control and civilize Indigenous peoples cannot be overstated. All this is to say that the colonial project reached into all dimensions of Indigenous life, including the cultural, political, social, and the religious.

However, it would be a mistake to reduce Canada’s colonial history to only the initial encounter with Indigenous people and subsequent developments in policies of marginalization and social exclusion like the Indian Act and the establishment of reservations and the residential schools. What is now Canada was also built and continues to be built by immigrants. Yet, not all immigrants have been valued to the same degree, a fact which is unmasked by considering the nation’s troubled history in dealing with the diversity of its cultural groups. There are many examples of discrimination including, among others: the Chinese immigration Act (1923), also known as the Chinese exclusion act; the use of indentured child labour from Britain.
in the 19th century (British home children, the Bernardo children); the internment of Germans and Hungarian Canadians during the first world war; the internment and confiscation of property of Japanese Canadians during world war two; the discrimination against African-Canadians (Nova Scotia, 1946); the rabid Jewish antisemitism in Quebec in the second half of the twentieth century; and the importing of domestic and temporary/seasonal workers from the Caribbean, the Philippines, and Latin America among other places from the 1950s to the present day.

Two important insights can be gleaned from this list. First, the notion of “whiteness” does not point to a homogeneous group as can be seen by the discriminatory policies directed towards “white” poor/orphaned British children and the internment of Germans, Hungarians and Italians, for instance. Whiteness is a chameleon-like social, political, economic construction of ethno-cultural identity tied to the Western European racialized colonial apparatus and designed to exclude and assimilate. Second, whiteness operates as a normative value system that establishes hierarchies among ethnic groups. As a result, people from groups who are racialized tend to fare worse in the long run. Furthermore, it almost goes without saying that whiteness, like any other discriminatory structure, is compounded when other identity markers, like gender, class, dis/ability, education, nationality, sexual orientation, age, accent, and other factors are taken into account. Decolonial thinkers remind us that even these categories are marked by the fact that they have been constructed within Western European epistemological framing.10

10 Suffice it to say a fuller analysis of the implication of these questions is too large for discussion here. See for example (Walsh, 2007) and (Medina, 2018).
The ugly colonial history of Canada is intricately woven with (cultural and ethno-racial) whiteness as the preferred (predominant) Eurocentric norm for all its inhabitants. Set in place are social structures and a historical imaginary designed to continually reinforce Canada’s colonial identity. As Celia Haig-Brown argues, “simple binary distinctions . . . fail to address the range of ways that people are a part of this country” (Haig-Brown, 2009, 14). Though all immigrants are implicated in processes of colonization, they are not all implicated in the “same ways as those who came with the clear intention of exploitation and profit. Many people came for better lives, to escape war and famine, to seek freedom, to start anew” (Haig-Brown, 2009). People come to Canada for a number of different reasons: as political and economic refugees, as skilled labour, as investors. But Canada also exercises its power to entice immigrants and temporary workers, while preventing them from becoming actual residents in the country. These dynamics are part of the way in which colonial economic power is played out in and by Canada.

Unsanitizing Canada’s history confronts this “historical context of the founding and grounding violence of the Canadian state—violence directed toward many immigrant and enslaved peoples, as well as toward Indigenous peoples” (Shotwell, 2015, 65). It unmasks our colonial legacy and exposes the utopic myth of Canada as a benign multicultural nation. Everyone’s presence in Canada is touched by coloniality. It is our collective history. And it is a history by which some of us have benefited greatly.

For Shotwell, a process of “unforgetting,” especially for white Anglo Canadians, who benefit from white systemic privilege, is necessary in order to combat the “colonial status quo [which] involves truly vast apparatuses and histories” (65). She notes that a “central feature of white settler colonial subjectivity is forgetting; we live whiteness in part as active ignorance and forgetting” (58). She also notes that “unforgetting” is only effective when it is coupled with a commitment to action “to craft a future different than the horrific past we have inherited and live in the present” (58).
in terms of wealth and status, while others—those condemned (damnés) to the colonial underside—have experienced oppression, impoverishment, racism, violence and even death (Fanon, 1963). Colonial power structures depend on a wide range of factors, codes, and processes in which whiteness has been one of the most salient features. More recently though, with the openness to immigration from countries of the Global South, class and education have gained greater importance. The chameleon changes its colours to ensure that the colonial apparatus stays intact through coloniality, in whatever form it needs to take.

This operative colonial power matrix which includes social and cultural whiteness, among other things, shapes society and includes our sources of knowledge and ways of being which are part of what decolonial scholars articulate more broadly as a “coloniality of being” and “coloniality of knowledge” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Walsh, 2007). Nelson Maldonado-Torres writes that the interconnected forces of colonial power impact our intersubjective relations as we come to grips with the “effects of coloniality in lived experience and not only in the mind” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 242). In other words, coloniality shapes and prescribes the way individuals ought to behave in a society. He argues that a coloniality of being “is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 243).

Maldonado-Torres proposes a number of strategic possibilities for decolonization including: borrowing from Fanon—receptive generosity in which “racialized subjects could give and receive freely;” suspending one’s identity and offering “one’s life to the task of achieving decolonial justice;” dialogue and exchange; confronting the “racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies that were put in place by European modernity as it colonized and enslaved
populations throughout the planet;” and opposing the paradigm of war (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 60–62). However, Maldonado-Torres’ insightful proposal is less help in the context of Canada where the notion of multiculturalism is deployed paradoxically both as a tool to celebrate diversity and as a mechanism for reinscribing the inherited white Anglo North Atlantic mode of being as normative. In our view, Nelson-Maldonado’s proposal runs the risk of romanticizing the work of decolonization but leaves unchallenged the subtle, complex and hard to detect mechanisms of coloniality. Taking these factors into account, we argue that, in the context of Canada, coloniality of being not only affects our sense of personal and community identity as we have articulated them, but also impacts that way Canadians understand themselves as a nation.

**Canada as the Subject and Object of Colonial Desire**

Canada’s geopolitical position and status in the global market allows it to become an instrument of colonial power both in its internal and external capacity to act on smaller players, but also to be acted upon, by the U.S.A. and Britain, for example. It is for this reason that any consideration of the present Canadian context necessitates an evaluation of the ways in which Canada aspires to function in the global scene imitating present global economic and military powers. As we have been arguing, Canada is marked by coloniality through and through and needs to be understood as located in the Americas, historically, geo-politically and culturally. At the same time, we wish to show that while Canada participates in the colonial project and benefits from the present geopolitical configuration, it simultaneously occupies an in-between identity space as a nation in which it displays elements of being a colonized society as well. In the larger interconnected web of historical and present-day colonial powers, Canada is both a subject and object of colonial desire.
Canada is the subject of colonial desire because it strategically draws from patterns of behaviour by more powerful actors which continue the legacy of Western European North Atlantic imperialism, especially the U.S.A. and Britain. It adopts colonizing strategies that seek to reproduce this behaviour in order to organize itself as a society and as a way to participate in the larger global theatre. It is not difficult to see how Canada tailors itself after these countries. For example, former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper mimicked a U.S.A.-style presidency by limiting “his access to the media, keeping something of a distance, [and] controlling what would be known and said,” making a show of his trip to Afghanistan, invoking the Christian God in a U.S.A.-style “God bless Canada,” and staging the speech from the throne more as a media-hyped State of the Union-style address (Haberman, 2006). According to Arthur Harberman, this behaviour of Harper’s in which he acted like the U.S.A. head of state violated the Canadian parliamentary approach in which he is rather the head of a party and a Member of Parliament, like all the other Members, responsible to the Crown as head of state. Of course, there is a significant irony in the fact that Canada’s head of state is still the Queen of England.

This aspiration towards Britain is exemplified in recent controversies related to the required swearing of the oath to the Queen at citizenship ceremonies. In a Globe and Mail article which documents the legal case of three would-be citizens who, for ethical and religious reasons do not wish to swear such an allegiance, argues in its favour, concluding that “The Crown is a powerful and historic symbol. Far from diminishing Canadian citizenship, it enhances Canada” (Globe and Mail, 2017). Emer O’Toole, another would-be-Canadian, writes in an op-ed for the Guardian that his socialist beliefs make the allegiance “anathema to my political conscience; I’m baffled by otherwise egalitarian people who are okay with aristocrats inheriting the position of head of state.” O’Toole continues by articulating the
coloniality behind this symbolic gesture. He writes “As an Irish person, I’m aware of the historical oppression of my people and culture by British colonialism” (O’Toole, 2014).

In both instances Canada’s complicity with coloniality is exposed and problematized. The U.S.A. and Britain function as an idealized double-optic which continues to shape Canada’s self-perception inside and outside. Canada’s imaginary (social, political, economic, cultural, etc.) is governed by a type of coloniality of being which simultaneously imitates and imposes colonizing social behaviours. Of course, a fuller discussion of the dynamics at play and the factors contributing to these dynamics go beyond the scope of this article. Our examples merely touch the surface of a much more complicated network of historical, social, political, cultural, and economic factors and issues that continue to shape Canadian self-perception and from which Canada and Canadians benefit enormously; ability to travel overseas, level of and access to education and wealth, healthcare, etc. However, they serve to illustrate how the dynamics of coloniality operate even at the highest levels of government. They also illustrate the profoundly cultural nature of coloniality which permeates all levels of society and inevitably has detrimental effects on entire sectors of the population, especially racialized peoples, in some of the ways we have shown.

Conversely, Canadians also find themselves existing in a liminal space, vulnerable to U.S.A. and British colonializing whims. Canada is looked at paternalistically as being a young nation when compared to its progenitor/motherland, Britain, and is bullied by its older brother to the South, the U.S.A. Alan Lawson describes this position as being “suspended between ‘mother’ and ‘other,’ simultaneously colonized and colonizing” (Lawson, 2004, 155) and Lee Maracle writes that “we are the grandchildren of an abusive industrial British parent” (Maracle, 2004, 206). We do not have to go too far to find examples in the political realm. As a constitutional monarchy
and member of the British Commonwealth, Canada’s identity as a nation is still geopolitically situated in relation to the British Empire and it resides under the shadow of the present tempestuous president of the U.S.A. The dismissal of Canada by President Trump in anticipation of NAFTA negotiations shows the little value the U.S.A. gives to Canada’s sovereignty (Dale, 2017). There is a long history of historical subjugation by Britain and interventionism by the U.S.A. Canada finds itself deeply influenced, historically, economically and culturally, by the over-bearing and paternalistic attitudes and actions of these two nations. Caught between, Canadians find themselves in a perpetual search for their Canadian “identity.”

**The Implications of Reading Coloniality in Canada**

In our view, coloniality operates as a range of expressions in which empire manifests its power in very concrete ways that we are still experiencing. The present configuration of Canada’s imaginary along with its systems of education and its social, political, and economic structures are predicated on inherited colonizing frames which perpetuate the exclusion of, discrimination against, and violence towards those who have been and are othered in ongoing processes that began 500 years ago. We affirm a decolonial stance which involves the undoing and unlearning of the strategies, approaches, methods and tendencies that wittingly or unwittingly reproduce this coloniality in all its manifestations. It also involves a systematic interrogation of the wide range of power structures, consumption, and profit-making which govern all human relations. With others, we dare to confront Canada’s coloniality with all of its attendant discriminatory hierarchies, practices, and systems (racism, sexism, etc.) “not [only] as regretful by-products of modern Europe, but as part of the conditions that made . . . [Canada] . . . possible (Lander, 2000, 525).
According to Roxana Ng, racist, sexist, and xenophobic roots “underpin the construction of Canada as a nation. This racism began in Canada with the interventions of Europeans convinced of their superiority to Indigenous peoples” (Haig-Brown, 2009, 8). Engaging this inheritance and facing the fact that coloniality is constitutive of Canada’s history, Canada’s formation as a nation, Canada’s identity as a nation-state, as well as the way Canadians understand themselves and each other in relation to these factors, would involve a decolonial turn towards those who inhabit the underside of coloniality. Himani Bannerji articulates such a move, stating that “the possibility for constructing a radically different Canada emerge only from those who have been “othered” as the insider-outsiders of the nation . . . They serve to remind us of the Canada that could exist” (Bannerji, 2004, 297). This “other” Canada goes beyond a liberal recognition of the others of Empire to include a reclaiming and celebrating of other epistemologies—the forms of knowledge of Indigenous peoples and other ethnocultural groups, a process which is already underway, as we have seen. It confronts the fact that the very way Canada has constructed its epistemologies is based on Western European rationalist Enlightenment thinking.\(^{12}\)

**Conclusion**

July 1, 2017 marked the moment of Canada’s deeply contested 150th anniversary since confederation first took place. A rich diversity of voices merged in the public sphere to mark the

\(^{12}\) According to Catherine Walsh, in our present context of “shifting geo-political knowledges,” the decolonial turn will include “a renovation and reconstruction of critical thought in ways that take into account the present-day relations between culture, politics, and economy, [and that] challenge the hegemony of Eurocentric perspectives, and promote dialogues and thinking with thought and knowledge ‘others’, including that of Afro and Indigenous social movements and intellectuals” (Walsh, 2007, 233).
occasion. At the most extreme end of the spectrum, a group of five “white” military men, self-described as “Proud Boys” who are “Western Chauvinists” disrupted a peaceful protest on Canada Day by Mi-kmaq (Indigenous) women in Halifax, Nova Scotia, by yelling “this is a British Colony.” The women, who were honouring murdered and missing Indigenous women were “trying to help, heal, and mourn” (Lagerquist, July 3, 2017). Other voices ran the gamut from romantically declaring that “at 150, Canada is a far better place, in a far better space than ever before — in a world that grows only worse,” to those who confronted the painful reality of racism and the difficulty of fitting in to the normative white-Anglo expectations of “Canadian” identity (Cohn, 2017; Jackson et al, 2017; Paradkar, 2017). In the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its recommendations, many Indigenous voices and allies called for protests against the celebrations noting that Indigenous communities have little to celebrate (Saganash, 2017; Morin, 2017).

Significantly and hopefully, as we cross the threshold of this 150th anniversary, even those who are inclined to be sentimental and romantic admit that it is necessary for Canada to acknowledge our racialized and gendered violent and traumatic past. For instance, powerful and compelling voices are calling on Canadians and their government to take concrete steps towards tangible reconciliation, daring to contemplate the possibilities of constructing another Canada, “for all of us, our first people and our most recently arrived people and those Canadians yet to come” (Keenan, 2017). We argue that this “other” Canada requires a task of decolonization which engenders the development of new attitudes towards all “others” of/in Canada and depends on building movements of solidarity,

13 Subsequent reports indicate that the military will remove the men from duty and training pending an investigation and called their actions deplorable. (Lagerquist, July 4, 2017).
alliance, and resistance between Indigenous peoples, immigrants, racialized people, and allies. The ethnocultural mosaic that “makes Canada great,” and was widely celebrated as the nation turned 150, also has, as part of its historical narrative, a legacy of exploitation, oppression, and genocide. The presence of such a rich ethnocultural diversity forces us to rethink inherited forms of social and political organization that privilege a small racialized sector of the country. It invites us to reinvent social, political, intellectual, and economic structures in ways that counter the various forms of coloniality while seeking ways to make Canada accountable for its complicity in the present forces of globalizing neoliberal capitalism. Recognizing Canada’s rich diversity also means uncovering the rich range of sources of human knowledge as well as cultural and social resources with which to construct a national intercultural imaginary of Canada as a welcoming home for the many. It is time for Canada to confront the skeletons in its closet, abandon the relics of imperialism and colonization, and to decolonize itself by truly embracing all its peoples.

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