UNSETTLING HOPE:
SETTLER COLONIALISM AND UTOPIANISM

by

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Abstract

This dissertation locates the manifold concept of utopia as imbricated with the project of English settler colonialism in the New World and the succeeding settler colonial societies of Canada and the US. I situate Thomas More’s *Utopia* as an early modern narrative that was mobilized to articulate notions of transcendental progress and universal rationality commensurate with Christian Humanism, which served to justify expropriation of Indigenous lands. I further locate contemporary Indigenous critical theoretical interventions into longstanding scholarly theories of nation and peoplehood. I argue that Indigenous critical theory, literary studies, and works of Indigenous speculative fiction serve an immanent critique to the settler utopian traditions of Canada and the US, which both reflect and further the naturalization of settler colonialism as an enduring force which frames the contemporary experience of globalization. This immanent critique is also applied to contemporary utopian studies discourses, including emergent discussions of “Non-Western” and “postcolonial” utopias. I proceed to an exploration of contemporary speculative narratives of Indigenous, racialized non-Native, and white settler peoples concerned with varying notions of indigeneity. I argue such narratives propose desirable social change in ways that further naturalize or resist settler colonialism in their respective envisages of the future.
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Chapter 1

Introduction:

Towards a re-articulation of utopia

This dissertation is the culmination of an intellectual journey that arrives primarily at the intersections of Indigenous studies and utopian studies. It is the product of a re-thinking of my own desires for a hopeful future in light of the critical influences of Indigenous and other decolonial cultural production, scholarship, and social movements. As such, this dissertation is intended to provide convincing arguments as to the vital importance of—and fundamental interrelationships between—concepts of utopianism, utopian narrative, educative desire, and the narratives that, in many ways, both prefigured and sustain the condition of white supremacy and settler colonialism that characterize both Canada and the US.¹ These considerations are inspired by a variety of scholarly discourses, among them Indigenous critical theory, Indigenous literary criticism, settler colonial studies, science fiction studies, and utopian studies. I sincerely hope this study will prove to be a worthwhile contribution to these fields and to wider contemporary anti and decolonial efforts.

My interest proceeds from curiosity about contemporary hopeful narratives of the future, and the implications of attending to critiques from Indigenous and racialized non-

¹ I refer here to “white supremacy and settler colonialism” as a means of highlighting both the interrelationships and distinct experiences of racialization, white supremacy, and settler colonialism. While this project is specifically concerned with the contexts of Canada, where I currently live, and the US, where I have citizenship, these are by no means the only locations impacted by white supremacy and settler colonialism—indeed these are phenomena with global implications.
Natives regarding processes by which white supremacy and settler colonialism are sustained in the contemporary world. Indigenous and racialized non-Native scholars offer critical analytic frameworks that provide a means of re-articulating discourses of utopia in light of critiques of colonialism and white supremacy in their varied expressions. I refer here to Stuart Hall’s notion of re-articulation, which has been taken up by Andrea Smith as means of avoiding a problematic “politics of inclusion that seeks to include a marginalized voice within a pre-established politics or discourse.” Following Hall, Smith argues for a processual re-centering, whereby previously marginalized communities are placed at the center of a given politics or discourse as a means of constructing a dynamic and ever “more liberating framework.” This dissertation, therefore, intends to center Indigenous concerns and experiences in a reconsideration of discourses of utopia as “expressions of desire for a better way of being,” to use Ruth Levitas’ conceptualization. However, doing so necessarily implicates a number of interrelated concerns and experiences with respect to white supremacy and colonialism, particularly those of non-Native racialized peoples, chief among them Black diasporic peoples. This is to say that such a notion of re-articulating utopia must indeed be enduringly processual and critically self-reflexive—similar to what Levitas has described as a utopia-as-method. Moreover, I wish to foreground a questioning of whether the implications of such a re-articulation of utopia/utopia-as-method involve an immanent critique of the discourse of utopia itself.

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3 Ruth Levitas. The Concept of Utopia. (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

This centering of Indigenous communities in a re-articulation of utopia may help interrupt what Chickasaw theorist Jodi Byrd has described as the “endless deferral” of the concerns and experiences of Indigenous peoples.\(^5\) It is my contention that attending to contemporary Indigenous presence, including but not limited to expressions of Indigenous nationhood and Indigenous futurisms, intervene in the ongoing naturalization of white supremacy and settler colonialism within the tradition of what Krishan Kumar has differentiated as “modern” utopia, specifically that of white settlers.\(^6\) Moreover, I argue these utopian traditions are themselves substantially co-constituitive with the condition of settler colonialism insofar as they contributed to the envisioning, sustaining, and naturalization of Indigenous erasure or subjugation. White settler utopian narratives have enabled the endless deferral of the concerns and experiences of Indigenous peoples to the extent that their proposals for desirable futures naturalize the condition of settler colonialism, or otherwise constrain or instrumentalize Indigenous peoples.

Settler colonialism has re-emerged in recent years as a critical analytic framework to address the specificities of invasion, occupation, and settlement of heretofore Indigenous territories by exogenous others.\(^7\) Recent theoretical formulations of settler colonialism have


\(^7\) A note on terminology: I have chosen to utilize the capitalized term “Indigenous” to indicate or reference the original peoples of a given land base or territory. Here I avoid the term “Aboriginal” which to my understanding is sometimes received by Indigenous peoples as offensive stemming from its use as an epithet, as well as in acknowledgement of Taiaiake Alfred’s critical analysis of what he calls “Aboriginalism.” However, I also wish to establish my view that the use of any singular, unifying terminologies to indicate or reference such a profoundly diverse peoples with unique cultures, governance and social structures, and traditional land bases is, in many ways, inherently problematic. I also wish to acknowledge my utilization of “Indigenous” as problematic in recognition of the differentiation between “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” being made by one of my mentors, Robert Lovelace (Ardoch Algonquin),
colonialism argue that settler colonialism ought be understood as distinct from other forms of colonialism. For example, it is argued that settler colonialism diverges from what is variously described as “external”, “exogenous”, or “exploitation” colonialism, which refer to situations in which an Indigenous population is subjugated, primarily for the purpose of extracting the surplus value of their labor and territorial “resources” for the benefit of a remote political authority. Moreover, a differentiated analysis of the broad category of “imperialism” that addresses the specificities of settler colonialism as distinct from other experiences of colonialism may be traced to the writings of Frantz Fanon, Vine Deloria Jr., and many others, including but not limited to analysts of what are often referred to as apartheid South Africa and colonial French Algeria. The emerging relative popularity of settler colonialism as an analytic framework must be, therefore, situated within the centuries-old historical and ongoing varying contexts of Indigenous peoples’ resistances, including what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor has termed “survivance,” and Kanien’kehaka (Mohawk) scholar Taiaiake Alfred describes as “resurgence,” in the face of coercive assimilation, forced displacement, and outright murder.

However, the relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples must also be located within what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang refer to as the “entangled triad structure of settler-native-slave.” This is to say that, for example, the settler colonialism as part of his work on “re-Indigenization.” See, for example, http://www.queensu.ca/devs/newsevents/Reindigenizationcourse.html

8 These various terms are offered by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization is not a metaphor” Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society 1, no. 1 (2012).

of the so-called New World and, in particular, Turtle Island, must be conceptualized beyond a reductionist framework focused upon relations between normatively white European settlers and Indigenous peoples.\(^{10}\) Not only must chattel enslavement of, principally, Africans factor into settler colonial analyses, but also the many and diverse processes of racialization should be understood as fundamental to the activating and sustaining of settler colonial societies. In the case of Turtle Island, this refers to, primarily, the racializations of non-European immigrants, migrants and refugees, all of whom are newcomers to Turtle Island, in addition to the unique experiences of Black racialization stemming from the abduction and enslavement of Africans. Certainly, it must also be clarified that Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island have also been racialized as part of the project of settler colonialism, which seeks to effect their de-naturalized relationship to their own lands. Racialization, in this particular settler colonial context, serves to contribute to the “indigenization” and naturalization of whiteness, which subsequently becomes normative.\(^{11}\)

Furthermore, the analytical lens of settler colonialism facilitates insights into the many ways in which settler colonialisms have figured in the creation and management of social difference and identities, capitalism, human/other-than-human relations, nationhood, the nation-state, and numerous other contemporary themes and concepts.

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\(^{10}\) I am using the term “Turtle Island” following the many Indigenous peoples who do so in reference to the lands that are now commonly understood as “North America,” though usually more specifically to encompass what is now Canada and the US.

\(^{11}\) A recent discussion of the intersections of anti-Blackness, Indigeneity, and settler colonialism can be found on the blog of the journal *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, Society*: [https://decolonization.wordpress.com/tag/antiblackness/](https://decolonization.wordpress.com/tag/antiblackness/)
integral to settler colonial societies, erstwhile colonial metropoles, as well as the wider global community.\textsuperscript{12}

While I argue here, following numerous others, that settler colonial invasion is a fundamental, original, and enduring condition that substantially characterizes Canada and the US, this is not at all intended to suggest that my utilization of analyses of settler colonialisms is intended as an exhaustive means of understanding, resisting, and transcending (human) social hierarchies, or the experiences of domination or oppression (human and other-than-human) in these societies.\textsuperscript{13}

This is to say, for example, that critical understandings of race and racialization, of gendered and sexualized divisions, of the role of capital, and of notions of ability and disability may be augmented by investigating the ways in which settler colonial analyses contribute to greater understandings of the interrelationships involved in experiences of domination and oppression. Each of these frameworks provides crucial insights by centering specific concerns and experiences, and may illuminate respective antecedents, ongoing logics and processes, as well as both existing and potentials for resistances and transcendences. Each of these frameworks offer a unique means of apprehending particular experiences and processes of domination and oppression. In doing so, they also avoid collapsing into a singular meta-analysis or framework, which facilitates ongoing constructive dialog among multiplicities of critical perspectives. This leads to new

\textsuperscript{12} I am using the term “other-than-human” following Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee), to refer to what is commonly described as the “non-human”—to include both the “living” and “non-living” aside from the category of human (homo sapiens sapiens).

\textsuperscript{13} My initial address of the nation-states and societies of Canada and the US in quotation marks is intended as a means of signaling my understanding of these as recognizable entities to be a (relatively) recently instantiated and naturalized fiction.
frameworks or means of analysis of heretofore un/under-addressed experiences and processes of domination and oppression, which may complicate and enrich heretofore seemingly unrelated critical approaches.

There is a claim, repeated often in utopian studies discourse, which holds that the past thirty plus years of neoliberal globalization have contributed to a growing sense of pessimism, which accounts for an alleged dystopian turn. That is, the content of what Lyman Tower Sargent terms “social dreaming” is said to have turned nightmarish.\textsuperscript{14} The potential for utopia is thought to be increasingly unavailable. Instead, it is argued that dissatisfaction with the trajectories of a globalizing society has resulted in the popularity of cautionary, pessimistic expressions of “what ought not be” understood here as dystopia, literally “the bad place.”

While recognition of the prevalence of dystopian expressions of warning may appear reasonable and substantially accurate, it must also be recognized that any notion of social dreaming is not monolithic or singular. Utopias, conceived of as social dreaming or expressions of desire for a better way of being, are here understood to be fundamentally social. As such, they are plural, enabled or constrained by context. Moreover, the historical specificities of culture, place, and of existing hierarchical social stratifications each have a substantive impact on who comes to be included, collapsed within, or entirely excluded from the implicit “we” or, alternatively, “they” embedded in each expression of utopia, or dystopia for that matter.

It follows that the content and character of utopias are educated, and co-emergent with the location and processes of socialization. Similarly, the ability to realize desires for a better way of being is also educated. And, perhaps more crucially, the self-confidence of an individual or group of individuals to realize desires for a better way of being is also educated. Given existing social inequalities, elites are clearly positioned to anticipate utopia, to demonstrate willful striving towards the potential concrete realization of their utopian propositions, in contrast to those in subordinate social positions. This notion of the education of desire emerges from the work of Miguel Abensour and Levitas, and may be considered alongside and, in many ways, as drawing upon Ernst Bloch’s related concept of *docta spes*, or the education of hope.

Using the above example of the alleged dystopian turn, it is certainly the case that there are those who do not, in fact, maintain dystopian outlooks on the merits of neoliberal globalization. To the contrary, for some, the contemporary condition may represent the substantial realization of utopia, an “end of history,” which only requires refinement rather than wholesale reconstitution.

However, accepting the premise of pervasive dystopianism at the current trajectory of global society, it is also necessary to acknowledge a variety of existing bases for such dystopianism. These may be antithetical to one another, fundamentally troubling the potential for a revitalization of utopianism.

Conceived of as social dreaming or expressions of (social) desire for a better way of being, utopias as proposals appear doomed to an inevitable failure. It seems impossible to construct a unified “we,” without stepping outside of history and neglecting the
realities of difference. Utopia, or more accurately, eutopia (“the good place”) for some appears to be inescapably dystopian, or, minimally, less-than-eutopia, for others.

Recognition of this apparently inexorable condition, however, is the basis of Levitas’ re-conceptualization of utopia as method. Here utopia operates as an educative heuristic, as an enduringly and emphatically dialogical, processual, provisional, and critically-self-reflexive “imaginary reconstitution of society.” Proposals for a better way of being effect an estrangement from the here and now, allowing for a remove that facilitates critical “archaeologies” of the historical present. Simultaneously, the “architectural” construction, the alternative proposal to the here and now, is subject to judgment. Whether described as social dreaming or expressions of desire for a better way of being, the social dimension to utopia as method may facilitate critical understandings of power, of hierarchies of difference, of relationships of domination and oppression: it may constructively educate desire.¹⁵

Clearly, scholarly conceptualizations of utopianism as a transhistorical and intercultural meta-category facilitate comparative study. Equally clear is the existence of social dreaming, expressions of desire for a better way of being, or “texts both in the West and outside it that pre-date More’s Utopia that describe a non-existent society identifiably better than the contemporary society.”¹⁶


However, I agree with Krishan Kumar’s contention that “utopia proper” ought be differentiated as “the modern utopia that was invented in Europe in the sixteenth century.” More’s *Utopia*, published in 1516, invented the word “utopia,” (often translated as “no place” or “the good place [which is] no place”) and the etymology is itself reflective of a historically- and culturally-bounded conceptualization and expression of desire. The notion of a “no place” as a transcendental “good place,” apart from the immanent sphere of existence, reveals a culturally-specific epistemology and ontology.

Moreover, *Utopia* is indeed a profoundly settler colonial text. Put another way, *Utopia* articulated a narrative—a distinctively utopian narrative—which operated in a variety of ways to rationalize to the genocidal project of the settler colonization of the so-called New World. Following Kumar and others, I also situate utopia as a decidedly modern phenomenon, or, more precisely, as co-constitutive with the creation of early modern narratives, in particular conceptions of a utopian settler modernity.

The condition of white supremacist settler colonialism that characterizes what is now understood as Canada and the US was prefigured, in part, by the narrative proposal put forth in More’s *Utopia*. Furthermore, the utopian traditions of the white settlers of Canada and the US have been, and largely continue to be marked by the naturalization of white settler colonialism within their imaginary reconstitutions of society. The social

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17 Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, 19.

18 Manuel and Manuel write “[More] combined the Greek ou, used to express a general negative and transliterated into the Latin u, with the Greek topos, place or region to build Utopia. In the playful printed matter prefixed to the body of the book the poet laureate of the island, in a brief self-congratulatory poem written in the Utopian tongue, claimed that his country deserved to be called “Eutopia” with an eu, which in Greek connoted a broad spectrum of positive attributes from good through ideal, prosperous, and perfect.” From Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel. *Utopian Thought in the Western World*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), 1.
dreaming of white settlers of Canada and the US has most often implicitly, but at many
times explicitly, excluded Indigenous peoples and racialized non-Natives from their
proposals for a better way of being.

Thus, utopia as a distinct cultural and historical phenomenon has operated to
educate the social dreaming of the peoples who have come to live within the white settler
colonial societies of Canada and the US. The potential of unsettling utopia, or put another
way, centering Indigenous decolonization and ending white supremacy in proposals for a
better way of being, requires addressing the contributions that utopia has made to inspire
and sustain the naturalized condition of white supremacist settler colonialism in what is
now Canada and the United States.

This dissertation begins with the first body chapter concerned with contemporary
Indigenous critical theory, tracing several key theoretical concepts to establish the critical
framework used to intervene in utopian discourses. Primarily I am concerned with
demonstrating how Indigenous scholars have endeavored to establish what Robert
Warrior (Osage) has termed Indigenous “intellectual sovereignty,” while, importantly,
avoiding notions of a romanticized, fossilized authentic Indigeniety. In particular, I draw
on Byrd’s work to highlight the potentialities associated with Indigenous studies’
engagement with postcolonial, poststructural and cultural studies, such that Indigenous
critical theory is both potentially enriched by and a contributor to critical theories.
Following Lina Sunseri, I locate the contemporary assertions of Indigenous nationhood as
an affirmation of Indigenous peoplehood apart from the development discourses of
modernity, progress, and rationality that were used to dehumanize and disenfranchise
Indigenous communities. I also engage with concepts drawn from Indigenous literary studies, including the work of Grace L. Dillon (Anishinaabe) to locate what she terms “Indigenous Futurisms” and “Indigenous Science Fiction.”

It is from this basis in Indigenous critical theory and literary studies that I turn in the second chapter to a close reading of More’s *Utopia*. Here I develop the notion of *utopian settler modernity* and trace the pre-figurations of white settler colonialism, including the emergent valourization of labour and instrumental rationalization of land-as-resource, as well as the (proto)racialization of human difference as one of the means utilized by More to conceptualize turning Abya Yala into the *Modus Novus*, the remaking of the New World into a “no place,” a blank slate available for projecting notions of the ideal commonwealth. Ultimately, I argue that *Utopia* serves as a clear touchstone for colonialist discourses that, in many ways, persist to this day even amongst the most ostensibly radical utopian fiction.

I then turn to emergent discussions in utopian studies regarding notions of the “postcolonial utopia” and utopianism from outside the West. I engage with prominent conceptualizations of utopia and utopian theory, including that of educative desire in the work of Miguel Abensour, Ernst Bloch, and Ruth Levitas. Here I am concerned with gaps in utopian studies discourse that has heretofore neglected Indigenous peoples and appears predisposed towards the sort of “add-and-stir” inclusion that Hall’s re-articulation explicitly seeks to avoid. I raise the question of the efficacy of notions of postcolonial utopias to describe Indigenous peoples’ desires for making a better world and, ultimately,
raise the issue of the appropriateness of “utopian” language and discourses given their clear relationship with colonialism.

In the fourth chapter I survey recent examples of utopian literature created by white settler authors, noting the apparent evidence of desire for indigeneity. I develop the notion of *settler ecotopianism* to describe the utopian narratives of white settlers that generally involve the instrumental appropriation of Indigenous culture as means of escape from the alienation experienced by the urban industrial white settler society. I engage with a variety of utopian texts ranging from Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* to Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* to the novels of Ursula K. Le Guin, Kim Stanley Robinson, and Starhawk. My central focus in this chapter is the simultaneous desire for an indigenous future combined with the naturalized evasion of decolonial concerns.

I then turn to a discussion of contemporary Indigenous sf (speculative fiction) as a means of exploring the re-articulation of utopia in light of the concerns and experiences of Indigenous peoples. I draw on the work of both Byrd and Dillon to demonstrate the emergent scholarship on Indigenous sf as distinct from but also in some ways congruent with the category of “postcolonial.” Ultimately, I argue the decolonial Indigenous Futurisms articulated in the Indigenous sf of Leslie Marmon Silko, Daniel Heath Justice, and others ought be understood as simultaneously proffering an immanent critique of the modern utopian tradition, while utilizing aspects of its conventions to do so. I also discuss how the mixed identities of some authors, including Nalo Hopkinson and Zainab Amadahy provide for a rich basis for transgenre narratives that simultaneously engage
Indigenous and postcolonial themes, alongside, for example, ecological and feminist concerns.

Ultimately, I argue that today’s social dreaming is increasingly subjected to dynamic, educative, and intersectional critical analyses that evokes Byrd’s notion of “cacophony,” and portends further complexity, humility, and relationality for the human and the other-than-human alike.
Chapter 2

Indigenous Critiques of
Colonial Modernity & Utopia

Scholars have developed theories of what may be broadly termed “colonial modernity” as a means of attending to the concepts, processes, and practices that have animated the centuries-long imperialist projects of white Christian Europe, resulting in experiences of subjugation for many of the peoples of Abya Yala, Africa, and Asia.¹⁹ Scholarly literatures regarding interrelated notions of (anti) colonialism, modernity, postcolonialism, and racialization are as diverse as they are vast. This diversity ranges from the influential writings of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said to Latin-American scholars of “coloniality” such as Walter Mignolo, and Black diaspora scholars such as Sylvia Wynter who have interrogated conceptualizations of humanism.²⁰ A central component of many theories of colonial modernity involve recognition of the role of (proto) civilizationalist and racialist discourses, which situated peoples of diverse cultures and geographic locations along a linear and temporal spectrum of human development. Such notions of human development were informed by discourses of transcendental progress and universal reason beholden to white Christian Europeans, with non-Christian, Indigenous, and racialized non-Native peoples rendered as pre-modern, backward,

¹⁹ I am adopting the term “Abya Yala,” which used by some Indigenous peoples to describe the lands usually described as the Americas or the Western Hemisphere.

²⁰ See, for example, Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks and Wretched of the Earth, Said’s Orientalism, Mignolo’s The Darker Side of Western Modernity and Wynter’s “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being” The New Centennial Review, Volume 3, Number 3, Fall 2003, pp. 257-337.
irrational, and ultimately subhuman in contradistinction. The creation of such discourses and their eventual popular adoption by Europeans, as well as those who arrived in Abya Yala with intentions claiming land as settlers, included the racialization and chattel enslavement Africans, the eventual construction of a new racialized category of person—“Latina/o” or “Hispanic”—and the subjection of Indigenous peoples to the ongoing condition of genocidal settler colonialism that characterizes “Canada” and the “US.” 21

Narratives or stories operate as a means of envisioning, perpetuating, and subsequently naturalizing this dehumanizing project. While 1492 clearly marks a historical touchstone in the creation of these narratives, they have disparate roots in and are also reflective of the continuance of a multiplicity of historical events and processes that pre-date Columbus’ voyage to Abya Yala, the so-called Mondu Novus or New World. Indeed, in Chapter 2 I will discuss the classical and Christian antecedents of More’s Utopia, in particular, and the confluence of historical encounters and events, in general, that contextualize the emergence of utopian narratives. This project, however, is primarily concerned with the relationship of concepts and discourses of utopia to colonial modernity, particularly as they contributed to the prefiguring, perpetuation, and naturalization of the condition of white supremacy and settler colonialism that continues to characterize Canadian and American societies. This chapter seeks to locate a distinctive critique of colonial modernity from emergent Indigenous Studies based on

21 This project is focused specifically upon the contexts of Canada and the United States as distinctively white supremacist and settler colonial contexts. Moreover, while this project attends primarily to considerations of white supremacy and settler colonialism, there are innumerable other interrelated discourses, processes, and practices that contribute to oppressive social stratification in these and other societies the world over.
Turtle Island, which I recognize as establishing the basis of an immanent critique of the discourses of what Krishan Kumar has differentiated as “the modern utopia… invented in Europe of the Renaissance.” Following Kumar and tracing a trajectory of contemporary Indigenous Studies I argue that the modern tradition of utopian narratives is implicated in the manifold project of colonial modernity.

Such narratives were enabling for Europeans in their self-aggrandizing and self-justifying conceptualizations of settler colonization as a beneficent, civilizing mission. However, if Abya Yala served as the space for an envisioned potential utopia—a “no place” that could be made a eutopia (“good place”) in pursuit of an image of a transcendental Christian humanist notion of heaven—then the pre-existence of Indigenous peoples was an impediment that had to be circumvented. The displacement of Indigenous peoples was, therefore, fundamental to facilitate the naturalization and “indigenization” of normatively white Christian European settlers as the rightful inhabitants of erstwhile European colonies, which eventually became independent settler nation-states.

The analytical frameworks developed in contemporary Indigenous critical theory provide a means of immanent critique of the modern utopian tradition. Indigenous critical theory compels an attending to the experiences and concerns of Indigenous peoples vis-à-vis the discourse of the modern utopia. The discourse of the modern utopia is revealed to be a constituent element of colonial modernity, a means by which future-oriented narratives that propose desirable social change are both inflected by and extend

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22 Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, 3.
colonialist doctrines of human difference, transcendental progress, and universal reason. The co-emergence of colonial modernity and utopia manifests in settler colonial circumstances to rationalize settler colonial societies as utopian with Indigenous and racialized non-Native peoples serving as the anti-utopian referent.

Indigenous Critiques of Utopian Colonial Modernity

The experience of contact between the European newcomers and Indigenous peoples was broadly diverse and was inflected by the respective metropoles’ own circumstances, especially in relation to their experiences of contact with non-Europeans. Consequently, there were a variety of disparate ways in which the European metropoles conducted their respective colonial endeavors. Ultimately, however, where Europeans sought to establish what were conceived of as decidedly modern and utopian colonies in the New World, Indigenous peoples and their land-based spiritual, epistemological, and ontological orientations were, broadly speaking, narratively represented as bygone, primitive, or pre-modern—as indicative of anti-utopia. It follows that such narratives contributed to justifications for attempts at subjugating or eliminating Indigenous peoples via dislocation (forced removal from traditional lands), annihilation (murder), and assimilation (strategies for bringing the Indigenous “up” or “forward” to the level of the European standard or incorporating them as new category of person in the case of the mestizo in Spanish colonies).

23 See, for example, Patricia Seed. Ceremonies of Possession: Europe’s Conquest of the New World 1492-1640. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
While the pre-contact narratives of desirable social change of both Europeans and Indigenous peoples are an important consideration—among other things, they may facilitate an understanding of the bases for evolution and change resulting from contact—it is also crucial to recognize the imposition of such supremacist narratives immediately inspired corresponding Indigenous narratives of Indigenous resistances. Furthermore, contact between the Indigenous and the European impacted the self-conceptions of both. From 1492 to the present day, narratives created by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples living in what is now Canada and the US continue to necessarily involve substantial degrees of co-creation and enduring dynamism.

To date there are relatively few direct, specific, substantive Indigenous scholarly engagements with discourses of utopia. However, the late historian John Mohawk (Seneca) offers one notable critical treatment in his *Utopian Legacies: A History of Conquest and Oppression in the Western World*. Here Mohawk offers a conceptual distinction between notions of “utopia” and what he refers to as the Western “pursuit of the ideal.” Mohawk understands utopianism, as he conceives it, to have existed “since antiquity in most if not all of the world’s cultures,” and to “propose that there has existed, now exists somewhere, or could exist in the future a perfect society, an existence in which all human needs are satisfied, all problems are solved, and everyone’s life is


fulfilled.” Utopianism, Mohawk maintains, is related but distinguished from what he argues is “the pursuit of the ideal,” a “theme in Western culture” which “articulates all reasonable human beings who have access to an adequate base of information will pursue an identical concept of what is ideal or good.”

Western utopianism, according to Mohawk, “is dominated by a certainty that an ideal world is possible, that such a world would be in the best interest of all human beings, and its conception and production will inevitably be the product of Western thought.” Consequently for Mohawk, Western utopianism historically operated and continues to operate as a self-aggrandizing and humanist ideology based in future-oriented notions of modernity and progress, which, crucially, never fully arrive—therefore providing a basis for its ongoing and continual renewal.

In contrast, Mohawk writes of “many ancient societies, [where] utopias were envisioned as located in a distant past when human beings and nature existing harmoniously in blissful unity.” Moreover, as a consequence of the oppression imposed by Western utopianism, Mohawk’s brief discussion of the utopianism of Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island is based in notions of an idealized pre-colonial past, one that explicitly rejects notions of transcendental progress:

…North American Indians were, with few exceptions, coerced or driven by military force from their ancestral lands. These Indians saw the fowl, fish, and

26 Ibid, 1.
27 Ibid, 1.
28 Ibid, 2.
29 Ibid, 15.
animals of their homelands driven to near extinction; their people decimated by
disease; and their land made off limits to them by a relentless invader. For them,
utopia would be a place where all things lost would be restored and the material
culture of their ancestors could be enjoyed.\textsuperscript{30}

Mohawk’s articulation of this notion of Indigenous utopianism is decidedly a form of
“paradise lost” that could be recognized as essentializing insofar as it is interpreted as a
call to a “return” to an Indigenous cultural ideal. However, Mohawk later describes
traditional Haudenosaunee stories

… of the past depicting a time when people were clear about the desires of the
spirits who created life on the earth, and found a sense of security and grace in
that knowledge. Among the Iroquois myths is a story of human beings becoming
forgetful of their obligations for the great good fortune of the gift of life; when
this happened, unhappiness, misfortune, and anomie befell them. Therefore,
ceremonies of thanksgiving are given by the people to the Creator of Life so they
will always remember to be grateful. But, the story continues, someday in the
future people will once again become forgetful, the earth itself will grow old, and
life will change.

Iroquois cosmology is in a sense utopian, but the utopia—the perfect
world—is in a shrouded and very ancient past during which the relationship
between human beings and the spirits who support life was very strong and
cooperative, and even the animals and birds participated along with human beings
in the continuous drama of life. As time passed, according to this myth, things
changed and continue to change. Even before the European expansion and the end
of the fifteenth century and long before the beginning of the Age of Extinction at
the end of the seventeenth century, Iroquois storytellers described a perfect age in
the distant past and urged the necessity of carrying on traditions to preserve as
much of the relationships and knowledge of those times as possible in a present
that was becoming ever more distant from that utopia.\textsuperscript{31}

So, while Mohawk states “all societies have had their utopian dreams,” he is explicit in
characterizing Western utopianism as progressive, universalizing, implicitly

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 7.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 17.
anthropocentric, and continually renewing a sense of modernity. At the same time, he offers a radically different understanding of an Indigenous utopianism that is traditional and embedded within a wider earth-based cosmology.

Mohawk approaches these concerns as a historian and so his referencing of notions of “pluralism” as an alternative anti-colonial, quasi-utopian project is understandably brief. While he avoids a more direct and explicit evocation of what he might hold personally as an ideal or utopian vision, he does assert that “[to] the degree a people or nation can be taught to respect the principles of pluralism and tolerance, the prospects of militias committing slaughters and armies participating in wholesale ethnic cleansing are diminished.”

The growing body of contemporary Indigenous critical theory reflects the development of varied concepts, discourses, and practices that are indicative of the diversity of their respective backgrounds and experiences. Therefore, I wish to recognize the dangers of appearing to collapse Indigenous narratives surrounding settler colonialism, Indigenous decolonization, or those otherwise concerned with proposing alternatives to the modern utopian tradition of white settlers. I wish to emphasize that Indigenous critical theories and their narrative proposals cannot be reduced to singular concepts, discourses, or practices that may have the effect of appearing to condense a

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32 Ibid, 267. Interestingly, Mohawk addresses More’s *Utopia*, but he frames the novel as a response to “wretched conditions of poverty and injustice being produced in England” as an example to support his broader contention that utopianism often emerges out of “desperation and oppression.”

33 Even the term “Indigenous” is itself a potentially problematic categorization insofar as it has only recently come into common use a means of describing a category of persons of widely varying cultures, histories, and geographical locations. “Indigenous” appears as general description of peoples with original claims to land, and who, in many cases, were subjected to colonial modernity.
vital diversity of thought and practice. Moreover, as I discuss below, Indigenous critical theorists and their narrative proposals ought not be reduced to mere alternatives or counters to those of the settler colonial societies they are now situated within. Just as there is danger in reducing the diversity of Indigenous thought to singular concepts, discourses, or practices, there is a similar problematic in a reductive understanding of Indigenous critical theories and narrative proposals as merely defensive or reactive in their inspiration and articulation.

This being said, there are constellations of prominent concepts, discourses, and practices shared by influential Indigenous critical theorists to which I will now highlight Indigenous scholarship that destabilizes the relative hegemony of white settler utopian narratives. My intention is to demonstrate how Indigenous critical theorists have been constructing a variety of means of simultaneously addressing both “internal” (i.e. within Indigenous communities) and “external” (non-Indigenous) audiences in differing ways for equally differing reasons.

Fundamentally, the emergence of a body of scholarly Indigenous critical theory involves the implicit and explicit demand for direct and focused attention to both the historical and contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous scholars from Turtle Island (and indeed worldwide) have sought to give voice to the resistances of Indigenous peoples and, to varying degrees in their own respective ways, Indigenous critical theorists have offered narrative proposals that seek to contribute to the envisioning of the end of settler colonialism.
Additionally, as Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith acknowledge “the conditions of Native peoples are inextricably linked to the conditions facing other oppressed groups…”34 Simpson and Smith therefore advocate for a notion of “intellectual promiscuity” with respect to contemporary Indigenous critical theory such that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous-identified scholars are invited to engage and contribute to the development of Indigenous studies discourses. This framing of Indigenous studies continues to assert that engagement with Indigenous studies necessarily involves accountability to Indigenous communities. Thus while maintaining that non-Indigenous scholars ought be held responsible to Indigenous leadership within Indigenous studies discourses, Simpson and Smith assert, “a different political imaginary would require…stronger intellectual and political solidarities.”35 As such, alliance and coalitional politics are understood as vital to the project of decolonization, both among white settlers and racialized non-Native peoples. The trajectory of Indigenous critical theory outlined below is not intended as an exclusive or singular means of challenging the utopian tradition of white settler peoples. Rather, this approach is intended as a contribution to a dynamic, expansive, and necessarily multifaceted intellectual and political project.

Indigenous critical theories provoke questions and possibilities surrounding notions of survival, reclamation, re-identification, renewal, resurgence, and a re-indigenization. In doing so, Indigenous critical theories incite, for the non-Indigenous and

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Indigenous alike, an understanding of the ways in which the processes and logics of ongoing settler colonialisms implicate non-Indigenous peoples in their perpetuation. Indigenous critical theories, in their assertion of the contemporary, active, and fully human presence of Indigenous peoples, thus expose the ideological work of utopian narratives of white settler peoples as they naturalize genocidal settler colonialism. Indigenous critical theories operate to challenge even the most seemingly “progressive,” “radical,” or, indeed, “utopian” narratives of settler society by revealing their implication and complicity in an ongoing genocidal settler colonial project.

**From Indigenous deferral to Indigenous re-articulation**

The work of contemporary Indigenous critical theorists evidences a collective refusal to be erased, a demand for attention to the ways in which many academic (and non-academic) concepts and discourses ignore the experiences and concerns of Indigenous peoples. It is vital, therefore, to first recognize and situate the manifesting of a body of Indigenous critical theory and Indigenous-led scholarly communities as existing within the academic infrastructure supported and regulated by the white settler nation-state. With this reality in mind, the proliferation of Indigenous studies programs and the work of Indigenous critical theorists, as such, may be generally observed as acts of resistance.

Chickasaw critical theorist Jodi Byrd refers to what she terms the “deferral” of Indigenous peoples’ experiences and concerns within the prominent threads of critical
theory within the (settler) academy.\textsuperscript{36} An attending to Indigenous concerns and experiences in discourses such as human rights, postcoloniality, or sustainability rarely occurs, if it can be said that it has ever occurred in a substantial or sustained way. These continual deferrals operate as a means by which the white settler academy, again itself understood here as an adjunct of the wider capitalist settler societies in which it is embedded, can avoid confronting the fundamental contradictions and violence underlying the very condition of settler colonial societies. As Byrd writes, “indigenous peoples are located outside of temporality and presence, even in the face of the very present and ongoing colonization of indigenous lands, resources, and lives.”\textsuperscript{37}

According to Byrd, one of the more prominent means of such acts of deferral is the assignment of Indigenous peoples and their concerns and experiences to the past. This acts to relegate of Indigenous peoples to a state of invisibility and irrelevance in the contemporary world. Colonial narratives represent Indigenous peoples as having vanished or as having otherwise been passed by as part of a linear and teleological notion of human development. This allows for, and indeed perpetuates, deferrals from direct and sustained contention with the genocidal violence of settler colonialism by understanding colonization to have always-already taken place. Settler colonialism is therefore understood as complete, with Indigenous peoples and their nations, cultures, languages, knowledges, governance structures, and spiritualities viewed as mere remnants pushed to the margins, as contradictions that require (temporary) management.

\textsuperscript{36} Byrd, \textit{The Transit of Empire}, xxxv.

\textsuperscript{37} Byrd, \textit{Transit of Empire}, 6.
These narrative deferrals also often involve an imposed notion of “authentic” Indigeneity to have been fundamentally and irrevocably lost at some point in the past. The supposed loss of authenticity furthers a sense of the inevitability of Indigenous peoples’ assimilation into settler society. This to say that if Indigenous peoples ceased to be authentically Indigenous at some point in the past, then their capacity to be recognized by settler societies as fully human, and as Indigenous nations, rests primarily on their assimilation, the termination of the their Indigenous identities.

Obviously, this operates, in part, as a means of deferring engagement with the enduring and ongoing genocidal character of settler colonialism. This includes, but is not limited to, the ongoing reservation and reserve system, the gendered and sexualized violence, and the mass settler state interventions into Indigenous communities (e.g. the removal of children from their families). Furthermore, the ongoing legacy of broken treaties between the erstwhile colonial metropoles, the settler nation-states that Byrd refers to as “breakaway settler colonialisms,” and Indigenous nations, requires the subsuming of Indigenous peoples within the settler nation-state, undermining Indigenous sovereignties and denying Indigenous nationhood.38

While it appears that, to date, the largest non-Indigenous audience for much of contemporary Indigenous critical theory has been in area studies and critical studies of race, gender, and sexuality, the work of Byrd in Transit of Empire offers a wide-ranging set of critical interventions, aimed at postcolonial and poststructural scholarship, as well as cultural studies. Byrd’s arguments focus on the construction of the notion of what she

38 Ibid, xix.
calls “Indian” and “Indianness,” which, in some ways mirror Anishinaabe writer and
theorist Gerald Vizenor’s similar characterization of the “Indian” as an imposed non-
Indigenous caricature. For Byrd the “Indian”

…becomes a site through which U.S. empire orients and replicates itself by
transforming those to be colonized into “Indians” through continual reiterations of
pioneer logics, whether in the Pacific, the Caribbean, or the Middle East. 39

Thus, for Byrd, “indigenous peoples must be central to any theorizations of the
conditions of postcoloniality, empire and death-dealing regimes that arise out of
indigenous lands.” 40 Similarly, Byrd also situates the deferrals of Indigenous concerns in
the proliferation of postructuralism, arguing that Indigenous peoples become an “absent
referent” on which much contemporary postructural theory is constructed. She argues,
“…the Indian is simultaneously, multiply, a colonial, imperial referent that continues to
produce knowledge about the indigenous as “primitive” and “savage” otherness within
postructuralist and postcolonial theory and philosophy.” 41

According to Byrd, even in critical theories that interrogate hegemonic
constructions of colonial modernity and which implicitly or explicitly acknowledge the
dichotomization of modern versus pre-modern cultures or “civilizations,” there is a
tendency to locate Indigenous peoples in the past—as though the pre-modern peoples
were all killed or assimilated: vanished. Byrd argues

39 Ibid, xiii.
40 Ibid, xiv.
41 Ibid, 19.
indigeniety as an ontological prior challenges postcolonial and critical theories because it serves as a significant parallax view—though certainly not the only one—along the baseline of colonialism through which to trouble the dialectical processes that underwrite colonialist hegemonies of racializations and normativities, subjectivities and subjectifications.\(^{42}\)

The goals of the *Transit of Empire* are thus to critically intervene in existing non-Indigenous discourses with the intention of compelling attention to the contemporary presence and experiences of Indigenous peoples and a critical recognition of the effects of the naturalized deferrals of ongoing lived contemporary concerns of Indigenous peoples. Byrd is claiming that a caricatured Indian as subhuman is continuously redeployed as the means of the “transit” of American imperialism, but also that the Indian as pre-modern-and-vanished is deployed as the alternative to hegemonic notions of modernity in critical theory.

Byrd also proposes a conceptualization of “cacophony” as means of understanding how liberal multiculturalism defers Indigenous concerns in part via “the noise of competing claims, recognitions, and remediations.”\(^ {43}\) Here she is naming the “contradictorily hegemonic and horizontal struggles” within contemporary multicultural settler nation-states as another means of deferring the concerns of Indigenous peoples.\(^ {44}\) Byrd’s argument is for an attending to the ways in which the efforts at rights and recognition from the nation-state has the consequences of pitting marginalized populations against one another in a competition that has the effect of further

\(^{42}\) Ibid, 32.

\(^{43}\) Ibid, 40.

\(^{44}\) Ibid, 53.
marginalizing and reinforcing the deferrals of Indigenous concerns. In doing so, Byrd’s
Transit of Empire represents one of the foremost contemporary examples of
contemporary Indigenous critical theory explicitly positioned as critical interventions
within non-Indigenous discourses.

Byrd’s work may be understood as doing the work of “re-articulation,” a notion
developed by Stuart Hall and subsequently taken up by Andrea Smith as a means of
calling non-Indigenous discourses into a responsible relationship with Indigenous
feminisms. Re-articulation refers to a processual re-centring of heretofore marginalized
communities to avoid a “politics of inclusion that seeks to include a marginalized voice
within a pre-established politics or discourse.”45 Following Hall, Smith argues for a
processual re-centering, a moment in which, using the example of Indigenous feminisms,
the deferrals of Indigenous women’s concerns and experiences are ended and they are
“centered” in feminist analysis. As Smith contends, “we [must] constantly re-center the
discussion to see if this illuminates our understanding […] so that we can build a more
liberating framework, not just for the communities we center in the analysis but for all
peoples.”46 Critical interventions such as Byrd’s in postcolonial, poststructural, and
cultural studies thus compels re-articulation in light of the concerns and experiences of
Indigenous peoples as acts of both intellectual and political responsibility.

Byrd’s work is clearly indebted to that of Vizenor, whose scholarship outlines
some of the more prominent and fundamental concepts of Indigenous critical theory.

45 Andrea Smith. Native Americans and the Christian Right, xiii.
46 Ibid, xiv.
Byrd’s discussion of “Indianness” reflects Vizenor’s own conceptualizing of “Indian” and “postIndian” as components of his manifold concept of “survivance.” The idea of survivance, for Vizenor, describes the assertion of continued presence and action of Indigenous peoples. In his own words:

> The theories of survivance are elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition, translation, comparison, and catchword histories, but survivance is invariably true and just in native practice and company. The nature of survivance is unmistakable in native stories, natural reason, remembrance, traditions, and customs and is clearly observable in narrative resistance and personal attributes, such as the native humanistic tease, vital irony, spirit, cast of mind, and moral courage. The character of survivance creates a sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry.47

Survivance, in Vizenor’s conceptualization, resists precise definition such that it defies an imposed external (i.e. non-Indigenous) categorization. Vizenor argues, however, it is “invariably true and just in native practice and company.” Thought of in such terms, Vizenorian survivance appears as an assertion of self-determined authenticity—Indigenous peoples’ own affirmations of “presence over absence,” experienced and understood on their own terms. Indigenous survivance thus interrupts imposition of settler narratives of modernity and utopia that naturalize the termination of Indigenous peoples or otherwise instrumentally subsume them within colonial modernity.

Vizenor’s association of the language of “true” and “just” appear as a means of recognizing incidences of Indigenous survivance as realizable immediately as part of an embeddedness in the land, in accordance with land-based Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. The assertion of Indigenous survivance is an immanence-oriented, disruptive

alternative to settler narratives that avow universalized notions of transcendentental progress and the human development requisite in the project of colonial modernity.

Vizenor’s conceptualization of survivance is related to another of his theorizations, that of “transmotion,” which he defines as a sense of native motion and an active presence [that] is *sui generis* sovereignty. Native transmotion is survivance, a reciprocal use of nature, not a monotheistic, territorial sovereignty. Native stories of survivance are the creases of transmotion and sovereignty.⁴⁸

Thus with both the concepts of survivance and transmotion there is an emphasis on active Indigenous presence, a resistance to externally-imposed categorization and domination, and an assertion of full human personhood. In his articulation of transmotion, Vizenor invokes the language of “sovereignty” itself a central ongoing concern of Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous sovereignty understood through Vizenor’s concepts of survivance and transmotion is fundamentally a claim of contemporary and full humanity, again, explicitly on the terms of Indigenous peoples themselves. Narratives that sustain settler societies may continually reify notions of modernity and progress, enabling related notions of what it is to be fully human. Such narratives are imposed as direct contradistinctions to tropes of vanishing or already-absent Indigenous peoples. It follows that the concepts of Indigenous survivance and transmotion speak to the contemporary presence of Indigenous peoples that confound hegemonic conceptions of colonial modernity.

⁴⁸ Vizenor quoted in Byrd, *Transit of Empire*, xvi.
Indigenous Intellectual Histories & Differentiating Indigenous Nationhood

Ideas of self-determination and sovereignty appear as prominent, indeed fundamental, themes across much Indigenous critical theory and contemporary Indigenous narratives. Osage scholar Robert Warrior has argued for an Indigenous “intellectual sovereignty” in *Tribal Secrets*, published in 1995. Warrior appeals for a (re)consideration of “the ways American Indian intellectuals write about and speak to each other about the role of intellectual work in the social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual struggle for an American Indian future.” In *Tribal Secrets* Warrior centers the works of the late scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) and writer John Joseph Mathews (Osage) in his argument for this notion of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty. Warrior understands Deloria Jr. and Mathews as progenitors of an emergent Indigenous intellectual community with distinct histories and discourses that “can now ground itself its own history the way that African-American, feminist, and other oppositional discourses have.”

Intellectual sovereignty, in Warrior’s conception, is “process-based” insofar as it simultaneously hinges upon the distinctive traditions that underpin the uniqueness of Indigenous identities and experiences as compared to non-Indigenous peoples, as well as a critical engagement—as opposed to disengagement—with the non-Indigenous intellectual community. Rather, Warrior is not arguing for what might otherwise be


50 Ibid, xvi.

51 Ibid, 2
described as a return to pre-contact notions of traditional intellectual work by Indigenous peoples. To the contrary, his articulation of “intellectual sovereignty” seeks explicitly to avoid reductive essentialisms of Indigenous peoples as only being authentic prior to contact, and instead directly addresses the experience of contemporary Indigenous peoples as, per Deloria Jr. and Mathews, one characterized simultaneously by “chaos” and “maturity.”⁵²

Warrior’s invocation of the language of chaos and maturity are, on this read, understood to propose that Indigenous intellectual work as realizing an intellectual evolution such that—in the face of the chaos of the lived Indigenous experience of the condition of settler colonialism—Indigenous intellectuals are neither compelled to appeal to nor avoid non-Indigenous intellectual institutions or traditions. Warrior asserts a notion of “sovereignty” insofar as contemporary Indigenous intellectual work may be understood to have achieved a substantial degree of self-determination. Warrior maintains this involves Indigenous intellectuals moving beyond a focus on “parochial questions of identity and authenticity” and towards

…a way of making ourselves vulnerable to the wide variety of pain, joy, oppression, celebration, and spiritual power of contemporary American Indian community existence, whether we find that variety in writing poetry, fiction, theology, or cultural criticism. Within that vulnerability we do not reduce intellectual production to mere aestheticism or functionalism, but find the sources of pain in explicit analysis of economic realities, gender differences, and a host of other areas.⁵³

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⁵² Ibid, 88.

⁵³ Ibid, 114.
Here Warrior’s plea marks a moment in time in the evolution of Indigenous studies; in 1995 he clearly felt compelled to agitate for the emergence of a diverse and robust contemporary Indigenous intellectual community that could attend to the “chaos of contemporary Indian lives.”

Warrior’s claim came at a point when some significant voices in Indigenous critical theory included a decidedly essentializing strand. To claim, as Warrior did, that Indigenous critical theory could make itself available, or “vulnerable”, as an intellectual community through engagement with wider non-Indigenous scholarship was to reject such essentialism on the grounds of asserting a self-determination within the white settler-dominated academy. Warrior’s call for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty may then be understood as a critical intervention in the white settler academy as a means of asserting a contemporary and dynamic Indigenous presence that both implicitly and explicitly destabilizes the naturalized deferrals of Indigenous concerns.

Intellectual sovereignty is, therefore, an act of what Vizenor would likely refer to as survivance. Similarly, the action of a “maturing” Indigenous intellectual tradition may be recognized via Vizenor as an incidence of transmotion; the creativity and dynamism of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty as, again per Vizenor, a sui generis act of a form of Indigenous sovereignty as such.

Proceeding from Vizenor’s notions of Indigenous survivance and transmotion and Warrior’s assertion of distinct Indigenous intellectual histories and the maturing of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty, the notion of Indigenous nationhood, as both an

54 Ibid, 111.
intellectual and political project, ought be recognized as a primary expression of Indigenous presence. Agitation for the (re)assertion of Indigenous nationhood appears as a near consensual component of contemporary Indigenous critical theory, as an active and meaningful move to self-determination. While expressions of Indigenous nationhood are diverse, they generally involve a focus on the reclamation of traditional lands, as well as the recovery of language, traditional knowledges and spiritual practices, and governance structures.

The concept of Indigenous nationhood articulated by many Indigenous critical theorists is decidedly and explicitly differentiated from the predominant settler conception of the nation-state. At the same time, the limitations of language and availability of accessible conceptual frameworks, coupled with existing contemporary demographic and political realities, contribute to the adoption of the English-language “nation” or “nationhood” as means of articulating and, in fact, translating Indigenous concepts for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. Meaning, the very notion of “Indigenous nationhood” is elaborated, for Indigenous critical theorists, in a second (colonial) language. It is notable that the signification of “nation” or “nationhood” works as a means of legible communication within Indigenous communities, many of whom faced organized and sustained state coercion via Residential schools, which have subsequently led to the loss their traditional language. Moreover, the use of “nation” or “nationhood” may also serve as a means of appeal to non-Indigenous peoples up to and including the white settler nation-state itself.
In particular, the declaration of Indigenous nationhood challenges the existing settler nation-states to honour the treaties between the British crown, and the successive settler nation-state governments of the US and Canada. Treaties were forged on a nation-to-nation basis indicating the British crown explicitly recognized the status of Indigenous communities as “foreign nations.” History records, however, the subsequent chronic, if not wholesale, abrogation of these treaties, and the many attempts of the successive nation-states of Canada and the US to legislate the elimination of Indigenous nations.

In sum, the status of broken treaties signed between non-Indigenous political authorities and Indigenous nations have been subject to a naturalized deferral predicated upon a variety of strategic appeals grouped around the supposed subhuman status of Indigenous peoples. These appeals include the notion of the vanishing Indian and the rejection of contemporary Indigenous nationhood as authentic. This assertion of Indigenous nationhood also acts to subvert the hegemonic and linear narratives of colonial modernity, which may be, again, understood to have disparate roots that coalesced around the first European contact with Abya Yala and the travel narratives of Columbus, Vespucci, and others.

Lina Sunseri (Oneida) draws an explicit connection between the advent of Western conceptions of modernity and nationhood as a means of relegating Indigenous nations to pre-modern and, therefore, subordinated status:

Mainstream theorists of nation treat nations as social constructions that are tied to modernity. The theories may at times give different dates and places of origins of nation and nationalism. However, they all argue that it was Western modernity that ultimately generated the need to imagine national identity and the formation of nations…this conceptualization of nationalism is Eurocentric and dismisses those experiences of nationalism that existed prior to and or outside of modernity.
and that in many cases preceded the time of contact with Europeans and colonialism, such as the experiences of Oneida people and of other Indigenous peoples.\(^{55}\)

Here Sunseri specifically draws together the emergence of early modernity with the formation of European notions of nation and nationalism, which themselves have come to be primarily associated with the nation-state. Her claim that Indigenous peoples had their own and pre-existing experiences of nationhood and nationalism prior to European contact serves to destabilize the Western/Euro-American/white settler idea of a linear, progressive notion of development that necessarily posits Western/Euro-American/white settler nationalism as the apex of human social organization. To suggest that Indigenous peoples maintained distinct but relatable models of nationhood undermines the notion of progress and modernity being brought to Abya Yala by the European newcomers.

I read Sunseri’s work as evidencing the sort of “mature” Indigenous intellectual sovereignty Warrior called for in her simultaneous engagements with “internal” Indigenous notions of nationhood and “external” non-Indigenous scholarship on nationhood and nationalism. In doing so, Sunseri is answering Warrior’s call for Indigenous critical theory that is capable of addressing the lived experiences of contemporary Indigenous communities. The assertion of Indigenous nationhood is integral to the contemporary appeals to the settler nation-states (and the British crown) to honour treaties as a means of re-asserting Indigenous cultural, political, and territorial

self-determination, all of which are routinely named as prerequisites for any notion of Indigenous decolonization.

Sunseri’s work also operates as a site of survivance, as an assertion of fully human Indigenous presence as both prior to, and just as importantly, subsequent to European contact. In doing so, Sunseri’s arguments for Indigenous nationhood critique the conceptualizations of nationhood and nationalism of prominent non-Indigenous theorists including Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm. Sunseri points out the ways in which these theorists alternately rely on theories of nationhood, which necessarily operate to deny the pre-existence of self-defined and self-organized Indigenous nations. At the same time, European nationalisms are elevated as “modern” and “progressive”, and evidencing cultural and linguistic unity and a notion of centralized political authority, among their other posited characteristics of “authentic” nationhood and nationalism.

It is, therefore, telling that Hobsbawm associates nationhood with, among other criteria, a “proven capacity for conquest.” In highlighting this, Sunseri demonstrates how Indigenous nationhood in this conceptualization is necessarily rendered absent as a basis for establishing European claims to nationhood. The tautological logic suggests that Indigenous nations were not nations because they were “conquered” by European imperialism. In fact, under this conception it was imperialism itself, which is viewed as a means of defining nationhood.

Anderson’s well-known view that nationhood and nationalism are, in effect, “imagined communities” originates in with the “discovery” of Abya Yala. Sunseri argues

Anderson’s views on nationhood ought be recognized as similarly dependent upon the consignment of pre-existing Indigenous nations, with their respective distinctive cultural traditions and complex political organizations, to something less-than that of the European by virtue of a notion of conquest. She writes

…contrary to his [Anderson’s] view that “the indigenous were conquerable by arms and disease, and controllable by the mysteries of Christianity and complete alien culture (as well as, for those days, an advanced political organization)”… [Anderson] in fact, dismisses the many ways that Indigenous peoples have resisted this “alien culture”; evidence of this resistance rests in the survival of Indigenous traditions and their revitalization. Oneida people and the other Haudenosaunee peoples did have, for those days, and an advanced political organization, a confederacy of nations that later influenced the formation of the United States of America and was admired by European theorists like Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. And they had a detailed and sophisticated body of laws, the Kayanl^hslako, or Great Law of Peace.⁵⁷

Sunseri’s critique of Anderson, as a well-known theorist of nationhood and nationalism, and her invocation of the Haudenosaunee’s Great Law of Peace are, again, evidence themselves of Indigenous presence and resistance to the “conquest” of settler colonialism. This act of survivance is itself supporting evidence for Sunseri’s own claim.

By virtue of her invocation of her own contemporary Oneida and Haudenosaunee identities Sunseri signals the active Indigenous presence, the enduring resistance to the supposed conquest of European-turned-North-American nationalism. Moreover, her discussion of the Great Law of Peace as “a central notion in the decolonizing of Canada by many Haudenosaunee people” is indicative of Vizenorian transmotion: an active and contemporary narrative proposal that counters the imposition of a sense of Indigenous

⁵⁷ Ibid, 23.
absence. In raising the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace as a contemporary means of Indigenous decolonization, Sunseri explicitly rejects the external imposition of notions of “authentic Indigeneity” that are mobilized as a means of deferring Indigenous concerns. Sunseri argues

The cultural and national identities of Oneida and the other Haudenosaunee nations contain both consistency and fluidity. For example, these identities are consistently tied to kinship, with the centrality of clan being its major element. However, due to experiences with colonialism, these identities have had to adapt to new realities: in the case of the Oneida people, the dispossession of land caused some groups to relocate in new territory and also affected their sense of belonging to the “old,” “original” territory and also affected their sense of belonging to the new one. Hence a series of historical experiences have changed the construction of such identities, challenging any static notions of identity and belonging to a nation. The symbolic and subjective nature of cultural identity is present within my community: the co-existence of fluidity and durability is what often underlies ethno-national identity, and the discourses of nationalism are to be seen within this parameter.

Thus, Sunseri is clear in her rejection of an essentialized “authentic” Indigeneity as something irrevocably destroyed by contact with European newcomers and subsequent settler colonization. To the contrary, she addresses the work of non-Indigenous critical theorists, specifically Homi Bhaba and Stuart Hall, in her discussion of anti-essentialism and an active Indigenous presence as part of her advocacy for contemporary Indigenous claims to nationhood. Sunseri maintains Bhabha and Hall

offer an innovative and creative way to imagine the identities of Indigenous peoples in the process of colonization: one must consider the possibility that these identities are not the same as they were before colonial contact, that in fact they

have been shaped by the exclusion, marginalization, dispossession, and loss of control produced by colonial discourses and institutions.\(^{60}\)

In referring to Bhaba and Hall, Sunseri demonstrates a means of linking arguments for Indigenous nationhood to different, though relatable struggles of racialized non-Native peoples. In advocating for Indigenous nationhood on Indigenous terms as a conceptual foundation for Indigenous decolonization, Sunseri’s arguments therefore simultaneously rely upon “internal” Indigenous experiences and intellectual bases while engaging critically with non-Indigenous experiences and intellectual traditions. Furthermore, Sunseri’s references to the Haudenosaunee’s Great Law of Peace as well as her references to some of her contemporary Indigenous theorists of nationalism, including Taiaiake Alfred, Kiera Ladner, and Audra Simpson are indicative of the sort of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty advocated by Warrior.

Ultimately, Sunseri’s arguments for Indigenous nationhood represent a critical intervention into those settler narratives that propose an exclusivist and hegemonic notion of colonial modernity and attendant conceptualizations of progress and utopia. The implications of Indigenous nationhood are fundamentally destabilizing to such narratives, which buttress the historical emergence of Canada and the US as beacons of democracy, freedom, and human rights. Moreover, Indigenous nationhood operates as an intellectual claim that challenges the centrality of the settler nation-state as a site for advocacy and redress of grievances of marginalized peoples, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. Sunseri’s critical intervention, alongside associated claims by her fellow Indigenous

\(^{60}\) Ibid, 27.
theorists of nationhood, thus exposes contradictions in settler nation-state law and policy with respect to Indigenous nations and peoples who now reside within their borders. The implications of which are as profound as they are wide-ranging insofar as they reveal the extent to which mainstream narratives associated with the histories of Canada and the US, respectively, rely upon deferrals, omissions, and tautologies.

Sunseri’s highlighting of Western concepts of nationhood as being predicated upon a linear, progressive, and self-serving notion of colonial modernity calls into question a fundamental difference in the epistemological and ontological orientations of Indigenous peoples: that of an immanent relationship to the land (space) versus the transcendental relationship to progress (time). These proposals are, therefore, decidedly place-based, as Indigenous critical theorists routinely orient to the land—conceived of as a manifold concept including all of the components of a given nation’s territory, including the human and other-than-human. Differentiated from the progress (understood as a continual re-defining of what it is to be “modern”) and time-oriented transcendental “no place[s]” of modern utopian narratives, Indigenous narrative proposals for decolonization may instead be (generally) characterized by principles of immanence, reciprocity, and relationship between the Indigenous nations and their traditional lands.

**Indigenous Critiques of the Politics of Recognition**

Indigenous peoples’ relationship to their traditional lands appears as a focal point for articulations of Indigenous nationhood and Indigenous decolonization. For Dene
critical theorist Glen Coulthard land is the ethical touchstone for the identity of
Indigenous peoples. He writes,

…it is a profound misunderstanding to think of land or place as simply some
material object of profound importance to Indigenous cultures (although it is this
too); instead it ought to be understood as a field of “relationships of things to each
other.” Place is a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating with the world—and
these ways of knowing often guide forms of resistance to power relations that
threaten to erase or destroy our senses of place. This, I would argue, is precisely
the understanding of land and/or place that not only anchors many Indigenous
peoples’ critique of colonial relations of force and command, but also our visions
of what a truly post-colonial relationship of peaceful co-existence might look
like… Although this place-based ethics has been worn by decades of colonial
displacement, for many it still serves as the radical imaginary guiding our visions
of a just political and economic relationship with non-Indigenous people and
communities based on principles of reciprocity and mutual obligation… It is
place-based imaginary that serves as the ethical foundation from which many
Indigenous people and communities continue to resist and critique the dual
imperatives of state sovereignty and capitalist accumulation that constitute our
colonial present. 61

Here Coulthard is articulating a rejection of the transcendental time-centered narratives of
progress and modernity that underpin settler utopian narratives in favour of an Indigenous
narrative proposal for decolonization that is decidedly immanent in its orientation. Rather
than the utopian “no place” of a future time, Coulthard’s narrative proposal for
Indigenous decolonization is emphatically located within the immanent “here and now.”

Coulthard’s contention is mirrored by Kahnawake (Mohawk) scholar Taiaiake
Alfred, who maintains the implications of Indigenous relationships to land are
fundamentally at odds with the capitalist instrumentalization of land as “resources.”

Alfred argues

61 Glen Coulthard, “Place Against Empire: Understanding Indigenous Anti-Colonialism,” Affinities: A
In today’s North America this [radical re-imagining of Indigenous decolonization] would mean rejecting the image of this land and everyone on it and in it as mere resources for capitalist enterprise. Would it be possible for people cultured in the North American mainstream to re-imagine themselves in relation to the land and others and start to see this place as a real, sacred homeland, instead of an encountered commodity destined to be used and abused to satisfy impulses and desires implanted in their heads by European imperial texts?62

Taken alongside Sunseri’s work on behalf of contemporary Indigenous nationhood, the assertions of Alfred and Coulthard—which are but two of many Indigenous critical theorists to centre land and place in their narrative proposals for decolonization—are, again, fundamentally destabilizing to the settler nation-state. Respect for Indigenous nationhood and a non-instrumentalized, reciprocal, responsible, and mutualistic relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and the other-than-human cannot co-exist with the settler nation-state.

The settler nation-states of Canada and the US are predicated on the instrumental commodification of the other-than human as a means to extracting value in accordance with the inexhaustible drive for capitalist economic growth and commensurate “resource” extraction. Indigenous reserves and reservations are therefore subject to a capitalist drive for Indigenous territories serves to further ongoing deferrals of Indigenous presence and self-determination. Thus, Alfred and Coulthard’s engagement with the variety of forces contributing to the contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples within Canada and the US extends to critical analyses of the role of capital.

Coulthard’s critique of what he describes as a politics of recognition and accommodation stems from his application of the Marxian concept of primitive accumulation to the land claims process. Moving from what he terms an emphasis on the “capitalist relation” to the “colonial relation,” Rather than viewing primitive accumulation through the terms of the “expropriation of the worker” it is instead recognized as part of the process of colonial dispossession. Coulthard writes:

By repositioning the colonial frame as our overarching lens of analysis, it becomes far more difficult to justify in antiquated developmental terms (from either the Right or the Left) the assimilation of noncapitalist, non-Western, Indigenous modes of life based on the assumption that this assimilation will somehow magically redeem itself by bringing the fruits of capitalist modernity into the supposedly backward world of the colonized.63

The politics of recognition, for Coulthard, involve Indigenous peoples being recuperated within the very structure of dispossession and violence that would now serve as a negotiating framework between Indigenous nations and settler nation-states. Indigenous “rights” to their territorial lands are delineated by the settler-nation state that seeks to assimilate Indigenous peoples. Coulthard quotes Paul Nadasdy: “to engage in the process of negotiating a land claim agreement, First Nations people must translate their complex reciprocal relationship with the land into the equally complex but very different language of ‘property.’”64


64 Ibid, 86.
This critique of appeals to recognition from the settler state involves a nuanced approach to the question of essentialism. Ideas of Indigenous peoples as culturally land-based and as occupying a unique status relative to the settler state may raise concerns of ossifying Indigenous identity. However, Coulthard offers a discussion of the problems inherent in both essentialist and anti-essentialist discourses as they relate to Indigenous concerns. He points out the ways in which anti-essentialist discourses can constrain the possibilities of Indigenous resistance:

…it is crucial that advocates of anti-essentialist criticism begin to acknowledge that, as discourses, both constructivist and essentialist articulations of identity can aid in either the maintenance or subversion of oppressive configurations of power…no discourse on identity should be prematurely cast as either inherently productive or repressive prior to an engaged consideration of the historical, political, and socioeconomic contexts and actors involved.65

As it moves towards denying the violent contradictions inherent in the societies it creates, settler colonialism works towards the collapsing of Indigenous identity. At the same time, Coulthard recognizes the ways in which the experience of colonialism has itself wrought imposed essentialisms, which have sometimes been adopted by elements within Indigenous communities, particularly with respect to the status of Indigenous women in relation to the Indian Act. In such cases, Coulthard argues, a critique of the manifold ways in which settler colonialism operates to construct notions of “legitimacy” is necessary to provide a means by which Indigenous self-determination can be actualized.66


Coulthard’s critique places him close to Alfred, for whom a notion of “anacho-indigenism” appears as an alternative to the so-called legitimacy conferred by the settler nation-state. Alfred views the legitimacy of the settler nation-state as “the most imperceptible yet crucial form of power.” Thus, both Alfred and Coulthard are deeply concerned with exposing the assimilative, collusive logics of capitalism and the settler nation-state as potentially eroding what they view as an ethical basis—land and the culture informed by it—for Indigenous resurgence. These authors share a sensitivity towards the potential charges of essentialism in how contemporary Indigenous peoples are identified and characterized. At the same time they privilege autonomy-oriented political projects emphasizing Indigenous nationhood insofar as they may provide spaces where decolonial alternatives may be developed relatively absent the immediate pressures of capital and the settler nation-state. However, while the specificities of Indigenous peoples’ concerns and experiences are indeed recognized by many Indigenous scholars as vitally important, the prospect of alliance and coalitional work is similarly understood as crucial to the project of decolonization and a liberatory politics for all.

**Indigenous Critical Theory: Theoretical Promiscuity and Intersectional Logics**

In seeking to address the scope of contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples living within Canada and the US, Indigenous critical theorists are necessarily compelled to critically engage with non-Indigenous critical theories including but not

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limited to those of capital, gender, the nation-state, racialization, sexuality, and the relationship of humans to the other-than-human. In doing so, Indigenous critical theorists are doing the work of relating to traditional nation-specific experiences, knowledges, and practices as a means of resisting the assimilation logics of the settler state and asserting Indigenous nationhood while also offering critical interventions into non-Indigenous critical theory while benefitting from this engagement. Indigenous critical theories are therefore emphatically dynamic and articulated as acts intellectual sovereignty but not intellectual isolation. Moreover, these critical interventions of Indigenous critical theorists may have the effect of destabilizing non-Indigenous critical theory that has heretofore naturalized or otherwise deferred Indigenous concerns and experiences.

For example, Indigenous feminisms may refer to nation-specific experiences and traditions as a means of asserting Indigenous nationhood alongside and as a means to engaging “the intersections of power and domination that have also shaped Native nations and gender relations.”69 Continuing with this example, critical engagement with non-Indigenous feminisms may serve to augment and contribute to the work of Indigenous critical theory’s abilities to address the historical and contemporary experiences of settler colonialism. This includes both academic and non-academic Indigenous feminist interventions such as the Native Youth Sexual Health Network and the #It Ends Here series of blogs hosted on the website of the Indigenous Nationhood

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Movement.\textsuperscript{70} It is therefore important to recognize, as Mishuana R. Goeman and Jennifer Nez Denetdale argue,

\begin{quote}
… for Native women there is no one definition of Native feminism; rather, there are multiple definitions and layers of what it means to do Native feminist analysis. However, as Native feminists, our dreams and goals overlap; we desire to open up spaces where generations of colonialism have silenced Native peoples about the status of their women.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

Moreover, Andrea Smith contends

\begin{quote}
…many indigenous feminists are challenging how we conceptualize indigenous sovereignty – it is not an add-on to the heteropatriarchal sovereignty model associated with the state-form. …the notion that we can separate gender justice from sovereignty struggles does not take into consideration the fact that it is precisely through gender violence that colonialism and white supremacy works. Gender violence operates to not only destroy indigenous peoples, but to destroy their sense of being a people. Gender violence also inscribes patriarchy onto the bodies of Native peoples, thus naturalizing social hierarchy and colonial domination.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

Hence, Smith’s analysis involves a simultaneous critique of the nation-state, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy all while centering Indigenous concerns, while Goeman and Nez Denetdale emphasize the dynamism and multiplicity of Indigenous feminisms. Indigenous feminist interventions operate to de-naturalize settler colonialism and its deferrals of Indigenous concerns and experiences in both academic and non-academic locales.

\textsuperscript{70} See http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/ and http://nationsrising.org/tag/itendshere/


Such Indigenous interventions in wider non-Indigenous critical theories hinge upon their ability to offer compelling arguments that demand an accountable response by non-Indigenous peoples. There is an important role, therefore, for non-Indigenous scholars to play in responding to and supporting the calls of Indigenous critical theorists. The emergence of settler colonialism as a distinct framework for critical inquiry may be understood, in part, as a consequence of the compelling work of non-Indigenous scholars, such as those predominately identified with critical ethnic studies and postcolonial studies.

It follows then, that Indigenous critical theory is also responsible to wider efforts aimed at analyzing the intersectional and interlocking logics of domination and oppression. As a case in point, there has been an ongoing discussion pertaining to the relative ascendancy of settler colonialism as a critical analytical framework absent a simultaneous accounting for the constituent role of anti-blackness in the triadic structure of the settler colonialism. This is a longstanding discussion that ultimately calls Indigenous (and allied non-Indigenous scholars as well) into a responsible relationship to wider anti-colonial and anti-racist scholarship. Contemporary Indigenous studies is therefore both asserting the unique concerns and experiences of Indigenous peoples as well as the implications of aligning with other critical approaches to colonial modernity, as part of a coalitional liberatory project.

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Where Byrd utilizes the concept of “cacophony” as a critique of the ways that competing claims aimed at the hegemony of white supremacist settler colonialism often effect the naturalized obscuring of Indigenous peoples’ concerns and experiences, there remain possibilities of a more positive notion of “cacophony.” In this reading, the variety of scholarly approaches to interrogating colonial modernity can be understood not as competing against one another, but as cooperative and facilitating greater insights across conversations. Rather than a discordant “noise” that has the effect of silencing already marginalized communities, Indigenous studies is being conceptualized in a way that facilitates a more complex, nuanced, and, ultimately, liberating framework. In this way Indigenous critical theories which articulate (strategic) essentialisms and advocate for land-based Indigenous nationhood may be enabled by and, in turn, assist in wider critical engagements with colonial modernity.

Indigenous studies’ relationship to nationalism and postcolonialism appear as two of the more central and indeed potentially controversial questions, in part because of the relatively unique status of Indigenous peoples in relation to other peoples subjected to the colonial modernity. While settler colonialism as an analytic framework suggests that “postcolonial” is not appropriate for Indigenous peoples living within, for example, Canada and the US, it is also true that, as Byrd argues, the insights of postcolonial theory can be advantageous to Indigenous peoples for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is illuminating why the particularities of Indigenous peoples’ concerns and experiences have often been neglected within postcolonial discourse. Moreover, concerns about nationalism abound, largely as a consequence of the experience of Western nationalism
critiqued by Sunseri. However, rather than categorical dismissals of postcolonialism, for example, by Indigenous scholars or Indigenous nationhood by critics of nationalism, it may be possible that critical yet open engagement can be a positive sum rather than what often appears as fears of a zero-sum exchange. In fact, the critical but coalitional approach appears, as Simpson and Smith argue in *Theorizing Native Studies*, to be an imperative for Indigenous studies and aligned scholarly communities and social movements similarly occupied with undoing colonial modernity.

**Towards Indigenous Futurisms: Decolonizing Utopia**

The Indigenous critical theories discussed above are themselves examples of the distinctly Indigenous concepts of survivance and transmotion, and are indeed reflective of Indigenous intellectual histories and sovereignties. The assertions of continued Indigenous presence and active critical interventions in other discourses act as a means of both demanding and attending to the concerns of Indigenous peoples. But they also compel comparative work on, and collaboration with, non-Indigenous peoples in order to add to, complicate, and extend the work of critical theory, as such, as a means of contributing to the broad and diverse projects of decolonialization.

This project attends to the constituent role of utopia in colonial modernity, especially the tradition of utopian narratives, which both prefigured and contribute to the naturalization of settler colonialism. While Indigenous authors of poetry and prose have received increasing critical and popular attention, especially since the publication of N. Scott Momaday’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *House Made of Dawn*, there has been relatively
little attention paid to Indigenous narratives that fall within “genre” literature. This includes speculative narratives, including, but not limited to, those often categorized as “sf”—science fiction, fantasy, or speculative fiction, under which the somewhat amorphous subcategory of utopian literature falls.

However, Anishinaabe scholar Grace L. Dillon’s work is foremost in the ongoing establishment of the field of what she alternately describes as “Indigenous futurisms” and Indigenous sf. Dillon characterizes Indigenous science fiction within the broader science fiction community as

…thought experiments that confront issues of “Indianness” in a genre that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century context of evolutionary theory and anthropology profoundly intertwined with colonial ideology, whose major interest was coming to grips with—or negating—the implications of these scientific mixes of “competition, adaptation, race, and destiny.”

Thus the broader genre of sf is explicitly identified for its contributions to the horrors of the nineteenth century holocausts of the Indigenous peoples while it is simultaneously recognized as potential means of redress and reimagining. As I will discuss in greater detail in the fourth chapter, the tradition of utopian narratives of white settlers itself has evolved considerably with respect to its orientation towards Indigenous peoples and the condition of settler colonialism. I will also engage with contemporary examples of Indigenous sf as well as examples of narratives created by authors of mixed identities as a means of addressing the relationship between postcolonial and Indigenous sf.

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In her edited anthology *Walking the Clouds*, billed as the first ever collection of Indigenous sf, Dillon identifies several themes and strategies in contemporary Indigenous writings that involve science-fictional, fantastical or otherwise speculative narratives. In her introductory essay to the collection, Dillon centers the Anishinaabe concept of *biskaabiiyang*, arguing:

> It might go without saying that all forms of Indigenous futurisms are narratives of *biskaabiiyang*, an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of “returning to ourselves,” which involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalyptic world. This process is often called “decolonization,” and as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori) explains, it requires *changing* rather than *imitating* Eurowestern concepts.

Indigenous futurisms, as expressed through Indigenous science fiction narratives, therefore serve several functions at once. They are a means of “internal” creative exploration, healing, and entertainment, as a means of *biskaabiiyang*. But they are also compelling critical interventions in the wider sf, literary, and indeed societal narratives concerned with Indigneity, race, settler colonialism, and decolonization.

Ultimately, I maintain there are significant and meaningful implications of attending to both the historical and contemporary effects of utopia on colonial modernity. Concepts developed by Indigenous critical theory, including those of Indigenous nationhood and Indigenous futurisms, may work to end the deferrals of Indigenous concerns and the naturalized dehumanization of Indigenous peoples within the resilient,

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56 Ibid, 10.
often interrelated narratives of utopia and colonial modernity. These concepts challenge non-Indigenous scholarship, including that of utopian studies, to center Indigenous peoples and, in doing so, to re-evaluate and re-articulate their respective critical frameworks in light of Indigenous critiques of colonial modernity.
Chapter 3

More’s *Utopia* and Utopian Settler Modernity

“If the invention of utopia—both the word and literary genre—in 1516 was contemporaneous with the ‘invention’ of the New World, it was because these inventions corresponded with the emergence of modern humanism, and they shared a confidence in the human capacity to explore and invent new forms of social living. This is what made America, in the eyes of those wanting to come to its shores as well as those already there, the utopian land *par excellence*, an emblematic figure of the promises of modernity.”

--Jean-Pierre Angremy & Paul LeClerq, from the Preface to *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*.

**Utopian Settler Modernity**

Thomas More’s *Utopia*, published in 1516, is itself a narrative proposal for an ideal commonwealth predicated on supremacist doctrines, and should be recognized as a fundamental settler colonial document. European desire for empty land, a “blank slate” or a veritable “no place” on to which their ideas of an ideal society could be projected, required narrative civilizationalist and racialist rationales that elevated Europeans as *modern* in relation to the existing Indigenous occupants of Abya Yala. Moreover, similar rationales were used to justify the chattel slavery of African peoples, which would be central to structuring of colonial societies. These emergent European narrative rationales reflected the historical experiences of encounters with Indigenous, African, and Asian peoples, as well as a means of “internal” criticism of aspects of European societies. Thus, narratives of utopian colonial modernity were and, crucially, continue to be, themselves dynamic and variegated. At base, however, the rendering of Indigenous, Black, and
racialized non-Native peoples to a subhuman status enabled European to justify themselves as, implicitly if not explicitly, more desirable occupants of heretofore Indigenous territories. Indigenous, Black, and racialized non-Native peoples were therefore marked for enslavement, erasure, or otherwise subjugated status within the order of white supremacist settler colonial societies.

This chapter is an investigation into the ways in which narratives, the stories that predominate to explain and sustain Canada and the US as settler colonial societies, are premised upon the simultaneous erasure of Indigenous peoples and the naturalization of an indigenized exogenous white settler population. In particular, I situate the specific emergence of utopian narratives as central to, though certainly not all-encompassing of, both historical and ongoing narratives that instigate, naturalize, perpetuate, and otherwise sustain settler colonialism in these contexts.

For the purposes of this study, I intend to refer to “utopian narratives” as narratives which address the social dimension of expressions of desire for a better way of being, which are most commonly represented in narrative proposals for alternative societies. Furthermore, it is my contention that More’s Utopia ought be recognized as originating a distinctive, elastic, relational, and renewable concept of utopian settler modernity. Briefly, I intend this term to refer to (most-often, though not exclusively)

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77 I adopt “expressions of desire for a better way of being” from Ruth Levitas and wish to also acknowledge the influential definitions of utopian narrative from Darko Suvin and Lyman Tower Sargent which stress the definitively social dimension to utopia, most often via societal-level alternative proposal relative to the author and expected readers. I will discuss such utopian studies discourses in greater detail in the third chapter.

78 This notion of utopian settler modernity follows the work of Nina Chordas, Jacqueline Dutton, and Adam Seligman, each of whom address aspects of the inter-relationships between (early) modernity, settler
forward or future-focused orientation of white settler conceptions, discourses, narratives, and practices of self-perception, which appeal to particular philosophical and religious-inflected idealized notions of transcendental progress and universal rationality. Here I draw on the work of Adam Seligman who analyzes the role of utopianism in the differences between what he terms Axial and non-Axial civilizations. The orientation towards the (future) realization of a transcendental utopian “no place” associated religious notions of salvation in heaven becomes a basis for conceiving modernity and, just as importantly, pre-modernity categorized as “savage” and “barbarian.” More’s *Utopia* characterizes this distinction in terms of a “kinship of nature,” one that excludes, and therefore marks as subhuman, those that diverge from the early modern ideals of the Utopian society. Those that do not share a kinship of nature with the Utopians are available for colonization, displacement, enslavement, or else must forego their backward culture and modernize by assimilating.

Utopian settler modernity is continually renewed as an inherently relational and contextual means of reifying normative and hierarchically differentiated categories of white settlers as always-already representative of what it is to be modern, progressive, and rational. This means that the normative white settler subject is always-already closest to (and or representative of), alternately, notions of God or heaven, progress, rationality, and, more recently, science, as one contemporary successor to historical colonialism, and utopianism in their respective works. See Chordas’ *Forms in Early Modern Utopia: The Ethnography of Perfection*. Dutton’s “‘Non-western’ utopian traditions” in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, and Seligman’s “The Comparative Study of Utopias” in *Order and Transcendence: The Role of Utopias and the Dynamics of Civilizations*.

conceptualizations of natural law. Of course, other ideals may be appealed to or oriented towards, but these represent the most prominent, and are the most often associated with notions of modernity. In this schema the normative white settler subject is positioned as most directly oriented towards, closest to, or even as representative of the realization of utopia.

At the same time, utopia serves to enable and equip the normative settler subject with a means to look to the past with a critical eye towards perceived failings. Crucially, such failings may then be acknowledged as already having ended, as being part of a discrete period of error that is understood to have closed. Thus, the re-formulation of utopian settler modernity acts simultaneously an indicator of the settler subject’s continual progress and also as a transcendental break from a flawed but already-now-ended past. In this way, the normative white settler subject is continually understood as (the most) modern, progressive, and rational both in relation to Indigenous peoples, as well as, crucially, their past selves. This allows utopian settler modernity to evolve as dynamic, elastic, and renewable concept with related narratives and discourses that serve to instigate, naturalize, perpetuate, and otherwise sustain settler colonialism.

Thus, concepts of utopian settler modernity as expressed through narratives or stories were constructed such that exogenous Europeans were enabled to see themselves as representative of, or perhaps as the harbingers of, a (more or the most) progressive, fully-actualized humanity in direct contrast to Indigenous and racialized non-Native peoples. Such narratives were (and are) not monolithic or static but emerged (and have subsequently evolved) to reflect the specificities of particular contexts. This is to say that
each European colonial power brought with them their respective narrative means of rationalizing their encroachment upon Indigenous territories. The specificities of such narrative rationales were (and are) necessarily dynamic to facilitate—crucially, and above other concerns—the desires of settlers for land. This could (has already and continues to) mean everything from forging instrumentalized, yet temporarily cooperative, relationships with Indigenous peoples, to justifying brutal massacres. Not only did each European colonial power bring with them their own respective historical “baggage” from within their own pre-New World-contact society, but also their experiences were inevitably shaped by their respective historical and contemporaneous encounters with both other European (proto) nation-states and African and Asian peoples. This complexity is exemplified by Gary Willis’ recognition that Christopher Columbus “worked for the most retrograde monarchs of his time, who were conducting the Spanish Inquisition and ‘cleansing’ the Iberian peninsula of all Moors and Jews. Columbus hoped to use the gold of the Orient to fund a new Crusade for recapturing the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem.”

This is to emphasize the complicating roles of experiences of social unrest and stratification from within Europe, and the pre-existing European encounters in Africa and Asia. In this way, the concepts and narratives mobilized by Europeans in their dealings with the Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala were fundamentally and inevitably prefigured.

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in part, through their own existing internal social problems as well as their previous acts of imperialism in Africa and Asia.

The bases of such narratives may be found in a variety of sources, not the least of which is religious dogma, with settlers conceived of as bearers of Christian truth about the nature of God and the cosmos. European contact with Abya Yala occurred alongside the emergence of Renaissance-era Christian humanism that valorized conceptions of reason as divinely ordained, and as the exclusive providence of humanity. As I discuss below, this category of “humanity” itself was differentiated, in part, through appeals to natural law. Popular narratives, including More’s *Utopia*, emerged to situate and offer proposals for humanity’s application of this purportedly divinely-ordained reason towards an adherence of “natural law.” Such Renaissance-era conceptions of natural law were not singular, nor static, and were largely, though certainly not exclusively, characterized by an attempt at reconciling (primarily Christian) religious dogma with the emergent potentialities of rationality associated with secular inquiry. It was argued, by More and others, that adherence to natural law, including the instrumentalization of human reasoning faculties and an emergent and interrelated valorization of labour and “productivity,” was in keeping with religious dicta and would result in an “abundance for all” and the ideal commonwealth.\(^1\) While, in retrospect, such notions of Christian humanism and natural law served as a philosophical means of narrating supposed European superiority and “natural lawful” claim to Indigenous lands, viewed within the European context of the day, it may be understood as a deeply flawed liberatory impulse.

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\(^1\) More, *Utopia*, 54.
Thus, natural law was viewed as a means to realizing a potential for progress—conceived as a definitive break with the past irrationalities and deprivations, therefore necessitating the simultaneous (early) conceptualization of modernity. Furthermore, again in keeping with the religious—specifically Christian—dogma of the day, an adherence to notions of natural law also took on the connotation of the best means to redemption and salvation. Humanity, conceived of as existing on a fundamentally and endurably flawed mundane plane of existence apart from God who resides in a transcendental heaven, could achieve degrees of redemption through a notion of perfectability that flowed from faithfulness to natural law. Humanity could achieve progress, it could move towards the perfect (while, crucially, never attaining true perfection in the mundane plane of existence) and, in doing so, could approach redemption and, eventually, salvation after death in meriting an ascendance to be with God in heaven.\(^8\)

Certainly, these rationales of natural law provided some notion of internal consistency to settlers’ rationalizations for their perceived superiority to Indigenous peoples, as well as African and Asian peoples who were simultaneously enslaved or otherwise marginalized as part of the settler colonization of the New World. But there

\(^8\) See for example, “…More’s launching of one of the essential motifs of modernity, one that bespeaks the courage or the recklessness of the moderns and that is rooted in what the Enlightenment will later call human ‘perfectability’.” Roland Schaer “Utopia, Space, Time, History” from *Utopia: The Search for Ideal Society in Western World*. (New York: NY Public Library/Oxford University Press, 2000), 4. Also, “Utopia, as re-imagined by Sir Thomas More, envisaged an ideal society of fallen human beings coming to terms with an imperfect world of scarce resources and without the benefit of divine assistance…Perfection, in an absolute sense, might not be a defining characteristic of utopia, but a species of perfection is: the ideal form of social and political organization congruent with the deficiencies of man and nature. It is perfection in a fallen world; the best we can do in a state of sin.” JC Davis “Utopia and the New World, 1500-1700” in *Utopia: The Search for Ideal Society in Western World*. New York, NY Public Library/Oxford University Press. 2000, 101.
was also the decidedly less high-minded reality of settler desires for Indigenous lands conceived of as a vast reservoir of “resources,” as a source of potential wealth. Such wealth, obviously, could further the interests of European poor and elites alike, who were living in much more direct competition for scarce forms of value (material, social, cultural, and otherwise) within Europe. Wealth taken from the New World could also be used to finance Christian crusading, as Columbus intended, in the Holy Lands of the Abrahamic religious traditions.

This points to one of the most fundamental epistemological divergences between the European settlers and the Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala. Europeans brought with them their own unique historical experiences, which included the emergent conceptualizations of natural law, progress, rationality, and the transcendental Christian religious orientation towards notions of redemption and salvation. Significantly, European settlers also imported particular and situated conceptions of scarcity that were, without question, informed by the experiences of the enclosure movements. 83

The European experience of scarcity, inflected and exacerbated by the enclosure movements, resulted in a failure of imagination, or perhaps, a “rational” importation of conceptual frameworks designed to justify the appropriation of Indigenous lands. Here Europeans developed the aforementioned notions of inane ac vacuum (“idle and waste”) and vacuum domicillium (“unoccupied home”) as well as terra nullius (“empty land/no man’s land”) as “rational” concepts, understood to adhere to natural law. The European

83 Direct evidence for the effects of the enclosure movements, including the emergence of notions of scarcity, is found in More, Utopia, 18-20, and will be discussed in further detail below.
experiences of enclosures of formerly public or common lands used for farming and other means of subsistence in co-emerged with an increasing fixation with notions of “productivity” and a commensurate valorization of labour as moral and ethical ideals. Of course, these justifications involved an insulated and circular logic that demonstrated the effects of the enclosure movements, which dispossessed many Europeans of their lands and, in doing so, instigated conditions and (early modern) conceptualizations of material scarcity so fundamental to classical liberal thought.84

While there are doubtlessly innumerable conceptual and experiential contributors to the emergence of such distinctive European rationales for settler colonialism, Thomas More’s 1516 publication and reception of *Utopia* ought be critically re-evaluated for the ways in which it crystallized these rationales. *Utopia* articulated decidedly new conceptualizations and established a (popular) narrative means of promoting concepts used to instigate, justify, perpetuate, and otherwise sustain settler colonialism. Moreover, as a historical text, it documents a pronounced (dis)juncture between the epistemology and ontology of the fictional Utopians and the Abraxans. The Utopians serve as proposed models for More’s contemporaneous English, and indeed wider European, society while the Abraxans (and other fictionalized non-Utopian peoples) who appear as a hybrid representative of the Indigenous peoples of the then-recently discovered New World and the African and Asian peoples with whom Europeans had already come into contact.85

84 For example, Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and Locke’s *Second Treatise on Civil Government*.

85 It was not just the (limited) accounts of the Indigenous peoples of the New World that may have informed More’s accounting for the Abraxans (and, indeed his discussions of other categories who fail to
**More’s *Utopia*, the *Mondus Novus*, and early narratives of modernity**

Dominic Baker-Smith maintains “*Utopia* is very much a book of a particular moment in European history, stimulated by the interaction between new experiences and old fantasies.” More’s *Utopia* was indeed written at a time of a great rupture in European society marked by a number of transformative changes, certainly none more dislocating than the then-recent “discovery” of the New World. Furthermore, as James Hexter argues, *Utopia* ought be understood as addressing a myriad of prominent contemporaneous issues in an innovative and cohesive form of social critique:

When More wrote of enclosure, vagabondage, the unemployed discharged solider, the law’s delays, the liveried bands of retainers, the recurrent straits of the cloth industry, and the engrossing and forestalling of produce to enhance its market price, he was considering problems of which for a quarter century in all cases, for more than a century in some, his compatriots had all been well aware. His achievement lay not in discovering these evils in detail but in dealing with them in a related whole, not as individual plants but as growth which however separate they might appear on the surface concealed a common root.

*Utopia* may, therefore, be fruitfully analyzed for its treatment of a variety of contemporaneous English and wider European social concerns. These concerns, however, were necessarily inflected by a spectacular shift in the awareness and understanding of

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England’s, and indeed wider Europe’s, position in the world, as part of an evolving understanding of the size, scope, and character of the planet itself.

More’s *Utopia*, envisioned and, in actuality, served to prefigure English (and indeed wider European) settler colonialism by decades, if not hundreds of years. More’s *Utopia* introduced what subsequently became a popular and often-imitated utopian (settler) narrative of Renaissance-era Christian-humanism on the speculative potentialities of creating the best republic in the newly discovered New World or, as it first was called, the *Mondus Novus* (in the translated Latin) by the Italian explorer and cartographer, Amerigo Vespucci. As Nina Chordas argues, ethnographic accounts of the Indigenous peoples of the *Mondus Novus*, following More’s use of Vespucci’s descriptions in *Utopia*, became a common foil or trope for early modern utopian narratives.

It was these “quasi-fictional” representations within fictional utopian narratives, as inaugurated by More’s *Utopia*, which co-emerged with contemporaneous conceptualizations of natural law as reason guided by [Christian] conscience that principally contributed to these nascent expressions of early modernity. The use of

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88 While Spanish efforts at (settler) colonization of what is now known as Haiti, Venezuela, Colombia, and Mexico may, in retrospect, be seen to have begun almost immediately with Columbus’ arrival in 1492, English and wider British and European settler colonization of what is now the Canada and the US did not begin for decades after *Utopia*’s 1516 publication.

89 Luciano Formisano writes “…the *Mondus Novus* enjoyed and immediate and lasting renown much on the order of Columbus’ *De insulis* [Latin version of Columbus’ letter announcing his discovery from April 1493]. It was published, without typographical notes, maybe in Florence, at the end of 1502 or the beginning of 1503… and was then reprinted several times in the course of a few weeks, over an area spanning Venice, Paris, and Antwerp.” “Introduction” *Letters from a New World*. Amerigo Vespucci. xx-xxi.

ethnographic accounts of Indigenous peoples served, in part, as a foil; the supposed “backwardness” or “barbarism” of Indigenous peoples were part of a narrative contrasting between an envisioned fictional utopian society and the actually-existing world. Furthermore, the ethnographic “traveler’s tale” or “travel narrative”—characterized by a narrator, ostensibly representative of the reader her or himself, traveling to a heretofore unknown or unexplored society and reports on its composition—was itself employed by Columbus, Vespucci, and, subsequently, More, and came to be a trope in utopian literature.

That is, More’s Utopians are clearly both speculative and prescriptive representations of his English contemporaries and indeed wider Europeans, set in direct contrast to the real life “discovery” of the Indigenous peoples of the *Mondus Novus*, as well as European encounters in Africa and Asia. Vespucci’s letters to his various Portuguese and Spanish benefactors involved descriptions of the Indigenous peoples he claimed to have met on his voyages in 1497-98, 1499-1500, 1501-2, and 1503-4. As is noted by Luciano Formisano, the editor and author of the introduction to Vespucci’s translated *Letters from a New World*, the verifiability of some of Vespucci’s claims remains in substantial doubt.91 Vespucci’s depictions of his and his fellow explorers’ actions, as well as his characterizations of both the lands and peoples encountered, is recognized to involve varying levels of embellishment, selective and strategic exclusions, and outright falsehoods. Regardless of the factualness of his accounts, Vespucci’s letters attained a relatively high degree of readership among learned elites across Europe. His

letters were translated into Latin—the “lingua franca” of the time—as well as Dutch, Flemish, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish, thus reaching an audience in all of what would come to be originating (settler) colonial metropoles.\(^9^2\)

While Vespucci’s ethnographies of Indigenous peoples of the *Mondus Novus* provided More (and others of the day, to be sure) with (speculative) models for their philosophical-religious explorations of natural law and the “best republic,” their instrumentalization of Indigenous cultures (the accounts of these cultures) of the *Mondus Novus* was decidedly mixed. Aspects of Vespucci’s ethnographies (again, widely recognized to be of wildly varying accuracy) included more decidedly reproachful characterizations of Indians as godless, “warlike,” sexually unrestrained, cannibalistic, etc., and also factored in More’s characterization of what *his Utopians were not* and, therefore, *should not* be, according to his theorization of natural law. At the same time, however, Vespucci’s accounts also involve a range an admiring, perhaps, romanticizing descriptions. For example, Vespucci wrote

> They [“rational animals” “savage people” “Cannibals” or “Indians” as he variously refers to Indigenous peoples] have no law or religious faith, they live as nature dictates, they do not know of the immortality of the soul. They have no private property among them, for they share everything. They have no borders of kingdoms or province; neither have they a king or anyone they obey: each is his own master. They do not administer justice, which is not necessary for them, since greed does not prevail among them.\(^9^3\)

The seeming absence of private property, the closeness to “nature,” and generally egalitarian, stateless collectivism of the Indigenous peoples described, are hallmarks of

\(^{92}\) See Formisano “Introduction” in *Letters from a New World*.

\(^{93}\) Vespucci, *Letters from a New World*, 32.
More’s fictional Utopia and its Utopian inhabitants. In this way aspects of the characterizations of Indigenous peoples, as represented by Vespucci (quasi-fictional) and More (fictional), come to serve as models to which English and wider European society is negatively contrasted.

However, while More’s Utopians and their best republic are clearly positively characterized as a consequence of Vespucci’s more favorable descriptions of the “Indians” of the *Mondus Novus*, Vespucci’s more negative and, indeed, (proto) civilizationalist, (proto) hetero-patriarchal, and (proto) racist commentaries also find their way into *Utopia*. Perhaps most famously, Vespucci offers a sensationalistic, if perhaps understandable, given the European sensibilities of the time, focus on practices of cannibalism. For example, he reports, “the meat they most commonly eat is human flesh.” Vespucci was also incredulous at why, per his description the “warlike people”, who are “very cruel to one another” and “dismember and eat their dead enemies”, would fight to “avenge the death of their ancestors” rather than out of greed or for property.”

These characteristics of “barbarism” figure prominently in More’s *Utopia*, again, as a foil

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94 My discussion of More’s *Utopia* and its direct relationship to Vespucci’s letters follows below.

95 These terms “civilizationalist” or “racist”, or indeed to read back a construction of a modern/pre-modern dichotomy by Vespucci, are problematic insofar as these concepts of civilization, modernity, and race were, at the time of Vespucci’s writings, as yet un-developed or existed in more nascent and substantially unconsolidated forms relative to their present day conceptualizations. Furthermore, More’s (proto)racialized characterization of the fictional peoples he describes in *Utopia* follows Vespucci’s own discussion of what have come to be commonly understood as “racial” characteristics, including distinctions of skin colour, hair, and facial features. Moreover, the sexualized representations of Indigenous peoples may be understood as an early modern narrativizing of normatively modern (settler) sexuality. The descriptions of Indigenous peoples, specifically women, as sexually unrestrained are clearly reproving.

96 See Vespucci Letter III 34 and Letter VI 62.
for what the Utopians are not and should not be. In short, representations of Indigenous peoples as warlike, godless, and cannibalistic were adopted as a foil for More’s Utopians. In fact, it is unmistakable that More’s Utopians are a hybrid of what he viewed as the better traits of the Indigenous peoples, as Vespucci described them, and some of More’s own applied philosophical Christian humanism.

More’s biography has been the subject of significant scholarly inquiry, and he remains a prominent figure in a variety of contexts. In addition to his lasting notoriety for Utopia, he was beheaded for his refusal to swear an oath that denied supreme papal authority, an act that led to his canonization in 1935 by Pope Pius XI. Also, his theoretical explorations of natural law and notions of the “best republic” surely contributed to Pope John Paul II declaring him the patron of Catholic politicians and statesmen in 2000. But his fundamental contributions, as noted by Stephen Greenblatt, involved his role in the early development of Christian humanism:

A learned man, deeply immersed in the pagan Greek and Latin texts that Poggio and his contemporaries had returned to circulation, More was also a pious

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97 Vespucci Letter III 32-34. My discussion of More’s adoption of Vespucci’s descriptions in Utopia follows shortly.

98 It must also be recognized, again, that More’s Utopia was reflective not only of Vespucci’s ethnographic accounts but also of previous English and wider European encounters with African, Asian, and even what are now considered European peoples, but who at the time would have been marked as exogenous “Others” for a variety of reasons including cultural practices, language, and bodily characteristics.

99 This claim is supported by a character remark early in Utopia’s text that “While he [Hythloday] told us of many ill-considered usages in these new-found nations, he also described quite a few other customs from which our own cities, nations, races, and kingdoms might take lessons in order to correct their errors.” More, Utopia, 12.

100 “It is a poignant touch that he went to his death proclaiming to the end that the law under which he was being executed was contrary to reason and conscience, and thus to Natural Law.” R.S. White Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 110.
Christian ascetic who wore a hair shirt under his clothes and whipped himself until the blood ran down his flesh. His speculative daring and his relentless intelligence enabled him to grasp the force of what had surged back from the ancient world and at the same time his ardent Catholic convictions led him to demarcate the boundaries beyond which he thought it was dangerous for him or anyone else to go. That is he brilliantly explored the hidden tensions in the identity to which he himself subscribed: “Christian humanist.” 101

Thus More’s religiosity, combined with his intellectual adventurism—supported and inspired by a network of correspondences involving intellectuals across Europe, often communicating in Latin via letters—propelled his explorations with Utopia. 102 Certainly, Utopia is itself a substantially ambiguous work, which ought be viewed in a historical context marked by significant religious and political constraints. Indeed, the use of fiction by intellectuals of that period to explore and propose heretofore heretical or dissenting

101 Stephen Greenblatt. The Swerve. 228.

102 Adams and Logan write

During his years as a law student…More came increasingly under the influence of a group of literary scholars, central figures in the emerging tradition of Renaissance humanism in England. As modern students have made clear, the term ‘humanism’, when applied to the Renaissance, is best used not to designate a particular philosophical position—for no single position is shared by all those Renaissance figures whom we are accustomed to regard as humanists—but to designate a particular scholarly orientation. ‘Humanism’ is a nineteenth-century coinage; but ‘humanist’ (like its cognates in other European languages) is found in the Renaissance itself, where it derived, first as Italian university-student slang, from studia humanitatis, a Ciceronian phrase that came to designate a family of disciplines comprising grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy. In the Renaissance as in the Middle Ages, Latin was the normal language of learning. Beginning in the fourteenth century, humanists like Petrarch attempted to revive the classical form of that language; by the early fifteenth century, they had undertaken a parallel attempt for classical Greek. More studied Latin composition with the grammarian John Holt, and Greek with the first Englishman to teach it, William Grocyn. He also fell strongly under the influence of John Colet. Like Grocyn, Colet had studied in Italy, the centre of humanist learning. After his return to England in 1496, he gave several series of lectures at Oxford on the epistles of St Paul, lectures that constituted the earliest English application of some of the exegetical and historiographical techniques of Italian humanism; later he became dean of St Paul’s Cathedral, and founded there the first of the humanist grammar schools in England. And in 1499, More made the acquaintance of the great Dutch humanist Erasmus, who in that year first visited England. xiii-xiv, Utopia. More.
views is well known. But there appears a relative consensus as to at least some of *Utopia*'s foregoing influences.

Adams and Logan, editors of a standard contemporary edition of *Utopia*, relate aspects of More’s biography including his friendship with Erasmus and Peter Giles, who appears as a fictionalized character in the book itself. Both significantly impacted More’s conception and writing of *Utopia* beginning in the summer and early autumn of 1515 in Flanders while “enjoy[ing] a rare period of leisure” after having visited Giles in Antwerp at the recommendation of his friend, Erasmus. More’s friendship with Erasmus and Giles, as well as his other European interlocutors concerned with the intellectual preoccupations of the day, is reflected in *Utopia*’s engagements with notions of natural law and is illustrated by his selective adoption of Vespucci’s ethnographic descriptions.

Erasmus, writing subsequent to the publication and reception of *Utopia*, claimed the influence of Plato’s *Republic* on More, a contention that is supported by scholarly analysis of *Utopia*’s text. Indeed, the effects of More’s *studia humanitatis*, including the classical Greeks, are reflected throughout *Utopia* insofar as the Utopian society is holistically outlined via what amounts to a serious of philosophical claims. But it is the convergence between both More’s and Vespucci’s apparent fascination with humanist...

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103 Interestingly, *Utopia*’s opening preface—its a letter from a fictionalized Thomas More to Peter Giles as an accompaniment to the book—includes the following curious statement, which Adams and Logan suggest may be read as “largely conventional”:

But, to tell the truth, I’m still of two minds as to whether I should publish the book at all. For men’s tastes are so various, the tempers of some are so severe, their minds so ungrateful, their judgments so foolish, that there seems no point in publishing a book that others will receive only with contempt and ingratitude…Most people know nothing of learning; many despise it. More, *Utopia*, 6.

thought, in particular that of Epicurus, which underscores the importance of the
intersections of Christian-humanism and ethnographic representations of Indigenous
peoples to the development of More’s proposed “best commonwealth.” Greenblatt writes

Reading Amerigo Vespucci and reflecting on the newfound lands known, in his
honor, as “America,” More seized upon one of Vespucci’s observations about the
peoples he had encountered: “Since their life is so entirely given over to
pleasure,” Vespucci had written, “I should style it Epicurean.” More must have
realized with a jolt that he could use the amazing discoveries to explore some of
the disturbing ideas that had returned to currency with Lucretius’ *On the Nature
of Things*. The link was not entirely surprising: the Florentine Vespucci was part
of the humanist circle in which *On the Nature of Things* circulated. The Utopians,
More wrote, are inclined to believe “that no kind of pleasure is forbidden,
provided no harm comes of it.” And their behavior is not merely a matter of
custom; it is a philosophical position: “They seem to lean more than they should
to the school that espouses pleasure as the object by which to define either the
whole of the chief part of human happiness.” That “school” is the school of
Epicurus and Lucretius.105

Indeed, Vespucci describes the Indigenous peoples he encountered as “rather more
Epicurean than Stoic or Academic” (Letter IV) and followed this up in his fifth letter,
stating “[t]hey [Indigenous peoples] live according to nature and might be called
Epicureans rather than Stoics.”106 A third example appears in his sixth letter:

We do not encounter among these peoples any who had a religion, nor can they be
called Moors or Jews, and are worse than heathens, because we never saw them
perform any sacrifice, nor did they have any house of prayer: I judge their life to
be Epicurean.107

229.


107 Ibid, 64.
Here Renaissance-era European fixation with theological and philosophical notions of the “greatest good”—itself associated with ideas of natural law—and concerns with the absence or presences of recognizable (i.e. monotheistic) religious or spiritual orientations is on full display.

While Greenblatt argues that the (re) introduction of “utterly weird” “pagan texts” such as Lucreitus’ *On the Nature of Things*, to the European intelligentsia was mirrored in the distances between Europe and “Vespucci’s Brazil,” he also maintains that More was simultaneously attracted to the “expressions of a whole way of life” made possible through the “no place” of the *Mondus Novus*.

…The description of the Epicureanism of the Utopians only made sense for More in the larger context of an entire existence. But that existence, More thought, would have to be for everyone. He took seriously the claim, so ardently made in *On the Nature of Things*, that Epicurus’ philosophy would liberate all of mankind from its abject misery. Or rather, More took seriously the universality that is the underlying Greek meaning of the word “catholic.” It would not be enough for Epicureanism to enlighten a small elite in a walled garden; it would have to apply to society as a whole. *Utopia* is a visionary, detailed blueprint for this application…The point of More’s celebrated fable is to imagine those conditions that would make it possible for an entire society to make the pursuit of happiness its collective goal.108

As Greenblatt explains, this philosophical impetus towards the totality of an envisioned “best republic” appears to have contributed to More’s adoption of Vespucci’s accounts of Indigenous “communism” in his Utopian proposal. But while More proved capable of criticizing and rejecting aspects of his contemporary English and wider European society,

his pious Christianity also dictated the necessity of clear and strict restraints on human behaviour in the pursuit of the best republic.  

As Adams and Logan, Chordas, Greenblatt, and others observe More (as well as Vespucci) privilege, and, in fact, require an orientation towards transcendence, as fundamental to what it is to be “one of the human race.” In particular, this proceeds from the notion of the human soul’s redemption and salvation via “ascendance”—literally an elevating conceptual break with the mundane plane of lived human experience—to a transcendent heaven. This figures into the Utopian rationales for declaring an existing [the fictional Abraxans] Indigenous population subhuman and, therefore, capable of being denied recognition of their territorial sovereignty. While the novel’s narrator, Hythloday, informs readers of the Utopians’ relative ecumenical and tolerant attitude towards religious difference, which given the prevailing attitudes of the day may be understood as quite progressive, King Utopus nonetheless maintains

…a solemn and strict law against anyone who should sink so far below the dignity of human nature as to think that the soul perishes with the body, or that the universe is ruled by blind chance, not divine providence…Anyone who denies this proposition they consider not even one of the human race, since he has degraded the sublimity of his own soul to the base level of a beast’s wretched body. Still less will they count him as one of their citizens, since he would openly despise all the laws and customs of society, if not prevented by fear. (italics my emphasis)

It is perhaps impossible to know whether More intended the above as a directive to deny the humanity of the Indigenous peoples of the Abya Yala, in particular, or as a more

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109 Here it is notable that references to Vespucci’s salacious reportage on the sexual practices of the Indigenous peoples, including descriptions of the genitalia of Indigenous women, is left out of *Utopia*.


111 Ibid, 95-96.
general invective against non-believers, as such. Though non-believers are plainly marked as subhuman non-citizens, More’s *Utopia* is characteristically ambiguous in elaborating a supposed tolerance for non-believers involving the Utopians’ “confidence” that their “madness will yield to reason.”\(^{112}\)

Interestingly, it is precisely More’s appeal to religious tolerance which serves as a cover for his colonialism: “Utopus had heard that before his arrival the natives were continually squabbling over religious matters, and he had observed that it was easy to conquer the whole country because the different sects were too busy fighting one another to oppose him.”\(^{113}\) Logan and Adams do acknowledge, however, that “[b]y More’s day there was general agreement that it was wrong for Christians to enslave Christian captives; but non-Christians—especially Africans and American Indians—were often regarded as a different matter…”\(^{114}\) Indeed More’s Utopians do keep slaves to serve as butchers, among other distasteful occupations, and, as noted above, *Utopia* offers unmistakable rationales for denying fully-human subjectivities.

More’s articulation of rationales for settler colonization is complex and is formulated as part of an interrelated approach to a variety of themes. Among them are the above-mentioned religious principles involving faith in the existence and sacredness of individual human souls, as well as what Adam Seligman describes as an Axial

\(^{112}\) Ibid, 96.

\(^{113}\) Ibid, 94.

\(^{114}\) Adams and Logan, *Utopia*, fn86 p77.
civilizational orientation of utopian transcendence as opposed to immanence. Seligman argues that utopianism ought be differentiated and situated as a product of the “Axial break.” This refers to the emergence of… Great Civilizations or Historical Religions…[predicated on] a fundamental reordering of the nature of the relations between society and the powers governing the cosmos. Breaking down their mutual interpenetration, the Axial age posited a new conception of the social order, autonomous from, but in tension with, the cosmic [transcendent] sphere. The institutionalization of this conception of a chasm between mundane and transcendental orders (between society and the cosmos) and, more importantly, the search to overcome this chasm—in Weberian terms, to attain “salvation”—became in Axial civilizations the matrix of utopian themes, and, in Christianity, of its millennial tradition.

Salvation is, therefore, associated with the transcendent plane, such that human striving towards an envisioned transcendent “utopian horizon” is mobilized, fundamentally, as a means of redemption from the ills and deprivations of the immanent mundane field of contemporary existence. In this view, utopianism is the project of envisioning the bridging of the chasm between the immanent, flawed, and mundane sphere of existence where society resides (“what is”) and ideas of a transcendent and perfectible-if-not-perfect “no place” (“what ought be”).

Following Seligman, I argue that the original expression of “utopia,” as well as all subsequent utopian proposals, each have particular lineages bounded to specific historical, cultural antecedents. The specificities involved in the mundane or immanent experiences of life in a given circumstance are reflected in proposals for utopian

115 Seligman, 6-7.

116 Ibid. 6-7.
transcendence. Within Axial societies there is necessarily difference and contestation, effecting correspondingly differentiated constructions of what would constitute utopia. Similarly, across Axial societies there are a variety of orientations toward this sense of a break or chasm between the mundane and the transcendent, which substantially shapes the character and function of utopianism for that culture.

Furthermore, it is not necessarily the case that all human cultures invest in this conception of a utopia, as an ideal “no place” separate and apart from the immanent plane of existence; the axial break is not universal. In fact, *Utopia* establishes a chasm between those peoples who profess a belief in a transcendent God and afterlife—clearly representative of Christianity, though articulated in a relatively ecumenical manner—and those that do not. The implication is that the animistic worldviews of Indigenous peoples are not only ungodly, but also irrational. This ungodly irrationality is grounds for constructing a hierarchical sense of difference, an early proposal for a dichotomous pre-modernity versus modernity, of subhuman versus fully-human.

There are some incidences of scholarly recognition of *Utopia*’s articulation of settler colonial rationales. However, existing scholarly literature substantially fails to situate *Utopia* as a settler colonial text. As a case of point, Adams and Logan (again, co-editors of a standard contemporary edition of *Utopia*) address *Utopia*’s relationship to settler colonialism via an external reference in a footnote:

…A fundamental principle of this law [law of nature] is that all things are common; from this it follows, as Surtz says, ‘a nation may take possession of wasteland necessary for its survival; (*CW, IV, 416*). Similar arguments were
applied to colonization of the New World—to which, as Baker-Smith observes, the Utopians’ proceedings bear ‘a painful similarity.’

Furthermore, no less a utopian studies scholar than Frederic Jameson, substantively neglects considerations of settler colonialism in his recent collected essays on the subject of utopia, *Archaeologies of the Future*, with one exception. Similar to Adams and Logan, Jameson resorts to an aside to situate utopia’s relationship to settler colonialism, also via an external citation:

> Then too, we do well to remember (as Balasopolous reminds us) that Utopia is very much the prototype of the settler colony, and the forerunner of modern imperialism (at least in its North American, apartheid, or Zionist forms - "the people without land" supposedly meeting "the land without people"). That Utopias should turn out to be one of the privileged literary expressions of the Spanish empire (whose subject Campanella also was) is thus equally significant: the predestined harmony between a form without content and a content without form. My own feeling is that the colonial violence thus inherent in the very form or genre itself is a more serious reproach than anything having to do with the authoritarian discipline and conformity that may hold for the society within Utopia's borders.

Ultimately, there are very few substantive analyses of *Utopia*’s discussion of Indigenous peoples or its relationships to early modernity, settler colonialism, and the interrelated instrumentalizing orientation towards the other-than-human. In some cases, there are brief asides, momentary acknowledgements of the genocidal (and, arguably, ecocidal) implications of the rationales offered by More’s narrator Raphael Hythloday.

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119 Hythloday, according to Logan and Adams, apparently derives from “the Greek *hythlos* (‘idle talk’, ‘nonsense’) plus *daien* (‘to distribute’) or perhaps *daios* (in the rare sense of ‘knowing’, ‘cunning’): hence ‘nonsense peddler’ or ‘expert in nonsense’.” *Utopia* 5n9.
utopian studies scholarly literature there are similarly few direct comments on the intersections of the modern “utopia proper” and settler colonialism. Ultimately, the vast majority of scholarly commentaries serve to naturalize, de-center, or otherwise appear relatively unconcerned with situating *Utopia* as, in some ways, a founding settler colonial text.

However, there is an unambiguous basis for a critical re-evaluation of *Utopia* given these concerns. For More’s fictional island of Utopia was not originally an island at all, nor was it an uninhabited. Hythloday explains Utopia as having previously been coastal territory known as Abraxa and populated by an (apparently) indigenous people known as Abraxans.

They say (and the appearance of the place confirms this) that their land was not always surrounded by the sea. But Utopus, who conquered the country and gave it his name (for it had previously been called Abraxa) and *who bought its rude, uncouth inhabitants to such a high level of culture and humanity* that they now surpass almost every other people, also changed its geography. After winning the victory at his first assault, he had a channel cut fifteen miles wide where the land joined the continent, and thus caused the sea to flow around the country. (italics my emphasis)

And, a few pages later in the narrative, More’s Hythloday recounts

> But if a city has too many people, the extra persons serve to make up the shortage of population in other cities. And if the population throughout the entire islands exceeds the quota, then enroll citizens out of every city and plant a colony under their own laws on the mainland near them, wherever the natives have plenty of

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120 Examples of such asides include: Baker-Smith’s reference to “Herman Oncken, writing in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, claimed to see in the colonial politics of the Utopians the first stirrings of Anglo-Saxon imperialism…” in Baker-Smith, *More’s Utopia*, 241.

unoccupied and uncultivated land. Those natives who want to live with the Utopians are adopted by them. When such a merger occurs, the two peoples gradually and easily blend together, sharing the same way of life and customs, much to the advantage of both. For by their policies the Utopians make the land yield an abundance for all, through previously it had seemed too poor and barren even to support the natives. But those who refuse to live under their laws they drive out of the land they claim for themselves; and against those who resist them, they wage war. They think it is perfectly justifiable to make war on people who leave their land idle and waste yet forbid the use and possession of it to others who, by the law of nature, out to be supported from it.122 (italics my emphasis)

Thus, More’s *Utopia* articulates the settler colonial doctrines of *terra nullius* [no man’s land], *vacuum domicilium* [unoccupied home], and *inane ac vacuum* [idle and waste] via an appeal to the “law of nature” to colonize Abraxa. More’s fictionalization of a “rude” and “uncouth” Indigenous Abraxan population, which fails to “cultivate” their land in order to create “an abundance for all” is a clear reference to what ought be understood as an emergent settler modernity.

As Nina Chordas notes,

One thing More categorically cannot assimilate is the *timelessness*, or lack of structure, of American society. When Vespucci says of the natives, “I judge their life to be Epicurean,” he means that they are unconstrained by anything save the immediate gratification of their bodily needs. This way of life is “very barbarous,” he says, “for they do not eat at specific hours, but when and however often they want, and it matters little to them if their appetite comes at midnight rather than during the day, since they eat at all hours (Formisano 63-64). In contrast every hour of the Utopian day is regulated by law or custom…The Utopian passion for minute temporal organization of social order champions *productivity*, in direct opposition to the relaxed and seemingly shapeless tenor of indigenous American existence, as depicted in many New World ethnographies besides Vespucci’s. American space may thus be perceived as practically begging for European intervention and organization. Native culture, moreover, is treated as “dirt”—something to be tidied through assimilation to European notions of order, or else

122 Ibid, 54.
relegated to the margins beyond the borders of European organization.\(^{123}\) (italics my emphasis)

Here contemporaneous European preoccupations with order, productivity, and transcendence—as inflected by the experiences of the enclosure movements and the Inquisition, among doubtless other contributing factors—surfaced via Vespucci and More’s treatment of ethnographic accounts of Indigenous peoples.

Furthermore, Chordas’ recognition of More’s inability to abide Indigenous peoples “timelessness” directly evokes the contrast drawn by Seligman in his discussion of Axial versus non-Axial civilizational orientations.

Central and in fact illustrative of this transformation [to an Axial orientation] is the time sense inherent in certain utopian and millennial beliefs and most saliently in the notions of ‘final time’—a cultural orientation that does not exist as such in pre-Axial social setting…the primitive (non-Axial, or in Weberian terms ‘magical’) man “knows primordial time, which for him dominates all life, which is renewed over and over again in the present day occurrences that are the guarantee of his life. As long a he performs the rites correctly, he creates his world anew each day, in a manner of creation continua. The creative world of myth renews the world for him.”\(^{124}\)

Thus, the relationship between immanent versus transcendental civilizational orientations frames More’s treatment of the emergent European experience of scarcity, and appears to inspire his emphasis on productivity and structure as a means to salvation.

Such a focus on productivity and structure is a consequence of Europe’s nascent enclosure movements contemporaneous to the writing of More’s *Utopia*, and is also

\(^{123}\) Chordas, *Forms in Early Modern Utopias*, 57.

\(^{124}\) Seligman, *Order and Transcendence*, 7. Internal reference from Eliade and van der Leeuw as quoted in Seligman). I will discuss the notion of millennialism as part of utopian theorizations in chapter 3.
reflected in the Utopians’ instrumentalizing and rationalizing outlook on the other-than-human. Thus, the following passages from *Utopia* may be understood as a direct reproach to European elites’ private expropriation of what were previously communal lands, as well as a basis for the inclusion of Indigenous “communism” characterized by a lack of private property and a contribution to the emergent valorization of labour:

…there the nobility and gentry, yes, and even a good many abbots—holy men—are not content with the old rents that the land yielded to their predecessors. Living in idleness and luxury without doing society any good no longer satisfies them; they have to do positive harm. For they leave no land free for the plough: they enclose every acre for pasture; they destroy houses and abolish towns, keeping the churches—but only for sheep-barns…

Thus, so that one greedy, insatiable glutton, a frightful plague to his native country, may enclose thousands of acres within a single fence, the tenants are ejected; and some are stripped of their belongings by trickery or brute force, or wearied by constant harassment, are driven to sell them. One way or another, these wretched people…(poor, but numerous since farming requires many hands) are forced to move out. They leave the only homes familiar to them, and can find no place to go…They would be glad to work, but they can find no one who will hire them.

This enclosing has led to sharply rising food prices in many districts…But even if the number of sheep should increase greatly, the price will not fall a penny, because the wool trade, though it can’t be called a monopoly because it isn’t in the hands of a single person, is concentrated in so few hands (an oligopoly, you might say), and these so rich, that that the owners are never pressed to sell until they have a mind to, and that is only when they can get their price.

Further to this, Edward Surtz makes the case that “[I]n one sense, dispossessed farmers, unemployed weavers, etc., are surplus population whom More would transfer to the

\[^{125}\text{More, *Utopia*, 18.}\]

\[^{126}\text{Ibid, 19.}\]
deserted tracts of the New World.” Hence, More’s critical response to the European enclosure movement can be understood to factor in the Utopians’ rationale for expansionist (settler) colonization as a means of addressing surplus population. In short, More’s sympathy for the displaced Europeans—ostensibly Christian and, therefore, demonstrating a common “kinship of nature”—enables his articulation of a rationale for the displacement of Indigenous peoples.

*Utopia* proposes a substantially egalitarian communist society believed realizable through the application of an instrumental rationality towards the maxizimation of the productive capabilities of the land. Here More evokes natural law, exclusively available for humans to realize through divinely-ordained rational faculties, which thus obligates their activity to “improve” the other-than-human through their “technical knowledge” for the benefit of the human population. To accomplish this, *Utopia* first confers a privileging of the human:

The pleasures of sound, sight, and smell they [Utopians] also pursue as the agreeable seasonings of life, recognizing that *Nature intended them to be the particular providence of man*. No other kind of animal contemplates with delight the shape and loveliness of the universe, or enjoys odours (except in the way of searching for food), or distinguishes harmonious from dissonant sounds. (italics my emphasis)

More’s humanist gesture thus situates humanity as exclusively capable of (fully) appreciating the natural world. Read alongside his unambiguous declaration of the (supposed) uniqueness of humanity’s divinely-ordained rational faculties, this establishes

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129 Ibid, 74.
a basis for his claims to the beneficial, if not obligatory, human intervention in nature for its “improve[ment].”

Their soil is not very fertile, nor their climate of the best, but they protect themselves against the weather by temperate living, and improve their soil by industry, so that nowhere do grain and cattle flourish more plentifully, nowhere are peoples more vigourous or less susceptible to disease. There you can not only observe that they do all the things farmers usually do to improve poor soil by hard work and technical knowledge, but you can see a forest which they tore up by the roots with their own hands and moved to another site. They did this not so much for the sake of better growth but to make transport easier, by having wood to carry by land over a long distance.\(^{130}\)

This theme of the application of reason informing superior developments in “technical knowledge,” as a basis for the displacement of the Utopians’ murder, displacement, and coercive assimilation of the indigenous Abraxan population is the central founding of Utopia. But More’s humanist faith in reason to improve “technical knowledge” is not an entirely sufficient basis for the creation of Utopia. Hythloday tells us “[King Utopus] put not only the natives to work at the task of digging a channel to separate the island of Utopia from the mainland, but all his own soldiers, too, so that the vanquished would not think the labour a disgrace.\(^{131}\)

Logan and Adams argue that More’s *Utopia*, therefore, seeks to stress the “dignity of labour” influenced by Christian monasticism where “[b]y contrast, in classical political theory and practice manual labour was normally assigned to members of the lower orders

\(^{130}\) Ibid, 74.

\(^{131}\) Ibid, 43.
This is provocative on a number of levels insofar as one might read this shift in attitudes towards labour as a move towards egalitarianism. However, it also simultaneously signals recognition of the need for the Utopian settlers to be labourers in order to avoid the necessity of enslaving the entirety of the native Abraxan population—itself an unpalatable and, perhaps more importantly, impractical prospect for a whimsical playful text authored by an eventual Catholic saint.

*Utopia* thus draws together a variety of (largely) previously disparate concepts and concerns in perhaps the first, but definitely the most prominent, articulation of a narrative proposal for utopian settler modernity. More’s use of fictionalized characterizations of himself, his friend Giles, and his creation of Hythloday, to explore nascent Christian-humanist ideas and ideals associated with natural law serves to destabilize conclusions regarding More’s own intentions or expectations for the book’s reception. R.S White writes

> It is clear… that Raphael is attacking not just an economic system, but a whole structure of apparent justice which is exposed as unjust by comparison with Natural Law. Pride is the central problem, since it ‘measures her advantages not by what she has but by what other people lack’. The disagreement between Raphael and ‘More’ (unrepentantly European to the end) lies in the basic problem of defining ‘human nature’. To the Natural Lawyer, pride is not ‘natural’ but it is a consequence of an ingrained ideology resulting from a customary ownership, a fiction so firmly fixed that it seems a truth.’ Raphael knows that ‘Pride is too deeply fixed in human nature to be easily plucked out’ (p.11), but he believes it can be. ‘More’ cannot countenance such a radical change in people’s convictions, and so he sees in Utopia at best only ‘many features that in our societies I would like rather than expect to see…On one reading, man’s reason and conscience are internal faculties, confused only by the existence of institutions which work against the implementation of a state based on Natural Law. On the other reading,

132 Ibid, 42 fn5.
men made these very institutions because their understandings were corrupted by the Fall, and only God or a holy fool like Hythlodaeus can see this. 133

Regardless of More’s authorial intentions, there is a final aspect to Utopia that is itself a darkly fascinating consideration in light of the subsequent real-world historical experiences of the Indigenous peoples: More’s Utopians refuse to engage in treaty-making. Utopia’s narrator Hythloday recounts

…the reason the Utopians don’t make any [treaties]…they think it a bad idea to make treaties at all even if they are faithfully kept. A treaty implies that people divided by some natural obstacle as slight as a hill or a brook are joined by no bond of nature; it assumes they are born rivals and enemies, and are right in trying to destroy one another except when a treaty restrains them. Besides, they see that treaties do not really promote friendship; for both parties still retain the right to prey on one another, insofar as careless drafting has left the treaty without sufficient provisions against it. The Utopians think, on the other hand, that no one should be considered an enemy who has done no harm that the kinship of nature is as good as a treaty and that men are united more firmly by good will than by pacts, by their hearts than by their words. 134 (italics my emphasis)

While the articulated rationale for the Utopians’ resistance to treaty-making (“kinship of nature” and “united…by good will…[and] hearts [rather than] by their words”) may be recognized for its ecumenical gestures, the simultaneous denial of sovereignty and fully-human status to the indigenous Abraxans is undermining. More’s Utopians have no need for treaties, for their sense of universal humanitas is, in fact, not universal. So long as some peoples are denied fully-human subjectivity because of, to use More’s own words,

133 White, Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature, 132-133.

134 More Utopia 84-85. This passage is especially noteworthy considering the contemporary demands the Idle No More movement in Canada (and elsewhere) to honour historical treaty agreements made between Indigenous nations and, for example, the British Crown.
a lack of “kinship of nature”—differing cultural, epistemological, ontological, and other hierarchically-differentiated identities—the Utopians are obliged to convert, displace, enslave or kill—to colonize—and have no duty to make or uphold treaty agreements with those considered subhuman.

More’s notion of a “kinship of nature” is particularly noteworthy insofar as Utopia offers an enlightened proposal on a number of social relations relative to the historical context alongside the abovementioned (proto) civilizationalist attitudes. With respect to gender relations, More’s Utopians are decidedly patriarchal as it is expected that “[w]ives act as servants to their husbands,” and are responsible for much of the domestic work, especially the preparation of meals. At the same time, women join men in the physical labour as well as attending daily public lectures intended as a sort of educational intellectual practice largely unavailable to women in More’s contemporaneous Europe. And More’s Utopians are also described as having a sympathetic attitude towards persons with disabilities, as they are said to uphold that “…derid[ing] a person for being deformed or crippled is considered disfiguring, not to the victim but to the mocker, who stupidly reproaches the cripple for something he cannot help.”

Additionally, More’s Utopia is, like Plato’s Republic, a proposal for an ideal society that includes slavery, though it may be read as “progressive” relative to its historical context. Utopia includes slaves who are captured in wars in which the Utopians

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135 Ibid, 55-56.
136 Ibid, 81.
themselves fight, criminals who have committed “heinous offence[s],” those who had been condemned to death in their home societies or who arrive in Utopia penniless and used to “drudgery.” Thus, the Utopians may be read as relatively compassionate insofar as they forego capital punishment in cases where it was apparently widespread. Moreover, there is a standing provision in _Utopia_ that allows for moderation of the treatment of a slave up to and including freeing them from their bonds provided they adopt Utopian attitudes and prove willing to assimilate.

But while More’s _Utopia_ may be recognized for its enlightened attitudes relative to its historical context within the Utopian society, it is unambiguous that the text articulates a rationale for colonial dehumanization. More’s insistence upon the eminent rationality of the Utopian project is couched in terms that demarcate a clear elevation of those human subjects which share a “kinship of nature” based upon an Axial-monotheistic and transcendental orientation that may include Christian Europe as well as the Islamic world. European encounters with African peoples and the Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala that were contemporaneous with More’s writing of _Utopia_ served as bases for his discussion of those who did not share this kinship of nature. As such, they could submit to assimilating, as some of the novel’s displaced Indigenous peoples, the Abraxans, did (“But Utopous, who conquered the country and gave it his name (for it had previously been called Abraxa), and who brought its rude, uncouth inhabitants to… a high level of culture and humanity”[^138], but if they fought in defense of their lands they

[^137]: Ibid, 77-78.
[^138]: Ibid, 42.
were marked for death or enslavement. Thus, More’s *Utopia* outlined both an expectation and a rationale by which peoples of non-European cultures would be considered conquerable and marked for colonization.

**Impact of Utopia**

Ultimately, whether More’s *Utopia* was intended as a blueprint for an ideal commonwealth, or rather as a whimsical and speculative yarn created for the amusement of More’s fellow intellectuals is perhaps irrelevant. What is not in doubt is the influence of More’s *Utopia* on the popular European imagination of the New World:

Renaissance descriptions of the New World were heavily coloured by classical and Christian utopianism. America, initially at least, could only too readily be seen as the actual embodiment of the Renaissance utopia. For many early explorers and administrators, More’s *Utopia* acquired the status of a guide and handbook. With its aid Vaco De Quiroga drew up a scheme for the government of New Spain. The leader of the first English colonial expedition, Sir Humfrey Gilbert, carried a copy of More’s book along with him in 1583; and the first English settlements began with a system of common ownership on Utopian lines.  

Between 1516 and 1750 25 Latin editions [of Utopia] appeared but this figure scarcely accounts for the popularity of the Utopian idea. In the same period translations multiplied, ten into English, seven into French, six into Dutch, three into German, with one each into Spanish and Italian. Moreover, R.W. Gibson has traced 220 works which are imitations or parodies, or contain some allusion to *Utopia*.  

*Utopia*, therefore, can be understood as envisioning and prefiguring English settler-colonialism insofar as English settler colonialism did not begin to substantively take

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139 Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, 71.

place until almost sixty years after the novel’s first publication. This is recognized—to varying degrees—by several scholars, including James Belich who observes

Formal emigration literature varied greatly in many ways, but as Robert Grant has recently observed it also displayed a ‘curious consistency’. Booster books normally portrayed themselves as guides, manuals, or handbooks, works of information specializing in hard fact, replete with gazetteers, and lists of statistics, wages, and prices. But this was usually intertwined with attempts to capture the imagination of their readers. The trick was to attach emigration to pre-existing hopes and to detach it from pre-existing fears…Utopian or paradise imagery, which invoked a linked cluster of aspirations, was very common. Writers did not portray destinations as heaven above, but they did regularly invoke the Biblical heaven on earth, the Promised Land of Canaan, flowing with milk and honey, complete with natives to dispossess. In formal booster literature, this fused with more secular ideas of Arcadia, fertile virgin lands in which lower class emigrants would become self-sufficient yeomen farmers through hard work and self-restraint… Emigration literature encouraged a people prone to seek promised lands to look outward for them—to the English-speaking new societies.141

The utopianism of emigration literature was indicative of what Krishan Kumar describes as an addition to the “mythological and religious repertoire of imaginary Atlantic civilizations.”142

The central feature of these conceptions was that they elevated the land, the physical landscape, over the people, such that the native people appeared at best as embellishments of the land, at worst as obstacles which had to be removed in order for it to fulfill its promise. Here, it seemed, was a land untouched by history, nature unmixed with art. This was the way the world must have looked before the coming of civilization. ‘In the beginning,’ said John Locke in his Second Treatise on Government, ‘all the world was America.’ The natives, in their rude simplicity, fitted in easily enough with this conception of the New World as primal nature. America was, to all intents and purposes, empty, a virgin land ready and waiting for settlement and civilization. Here mankind would make a new beginning.143


142 Kumar. Utopia & Anti-Utopia in Modern Times, 70.

143 Ibid, 70-71.
A focus on envisages of the land is particularly notable insofar as utopian conceptions of the New World inform critical analyses of settler colonialism. Moreover, Antonis Balasoupolus, in what is perhaps the most substantive engagement of Utopia’s relationship to colonialism from within utopian studies discourse, has argued “the birth of utopian fiction in the early modern era” ought be recognized as “…not only ‘contemporaneous with’ but also ‘inseparable from’ the beginnings of overseas colonization, suggesting that a ‘fundamental relation between utopianism and colonialism’ lies at the very root of the utopian project.”

Balasoupolous also cites Jeffrey Knapp’s contention in his An Empire Nowhere that Utopia “…contains perhaps the first Tudor attempt to elaborate a theory of colonization” and may “be taken, and intended as colonialist propaganda.” Furthermore, according to D.B. Quinn, More in Utopia even “appears to be the first Englishman to use the word colonia in a Roman [i.e. imperialist] meaning.” Knapp’s own argument concludes that “More’s Utopian colonial theory, which turns the accusation that a land is ‘idle and waste’ into a justification for colonizing it, came in fact to be repeated time and again in the American propaganda of Renaissance England.”

147 Ibid, 21.
More’s invocation of *terra nullius*, *vacuum domicilium*, and *inane ac vacuum* is characteristic of what Balasoupoulos terms an “…ideological rationalization for an enterprise that differentiated itself from Spanish and Portuguese ‘conquest’ by rendering the vacuous nature of the object of its desire (*terra nullius*) equivalent to the guiltless immateriality of its own nature.”\(^{148}\) This notion of a distinctive English ideologically, culturally, and historically-differentiated form of (settler) colonialism is congruent with Balasoupoulos’s discussion of Mary Louise Pratt’s idea of “anti-conquest” as …a utopian, innocent vision of European authority…[that] designates an ensemble of stylistic and rhetorical devices through which the western narrating subject entering colonial terrain seeks to be expunged from the stain of colonialism’s appropriative violence at the same time that s/he possessively holds on to an ethically sublimated version of cultural and ontological supremacy.\(^{149}\)

Thus, *Utopia*’s status as an ambiguously playful fantasy may be observed both alongside and as part of the emergence of an English settler colonial ideology, which simultaneously promotes and obscures its ideological content, not to mention its own genocidal implications. This may further be understood to prefigure, in part, an emergence of so-called “American exceptionalism,” to which, in terms of settler colonialism, a notion of “Canadian exceptionalism” may be appended. While conventional notions of “exceptionalism” involve a variety of concepts, practices, and experiences, in this context I intend it to refer to the notion of Canadian and American settler colonization as somehow an exception to the wider European colonial project.

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\(^{149}\) Ibid, 20.
Balasoupoulos has, therefore, identified an “expansionist ideology” he maintains to be “entangled” in the popularity of utopian fiction. Further to this, Knapp informs us that because Christopher Columbus’ letters never found an English publisher, the first references to the New World in England came via imaginative literature.

\[\ldots\text{as long as utopian colonialism’s object of desire was conceptualized in the negative and self-annulling terms of land that is ‘inane ac vacuum,’ ‘idle and waste.’ America…has been the (non) site in which the ludic, oxymoronic colonialism of Renaissance humanist encounters the spectral conquests of royal patents and charters of discovery and converses with the otherworldly colonialism of Protestant and Catholic reform. No less significant, of course, is the fact that the doctrines of terra nullius and vacuum domicilium widely evoked by seventeenth century English and French colonialism would legitimate the expropriation of native American land by appealing to a logic that is utopian both in its visualization of desirable territory as a legally uninhabited non-place and its direct evocation of Utopia’s ideal colonialism.}\]

\[\ldots\text{given their need to imagine what they did not yet know and to translate new and disorienting experiences according to what they knew, European explorers and conquerors could not help but rely on the ideological fuel provided by the scraps of older wishful topoi and replenished by the imaginative projections of the emerging utopian genre itself.}\]

Thus, the relationship of an emergent, distinctively settler utopian modernity was forged in the “negative” space of the supposed nowhereness of the Mondus Novus. English explorers and settlers could embark on voyages across the ocean to stake claims to supposedly (legally) uninhabited land, enabling a notion of an “exceptional” and “bloodless” invasion. Balasoupoulos describes this as an example of a “…utopic negativity—the non-sense which anticipates what has not yet become ideological

\[150\text{Balasopoulous “Unworldly Worldliness: American and the Trajectories of Utopian Expansionism” 5-6.}\]

\[151\text{Ibid, 12.}\]
common sense—for those historical moments of transition when an emergent ideology comes to articulate itself by exploring the limits of the imaginable.”\(^{152}\)

In this way, the emergence of a distinctively modern settler society involved “[t]he appropriation of the utopian by ‘an official apparatus of national identity’” which, I argue, has evolved to become naturalized to “undergir[d] the formation of a cultural common sense “in the national frame[…]u
topia is both ‘utopia and ‘ideology.’”\(^{153}\)

In this case, we may observe a confluence of factors contributing to the envisioning of the *Mondus Novus* as utopia—a negative, no-place or blank slate available for locating a new utopian modernity characterized and influenced, in part, by emergent Renaissance humanism and the Reformation. The utopianism associated with the break from the “pre-modern” becomes ideological in the establishment of Canada and the US as “exceptional” utopias themselves, embodying the characteristics of, and serving as representation of, humanity’s transcendence into modernity. The ideological elements of this utopian (settler) modernity are readily available in the text of More’s *Utopia*, demonstrating the co-evolution of notions of utopian modernity with an anti-utopian pre-modernity associated with “wild nature” and Indigenous and African peoples, as well as other peoples that would be racialized within a white supremacist, settler colonial order.

Commentators have highlighted such obvious contradictions in the “moral” behavior of the Utopians, including JC Davis’ observation of their “amoral, free-

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\(^{152}\) Ibid, 14.

\(^{153}\) Ibid, 14.
wheeling conduct in foreign relations and in particular in war.”

This is in direct contrast to More’s narrator, Hythloday, boasting “…[Utopians] only go to war only for good reasons: to protect their own land, to drive invading armies from the territories of their friends, or to liberate an oppressed people, in the name of compassion and humanity, from tyranny and servitude.”

To the contrary, Davis rightly asserts, “[I]n their external relations, particularly towards enemies, they [Utopians] are Machiavellian…”

Ultimately, Logan and Adams offer the sympathetic assessment that “[i]t is impossible to believe that More approved of all these practices [foreign policy, war]; yet apparently he thought them necessary.”

It is true that we have the benefit of hindsight and that More’s *Utopia* is indicative of a particular time and space which surely demands appropriate contextualization. However, it is equally true that the lived consequences of More’s *Utopia*, and the utopian settler modernity it contributes to inaugurating, include genocide and, arguably, ecocide.

Indeed Greenblatt’s estimation of the attitudes of the early settlers bears a striking resemblance to that articulated in *Utopia*:

The Europeans who ventured to the New World in the first decades after Columbus’ discovery… Their culture was characterized by immense confidence in its own centrality, by a political organization based on practices of command and submission, by a willingness to use coercive violence on both strangers and

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156 Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society*, 57.

fellow countrymen, and by a religious ideology…Such was the confidence of this culture that it expected perfect strangers…to abandon their own beliefs, preferably immediately, and embrace those of Europe as luminously and self-evidently true. A failure to do so provoked impatience, contempt, and even murderous rage.\textsuperscript{158}

Again, the considerable ambiguity of \textit{Utopia} and questions surrounding More’s authorial intentions dictate it would be unfair to assign him primary responsibility for the subsequent explosion in utopian travel narratives and the settler colonization of the \textit{Mondus Novus}. Regardless, the impact included the subsequent consolidation of an entire literary genre, not to mention an amorphous concept of “utopianism.” Roland Schaer, writing in \textit{Utopia: The Search for Ideal Society in Western World}, produced as part of \textit{Utopia} established itself as a prognostic genre, capable of anticipating a history that had yet to come; in no time, these anticipatory visions took on a vacillating quality as they alternative between the dream and the nightmare, paradise and disaster, “eutopia” and “anti-utopia.”

Anticipation, in this case, is not to be confused with the earlier mode of prophecy, especially as the aftermath of the revolutionary upheavals ushered in an era, encompassing Condorcet and Marx by way of Comte and Hegel, of philosophies of history and “grand narratives” that sound to bring rationality to bear on historical time and to explain instability and irreversibility though logical causality. While some endowed history with transcendence under the insignia of Progress and Reason, and others, like the materialist philosophies, professed the scientific status of their discipline, all of these rationalized conceptualizations of time and history altered utopian states by, in effect, situating utopia within a historical chronology, usually to be found, as it had been in the traditional novels, at the end of a propitious journey, or as the result of a chance encounter, or in the happy contingency of a shipwreck that turned out well. Rather, it was to await us as the end of a process of rational discourse like a vista of the final destination of a history governed by meaning, not to say necessity.\textsuperscript{159}


\textsuperscript{159} Roland Schaer “Utopia, Space, Time, History” from \textit{Utopia: The Search for Ideal Society in Western World}. New York, NY Public Library/Oxford University Press. 2000. (5-6)
More’s *Utopia* must, therefore, be recognized as contributing to, and, in many ways, as having crystallized an emergent conceptualization of a utopian settler modernity counterposed to Vespucci’s ethnographic accounts of Indigenous peoples, African peoples, as well as Moors, Muslims, and otherwise Asiatic peoples as formative to the English, and indeed the wider European population’s imagination.

The subsequent utopian traditions of the settler colonial societies of Canada and the US, as well as the related but distinct utopian traditions of Europe, as the erstwhile colonial metropoles, reveal the substantial naturalization and perpetuation of notions of transcendental progress and universal rationality.

**Conclusion: destabilizing narratives of utopian settler futurity**

In coining the word “utopia” as a pun on a combination of Greek words usually translated as “no place” or, more commonly as a “good place [which is] no place,” More projected the strivings for progress, rationality, redemption, and salvation through an adherence to Christian-humanist notions of natural law on to *Mondus Novus*. Additionally, More’s *Utopia* reflected and furthered the intellectual means of rationalizing the unambiguously already inhabited Turtle Island as a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, on to which the desires of English and wider European peoples could be unproblematically projected.

*Utopia* constructed a narrative that invoked the conceptualizing of the *Mondus Novus* as a “no place” in order to effect a means of envisioning a “progressive” and “rational” societal transformation aimed at redemption, salvation, and transcendence.
from the mundane present plane of existence. In doing so, Utopia constructed a utopian narrative proposal of early notions of the modern as apart from England or wider Europe. In this way, inhabiting modernity worked as a means to be the most utopian, the most perfected or fully-human, as a means of seeking redemption, salvation, and transcendence. Crucially, however, these utopian settler narratives were articulated to envision a utopian settler futurity—that is, the implicit or explicit subject of a proposed utopian society was a European transferred, of course, to the “no place” of the Mondus Novus.

The use of a utopian narrative to displace More’s own England or European society as the location of progress, rationality, redemption, and salvation necessarily involved the rendering of Indigenous peoples to a pre-modern and subhuman status. The simultaneous elevation of (and orientation of) settlers to (and towards) a decidedly utopian modernity was and, I argue continues to be, fundamental to the sustaining of the condition of settler colonialism.

In the case of More’s Utopia, the utopian narrative proposal of settler modernity involved rationales of “terra nullius” (empty land) and “inane ac vacuum” (idle and waste) “vacuum domicillium” (unoccupied home) as justifications for appropriating inhabited lands. These rationales reflected the prevailing ideas of More’s contemporaneous English (and wider European) society and were invoked as the bases of the legalistic justifications for English (and other European) appropriations of Indigenous territories in the Mondus Novus.
The operational capacity of utopian narratives of settler modernity endures as a renewable means of continually re-formulating a notion of settler superiority in relation to Indigenous peoples. Inherent is the notion that normative white settler subjects maintain the primary means of (re)defining notions of what it is to be modern, constructed in direct contrast to Indigenous and racialized non-Native peoples as a means of furthering the rationalization of white supremacist settler colonialism as “natural,” “inevitable,” or otherwise indicative of “progress.”

In relation to context, utopian settler modernity has evolved since More’s 1516 text to the present day. The relatively recent emergence of “post” narratives, of “post-race” and “post-feminism”, not to mention the implicit and explicit positioning of Canada and the US as “post-colonial” nation-states, all serve to re-inscribe a notion of utopian settler modernity. These reformulations relegate critiques of the settler colonial condition of Canada and the US to the past, and in doing so simultaneously (re)claim the mantle of “progress” for settlers while disavowing Indigenous peoplehood and sovereignty claims.

For example, the official apology of the Canadian state for the residential school system, resulting in a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, all serve to allow for a re-production of a utopian settler modernity that acts to reframe a utopian horizon that breaks with the past. They enable a reformulation of settlers as, again, representative of modernity – progress, redemption, and salvation from a “dark period” necessarily consigned to the past.

Such renewals of utopian settler modernity are therefore articulated as a fundamental break, a chasm that reifies a notion of salvation and redemption as an
emergent and ongoing, if not already past, means of disavowing critiques of the
ostensible “good place.” Settler colonial Canada and the US are always-already utopian,
the most modern; the most progressive even, and especially because this conception
incorporates challenges and critiques as means of continually re-asserting supremacy.
Crucially, Indigenous peoples’ access to the utopian modernity is available to the degree
to which they are enabled and willing to assimilate into the normative settler society.

*Utopia*, therefore, marks the birth of a distinctive and enduringly consequential
modern (settler—though the tradition has also developed outside of settler societies)
utopian tradition, and, as Phillip Wegner argues, “it is [the] act of repetition that
establishes the ‘historical necessity’ of the founding case.”\(^{160}\) Wegner situates *Utopia* as
the founding text of what he terms the genre of the “utopian narrative.” His discussion is
useful for our purposes insofar as he contends that the ensuing explosion in utopian
narratives demonstrate a
critical ‘self-awareness’ itself [which] defines the genre’s *existence*…[and] enables us to bring into focus the ways the various works making up the generic
institution of the narrative utopia engage simultaneously in a number of what
Mikhail Bakhtin describes as *dialogic* relationships: within the traditions of
utopian writing that both precede and follow them; with the broader literary and
intellectual presents they inhabit; with their variously situated readers; and finally,
with the concerns of the larger cultural and social realities in which they first appear.\(^{161}\)

While Wegner’s own conceptualization of the utopian narrative is substantially confined
to analysis of literary texts, it may also be observed as the act of “re-authoring”, as a

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“cognitive practice” which, in the example of *Utopia*, contributes to profound developments in cultural mores and practices. Thus, following Wegner, “the original intentions of the author as she sets out to accomplish a specific textual performance become less significant: far more important, from the perspective of the later institutionality of the genre, are what the subsequent readers take it to mean.”\(^{162}\)

It is from this basis that I will proceed to offer some considerations of a notion of utopian settler modernity. Where Wenger describes “histories and processes of western *modernity* and *modernization*...” [italics in original] as the “long revolution of creative destruction and ultimate recomposition of the social body that begins, not coincidentally, in the very moment that also witnesses the birth of the genre of utopia,” I situate the utopian narrative as a constituent element of settler colonial project in the New World.\(^{163}\)

It is my contention that expressions of desire for a better way of being as expressed through the most widely understood utopian vehicles (novels) and through social movement narratives concerned with decolonization represent the emerging potential re-articulation of utopia in keeping with the notion of a social desire that is dialogical, provisional, and critically self reflexive. Part of this notion of settler narratives, I argue, has to do with the ways in which particular forms of (social) desire are created and articulated. These narratives have several temporal dimensions, including past, present, and future. I contend that utopian narratives articulate notions of settler modernity whereby orientations towards progress and salvation—renewable

\(^{162}\) Ibid, 32.

\(^{163}\) Ibid, 119.
constructions of utopia—a conceptual horizon or “no place” allow for the continuance of the linear narrative structure.

Settler colonial narratives must create a historical narrative that explains their coming to invade/occupy/settle Indigenous territory. This allows for the construction of a linear narrative which explains the present circumstances of settler colonialism and evokes or prefigures descriptions or envisioning of the future whereby the settler colonial project may be understood as coming to be “post-settler colonial.”

The implicit and explicit futurity of settler narratives as becoming post-settler-colonial is necessarily accomplished through a notion of completing the transfer of settlers in and Indigenous people out, the fulfillment of the process of settler indigenization. For example, Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation process has been a source of great debate by Indigenous activists and scholars, including questions over the efficacy of such a process, and charges of its inherently resulting in the continued disavowal of Indigenous political autonomy and land claims.\(^{164}\) Furthermore, in the Canadian context there is an official policy of multiculturalism which is often viewed by Indigenous critics as a strategy for reconstituting the settler polity in an assimilative framework that perpetuates a renewed condition of settler colonialism. The settler utopia, as well as the notion of modernity associated with the condition of settler colonialism, is renewed; Canada is understood as a modern multicultural utopia where racialized peoples

\(^{164}\) See, for example, Marlene Brandt Castellano, Linda Archibald, and Mike DeGagne. *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools.* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008).
as well as Indigenous peoples are invited to assimilate within the borders of a white supremacist settler colonial order as elements of a “mosaic.”

Alternatively, an examination of Indigenous narrative forms and their content reveals the continuance of several key themes: the ongoing assertion of Indigenous peoplehood further expressed in demands for dignity and cultural and political autonomy. One way in which this is expressed is through the assertion of Indigenous nationhood. This is articulated both in Indigenous literary forms and criticism (for example, Indigenous literary nationalisms), as well as social movement narratives from Idle No More and the subsequent Indigenous Nationhood Movement such as “we are all treaty people,” and calls for nation-to-nation relations between Indigenous nations and the Canadian state and British Crown.

This call is itself an explicit intervention/attempt at highlighting the historical treaty abrogations and a re-assertion of the original conditions of Indigenous-newcomer contact, that is, the engagement as equals, nation-to-nation. This acts to intervene in consolidated, linear settler narratives that operate to consign autonomous Indigenous political and cultural authorities to the past, as pre-modern and necessarily “backward.” Such contemporary Indigenous narratives interrupt settler claims to being the exclusive representatives of modernity and utopia. In doing so, they compel a rethinking of the naturalization of settler futurity in proposals for desirable change. The implications of such a reconsideration for utopian studies are explored in the following chapter.
Chapter 4
Educating Hope… Decolonizing Utopia?

“Utopians are always faced with [a] dilemma when they attempt to move their dream to reality—is their dream compatible with the imposition of their dream; can freedom be achieved through unfreedom, or equality through inequality?”
--Lyman Tower Sargent

“the wish to become an indian is therefore, precisely one of these shards of a possible future utopia… actually…about the wish to become fully human for the first time. The “otherness” of the indian, therefore, stands for the sameness of the as yet incomplete human species.”
--Peter Thompson

“The predicament of homelessness, the ex-topic “ground zero” of modernity is, then, the sine quo non for any positive formulations of utopian anchored in finite human existence.”
--Michael Marder and Patricia Vieira

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Thomas More published Libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus, de optimo rei publicae statu deque nova insula Utopia in 1516. With that fictional work, More created the neologism “utopia,” as a pun taken from a combination of Greek words. More’s Utopia is, therefore, credited by scholars with coining the term used to describe a literary genre, as well as varied and contested conceptualizations of “utopian” phenomena. Both informal and academic notions of utopias and utopianism have evolved
alternately to signify ideas of hope, idealism, perfection, totalitarianism, impossibility, frivolity, and so forth.\footnote{Sargent, Ruth Levitas, and Lucy Sargisson (among others) point to Karl Popper’s \textit{The Open Society and its Enemies} (1962) as having substantially contributed to the linking of utopianism with totalitarianism, especially within scholarly discourse.}

The popular conceptualization of utopias and utopianism has been profoundly elastic; it has been deployed to both inspire and condemn, with the ready assertion that a eutopia/utopia or a “good place” for one is inevitably a dystopia, or “bad place” for another.\footnote{The second quotation at the start of the chapter speaks to this dilemma, a fundamental concern for utopian studies.} As such, utopias and utopianism have been utilized both by revolutionaries and by the reactionary forces of the status quo. It is sometimes also popularly used as an epithet, as a criticism that links utopia to notions of totalitarianism and closure, as in the case of conservative commentator Glenn Beck’s criticizing of what he terms the “socialist utopianism” of the Obama Administration.\footnote{“Glenn Beck’s Top Five Conspiracy Theories.” \textit{Media Matters.} http://mediamatters.org/blog/2011/06/30/glenn-becks-top-5-conspiracy-theories/180582} But utopianism may also be finding new favor for its association with human desire for liberation, emancipation, and for freedom, as evidenced by Erik Olin Wright’s \textit{Envisioning Real Utopias} project, which served as the theme for the 2012 meeting of the American Sociological Association.\footnote{See “Envisioning Real Utopias” http://realutopias.org/}

There are some elements which are fundamental to the diverse conceptualizations of utopias and utopianism by scholars. The relationship of the individual human to the wider human (and other-than-human) collective appears as a pivotal concern insofar as utopianism has, at times, been conceptualized so expansively as to enable some theorists
of utopia, such as Ernst Bloch and Lyman Tower Sargent, to proclaim it a universal, even innate, human propensity. This alleged universality of utopianism is bound to an assertion of an intrinsic relationship between utopia and the human experiences of desire, dreaming, and what literary scholar Darko Suvin termed “cognitive estrangement.” This is the idea that in the narrative proposals of alternative, qualitatively better societies—proposals for “what ought to be”—the recipients of the proposal experience a remove—a cognitive estrangement—from the status quo that enables a critical perspective on “what is.” This may facilitate social change in the pursuit of the alternative proposal. Claims to utopia’s universality certainly have strategic discursive value, in that they facilitate comparative studies and also buttress various arguments for the relevance, if not centrality of utopianism, to questions of human desires and desirable social change. Indeed, Sargent has declared “…utopianism is essential for the improvement of the human condition.”

However, such declarations of utopia’s universality have the potential to neglect the specificities of cultural and historical diversity, including ontological and epistemological differences as they relate to both individual human desires and societal change. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the narrative origins of More’s *Utopia* were predicated, in part, upon the rationales for a (proto) racialization and settler colonialism, themselves characterized by notions of a linear progressive human development enabled by definitive, transcendental breaks with the past, and the corresponding evocation of (an early notion of) modernity.

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Therefore, while there is surely strategic value in facilitating an inclusive conceptualization of utopias and utopianism, it is the specificities of actually *lived consequences* of both the historical past and present expressions of utopias and utopianism that are themselves vital to considerations of utopia’s supposed fundamental relationship to the improvement of the human condition. It follows, then, that there must be an enduringly critical and reflexive assessment of the effects of expressions of utopias and utopianism in lived experience.

Further to this, it is my contention that what Krishan Kumar has differentiated as the “modern utopia,” as inaugurated by More’s *Utopia*, has inspired and cohered a tradition that should be understood as co-constitutive with ongoing white supremacist settler colonization. Certainly the modern utopian tradition is also related to the exploitative and instrumentalizing relationship between the human and the “other-than-human” on Abya Yala (or) Turtle Island.\(^{170}\) The interrelationship between the modern utopian tradition, what I have previously described as *utopian settler modernity*, genocidal white supremacist settler colonization, and, arguably, the ecocidal instrumentalization of the other-than-human, is under-researched despite sporadic incidences of recognition in utopian studies scholarship. I argue that this interrelationship, in fact, has profound implications for a variety of scholarly discourses, creative practices, and social movements, in addition to the utopian literary tradition, that is central to utopian studies discourses.

\(^{170}\) Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, 3.
This chapter critically explores utopian studies theory to offer an immanent critique of the modern utopian tradition, which is conceived expansively here to include modern utopian ontologies, epistemologies, cultural expressions, and social movements) via a critical exploration of utopian studies theory. A critical genealogy of the modern utopian tradition reveals its dynamic, evolutionary character and content as indeed co-constituitive with the ongoing naturalizing of white supremacist settler colonialism of Canada and the US.

However, I also draw upon Ruth Levitas’ re-conceptualization of a dialogical, processual, and critically self-reflexive “utopia as method” to demonstrate a basis for a hopeful excavation of the modern utopian tradition for what Ernst Bloch calls the “cultural surplus.” I argue for a re-evaluation of utopias and utopianism in light of Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism and a corresponding instrumentalization of the other-than-human. Furthermore, given utopia’s clear associations both historically and contemporarily with genocidal white supremacist settler colonialism, I join Jacqueline Dutton in questioning the appropriateness of the use of the language of “utopia” as a trans-historical and trans-cultural meta-category of social desire.

However, I do maintain that the educative function of utopianism, as theorized by Bloch, Miguel Abensour, and Levitas provides a potential theoretical basis from within existing utopian studies discourses for engaging with and forging accountable relationships to Indigenous critical theories, literary studies, and social movements. In this way, utopian studies may be mobilized to recuperate the “cultural surplus” of the modern utopian tradition as part of a re-articulation of discourses of utopia in the service
of both Indigenous decolonization, specifically, and desirable re-imaginings of human society, more generally.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the concept of utopian settler modernity is substantially characterized by the stratification of human beings into value-laden categories, which are themselves facilitated by related conceptions of modernity, transcendental progress, and universal rationality. At the apex of this social hierarchy are those deemed most fully-human as subjects and who are most fully empowered as citizens of the white supremacist settler nation-states of Canada and the US. The fully-human citizen-subjects allegedly embody and perform notions of “progress” and “rationality” commensurate with idealized notions of Canadian and American societies as both progressive and rational. This category of the fully-human citizen-subject may be thought of as also embodying and performing what it is to be fully-modern and, indeed, utopian. It follows that the fully-human citizen-subjects of Canada and the US represent these societies as correspondingly fully-modern and utopian. Examples of this include the discourses of “American exceptionalism” and “Canadian multiculturalism” which articulate (via a closed and tautological logic) the US and Canada as utopian exemplars of progressive modernity, respectively.

The fully-human citizen-subject has historically been characterized by the normative privileging of whiteness, cis-gendered maleness, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, and other embodiments and performativities to which non-normative peoples are necessarily judged to be lesser-than. The means with which human bodies are marked within (white) settler North America are dynamic and fluid. I wish to
acknowledge that the categorizations mentioned here are not at all exhaustive, nor static in and of themselves. Moreover, this stratification of human bodies depends upon a self-insulating and self-perpetuating logic of supremacy, such that within Canada and the US, the fully-modern and utopian-citizen-subject may thus be understood as simultaneously privileging, naturalizing and, at the same time, obscuring its very position within a stratified order. This is to say that, for example, the elevation of white settler bodies to the apex of the social hierarchy within Canada and the US conspires to obscure the very condition of white settler colonialism and any recognition of white settler peoples as, in fact, settlers of land stolen from Indigenous peoples.

Within the white supremacist settler colonial societies of Canada and the US, Indigenous bodies are both implicitly and explicitly marked as non-normative, other-than-modern, or perhaps more accurately, as pre-modern and less-than-fully human. Within the category of Indigenous personhood, there are further value-laden differentiations corresponding to the disempowerment of, for example, cis-gendered maleness or able-bodiedness as part of the hierarchical stratification of normatively fully-modern utopian settler citizen-subjects. By this I mean to emphasize that there are a multiplicity of identities, which further serve to hierarchically stratify communities already disempowered within white settler society.

Of course, there exists a wide variety of subjectivities within Canadian and US societies, including, for example, racialized non-Native peoples, which may be observed as normatively less-than the fully-human citizen-subject. But while these subjectivities are judged less-than-fully-human they may, in some circumstances, still be conveyed
with greater degrees of empowerment and experience some privilege vis-à-vis Indigenous subjectivities. Furthermore, the logics of white supremacist settler colonial Canadian and American societies operate to reward non-normative subjectivities in accordance with their conformance to the normatively modern citizen-subjectivity. This is to say, greater degrees of assimilation and conformity to the normatively modern citizen-subjectivity results in the conveyance of (em)power(ment), while acts of resistance are repressed in a variety of ways.

The rationales for settler colonialism articulated in More’s *Utopia* have affected (and, I argue, continue to affect) the ongoing lived experience of the settler colonization of the so-called New World—the *Mondus Novus*, specifically with respect Canada and the US for the purposes of this project. More’s *Utopia* contributed to, and is bound up with, both the emergence and perpetuation of the narrativizing of a normatively modern white settler citizen-subjectivity as the utopian subjectivity—the apex of social hierarchy. As such, More’s *Utopia* and the subsequent modern utopian tradition share in the responsibility for the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples subject to the condition of white supremacist settler colonialism of Canada and the US. Similarly, the “rational” utilitarian approach of More’s fictionalized settler Utopians to the other-than-human of the erstwhile fictional territory of Abraxa ought be acknowledged for its connection to and the consequences a largely instrumentalized and, arguably, ecocidal relationship between Canada and the US and the other-than-human of the lands which they currently occupy.
As such, there must be recognition that expressions of utopianism which emerge from these settler societies should themselves be understood as part of the (ongoing) process of white supremacist settler colonization; so long as settler colonization remains embedded or naturalized within the desires, dreams, hopes, or wish-fulfillment of settlers and settler societies, utopianism itself must be understood as co-constitutive with and, in fact, contributing to the ongoing lived experience of white supremacist settler colonialism in Canada and the US.

In short, if, as Sargent contends, conceptions of utopianism are fundamentally about the improvement of the human condition, utopianism cannot be facilitated by colonialism, genocide, and white supremacy.

Furthermore, Sargent has opined that the utopian literary subgenre of “ecotopia,” named for Ernest Callenbach’s 1975 novel that centers ecological concerns in its utopian narrative, are “today the strongest utopian current.”171 It is clear that ecology and sustainability-based utopian social theory and movements are indeed prominent, which ought compel critical engagement with the interrelationship between what has been described elsewhere as “indigenization,” what I will call white settler ecotopianism and white settler colonialism. By this I intend to stress that white settler ecotopianism, devoid of simultaneous commitments to decolonization and ending white supremacy, should itself be recognized as also contributing to the naturalization, perpetuation, and otherwise sustainment of white supremacist settler colonialism.

To re-state my earlier claim, if conceptions of utopianism are essentially about the improvement of the human condition, halting ecocide cannot be predicated upon colonialism, genocide, and white supremacy.

A critical understanding of this fundamental relationship of modern utopianism to settler colonialism and the attendant instrumentalization of the other-than-human is vital to the potential contemporary revaluation of utopianism. This is not to say, that the entirety of the modern utopian tradition ought necessarily be summarily dismissed or jettisoned as irrevocably colonial. To the contrary, I intend to discuss notions of educative desire or hope, the implications of which, I argue, demand responsible acknowledgement and action in the service of Indigenous decolonization and the ending of white supremacy. I propose to call to question the potential of a critical engagement between (white settler) utopianism, Indigenous Futurisms, and the literary traditions of racialized non-Native peoples including but not limited to Afro-Futurism. The implications of attending to the concerns of Indigenous peoples, racialized non-Native peoples, and white settlers necessarily involve a deep reevaluation of the discourse and language of the white settler utopian tradition.

Utopian studies theorists, including Sargent and Jacqueline Dutton, have begun the work of addressing utopia’s Euro/Western-centricism up to and including the appropriateness of the language of “utopia” itself. Ralph Pordzik’s study of “postcolonial utopianism” also contributes to this emerging discourse within utopian studies, though there has yet to be a sustained discussion of, for example, Indigenous Futurisms, utopia’s
constituent relationship to colonial modernity, and the central role of settler colonialism in More’s titular Utopia.

What follows is a discussion of the modern utopian tradition from More’s Utopia to the present day, relying upon utopian studies scholarship, the utopian literary tradition, and the lived historical record. Obviously, this is not an exhaustive genealogy. However, my intention is to situate my critical intervention within existing utopian studies scholarship, establishing the basis for an immanent critique of the modern utopian tradition. I then turn to an exploration of the possibilities of an educated “utopia,” offering an argument for the re-evaluation of utopia as an act of reflexive accountability to Indigenous and allied critiques of white supremacist settler colonialism.

**Defining and differentiating utopia**

While More’s Utopia gave name to both a literary genre and diverse phenomena concerned with human desire and social change, scholars appear agreed that both the literary form and wider conceptions of utopian phenomena pre-date its 1516 publication. While there have been significant differences in the categorization of utopian literature and the conceptualization of utopianism, More’s Utopia is nonetheless a clear touchstone for most studies of utopias and utopianism given its coining of the language of “utopia,” and the significance of the literary utopia to broader considerations of utopianism. As such, I will begin with some prominent classifications of utopian literature as a means of contextualizing the wider discussion to follow.
For both Darko Suvin and Lyman Tower Sargent, it is the *social dimension* of human desire that forms the basis of their respective categorizations of utopian literature. Suvin, an influential scholar of science fiction, is credited with originating the notion of “cognitive estrangement” as a defining characteristic of utopian literature. Sargent is one of the most respected contemporary utopian studies scholars, having had the Society for Utopian Studies’ award for distinguished scholarship named in his honour.\(^{172}\)

First, Suvin’s influential definition of utopian literature:

The verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis.\(^{173}\)

Sargent expands somewhat on Suvin’s definition:

A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space. In standard usage utopia is used both as defined here and as an equivalent for eutopia or a non-existent society described in considerable detail

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\(^{172}\) The Society for Utopian Studies (SUS) is based primarily in North America and is described as follows per the SUS website (http://www.utopian-studies.org)

Founded in 1975, The Society for Utopian Studies is an international, interdisciplinary association devoted to the study of utopianism in all its forms, with a particular emphasis on literary and experimental utopias. Scholars representing a wide variety of disciplines are active in the association, and approach utopian studies from such diverse backgrounds as American Studies, Architecture, the Arts, Classics, Cultural Studies, Economics, Engineering, Environmental Studies, Gender Studies, History, Languages and Literatures, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology and Urban Planning. Although many Society members are involved in social activism or communitarianism, the purpose of the Society itself is to study utopianism rather than to pursue utopian projects.

The Lyman Tower Sargent Award for Distinguished Scholarship is conferred by the SUS and The Society’s by-laws describe this award as aimed at recognizing “lifetime achievements, for diversified activity, and for accomplishments not only in the academic fields to which we are accustomed, but also for achievements in fields not usually considered for academic promotion and tenure,” with distinguished work in at least two of the following areas: “Literary/Publication/Published Scholarship”, “Teaching”, and “Professional service/non-literary activity”.

and normally located in time and space that the author intended a
countemporary reader to view as considerably better than the society in which
that reader lived.\textsuperscript{174}

Thus, the determining factor for both scholars is clearly the construction or description of
an alternative \textit{community or society} intended to be recognized as better or more perfect
than the author’s community or society.

Further, Sargent, among other utopian studies scholars, argues for recognition of
\textit{Utopia}’s antecedents in myths, verbalized if unwritten, “from ancient Greece and Rome,
Sumer, and early Judaism” as “central to the development of Western utopianism.”\textsuperscript{175}
While his notion of More’s \textit{Utopia} as a part of a broader “Western utopianism”, itself
rooted in earlier mythologies and written works associated with what are described as the
Classical and Christian traditions, Sargent also argues “similar myths, such as the
Chinese ‘Peach Blossom Spring’, are found in most early civilizations.”\textsuperscript{176} That is, while
there is an acknowledgement of the specificities of what is described as a “Western”
tradition, itself derived from the Classical and Christian traditions, from which More’s
\textit{Utopia} clearly emerged, Sargent conceptualizes utopia to be an trans-cultural and trans-
historical meta-category or phenomenon.

While there is an emphasis on the social dimension of expressions of human
desire in studies of literary utopias, there is also necessarily recognition of the important
role of individual human desire. For his part, Sargent differentiates a notion of

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid, 6.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid, 13.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid, 13.
individualized “body utopias” or “utopias of sensual gratification” in the early development of Western utopianism. Body utopias are the “utopia of escape” or those which deal with “pleasure, and bodily pleasure in particular, with plenty of food and drink at its center, with, in some versions, lots of readily available sex.” Sargent’s characterization of the body utopia is largely devoid of human agency. Rather, the body utopia “is brought into being by Nature, God, or the gods.” Moreover, he asserts “[e]very culture has some such stories, and I believe they are that they are the foundation of utopianism.” This notion of an escapist, wishful, individualized, body utopia is contrasted with a concretized, willful, social utopianism, which is marked by “humans solving human problems, such as adequate food, housing, and clothing and security, rather than relying on Nature or the gods.”

Of course, these categories of the body versus societal utopia are themselves strategic rather than definitive. Notions of escapist, wishful, individually-focused utopianism and a concretized, willful, socially-focused utopianism may be understood to represent polar extremes on a spectrum of utopian expressions. In fact, there is overlap and fluidity to such expressions; the escapist and the concrete, the wishful and willful, the individual and the social, each are co-reliant. For example, Sargent characterizes early

177 Ibid, 12.
178 Ibid, 12.
179 Ibid. 12
versions of Carnivale, as well as the Roman Saturnalia festivals and the medieval Feast of Fools, in which the elites and their subordinates temporarily switch places, in parallel to his notion of the individualized escapist body utopia. However, such phenomena clearly involve a degree of concretized, social, and willful activity; they demonstrate a decidedly social and willful realization in lived experience.\(^{182}\)

Proceeding from similar bases, several utopian studies scholars have established a variety of typologies to describe and categorize instantiations of utopias and utopian literature, in particular, including the Golden Age, the Land of Cokaygne, Arcadia, the Millennium, and the Ideal City or Commonwealth. I will provide brief descriptions of each below. More recently, however, scholars have also developed the concepts of the “critical utopia” and “critical dystopia,” the “feminist utopia,” and, central to our purposes, the “postcolonial utopia.”\(^{183}\) Additionally, Callenbach’s own aforementioned neologism “ecotopia” has become its own category for the environmentally-focused utopia. Kumar’s notion of the “modern” utopian tradition is a further fundamental differentiation.

While there are differences in the specific elements or characteristics assigned to comprise such categories, scholarly differentiation of the distinctive forms of utopian literature signals recognition of the effects of cultural and historical contexts. Such categorizations ought, again, be understood as strategic, rather than definitive,

\(^{182}\) Ibid. 12-13.

\(^{183}\) These categories can be attributed to Kenneth Roemer and Tom Moylan, Lucy Sargisson, Ralph Pordzik, respectively. Additional categories could include the Marxist utopia, the anarchist utopia, and so on.
constructed, in part, to assist comparative study. There ought also necessarily be an
acknowledgement of the influence and interrelationship between these categories in
keeping with an understanding of utopias and utopian literature as culturally and
historically bound.

Furthermore, constructive evaluations of utopian literature may be facilitated by
wider considerations of utopian phenomena or “utopianism.” Again, scholars differ in the
conceptualizations of utopianism, some offering expansive notions that facilitate
universalisms while others’ formulations are much more narrowly constrained.

Sargent “[defines] the broad, general phenomenon of utopianism as social
dreaming—the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people
arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in
which the dreamers live.” Sargent also puts it another way: “basically, utopianism is a
philosophy of hope…characterized by the transformation of generalized hope into a
description of a non-existent society.” This conception of utopia as an accumulation of
individual desires into the social dreaming of a re-making of society permits his totalizing
assertion that “the history of the utopia reflects the whole range of human experience and
desire.” Again, this expansive, inclusive view of utopianism lends support to his
normative assertion of its ubiquity and fundamental relationships to human desire and the
“improvement of the human condition.”

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Moreover, Sargent has influentially argued that social dreaming, as a “multi-dimensional phenomenon” can be usefully situated among three categories, what he describes as “faces.”187 These are the genre of utopian literature, utopian social theory, and what he calls the “communitarianism,” which is substantially associated with the phenomenon of intentional communities. Sargent’s three faces of utopianism are a useful means of addressing the varied expressions of utopianism, though I prefer a broader notion of social movement activity to his focus on the communitarianism of intentional communities.

The significance and influence of Sargent’s notion of utopia as “social dreaming” is reflected in the first release of the Ralahine Utopian Studies book series: *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming*. However, the title also refers to the work of sociologist Ruth Levitas, who has provided perhaps the most comprehensive contemporary theoretical engagement with the conceptualization of utopianism.

Levitas’s *The Concept of Utopia* is a now-classic monograph in utopian studies dedicated to exploring the scholarly conceptualizations of utopianism.188 Levitas’ study identifies three primary means of defining utopia: content, form, and function, which have been used by scholars as criteria for classifying utopias. She addresses each, and, ultimately, rejects them all for their respective failures to serve as empirical constants. After discussing early scholarly treatments of utopia, she traces a lineage of utopianism

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from the utopian socialists (Fourier, Saint-Simon) and their most prominent critics (Marx and Engels), through Karl Mannheim and Georges Sorel to Ernst Bloch, William Morris, and finally Herbert Marcuse. In doing so, Levitas situates these approaches to utopia into two broad streams: the liberal-humanist tradition, marked by definitions in terms of form, and what she describes as “a largely, but not exclusively Marxist tradition that has defined utopia in terms of its function—either a negative function of preventing social change or through the process of the ‘education of desire.’”¹⁸⁹

Ultimately, Levitas observes that definitions that hinge upon content require normative judgments, which necessarily vary depending on the subjective perspective of the evaluator. Levitas advocates for an open and dialogical “analytic rather than descriptive” definition of utopianism that forgoes any teleological outcomes or goals, to which the content of a given utopia might be judged.¹⁹⁰ Further, she rejects definitions that center upon form, noting that the form of utopia, especially as a literary fiction, is dynamic and is thus subject to specific historical conditions. Meaning, if utopia is defined by form, there must be a consistent and objective basis for privileging one form over another. Just as with definitions based upon content, she finds there is not an intellectually satisfactory rationale for making normative judgments on particular forms of utopian expressions.

Definitions of utopia that depend upon function similarly require normative judgments. Levitas’ survey of existing definitions of utopia based on function identifies


¹⁹⁰ Ibid, xi.
as compensation, criticism, and change. She acknowledges the respective strengths and weaknesses of various function-oriented definitions of utopia:

Compensation is a feature of abstract, ‘bad’ utopia for Bloch, of all utopia for Marx and Engels and of ideology for Mannheim. Criticism is the main element in Goodwin’s definition. Change is crucial for Mannheim, Bauman, and Bloch. Utopia may also function as the expression or education of desire, as for Bloch, Morton and Thompson, or to produce estrangement as for Moylan and Suvin.¹⁹¹

Concluding, “one must of course be able to locate something which remains constant while content, form, and function vary,” she argues for desire as the basis for addressing utopianism, specifically formulating her conceptualization as “the desire for a better way of being and living.”¹⁹² She is, therefore, primarily concerned with avoiding unnecessary restrictions on “what may properly be regarded as utopian and thus upon the field of enquiry itself.”¹⁹³ Thus, her conceptualization of utopianism avoids normative judgments on whether expressions of desire are individualized or social, realistic or unrealistic. Interestingly, despite the openness of her conceptualization of utopianism, she declines to argue for its universality:

To [identify desire as utopia’s fundamental element] is not to make a claim that there is an essential ingredient in human nature with its source deep in the human psyche, reading towards utopia (as suggested by Marcuse and Bloch). We may claim that all utopias have something in common without making claims about the universality of utopia or the existence of a fundamental utopian propensity. Rather, where such desire is expressed—and the scope for this will itself be historically variable—it will not only vary markedly in content but may be

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 208.
¹⁹² Ibid, 8.
¹⁹³ Ibid, 8.
expressed in a variety of forms, and may perform a variety of functions including compensation, criticism, and the catalyzing of change.\textsuperscript{194}

utopia is a social construct which arises not from a ‘natural’ impulse subject to social mediation, but as a socially constructed response to an equally socially constructed gap between the needs and wants generated by a particular society and the satisfactions available to and distributed by it. All aspects of the scarcity gap are social constructs, including the propensity to imagine it away by some means or other…Utopianism, then, has as a precondition a disparity between socially constructed experienced need and socially prescribed and actually available means of satisfaction.”\textsuperscript{195}

Therefore, utopianism, for Levitas, is fundamentally a set of socially constructed and dialogical phenomena. But while Levitas resists unnecessary claims to utopianisms’ universality, which, therefore, perhaps precludes her agreement with Sargent’s contention of utopianism’s inherent relationship to the improvement of the human condition, her subsequent work clearly demonstrates her commitment to utopianism as a means of social change. Her notion of utopia as a method, what she calls IROS or the “imaginary reconstitution of society” reflects the influence of Ernst Bloch’s conception of \textit{docta spes} or “educated hope.” I will return to an in-depth discussion of Bloch vis-a-vis Levitas’s IROS methodology as part of this chapter’s concluding discussion on the potential revaluation of utopianism.

However, having discussed prominent conceptualizations of utopianism, I now return to Krishan Kumar’s discussion of what he calls “utopia proper” or the “modern utopian tradition.” Kumar’s argument for differentiating utopia facilitates a transitioning

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid, 8.

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid, 210-11.
from the establishment of conceptual definitions to a discussion of More’s *Utopia* and the subsequent modern utopian tradition, which, I argue, has substantially contributed to the naturalization of white settler colonialism and a corresponding anthropocentric instrumentalization of the other-than-human.

Their conceptual differences notwithstanding, utopian studies scholars, including Sargent, Levitas, Kumar, and JC Davis, have created similar typologies of the diverse instantiations of social desire. Thus, while there is disagreement regarding the applicability of “utopia” as an appropriate trans-historical meta-category, there is substantial shared recognition of the effects of cultural and historical contexts on the character and expression of social desire.

A brief description of Kumar’s schema follows, to assist our entry into a discussion of More’s *Utopia* as the advent of a distinctively new—a “modern”—social dreaming or expression of desire for a better way of being, with its own equally distinctive effects in lived experience.

Conceptions of the Golden Age involve notions of an intrinsic, “instinctive harmony between humanity and nature.”¹⁹⁶ Perhaps the foremost example, in the Western context, may be the Christian Biblical Eden, though Kumar describes Hesiod’s seventh century BCE *Works and Days* as “the canonical depiction” of the Golden Age. Similar to Adam and Eve prior to the Biblical Fall, Kumar notes *Works and Days*’ representation of “when men [sic] ‘lived as if they were gods, their hearts free from all sorrow, and without

hard world or pain’.”\textsuperscript{197} Kumar further characterizes life during the Golden Age as “simple and pious,” devoid of extravagant desires that could not be easily satisfied by “the abundance of nature.”\textsuperscript{198} The pagan Golden Age is set apart from the related Judeo-Christian Paradise, which, Kumar argues, evolved to conceive of a potential future reclamation of the heavenly world that existed before the Biblical Fall. The temporal shift—from the past to future—is crucial to the later development of the Millennial utopia.

Named for the fourteenth century English poem, \textit{The Land of Cokagne}, Kumar’s conception might be classified as a classic example of the escapist, compensatory body utopia. The happy Land of Cokagyne, a land of abundance, idleness and instant and unrestrained gratification, is thought to be found in practically all folk cultures including the pre-Classical as well as pre-Christian. Of all the components of utopia, it contains the strongest element of pure fantasy and wish-fulfillment. This is a fair reflection of the fact that it is ‘the poor man’s heaven’, the dream of the labouring classes of all ages, to be free from toil and drudgery. Such a characteristic comes out clearly in two well-known American versions of Cokaygne, \textit{The Big Rock Candy Mountains} and \textit{Poor Man’s Heaven}.\textsuperscript{199}

Arcadia may be contrasted with both the Land of Cokagne, as “a place of rustic simplicity and felicity” and the Golden Age insofar as it is conceived as a future possibility.

its hallmark was the harmony between man and nature, based on moderate ‘natural’ needs, uncomplicated and uncorrupted by ‘civilization.’ Arcadia, as the

\textsuperscript{197} Kumar, \textit{Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times}, 3.

\textsuperscript{198} Kumar, \textit{Utopianism}, 4.

\textsuperscript{199} Kumar, \textit{Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times}, 7.
myth of the Golden Age indicated, might exist in the past. But that did not prevent its being willed into existence, in some future time, as the conscious product of a utopian design.  

The key consideration, in addition to the sense of future realizability, is the degree of human agency. Where the pagan Golden Age, the Judeo-Christian Paradise, and the folk Land of Cokaygne are conceptualized as fantastical wish-fulfillment, Arcadia involves a conscious, willful idea of living well within nature’s existing constraints.

Like Arcadia, the category of the Millennium is realized by willful human action. Understood as the end of the world and of historical time, it is thought to bring about the creation of a new world.

The millennium in its aspect as an ideal condition of humanity, connects with the Idea of ‘the once and future Paradise’. It is both Golden Age and New Era; primitive Paradise and Promised Land. Both beliefs and the movements associated with them oscillate constantly between the two poles, lending to millenarianism equally the characteristics of extreme conservatism and extreme radicalism. …A new world, and a new time, will be inaugurated, usually through the agency of a messiah: a saviour or deliverer. There will be many tribulations and might conflicts. The forces of evil will gather themselves up in a last bid for victory. But the good will triumph. The new era—the millennium—will be a time of peace, plenty and righteousness.

Thus, the Millennium originates in Christianity, most often expressed through the idea of the Second Coming of Christ, and the supposed thousand year reign of a veritable heaven on earth. However, Kumar contends the basic elements of millenarianism have proved

200 Ibid, 4.
201 Kumar, Utopianism. 7.
resilient and capable of secular adaptation; science and revolution may be understood as the “new messiahs.”

Joachim’s doctrine of the Three Ages, culminating in the love, peace and freedom of the Age of the Holy Spirit, seemed to find a direct echo in the philosophies of history of Saint-Simon, Hegel and Marx. Saint-Simon’s scientific society, Hegel’s age of the actualized Spirit, and Marx’s society of full communism all carried strong millennial overtones. So too, in a grotesque parody of Three Ages philosophy, did Hitler’s Third Reich.

Fundamental to millenarianism then is the notion of a decidedly new and transcendent epoch capable of being brought into being by willful human agency—be it through revolutionary political action or strict adherence to religious dogma. Interestingly, Kumar also claims to find evidence of millenarianism in the Guarani of Brazil, the Karen of Burma, and the Indigenous peoples of what is now known as the Pacific North-West (of Turtle Island), as well as in the Taiping Rebellion.

For Kumar, an additional key aspect of the Millennium is the sense of an “ordered or preordained history with a beginning, a middle and an end.” This facilitates a delineation of how one should act, and also provides a basis for evangelism, leading to Kumar’s claim that millenarianism is “fundamentally a collectivist doctrine.” Perhaps most important for our concerns is the consideration of the New World (Abya Yala) as a site for the Millennium.

\[202\] Ibid, 11.
\[203\] Ibid, 11.
\[204\] Ibid, 11.
\[205\] Ibid, 9.
More’s *Utopia* ought be recognized as an archetypical ideal commonwealth portrayed as a “triumph of reason and artifice over the amoral and chaotic realm of nature.” It is these elements of the city as “an escape from nature, and an attempt at human and rational mastery over it” which define the ideal city or commonwealth tradition. Further to this, Kumar asserts the pivotal role of those who “gave the law and made the rational order of human society, the founders and framers of cities and constitutions, the philosopher-kings, the architect-planners.” This supports the assertion of George M. Logan and Robert M. Adams, co-editors of a contemporary edition of More’s *Utopia* that it belongs “to the oldest genre of political writing, the discourse on the ideal commonwealth initiated by Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws* and continued in Aristotle’s *Politics* (and subsequently in many other works).”

However, for Kumar, More’s *Utopia* represents a decidedly new “modern” instantiation of social desire. Kumar’s notion of “utopia proper” as the “modern utopia” is, again, not intended to disavow the existence of dreaming and estrangement, or social expressions of desire and hope outside of the West or prior to More’s *Utopia*. To the contrary, he explicitly acknowledges “Other societies have, in relative abundance, paradies, primitivist myths of a Golden Age of justice and equality, Cokayne-type fantasies, even messianic beliefs; they do not have utopia.”

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206 Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, 4.

207 Ibid, 6.

208 Ibid, 4.

Anti-Utopia in Modern Times (1987) offers the most prominent argument for differentiating the modern utopia, JC Davis’ earlier Utopia and the Ideal Society (1981) makes a similar contention that “[m]odern utopianism begins in the sixteenth century…”

Central for the purposes of this study is recognition of this modern transformation of social dreaming or expressions desire for a better way of being in the lived experience not just of European settlers and Indigenous peoples, but the wider European and, indeed, global community. Kumar writes

The Renaissance, the Reformation and the European voyages of discovery are one conventional and still persuasive line of division between the modern and the ancient and medieval worlds. Utopia is, on this view, a creation of the modern world. It is a modern European novelty. Thomas More did not just invent the word ‘utopia’, in a typically witty conflation of two Greek words (eutopos = ‘the good place’, outopos = ‘no place’): he invented the thing. Part of that new thing was a new literary form or genre, the other, more important, part was a novel and far-reaching conception of the possibilities of human and social transformation.

It is this differentiation of the modern utopian tradition, as a phenomenon resulting from the confluence of seismic (European) cultural shifts, which helps us to address the distinctive effects of a modern utopianism, in lived experience, specifically for the Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala and African peoples, as well as the other-than-human that were subject to its imposition. Furthermore, it allows for recognition of modern utopianism as co-constitutive with the white settler colonization of what is now known as Canada and the US. Given the notion of utopia as a definitively social phenomena and,
according to some, essential for the improvement of the human condition, the reality is that the modern utopian tradition is characterized, in part, by the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala and African peoples, and the instrumentalization of the other-than-human.

While Kumar’s notion of the modern utopian tradition differs from the conception of a utopian settler modernity that I have proposed, his contention, as well as Davis’, does represent an acknowledgement from within existing utopian studies discourse of the distinctive characteristics and lived experiential effects of *Utopia* as part of a wider modern utopian phenomena. While, for example, Kumar is concerned with the form, such as the creation of new literary tropes, in his notion of modern utopian expressions, my concern lies primarily with engaging the subsequent naturalization of the condition of white settler colonialism and the corresponding instrumentalization of the other-than-human in Canada and the US. This includes coming to an awareness of the ways in which the utopian traditions of Canada and the US have necessarily co-evolved with the emergence of these societies and are themselves bound up with and, therefore, ought to be understood as inseparable from the “structure” of an invasive white settler colonialism.

It bears emphasizing that any characterization of modernity, white supremacist settler colonialism, or utopianism ought to be situated within a particularized time/space context involving recognition of cultural and historical specificities, such that each of these phenomena is understood in plural and variegated terms. However, as I have argued in Chapter 2, More’s *Utopia* establishes a framework that I contend is substantially
characteristic of the utopian traditions of Canada and the US up to and including an understanding of Canada and the US as utopias. 213

In addition to Kumar’s notion of the modern utopia and the aforementioned categories of historical utopias, newer categorizations have been created to describe the evolution in utopian narratives in keeping with the real-world happenings of the twentieth and early twenty first century. The dynamism of utopian narratives is reflective of the educative function prioritized by Levitas as discussed above. These include analyses of a discernable shift away from the famous socialism-focused “blueprint” utopias of the 19th century such as Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward that propose fictional societies that effectively perfect and without substantial conflict or suffering, as well as studies of “non-Western” and “postcolonial” utopianism from societies outside the West or indicating those narratives that have emerged in the former colonies of exploitation.

Tom Moylan is recognized for coining the term “critical utopia,” which describes those narratives that “reject utopia as blueprint while preserving it as a dream.” 214 In his

213 Kenneth Roemer advocates studies of American utopian literature for anyone who wants to understand America. The inclusiveness of the utopias and their revelations about basic hopes and fears make them fascinating indices to American attitudes. This is especially so because American history is in part a history of potential dystopias and eutopias: the dystopian aura of the “howling wilderness,” the genocide in the name of Manifest Destiny, the horrors of slavery, the nightmares of rampant commercialism, technology, urban squalor, Vietnam, Watergate and energy shortages, and the eutopian impulse of Winthrop’s “City upon a Hill.” Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence, the possibilities for rebirth in the “virgin” West, the idealism of youth and civil rights movements, New Deals, New Frontiers, and Great Societies, and the technology and spirit that sent Americans to the moon and a bicentennial Viking to Utopia. To know America, we must have knowledge of America as utopia.

Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination, Moylan evaluates four utopian novels—Ursula Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974), Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Samuel Delany’s *Trouble on Triton* (1976), and Joanna Russ’ *The Female Man* (1975)—as case studies to develop his framework for the critical utopia. In each of those four novels, Moylan asserts, there are proposals that, to use Levitas’ formulation, “imagine the reconstitution of society” even as they are unfinished, open, contradictory, and (human) suffering remains. Narrative critical utopias are, therefore, those that ought be understood as

> [c]ritical in the Enlightenment sense of critique—that is, expressions of oppositional thought, unveiling, debunking, of both the genre itself and the historical situation. As well as “critical” in the nuclear sense of the critical mass required to make the necessary explosive reaction.\(^\text{215}\)

Moylan’s assessment is based, in part, on an interpretation of the narrative strategies utilized by the authors of his four case studies—three authored by white cis-females and an African-American male—that directly and indirectly address the challenges of wholesale revolutionary social change. This is to say that narrative critical utopias, for Moylan, are more overtly engaged with the processes of social change.\(^\text{216}\)

In order to contextualize the emergence of the critical utopia, Moylan’s argument centers on the notion that utopian narratives were renewed principally as a consequence


\(^{215}\) Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, 10.

\(^{216}\) Ibid, 10.
of the hopeful social movement upsurges of the 1960s, including the New Left.²¹⁷ He
does view their emergence as a substantive renewal rather than a continuation insofar as
he asserts that utopian discourse in the twentieth century as “muted” and effectively
“absorbed into the affirmative ideologies of the totalizing systems of Stalinist Russia,
Nazi Germany, and the corporate United States.”²¹⁸

Interestingly, Moylan situates his overall discussion of the evolution of utopian
narratives through invocations of both modernity and the New World, writing

utopian narrative since the time of More has been linked with the broad changes
at work in the modern social order and with the dreams and desires set in motion
by the opening up of human existence promised in a growth and profit oriented
economy. Utopia grew up with capitalism and the new world as its god parents
while the underlying social and personal yearnings and sufferings were its
immediate progenitors…²¹⁹ (italics my emphasis)

Thus, Moylan explicitly recognizes a shifting in the concerns—the content—of utopian
narratives as well as their form. While Demand the Impossible speaks to four texts
created from within the white settler colonial nation-state of the US, he points to the
influence of the “new opposition” of the 1960s that was clearly global in its scope—
involving the struggles for independence of previously colonies of exploitation, the Civil
Rights movement in the US, and the student, labour and counter-cultural movements that
swept Europe and elsewhere. This new opposition inspired critical utopianism which,
according to Moylan, is “deeply infused with the politics of autonomy, democratic

²¹⁷ Ibid, 9.
²¹⁸ Ibid, 8.
²¹⁹ Ibid, 4-5.
socialism, ecology, and especially feminism.” It follows that the critical utopian narratives discussed by Moylan address “individual sovereignty” involving issues of identity politics surrounding gender, race, sexuality, as well as class and “local community” such that the imagined reconstitution of society largely departs from the (settler) nation-state in favour of a decidedly smaller and more human-scale.

Alongside the formulation of the critical utopia as an analytical category, scholars have also subsequently adopted the related notion of the critical dystopia. As Moylan and Rafaella Baccollini write in their co-edited *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*,

> the dystopian imagination has served as a prophetic vehicle, the canary in a cage, for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the real of utopia’s underside.

Critical dystopias are therefore similar to critical utopias insofar as they involve narratives that describe a measurably worse society than the author’s yet do not foreclose entirely on the possibilities for resistance and hope. They “allow readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure… the critical dystopia opens a space of contestation and opposition for those collective “ex-centric” subjects whose class, gender, race, sexuality, and other positions are not empowered by hegemonic rule.” The critical dystopia

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220 Ibid, 11.

221 Ibid, 11.


223 Ibid, 7.
warns against the trajectories of the present while avoiding the closure of the telling of the end of the story.

This sub-genre of utopian literature has exploded over the past several decades as writers have sought to contend with the seeming (ideological) closure associated with the late British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s declaration “there is no alternative” and Francis Fukuyama’s similarly infamous “end of history” thesis. Both claim that there is no more preferable way to organize human life than through the liberal-capitalist-nation-state framework. The transnational movements that arose in the 1990s under such titles as “anti-globalization,” “alter globalization” and “global justice” adopted the slogan “Another World is Possible!” as a direct response to the threats of closure and the elimination of alternatives surrounding the triumph of what has come to often be referred to as neoliberalism.

**Postcolonial Utopias and Indigenous Peoples**

Central to a critical evaluation of the emergence of the critical utopias of the 1970s and the critical dystopias of the 1980s through to the present day is a situating of both authorship and intended readerships, respectively. By this I intend to draw attention to the ways in which readings of critical utopias and dystopias may be recognized for their social and historical locations. This points to considerations of Ralph Pordzik’s work in *The Quest for the Postcolonial Utopia*, as well as the emerging self-consciousness on the part of Western or global Northern utopian studies scholars of the need to address the question of utopianism existing outside the Western or Northern
traditions as well as the role of Western/Northern utopianism in the experiences of colonialism the rest of the world has been (and continues to be) subjected to.

Notably, there has yet to be a sustained investigation of the prospects of utopianism in Indigenous societies—if it is, in fact, appropriate to utilize that term and categorization for Indigenous narratives that propose a desirable social change.

In fact, Sargent and Lucy Sargisson have raised this concern in the introduction to their co-authored study of utopian intentional communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand, *Living in Utopia*.

If colonies produced utopian literature on the one hand and life in dystopia on the other, where are the eutopias of the Aborigine, First Nations, Inuit, Maori, North American Indians, and other indigenous colonized peoples? The first, and simplest, answer is that no one has done the work to find out... But oppressed peoples do not have access to print in the same way as the dominant group, and there is often an inability or unwillingness to communicate in the language of the oppressor... As a result, we need to look into the indigenous languages and at oral traditions, songs, myths, and the like. The second big problem is, even if we figure out where to look, will we recognize it when we see it? To what extend does one have to be inside a tradition to understand it? (italics my emphasis)

Here Sargent and Sargisson’s recognition of a gap in utopian studies scholarship regarding Indigenous peoples is immediately understood to inspire a problem for utopian studies scholarship, implicitly understood to be normatively non-Indigenous. This is perhaps a practical recognition, but it is also clearly a problematic one as it presupposes the absence of Indigenous voices capable of addressing these issues themselves; it reifies the naturalization of an outsider’s (quasi) anthropological gaze as normative. And, as yet,

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there has been no sustained critical engagement between the “Western”-dominated field of utopian studies and Indigenous critical theory and literary studies.

Unfortunately, as part of his monograph addressing the notion of postcolonial utopias, Pordzik refers to the “postcolonial context” and the “former settler colonies” when situating his analyses of what he identifies as utopian narratives originating in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which are three of the more prominent contemporary white supremacist settler colonial societies. Moreover, Pordzik is explicit in reifying the settler colonial state despite directly addressing the assertion (he cites a non-Indigenous scholar) that the term “postcolonial” should not be used to describe what he refers to as the “internal colonization” that affects Indigenous peoples, an experience of colonialism that he confusingly refers to in both the present and past tense at various points in his text.

Nevertheless, Pordzik’s work on postcolonial literary narratives is significant in that it represents perhaps the most substantive contemporary engagement with interrelating notions of postcolonialism and utopianism. Just as with Davis, Kumar, and others, he refers to More’s *Utopia* as the originator of the utopian literary genre, and in proposing to analyze postcolonial utopias, he acknowledges the dangers of applying “Eurocentric concepts of literary classification and textual analysis.” He further offers the challenge that


226 Pordzik, *The Quest for the Postcolonial Utopia,* 22.
more than any other literary genre the utopian novel has a particular interest in coming to terms with the problems created by the disenchantment with cultural nationalism and decolonization on the one hand and the disillusionment with Marxism and utopian idealism that followed the end of the socialist world on the other.228

It follows, for Pordzik, that an examination of what he describes as postcolonial utopias involves a degree of rethinking for the utopian literary genre, one that is accountable to the voices of what he would apparently describe as the postcolonial authorial subject:

[T]heir quest for opportunities not yet intuited or imagined is reflected in their semantic multiplicity as well as in the diversity of codes, usages, and perspectives employed by writers to capture the hybridity of their respective societies and to form their function as basic constituents in the act of projecting a utopia of their own.229

Here Pordzik’s apprehension of the postcolonial utopia is reminiscent of Moylan’s conceptualization of the critical utopia insofar as it breaks substantially with the modern utopian tradition both in terms of content and form. Drawing on both Moylan’s work as well as Foucault’s idea of the “heterotopia,” Pordzik’s analysis seeks to situate the narratives he locates as emanating from postcolonial circumstances as troubling the “Eurocentric” literary conventions of the modern utopian tradition. Pordzik’s conception of the postcolonial utopia hinges substantially upon the authorial subject’s experience of (or implication in) colonialism, and its effects on the narrative propositions for desirable social change. He argues

227 Ibid. 13.
228 Ibid. 9.
229 Ibid, 16.
many utopian narratives in the new English literatures are related forms of writing in that they dialectically respond to a particular set of conditions created by their historical links with the important culture of the ‘colonizer’ and the literary forms in which this culture has been reproduced and perpetuated. They share what comparatists refer to as a contextual analogy—common sociocultural and/or historical background against which opposite writings strategies and perceptual alternatives can be developed.230

Here Pordzik’s collapsing of narrative “opposite writing strategies” stemming from experiences of colonialism all within the same category of the “postcolonial” is exposed as lacking a capacity to account for Indigenous peoples concerns and experiences. The circumstances of Indigenous works composed from within the ongoing condition of settler colonialism are not in “common” with that of, for example, are not in “common” with that of writers who could be read into the category “postcolonial,” as the presumed representative subjects of a postcolonial nation-state. To the contrary, as discussed in Chapter 1, this distinction is a primary concern of contemporary Indigenous literary studies and critical theory.

While Pordzik’s schema fails to recognize the specificities of the experience of colonialism and their effects on authorial subjects and their creation of “utopian” narratives, such differences are recognized by Sargent, albeit in a confused and problematic manner, in his recent essay “Colonial and postcolonial utopias.”231 Ultimately, while Sargent does demonstrate recognition of the implication of utopianism in the particular experiences of white settler colonialism that have conditioned the lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in white settler colonial societies, he

230 Ibid, 18.

undermines some of his own claims in following the same deferrals of consigning authentic Indigeneity to the past.

Sargent differentiates, following similar delineations by Indigenous and other critical theorists concerned with imperialism, between colonialism “designed to exploit the labour of the inhabitants and the natural resources of the country” and colonialism for settlement.232 Sargent further notes, “the whole process of colonial settlement can be seen as a type of utopianism.”233 He also recognizes “[t]he spaces chosen for settlement were not empty but inhabited, and the settler utopia was always accompanied by dystopias for the indigenous inhabitants. And until the late twentieth century, utopian literature was written almost exclusively by the colonizers.”234

However, he offers a description of More’s Utopia as the “first utopia to raise the issue of colonies” and argues “More’s Utopians simply did not consider the inhabitants of the area to be colonized to be important, and this attitude is frequently repeated in utopian literature set in colonies” while neglecting to situate More’s Utopia as itself a settler colony and as a narrative proposal for the very model for settler colonial societies of Canada and the US that were to come.235 Yet Sargent does draw a connection between settler colonialism and utopianism, arguing

…all settler colonies produced works that depicted the future of the colony in utopian terms, and descriptions of the United States and New Zealand in

234 Ibid, 204.
235 Ibid, 204.
particular described the landscape in terms reminiscent of traditional utopian genres like the earthly paradise and arcadia.\textsuperscript{236}

Sargent thus reproduces some of the very tropes that Jodi Byrd and others are concerned with—that of the deferral of Indigenous concerns via the consignment of Indigenous peoples to the past, or a rejection of contemporary Indigeneity as inauthentic on the very basis of their experience of colonialism. He acknowledges that settler colonialism has existed, but he slips into the language of postcolonialism and the use of the past tense, discursively ending settler colonialism at some undetermined time.

It can be argued that utopianism has been the most important in countries that were once colonies. This utopianism was initially based on themes drawn from the colonial power, but over time it became different as it was adapted to the conditions of the new country.\textsuperscript{237}

This collapses his earlier distinction of settler colonialism and colonies of exploitation without explanation or any engagement with whether Indigenous scholarship offers comment on the matter. This is further exemplified by Sargent’s statement that “the settler utopia was always accompanied by dystopias for the indigenous inhabitants” which he implicitly bases on a consignment of authentic Indigeneity to the past.\textsuperscript{238}

Moreover, his description of the “postcolonial period” is deeply problematic both for its paternalistic Eurocentricism, its continued avoidance of the specificities of Indigenous

\textsuperscript{236} Ibid, 205.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid, 215.
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid, 204.
peoples’ experiences of settler colonialism, and of its essentialization of authentic Indigeneity. Sargent writes

Many changes have come about in the postcolonial period either because, as in Africa, the colonized came to power, or, as in Canada and New Zealand, to improve the situation of the colonized. And the European utopian ideas of freedom and equality, taught to the colonized, demonstrated the disjunction between belief and practice, and provided independence movements with the intellectual tools needed to confront their masters. Ideas that had once been explicitly utopian in Europe and put into practice to at least some extent became again utopian for those seeking independence.

The recreated sense of the traditional cultures are presented by the contemporary cultures as the reality of the past, but these recreations are purified, made more utopian, that what we know of the actual pasts. The interesting point about these recreated pasts is that there are similarities across widely diverse cultures from different parts of the globe. Thus, today there is a commonality about indigenous representations of their ideal pasts, which stresses closeness to nature, including flora, fauna and physical features like mountains and rivers.239

Sargent is apparently capable of these sweeping claims to collapsing experiences of colonialism and via notions of “traditional cultures” because of his belief that

\[B]ecause native cultures were so thoroughly destroyed, we know very little with certainty about the nature of indigenous utopianism in settler colonies or in most of the exploitative colonies. Most of the indigenous cultures were transmitted orally, and the deliberate destruction of indigenous religious resulted in the lost of some of the myths that almost certainly included utopian elements.240 (italics my emphasis)

Thus, while Sargent goes further than Pordzik in his attempt at locating Indigenous peoples within utopian studies by articulating an understanding of the differences of colonialism and their effects on the utopian traditions of settler colonial societies, he is

239 Ibid, 212.

240 Ibid. 212.
able to render contemporary Indigenous voices as somehow “modified” and therefore apparently inauthentic and, therefore, no longer colonized. This is particularly noteworthy insofar as Sargent, as a bibliographer of utopias, is keenly aware of the colonial tropes that characterize the utopian narratives tradition of white settler colonial societies and their erstwhile metropoles. He notes that “often there are indigenous inhabitants that pose problems, whether the colony is for exploitation or settlement or both. The most common scenario suggests that humanity has learned nothing from its experiences on Earth…”

Unfortunately, it appears that Pordzik, Sargent, and other utopian studies scholarship to date have reproduced a similar failure to substantively address the “problems” posed by ending the deferrals of Indigenous peoples’ concerns. Of course, it should be noted that Pordzik, Sargent, and utopian studies scholarship is not the exception to these deferrals, but it is perhaps more glaring an omission in a scholarly discourse fundamentally concerned with the “improvement of the human condition,” and predominantly originated in a settler colonial text (*Utopia*).

Jacqueline Dutton’s notion of “intercultural imaginaries of the ideal” represents perhaps the most comprehensive and critical engagement with the all-too-real interrelationship between utopianism and colonialism. She rightly locates the “definition, design, and development of utopian literatures and theories [as having]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{241}}\text{Ibid, 212.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{242}}\text{Jacqueline Dutton. “‘Non-Western’ utopian traditions” in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 223-258.}\]
emerged from western examples of the genre and practice,” as well as noting “the overwhelming majority of references to the (pre-)history of utopia point to western traditions and worldviews as its foundations.” Her concerns thus provide a basis for her interrogating the language of “utopia” as universal.

With its historically West-centered description of theory and practice, the concept of utopia may no longer be broad enough to encompass the full scope of social dreamings. ‘Intercultural imaginaries of the ideal’ may be a more appropriate and neutral term for this study of several different traditions of speculative and idealistic thought grounded in the projection of a better society. Dutton’s conceptualization of utopianism draws, therefore, substantially on Sargent’s notion of “social dreaming” even as she clearly is uncomfortable with his universalistic leanings. However, she equivocates on the basis for comparative study and categorization of “non-Western” utopianism, maintaining that “non-western” utopian traditions may have been established and elaborated according to fundamentally different cultural paradigms to those that define the western utopian tradition” while later arguing “there is substantial evidence to suggest that most cultures generate—if not utopias corresponding to the western design—then at least some representation of an imaginary ideal place or time that do reflect similar preoccupations to those observed in western utopian writings and practices.” Thus, Dutton seeks to preserve a means of comparative study even as she is stepping away from earlier pronouncements of utopia’s universality.

243 Dutton, “‘Non-Western’ utopian traditions,” 223.
244 Ibid, 224.
This facilitates her critical engagement with Adam Seligman’s differentiation of Axial and non-Axial civilizations as a basis for the existence of utopianism. Dutton seeks to rescue the possibility of utopianism, for example, within the contemporary Australian Aboriginal peoples, in her argument that “bringing the ‘Dreaming’ back into balance through land rights claims, artistic development and reconnecting to traditional ways of being in the world demonstrates the successful co-existence of indigenous and western social ideals within an explicitly utopian vision for improving the life of indigenous peoples in Australia.”

Here she is arguing for the notion that, per Seligman, non-Axial civilizations, which are oriented towards the immanent “mundane” plane of human existence—as opposed to the Axial orientation towards a transcendental heaven or utopia—may evidence utopianism, at least in part through their hybridized adoption of “western social ideals.”

Dutton’s conceptualization of utopianism as rooted fundamentally in Western traditions and worldviews is helpful for utopian studies scholarship, as is her questioning of the appropriateness of universalizing language. However, she does not address, as Sargent does problematically, the multifaceted role of utopianism in the founding of the white settler nation-states, including Australia, and the specific impact of More’s *Utopia* in offering perhaps the founding narrative proposition for utopian settler modernity that was to come. Thus, while she claims that “it seems that the desire for a better way of being in the world is indeed a universal concept” she is correct to anticipate “[w]hether or not we choose to refer to these culturally differentiated representations of social dreaming

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246 Ibid, 249.
using the western term of ‘utopia’ may persist as a point of contention in contemporary utopian studies of utopian thought.”

Interestingly, her move to differentiate between the “western term of ‘utopia’” and utilization of the language of “imaginaries of the ideal” is reminiscent of John Mohawk’s similar schema, discussed in Chapter 1. Both Dutton and Mohawk identify a relationship between Western colonial modernity, and a distinctively utopian tradition, while leaving open the possibility for a basis for comparative inter-cultural study of expressions of social desire. However, while they clearly arrive at similar analytical frames, they both offer rather cursory discussions, and, arguably, do so from different methodological basis—Indigenous and literary studies, respectively.

Given the clear efforts of Indigenous literary scholars and critical theorists to situate the specific histories and contemporary realities for Indigenous peoples subject to the imposition of utopian settler modernity, it appears that utopian studies must effect its own education of hope. This notion of a dialogical, critically-self-reflexive, and, ultimately, always-already-provisional utopia-as-method has been developed by Levitas following the fundamental theorizing of utopia by Ernst Bloch, as well as the more recent work of Miguel Abensour. The following section focuses on the potential for utopia-as-method to attend critically to the interrelationship between utopianism and settler colonialism. The related notions of the education of hope and desire represent, alongside Dutton’s cautions, the most promising basis for utopian studies own “internal” discourses.

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247 Ibid, 250.
to enter into an accountable relationship with Indigenous peoples as part of utopia’s purportedly fundamental relationship to the “improvement of the human condition.”

**Educating Utopia: Levitas, Absensour, and Bloch**

As discussed above, contemporary utopian studies scholars have been concerned with clarifying the concept of utopia and the notion of utopia as innate to the human experience, as something universal, both trans-historical and trans-cultural. I proceed, following Levitas, Sargent, and Suvin, for recognition of utopia as a concept generally concerned with the social as opposed to individual human expressions for desirable change. Furthermore, Levitas’ formulation of utopia-as-method, as an enduring dialogical, processional, and provisional means of educating expressions of desire for social change, appears as a useful basis for an expansive analytic framework that avoids static normative judgments. Moreover, her situating of utopia-as-method is concerned not so much with

what we imagine, but that we imagine, at the same time exposing the limits of our imagination. So that the function of the utopian text becomes, as Jameson puts it, “to provoke… to jar the mind into some heightened but unconceptualizable consciousness of its own powers, functions, aims, and structural limits…”

Essentially, the imaginary reconstitution of society involves narrative proposals for desirable social change. When the reader, listener, or otherwise recipient encounters the narrative proposal they may experience a form of estrangement from the here and now (“what is”). The experience of estrangement involves being cognitively, affectively, and

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otherwise displaced from the status quo of the here-and-now and a temporary transportation to the provisional time-space of the imaginary proposal.

In experiencing such a displacement to a “no place” proposed as a “good place,” one may establish a critical perspective on the here-and-now. One may look “backward” or “inward” at the circumstances of the “what is” of lived experience from the relatively removed time-space of the narrative proposal for a better way of being. For Jameson, as referenced above, this estrangement enables a realization of the naturalized constraints on our imagination: utopias have the paradoxical effect of revealing that we cannot actually imagine utopia; it always-already lies beyond the horizons of our imaginations, which are educated (i.e. socially constructed) by the ideological conditions of our being in the world.

Apprehending utopian proposals, therefore, compels a critical comparison between what is being imagined and the lived experience. If the imaginary reconstitution of society appears as measurably better or worse, as in the case with dystopian narrative proposals, the recipient is provoked to a critique of the here and now. The recipient is called to evaluate the trajectories of the lived experience of “what is”—is there a trend towards something measurably better (utopia) or worse (dystopia)?

At the same time, the proposals for desirable social change are themselves offered up for judgment; the alternatives may fall short of the recipients’ own conceptualizing of what ought to be. In this way, utopia may serve as an educative heuristic that is enduring processual, provisional, and, ultimately, dialogical, as the very concept of utopia itself (as this chapter’s discussion intends to demonstrate) is dynamic and evolutionary.
Levitas draws on the work of Miguel Abensour, whose critical treatment of Morris’ famous *News from Nowhere*, raises this notion of a utopia-as-heuristic as opposed to utopia-as-blueprint. Abensour situated his novel as a narratological shift from the traditional utopian narrative and also marked a break from the utopian socialists (Fourier, Owen, and St. Simon). For Abensour,

in such an adventure two things happen: our habitual values (‘the commonsense’ of bourgeois society) are thrown into disarray. And we enter utopia’s proper and new-found space: the education of desire. This is not the same as ‘a moral education’ towards a given end: it is rather, to open a way to aspiration, to ‘teach desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way.’

Thus, Levitas, drawing on Abensour, sidesteps the question of the *content* of a critical analytic framework to judge “hope” by referring to an open-ended process of the “education of desire.” For Levitas, “[t]he point is not whether one agrees or disagrees with the institutional arrangements, but rather that the utopian experiment disrupts the taken-for-granted nature of the present.”

While Levitas adopts Abensour’s notion of the “education of desire,” her work is unambiguously indebted to that of the philosopher Ernst Bloch. Bloch’s notion of *docta spes*, or educated hope, predates that of Abensour and Levitas, and she readily attributes his influence in her work. However, Levitas is in agreement with other commentators who have critiqued Ernst Bloch’s theorizing of utopia for being both teleological and

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250 Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 141.
constrained by its unapologetic situation by Bloch within the Marxian project. Nevertheless, Bloch’s theoretical framework is a predominant touchstone in contemporary utopian studies. Interest in his work also appears to be growing, with a recent collection co-edited by Slavoj Zizek appearing in 2013. Bloch’s utopian philosophy has also been favourably compared to Paolo Freire’s notions of “conscienization,” fundamental to his famous work in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Bloch’s notion of utopia may be fundamentally understood as “wish-fulfillment” insofar as he constructs his theoretical framework upon what he alleges, drawing on Freud, is an innate and universal human experience of lack, which stems from notions of both an “anthropological” view of the subjective human experience as always-already unfinished in relationship to a “cosmological” view of an always-already unfinished character of the material world in which the human finds themselves.

This forms the basis of his manifold concept of the Not-Yet, which involves two primary dimensions, which he describes as the Not-Yet-Conscious (NYC) and the Not-Yet-Become (NYB). The NYC refers to the dynamic, evolutionary, and subjective character of human consciousness shaped by both ideological (i.e. human social

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251 See for example Geoghegan’s *Utopianism & Marxism*. Bloch is unambiguous in *The Principle of Hope*, “Becoming happy was always what was sought after in the dreams of a better life, and only Marxism can initiate it.” (17)


constructions) and material (here understood as external to the human) forces. The NYB describes the material and objective dimension of reality of which the human is both a part of and lives within. For Bloch, the notion of the material world as always-unfinished, as Not-Yet-Become, is the basis for the human experience of lack and the Not-Yet-Conscious. Humans experience the enduring need to satisfy hunger and the basic material means of survival, which Bloch argues is the basis of an enduring and essential human experience of lack, but also of fantasy. That is, Bloch conceives of human experience as being innately characterized by dreaming, of experiencing desire-to-wish-fulfillment. Utopianism, for Bloch, involves the broad notion of human striving to satisfy this experience of lack. Bloch writes

to limit the utopian to the Thomas More variety, or simply to orientate it in that direction, would be like trying to reduce electricity to the amber from which it gets its Greek name and in which it was first noticed. Indeed, the utopian coincides so little with the novel of an ideal state that the whole total of philosophy becomes necessary… to do justice to the content of that designated by utopia.\(^\text{255}\)

Bloch’s notion of human dreaming, as the desire-to-wish-fulfillment, is further categorized into interrelated but distinct categories of the compensatory (wishful, dreaming of satisfying the experience of lack via an abstracted utopia) and anticipatory (willful action towards a utopia within material reality). The relationship between compensatory and anticipatory consciousness, as with the NYC and the NYB is dialectical. That is, the interrelationship between compensatory and anticipatory hope is animated by the dialect of what Bloch described as the “cold” and “warm” streams. The

cold involves the disenchanted scientific and rational while the warm describes the passionate pursuit of what he terms “unalienated” experience.256

Bloch sought to recognize a wide-variety of cultural expressions of wish-fulfillment, ranging from what he referred to as “Little Daydreams” to “Wishful Images of the Fulfilled Moment,” which span everything from everyday reveries to fairy tales and myths, popular culture, literature, theater, all forms of art, and Bloch’s privileged Marxist project of communism. Where some Marxist critique dismisses ideology and cultural production as instantiations of false consciousness that hinder the revolutionary impulse, Bloch sought instead to rescue potential emancipatory elements of compensatory expressions by seeing them as indications of a utopian impulse. Bloch’s notion of ideology is “Janus-faced” insofar as it requires both an “unmasking (Entlarvung), or demystification” of the “errors, mystifications, and techniques of manipulation and domination” but also a notion of a “cultural surplus” that should be

256 For a helpful discussion see Peter Thompson’s in “From Karl May to Karl Marx: Ernst Bloch and the Native American Tribe as Concrete Utopia” in Tribal Fantasies: Native Americans in the European Imaginary, 1900-2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 96.

‘Abstract’…is from verbal phrase ‘to abstract’ or abstrahieren. The concrete on the other hand, is derives from the past participle, concretus, of the Latin concrescere (‘to grow together, condense’). In other words, the term concrete describes and ongoing process of growing together and condensation, whereas abstract means the extraction of a moment from that concrete process. The abstract is, therefore, what Bloch calls a reified processual moment, crucial in its contingent role within history, but meaningless in its own right. The truth of an abstraction of a fact can be discerned only on the basis of understanding it within history, but meaningless in its own right. The turn of an abstraction or a fact can be discerned on the on the basis of understanding it within the nonsimultaneity of the past, present, and future as we experience and anticipate them. The problem with a fact, therefore, is that its truth is limited to itself, It is merely a screen grab from an ongoing film, valid for the moment in which was taken but limited to that moment.
realized as a basis for social critique, as an impulse towards the willful realization of utopia.\textsuperscript{257}

It is the accumulation of this cultural surplus from the compensatory (described by Bloch as an “immature, but honest substitute[s] for revolution”) that affects the \textit{docta spes}, or the educated hope. Bloch writes

knowledge and removal of the finished utopistic element, with knowledge and removal of abstract utopia. But what then remains: the unfinished forward dream, the docta spes which can only be discredited by the bourgeoisie—this seriously deserves the name utopian in carefully considered and carefully applied contrast to utopianism; in its brevity and new clarity, this expression then means the same as: a methodical organ for the New, an objective aggregate state of what is coming up.\textsuperscript{258}

This educated hope accumulates in an anticipatory consciousness concerned with activating a notion of latency of what Bloch describes as the “objectively-real,” the material conditions which frame human experience and, therefore, delimit the possibilities of human freedom. Here Bloch evokes a seemingly animistic and clearly developmental view of the material world as well as a teleological notion of human destiny insofar as he seeks to attach a sense of “tendency” in the strivings of human wish-fulfillment towards “the fulfilled moment.”\textsuperscript{259}


Jameson has suggested that mass cultural texts often have utopian moments and proposes that radical cultural criticism should analyze both the social hopes and fantasies in cultural artifacts, as well as the ideological ways in which fantasies are presented, conflicts are resolved, and potentially disruptive hopes and anxieties are managed (“Reification” 130-48). Kellner, “Ernst Bloch, Utopia, and Ideology Critique”, 88.


\textsuperscript{259} Douglas Kellner helpfully describes Bloch’s utopian ontology:
Bloch’s conception of the realization of utopia is characterized by his concepts of the *der aufrechte gang* (the Upright Gait) and *Heimat* (Home or Homeland). Commentators have analyzed these notions through the lens of Bloch’s avowed Marxism, understanding his notion alienation in class society as a form of homelessness and the potential for humanity to regain an upright gain through the realization of freedom and unalienated experience in the communist society to come.

But Bloch’s conceptualization of a utopian homecoming as something that is qualitatively new may also be recognized as a millenarian (and teleological) notion of a transcendental break with the past, albeit conceived perhaps better understood as the cohering of the elements of anticipatory consciousness as expressed through cultural surplus. In this way Bloch reifies modernity (as, arguably, does much of classical Marxist thought), setting the stage for his approach to the experience of Indigenous peoples, whom he romanticized in Vizenorian terms as Indians living in “childlike” freedom and being at “home.” As such, the Indian represented a primitive and romantic past that would be transcended as humanity “progressed” through the experience of industrial capitalism to the free communist society.

Peter Thompson’s work to explicate Bloch’s fascination with Native Americans is crucial here, as he argues

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The present moment is thus constituted in part by *latency* and *tendency*: the unrealized potentialities that are latent in the present, and the signs and foreshadowings that indicate the tendency of the direction and movement of the present into the future. This three-dimensional temporality must be grasped and activated by an *anticipatory consciousness* that at once perceives the unrealized emancipatory potential in the past, the latencies and tendencies of the present, and the realizable hopes of the future. Above all, Bloch develops a philosophy of hope and the future, a dreaming forward, a projection of a vision of a future kingdom of freedom. (Kellner, “Ernst Bloch, Utopia, and Ideology Critique,” 84)
[f]or Bloch, the *Indian* exists in the early twentieth century as a concrete example of [Bloch’s notion of a] nonsimultaneity: First, the Native American represents a still extant prehistoric social formation, a carrier of the idea of the primitive communism of a society based on the communality of hunter-gathering as outlined in Engels. Second, he has been exposed to—and resisted—the industrializing and brutalizing forces of the immensely rapid expansion of Europeanism throughout the American continent and in that sense he stands for a form of political struggle against social atomization that retains a fantastic and spiritual dimension. Third, the values he stands for and wishes to maintain also represent a possible future of collective humanity beyond the primitive accumulation and valorization of capital in which the individual would also be valued and find a place.\(^{260}\)

In fact, to adopt the language of Jodi Byrd, the settler colonization of the Indian becomes, in part, an acknowledged referent, and also a transit of Bloch’s utopian philosophy.\(^{261}\)

Western/Euro-American modernity is articulated through its distinguishing itself from, and passing through the primitive stage of human development consigned to the pre-modern Indigenous other.

At the same time, the Western/Euro-American settler who comes to inhabit modernity loses a connection to the wider world and becomes “homeless.” Bloch therefore envisions utopia in terms that evoke a returning home to something qualitatively new, educated by the cultural surpluses afforded by modernity. Thus the

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\(^{260}\) Thompson, “From Karl May to Karl Marx: Ernst Bloch and the Native American Tribe as Concrete Utopia,” 91-92.

\(^{261}\) Interestingly, Thompson gestures towards this notion of Indigeneity as a transit of utopianism, highlighting that Bloch points out that the obsession with Native Americans to be found in nineteenth-century Germany was also functionalized for political purposes by being translated from the North American prairie to the Russian Steppe... The Russian steppe, just like the American prairie, was a land of immeasurable wealth and opportunity and the natural home of the German tribe, not yet colonized but full of deeply religious *Narodnik* who represented what the premodern and unspoilt German might have become had he not been locked into the ‘decadence’ of Western Enlightenment and industrial modernity. (Thompson, “From Karl May to Karl Marx: Ernst Bloch and the Native American Tribe as Concrete Utopia,” 94.)
trope of Indigenous peoples as “childlike” is operationalized as a necessary referent for Bloch’s utopian philosophy. Thompson’s work therefore offers an important analysis of the role of the imagined “Indian” as, indeed, a transit in Ernst Bloch’s utopian theorizing. Bloch’s notion of the “Indian” is qualitatively divorced from the reality of contemporary Indigenous peoples and is instead a romanticized caricature instrumentalized for the consumption of (white) Euro-Americans. In particular, Thompson focuses on Bloch’s fascination with the work of the German novelist Karl May (1842-1912), whom Thompson situates as

a late nineteenth-century purveyor of dreams of the Wild West, whose most familiar and popular characters were Winnetou and Old Shatterhand. The latter was a German immigrant to North America who was a blood brother to Winnetou, a chief of the Mescalero Apaches. Old Shatterhand—so-called because he could fell a man with a single punch—represented the fantasy of a man who had escaped the stultifying constraints of European industrial modernity and banality to ride a Kafkaesque horse called Iltschi across the close-cropped plains of North America.262

Thus the fictionalized Indian may be read, as Bloch himself might suggest, for its cultural surplus, insofar as it represents the desire of Euro-American modernity to escape its alienation from the mundane plane of lived experience in “industrial modernity and banality.” In effect, Bloch’s heimat is predicated upon a notion of “re-indigenization” or

262 Ibid, 86-87. Thompson states that May remains to this day one of the most read German authors, with sales of his books running into the tens of millions, (93) and quotes Bloch as proclaiming: “I only know Hegel and Karl May. Everything else is just an impure mixture of the two.” Later, Thompson writes

His [May’s] descriptions of places he had never been (which in both Bloch’s and Hitler’s eyes, pointed to the real fantastical strength of this imagination) and people he had never seen, from the ‘Wild West’ to the Orient, left an indelible mark on the German psyche by tapping into the apparently inexhaustible desire for a founding mythology to which this belated nation could cleave. In Germans and Indians, we can see how the ‘indian’ functions as a cipher for all sorts of romantic mythology about the nature of what it was to be German. (94)
of “becoming Indian.” Of course, Bloch’s notion of a return to a (new) *heimat*, or homeland characterized by an unalienated experience of freedom and security serves to defer the experiences of Indigenous peoples themselves. Ultimately, Indigenous peoples’ struggles are collapsed, as are notions of Indigenous decolonization, into the grand historical telos of the Marxist project. As Thompson writes,

> [t]he concrete utopia we seek is by definition not yet available or visible to us and yet its preechoes reach from Karl May’s Native American fantasies through to Karl Marx’s and Friedrich Engels’s concept of the withering away of the state so that we can all live like the prefirst contact Iroquois, but this time on an immeasurable higher level. History thus carries within it all of these past and present abstractions and incorporates all the stages of previously human development into a future that will be more than just the sum of its partial tribal parts. History, according to Bloch, is, therefore, the ultimate, universal tribal fantasy.

This begs the question of what the ending of deferrals of Indigenous peoples’ concerns would mean for Bloch’s philosophy of utopia and, moreover, for contemporary utopian studies. Instead of understanding contemporary Indigeneity as inauthentic or as already/inevitably finished through the eliminatory processes of murder, displacement, and coercive assimilation, utopian studies should re-articulate its own understandings of

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263 Thompson writes

In Nietzsche, Marx, Hegel, and Freud—and, of course, Karl May in nontheoretical form—we have the description of the constant human search for the overcoming of the subject-object split, in which, even if just for the odd Faustian moment of fulfillment, we cease to be thinking beings and get a glimpse of what we might one day be. This ‘Principle of Hope’ is the undertone of Kafka’s short story about the wish to be an *Indian*; that somehow the Native American, in the *Rausch* (rush) of his headlong, quivering flight into the distance, becomes one with both the horse he is riding and the landscape through which he is riding. The great attraction of this fantasy *Indian* [Vizenor’s concept] to the modern European lies in his landscape, his context, and the idea that the rush he attains represents a oneness with nature, whereas the ones available to the modern and industrialized European are examples of false, artificial, and ultimately unsatisfying intoxication and escape from both nature and himself. (PAGE #)

264 Ibid, 97.
utopia and utopianism through the ending of such deferrals of contemporary Indigenous desires for decolonization.

Towards a Re-Articulation of Utopian Studies

What then for the concept of utopia? It is possible for the “surplus” of its compensatory settler colonial consciousness to be recovered as the basis for a willful and, perhaps anticipatory, decolonial hope? In their recent collection Existential Utopia, co-editors Michael Marder and Patricia Vieira argue

> dystopia has now firmly established itself as the current Weltanschauung, a lens through which we filter historical reality… [which has turned] into another name for social ontology, in that it becomes the default description of the world and gets identified with the totality of what is."\(^{265}\)

Thus contemporary life is understood as alienated and dystopian despite, as Bloch might argue, that there are abundant examples of latency in human strivings for “what ought to be” or, per Levitas, the reconstitution of society.

Interestingly, there are clear commonalities on the new and emphatically “open” formulations of utopianism, which yet still must be “grounded,” as Laurence Davis claims, such as Levitas’s *utopia-as-method* operationalized by the dialogical, provisional and critically self-reflexive education of desire.\(^{266}\) There’s also Marder and Vieira’s *existential utopia*, operationalized by “an appeal to justice, which contends with the

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unbearable senselessness of hegemonic meanings, proliferating in the current world disorder.”

In this way, contemporary fatalistic dystopianism underscored by a growing anxiety at the consequences of the project of Western colonial modernity, is challenged by a robust sense of openness and appeal not to transcendental notions of truth, but by a social “utopianism” that is educated via a basis in memories of past injustices as well as an accountability to contemporary realities.

While Davis hopes that “we may well be witnessing a paradigm shift in utopian thinking at the dawn of the twenty-first century,” the content of the “we” remains a fundamental concern. Unless Indigenous and other peoples who have suffered dehumanization and dispossession through the project of utopian (settler) colonial modernity decide on the worthiness of an engagement with the concept and discourses of utopia, it will remain a highly suspect as a means of bringing about an “improvement in the human condition.”

Levitas’ notion of utopia-as-method offers a conceptual basis for the reconsideration, indeed a re-articulation, of utopian discourses. Her work compels accountability to Indigenous critical theory, which situates the modern tradition of utopian narrative as co-emergent and co-constitutive with European colonial modernity and, indeed, settler colonialism and white supremacy. The implications of a critically self-reflexive, dialogical, and processual utopia-as-method necessarily include

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accountability to Indigenous concerns and experiences, as they destabilize the notion that the modern utopian tradition is indicative of the “improvement of the human condition.” To the contrary, a meaningful attending to Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies—on their terms, as fully-human subjects—requires the fundamental displacement of utopian studies discourses. An Indigenous re-articulation of utopian discourses may be then be understood not as congruent with Levitas’ utopia-as-method, but as its necessary consequence.
Chapter 5

Contemporary Utopian Narratives of White Settler Futurity

If, as Marder and Vieira have argued, our contemporary ontology is dystopia, then a reconsideration of utopia appears both timely and necessary. This claim of recognition of the contemporary ubiquity of dystopia does important work: it acknowledges discontent with present society and its perceived extrapolative trajectories into the future. However, the notion that dystopia is somehow a defining characteristic of the present is loaded with the historical realities of particular social locations. Perhaps dystopia appears to be the contemporary ontology to Marder and Vieira because the traditional utopians are no longer convinced. In fact, it could be argued that virtually the entire history of the modern utopian tradition from the 1516 publication of Thomas More’s *Utopia* through to the present day has contributed to a dystopian lived experience for those peoples impacted by European colonial modernity. Thus, when Marder and Vieira characterize the contemporary condition as dystopia, does this actually serve, albeit unintentionally, to obscure (yet invert) the sense of dystopia that colonized peoples have experienced since the modern utopia’s very inception?

Considered from a different perspective, perhaps “our” contemporary ontology is not so easily definable or reducible to a singular formulation, and, in fact, it may be the case for those who were relegated to dystopia by the modern utopian tradition that there is as much or more cause for hope today than in the past five hundred plus years since

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269 Marder and Vieira, “Introduction”, ix. This is a reference to my conclusion in chapter 3.
initial European invasion. The “externalities” of the modern utopian tradition—death, dislocation, enslavement, alienation, and coercive assimilation, among others—are being de-naturalized and questioned by a variety of interests even amidst the litany of social and ecological catastrophes, both ongoing and predicted.

Whether or not it is appropriate to describe the “social dreaming,” “expressions of desire for a better way of being,” or “imaginary reconstitutions of society” (three of the most prominent definitions offered by theorists of utopia) of those historically relegated to the dystopian social location of pre-modern Others as “utopian” is perhaps academic, but nonetheless a question I feel compelled to raise. I believe it may offer an important grounding for contemporary re-conceptualizations of “utopia” that may provide some means of self-critique and engagement with the constituent role of the modern utopian tradition in ongoing (settler) colonialism and white supremacy. It is my contention that such proposals offered by historically colonized peoples, including Indigenous and racialized non-Native peoples in the contexts of Canada and the US, are in the words of Daniel Heath Justice, “imagining otherwise” in ways that center decolonization and, in doing so, simultaneously utilize, amend, and resist the conventions of the modern utopian tradition. Whether such peoples are amenable to association with the tradition of “utopia” remains to be answered by their own self-identifications.

At the same time, there is a clearly distinguishable and, in many ways, self-defined utopian literary tradition most often situated within the science fiction and

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270 I would similarly argue that the critical examination of the modern utopian tradition may provide insights into a variety of social justice concerns, though this lies outside of the scope of the present project.
fantasy genres or the more expansive conception of speculative fiction (sf). Darko Suvin and some other scholars of science fiction have sought to create a hierarchy between fantasy and science fiction based upon their respective narrative means of effecting the audience’s cognitive estrangement from their “normal” lived experience of reality. That is, while fantasy narratives are said to make use of magic or the otherwise fabulously metaphysical—a break with normative cognitive plausibility—science fiction is premised upon such cognitive plausibility. Science fiction, it is argued, simultaneously appeals to but estranges the audience from the normality of lived experience through a fantastic extrapolation of current scientific understanding, therefore, generally exploring notions of techno-scientific progress in one form or another. Thus, it is argued that science fictional narratives are superior to fantasy narratives precisely because of their reliance upon seemingly plausible extrapolations of techno-scientific progress rather than on a suspension of normative cognitive plausibility as a means of effecting the audience’s estrangement. In other words, science fiction is more rational than mere fantasy.

Scholars have thus situated the historical emergence of science-fictional narratives into a loose-but-recognizable genre, in part, as an inheritance of Enlightenment rationality and the emergence of Western scientific inquiry. Alongside such considerations, John Rieder has argued for recognition of the relationship between the historical emergence of science fiction and nineteenth century colonialism:

271 “sf” as a signifier for “speculative fiction” has come to recent prominence for some writers and critics as a means of sidestepping categorization into genres of fantasy and science fiction. The preference for sf as opposed to fantasy or science fiction allows for an avoidance of the perceived limitations associated with the limitations of the established traditions of fantasy and science fiction. However, writers and critics who adopt sf do so for these and other reasons not necessarily limited to an avoidance of being pigeonholed as “genre.” I adopt the use of sf/utopian in this text as a means of signalling inclusivity.
many of the repetitive motifs that coalesced into the genre of science fiction represent ideological ways of grasping the social consequences of colonialism, including the fantastic appropriation and rationalization of unevenly distributed colonial wealth in the homeland and in the colonies, the racist ideologies that enabled colonialist exploitation, and the cognitive impact of radical cultural differences on the home culture. These range from triumphant fantasies of appropriating land, power, sex, and treasure in tales of exploration and adventure, to nightmarish reversals of the positions of colonizer and colonized in tales of invasion and apocalypse.272

Rieder’s analysis provides an important consideration for debates over the alleged superiority of science-fictional over fantasy narratives: it provokes the question of whether science fictional narratives that appeal to their audiences as extrapolation are themselves co-constitutive with imperialist logics of progress and rationality. For example, some sf/utopian narratives authored by non-Western, postcolonial, and Indigenous writers have been described as “magical realism” insofar as they portray elements of the fantastic, in ways that do not rely upon the extrapolation of technoscience. Rather, to cite one strategy, the “realistic” depiction of traditional cultural mythology, including animistic orientations towards the other-than-human, serves as the means of effecting the audience’s estrangement from the lived experiences of “normalcy.” Thus the ideological dimension of sf/utopian narratives is revealed in the historical predominance of the traditional beneficiaries of colonialism in both their authorship and readership.

Contemporary sf narratives authored by Indigenous peoples, racialized non-Natives, and other historically colonized peoples are therefore offering critical

interventions in the dialogical reconsidering of sf/utopian narratives through their engagement with social issues—among them colonialism, indigeneity, and white supremacy—most often neglected or problematically addressed by the traditional utopians. The effects on the dialogic of utopia are ongoing and emergent, including this very study, which seeks to propose a rethinking of the entire modern utopian tradition in light of the concerns and experiences of Indigenous peoples, in particular.

The educative function of utopia-as-method, according to Levitas is framed around the dialogic of proposition, examination, critique and recovery of the appropriate “surplus,” and counter/alternative proposal. Viewed from this perspective, the interventions of Indigenous, racialized non-Native peoples, and other historically colonized peoples into sf/utopian narratives evidence the influences of the sf/utopian traditions of the historical beneficiaries of colonialism while simultaneously offering fundamental challenges to the very same traditions. Thus, these traditions are in the process of being irrevocably transformed, up to the potential for utopia-as-method to inspire an immanent critique of the modern utopian tradition itself.

Contemporary white settler authors—the traditional utopians and beneficiaries of colonialism—such as Kim Stanley Robinson, Ursula K. Le Guin, Starhawk, Margaret Atwood, and Ernest Callenbach have authored prominent contemporary sf/utopian narratives that, in varying ways, address many of the critiques of the modern utopian tradition, including ideas of modernity, colonialism, human development, indigeneity, traditional culture and spirituality, and the relationship of human societies with the wider natural world. Indigenous critical theories, such as Byrd’s notion of “deferral,” therefore
compel their critical evaluation in light of Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism. Moreover, following Bloch and Levitas, a critical examination of such works reveals both their relative failures and successes/surpluses. For in their respective narratives, each of these authors can be critiqued for her or his lapses into cultural appropriations and romanticizations as these imaginary reconstitutions of society often instrumentalize Indigenous, racialized non-Native peoples and other colonized peoples as a means narrating desirable futures for white settlers.

Society is speculatively re-imagined in these narratives, through varying appeals including elements of techno-scientific extrapolation, magical realism, and otherwise, but the complicated and inherently relational work of decolonization is almost always not the focus—Le Guin’s *The World for World is Forest* and, to an extent, *The Telling* are perhaps exceptions that prove the rule. In both of these narratives, the protagonists are clearly engaged in anti-colonial struggle; their respective expressions of social desire are fundamentally centred on decolonization. But, in the vast majority of contemporary sf/utopian narratives, decolonization is sidestepped in one way or another in favour of other concerns, generally reflecting the interests of white settler peoples, ultimately resulting in a continued deferral of the concerns and experiences of Indigenous, racialized non-Natives, and other colonized peoples.

In particular, there is a clearly recognizable desire in the narratives of many white settler authors to become Indian, in Vizenorian terms, often conceived as a return to a romanticized notion of pre-contact Indigenous peoples—with respect to culture,

spirituality and lifeways, and to re-harmonize the human and other-than-human relationship. This is the case in Le Guin’s *Always Coming Home*, Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (and its prequel *Ecotopia Rising*), Starhawk’s *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, and Robinson’s edited collection *Future Primitive: The New Ecotopias*. Taken together, these narratives represent what I would term *settler-ecotopian* narratives, those which, to varying degrees, propose to become Indian as a means of pivoting away from the trajectories of late modern white supremacist settler society towards an ecologically-sustainable future. Such narratives prioritize white settler futurity via the instrumentalization or continued deferral the experiences and concerns of Indigenous and racialized non-Native peoples. Terry Goldie describes a similar notion of “indigenization” in his study of the literatures of white Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders to describe the manifestation of settlers’ need to become “native.”

While these authors’ texts may be faulted for their respective shortcomings, that is for the ways in which they (unconsciously) contribute to a deferral of Indigenous and other colonized peoples’ concerns and experiences, there are also elements of what Bloch would describe as a cultural surplus that deserve recognition. White settler ecotopian desires for indigeneity, for a post-settler colonial society, or for a post-racial society ought to be critiqued for their shortcomings but also considered for the ways in which they contribute to an emerging rejection of white supremacist settler colonial modernity and evidence a growing attention to Indigenous and other colonized peoples’ interventions in

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sf/utopian narratives. Moreover, while there is certainly a central focus on the desires of white settlers in their narratives, there are also moments in several of these authors’ texts that do engage, to varying degrees, with the complex and relational project of decolonization.

The discussion that follows seeks to construct a necessarily limited genealogy of the white settler utopian/sf literary tradition, and its engagement with colonialism, indigeneity, and white supremacy. I endeavor to offer critical readings of these texts that, following Bloch and Levitas, simultaneously critique and recover the surplus of the respective narratives such that the narratives are neither summarily dismissed for their failings nor uncritically celebrated. The following (fifth) chapter engages with contemporary narratives of Indigenous and racialized non-Native peoples residing within the white supremacist settler societies of Canada and the US, and is intended to demonstrate the ways in which these interventions simultaneously work within, alongside, and in resistance to the established sf/utopian narrative tradition, ultimately posing an immanent challenge to utopia itself.

**Settler colonialism as an aside in *Looking Backward* and *Herland***

Indigenous critical theorists and literary critics routinely center the role of story and storytelling as a means of what Vizenor terms survivance, as resistance, and as resurgence. As Jodi Byrd and numerous other Indigenous critical theorists and literary scholars have argued, the perpetuation of white settler society depends upon the continued deferrals of the concerns of Indigenous peoples and the corresponding
naturalization of white settler colonialism. Following these considerations, critical evaluation of white settler sf/utopian narratives may reveal their role in the perpetuation of the stories white settlers tell themselves as a means of affirming and perpetuating the white supremacist settler colonial project. White settler sf/utopian narratives may thus be understood as re-imagining society in ways that consciously or unconsciously reify white supremacist settler colonialism as the natural extrapolation of the status quo into the future.

It follows that the utopian literary tradition of white settler societies of Canada and the US should also be understood as contributing to what settler scholar Lorenzo Veracini usefully calls a process of “settler indigenisation.” This refers to settlers and Indigenous peoples being made to switch places as a means of establishing and affirming the settler society as legitimate and, indeed, natural. Veracini argues that this is accomplished through what he terms a “transfer”: the modern citizen-subject of the settler society is rendered natural and, in fact, indigenous to the modern nation-state and its territory while the original inhabitant, the “Indian” or “Aborigine,” is made foreign and unnatural in the settler society. Another settler scholar, Patrick Wolfe, has similarly described these processes as resulting in the marking of Indigenous peoples for “elimination.”

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276 Veracini, Settler Colonialism, 33-52.

the future as means of envisioning the desirability (and seemingly natural inevitability) of
the indigenization of settlers.

While the white settler utopian literary tradition of Canada and the US has
historically sought to address issues of social (in)justice and, more recently, ecological
concerns, the concerns and experiences of Indigenous peoples, racialized non-Natives,
and other colonized peoples have almost always been subsumed by a focus on other
issues in the formation of sf/utopian narratives. In particular, Indigenous peoples are
often rendered absent or assimilated into the (white, or more recently, multicultural)
settler polity in such narratives, which ultimately are primarily concerned with proposing
desirable futures for white settlers. If Indigenous peoples do not factor in these sf/utopian
narratives of the future, then there is little to no opportunity for the educative function of
estrangements that result from such narratives to include critical engagement with the
concerns and experiences of Indigenous peoples in the present.

More’s *Utopia* established an early modern narrative that inspired a great many
imitators, though, as Rieder has argued, it was not until the nineteenth century that a
coalescing of colonial modernity and the genre of science fiction took place. Social
upheavals, including the debates over slavery and the ending of the frontier in the
American west, and the advent of urban industrial underclass of white settlers, conspired
to set the stage for Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* published in 1887.\(^{278}\) Bellamy’s
*Looking Backward* was one of best selling American novels of the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century and
served as a vehicle for the author’s articulation of what he referred to as “nationalism,” a

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proposal for a version of industrial socialism as an alternative to the burgeoning urban industrial capitalism of his day. It reflected the international, trans-continental scope of Western or Euro-American utopian modernity, and the clear influence of the utopian socialists, including the well-known Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen, and their critics, Marx and Engels.279

The story makes use of the well-known narrative device of the first person narrator transported to an unfamiliar utopian society, the workings of which are helpfully explained by various characters as a means of explicating the desirable features. In this case, the narrator falls asleep in Boston 1887 only to awake in the year 2000 to a socialist utopia. As in the case of the utopian socialists, as well as Marx and Engels, Bellamy’s utopian proposal was primarily concerned with addressing class divisions and the role of labour in society. His treatment of Indigenous and other then-colonized and racialized peoples is demonstrative of the “progressive” social ideals of his day: he naturalizes a linear-temporal sense of progress, thus positioning the Euro-American industrial society as flawed, yet still the most modern and occupying a transitional phase of human development. This is evident in an exchange between the novel’s first-person protagonist, Julian West, and Dr. Leete, his new friend and conveniently professorial guide to his exploration of the year 2000:

“By the way," I said, "I have not thought to ask you anything about the state of Europe. Have the societies of the Old World also been remodeled?"

279 Marx and Engels criticized what they described pejoratively as the “utopian socialism” of St. Simon, Fourier and Owen in The Communist Manifesto, seeking to contrast their approach as “scientific socialism.”
“Yes,” replied Dr. Leete, "the great nations of Europe as well as Australia, Mexico, and parts of South America, are now organized industrially like the United States, which was the pioneer of the evolution. The peaceful relations of these nations are assured by a loose form of federal union of world-wide extent. An international council regulates the mutual intercourse and commerce of the members of the union and their joint policy toward the more backward races, which are gradually being educated up to civilized institutions."

(italics my emphasis)

It’s clear in this passage that the narrative centers the linear progressivism of a normatively white settler American socialism as its primary proposal for desirable social change. In fact, Bellamy’s embrace of a notion of a highly industrialized and indeed rationalized form of “nationalism” seeks to extrapolate from the linear notion of “evolution” (modernity underpinned by ideals of transcendental progress and universal rationality), albeit proposing industrial modernity and capitalism as temporary phases, which ultimately results in a post-capitalist and largely egalitarian global unity. The notion that the “backward races” are being “educated up” insofar as they are being invited to “evolve” into a white settler-led notion of progress and modernity is clearly intended to appear as beneficent and altogether “progressive” ideal. Any notion of self-determination of the “backward races” is glossed over entirely, or rather it is taken for granted that Bellamy’s nationalism as an urban industrial socialist alternative to the realities of the day would necessarily be recognized as both utopian and definitively modern. It is a given that the “backward races” would desire to be “raised up” to be modern and inhabit the utopia Bellamy describes.

However, while *Looking Backward* clearly reflects the progressive modernist attitudes of the socialist movements of the era, which certainly do not imply a recognition of Indigenous nationhood, notions of autonomy, sovereignty, nor a particularly critical outlook on white supremacy, Bellamy’s vision of global unanimity does bear interesting results:

“How happened it,” was Dr. Leete's reply, "that your workers were able to produce more than so many savages would have done? Was it not wholly on account of the heritage of the past knowledge and achievements of the race, the machinery of society, thousands of years in contriving, found by you ready-made to your hand? How did you come to be possessors of this knowledge and this machinery, which represent nine parts to one contributed by yourself in the value of your product? You inherited it, did you not? And were not these others, these unfortunate and crippled brothers whom you cast out, joint inheritors, co-heirs with you? What did you do with their share? Did you not rob them when you put them off with crusts, who were entitled to sit with the heirs, and did you not add insult to robbery when you called the crusts charity?”

Bellamy’s insistence, via the character of Dr. Leete, on addressing all of humanity “the race” while obviously collapsing historical and contemporary differences, is clearly intended as a move towards egalitarianism and inclusivity—*universal humanitas*. Dr. Leete’s invocation of “inheritance” and “robbery” alongside his casual use of the pejorative “savage” suggests a contradiction of sorts; however, because it is clearly not the focus of Bellamy’s utopia, the contradiction is left unresolved. Civilizationalism is therefore acceptable, though the “white man’s burden” is appealed to through a sense of shared human history. Ultimately, however, Dr. Leete’s exhortation to the narrator suggests recognition of the injustice of racialist discourses, though the solution is clearly

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281 Ibid, 197-198.
assimilation into Bellamy’s version of American exceptionalism, one in which a linear and singular notion of modernity is renewed as urban industrial socialism. That America exists on land stolen from Indigenous peoples, and has “evolved” to a level of industrial urbanism in large part through the chattel enslavement of Africans, is naturalized as an apparently necessary transitional phase through which humanity had to progress through to reach Bellamy’s utopia.

Bellamy’s Looking Backward was enormously influential on the American socialist movement and, according to Kenneth Roemer, inspired the formation of at least 165 Nationalist or Bellamy Clubs across the US, which grew into the Nationalist Party and came to influence the national Populist Party.282 It also compelled a famous 1890 response novel, News from Nowhere, from the English socialist William Morris. News from Nowhere interestingly addresses Indigenous peoples through a similar, yet much more sympathetic, aside describing their experience of dispossession and settler colonialism through the Marxian notion of primitive accumulation. The novel adopts a remarkably similar narrative device in which the first person protagonist awakens to a future utopian socialist society and relies upon a guide’s explanations:

“The appetite of the World-Market grew with what it fed on: the countries within the ring of ‘civilisation’ (that is, organised misery) were glutted with the abortions of the market, and force and fraud were used unsparingly to ‘open up’ countries outside that pale. This process of ‘opening up’ is a strange one to those who have read the professions of the men of that period and do not understand their practice; and perhaps shows us at its worst the great vice of the nineteenth century, the use of hypocrisy and cant to evade the responsibility of vicarious ferocity. When the civilised World-Market coveted a country not yet in its

clutches, some transparent pretext was found—the suppression of a slavery different from and not so cruel as that of commerce; the pushing of a religion no longer believed in by its promoters; the ‘rescue’ of some desperado or homicidal madman whose misdeeds had got him into trouble amongst the natives of the ‘barbarous’ country—any stick, in short, which would beat the dog at all. Then some bold, unprincipled, ignorant adventurer was found (no difficult task in the days of competition), and he was bribed to ‘create a market’ by breaking up whatever traditional society there might be in the doomed country, and by destroying whatever leisure or pleasure he found there. He forced wares on the natives which they did not want, and took their natural products in ‘exchange,’ as this form of robbery was called, and thereby he ‘created new wants,’ to supply which (that is, to be allowed to live by their new masters) the hapless, helpless people had to sell themselves into the slavery of hopeless toil so that they might have something wherewith to purchase the nullities of ‘civilisation.’

“Ah,” said the old man, pointing the dealings of to the Museum, “I have read books and papers in there, telling strange stories indeed of civilisation (or organised misery) with ‘non-civilisation’; from the time when the British Government deliberately sent blankets infected with small-pox as choice gifts to inconvenient tribes of Red-skins, to the time when Africa was infested by a man named Stanley, who—”

“Excuse me,” said I, “but as you know, time presses; and I want to keep our question on the straightest line possible; and I want at once to ask this about these wares made for the World-Market—”

Morris’ character thus calls critical attention to civilizationalist discourse and to the acts of genocide inherent in the settler colonization of “inconvenient tribes of Red-skins,” even as it appears as an interrupted point, a digression from the narrative’s primary exposition. This critique of “civilisation” appears as, in effect, both a critique of modernity and colonialism, and is truly remarkable for its time. Morris’ explicit recognition of Indigenous dispossession as a part of the process of what Marx described

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as “primitive accumulation” and his damning characterizations of “transparent” pretexts for colonialism, is reminiscent of themes in contemporary Indigenous critical theory.\(^{284}\)

Of course, while both *Looking Backward* and *News from Nowhere* offered critical analyses of capitalism as an imperial project, the historical context dictated the capacities for their respective audiences. Bellamy and Morris were writing to overwhelmingly white male readerships and the intended educative function of their utopias was primarily focused on advocacy for socialism. The anti-colonial “surplus” recoverable in the above-mentioned passages remains an aside, while with the benefit of history, their relative weaknesses on many social inequities, such as sexism, that would come to the foreground in subsequent utopias.

This certainly includes Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s classic feminist utopia *Herland*, first published in serial form in 1915, and its sequel *With Her in Ourland* that appeared the following year, which was primarily concerned with the station of women in her contemporaneous American society. The narrative proceeds from a discovery of an all-female society by three male characters, one of whom serves as the novel’s first-person protagonist. Here again, *Herland* ought be recognized as reflective of Gilman’s apparent primary intentions (anti-sexism, feminism) for her expected audience and their capacities. Thus *Herland*’s lacks a meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples and

\(^{284}\) The similarities between Morris’ discussion of Indigenous peoples vis-à-vis primitive accumulation *News from Nowhere* and the contemporary work of Glen Coulthard would make for an interesting study.
their experiences and concerns. However, there is such an exchange Herland’s sequel, *With Her in Ourland*:

“I can see now the wonderful advantage you have,” she said eagerly. "Humanity got its 'second wind' with the discovery of the 'new world'—didn't it?"

It always delighted me to note the speed and correctness with which she picked up idioms and bits of slang. They were a novelty to her, and a constant delight.

"You had a big new country to spread out in, and no competitors—there were no previous inhabitants, were there?"

"Nothing but Indians," I said.

"Indians?"

"Yes, savages, like those in the forests below your mountain land, though more advanced in some ways."

"How did you arrange with them?" she asked.

"I hate to tell you, Ellador. You see you have—a little—idealized my country. We did not 'arrange' with those savages. We killed them."

"All of them? How many were there?" She was quite calm. She made no movement of alarm or horror, but I could see the rich color fade from her face, and her dear gentle mouth set in harder lines of control.

"It is a long story, and not a nice one, I'm sorry to say. We left some, hemming them in spots called 'reservations.' There has been a good deal of education and missionary work; some Indians have become fully civilized—as good citizens as any; and some have intermarried with the whites. We have many people with Indian blood. But speaking generally this is one of our national shames. Helen Hunt wrote a book about it, called 'A Century of Dishonor.'"

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285 There is only a brief mention of Indigenous peoples:

“And do no men wear feathers in their hats?”

"Only Indians," Jeff explained. "Savages, you know." And he sketched a war bonnet to show them.

"And soldiers," I added, drawing a military hat with plumes."
Ellador was silent. That lovely faroff homesick look came into her eyes.

"I hate to disillusion you, dear heart," I said. "We are not perfect in America. I truly think we have many advantages over any other country, but we are not blameless."

"I'll defer judgment till I get there," she presently answered. "Let's go back to what we were discussing—the pressure of population."

Again, there is a relatively sympathetic aside engaging with the experiences and concerns of Indigenous peoples. Here the characters of a (white) feminist utopia clearly demonstrate some recognition of their ongoing implication in condition of settler colonialism ("still one of our national shames"), though the above passage represents the most substantial engagement with such concerns in the two novels. As such, the deferrals of engagement with settler colonialism are a means to inspire a focus on the concerns of white women in keeping with the novels’ expected audiences.

However, as authors of some of the most famous and widely-read utopian narratives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Bellamy, Morris, and Gilman did evidence some recognition of the constituent role of settler colonialism in the foundations of the very utopian societies they themselves envisioned. That is, the unresolved contradictions of (normatively white) socialist or feminist utopianism premised upon (settler) colonialism are readily recognizable and, thus, present a challenge to future authors who then either perpetuate the deferrals of Indigenous peoples’ concerns or attempt to resolve them.

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From dystopia to Ecotopia and the 1970’s “critical utopias”

The creation of the Soviet Union, two world wars, and the rise of the US to the status of global superpower framed developments in the sf/utopian narratives of the early to mid 20th century. These included the Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*, often described as one of the foremost early examples of the literary dystopia, written in the wake of the 1919 Russian revolution and first published in 1921. Dystopian narratives propose a critique of the present through a fictional representation of the anticipated future, illustrating the author’s warnings at the trajectory towards undesirable social change. *We* depicts Zamyatin’s anxieties at the tendencies of the then newly created Soviet Union, depicting the near total panoptical surveillance of the fictional “One State” over nearly every aspect of the human population. Zamyatin’s protagonist is known as “D-503” and struggles against severe repression and control over individuality. For example, dreaming is repressed as it offends the One State’s sense of control such that D-503 grapples with his sense of sanity once he begins to regularly dream at night and is told by a doctor that he is developing a soul.

Yamyatin’s *We* was published in English in 1924 and set the stage for Aldous Huxley’s celebrated *Brave New World*, which appeared in 1932. Huxley’s *Brave New World* and George Orwell’s *1984* are often canonized as classic works of literature,

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288 Zamyatin, *We*. 89.
despite their generic status as science fiction, fantasy, or the more recent label of speculative fiction. Each of these works grapples with social anxieties regarding the loss of individuality to the conformity of an over-bearing state, itself enabled by technocratic and ideological apparatuses of surveillance and control. Viewed retrospectively, the dystopian turn of these classic works of literature in the early to mid 20th century may be understood as a critique of the utopian self-representations of the US and Russia, the two post-war superpower Cold War combatants.

Indeed, the emergence of the literary dystopia as a distinct literary subgenre took place at the conjuncture of a number of noteworthy socio-cultural events, including the stretching of European imperialism to cover more than three quarters of the planet’s land mass and the World War I. The veritable contemporary explosion in popularity of the dystopia suggests a similarly extraordinary confluence of societal anxieties, though contexts have shifted demonstrably.

Interestingly, Huxley’s final novel, Island, published in 1962, is something of a utopian counterpoint to his earlier dystopian Brave New World, and depicts a fictional Polynesian island, Pala, which has managed to avoid being colonized. The protagonist, Will Farnaby, is a cynical and tortured Englishman who crashes on the forbidden island, and gradually becomes convinced by the utopian elements of the Palanese society. Pala is characterized as a hybridization of Indigenous, Buddhist, and Western cultures that ultimately serves as Huxley’s utopian proposal. The looming threat of colonization—capitalist interest in untapped Palanese oil reserves serves as a major

plot point—sets the stage for the conversion of Farnaby, who had been sent to the island secure the oil rights from the Palanese queen, but eventually comes to question his original motives.

It is remarkable that Huxley, one of the preeminent intellectuals of his time, would chose to center an anti-colonial (or perhaps even postcolonial) narrative conceit in his creation of a utopian counter-point to his renowned *Brave New World*. While *Island* may be read as a critique of British colonies of exploitation, Huxley’s conversion drama speaks both to the colonized and colonizer. It may also be observed as a re-articulation of utopianism, one that explores some of the same concerns and themes of the contemporary examples of postcolonial and Indigenous sf narratives.

The reader is invited to follow the protagonist’s own growing openness to the Palanese way of life. While the locals are resistant (anti-colonial) to the potential loss of political independence and cultural autonomy, they have been exposed to and selectively incorporated ideas and practices from the outside world. Huxley’s depiction of a utopian society is therefore one that bears the impacts of colonialism, but is neither bound to a wholesale rejection of the colonizer, nor to a notion of pre-colonial purity. To the contrary, Huxley’s *Island* is grounded and tempered by the tensions involved in anti-colonial resistance, the possibilities of cultural exchange, and the challenges of both personal and societal transformation as fundamental to a sense of hopeful possibility. The novel’s conclusion involves Farnaby’s experience of a psychedelic mushroom trip—*moksha*—while the Palanese prepare for their impending invasion; the personal transformation of an English rogue is contrasted with the pacifistic response of the
Palanese to the threat of overwhelming colonial violence. Thus, the relative ambiguities involved in Island’s moving beyond both the classical blueprint utopia, and the similar sense of closure associated with the dystopia of Brave New World, would set the stage for the next major period of utopian literature to receive substantial scholarly attention.

However, this did not coalesce until the early 1970s with what Tom Moylan called the “critical utopias” in his Demand the Impossible. Moylan refers to Samuel Delany (Trouble on Triton, 1976), Ursula K. Le Guin (The Dispossessed, 1974), Marge Piercy (Woman on the Edge of Time, 1976), and Joanna Russ (The Female Man, 1975) to argue these novels represented a turn away from the classical sense of utopias as blueprints for ideal societies. Critical utopias offer representations of imperfect, incomplete, and non-totalizing societies measurably better than contemporaneous reality but still plagued by injustice, conflict, and struggle. For Moylan, the new literary form of the critical utopia was informed by the New Social Movements of the 1960s and was reflective of shifting societal attitudes towards notions of revolutionary social justice and desirable social change. Indeed, Le Guin’s The Dispossessed was subtitled An Ambiguous Utopia and Delany’s Trouble on Triton drew on Michel Foucault’s work in its subtitle, An Ambiguous Heterotopia.

These narrative proposals for desirable social change self-consciously align themselves with the utopian literary tradition but do so in decidedly “ambiguous” fashion. Portrayals of ideal and static utopian societies, as in Looking Backward and


*Herland*, are jettisoned in favour of narratives that reflect a sense of confusion and ambivalence at the possibilities of transcendental progress, evidencing an underlying questioning of the master narratives of modernity itself. Hopeful alternatives are portrayed as being under looming threat, and the ambiguity of such alternatives is illustrated by the blurring of utopian and dystopian characteristics of the fictional societies. The notions of a definitive break from a dystopian past and of linear notions of progress are rejected as history is shown to be contingent, contested, and, in fact, multiple and relational.

In Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*, the Annaresti society is run largely along anarchist-syndicalist lines and exists on a moon side-by-side with Urras, a planet controlled by several states that appear to serve as representations of the US, the Soviet Union, and the non-aligned states of what are now commonly referred to as the Third World or Global South. While Annares is clearly depicted sympathetically, life is far from perfect, and characters experience doubts, toil as labourers, and suffer anxieties under the threat of annihilation as the tensions between the fictional representations of Le Guin’s contemporaneous world (Urras as representing 1970s geopolitics) and her “ambiguous” utopian proposal (Annares) play out.

Similarly, in Delany’s *Trouble on Triton* the reader is introduced to an interplanetary society, complete with techno-scientific advancements, libertarian and anarchic social and political organizations, and a fluid and experimental sense of human individuality. This is illustrated by communal living arrangements based on a variety of identity characteristics, ranging from sexual identities to political affiliations, and the
veritable absence of a governmental or state-like involvement in people’s everyday lives.

The novel’s protagonist, Bron, is described as a male prostitute from Mars who emigrated to Triton, and seeks a sense of belonging and connection with a street artist, the Spike. The ambiguity of the utopian elements of a technologically-advanced and politically anarchic or libertarian society is left unresolved as inter-planetary war breaks out, suggesting Delany’s own seeming preference for a notion of a heterotopia as opposed to a utopia. Triton is clearly an “other space” apart from what Delany experiences but whether this is a desirable alternative is ultimately left unresolved: Bron fails to win the affections of the Spike, and he is left unfulfilled as the novel abruptly ends.

In both Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Russ’s *The Female Man*, readers experience shifts of time-space that depict varying social conditions that have the effect of troubling the supposed linearity of time and progress that are so central to most notions of modernity. *Woman on the Edge of Time* alternates between the lived reality of the protagonist, Connie Ramos, a survivor of domestic violence who is incarcerated in a mental institution, and her transportation to an apparently future utopian communal and quasi-Indigenous society of Mattapoissett. As the novel progresses, Connie comes to understand herself as a pivotal actor in determining possible futures, whether it will be Mattapoissett or a dystopia of sexist mind control and organ harvesting. Similarly, in Russ’ *The Female Man*, the novel follows characters’ movements through parallel worlds, each addressing gender and sexual roles differently, albeit all through a decidedly feminist lens, and the characters themselves are revealed to be versions of the same person.
These critical utopias of the 1970s demonstrated early elements of what some refer to as postmodernism insofar as the contested, contingent, and, indeed, ambiguous sense of history, progress, and notions of rationality commonly associated with modernity are thrown into question. Moreover, postmodernist literature also experimented with formal constraints of the traditional novel, availing the possibilities of hybrid and new forms of literary expression. While the potential for desirable social change remains in these narratives, it does so under the weight of the failings of modernity: gender, sexuality, race, and class, among others, appear as social issues that persist as sources of ongoing injustice.

The ideological battles between the US and USSR both of drew upon a sense of historical linear temporal progress that reified modernity, albeit with differing utopian horizons. The critical utopias of Delany, Le Guin, Piercy, and Russ each grappled with a sense of a third way or, perhaps more accurately, third ways, troubling the notion of a progressive linear march of history from a backward past towards a modern present and ever more progressive and modern future. While post-war decolonization of the erstwhile colonies of exploitation resulted in fledgling independent nation-states, their cultural, economic, and political autonomy was under constant threat as they became proxy battlegrounds in a protracted cold war. Moreover, the capacity of decolonized nation-states to actualize meaningful self-determination was radically undermined by their historical experiences of being colonized; they were not starting at “zero” but in fact had to grapple with the lingering consequences of colonial domination. Thus questions surrounding the intractability of such inequality and injustice linger in each of these
American authors’ critical utopias, even as they clearly drew inspiration from the 1960’s New Left social movements and the decolonization of the so-called Third World.

These critical utopias also often reflected a sense of alienation from the environment, though this is a substantial aspect of the novels of Le Guin, Piercy, and Russ, each white settler women, and less so in Delany, an African-American. Where *The Dispossessed, Woman on the Edge of Time,* and *The Female Man* each involve a sense of re-harmonization of the relationship between human society and the wider natural world in their respective utopian proposals, *Trouble on Triton* is primarily concerned with a libertarian sense of individual freedom and its “ambiguous consequences.” As Gerry notes in his introduction to *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction,* Delany’s nonfiction literary criticism offers potential insight into this difference.

[Delany] has written that two ideological positions are available to us in modernity, each one carrying either a positive or a negative charge. One can imagine oneself to be the citizen of a marvelous New Jerusalem, the “technological super city where everything is clean, and all problems have been solved by the beneficent application of science”—or else one can be a partisan of Arcadia, “that wonderful place where everyone eats natural foods and no machine larger that one person can fix in an hour is allowed in. Throughout Arcadia the breezes blow, the rains are gentle, the birds sing, and the brooks gurgle.”

Of course, Delany recognizes that the dystopian opposites of the New Jerusalem and Arcadia, the Junk City (decaying techno-urban utopia) and the Cultures of the Afternoon (contaminated countryside) also frame “our political and aesthetic judgments.” For Delany, the dynamic tension between these four potentialities serves as a guidepost for

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the postmodern condition struggling to envision a way beyond. That *Trouble on Triton* veers more in the direction of the New Jerusalem/Junk City than other critical utopias is perhaps telling of his own judgments of the potential contours of the future, one in which human individuality of the New Jerusalem reigns as a greater influence than the ecology-oriented natural Arcadia.

But while Delany’s analysis is perhaps helpful in understanding the early 1980s emergence of cyberpunk (New Jerusalem/Junk City), the attraction of Arcadia represented in the advent of the environmental movement clearly inspired Ernest Callenbach’s 1975 novel *Ecotopia*, which offers a more conventionally “blueprint” utopian portrayal of an ideal society. Certainly the substantial influence of the New Jerusalem continues to present day; indeed, as Canavan declares, “recognition of the immense planetary scale of ecological crisis, and the shocking inadequacy of our response…[is] now the prerequisite for our collective survival. The future has gone bad; we need a new one.”

This perspective continues to grow with increasing awareness of the effects of climate change, and Lyman Tower Sargent has argued that ecotopias, as a subgenre understood as utopias concerned primarily with issues of environmental sustainability, have become the most prominent current in contemporary utopian literature.

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But alongside the growing desire for ecotopia, there has been a discernable turn towards engagement with various notions of indigneity, sometimes involving an engagement with the historical and, less often, contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples and the realities of white settler colonialism. There is often an expression of desire for indigneity on the part of white settler authors who elide the ongoing condition of white settler colonialism in the envisioning of a “return” to a land-based, ecological lifestyle. In such cases, a romanticized pre-contact notion of Indians living in harmony with the wider natural world serves as a sort of Golden Age utopia idealized by white settlers alienated by an ecocidal urban industrial modernity. Literary critics have described this trope as the “Ecological Indian” and point out that it often involves an ideological consignment of Indigenous peoples to a stereotype that simultaneously collapses that vast differences amongst Indigenous peoples and renders their contemporary presence in the world as somehow inauthentic if the stereotypes are not upheld.296

The desire for indigeneity certainly has roots in what Leo Marx described as a “middle landscape” that emerged alongside the shifts towards urbanization and industrialization in the nineteenth century. Marx analyzed literature of the nineteenth century—notably the same time period in which Rieder describes the co-emergence and consolidation of both the genre of science fiction and colonial modernity—for the ways in which it demonstrated a desire for

a space conceived as one formed within but tempering what are imagined as the extremities of European civilization and industrialism and one that is invigorated by but tames what is imagined as ‘wilderness’, providing a ‘moral position perfectly represented by the image of a rural order, neither wild nor urban as the setting of man’s best hope’.

Thus there are literally centuries of evidence of literary narratives, both those which are recognizable as sf/utopian and not, in which the effects of modernity result in expressions of desire for a re-harmonization of modern society with “nature.” As Lynn Caldwell argues in her discussion of the contemporary representation of the Canadian province of Saskatchewan, “[t]he moderate landscape is not conceived of as somehow absolutely removed from colonial modernity, but rather as having adopted its technologies in such a way that the landscape remains marked as a space of nature.” Implicit to these phenomena is the alienation of white settlers from “nature” as something both unpleasant and immoral, with the corrective being variations on the theme of “middle landscape” or what I term settler ecotopianism. In such cases, the settler desire for a “return” to “nature” assumes primacy and critical attention to the realities of colonial modernity is deferred through a variety of means. Contemporary strategies of such deferrals include invoking notions of multiculturalism or postracialism as a solution.

Callenbach’s Ecotopia, published in 1975, ought to be understood as an archetypical settler ecotopian text. In the novel, Callenbach’s fictional Ecotopians secede from the US to create an ecological society in the territory of the Pacific Northwest.

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298 Caldwell, “Unsettling the Middle Ground”, 113.
(described in the book as encompassing northern California, Oregon, and Washington), but they do so through overt appropriation of Indigenous culture and spirituality. The novel’s text is comprised of official newspaper articles composed by the protagonist, William Weston, a fictional journalist from the US sent to report on the Ecotopian way of life, and his private journal entries through which *Ecotopia’s* undeniable appropriation of Indigenous peoples becomes clear.

Many Ecotopians are sentimental about Indians, and there’s some sense in which they envy the Indians their lost natural place in the American wilderness. Indeed this is probably a major Ecotopian myth; keep hearing references to what Indians would or wouldn’t do in a given situation. Some Ecotopian articles—clothing and baskets and personal ornamentation—perhaps directly Indian in inspiration. But what matters most is the aspiration to live in balance with nature, “walk lightly on the land,” treat the earth as a mother.  

And in a later journal entry,

Mysteriously, the Ecotopians do not feel “separate” from their technology. They evidently feel a little as the Indians must have felt: that the horse and the teepee and the bow and arrow all sprang, like the human being, from the womb of nature, organically. Of course the Ecotopians work on natural materials far more extensively and complexly that the Indians worked stone into arrowpoint, or hide into teepee.

Weston’s descriptions of the Ecotopians’ incorporation of Indigenous culture are couched in nostalgic, even romanticizing terms that discursively locate Indigenous peoples in the past. The notion that actual Indigenous people would exist within the Ecotopian territory is rendered moot; they are “lost” to a bygone, foreclosed era of a “natural” relationship

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300 Ibid, 51.
with the environment. Thus the Ecotopians clearly intend to celebrate a particular conception of Indigenous peoples as something fixed, noble, and, ultimately, in the past.

Moreover, Weston also develops a romantic relationship with Marissa Brightcloud, “a self-adopted Indian-inspired name—many Ecotopians use them.”

Because actual Indigenous peoples are narratively (almost entirely) absent from the novel, and are referred to in romantic terms, the Ecotopians may become them, up to and including renaming themselves with “Indian-inspired” names. Callenbach also utilizes civilizationalist language, as in the chapter “Savagery Restored: Ecotopia’s Dark Side,” which details Ecotopia’s ritual war games. The association of “savagery” with Indigenous peoples is further evoked problematically as Weston reports on his participation in the war games, mentioning that “Somebody remarked on the warm weather, and Tom quoted the old plains Indian saying: ‘It is a good day to die.’”

Yet, aside from such repeated references to the positive influence of “Indian” culture and spirituality, the only reference to actually existing Indigenous people in the novel takes place as the narrator explains in a newspaper article that within the Ecotopian territory “Jewish, American Indian, and other minorities all contain militants who desire a greater autonomy for their peoples.” Thus, while Callenbach’s representation of Indigeneity is certainly positive—though romanticized—it must also be acknowledged as a clear and, unfortunately influential, example of settler-indigenization. Effectively,

301 Ibid, 54.
302 Ibid, 148.
303 Ibid, 164.
settler Ecotopians have adopted and become indigenous to the Ecotopian territory while the original Indigenous peoples of those lands are relegated to a passing mention in a list of minorities desiring greater autonomy within what amounts to a white supremacist settler society. Obviously, this bears a striking resemblance to the reality Indigenous peoples have experienced for more than 500 years.

However, the representation of Indigenous peoples is improved, through it remains problematic in Ecotopia’s prequel, Ecotopia Emerging.304 Published in 1981, it tells the from-here-to-there story of the succession of the Ecotopia. In Ecotopia Emerging there are two Indigenous characters who actually contribute to part of the narrative. Their inclusion in the novel is brief, spanning only three and a half pages, and their characterization is somewhat romanticized and superficial. The two “Indian” characters are John Hanley, identified as a Mohawk who “moved slowly and gave the impression of having a great deal of power inside him somewhere,” and a “hot shot young lawyer, Ramona Dukane, part Navajo, part Chickasaw.” The two are invited to speak to a meeting of the Survivalists, a group of white environmental separatists who go on to form Ecotopia.

Their dialogue represents a considerable movement from the complete absence of Indigenous characters in Ecotopia, as they offer a direct challenge to the naturalization of settler colonialism:

“some of your ideas… [sound] like Indian ideas in certain ways… I was surprised that white political people were thinking in that spiritual way. Indians are used to being called unrealistic and backward for holding to such ideas… To Indians,

every part of the creation is alive. To rip open the earth for uranium, or to destroy the salmon runs or ruin the forests is a direct hurt, from which all creatures suffer. Now there’s a scientific term for it—disrupting the biosphere. Indians have always considered this wrong. For thousands of years. We have known it in our bones, even if we had no scientific theory for it.”

Of course, this dialogue may be criticized for the ways in which it collapses “Indians” into a singular category and indirectly refers to Indigenous knowledge as unscientific. However, despite the generalization of Indigenous culture and knowledge, the two characters offer a direct challenge to readers of *Ecotopia Emerging* to reconsider the ways in which Indigenous ways of being have been denigrated for hundreds of years only to recently, in the eyes of environmentalists, appear to have held profound value.

But what’s more, Dukane and Hanley go on to further educate the Survivalists about Indigenous governance, mobilizing the example of the Haudenosaunee/Iroquois, and of the ongoing struggle for self-determination:

“It’s been established by historians that Franklin was friendly with a number of Indian leaders from the Iroquois federation. The Iroquois had a democratic federation since before Magna Carta, but the idea had never arisen in European cultures. So when Franklin and the other colonial thinkers started talking revolution and the creation of a new kind of country, they didn’t want to fall into the centralized pattern of the British monarchy, and they didn’t want to revert to the local scale of Athenian democracy—

“So federalism was an Indian idea?” interrupted Vera, astonished.

“And an Indian practice,” said Ramona. “Indians also practiced internal democracy within the tribes. Indian decision-making has always been done by consensus, including the selection of chiefs. Their powers, by the way, were very limited, and that may have given Franklin some ideas too.”

305 Callenbach, *Ecotopia Emerging*, 73.

306 Ibid, 74.
“So even though Indians have been killed and sent away to strange schools and pushed back into tiny corners of this continent, we have kept alive in our culture the sense of what it means to live in harmony with the earth, sharing it with the four-footed creatures, with the birds, with the million grasses that all bow to the same wind…”

“We have had to learn self-defense, so we can go into white courts and seek redress against broken treaties—so we can regain our independent status as nations, and build an Indian society that cannot be destroyed by white greed.”

Ultimately, these passages occupy a single scene in novel primarily concerned with the conversion of an ostensibly white settler audience to Callenbach’s vision of an ecotopia. As such, the Indigenous characters and their dialogue are largely instrumentalized, and the implications of their calls for sovereignty, respect for Indigenous knowledge and spirituality, and recognition of historical injustices effectively go unfulfilled. The inclusion of the Indigenous characters is left as an aside, a moment of critical reflection, but not one which compels the non-Indigenous characters to prioritize Indigenous decolonization of the end of settler colonialism over their own settler ecotopian desires. Even amongst the Survivalists, environmental radicals with a clear, if romanticized, respect for Indigenous ways of being in relation to the land, settler colonialism appears as inevitable; the implication appears that settler peoples ought strive to become Indigenous while the questions of Indigenous decolonization and meaningful self-determination are left unaddressed.

**From white settler ecotopianism to other-than-settler futurisms**

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*Ibid, 75.*
Callenbach’s shortcomings in *Ecotopia* are all the more glaring considering that the American Indian Movement gained substantial notoriety prior to *Ecotopia*’s publication with the occupation of Alcatraz and the Trail of Broken Treaties, in 1969 and 1972, respectively. Of course, *Ecotopia*’s success in finding a wide readership, especially amongst environmentalists and leftists, suggests the substantial appeal of settler ecotopianism is the notion of becoming Indian. That Callenbach included Indigenous characters with pointed dialogue in *Ecotopia Emerging* suggests a further evolution of his own thinking and indicates a growing awareness of the naturalization of white settler colonialism in the modern utopian tradition, albeit not necessarily a substantive critique thereof.

*The Fifth Sacred Thing*, published in 1993 by self-identified pagan witch and prominent feminist activist, Starhawk, offers similar treatment of Indigenous people, culture, and spirituality. In the novel a post-apocalyptic ecotopian community clearly influenced by Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices is portrayed in the Bay Area of California with almost no representation of actually existing Indigenous people aside from a few brief appearances of people from the “tribal lands upriver.” In a particularly problematic passage, a non-Indigenous character recalls being “delighted by the crowded streets where people seemed to be perpetually in costume: gypsies, pirates, Indians, sorceresses skipping down the sidewalks...”308 The irony of Starhawk’s multicultural (settler) ecotopia is particularly troubling as it assigns actual Indigenous peoples to a list

of costumed festival characters, thus eliminating the need to wrestle with settler colonialism and the actual contemporary lived experiences of Indigenous peoples.

The New Age sensibility of *The Fifth Sacred Thing* is an example of a wider set of such phenomena in settler society in which the desire to escape the alienation of industrial urbanized modernity for the “middle landscape” of an ecotopia is realized in part through a desire for an (romanticized) Indigenous cultural and spirituality in the absence of Indigenous political and social persistence. In such cases the desires of non-Indigenous peoples to, in effect, construct a sense of return to an idealized pre-modern state of harmony neglects the agency of contemporary Indigenous peoples in their struggles for self-determination on their terms, and it furthers the centring of non-Indigenous peoples in narratives of desirable social change in ways that are predicated upon the naturalized perpetuation of settler colonialism. As such, these narratives are fundamentally destabilized by interventions of contemporary Indigenous critical theory, literary studies, and speculative narratives, which compel an attending to the ongoing contemporary existence of Indigenous peoples that is otherwise denied in settler ecotopian narratives.

Kim Stanley Robinson is another contemporary white settler author who has come to routinely address issues of Indigeneity and colonialism in his works, albeit in ways that resist easy categorization. He edited the short story collection *Future Primitive: The New Ecotopias*, and he writes in the introduction of “rethinking the future” in ways that “invoke the wilderness, and moments of our distant past, envisioning futures that
from the viewpoint of the industrial model look ‘primitive.’” Robinson argues for a utopian narrative that draws on “aspects of the postmodern and the Paleolithic, asserting that we might for very good reasons choose to live in ways that resemble in part the ways of our ancestors and of the primitives that still inhabit corners of our planet.”

In the same sentence that he utilizes “we” to collapse his readership into something singular, he also refers problematically to actually existing Indigenous (“primitive”) others inhabiting “corners of our planet.” The implication, of course, is both an implied recognition of ongoing colonialism and of the contemporary existence of Indigenous peoples, though the latter are consigned to elsewhere, not, as is actually the case, living alongside Robinson and his apparently intended white settler readership. Several of the stories in *Future Primitive* directly evoke Indigenous culture, though the authors themselves do not appear to identify as Indigenous. There is a romanticization and what might fairly be characterized as cultural appropriation insofar as there is a continual “speaking for” and authorial inhabitation of Indigenous voice in ways that are clearly instrumentalized to suggest authority and authenticity of the narrative for the presumed-to-be-non-Indigenous reader.

While pointing out the rampant cultural appropriation and romanticization in Robinson’s *Future Primitive* is worthwhile, it also bears emphasis that at this time (the collection appeared in 1994), there were many high profile Indigenous writers, though few writing in speculative fiction genres. Cultural appropriation and romanticization

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contributes to the naturalized notion of Indigenous peoples having already vanished, thereby perhaps undercutting the potential for readers to be primed to act in solidarity with actually existing contemporaneous Indigenous peoples. There is also a potential function that serves to humanize and even valorize Indigenous peoples and their struggles such that readers might become educated, in some ways, towards a sympathy, if not solidarity, with Indigenous peoples. In a recent interview, Robinson points to honouring Indigenous peoples’ ways of being on the land as a model for the necessity of non-Indigenous peoples’ adopting a sustainable relationship with the other-than-human:

[I]ndigenous peoples… are the ones who know the land they live on the best. Their view is often restricted to the local, but we need that local knowledge, which has to be protected and kept alive. All of us should become as aware of our home ground as indigenous peoples are to theirs. This would be the necessary work of becoming native to our place, whatever it may be. Just getting outdoors and paying attention, then learning the birds, which tend to still be around no matter how thrashed the landscape, and knowing the water, the ecological footprint of our own lifestyles, and so on; these are ways of knowing we can adapt from indigenous peoples. 

Robinson’s primary concern here is a sense of future or sustainability of the human species, with notions of justice for Indigenous peoples as a means to this end. This theme of re-thinking humanity’s relationship to the other-than-human served as a basis for his acclaimed Mars trilogy, published in 1993, 1994 and 1996. These books cemented his status as perhaps the preeminent author of utopian narratives. Robinson depicts the near-future colonization and terraforming of Mars as a potential future utopian space for humanity reeling from the devastating impacts of climate change. The Mars books depict

311 Karl Hardy, ed. “‘Roundtable’” Q&A.” Puerto Del Sol 47 no. 2 (2012), 49-50.
a philosophical struggle between “Red” and “Green” factions over the terraforming of Mars that mirrored 1980s debates between deep ecologists and social ecologists regarding concepts of “biocentricism” and the ethical role of humanity in the wider natural world. Here Robinson’s narrative depicts the utopian potentialities associated with science and technological development in tension with the dystopian realities wrought by modernity characterized (by critics) as hubristic and anthropocentric.

To address social inequities, Robinson largely relies upon extrapolative technoscientific development as a means to create a new New World, a “no space” in the blank slate of Mars as a means of addressing the 500-year effects of colonialism. As critic Elizabeth Leane has pointed out,

The whole trilogy can, from one perspective, be seen as an attempt to theorize, or, more accurately, to narrativize, a postcolonial dystopia on Earth, and a postcolonial utopia on Mars; its central problematic is whether the two can exist simultaneously and interdependently. 312

While Leane acknowledges Robinson’s attempts at depicting what Sandra Harding has called a “feminist successor science,” she also draws on Denise Albanese to recognize One strategy of colonial discourse…is to naturalize the colonized, to place the colonized in the same relationship to the colonizer as the natural world is to the scientist. Thus Robinson’s emptying out of the site of colonization could be read as a literalization of this naturalizing impulse, an attempt to make the isomorphism of the colonial and scientific impulses explicit. 313


Robinson’s *Mars* trilogy and his more recent *2312* appear as thought-experiments primarily, though certainly not exclusively, in techno-scientific extrapolation, where social issues are attended to, in part through the re-instantiation of the off-planet “no space.” In contrast, the *Science in the Capital* trilogy and his stand-alone novel *The Years of Rice and Salt* are both situated on Earth, though they offer wildly differing means of speculative narratives.\(^{314}\)

*The Years of Rice and Salt* is a meditation on the provisionality of history, where Robinson speculates as to how global history might have evolved if the emergence of Christian Europe as a world imperialist power—itself perhaps substantially implicated in the establishment of colonial modernity—did not occur due to the Black Death killing almost all of Europe’s population rather than only about a third. The *Years of Rice and Salt* thus appears as a decidedly anti-colonial narrative, to the extent that the estrangement is predicated upon the absence of European colonial modernity, including the Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala (the Americas), for example, evolving apart from the this-reality experience of settler colonialism. While the thought experiment may be understood as re-centring the absent referent of the white settler (Robinson), it also represents an implicit foregrounding of colonialism, in its varied forms. Moreover, readers are compelled to an other-than-settler perspective in a narrative where white settler identity effectively does not exist in order to effect the estrangement of Robinson’s uchronia.

\(^{314}\) Kim Stanley Robinson. *2312, Blue Mars; Forty Signs of Rain; Fifty Degrees Below; Green Mars; Red Mars; Sixty Days and Counting; The Years of Rice and Salt.*
In the *Science in the Capital* trilogy, Robinson is primarily concerned with converting readers to his sense of alarm at the catastrophic effects of anthropogenic climate change. The novel revolves around the actions of several scientists, who are provoked to activism, though Robinson also creates a fictional Buddhist island nation of Khembalung, which serves both as a means of advocating for Buddhist philosophy and humanizing the effects of climate change: the island nation must be abandoned.

Robinson’s use of a fictional Buddhist island nation is reminiscent of both Huxley’s *Island* and James Hilton’s classic *Lost Horizon* in suggesting the neo-colonial effects of climate change. The interrelationship between Robinson’s primary focus on climate change and social justice frames his own outlook on the contemporary relevance of utopia:

I feel like the utopian impulse is expressed now less in literature than in activities like architecture, urban design, the human sciences, new technologies, open source work in computers and other technologies, and in the various progressive political movements struggling for justice... there has come a shift in thinking about utopia, that moves it from a literary genre to civilization’s survival strategy. We are now a global civilization, and we have to create a way to live on Earth over the long haul. We don’t have that yet, so utopia now names a kind of vision that we synthesize out of all the other parts of our efforts to improve our situation... I am convinced that social justice is a climate change technology, and when we talk about our responses to climate change, we need to make sure that we always include the social with the more mechanical, and regard both as “technologies.”

It is the truly global character of the climate crisis, for Robinson, which frames the context of contemporary social justice struggles. In this view, the particular struggles of oppressed communities are themselves integral to prevailing concern about the

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315 Hardy, “‘Roundtable’ Q & A”, 46.
sustainability of human societies on the planet. This to say that Robinson holds that “It’s become a case of utopia or catastrophe,” such that ongoing social injustices must be addressed in order that the enormous complexities associated with climate change can be meaningfully addressed.

While Callenbach’s Ecotopia and Starhawk’s The Fifth Sacred Thing are clearly examples of appropriative white settler ecotopianism, and Robinson’s multiple approaches to issues of colonialism and indigneity have attracted a popular audience, Ursula Le Guin’s Always Coming Home has received greater critical acclaim for its adventurous form—involving anthropological reports, poetry, song, a glossary of created language and concepts, alongside a more conventional, if de-emphasized, narrative.\textsuperscript{316} While Always Coming Home is, in some ways, a path-breaking book, it may also be read as a utopian narrative realized by the ultimate fulfillment of settler-indigenization. In this envisioned future, the fictional Kesh people have apparently evolved Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices in what is now California. Interestingly, Le Guin’s father was the anthropologist, Alfred Kroebel, who published a 995 page Handbook of the Indians of California. Kenneth Roemer acknowledges

On the one hand, it is clear that both of them wanted to give voice—at great length and great verbal and visual detail—to cultures that had something of great value to say to “mainstream” American culture but who were silenced. And yet to “preserve” (anthropological voice) or “express” (literary voice) the truths of great value that they learned from descendants of California tribes or from books about them, both father and daughter had to participate in the centuries old drama of “speaking for the Other.”\textsuperscript{317}


\textsuperscript{317} Roemer, Utopian Audiences, 57.
Le Guin’s taking up of issues of colonialism and indigeneity in her work may be seen as the product of what Roemer describes as “constructive guilt” in his monograph *Utopian Audiences*, a study of the readership of utopian literature. Roemer argues, as do many scholars of utopian literature, that readers of utopias are invited to experience a form of cognitive and affective estrangement from their own realities and to become fellow travelers in the conversion dramas that routinely mark utopian narratives. This involves authors of utopian literature “inviting readers to construct particular meanings by presenting them with networks of characters, episodes, settings, and other signs that, because of their readers’ preparation, will direct them toward anticipated intellectual, emotional, and in the case of utopian fiction, behavioral responses.”318

Le Guin articulates her own reflections on utopia and its historical characterization as what she describes as “euclidean… European… masculine” in her essay “A Non-Euclidean View of California”319 In arguing for its re-consideration she draws on a variety of cultural referents, ranging from a Cree concept of “thinking like a porcupine,” to Lao-Tzu’s Taoist notion of the Way, to a late scholar of utopia’s notion that Huxley’s *Island* made utopia “thinkable again.”320 In her meditation, Le Guin is therefore clear in rejecting the trajectories of European colonial modernity as a basis for the utopian project and looks outward for sources of non-Western inspiration towards its


reconsideration. Ultimately, she remains hopeful, though it is a tempered hope, and one that she resists articulating in definitive terms:

I don’t think we’re ever going to get to utopia again by going forward, but only roundabout or sideways… We have got ourselves into a really bad mess and have got to get out; and we have to be sure that it’s the other side we get out to; and when we do get out, we shall be changed. I have no idea who we will be or what it may be like on the other side, though I believe there are people there. They have always lived there. It’s home.

Le Guin’s own evocation of a sense of “home” recalls Ernst Bloch’s similar articulation, a common desire for peoples of European heritage themselves displaced culturally and geographically by colonial modernity. Thus, while Le Guin’s Always Coming Home may be critiqued as, in some ways, a narrative fulfillment of settler colonialism, it may also be read sympathetically in light of her clear recognition of colonialism in her non-fiction, as well as the anti-colonial focus of both The Word for World is Forest and The Telling. In those novels, the central conceit involves an exogenous colonizing force and a local, Indigenous resistance, paralleling real world experiences.

Ultimately, the development of settler ecotopian narratives, which address the experiences and concerns of Indigenous peoples in wildly varying ways, may be evaluated for the degree to which such narratives effect the intended responses in their respective audiences. While Veracini has argued “[t]here is still no intuitive/acceptable narrative of settler colonial decolonisation, and/or Indigenous/national reconciliation,” the contemporary predominance of settler ecotopianism in sf/utopian literatures, and the

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ongoing troubling of linear notions of human progress and development associated with colonial modernity by white settler authors suggests, in fact, there is an ongoing experimentation and dialogue regarding these very issues. I argue this is indicative, to varying degrees, of the sort of processual critical self-reflexivity championed by Levitas and, therefore, reveals the evolutionary and provisional character of contemporary sf/utopian narratives.

Of course, there remains an ongoing need for accountability to critiques of settler colonialism, white supremacy, as well as the decolonizing efforts of Indigenous peoples and their allies. This represents a challenge to, as Daniel Heath Justice says, “imagine otherwise”: to envision an unsettled society. To be sure, this provokes difficult questions regarding the appropriateness of settler authors’ representations of Indigenous peoples, settler colonialism, and decolonization. That is, what might be called “unsettling narratives” necessarily requires a fraught dialog between Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers and the wider social-ecological context.

The succeeding chapter addresses the interventions of Indigenous and racialized non-Native peoples into the arenas of sf/utopian narratives, and offers a discussion of the way these narratives are being evaluated by Indigenous literary critics as contributions to ongoing efforts at Indigenous decolonization.
Chapter 6
Indigenous Futurisms:
Transcending Utopia

In response to a variety of social and ecological developments, white settler authors of sf/utopian narratives have increasingly demonstrated critical awareness, albeit to widely varying degrees, of the constituent role of white settler colonialism in their experience of the contemporary dystopian present. White settler desires for an ecotopian future have resulted in a gradual yet momentous shift in the characterizations of Indigenous peoples in sf/utopian narratives. Indigenous peoples have gone from being depicted as innocent childlike primitives or backward bloodthirsty savages to noble disappearing Indians to the objects of contemporary desire. In effect, the Ecological Indian has emerged as a utopian horizon, as an envisioned way out of an alienating dystopian present and an even more foreboding future.

But both Indigenous and racialized non-Native peoples, who occupy a complex position within the white settler colonial societies of Canada and the US, have found increasing agency in their interventions in the dialogue of utopian/sf narratives. For example, two literary anthologies, *So Long Been Dreaming: Post-colonial Science Fiction and Fantasy* was published in 2004, and *Walking the Clouds* appeared in 2013, billed as the first-ever anthology of Indigenous science fiction. Moreover, Afrofuturism has recently emerged as a prominent constellation of both cultural

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productions and scholarly inquiry, and the category of “magical realism” is perhaps most often associated with Latina/o authors. Asian writers’ interventions into sf/utopian narratives are also drawing both popular and critical attention. Certainly, the interventions of Indigenous and racialized non-Natives, in combination with the challenges of emergent artistic production, scholarship, and social movements, have done much to affect the aforementioned shifts in the utopian/sf narratives of white settlers.

Indigenous and racialized non-Native authors have drawn from their own experiences of colonial modernity to create narratives that utilize elements of the conventions of normatively white-dominated science fiction, fantasy, or speculative fiction genres as a means of expressing their experiences of the past and present, and, in some cases, to imagine decolonial or noncolonial futurisms. By “decolonial” I am referring to envisionings of decolonization, as active movements or processes that involve shifts in the character of both individual lives and societal institutions away from those that are substantially dominated (or at least inflected) by white settler colonialism and towards meaningful revitalization and self-determination. This includes, but is not limited to, notions of Indigenous “resurgence” articulated Taiaiake Alfred, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Glen Coulthard. By “noncolonial” I intend to mean those depictions of Indigenous peoples which are not concerned with processes or movements for decolonization but which portray aspects of Indigenous culture or ways of being that are substantially unaffected by an experience of colonialism. In both decolonial and

323 See, for example, Jessica Langer. *Postcolonialism and science fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

324 See, for example, Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*. 209
noncolonial futurisms there remains a question as to whether these acts of “social
dreaming” are commensurable with the utopian tradition, particularly the modern utopian
tradition that is interrelated with the advent and perpetuation of white settler colonialism.

Of course, within these categories there are many additional differences of social
location and circumstance that only add further complexity to contemporary utopian/sf
narratives. That is, I wish to signal my recognition of the limitations of utilizing a
strategic categorization of authors of utopian/sf narratives into categories of
“Indigenous,” “racialized non-Native,” and “white settler” insofar as these categories
may obscure and reduce vital concerns regarding (dis)ability, age, class, gender,
geographic location, religion or spiritual orientation, sexuality, and many other important
considerations, up to and including considerations of Indigeneity, race, and nation
themselves.

However, for the purposes of this study, I am addressing these three primary
categories as a means of foregrounding the tripartite order (Indigenous, racialized non-
Native, white settler) of Canada and the US. I view this contribution as an initial foray
into under-studied intersections of utopian/sf narratives with Indigenous studies, settler
colonial studies, and both science fiction and utopian studies.

Such narratives are reflective of a variety of tensions given the historical emergence
of utopia and science fiction with (settler) colonial modernity, including a fundamental
question of whether and to what degree utopian/sf narratives are reconcilable with
decolonial futures. One aspect of this was addressed directly by Nalo Hopkinson in her
introductory essay for So Long Been Dreaming:
Arguably, one of the most familiar memes of science fiction is that of going to foreign countries and colonizing the natives, and… for many of us, that’s not a thrilling adventure story; it’s non-fiction, and we are on the wrong side of the strange-looking ship that appears out of nowhere. To be a person of colour writing science fiction is to be under suspicion of having internalized one’s colonization.\(^{325}\)

This points, in part, to a longstanding and multifaceted debate regarding the efficacy of using the cultural conventions or “tools” of the colonizer in the work of decolonization. Hopkinson, who identifies as being of Taino/Arawak and Afro-Carribean descent, thus gives voice to this dilemma, and provides her own conclusion, declaring, “In my hands, massa’s tools don’t dismantle massa’s house—and in fact, I don’t want to destroy it so much as I want to undertake massive renovations—then build me a house of my own.”\(^{326}\)

A related concern also features in Grace L. Dillon’s introduction to Walking the Clouds, as she refers to Drew Hayden Taylor’s play alterNatives, in which the character Angel—a Native science fiction writer who expresses admiration for Arthur C. Clarke, William Gibson, and Ursula K. Le Guin—resists the pressure of writing “the great Canadian aboriginal novel.”

“Unless there’s a race requirement,” he [Angel] jests, “I like the concept of having no boundaries, of being able to create and develop any character, any environment or setting I want….do it my way, by becoming a financially comfortable writer of sci-fi who happens to be aboriginal.”\(^{327}\)

Dillon (Anishinaabe) further maintains that Angel’s character is reflective of the assertion that “[science fiction] provides an equally valid way to renew, recover, and extend First


\(^{326}\) Hopkinson, “Introduction”, 8.

\(^{327}\) Dillon, Walking the Clouds, 1.
Nations peoples’ voices and traditions,” which, in turn, provokes questions about the fluidity of the genre of science fiction itself and “[whether science fiction has] the capacity to envision Native futures, Indigenous hopes, and dreams recovered by rethinking the past in a new framework.”

In the above-cited examples, framed as postcolonial and Indigenous science fiction, respectively, the possibilities of sf/utopian narratives are embraced as a means of expression for a variety of possible ends. The question of social location is one of many possible considerations for critical analyses, as authors of differing perspectives are differently motivated in adopting, aligning, co-opting, resisting, and otherwise constructing some association with the conventions of sf/utopian narratives. Critical attention to Indigenous sf/utopian narratives is only just emerging, with studies of racialized non-Natives and what is sometimes constructed as postcolonial sf/utopian narratives having received relatively more attention to date. However, it is certainly the case that scholarly attention has historically been overwhelmingly focused on what has been a white and cis-male dominated field. Historically, white critics writing about white authors have dominated both science fiction and utopian studies, though there are certainly signs this is changing.

However, one of the consequences of this historical reality is a predisposition to subsume Indigenous sf/utopian narratives under the “postcolonial” heading, and to situate critical attention to these narratives within the sprawling scholarly literature known as postcolonial studies. Of course, this is entirely consistent with the wider societal tendency

\[328\text{ Ibid, 1-2.}\]
to naturalize white settler colonialism as something already completed or reconciled, and
to render contemporary Indigenous peoples either somehow inauthentic or already
disappeared. It follows that, because Indigenous authors of science fiction are only
recently receiving scholarly attention, there has been relatively little work done towards
establishing a framework for applying critical considerations of white settler colonialism
or Indigenous decolonization in sf/utopian studies. The consequence has been to subsume
considerations of Indigenous peoples or studies of Indigenous authors of sf/utopian
narratives to recognizable postcolonial discourse. The point is that “postcolonial” may
discursively position Indigenous peoples’ anticolonial struggles in the past tense, or
otherwise redirects Indigenous peoples’ demands for collective rights and self-
determination within the existing framework of the settler nation-state. Thus, scholarly
work in sf/utopian studies that addresses Indigenous peoples through “postcolonial” may
neglect some fundamental ongoing concerns and experiences of Indigenous peoples.

However, the editors of *So Long Been Dreaming* include several Indigenous-
identified authors for a collection described as “postcolonial science fiction and fantasy.”
Dillon’s use of the term in *Walking the Clouds* is much more circumspect; when she
utilizes the term it appears as “(post)colonial.” Of course, there is an enormous scholarly
literature addressing debates surrounding the applicability of “postcolonial” language and
discourse to the contemporary circumstances of all peoples who have experienced
colonialism in its many forms. These debates are largely an adjunct to the present study,
except for the important argument of many Indigenous peoples that the language and
discourse of “postcolonial” may be an inappropriate characterization for Indigenous
peoples, and the need for differentiated spaces and approaches to the concerns and experiences of Indigenous peoples. That is, there has been a significant shift in the profile of Indigenous peoples’ concerns in artistic, academic, and social movement communities during the ensuing period after the publication of *So Long Been Dreaming*.

Thomas King (Cherokee) composed a relatively early and unambiguous rejection of “postcolonial” in his seminal 1990 essay “Godzilla vs. the post-colonial.” While King was writing broadly about Native literature, his arguments are certainly applicable to the specificities associated with genre writing, and sf/utopian narratives by Indigenous authors, in particular.

While post-colonialism purports to be a method by which we can begin to look at those literatures which are formed out of the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor, the colonized and the colonizer, the term itself assumes that the starting point for that discussion is the advent of Europeans in North America. At the same time, the term organizes the literature progressively suggesting that there is both progress and improvement. No less distressing, it also assumes that the struggle between guardian and ward is the catalyst for contemporary Native literature, providing those of us who write with method and topic. And, worst of all, the idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question, traditions which have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization, and it supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression…I cannot let post-colonial stand—particularly as a term—for, at its heart, it is an act of imagination and an act of imperialism that demands that I imagine myself as something I did not choose to be, as something I would not choose to become.330

King’s essay may now be situated as part of a substantial body of Indigenous-identified critical attention to Indigenous literatures, or Indigenous literary studies, which are clearly differentiated from approaches to “postcolonial” and instead concerned with the


330 King, “Godzilla vs the postcolonial”, 11-12.
specificities associated with Indigenous experiences marked by the ongoing condition of settler colonialism. The intentional or unintentional assimilation of the concerns and experiences of Indigenous peoples under the rubric of postcolonial theory or studies is also a primary concern for Jodi Byrd’s *The Transit of Empire*, in which she argues that an endless deferral of Indigenous peoples’ concerns serves as a transit, that is, as an unacknowledged referent or instrumentalized basis for postcolonial studies. Moreover, there is a growing use of the language and discourse of “settler colonialism” in reference to the experiences of Indigenous peoples to differentiate from mercantile colonialism.

I do not intend to belabor this point; however, it is important to emphasize this as part of considerations of the sf/utopian writing that emerges from the white settler societies of Canada and the US. These are not postcolonial societies, but rather societies that continue to be conditioned by white supremacy and settler colonialism. The speculative fiction and narrative imaginary reconstitutions of society created in these contexts are necessarily implicated in wider societal narratives, which serve to sustain the naturalness of settler colonialism. Indigenous peoples, racialized non-Native peoples, and white settler writers are differently located and motivated (consciously or not) to interrupt or perpetuate an ongoing settler colonial reality. The negotiation of post (settler) colonial language and discourse is, therefore, a fundamental scholarly concern.

As I have discussed in chapter 3, the question of “non-Western” and postcolonial utopianism has emerged as relatively recent point of interest in utopian studies, with only a few contributions to an emerging scholarly literature. Within the wider field of science fiction studies there have been monographs, notably authored by non-Indigenous
scholars, dedicated to literary criticism at the intersections of Marxism and science fiction as well as ecology and science fiction, which have engaged, albeit almost entirely indirectly, with the intersections of science fiction and colonialism.\textsuperscript{331} The most substantial critical attention has come from Ralph Pordzik’s \textit{The Quest for the Postcolonial Utopia} (2001), John Rieder’s \textit{Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction} (2008), Jessica Langer’s \textit{Postcolonialism and Science Fiction} (2011), and Eric D. Smith’s \textit{Globalization, Utopia, and Postcolonial Science Fiction} (2012).\textsuperscript{332}

To recap my earlier discussion, Pordzik offers some mention of the unique location of Indigenous peoples, albeit in a move to discursively consign them within his rubric of the “postcolonial utopia.” Rieder’s study is primarily concerned with the nineteenth century consolidation of the genre of science fiction as co-constitutive with colonial modernity as a global phenomenon. Smith omits direct mention of Indigenous peoples and ongoing settler colonialism altogether, even as he offers a chapter primarily focused on Nalo Hopkinson’s \textit{Midnight Robber}, an excerpt of which is collected in Dillon’s \textit{Walking the Clouds} anthology of Indigenous science fiction. Moreover, Dillon authored a 2008 article explicitly analyzing \textit{Midnight Robber} as a text characterized by advancing what she terms “Indigenous scientific literacies.”\textsuperscript{333} As such, it appears that Smith obscures the Indigenous component of Hopkinson’s identity, and the relationship


of Indigeneity to *Midnight Robber* in privileging a notion of her identity and work as solely “postcolonial.”

Langer’s *Postcolonialism and science fiction* provides perhaps the most explicit engagement with the problematics associated with Indigenous sf narratives and postcolonial discourse. As part of her discussion, Langer quotes the literary critic Curtis Marez, who argues “science fiction imaginatively removes Indian people from speculation about the future. Along with other imperialist discourses, it suggests that there is no future in being Indian.”

Situating herself as a Canadian literary critic, Langer devotes substantial attention to the specificities of the Canadian circumstance, as what she describes as a “breakaway settler state” that “is in many ways neither post-settler nor postcolonial.” She further argues “Indigenous peoples in settler states, including First Nations peoples in Canada, are in a sense more disadvantaged than any other colonized group.” However, absent an existing alternative framework to critically engage the particularities of sf narratives authored by Indigenous and racialized non-Native peoples in settler colonial circumstances, Langer ultimately relies upon postcolonial language and discourse. Opting for a generously expansive approach to “postcolonial sf,” she maintains:

> Science fiction within a postcolonial idiom, however, presents a different critique of Western scientific developments: instead of criticizing the extent to which it is allowed to eclipse all other values, postcolonial SF questions the system itself,

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335 Ibid, 39.

336 Ibid, 40.
and explores specifically its deleterious effects on societies and cultures whose own worldviews are built on a different basis entirely.\footnote{Ibid, 131-132.}

The implications of Langer’s approach to postcolonial sf appear to include recognition of the degree to which established sf/utopian narratives are implicated in the “system” of ongoing settler colonialism. In proceeding this far into an analysis of the co-reliance of sf and settler colonialism, Langer refers to Dillon’s work, whose writings represent the most direct engagement with what Dillon herself has termed “Indigenous Futurisms” and “Indigenous Science Fiction” to date. Indigenous scholars such as Jodi Byrd and Daniel Heath Justice have also addressed similar themes, though as yet this remains a still-nascent field of scholarly inquiry.

As such, discussions of Indigenous sf/utopian narratives, to the degree that they have been addressed at all, have indeed been held under the aegis of “postcolonial” studies. In fact, there are moments in Dillon’s journal articles prior to the publication of \textit{Walking the Clouds} where she relates Indigenous sf to postcolonial discourse. However, recent work by Byrd and \textit{Walking the Clouds} clearly represents initial work in developing an Indigenous-centred means of analyzing Indigenous sf narratives inflected by the condition of settler colonialism.

**Dillon & Byrd: Locating Indigenous SF**

Byrd’s contribution (entitled “Red Dead Conventions: American Indian Transgeneric Fictions”) to the \textit{Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literatures}...
(2014) represents the most sustained engagement with Indigenous sf in this substantial volume. In this piece, Byrd argues that existing genre distinctions “coloniz[e] texts” through establishing conventions to facilitate readily commodifiable categorization, which necessarily operates to “produce its own others.”\footnote{Jodi A. Byrd. “Red Dead Conventions: American Indian Transgenre Fictions” in \textit{Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literatures}. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 345.} The fact that Indigenous peoples have been and most often continue to be “on the threshold of past doneness, always the signifying precipice of dead to the future”\footnote{Byrd, “Red Dead Conventions”, 348.} means that their contributions to genre fiction, including science fiction and fantasy, appear as “others” that disrupt these established conventions. That is, science fiction and fantasy are, as elements of the mass culture of settler colonial societies, “imbricated in colonialism, empire, and racialization.”\footnote{Ibid, 353.} Because of the disappearing Indian trope, Indigenous genre narratives therefore

…test the limits of genre’s laws and transgress the boundaries of taxonomy, [producing what] might be understood as transgenres, texts that experiment, refuse categorization, and that genre-bend narrative fiction into poetry, traditional stories into science fiction, fantasy into the historical, and horror into the epistolary. After all, genre is socially constituted, produced at the site of interpretation, and is a system of identification. And popular genre says as much about the cultural moment that produces it as it does about definitions.\footnote{Ibid, 347.}

In asserting their presence through sf narratives, Indigenous authors are, according to Byrd, re-shaping the genres of science fiction, fantasy, or speculative fiction themselves through “transgenre” writing that incorporates specifically Indigenous cultural themes

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotetext{339}{Byrd, “Red Dead Conventions”, 348.}
\footnotetext{340}{Ibid, 353.}
\footnotetext{341}{Ibid, 347.}
\end{footnotesize}
and frameworks that challenge existing conventions. For Byrd, this functions “to disrupt and resist the narrative strategies of colonial imaginings by transforming the modes of interpretation and revealing the structures of dominance by turning conventions against affiliations.” What Byrd refers to as Indigenous “transgenre” narratives therefore operates to reveal the often-unacknowledged ideological content of white settler sf conventions. The implications of Byrd’s argument include a re-evaluation of existing sf narratives through a critical Indigenous lens, similar to Rieder’s approach to situate the co-emergence of sf and colonial modernity.

But what’s more, Byrd points toward an experimental horizon that affects and is affected by the “current cultural moment.” That is, the combination of contemporary (white settler ecotopian) desires for a re-harmonized relationship to the natural world and the ascendency of a global Indigenous peoples movement as demonstrated by, for example, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, herald the creation of new spaces and narrative forms for new imaginings. Of course, the current cultural moment is characterized by multiple factors beyond those mentioned, but, nonetheless, there are clear signs of recognition of the specificities of Indigenous peoples’ concerns and experiences, and of their unique approaches to speculative narratives, including those that explicitly imagine the reconstitution of society.

The growing recognition of Indigenous sf is evidenced, in part, by Dillon’s contribution of a piece on Indigenous science fiction to a recent symposium on “Science

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342 Ibid, 346.
Fiction and Globalization” in the journal *Science Fiction Studies*.\(^{343}\) She takes this opportunity to argue that Indigenous science fiction is not itself new, arguing that, for example, Gerald Vizenor’s coining of the term “slipstream” substantially predates its conventional attribution to a non-Indigenous writer. Essentially, Dillon holds that contemporary recognition of Indigenous sf hinges on a shift away from the simplistic and reductive categorization of all Native writing only as “Native literature” such that, for example, Vizenor is widely recognized as a Native writer, but not necessarily as an author of sf.

Dillon’s assertion of Indigenous presence in the field of science fiction seeks to highlight the potential synergistic relationships between sf theory and Native intellectualism and between what she terms Indigenous scientific literacy and western techno-cultural science. She also is concerned with the implications of “Skin thinking,” a concept utilized by Joy Harjo and Robert Warrior to describe Indigenous writers explicitly creating work that is reflective of self-consciousness of their Indigenous identities.\(^{344}\) This includes the foregrounding of Indigenous nationhood insofar as Indigenous sf writers draw from their respective nation’s historical experiences, as well as the specific traditional cultural knowledges and practices that distinguish Indigenous nations from one another, and from the wider white settler society.

Dillon’s own approach to literary analysis is reflective of her Anishinaabe identity, as she refers to Anishinaabe elder and writer Basil Johnson’s use of *w’dab-a-


\(^{344}\) Dillon, *Walking the Clouds*, 2.
wae, which she translates as a “telling of the truth.” She uses w’dæb-a-wae to describe the challenges that Indigenous writers’ interventions bring to bear on mainstream (i.e. white settler) sf narratives. As she notes, many of the tropes of mainstream sf for example, those of alien invasions and post-apocalyptic scenarios have dramatically different implications for Indigenous peoples. In many ways, Indigenous peoples have served as an often-unrecognized referent in such narratives. That is, Dillon’s application of w’dæb-a-wae appears similar to Byrd’s arguments regarding Indigenous writers’ “transgenre” writing and its critical implications for re-thinking the history of sf.

Moreover, Dillon highlights what she terms Indigenous Scientific Literacies, as a theme in Indigenous sf that draws upon traditional Indigenous knowledges, which have historically been denigrated or unacknowledged by mainstream scientific communities (read: Western/white settler scientific communities), to affect the fabulation characteristic of sf narratives. Dillon explains her distinction:

In contrast to the accelerating effect of techno-driven western scientific method, Indigenous scientific literacies represent practices used by Indigenous peoples over thousands of years to reenergize the natural environment while improving the interconnected relationships among all persons (animal, human, spirit, and even machine.) … Since Indigenous scientific literacies historically are shaped by the diverse natural environments of the groups that use them, no single set of practices summarizes the possibilities.345

Again, the specificities of distinct Indigenous nations, and their respective histories and locales are explicitly understood as a continual and unbroken, yet dynamic basis for knowledges and practices that Indigenous writers draw from to create Indigenous sf stories. Dillon further looks to another Anishinaabemowin concept to aid her discussion

345 Dillon, Walking the Clouds, 7-8.
of Indigenous scientific literacies, arguing that “the word *gikendaasowin* begins to measure the prevalence and depth of scientific discourse. It is botanical knowledge, knowledge of the land, but it is also knowledge itself, teachings and ways of living.”

Indigenous scientific literacies, per Dillon, are therefore reflective of, generally speaking, the distinctive epistemologies and ontologies of Indigenous peoples.

In addition to the notion of Indigenous sf as being animated by references to nation-specific Indigenous scientific literacies, Dillon also highlights what she terms Native Slipstream,

> a species of speculative fiction within the sf realm, [that] infuses stories with time travel, alternate realities and multiverses, and alternative histories. As its name implies, Native slipstream views time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream. It thus replicates nonlinear thinking about space-time.

Here again Dillon is arguing that culturally-distinctive epistemological and ontological approaches to space-time depart from the conventions of linear time, progress, and development that characterize much of mainstream sf. In doing so, Native Slipstream, of which Dillon suggests Gerald Vizenor’s “Custer on the Slipstream” is a founding archetype, confounds the general appeal to extrapolation of techno-science of much of mainstream sf. Importantly, Dillon emphasizes that Native Slipstream “is intended to describe writing that does not simply seem avant-garde but models a cultural experience of reality…slipstream also appeals because it allows authors to recover the Native space

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346 Ibid, 8.

347 Ibid, 3.
of the past, to bring it to the attention of contemporary readers, and to build better futures.\textsuperscript{348}

Ultimately, Dillon is unambiguous in maintaining that Indigenous sf texts ought to be recognized as assertions of contemporary Indigenous presence and as examples of Vizenor’s concept of “survivance.” Once again, Dillon turns to an Anishinaabe concept, \textit{biskaabiiyang}, to relate what she calls “Indigenous Futurisms” to wider struggles for Indigenous decolonization. She writes,

It might go without saying that all forms of Indigenous futurisms are narratives of \textit{biskaabiiyang}, an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of “returning to ourselves,” which involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world. This process is often called “decolonization,” and as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori) explains, it requires \textit{changing} rather than \textit{imitating} Eurowestern concepts. \textit{Walking the Clouds} confronts the structures of racism and colonialism and sf’s own complicity in them. Authors who experiment with Indigenous futurisms can create “ethnoscapes” in the manner that Isiah Lavender has suggested: estranged worlds of the future in which the writer can “formulate an imaginary environment so as to foreground the intersection of race, technology and power,” or sometimes, more to the point for the stories here, the intersection of Indigenous nations with other sovereignties, race, technology, and power.\textsuperscript{349}

Dillon is therefore explicitly conjoining Indigenous sf with Indigenous nationhood, and also with notions of dynamism and adaptation of Indigenous culture, as part of processes of “returning to ourselves.” Her reference to Linda Tuhiwai Smith is reminiscent of Nalo Hopkinson’s remarks in introducing \textit{So Long Been Dreaming} insofar as Indigenous peoples may utilize aspects of the colonizer’s tools both in efforts to dismantle the

\textsuperscript{348} Ibid, 4.

\textsuperscript{349} Ibid, 11.
condition of white settler colonialism and to heal and renew themselves through creative innovations including Indigenous Futurisms.

It is also telling that Dillon maintains that “decolonization should be recognized as at least tangential to (post)colonial sf literature as whole, and central to Indigenous futurisms as a path to biskaabiiyang.”\(^{350}\) As such, she is at once distinguishing Indigenous sf, but also marking a clear affinity with what she refers to as “(post)colonial sf literature.” She is insistent upon Indigenous sf being recognized on its own terms, apart from the meta-categories of postcolonial or Native literature, declaring in the pages of *Science Fiction Studies* that “Indigenous sf will declare itself sf rather than acquiescing to categorization as ‘Native literature’.”\(^{351}\)

Dillon’s scholarship represents an Indigenous approach to doing literary studies of Indigenous sf. Her approach draws on Anishnaabe concepts, including w’-daeb-a-ware and biskaabiiyang, and her work also highlights another concept, that of miinidiwag:

> When viewed as tales of survivance, however, Native authored sf extends the miinidiwag tradition of ironic Native giveaway, of storytelling that challenges readers to recognize their positions with regard to the diasporic condition of contemporary Native peoples.\(^{352}\)

For non-Indigenous scholars, especially white settler scholars such as myself, this offers a challenge to critical self-reflexivity as readers. That is, it suggests that Indigenous sf implicates readers in entering into a responsible relationship with Indigenous peoples by offering entertaining stories that simultaneously affect readers’ consciousness of

\(^{350}\) Ibid, 11.


Indigenous peoples’ concerns and experiences. I am therefore compelled to proceed mindfully when analyzing Indigenous sf in accordance with my recognition of the complex dynamics involved in pursuing such scholarship. At the same time, the experimentations of transgenre narrative offer an emergent and rich field for critical reflection for peoples of all social locations. The following discussion therefore seeks to offer a contribution to this nascent discussion of existing Indigenous sf and its relationships to anti and postcolonialism, as well as a variety of other concerns of justice and sustainability. I endeavor to highlight discernable themes and trends in these narratives which propose Indigenous Futurisms, recognizing the limitations in such a survey given the relatively embryonic status of Indigenous sf and related criticism. The challenge such narratives pose to the utopian/sf tradition in general, and of white settler peoples in particular, is one that points towards emergent transgenre experimentation and the creation of new horizons of hope.

**Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead***

While there are certainly earlier examples of Indigenous sf, I begin my discussion with *Almanac of the Dead*, Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko’s epic 1991 novel. Silko drew tremendous critical and popular attention following the success of her earlier novel *Ceremony*, which is recognized as an integral work of the so-called Native American Literary Renaissance. *Almanac of the Dead*’s ambitious scope and

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353 Leslie Marmon Silko. *Almanac of the Dead*. (New York: Penguin, 1992). In particular, Dillon has argued that some of Vizenor’s fiction, in his *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*, ought be recognized as Indigenous sf.
experimentation therefore reflects a creative license that was arguably unavailable to other Native writers. The sprawling novel appears as something of a critical dystopia, a term utilized by utopian studies scholars to describe dystopian narratives that incorporate moments of resistance and hope amidst a general warning at the trajectories of contemporary society.

The narrative details the dysfunction and violence of white settler society, building towards what might be called the utopian fulfillment of a prophetic reclamation of Indigenous lands. Silko framed the dystopian/utopian narrative from an explicitly Indigenous perspective, spurring readers to reflect critically on the historical and contemporary experience of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island. Critic William H. Katerberg specifically addressed this dynamic, arguing that

*Almanac...* is dystopian (in envisioning the collapse of European American civilization), utopian (dreaming of a future in which Native ways and peoples are restored to prominence in the Americas), and traditional (viewing spirits from the past and ancient prophecies, ways of life, and ideals as the basis of this future.)

The novel is therefore recognized as a challenging work, not only for its breadth—it spans more than 750 pages—but also for its themes that compel non-Indigenous readers to confront a revolutionary Indigenous perspective towards contemporary white settler society. Indeed, Katerberg explains that *Almanac* “baffled and offended many readers” because

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to assert the political relevance of Native prophecies, depict armed Indians planning an insurrection... and posit a return by Indians to their homes and to political hegemony was to go beyond the liberal pale.\textsuperscript{355}

The story follows many sets of characters, including twin Yaqui sisters Lecha and Zeta, who are the keepers of the Mayan codex, fragments of an almanac that details the history of Indigenous peoples of the Americas, and includes a prophesy of the resurgence of Indigenous peoples and the reclamation of their traditional lands. \textit{Almanac} also addresses notions of a pan-Indigenous movement, the relative attractions of Marxism, a generally approving view of radical environmentalism, and a clear skepticism about New Age spiritualism, in particular. Ultimately, Silko weaves together a plot that implicates capitalism and white settler colonialism in the subjugation of Indigenous peoples and the destruction of the other-than-human world.

Silko presents readers with the concern that Indigenous revival is not only a matter of justice for Indigenous peoples, but, as Dillon argues, “a matter of planetary survival.”\textsuperscript{356} In pursuing this, \textit{Almanac} presents a grim picture of drug-fueled decadence and violence alongside racial tensions, which evokes an apocalyptic sense of impending societal collapse—and impending Indigenous resurgence. In an interview, Silko acknowledged such intentions:

> It’s like, read this and be horrified, and then don’t let it be this scenario—let it be the other scenario, where just through birth-rate and immigration the tide is changing. You can’t stop it. The United States is never going to be, it never has been, what they said. We’ve always had the Third World here, always.\textsuperscript{357}

\textsuperscript{355} Katerberg, \textit{Future States}, 87.

\textsuperscript{356} Dillon, \textit{Walking the Clouds}, 217.

\textsuperscript{357} Quoted in Katerberg, 86.
Taken in the context of its 1991 publication, amidst the seeming total triumph of Western capitalism and the advent of neoliberal globalization, *Almanac’s* attempt at re-framing the history of the Americas through Indigenous peoples’ experiences was especially radical, as Katerberg notes, as it overtly rejected a “kinder, gentler” incorporation of Native histories into the wider narratives of settler societies.\(^{358}\)

Indeed, Silko’s literary intervention destabilizes the utopian literary tradition of settler societies, insofar as her stated goal was to show that the history of settler societies of the Americas was undeniably violent and ultimately unsustainable. As such, her novel works as a scathing polemic that reveals “the very traditions and utopian dreams that might inspire hope in Native readers signify a threat to the hegemony and way of life of white Americans.”\(^{359}\) In doing so, it indeed went “beyond the liberal pale” to, crucially, implicate ostensibly sympathetic non-Indigenous readers, resulting in a mixed critical and popular reception. Silko anticipated the “hysteria” from some readers but appears generally unconcerned, explaining that *Almanac* was affirmed by its intended audience: “In the Native American community people love this book; it gives them hope.”\(^{360}\)

Katerberg’s analysis of *Almanac* further situates it as a challenge to “modern life,” as such. Not only does the content of the novel question modernity as ultimately hubristic and unsustainable, but also the novel’s form may be understood as a

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\(^{358}\) Ibid, 87.

\(^{359}\) Ibid, 88.

\(^{360}\) Ibid, 94.
contributing to her critique. *Almanac* utilizes a nonlinear and interwoven narrative form to depart from predominant Western conventions that generally follow a progressive and developmental trajectory.\(^{361}\) *Almanac* thus provides a potent example of Dillon’s notion of Native Slipstream, for it incorporates notions of time as both cyclical and eternal, such that Indigenous peoples’ home in the Americas appears both unbroken and inevitable, and white settlers peoples are ultimately understood as wayward orphans of time and space.

Additionally, the hemispheric scope of the novel, along with its labyrinthine narratives of characters and settings is reminiscent of Jodi Byrd’s invocation of the potentialities associated with the concept of “cacophony.” For Byrd “the noise of competing claims, recognitions, and remediations involved in ‘contradictorily hegemonic and horizontal struggles’ ultimately resulting in the deferral of Indigenous concerns, *Almanac’s* cacophonous narrative suggests liberatory possibilities through coalitional struggles involving Indigenous, Arrivants, and white settlers.”\(^{362}\)

This is evident as the novel’s climax witnesses Wilson Weasel Tail, otherwise referred to as the Barefoot Hopi, addressing a New Age convention as simultaneous acts of eco-sabotage and Indigenous-led uprisings across the hemisphere appear to touch off a revolution. Here Silko’s vision clearly draws together the fates of Indigenous peoples and the other-than-human, in a manner reminiscent Dr. Martin Luther King’s famous line that the “arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”

\(^{361}\) Ibid, 89.

\(^{362}\) Byrd, *Transit of Empire*, 40 and 53.
You think there is no hope for the indigenous tribal people here to prevail against the violence and greed of the destroyers? But you forget the inestimable power of the earth and all the forces of the universe. You forget colliding meteors. You forget the earth’s outrage and the trembling that will not stop. Overnight, the wealth of nations will be reclaimed by the earth… Throughout the Americas, from Chile to Canada, the people have never stopped dancing; as the living dance, they are joined again with all our ancestors before them, who cry out, who demand justice, and who call the people to take back the Americas! 

In this passage, the sense of epochal return is undeniably evident, as is Silko’s evocation of the veritable Bible of capitalism, Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations. Thus the range of time and space addressed by Alamanac is enormous: it seeks nothing less than to indict Western modernity and white settler society, and to establish a sense of hope, even inevitability for the resurgence of Indigenous peoples.

In considering Almanac of the Dead in terms of the utopian literary tradition, Katerberg is unsettled, writing

its hope for the future does not fit classic utopias, in which a distant place or time provides a blueprint for an alternative society and the past is a problem to be overcome and left behind so that something new can be built. Silko’s vision is more akin to a critical utopianism, in which there is an ongoing dialogue between new and old, European and Native, technological and spiritual, linear and cyclical. Within the cycles of time are periods of progress and decline. Instead of seeking something “new,” her utopian hopes are for the “renewal” of a tradition in a clearly identified place. Playing with the roots of the term “utopia,” one might say that the “good place” that Silko believes is coming is not “no place” but a return of Native peoples to “this place,” their homeland, and a renewal of their ways.

Katerberg’s analysis here is fruitful in facilitating a recognition of Almanac’s clear demonstration of “social dreaming” or an “imaginary reconstitution of society” to refer to

363 Silko, Almanac of the Dead, 723-724.

364 Katerberg, Future States, 97.
two of the most prominent conceptualizations by utopian studies scholars. Whether it belongs as a part of what Kumar termed the “modern utopian tradition” is, however, ambiguous. Indeed Almanac’s stature as a work of Indigenous sf published at the moment of Fukuyama’s “end of history” seems more indicative of a rupture, an intervention intended to destabilize the foundations of modernity and white settler society. The notion of cyclical return, and the orientation towards a renewed immanence, as opposed to transcendental progress, may represent aspects of what Dutton has called an “imaginary of the ideal,” but Almanac of the Dead is unequivocally a rejection of many of the tenets fundamental to the utopian tradition of settler societies. In doing so, it offers a glimpse into the potential, perhaps inevitable sense of something at once qualitatively new and yet categorically old, a sense of Indigenous place-based ways of being since time immemorial:

All were welcome. It was only necessary to walk with the people and let go of all the greed and the selfishness in one’s heart. One must be able to let go of a great many comforts and all things European; but the reward would be peace and harmony with all living things. All they had to do was return to Mother Earth. No more blasting, digging, or burning.365

This passage, which appears during the novel’s revolutionary narrative climax, unequivocally speaks to a hopeful decolonial future. The vision is an ecumenical one that rejects the trajectories of European colonial modernity and simultaneously evokes a sense of (cyclical) return, a clear break with the notion of progressive transcendentalism. Silko’s Almanac is fundamentally premised on the notion of a prophetic Indigenous

365 Silko, Almanac of the Dead, 710.
resurgence foretold prior to the arrival of Europeans and the onset of the settler colonialization of Turtle Island. Ultimately, there is a sense of the entirety of colonial modernity as wayward and transitory, revealing the insignificance of humanity itself—a narrative beyond human utopianism:

The snake didn’t care if people were believers or not; the work of the spirits and prophecies went on regardless. Spirit beings might appear anywhere, even near open-pit mines. The snake didn’t care about the uranium tailings; humans had desecrated only themselves with the mine, not the earth. Burned and radioactive, with all humans dead, the earth would still be sacred. Man was too insignificant to desecrate her. 366

Here Sterling, a humble, unassuming Indigenous character muses on the reappearance of a giant stone snake as the novel draws to a close. The stone snake appears as a symbol of spiritual rebirth, a renewal, of decolonization, but also the sense of greater forces being at work beyond human agency, reason, or hope. Silko’s *Almanac* is therefore not a utopia, at least not one that could be considered a part of the modern utopian tradition, though it certainly draws upon the conventions of the genre. It is evocative of cyclical, spiritual, and other-than-human forces that predate and will arguably succeed any anthropocentric notion of utopia.

**Nalo Hopkinson’s *Brown Girl in the Ring* & *The Midnight Robber***

Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* appears as clear touchstone for contemporary Indigenous sf, paving the way for Taino-Arawak and Afro-Caribbean-identified author Nalo Hopkinson to emerge as the most prominent and prolific contemporary sf writer of

366 Ibid, 762.
colour from the white settler colonial contexts of Canada and the US. Hopkinson’s work has drawn perhaps the most attention from critics concerned with notions of Indigenous and postcolonial sf, having published a total of six novels, a short story collection, a young adult novel, and having co-edited four fiction anthologies, including the aforementioned *So Long Been Dreaming*. As a Black female author, Hopkinson sf has drawn comparisons to Octavia Butler. Her work has been nominated for the James Tiptree Jr. Award, given annually to works that expand or explore the conception of gender, and she won the Gaylactic Spectrum Award for GLBTQ themes in science fiction and fantasy. She has also been recognized by the sf establishment, having been nominated for the prestigious Nebula Award, and the Philip K. Dick Award, and winning Canada’s Aurora Award for science fiction and fantasy.367

Hopkinson’s own mixed identity is reflected in her work, and has seen her claimed as an “heir apparent to a black science fiction tradition,” but also associated with Caribbean writers such as Kamau Brathwaite and Jamaica Kincaid who are not often associated with sf.368 While Hopkinson cites Samuel Delany, in particular, as a major literary influence, and clearly aligns her work with Black sf, she is also cognizant of Indigenous peoples’ concerns as demonstrated in the premise of her debut novel *Brown Girl In The Ring* published in 1998. *Brown Girl In The Ring* may be described as a critical dystopia insofar as it is set in a near-future “doughnut hole” Toronto, where the state has receded to the wealthy, predominantly white suburbs and poor, largely


368 Nalo Hopkinson and Alondra Nelson. “Making the Impossible Possible” An Interview with Nalo Hopkinson. Social Text, 71 (Volume 20, Number 2), Summer 2002, pp. 97-113
racialized peoples are left in the downtown core to fend for themselves. The absence of state authority and capital has re-christened Toronto as the “Burn,” and the narrative follows Ti-Jeanne, a young diasporic Afro-Caribbean protagonist, who is struggling to assert her own young adulthood in a setting undergoing rapid transformation. Her Grandmother serves as a healer to the neighborhood, bartering to acquire the traditional medicines she uses to tend to the community. Ti-Jeanne resists her authority even as the alternative, going it alone with her immature and unreliable boyfriend, is fraught with danger in an environment constantly threatened by violence from the novel’s antagonist Rudy Sheldon. Sheldon and his gangsters harvest organs for the wealthy interests who reside outside the Burn in relative safety.

Though *Brown Girl In The Ring* focuses primarily on the depiction of Afro-Caribbean culture and spirituality, Hopkinson demonstrates a critical awareness of Indigenous issues and settler colonialism in establishing the background to the emergence of a future dystopian Toronto. In the opening pages of the novel, Ti-Jeanne visits a makeshift library where she encounters a display “TORONTO: THE MAKING OF A DOUGHNUT HOLE,” itself a collection of newspapers that frame the narrative’s future context:

Ti-Jeanne had read the headlines:

TEMAGAMI INDIANS TAKE ONTARIO TO COURT: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FUNDS TEME-AUGAMI ANISHNABAI LAND CLAIM

FEDERAL GOVT. CUTS TRANSFER PAYMENTS TO PROVINCE BY 30%, CITES INTERNATIONAL TRADE EMBARGO OF TEMAGAMI PINE
JOBLESS RATE JUMPS 10%: TEMAGAMI LAWSUIT IS FUELING ONTARIO RECESSION, SAYS LABOUR MINISTER

CRIME AT ALL-TIME HIGH BUT BUDGET CUTS FORCE ONTARIO PROVINCE POLICE TO DOWNSIZE

TORONTO POLICE THREATEN MASS WALKOUT; JOB TOO DANGEROUS, NOT ENOUGH BACKUP, SAYS UNION

JOBS LEAVE TORONTO: 7 LARGEST EMPLOYERS RELOCATE, SAY TORONTO’S NOT SAFE

TORONTO CITY HALL MOVES TO SUBURB: SAFER FOR OUR EMPLOYEES, SAYS MAYOR

HUNDREDS KILLED IN RAPID TRANSIT CAVE-IN: TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION BLAMES FEDERAL CUTBACKS TO ITS MAINTENANCE BUDGET

CAVE-IN PROTEST SPARKS RIOT: THOUSANDS RIOT: THOUSANDS INJURED, DEAD

RIOT COPS LAY DOWN ARMS, ARMY CALLED IN: TORONTO IS “WAR ZONE,” SAYS HEAD OF POLICE UNION369

Thus, Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism is placed at the beginning of the collapse of Canada’s signature city, and frames the withdrawal of capital and the settler state. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples who were the original peoples of the territories now occupied by the settler nation-state of Canada are largely absent from the narrative, which focuses almost exclusively upon diasporic Afro-Caribbean peoples. This evokes a sense of tension or conflict implicit in the book between nation-based Indigenous land claims, on the one hand, and the dissolution of the Canadian state that leads to the dystopian future for landless, diasporic racialized people in the city. At the same time, the reclaiming of land-based knowledges and practices, including the cultivation of food and medicines, as well as the renewal of traditional spirituality, are clearly resonant with both Afro-Caribbean and Indigenous themes.

In fact, the novel’s sources of optimism, the “critical” aspect of the critical dystopia, are the spaces of hope created through the depiction of reclaiming and renewing traditional land-based knowledges and practices. The novel invokes elements of magical realism to portray ceremonies where the major characters encounter the spirit world and communicate with spirit beings. Hopkinson characterizes Ti-Jeanne and her Grandmother, and the antagonist Rudy, as *Obeah*, evoking traditional Caribbean notions of persons with powerful spiritual capacities that are said to have originated with the Igbo peoples of West Africa. The hopeful possibility, it appears, lies in the creation of alternative spaces characterized by the reclamation and renewal of histories, knowledges, and practices obscured by colonialism, and in the sustained resistance to (settler)state-capital.
Where *Brown Girl In The Ring* is set in a near-future characterized by all-too-real violence and extrapolates the trajectories of the settler colonial state and capital, Hopkinson’s follow up novel *Midnight Robber* (2000) is even more experimental in its setting. The novel is the primary subject of an article by Dillon, in which she develops the concept of Indigenous Scientific Literacies that she later returns to in her commentaries in the *Walking the Clouds* anthology. For Dillon, Indigenous scientific literacies are those practices used by indigenous native peoples to manipulate the natural environment in order to improve existence in areas including medicine, agriculture, and sustainability… And since indigenous scientific literacies are shaped by the diverse natural environments of the indigenous groups that use them, no single set of practices summarizes the possibilities… The essence of indigenous scientific literacy, in contrast to western science, resides in this sense of spiritual interconnectedness among humans, plants, and animals.  

Dillon reads *Midnight Robber* as an sf narrative that draws upon a variety of cultural referents, and “transnational geographies,” to explore the notions of hyrbrid, multiple identities and knowledges that do not always easily adhere to a colonizer/colonized binary. In fact, Dillon’s analyzes *Midnight Robber* as acknowledging the transferences that historically have occurred among African, Caribbean, and Amerindian indigenous and diasporic peoples. [Hopkinson] derives material from the Anishinaabe/Ojibwa of First Nations Peoples in the northern United States and Canada, West Africa Yoruban and Caribbean Yoruban, Australian Aboriginals, the non-vanished Taino/Arawak, and Maroon communities, perhaps especially Jamaican Blue Mountain, John Crow, and Haitian locales.

Thus, for Dillon, *Midnight Robber* is an experiment in engaging with dynamism of identities forged by the distinct, yet relatable experiences of colonialism. Just as with

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371 Ibid, 28.
Brown Girl In The Ring, Hopkinson utilizes elements of the sf genre conventions, including science fiction, fantasy, and magical realism (Dillon refers to it as “post-cyber-punk”) to transport traditional stories into a new context.\(^{372}\) Midnight Robber follows Tan-Tan, a female protagonist living on the planet Touissant who, along with her father Antonio, is exiled to another dimension, New Half-Way Tree. Touissant is vaguely science-fictional; its human denizens are all connected to Granny Nanny, a network of information similar to the internet through nanotechnology implanted in their brains. New Half-Way Tree, however, is a world where animal-persons, the *douen, hinte*, and *mako jumbie* interact with the exiled humans who struggle to live in what appears as an alien landscape. Thus, Midnight Robber may be read as a metaphor for the experience of both the African slave trade and the colonization of Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean and Turtle Island.

Here Dillon draws on Jim Cheney’s concept of the “ceremonial world,” the “worlds or stories within which we live, the worlds—myths…that have the power to orient us in life,” to describe the side-by-side dimensions of Midnight Robber:

As meditations on indigenous contact with colonial power, the ceremonial worlds created in [Hopkinson’s work] cast the landscape as the “dreamwork” of imperialism where indigenous or diasporic aboriginal peoples engage colonizers in conflicted (sometimes ambivalent) negotiations that potentially evolve into positive exchanges of commodities and customs… Hopkinson’s postcolonial ceremonial worlds contemplate “third world” and “fourth world” future-worlds that overcome that exported “technoscientism” of ‘90s globalization practices. This overcoming occurs by going back, way back, to tradition through the telling of story/ceremony, and going forward, way forward, by mining the imagination to

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\(^{372}\) Dillon, *Walking the Clouds*, 100.
construct an ameliorated technology informed by indigenous tradition and practice.\textsuperscript{373}

Hopkinson’s ceremonial worlds in *Midnight Robber* do indeed reflect a fascination with the possibilities of high technology alongside notions of reclamation of traditional knowledges and practices. Touissant’s futuristic and vaguely dystopian Granny Nanny network is contrasted with the mystical, traditional New Half-Way Tree. And, just as in Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, the interrelationships between Indigenous peoples, (or more inclusively, land-based peoples) and the other-than-human appear as an integral part of the narrative, in both its hopeful and critical dimensions. The *douen* and *hinte* animal-people of New Half Way Tree refer to humans as “Tall people,” and Dillon traces their description, in part, to Ojibwa stories, and to prominent theorizing in Native Studies.\textsuperscript{374}

The *douen* and *hinte*, like many Aboriginal, assume no one to be strangers but graciously lodge “guests” within the territory and typically assign them to a local family or clan for education. This thinking reflects many Native ways of articulating “communitism,” as Jace Weaver terms it, indigenous community values with the exchange and movement of “diaspora (reservation, rural village, urban, tribal, pan-Indian, traditional, Christian)” (qtd in Pulitano 73). It underpins First Nations sovereignty struggles, both intellectual and material, as voiced by leading Native scholars such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Craig S. Womack, Gerald Vizenor, and Robert Warrior (Pulitano 59-70, 168-180). Those who give most generously and freely enjoy the strongest claims. In the branch of international law and treaty claims, the First Nations perspective simultaneously is both one of sharing and one of self-determination; it is the will, not the birthright, of Aboriginal peoples to ally with alien nations as a means of protecting Aboriginal values (Battiste and Semaganis 96-103).

\textsuperscript{373} Dillon, “Indigenous Scientific Literacies in Hopkinson’s Ceremonial Worlds”, 24.

\textsuperscript{374} Dillon relates, “Animals receive the genuine status of personhood in the traditional Ojibwa worldview; they are capable of reason, reciprocity, revenge, and even speech (Callicott and Nelson 112-119).
Thus Tan-Tan’s eventual friendship and collaboration with the animal-peoples is an example of one component of Dillon’s concept of Indigenous scientific literacies, that of “reciprocal altruism, a facet of learning and modeling sustainable behavior after, or along with, animal species.” In fact, Tan-Tan’s emergence as an ethereal quasi-heroine comes through what Dillon describes as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and is encapsulated in the refrain “take one, give back two.”

Dillon further reads *Midnight Robber* as drawing upon Hopkinson’s ancestral connection to the Taino/Arawak peoples, reading the novel’s climactic scene as something of a decolonial tribute, as

Tan-Tan’s wrenching decision to chop down the Kabo Tano tree, the source of all food, and her sharing and reciprocity, giving back two for one with the beasts of this planet, transform ruined earth into the land of the New Half-Way Tree (90). She must fight instincts that belie generosity (in a desperate time of survival, who has the will to share with others?), but her acquisition of a spirit of sharing quiets the chaos of the four dimensions of the Taino/Arawak world…

In the end *Midnight Robber* is another example of multiple, over-lapping and interrelated narratives that evoke Indigenous or land-based peoples’ resurgence, and, in doing so, intervene in the predominant narratives of colonial modernity. There’s also an apparent nod to Indigenous nationhood, as Tan-Tan is told that “Every douen [one of the animal-peoples] nation have it own daddy tree.”

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376 Ibid, 36.
Interestingly, in an interview, Hopkinson explicitly refers to *The Midnight Robber* as a utopian work, and appears to show an interest in the notion of utopia and the category of utopian literature:

I think I absolutely have the capacity to be utopian. I think it shows up in my literature a lot. I remember, to my dismay, realizing that my second novel [*Midnight Robber*], what I was writing was a utopia. And the dismay was a writerly one because… fiction is about problems and overcoming them. Utopia kinda takes away a plot. (laughs) The utopian fiction I have tried to read, the older utopian fiction mostly feels like a not-very-imaginative-travelogue of wandering and going “see here’s all this cool stuff that we have and you don’t,” but no plot. A heaven that would be populated with people you only get along with is… you. It’s nobody else but you. You’re watching the theatre in your own head.

That whole idea that the place we finally get to a place of peace and concord… I’m not really sure what that is. We are human beings, and we’re going to disagree every five seconds, and if that cannot be part of utopia, then we need to come up with something else. We need to change our idea of what utopia is, and make it constantly dynamic and in the creation of itself. It needs to be more… toothy. There’s always a problem. (laughs) We’re human beings; we cause each other trouble.  

Hopkinson’s remarks on utopian literature appear in line with the sort of processual, provisional re-conceptualization of utopia as a method offered by Ruth Levitas and discussed in Chapter 3. Taken together with Dillon’s analysis of *Midnight Robber* as a work of Indigenous sf, this is perhaps one of the most overt instances of an Indigenous sf narrative being positively compared to utopian literature. Hopkinson’s apparent description of *Midnight Robber* as a utopia raises questions insofar as both of the novel’s settings, Touissant and New Half-Way Tree, are clearly sites of struggle and suffering, albeit in differing ways for different characters.  

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378 “Nalo Hopkinson on utopian literature” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vA8XIDFW4U.
But perhaps the acts of (re)connection that take place on New Half-Way Tree between human-persons and animal-persons, and the sense of redemptive possibility that concludes the narrative, are indicative of Hopkinson’s own sense of a re-articulated utopianism. The novel’s eventual sense of hopeful possibility, of course, arrives at the conclusion of a narrative characterized by desolation, dislocation, and a profound sense of alienation, not to mention the incidences of rape and violence that frame Tan-Tan’s emergence as an unmistakable survivor, a symbol of decolonial resistance and, indeed, resurgence. The novel then perhaps deserves recognition as simultaneously concerned with Black, feminist, Indigenous, postcolonial, and utopian elements, drawing inspiration from each tradition but at once stretching towards something new. That her work defies easy or singular categorization and challenges readers (and critics) to grapple with such complexity is perhaps the most “utopian” aspect, one that perhaps portends an emergent transgenre horizon of hope.

**Indigenous Critical Dystopias: Nationhood & Native Apocalypse**

Where Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* is arguably hemispheric if not global in its scope, and both Hopkinson’s *Brown Girl In The Ring* and *Midnight Robber* are works that reflect the author’s own complex background, much of contemporary Indigenous literary criticism has emphasized Indigenous nationhood as a primary means of analysis for Indigenous narratives. James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice highlight notions of “tribal nation specificity” and “American Indian literary nationalism” in their
introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*, published in 2014. Cox and Justice take care to situate these distinct but related approaches to criticism, positing that

Tribal nation specificity encourages a shift in critical focus from identity, authenticity, hybridity, and cross-cultural mediation to the Native intellectual, cultural, political, historical, and tribal national contexts from which Indigenous literatures emerge. American Indian literary nationalism works more explicitly to produce literary criticism that supports the intellectual and political sovereignty of Indigenous communities and tribal nations. Both literary critical modes affirm that these contexts, communities, and tribal nations are the first concern of the discipline.\(^{379}\)

Thus, Indigenous literary criticism is explicitly politicized alongside wider efforts to promote Indigenous nationhood, and it follows that Dillon’s work to develop a framework for analyses of Indigenous sf draws explicitly on her Anishinaabe identity. Moreover, Indigenous sf offers another narrative means of furthering Indigenous nationhood in popular form, such that genre conventions are re-purposed to highlight nation-specific histories, contemporary experiences, and aspirations.

Two contemporary examples of nation-specific Indigenous sf are Celu Amberstone’s stand-alone novel *The Dreamer’s Legacy* and Daniel Heath Justice’s *The Way of Thorn and Thunder* trilogy. Amberstone and Justice identify as Cherokee, and both appear, to varying degrees, to draw upon the lived historical experience of the forced removal of Cherokee peoples in their respective sf narratives. In both cases, Indigenous peoples with a fantastical, magical, and deeply mystical relationship to the other-than-

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human are faced with an invasion by exogenous would-be settler colonists whose desire for the land is the primary basis for narrative tension.

Justice’s trilogy of fantasy novels, collectively titled *The Way of Thorn and Thunder*, is set in a Tolkien-esque fantastical world, and the story’s dramatic tension involves the Folk, the “collective term for those peoples and nations originating from the Eld Green.” They are Indigenous inhabitants struggling against the threat of invasion and displacement by the Humans, an exogenous race of people who appear representative of European settlers. *The Way of Thorn and Thunder* has received critical attention from Indigenous scholars, including Byrd, who maintains,

> Justice uses Cherokee oral stories and traditions to provide the foundation for a reciprocal engagement with fantasy to draw on the strengths of both narrative strategies and to make the generic familiarity of fantasy tropes serve the larger narrative appeals of dramatically drawing out the consequences of forcibly relocating a nation of people for profit and land.381

The Folk include a variety of humanoid and other-than-humanoid beings with some anthropomorphic traits, who are characterized by a relationship to the Eld Green so embedded in their way of being that they appear as an altogether different species as compared to the Humans. The primary protagonist, Tarsa’deshae, is Kyn, beings that have extra-sensory stalks that allow them a direct connection to the spirits of the natural world. Tarsa is also a Wielder who has unique spiritual abilities involving the *wyr*, a spirit-force that can be used for healing and other fantastical powers. Tarsa and a variety of other characters are pitted against Lojar Vald, the “Iron Fist” and ruthless

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381 Byrd, “Red Dead Conventions”,
Dreydmaster—leader of the predominant Human religion—who serves as the primary antagonist.

The Kyn, as well the other Folk, are differentiated from the Humans by their immanent and animistic orientation. Each of the Folk has a distinct culture rooted in their unique connections to their respective territories, though not all of the Folk have a strong connection to the wyrm. Justice depicts the various Folk peoples and nations with aspects of Indigenous culture and history, including the Seven Sister nations, which appears reminiscent of real world instances of confederated Indigenous nations. Alternatively, the Humans are clearly transcendental, followers of religion of the Dreyd, which is evocative of the Christianity of European settlers. Similarly, the Friends of the Folk, a group of Humans who seek to assimilate the Folk into the Dreyd, appear as fictionalized representations of the real world evangelical missionaries and other settlers who attempted to assimilate Indigenous peoples into white (Christian) settler society. Thus, the narrative hinges primarily upon the collision of radically differing cultural and, more specifically, spiritual orientations towards the wider natural world. The Humans’ desire for land appears as a consequence of their expansionist, imperialistic culture, marking another parallel to the lived historical experiences of (settler) colonialism of Turtle Island/Abya Yala. It is perhaps telling that The Way of Thorn and Thunder is organized into seven “cycles,” suggestive of a non-Euclidean sense of narrative movement, even as the epic scale of The Way of Thorn and Thunder evokes Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings. Justice’s work therefore compels a re-consideration of the ways in which fantasy genre
conventions may themselves be recognized for their implications as (settler) colonial narratives.

In addition to unmistakable themes of settler colonialism and resistance, Justice also develops themes that critically engage gender and sexuality: for example, the Kyn have three genders, He-Kyn, She-Kyn, and Zhe-Kyn, with the Zhe-Kyn represented as having healing powers as a consequence of their capacities for and sensitivities to both the masculine and feminine. Moreover, Tarsa, as the novel’s primary protagonist, has same-sex relationships and might be described as queer, though such identifications themselves are not appropriately translatable to this fictional world. In fact, the world-building involved in the creation of Justice’s *The Way of Thorn and Thunder* clearly appeals to fantasy genre conventions—the Folk may be associated with the magical, animistic beings of any number of classic fantasy stories—and, in doing so it certainly appears as an example of Byrd’s notion of transgenre Indigenous sf. Justice’s narrative could potentially be described as environmental, fantasy, Indigenous, and queer fiction.

In an interview, Justice is explicit in characterizing his expansive approach,

> Because of its capacity to help readers “imagine otherwise” (my personal motto), speculative fiction is an ideal literature for contributing to an anticolonial project, but just as the imagination can be directed toward liberation and inclusivity, so too can it envision and help to create divisiveness, exclusion, and oppression. Sadly, science fiction and fantasy as literary genres of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have too often justified and celebrated settler colonialism, white privilege, heterocentrism, and misogyny, Eurowestern supremacy, and militant patriarchy, either explicitly or implicitly. Much ink has been devoted to critiques of race, gender, and sexuality in speculative fiction, and for good reason, as it’s a mixed history, but a fascinating one. More than any other literary method or body of writing, I think speculative fiction is a literary genre/method/approach that is
characterized by possibility, but like all things of power, it can be oriented toward ends both wise and wicked.\textsuperscript{382}

Thus Justice appears motivated by the potentialities of creating “imagined secondary worlds” that are accountable to those historically neglected by the modern utopian tradition, though his own feelings about the utopian or dystopian dimensions of \textit{The Way of Thorn and Thunder} are circumspect:

I’m a bit ambivalent about thinking about this work as “utopian,” as that term seems too burdened by models of political disengagement; the world that emerges from the devastations of the novel isn’t a perfect world in any way—it’s as much a world in process as the world the characters have lost, and while there’s much hope and possibility, there’s also danger and uncertainty. I’d also say that it’s not entirely a dystopia; while there is undeniably devastation and dislocation…the devastation isn’t complete. Both terms seem too narrow and final; neither leaves much room for the complexities of lived relationships—the good, the bad, and the indeterminate or provisional. Readers and critics with more distance and insight than I have may find more of a place for the novel within a utopian tradition, and I’m certainly open to the arguments; for myself, I’m not sure it very comfortably fits the general template, though the notion of “critical dystopia” seems more in keeping with the possibilities of the text than the more common “utopia” offers.\textsuperscript{383}

Justice’s discussion of the central notion of process, and the continual uncertain potentialities of hope and devastation are indeed mirrored in the text of \textit{The Way of Thorn and Thunder}. The novel’s coda chapters, “Gathering Grounds” which completes the sixth cycle, and “Forever Green” which comprises the seventh and final cycle, take place following a veritable apocalypse, though one that is ultimately incomplete, allowing for the possibility of renewal:

\textsuperscript{382} Hardy, “Roundtable” Q&A \textit{Puerto Del Sol}, 45.

\textsuperscript{383} Hardy, “Roundtable” Q&A \textit{Puerto Del Sol}, 42.
The naming was the first of many steps in the long, difficult task of healing both themselves and their wounded new homeland, which still bore the scars of a thousand years of devastation. They went slowly about the task of rebuilding their lives, making homes, towns, and settlements, discovering ways of understanding the spirits of new animals and plants and introducing the many remembered Beast and plant people who had traveled with the Folk on the Darkening Road, familiarizing themselves with the weather patterns and the flow of waters, connecting with the ghosts who still inhabited the wilder places of this new Everland.

This new “Folkhome” is fraught with uncertainty and the sense of trauma is palpable “for there were none who hadn’t lost at least one beloved friend or family member.” But as the novel ends, the possibilities of a hopeful future remain, as a pregnant Tarsa narrates:

There are now new gathering grounds, and even some of the Celestials have started to come to the grounds to keep the Tree alive…Kinship is so much more than blood. It’s a lesson we should never forget…

“We will change, as all things change, and our future will be no better or worse because of it. We will simply be. The Folk will continue. We’ll lose some of what we are, and gain other things, other ways, but we’ll endure, and so will the Green. That’s the way of life in this Melded world of Folk and Men. It’s our blessing and our curse. It’s our great hope.”

Thus, Justice’s Way of Thorn and Thunder also appeals to notions of enduring other-than-human forces that exceed human agency but also of the hopeful potentialities inherent in dynamism and hybridity that are embedded within cyclical sense of continual renewal. Similar to Silko’s Almanac, Justice’s sf narrative therefore does not belong to the modern utopian tradition, as it bears both a distinctively Indigenous character and one that also is

384 Justice. The Way of Thorn and Thunder. 578.
385 Ibid, 578.
386 Ibid, 588.
evocative, in some senses, of postcolonialism but also indebted to the influences of the critical utopian/dystopian narratives of Butler, Delany, Le Guin, Piercy, and Russ.

As a fellow Cherokee-identified author, Celu Amberstone’s *The Dreamer’s Legacy* tells a young adult-oriented story of a fictional Indigenous People’s (the “Qwani’Ya”) forced removal from the Arctic as a consequence of white settler (the “Chamuqwani”) desires for land. In this case, it is the Chamuqwani’s mining interests and their racist attitudes (many refer to the Qwani’Ya with the epithet “Zaunks”), which establish clear parallels between the historical experiences of countless Indigenous nations. The novel’s protagonist, Tasimu, is a young boy with unique Spirit-Power or “Qwakaiva.” Tasimu struggles to understand and develop his spiritual gifts against the backdrop of his Qwani’Ya people being forcibly removed to a reservation.

Thus, the novel situates aspects of the familiar coming-of-age tale within a tragic account of violent colonial dispossession. Moreover, the profound mystical and spiritual interrelationship between the Qwani-Ya and their territory figures significantly into Tasimu’s pursuit of his Spirit-Power. Ultimately, the story ends in tragedy with Tasimu’s young sister dying during the relocation, though the novel itself is revealed in an epilogue to be an aged Tasimu’s memoir, suggesting some veiled hope for the future.

In an interview Amberstone explains her choice to work within sf,

...[it] allows me the opportunity to explore troubling issues in our own reality without the restraints and predictable outcomes of our mundane world. In my opinion, much of Aboriginal Literature today is still ensnared within the modalities of colonialism. So, in order to pass beyond these restrictions, some Aboriginal authors, like myself, have found it necessary to create whole new worlds, or journey to the stars.387

Thus, *The Dreamer’s Legacy*, as well as her short story “Refugees” included in *Walking the Clouds*, are, for Amberstone, themselves acts of decolonization insofar as they reflect what she terms Indigenous peoples’ “bicultural” standpoint. For example, Amberstone has acknowledged the perceptible relationship between *The Dreamer’s Legacy* and the historical experience of the Cherokee, whose traditional territories were found to have gold, contributing to their forced removal. The novel is therefore is not reducible to categorization as Aboriginal or sf but results in the sort of critical, decolonial transgenre interventions described by Byrd.

*The Dreamer’s Legacy* is also clearly an example of what Dillon has characterized as Native Apocalyptic storytelling, which “shows the ruptures, the scars, and the trauma in its effort ultimately to provide healing…” Apocalyptic scenarios are a well-known conceit in mainstream sf narratives, but as Dillon notes “the Native Apocalypse, if contemplated seriously, has already taken place.” That is, white Europeans and white settlers of Turtle Island have occupied the default social location for mainstream sf, necessitating an inversion of the apocalyptic narrative for Indigenous and racialized non-Native writers. Where mainstream sf narratives contemplate the possibilities of alien invasions, or futures marred by technological or environmental

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390 Ibid, 8.
collapse, these conventions are being utilized by Indigenous writers to draw critical attention to the already-lived experiences of marginalized peoples.

An additional remarkable example is the short story “When This World Is All On Fire” by William Sanders (Cherokee) published in 2001, which anticipates today’s “cli-fi” (climate change-related fiction) movement. Sanders imagines a future where white climate refugees attempt to squat on North Carolina Cherokee reservation lands. The story’s protagonist, Davis Blackbear, is a reservation policeman, faced with evicting desperate would-be squatters, and the story opens with just such an encounter:

The man in the red baseball cap spat on the ground, not taking his eyes off Davis. "Go to hell, Indian."
Oh oh. Going to be like that, was it? Davis said formally, "Sir, you’re on Cherokee reservation land. Camping isn’t allowed except by permit and in designated areas. I’ll have to ask you to move out."
The woman said, "Oh, why can’t you leave us alone? We’re not hurting anybody. You people have all this land, why won’t you share it?"
We tried that, lady, Davis thought, and look where it got us. Aloud he said, "Ma’am, the laws are made by the government of the Cherokee nation. I just enforce them."
"Nation!" The man snorted. "Bunch of woods niggers, hogging good land while white people starve. You got no right."

Here Sanders’ characteristic dark humour is on display as the exchange evokes the historical irony of the lived experience of settler colonization and white desires for lands heretofore deemed valueless enough to be left to Native peoples. It also points to the centrality of Indigenous nationhood as a point of revitalization as a key component of the inversion of the standard apocalyptic scenario. In Sanders’ story it is clear that

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392 Ibid, 268.
apocalypse for white settlers involves the collapse of an unsustainable settler society, but the narrative is told from an Indigenous perspective. Native apocalypse has long since occurred, and, in fact, it appears that Indigenous sovereignty is perhaps as strong as it has been since the arrival of white settlers.

Many of Sanders’s short stories are collected in *East of the Sun and West of Fort Smith*, and his own commentaries accompany each selection. His work often involves Indigenous characters with supernatural elements that Sanders himself opines may be described as science fiction or fantasy. In doing so his work certainly deserves recognition, per Byrd, as transgenre Indigenous sf. Dillon has also recalled Vizenor’s description of survivance stories as a “literature of laughter” in her approach to developing criticism of Indigenous sf. The acerbic humor with which Sanders creates his stories serves to draw readers, including non-Indigenous readers, into a glimpse of Native life as persistent and part of the future. And, using the example of “When this World is All on Fire” readers are certainly called to acknowledge the marginalization of Indigenous peoples within white settler colonial society but also consider the catastrophic implications of climate change—a concern that effects all humans but also the other-than-human of the entire planet.

Zainab Amadahy, who identifies as being of African-American, Cherokee, and European descent, published *Resistance* in 2013, which also figures as a more contemporary example of Native Apocalyptic sf. Similar to both Starhawk’s *The Fifth Sacred Thing* and even more so to Hopkinson’s *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Amadahy’s...
novel is set in 2036, in post-apocalyptic Toronto. The novel’s protagonist is Inez Xicay, a nano-immunology researcher who finds herself a part of a threatened community after being subjected to a sexual assault that undermines her promising career. Inez joins the Marketview Community only to find it is itself under constant threat of violence by a private militia funded by a corporate conglomerate with designs on evicting the community in order to initiate the mining of coltan—used in cell phones—on the site.

As in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* and *Brown Girl in the Ring*, the story centers on the strength of a resurgent community predicated on revitalized traditional cultural knowledge and practices. Amadahy creates a rich diversity of inter-generational, multi-racial, and multi-cultural characters with a variety of gender and sexual identities, all of whom are living together in a commune where gardening, yoga, meditation, and ceremony form the basis of what appears as a (relatively) utopic enclave. Inez struggles to adjust to life in the community at first, and as she warms up readers experience a vicarious conversion and healing. Like Starhawk and Hopkinson’s novels, *Resistance* posits a future where what spaces of hope exist are conceptualized as necessarily reflective of a variety of different social locations, which indicates it is apparent that the capacity for community dialogue and dynamism is paramount. Amadahy speaks to this very notion in a video blog discussing the novel:

The community that I write about is as diverse as the city of Toronto, where the story takes place. We’ve got folks from different ethno-cultural backgrounds, gender identities, sexual orientations, ages, life choices, people who are able-bodied, people who are disabled. And they are not living in any kind of utopia… The differences among them actually make a difference to them. So they don’t always agree on everything, they don’t always get along. Because they understand their survival is at stake, they have very different values than what you see in
mainstream society today. They value peace-making because their survival depends on it. For me, that’s where we are at in the real world.\textsuperscript{394}

Hence, Amadahy explicitly rejects the label of “utopia,” implicitly associating it with a perfect and static society. But in doing so, she also depicts a sense of dynamic community and its processes that she believes necessary not only for future human survival but also for a sense of potential well-being. In doing so, \textit{Resistance} appears to represent a narrative exploration of Levitas’ notion of utopia-as-method; the dialogic, proceessual, critical-self-reflexive “peace-making” of Marketview is perhaps a microcosm of the broader literary and, indeed, increasingly global means of reconstituting society.

In addition to \textit{Resistance}, Amadahy has also written extensively on a variety of related topics, including co-authoring “Indigenous Peoples and Black Peoples in Canada: Settlers or Allies” with Bonita Lawrence, as well as a series of blog posts for \textit{Muskrat Magazine} on “Indigenizing Sci Fi.”\textsuperscript{395} She also published an earlier novel \textit{The Moons of Palmares}, in which the historical liberated African slave communities—quilombos—of what is present day Brazil are depicted on another planet in a science-fictional universe. All told, she is very comfortable describing her work as Indigenous sf, explaining that \textit{Resistance} itself is a little Indigenous in its storytelling style in that I don’t provide the reader with packaged right or wrong answers and I don’t preach… As the reader you’re going to have to figure out how you feel about the issues explored in the book. This doesn’t mean I portray mining companies as good

\textsuperscript{394} “Resistance the community” Zainab Amadhy, http://youtu.be/val7IfM2oE?list=UUe8QJmEAnfeEb3ueQT6gmkA

\textsuperscript{395} Zainab Amadahy, “Indigenizing Sci Fi” \textit{Muskrat Magazine} http://www.muskratmagazine.com/home/node/202#.VIivYWSwNtK

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guys, you are going to know who the good guys and the bad guys are. But within
the good guys, there’s a lot of perspectives that I share for discussion and thinking
about…
The issues in the book are still issues for Indigenous and other communities
around the globe…There are also a host of Indigenous characters in the story,
some of them are from Turtle Island, some are from Latin America, or Indigenous
peoples from the Phillipines or Africa, or other places. […]
Most of the characters are mixed race, and I wanted to illustrate the various ways
that mixed people identify… some of them have more of a direct connection to
the land than others. The main character, Inez, has very little connection to the
land, so she has a hard time being useful to the community. What she most wants
to do isn’t what the community needs, so there’s that tension in the story. 396

Thus, Amadahy’s Resistance reads as much as part of ongoing Indigenous liberation and
wider social justice movement discourse as a literary endeavor. But while Resistance is
certainly unique in many respects, where the novel truly stands out alongside The Fifth
Sacred Thing and Brown Girl in the Ring is in its work to draw together what Amadahy
refers to as “different scientific paradigms” and traditional knowledges. That is, the
novel’s multi-racial, Indigenous female protagonist is a professional scientist who is
exposed to what Amadahy describes as “so-called paranormal” or “supernatural”
phenomena. Faced with a paramilitary force, the community resists through a
combination of high technology, specifically nanotechnology and electromagnetic pulses
designed to disable electronics, and spiritual, seemingly paranormal or supernatural
forces. Amadahy expounds,

Of course, the bad guys in the story are using science to profit, and they don’t care
about people or the land. She [Inez, the lead character] is a professional scientist
so she likes things to be clean, straight-forward and provable—reproducible. And
she has a hard time with things that she witnesses in the story because her
scientific worldview doesn’t explain what she sees. She comes up against

different characters who are coming out of a completely different mindset, a
different scientific paradigm. And she’s experiencing things that her brain can’t
comprehend. I researched all of the science, particularly the so-called paranormal
and cutting edge [science] pretty thoroughly. So everything in the book is really
plausible. But *Resistance* isn’t a science text, it’s a story. 397

Therefore, while *Resistance* doesn’t reach the level of craft or aesthetic sophistication
found in, for example, Hopkinson’s work, Amadahy’s novel appears as an indicator for
the potential future directions for sf, as such, and is certainly a clear contemporary
touchstone for Indigenous and racialized non-Native writers.

**Conclusion**

The flowering of sf narratives from a variety of social locations, both within white
settler societies and elsewhere, is already underway, as demonstrated by the above
discussion. The potential for heretofore marginalized perspectives to intervene in sf
narratives is already having a noticeable effect of re-shaping what is considered canonical
sf. Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler, both African-American authors of sf, have
received substantial critical and popular attention, and Nnedi Okorafor, a Nigerian-
American author, was awarded the 2011 World Fantasy Award for her novel *Who Fears
Death*. There has subsequently been a movement to remove the bust of HP Lovecraft,
whose racism in both his private correspondence and his fiction is well established, as its
statuette and replace it with a bust of Butler. 398


398 Daniel Jose Older. “Move over HP Lovecraft, fantasy writers of colour are coming through”, *The
Guardian*. http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/09/move-over-hp-lovecraft-black-fantasy-writers-
are-coming-through
In addition to the incursions into sf fiction, there have also been several notable short Indigenous sf films that have been produced over the past few years: *The Cave* is said to be the first ever Indigenous sci-fi film shot entirely in a Native language, and tells the traditional Tsilhqot’in story of a hunter who accidently encounters the afterlife while tracking a bear.\(^9\) *The Sixth World* is another short film produced for PBS series *Future States* and tells the story of a Navajo scientist and astronaut on a mission to Mars.\(^0\)

Navajo astronaut Tazbah Redhouse experiences a mysterious dream that helps her to discover a way to grow corn on the new planet, thus enabling a new possible future for humanity. Navajo tradition and origin stories tell that the current world is the Fifth World, and so the Sixth world, on Mars, will be the beginning of a new cycle. And *Wakening*, a short film by Cree-Metis director Danis Goulet, also merits mention.\(^1\)

The film is set in the near future characterized by environmental degradation with a decaying urban landscape apparently under military occupation. A lone Cree wanderer, Weesakechak searches an urban war zone to find the ancient and dangerous Weetigo to help fight against the occupiers. In an interview, the director talked about how she drew on her childhood experiences of hearing stories about Weesakechak and Witigo, who are

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\(^9\) Helen Haig-Brown, dir. “The Cave”. 2009. *CBC Short Film Face Off*  
http://www.cbc.ca/player/Shows/Shows/Short-Film-Face-Off/Short-Films/ID/2022224140/

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7t4Jm0y_iLk

traditional rivals, and placing them in a new context where they might join forces against a colonizing force.\textsuperscript{402}

Ultimately, as sf narratives continue to become less and less dominated by white settlers, the perspectives of Indigenous peoples and racialized non-Native peoples are necessarily challenging the foundations of sci-fi and fantasy as we know it, and this is prompting a re-thinking of the ideological work they have done in supporting the ideas of progress and modernity that were so central to the founding of Canada and the US, and these states’ genocidal policies and actions. The narratives explored in this chapter simultaneously reflect the influences of the utopian tradition of colonial modernity while establishing distinctively Indigenous and postcolonial interventions that both resist and transcend the utopian/sf genres while simultaneously adopting many of their conventions.

There is great promise in following the outcomes of Indigenous futurisms’ interventions into ongoing cultural conversations, alongside those of Afro, Latina/o, Asian, postcolonial, and other futurisms, which are already inspiring us to think differently about what is possible. As Dillon argues, “in a world in which Indigenous peoples are constantly represented as always on the margins of modernity and on the verge of disappearing, Native American and Indigenous [cultural production] serves as an affirmation of a robust Indigenous cultural present.”\textsuperscript{403} Indeed, our collective ability to imagine otherwise about the future says as much about how we might confront obscured

\textsuperscript{402} “Danis Goulet chats about 'Wakening' - TIFF 2013 Interview” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iiR3gcUnhyE

\textsuperscript{403} Dillon. \textit{Walking the Clouds}, 10.
historical realities, but also how we might think and act in the present to bring about a better world for all.
Epilogue:

Indigenous Decolonization and Utopia

This dissertation has been animated primarily by questions regarding the possibilities for hopeful, decolonial futures in light of the increasingly global character of interrelated social injustices and profound environmental concerns. And, to paraphrase George Orwell, the stories we tell ourselves today about what approaches on the horizon are dictated by the prevailing narratives about the past. To understand the character of our collective sense of imagination and possibility requires mindfulness of the histories that have both educated our hopes for the future and shaped our ways of being in the present.

During the course of this study, I’ve learned a great deal about situating myself and deepened my understanding the US, where I have citizenship, and Canada, where I am currently living, studying, and teaching, as societies conditioned by white supremacy and settler colonialism. I’ve been challenged to consider what it means for me, as white settler on this land, to desire a hopeful future. This has led me to explore the history and character of hope and collective imagination as expressed through narratives that white settlers told (and continue to tell) themselves as rationales for committing acts of genocide, oppressing other humans, and stealing land.

Indigenous and allied scholars have recognized how stories of the future popularly told through science fiction and fantasy have historically left Indigenous peoples out altogether, or else used them as symbols of the past, sometimes a romantic or noble past and sometimes a brutal or “savage” one. However, the absence of Indigenous
peoples’ perspectives in narratives of the future has a great bearing on both the here and now, and how we confront history.

I have located the modern utopian tradition as co-emergent with and co-constitutive of European colonial modernity, and the ongoing settler colonialisms of what are now known as Canada and the US. Part of this notion of utopian narratives, I argue, has to do with the ways in which particular forms of (social) desire are created and articulated. I contend that utopian narratives articulate notions of settler modernity orientated towards progress and salvation, which serve as renewable constructions of a conceptual horizon or “no place” that allows for the continuance of the linear progressive narrative structure.

Settler colonial narratives work to create a historical narrative that explains settlers coming to invade/occupy/settle Indigenous territory. This allows for a construction of a linear narrative which explains the present circumstances of settler colonialism and evokes or prefigures envisages of the future whereby the settler colonial project may be understood as coming to be “post-settler colonial.” The implicit and explicit futurity of settler narratives as becoming post-settler-colonial is necessarily accomplished through a variety of processes, including those described by Byrd as “deferral,” as well as the notion of settler indigenization. Utopianism thus serves to obscure the violence of settler colonialism and white supremacy within otherwise ostensibly “progressive” frameworks.

Alternatively, contemporary Indigenous critical theories and narratives of Indigenous Futurisms reveal the ongoing assertion of Indigenous peoplehood, often
expressed through declarations of Indigenous nationhood. This is articulated both in Indigenous literary forms and criticism as well as social movement narratives from Idle No More and the subsequent Indigenous Nationhood Movement. These include the "we are all treaty people" slogan and calls for nation-to-nation relations between Indigenous nations and the Canadian state and British Crown. This call is itself an explicit intervention aimed at highlighting the historical treaty abrogations and a re-assertion of the original conditions of Indigenous-newcomer contact, one predicated upon engagement as equals, nation-to-nation. This acts to intervene in consolidated, linear settler narratives that operate to consign autonomous Indigenous political and cultural authorities to the past, as pre-modern and necessarily "backward." Such contemporary Indigenous narratives interrupt settler claims to being the exclusive representatives of modernity and utopia. In doing so, they compel a rethinking of the naturalization of settler futurity in proposals for desirable change.

A meaningful attending to the concerns and experiences of Indigenous peoples not only implicates the modern utopian tradition, but also contemporary utopian studies. Indigenous critiques of European colonial modernity and settler colonialism compel acknowledgment of Indigenous peoples’ distinct ontological and epistemological orientations as part of the “human condition.” The denial of Indigenous peoples’ humanity has been largely naturalized within the modern utopian tradition, even as I have shown there to be an evolving engagement with notions of indigeneity and decolonization within contemporary sf/utopian narratives of white settlers.
At the same time, Levitas’ notion of utopia-as-method offers a basis from within utopian studies for a renewal of Bloch and Abensour’s notions of educated hope and desire, respectively. The implications of a dialogical, processual, critically-self-reflexive re-conceptualization of utopia-as-method involve the fundamental de-centring of utopian studies discourses themselves insofar as the potential Indigenous re-articulation of utopia necessarily involves distinct bases, methods, and trajectories unique to the experiences and concerns of Indigenous peoples themselves. This to say that Levitas’ utopia-as-method provides one possible entry for utopian studies’ accountability to Indigenous peoples, but that, fundamentally, Indigenous peoples’ humanity—their ontologies, epistemologies, and expressions of social desires—must be affirmed on their own terms. The education of contemporary social desires certainly demands critical self-reflexivity on the part of the traditional beneficiaries of colonialism as part of a processual, dialogical re-articulation of social desire.

There is evidence of some elements of such an education in the relative successes of Indigenous interventions into the Occupy Wall Street movements, even during the two to three months when the movement was at its peak. For in response to blog posts, social media memes, in-person interventions, and otherwise, many Occupy assemblies held discussions about colonialism, which resulted in the passing of statements or resolutions of solidarity with Indigenous peoples and against colonialism and racism. In some cases, there were efforts at name-changes, from Occupy to Decolonize, and, in New Mexico,
Occupy Albuquerque was changed to Un-Occupy Albuquerque in response to the challenges of Indigenous activists.\(^{404}\)

The relative success of bringing Indigenous critiques to bear on the Occupy movement via social media and otherwise may have contributed to setting the stage for Idle No More, which emerged in the Winter of 2012 as a powerful Indigenous peoples’ movement. Idle No More grew from a teach-in held on a Saskatchewan reserve in the winter of 2012 in response to omnibus legislation tabled by the Harper government. Bill C-45 was viewed as violating the rights of Indigenous peoples as set forth in the Canadian Constitution and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous and allied critics decry the legislation as unilaterally changing the terms of consultation and consent for so-called “resource development” on traditional Indigenous territories as part of the Harper government’s overall agenda to promote economic growth via extractive industries. What’s more, this was recognized as part of a centuries-long pattern of broken treaties ranging back to those forged between Indigenous First Nations and the British Crown, as nation-to-nation agreements between sovereign nations. In response, the Idle No More movement asserted contemporary Indigenous presence and, indeed, resurgence in the face of centuries of genocidal settler colonialism, in particular, through the affirmation of self-determined Indigenous nationhood.

The reality, of course, is the fundamental contradictions of settler societies premised upon racist and civilizationalist genocidal practices cannot be reconciled within the settler nation-state framework. The settler state cannot simply accept the authentic

\(^{404}\) See, for example, “Unoccupy Albuquerque” https://unoccupyabq.org/
contemporary existence of Indigenous nations within their borders. The movement for resurgent Indigenous nationhood is reflective of a robust diversity of conceptions of Indigenous nationhood: some, such as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Alfred, orient towards something sometimes described as Anarcho or Anarcha-Indigenism, which rejects the state form as the singular goal of a movement for Indigenous political self-determination in the contemporary world. At the same time, there are also more conservative and pragmatic Indigenous peoples who are pursuing a revitalized nationhood in part as a means to bolster legal challenges, including land claims associated with treaty agreements, intended to secure greater economic benefits for their people as they face increasing territorial pressures from the collusion of extractive industries and settler states’ agendas for economic development.

In fact, what has been called a “Native-rights based strategic framework” appears to increasingly be attracting the attention and support of non-Indigenous environmentalists, who have come to see struggles for Indigenous nationhood and associated legal challenges represent a “last, best chance” to stem the catastrophic effects of climate change and other environmental ills associated with the extractive industry. Ironically, capital and settler states are increasingly interested in territories heretofore considered undesirable enough to be left to Indigenous peoples, leading environmentalists to support Indigenous struggles as a means of environmental, if not anti-colonial, activism.

There have been examples of analyses, artistic interventions and protest actions that seek to draw together concerns affecting Black and Indigenous peoples of Turtle
Island with the situation of the occupied Palestinian territories, contributing to anti-colonial analyses that are challenged to account for the global ramifications of racism and settler colonialism. Moreover, such analyses are complicated and enriched by attending to the variety of ways in which peoples and the other-than-human are differently affected yet share a common human bond, and indeed an inextricable rootedness in our common home—Earth.

Our collective desires for a hopeful future are therefore complex and located in the present tense, and on Turtle Island, “we” are positioned very differently and there are certainly many important considerations including, but not limited to age, class, gender and sexuality, dis/ability status, that impact how one might envision a hopeful future. Racialized non-Native peoples confront ongoing racism and white supremacy on the one hand and assimilationist multiculturalism and ideas of “post-race” on the other, all while being located on Indigenous lands expropriated via the settler colonial project. White settlers must contend with being implicated by white supremacy and settler colonialism.

My own hope in the possibilities of new and inspiring stories and social movements that work to place Indigenous, racialized non-Native, and other peoples marginalized by colonial modernity into the future. As popular stories of the future continue to become less and less dominated by white settlers, the perspectives of Indigenous peoples and racialized non-Native peoples are necessarily challenging the foundations of utopias, sci-fi, and fantasy as we know it, and this is prompting a re-

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thinking of the ideological work they have done in supporting the ideas of progress and modernity that were so central to the founding of white supremacist settler colonial societies. Similarly, social movements concerned with social justice and environmental sustainability are increasingly challenged to attend to dynamic, intersectional, and reflexive analyses. Ultimately, the relationship between our collective ability to imagine otherwise about the future says as much about how we might confront obscured historical realities, but also how we might think and act in the present to bring about a better world for all.
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