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The Flying Heads of Settler Colonialism; or the Ideological Erasures of Indigenous Peoples in Political Theorizing

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Abstract

This essay relies on the insight that settler colonialism is an ongoing structure geared toward the elimination of Indigenous presence to argue that ideologies that legitimate and naturalize settler occupation are equally ongoing. More specifically, the ideologies that justify settler colonialism in major states like Australia, Canada, and the United States, are like Flying Heads that shape-shift and recur over time. We explore how two notorious ideological tropes—terra nullius and the myth of the Vanishing Race—recur in the work of contrasting contemporary theorists. Ultimately, Flying Head ideologies of settler colonialism cannot be defeated by reasoned argument alone, but by structural transformations beyond the settler-colonial relations that necessitate and sustain them. Following diverse Indigenous theorists and activists, we briefly explore prefigurative resurgent practices and how Indigenous political imaginaries, like the Dish with One Spoon, offer alternatives to transcend the settler colonial present.

Keywords

settler colonialism, Indigenous peoples, ideologies, political theory, Indigenous resurgence

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> "[T]he history of North America, and all of the Americas would become the history of that invasion and of its explanation of how that invasion was right. It was right because these were heathens; it was right because there were savages; it was right because The Word must be brought in; it was right because they were the conquerors; it was right because they had might. [. . .] they had to explain their behavior in a way that shed light on them properly. They had to look good in doing it" (Mohawk, 1992: 24).

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> "The Indian attitude [that the European invasion was a form of military conquest] seemed normal enough to contemporary Europeans, who armed themselves in anticipation. The invaders also anticipated, correctly, that other Europeans would question the morality of their enterprise. They therefore made preparations of two sorts: guns and munitions to overpower Indian resistance and quantities of propaganda to overpower their own countrymen's scruples. The propaganda gradually took standard form as an ideology with conventional assumptions and semantics. We live with it still" (Jennings, 1975: vii).

> "For every image, I have 'defeathered,' another one pops up [. . .] As long as a power struggle exists between peoples [. . .], there will be new, convenient stereotypes for those in power" (LaRocque, 1990: 89).

Many of today's most economically and politically powerful and influential states are settler-colonial nations, including Australia, Canada, and the United States. Yet, outside Indigenous and settler-colonial studies rarely is the relationship between their political authority and settler-colonial ideologies made explicit or even acknowledged. Within political science, more attention needs to be paid to settler colonialism as a global dynamic, including the ideological justifications upon which these nations were created and still depend; so doing sheds new light on settler colonialism, but also on the ways that the settler-colonial context frames the allowable discourses of political scientists and theorists from diverse, even divergent traditions, thus reproducing settler-colonial ideologies in and through political theorizing itself.

Since the publication of Wolfe's (2006: 388) *Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native*, the idea that settler colonialism is "a structure not an event" has taken root and is now foundational to scholarship in settler-colonial studies. As Strakosch and Macoun (2012) further observe, Wolfe's insight points to the "vanishing endpoint of settler colonialism," the continual postponement of the day when the colonial conflict is over, finally historical. In such a context, the reproduction of settler-colonial structures is a permanent social, economic, and politico-legal feature of settler-colonial societies and, we contend, so are ideologies that naturalize and normatively sanction colonial relationships of oppression and domination.

Our concern is the ongoing structures of settler colonialism and, specifically, the ideologies that legitimate them. Inspired by a Wendat and Wyandot story, we suggest that settler-colonial ideologies are like Flying Heads that, even after their bodies are slain, continue to live and wreak havoc. Flying Head ideologies of settler colonialism cannot be defeated by reasoned argument alone, but only in a turning away from the colonial state relations that necessitate and sustain them and in a turning toward the resurgence of diverse Indigenous political thoughts that structure alternative political practices.

This essay participates in ongoing discussions about the need for and persistence of ideologies that justify and legitimate settler colonialism. As Mohawk (1992: 24) observes, the desire to "look good" demands that military strength is never used alone but always accompanied by "quantities of propaganda" produced and reproduced by settler colonizers "to overpower their own countrymen's scruples" (Jennings, 1975: vii) at the violence that occupation requires. These legitimating ideologies arise historically with conquest and invasion, but persist into the present, no matter how often they are deconstructed, as with LaRocque (1990: 85), who "defeathers" the "feathered" Indian of colonial stereotypes, only to see new feathered Indians arise. Dehumanizing stereotypes are useful to colonial power, which never subsists on overpowering force alone, but always demands the renewal of supporting ideologies.

We first explore settler colonialism as a political, social, economic, and legal structure organized around the logic of land acquisition by settlers. This includes the erasure and elimination of Indigenous ways of being, doing, and knowing and the exploitation of racialized labor. We then focus on but complicate the settler-Indigenous relationship by appealing to "the vanishing end-point of settler colonialism" (Strakosch and Macoun, 2012). Since settler colonialism is an ongoing set of social structures aiming for the elimination of the native, it is never fully perfected, although various narratives, including discourses around "reconciliation" (Corntassel, 2012), may claim closure. This insight allows us to develop the idea of Flying Head—or, to recall more familiar sibling concepts, zombie or undead (Coburn, 2015a: 35)—ideologies, which recur in iterations to legitimize the settler-colonial project.

Second, we demonstrate the contemporary theoretical relevance of these conceptual innovations, notably for political theory but with broader public resonance, since scholarly Flying Heads are organically enmeshed with widely held beliefs and stereotypes about Indigenous peoples. Two key Flying Heads that have centuries-long histories but that persist in new forms across academia and in broader publics are the myths of terra nullius, which denies politically meaningful Indigenous presence on lands claimed by the colonizers, and the myth of the "Vanishing Race," which acknowledges Indigenous presence but only as ontologically or culturally doomed. We describe their varied forms and explore how they are reproduced and developed by two contrasting contemporary political thinkers, "classic liberal" political scientist Tom Flanagan and "no borders" social justice scholar Nandita Sharma. Despite very different political-theoretical orientations and whatever their intentions, in their scholarly discourses for a perfected world, both reproduce the settler-colonial erasure of Indigenous peoples.

Third, we contend that the preceding examples of how settler-colonial tropes operate are evidence that, to be effective, Indigenous peoples' struggles against the Flying Heads of settler colonialism cannot only take the form of reasoned argument against them. By reasoned argument, we mean Western-style academic practices, but also more embodied and "traditional" forms of Indigenous theorizing, like storytelling and artistic performance; specifically those that defensively respond to Flying Head ideologies. We follow Indigenous theorists of resurgence, whose work calls for reorientation from defensive discursive engagement with settler colonialism to prefigurative practices; the transformative potential of these struggles requires the theorization *and* enactment of structural alternatives. To briefly illustrate, we tentatively explore the Dish with One Spoon as one political imaginary on which to ground such transformative alternatives; this may disempower the Flying Heads of Settler Colonialism, not by proving them wrong, but by enacting a world, rooted in Indigenous political thought, in which settler-colonial structures are transcended and wither away.

Settler-Colonial Relations and the Vanishing Endpoint

In Africa, the Middle East, South America, and much of the rest of the world, decolonization often meant the expulsion or departure of most colonial settlers. In contrast, in settler colonial states like Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States, settlers have not left, even as independence from the metropole was gained, so that, in the now well-known observation quoted earlier: "settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event" (Wolfe, 2006: 388). The systemic oppression and domination of the colonized by the colonizer is not historical—firmly in the past—but ongoing and

supported by radically unequal political, social, economic, and legal institutions. As Green (2003: 52) summarizes, both historically and today, "Colonization is not only the physical occupation of someone else's land, but also about the appropriation of others' political authority, cultural self-determination, economic capacity and strategic relationship." Colonizers ongoingly assume or assert this authority and control over Indigenous peoples as well as exogenous "Others" (Veracini, 2010: 20). Historically, the latter includes slaves, indentured laborers, and today racialized migrants, who are purposefully excluded, or precariously and selectively assimilated into the White settler colonial polity (Amadahy and Lawrence, 2009; Dhamoon, 2015; Veracini, 2010).

Underlying the dynamics and relationships constitutive of settler colonialism is land, specifically the settler's acquisition of land (Coulthard, 2014; Veracini, 2010; Wolfe, 2006). To this end, settler colonialism aspires to the elimination of the native, either through assimilation, displacement, or extermination, especially for those deemed unassimilable (Strakosch and Macoun, 2012; Veracini, 2010; Wolfe, 2006). In settler colonial contexts, relationships with Indigenous peoples, whose existence troubles settlers' desires for land, co-exist with relationships with racialized exogenous Others exploited for their labor (Arvin et al., 2013: 12; Veracini, 2010), or excluded at the border. In contrast, whatever their supposed cultural "defects" as foreigners, White migrants are presumed to be more easily assimilable into a nation imagined as foundationally and enduringly White but with "multicultural" Others (Bannerji, 2000). In these ways, the settler colonial state makes distinctions between exogenous Others who, with proper control and guidance, may *become* apt for incorporation into the settler polity through selective inclusion on a minoritarian basis and those who are ontologically or culturally *incapable* of membership—the "abject other" (Veracini, 2010: 27–28)—destined for progressive elimination or perpetual exclusion. Ultimately, the settlers' acquisition of land is carried out through the settler state's control of who may or may not be granted permanent, full membership into the settler collective and, therefore, who may or may not access the lands over which settlers claim sovereignty (Veracini, 2010: chapter 1).

In settler colonialism, the practice and institutionalization of access to land, regarding both Indigenous peoples and resident or migrant exogenous Others, depends upon racialization, which takes complex, changing forms. As Wolfe (2016: 21) summarizes, "race is colonialism speaking," and race logics operate according to opportunistic narratives that hierarchize arbitrary physical differences, with those characterized as "White" granted full membership while all others are selectively, provisionally, or precariously included or actively excluded and eliminated. In settler colonial societies, "[r]ace in action," as Wolfe (2016: 32) explains is flexible enough that racial categories can be mapped onto diverse social realities, the phenotype of Indigenous and racialized Others opportunistically interpreted as signaling the appropriateness of their assigned social location and labor. In North America, at the most general level, Indigenous peoples are understood as racial and culture primitives doomed to be superseded, in a Social Darwinist logic, by racially and, in a cultural variant, civilizationally superior Whites. In a related but distinct move, Blackness, for instance, variously interpreted but now characterized by the "one drop rule," was historically construed as indicating an ontology destined for the institution of slavery (Browne, 2015; Wolfe, 2016: 30–31), and today identified with fitness for menial physical labor or criminality (Maynard, 2017; Muhammad, 2011). Such racist logics saturate the structures of settler colonial societies, and are institutionalized through policies ranging from residential schools, to selectively racially restrictive immigration laws, to racist policing practices.

Regarding Indigenous-White settler relationships, racialized narratives are complicated by the perpetual temporal displacement of a perfected settler colonial reality. If as Wolfe (2006) observes, the elimination of Indigenous peoples, whether through physical extermination or cultural assimilation, is the endpoint of settler colonialism, then Strakosch and Macoun (2012: 52) point out that this imagined or wished-for outcome—whether in the past or in the future—is never truly achieved. As they explain:

> Instead of the moment of decolonization, [the wished-for endpoint of settler colonialism] is the moment of full colonization—or rather, it is both, because in this imagined moment colonial relationships will dissolve themselves and settler authority will be naturalized. This transformative event is both an impossible colonial dream, premised on the disappearance of Indigenous political difference, and a concrete political project that justifies all manner of tactics in the present.

The endpoint of settler colonialism is the imagined moment where the colonial relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples are superseded, because Indigenous peoples no longer exist to jeopardize settler occupation and sovereignty. Insofar, as settler colonialism aims for the naturalization of settler authority and to correct its own imperfectly realized occupation, the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples justifies diverse eliminatory and assimilationist politics and policies—ironically, proving the incompleteness of the settler colonial project.

In settler colonialism, there is no decolonial or postcolonial moment, no beyond-the-endpoint. Settler colonial policy seeks Indigenous extinction although methods for achieving these aims change in response to Indigenous affirmations of their humanity and associated struggles. As Veracini (2010: 113–114) explains:

> Lacking the possibility of a clearly defined decolonising moment (i.e., the moment in which it is settler colonialism that is discontinued), settler colonial contexts retained the policy objectives, if not the methods, of their settler colonising pasts. The drive towards further extinction and/or assimilation of indigenous law, tenure, autonomy, and identity was retained.

Rather than a significant break with past policies, contemporary self-government agreements and land claim settlements, for instance, can be seen as functionally geared towards the ongoing objective of legitimating and naturalizing settler sovereignty and thus eliminating Indigenous presence qua Indigenous presence (Coulthard, 2014). As Alfred and Corntassel (2005: 601) suggest, settler colonial institutions are "shape-shifters" so that "the instruments of domination are evolving and inventing new methods to erase Indigenous histories and senses of place." Even the politics of reconciliation in Canada, for instance, continues to presume the sovereign authority of the settler colonial state, leaving unquestioned the Crown's legal authority, both party and judge when adjudicating the state's relationship with diverse Indigenous peoples.

The Flying Heads of Settler Colonialism: Settler Colonial Ideologies

Our central theoretical claim is that ideologies of settler colonialism must be understood both in light of the logic of elimination *and* in light of the vanishing endpoint of settler colonialism. We need to appreciate how these ideologies shape-shift and return to support a goal that is never fully achieved. This is why we refer to ideological tropes of settler colonialism as Flying Head ideologies.

Flying Heads appear in a Wendat and Wyandot[1] story (Barbeau, 2015: 311–313; Sioui, 1994: 50–51), although there are other versions. It is retold here to performatively recenter Indigenous imageries to metaphorically make sense of political dynamics. We are not excavating or appealing to the teachings embedded in the story, but instead, foregrounding an Indigenous culture for metaphorical hermeneutics, as relevant and as meaningful as other cultural repertoires used in contemporary theorizing.[2]

During their travels, the Wyandots came upon a river belonging to Giants, who opposed their crossing. After various unsuccessful attempts to cross the river, where many Wyandots were captured and killed by the Giants—who were "cruel and wicked cannibals" (Barbeau, 2015: 312)—the Wyandots developed a plan to capture and destroy their enemies. With the help of the Big Turtle, they managed to cross under the river and mount a surprise attack; during which the Little Turtle "brought the Thunder and the Lightning" (Barbeau, 2015: 312) to control the Giants. Taking advantage of the Giants' momentary incapacity:

> The Little Turtle carried the Giants to a high rock that overhung the river. Here the head of each Giant was cut off and thrown down into the raging water. But the surprise of the Wyandots, and their dismay also, was great when at the dawning of the day they saw all these Giant Heads rise from the waters, with streaming hair covered with blood which shone like lightning. They rose from the troubled waters uttering horrible screams, screeches, and yells, flew along the river, and disappeared (Barbeau, 2015: 312).

It is said that the Flying Heads continue to pursue the Wyandots, seeking revenge for their losses and causing sickness and death in their wake. We suggest that racist settler colonial myths are like Flying Heads that despite being defeated, rise up again and return to plague Indigenous peoples, often with devastating consequences.

As already suggested, most of these ideologies can be broadly understood within a Social Darwinist evolutionary perspective that conceptualizes Indigenous peoples in racialized terms, with Indigenous peoples cast in the role of primitive Others compared to more advanced, evolved, or civilized settlers, racialized as White. LaRocque (2010: 39–47) characterizes this, in a conceptual shorthand, as the "civ/sav" dichotomy: settlers are civilized and Indigenous peoples are primitive, backwards, even prehistoric figures, no matter their actual contemporaneity with settlers. Within this general civ/sav framework, we argue that the following two key recurring Flying Head ideologies, each with diverse expressions, persist: the myths of terra nullius and "the Vanishing Race."

Terra Nullius. This myth asserts that settlers arrived in literally empty lands or alternatively and more commonly, in lands that are figuratively empty due to the normatively inappropriate occupation of those already there, thus denying meaningful Indigenous presence both at the moment of the colonial invasion and subsequently.[3] As Asch (2002: 25) has argued, focusing on English law, terra nullius originates in the early-seventeenth century, when juridical decisions maintained that non-Christian "infidel" nations offended both "the law of God and of nature," so justifying Christian rule over heretical natives, recognized as literally present but religiously, hence politically, absent as right-bearing peoples.[4] In the eighteenth century, the influential lawyer and Enlightenment philosopher Emer de Vattel, notably following liberal philosopher John Locke (2003), elaborated the agricultural-productivist argument that title to land requires its efficient use; one cannot claim land in a manner that excludes those who could make more productive use of it. In a notorious passage, De Vattel (2008) wrote:

> Those who still pursue this idle mode of life, usurp more extensive territories than, with a reasonable share of labor, they would have occasion for, and have therefore no reason to complain, if other nations, more industrious, and too closely confined, come to take possession of a part of those lands. Thus, though the conquest of the civilised empires of Peru and Mexico was a notorious usurpation, the establishment of many colonies on the continent of North America might, on their confining themselves within just bounds, be extremely lawful. The people of those extensive tracts rather ranged through than inhabited them.

Following this productivist account, before the European invasion, North America was not literally empty, but effectively empty of civilized peoples, whose productive use of the land would justify their occupation, and who might therefore claim natural rights to sovereignty.

By the twentieth century, racist ideologies about primitive versus supposedly more evolutionary and civilizationally advanced peoples were invoked to simultaneously acknowledge native presence but deny that this implied any right to sovereignty and self-determination (Asch, 2002: 25). At least three variations of terra nullius thus succeed each other, overlapping in time, respectively depending on the denial of meaningful Indigenous religious, political-economic and (relatedly) civilizational existence. All are justified against the standards of settler colonial norms and practices, narrowly and exclusively equating White Europeans and their ways with rights-bearing humanity.

The Vanishing Race. This myth sees Indigenous peoples as doomed, because they are ontologically or culturally ill adapted to the contemporary civilized world (Deloria, 1982: 91; Pappas, 2017: 96–104). This is known as "the Vanishing Race" or "Vanishing Indian" (Berry, 1960)[5] trope, after one of the best-known images of the nineteenth-century photographer and propagandist Edward S. Curtis, depicting a single file of Plains Indians on horseback wending their way toward the horizon, symbolizing their disappearance, given an inevitably settler colonial future incompatible with Indigenous ways of life. Curtis' staged photos carefully stripped his Indigenous subjects of any signs of interactions with settler culture, to record what was "scientifically" known to be inevitable: Indigenous peoples were remnants of a bygone age, destined to be extinguished, superseded by a superior European race and civilization (Deloria, 1982).

The Vanishing Race, published in 1913, is one unusually explicit scholarly formulation (and invention of) this narrative. In the introduction, the author, Joseph K. Dixon (1913: 3) writes that "Annihilation is not a cheerful word, but it is coined from the alphabet of Indian life and heralds the infinite pathos of a vanishing race. We are at the end of historical origins." In this romantic lament for the doomed "Indian brother," Dixon (1913: 4) locates Indigenous peoples firmly in the past, while the "conquering race" of White settler colonizers occupies a future where Indigenous peoples appear only as ghosts: "The door of the Indian's yesterdays opens to a new world—a world unpeopled with red men (sic), but whose population fills the sky, the plains, with sad and spectre-like memories—with the flutter of unseen eagle pinions." Such unabashed romanticism, in the Noble Savage tradition, inspires Dixon's lament for the inevitable demise of Indigenous peoples. This trope persists alongside ugly and differently dehumanizing stereotypes of the Indigenous barbarian, "atheistical, proud, wild, cruel, barbarous, brutish (in one word) diabolical creatures," as one seventeenth-century American writer, quoted by Berry (1960: 52), described Indigenous peoples. Whether noble or brutish, for the settler colonizers the future is the same: "right or wrong, for good or ill, the Indian was doomed" (Berry, 1960: 52).

The Vanishing Race trope emphasizes the incompatibility of Indigeneity with the present and the future, always-already defined as belonging to the settlers. Today, this argument is expressed in several variants; here, we consider two. First, the "Indian race" vanishes because of intermixing with settlers, a literal diluting of Indigenous "blood" and so, in racial-biological conceptions of Indigeneity, disappearing through this loss of "racial purity" (Berry, 1960: 54–55; TallBear, 2003). Simultaneously, such intermixing is interpreted as rendering White settlers "Indigenous," nativized through the same contact that disappears Indigenous presence. The divide between settlers and Indigenous peoples is claimed to be already (or soon) dissolved through métissage: settlers acquire Indigeneity and Indigenous peoples are diluted into the settler collective (Leroux, 2019; Veracini, 2010; Vowel, 2016: 43–47; Wolfe, 2006: 389). Second, moving from blood and race to civilization and culture, the "Indian" may vanish because she fails to embody and perform authentic, romantic aboriginality (Smith, 2009; Wolfe, 1994: 110–118, 1999: 168–190). The urban Indigenous person, for instance, is no longer truly Indigenous, as measured against the standards of the stereotypical colonial imagination that freezes Indigenous peoples in rural and reserve settings (Adese, 2015; Lawrence, 2014; Peters and Andersen, 2013). Regardless of descent and relationships, the urban Indigenous person, though literally alive, is held to have ceased to be culturally authentically aboriginal; hence, no longer effectively exists as an Indigenous person. In both variants, the Vanishing Race asserts that Indigenous peoples have disappeared or are fast disappearing, leaving their lands open for morally justified occupation.

The purpose of these ideological claims and their variations is to legitimate settlement. The political, moral, and sometimes juridical claim of these Flying Head myths is that "colonisation is an inherently non-violent activity; the settler enters a 'new, empty land to start a new life'; indigenous people naturally and inevitably 'vanish'; it is not settlers that displace them" (Veracini, 2010: 14). Since settler colonialism is a structure, not an event, Flying Head ideologies are not the historical artifacts of a lamentable racist past, but organic to its reproduction and continuity today (Wolfe, 2006: 402). In short, the elimination of the native is performed at the level of ideas, as well as in practice, requiring, as Dahl (2018: 4) explains, disavowal and erasure: "the active and interpretive production of indigenous absence."

Erasure is an ideological construction, which exists alongside and is necessitated by persistent Indigenous presence—a presence that challenges the legitimacy of settler occupation and sovereignty. This means that "[a]t stake in settler colonial ideology is not simply racial assumptions about the inferiority of indigenous bodies, but, more saliently, the spatial absence of indigenous peoples in geographic mappings of land" (Dahl, 2018: 79). Settler colonial ideologies need to deny and mask the foundational and ongoing violence of the settler state; they do so by clearing the land in claiming that Indigenous peoples were not and still are not, for one reason or another, truly, permanently and legitimately occupying the land.

Flying Heads in Contemporary Political Theory

Two contemporary North American scholars, Tom Flanagan and Nandita Sharma, writing from divergent political commitments nonetheless converge in reproducing variations of the Flying Head ideologies of terra nullius and the Vanishing Race. Flanagan, a member of the Royal Society of Canada, one of the highest scholarly honors for academics in that national context, describes himself as a "classical liberal" committed to "representative

government," "free markets," and "progress" (Flanagan, 2019: 8–9). Previously professor of political science at the University of Calgary and an advisor for former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Flanagan comprehensively develops his ideas about Indigenous peoples in his oft-quoted book *First Nations? Second Thoughts*, originally published in 2000 and edited a third time in 2019. Nandita Sharma, a professor of Sociology at the University of Hawai'i, describes herself as an "activist-scholar" who draws on "anti-racist feminist" approaches in alliance with social justice movements, "particularly the No Borders movement and those struggling for the commons" (Sharma, nd). Indicative of her international scholarly reputation, Sharma (nd) was invited to distinguished visiting professorships at universities in Canada and the United Kingdom in 2019 and 2020. She has written widely on Indigenous peoples but we focus on her recent book, which draws on her prior theorization of native-migrant relationships, *Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants* (Sharma, 2020).

Given the very recent (re)publication of their work in peer-reviewed university presses and their professional standing as distinguished tenured scholars, we believe their convergence on broad Flying Head ideologies to be strikingly revealing of these ideologies' pervasiveness and continuing appeal across contemporary, and in this case, sharply divergent, political-theoretical discourses.

Flying Heads in Contemporary Canada

Flanagan emphasizes that his views are "controversial," given a new "Aboriginal orthodoxy" demanding respect for the rights to self-determination of Aboriginal peoples; an orthodoxy that, Flanagan (2019: 4) claims, is increasingly sympathetically heard by the broader Canadian public and state policy-makers. Certainly, over the last 50 years, there are real, if contested and precarious gains made by Indigenous peoples that render Flying Head ideologies, and Flanagan's views, less acceptable than they once were. Yet, there are instructive critical continuities between Flanagan's approach and Flying Head ideologies[6] spanning several centuries. Indeed, Flanagan (2019: 39–45) explicitly evokes seventeenth-century thinkers John Locke and Emer de Vattel, citing both as political philosophical authorities whose central claims are of enduring relevance today to challenge what he sees as Indigenous political movements' wrong-headed call for self-determination.

In some detail, Flanagan (2019: 36) describes terra nullius claims since conquest, arguing they remain persuasive today, "given the civilization gap between the Indians (sic) and Inuit, on the one hand, and the Europeans, on the other." At the time of contact, Flanagan argues that Indigenous peoples were hunter-gatherers or simple horticulturalists without sovereign, bounded nation states, whereas Europeans practiced proper agriculture, under a sovereign power. This European civilizational advantage over Indigenous peoples, as proven by the colonizers "power over nature and over uncivilized societies" (Flanagan, 2019: 45), has juridical-political and even moral implications: "if, as I have argued, the distinction between civilized and uncivilized is meaningful, then the doctrine of terra nullius comes into play, because sovereignty in the strict sense exists only in the organized states characteristic of civilized societies" (Flanagan, 2019: 58–59). For Flanagan (2019: 38), since "Canadian natives were both stateless, and for the most part, non-agricultural," the question whether or not settler colonialism is "right or wrong?" (Flanagan, 2019: 39) is easily decided in the affirmative, in keeping with de Vattel's seventeenth-century reasoning that Indigenous peoples' supposedly unproductive land use and political immaturity rendered their presence politically and legally meaningless.

Flanagan (2019: 46) emphasizes that his argument is not racist, since, if Indigenous peoples are culturally inferior—he estimates that at the time of contact "the Old World was about five thousand years ahead of the New World on the path of civilization"—Indigenous peoples nonetheless have the capacity to become civilized through assimilation (Flanagan, 2019: 45–47), an ontological potential that racists deny. Ultimately, this supposedly non-racist, moral recourse to terra nullius is superfluous, given the evolutionary march of history:

> the assertion of European sovereignty in the New World, even if morally unjustified, was historically inevitable. Civilized societies are so much more powerful than uncivilized that it is only a matter of time until the former extend their sway over the latter (Flanagan, 2019: 60).

Given the "civilizational gap" between the Old and New Worlds at the time of contact, he explains, "it seems almost beside the point to raise questions about morality. It is like asking whether it is right or wrong that childbirth is painful, or that everyone eventually has to die, or that floods and droughts occur" (Flanagan, 2019: 39). Even if terra nullius arguments are not morally persuasive (and Flanagan thinks they are), then the Vanishing Race argument comes into play, making such concerns moot: settler colonialism is as inevitable as pain, natural disasters, even death.

The march of civilization means that today, many:

> Indians (sic) and Inuit have adopted the civilized mode of life. They work, buy and sell, and invest in the economy. They acquire literacy and education, both basic and advanced. They vote and in other ways participate in political decision-making (Flanagan, 2019: 45).

Along with the movement from reserves to urban areas, such practices are seen as supplanting "authentic" Indigenous lifeways, symptomatic of Indigenous peoples' inevitable "gradual integration into the larger society" (Flanagan, 2019: 196). Or as Flanagan contends:

> In order to become self-supporting and get beyond the social pathologies that are ruining their communities, aboriginal people need to acquire the skills and attitudes that bring success in a liberal society, political democracy, and market economy. Call it assimilation, call it integration, call it adaptation, call it whatever you want: it has to happen (Flanagan, 2019: 195–196).

This shift is part of the "pathway of civilization" that all human societies must travel, but which is unfortunately slowed by the growing acknowledgment of Indigenous self-determination. In Flanagan's view, "Indians" are vanishing, but not quickly enough for their own well-being and for the continued survival of the Canadian state, which Flanagan understands as an important political good.

Much of the charge of Flanagan's book arises from his critique of stubbornly persistent self-determination movements among Indigenous peoples, as expressed in the new "aboriginal orthodoxy." If officially accepted, Flanagan (2019: 5) maintains that the new consensus around Indigenous rights to self-determination will inflict irreparable "damage to Canada," while failing to rectify the "social pathologies" that maintain Indigenous peoples "poor and dependent, marginalized on reserves." Despite claims about the inevitably vanishing race, settler colonialism's assertions of sovereignty, therefore, remain imperfect, as Flanagan (2019: 194, italics added) laments: "Because the aboriginal element is small relative to Canada's population . . . [the realization of] aboriginal self-government

might not destroy the country, *but it would be a continuous irritant*." In Flanagan's (2019: 45) view, the remedy is a more thorough application of "the policy of civilization," rooted in Indigenous peoples' full participation in market relationships, especially private property ownership (Flanagan, 2019: 133) and incorporation in the political body of the settler colonial state.

Taken together, Flanagan's arguments identify European political and agricultural practices with civilization and civilization with the future. In familiar terra nullius arguments, he denies politically meaningful Indigenous presence and combines this with a teleological narrative that imagines settler colonialism as triumphant—and therefore, Indigenous peoples as necessarily vanishing. Although Flanagan distances himself from racist ontological arguments, his narrative remains substantively in line with settler colonial tropes, conflating European political and economic forms with desirable futures and indeed, with desirable political, economic, and social arrangements *tout court.* Similarly, identifying Indigenous peoples with prehistory, if couched in civilizational rather than ontological terms, construes Indigenous peoples as historical remnants persisting anachronistically into the present (Fabian, 2014: 31). Ironically, if Flanagan describes an inevitable settler colonial future, he recognizes its vanishing endpoint, its perpetual postponement, when he casts persistent Indigenous self-determining polities as a "continuous irritant" to the full consummation of the settler colonial project. Flying Head ideologies co-exist with an alarmed appraisal of the ongoing existence and persistence of Indigenous peoples, as threats to civilizing, productivist market relationships, and to the integrity of the colonial nation state, taken by Flanagan to be a civilizational and human good.

Flying Heads in a World without Borders

In quite a different narrative, Sharma (2020: 33) emphasizes that what she calls the Postcolonial New World Order (PNWO) is fundamentally informed by a racist biopolitics that flips the "imperial binary of European/Native [. . .] into the [equally problematic] national binary of Migrant/Native." This binary structures the PNWO; there are National-Natives, who claim sovereign and exclusive territorial rights, and Migrants, who are "demonized as destroyers of nations" (Sharma, 2020: 8, 11, passim) and conflated with colonizers. Ultimately, for Sharma (2020: 281), this dualism must be overthrown for "a world without borders, without racisms."

Among other categories of National-Natives, there are "Indigenous National-Natives" and "White National-Natives," each with specific histories shaped by distinct relationships to "imperialism, racism and nationalism" (Sharma, 2020: 12). Sharma (2020: 12) recognizes their claims as non-identical, since Indigenous National-Natives may conceive their claim to sovereignty as "essential to taking good care of the planet, each other, and the generations of life to come," while White National-Natives may eschew such claims. Yet, both participate in the reproduction of "[a]utochthonous" discourses' (Sharma, 2020: 7) and both participate in the dangerous equivocation of "Nativeness with 'nationness'"; each "claim[s] that only National-Natives have rightful political claims to power," a stance that "count[s] on the subordination of Migrants" (Sharma, 2020: 13). In her account, otherwise distinct autochthonous discourses are functionally equivalent in producing "a hierarchical separation between National-Native (autochthons) and Migrants (allochthons)" (Sharma, 2020: 13), so collaborating in the biopolitical creation of the Migrants "as foreign bodies contaminating the national body politic" (Sharma, 2020: 4).

Insofar, as Indigenous peoples appear in Sharma's account only as a sub-category of National-Natives, they differ little, if at all, from other actors embracing morally and politically condemnable autochthonous discourse—despite her prior recognition that they are not identical. Indeed, she writes that

> Across their various permutations, *all* autochthonous discourses rely upon—and *all* are productive of—essentialist and ahistorical ideas of nation and race, both of which are then made the fundamental basis of legitimate political claims. *All* autochthonous discourses assert that National-Natives are the original and ultimate source of law and the grantors of rights. *All* transform land into nationally sovereign territory. And, in classic postcolonial style, *all* claimants to autochthonous national sovereignty imagine themselves to be engaged in anticolonial resistance. [. . .] *All* mobilizations of national autochthonous discourses thus view indigeneity as a *first principle* of political action (Sharma, 2020: 208, italics in original).

By this account, to the extent that they adopt autochthonous discourses, both Indigenous and White National-Natives are functionally equivalent. Both of their autochthonous discourses must be deconstructed and challenged for essential political progress toward a more truly decolonized future beyond the racist, anti-migrant present.

Despite this account, Sharma (2020: 21) insists that her "book is not against Indigenous people," but instead seeks to "contribute to a deepening and strengthening of a collaborative project" (Sharma, 2020: 21) leading beyond the anti-migrant PNWO to a more just world: the Decolonized Commons (Sharma, 2020: chapter 9). To those ends, Sharma (2020: 21, 282) explains that she deconstructs the binary "state categories of National-Native or Migrant," not Indigenous peoples themselves, to challenge the PNWO's horizon of emancipatory possibilities, currently limited to national sovereignty. This restores a more meaningful decolonial politics, since, under the PNWO, "decolonization" has been degraded and "has become nothing more than 'home rule'—the elevation of National-Natives over Migrants" (Sharma, 2020: 274, italics in original).

Yet, Sharma's decolonizing political project requires that Indigenous peoples abandon *all* their claims to aboriginality and associated distinct entitlement, relationships and responsibilities to the land. In a familiar terra nullius argument, these claims are cast as immature and so justifiably supplanted by a politically superior and more legitimate relation to the land, held in common. Put differently, if the productivist account of terra nullius, for instance, disqualifies Indigenous peoples' title to the land because they "rather ranged through than inhabited them"; Sharma's arguments disqualify Indigenous peoples' title and special relationship to the land, since, from the point of view of the Decolonized Commons, these claims, like *all* autochthonous claims, are construed as anti-Migrant and thus illegitimate. Indigenous peoples, as a sub-category of "National-Natives" alongside White National-Natives, must ultimately shed and abandon this immature political persona, along with all its inconveniences for the use of land by others.

Sharma briefly acknowledges Indigenous political claims, notably referring to Mohawk scholars A. Simpson and Alfred (Sharma, 2020: 250–260). Yet, they are read as ultimately enacting the colonial rhetoric and ambitions of nationhood; in this, Sharma fails to engage with complex Indigenous political views about land. Indigenous claims are not heard in their own voices but are ultimately and exclusively apprehended through the comprehensive category of the autochthonous National-Native. Characteristically, Sharma (2020: 3, italics in original) critiques Indigenous peoples for seeking to establish bounded national territories, "those lands that states successfully abstract as *state space*"; but only because nowhere does she engage in extended argument with distinctive

Indigenous conceptualizations of nationhood grounded in specific relational responsibilities to and with the land (Coulthard, 2014; Deloria, 1994; Goeman, 2015; Henderson, 2000; Kimmerer, 2013; Price, 2008; Sherman, 2008). The sui generis Indigenous philosophies and political imaginaries that underlie these Indigenous claims are erased through their flattening into National-Native narratives; through this erasure, their claims are disavowed and excluded from Sharma's politically desirable decolonized future.

In sum, in a reprise of terra nullius arguments, Indigenous peoples' special claims to the land are deemed normatively inconsequential, insofar as they reproduce problematic autochthonous discourses; and in a reproduction of Vanishing Race narratives, Indigenous political philosophies and imaginaries grounded in special relations to the land are always-already excluded from the wished-for world to come. Characteristic of settler colonial Flying Heads, Indigenous peoples' persistent autochthonous presence is a *continuous irritant*, to borrow Flanagan's formulation, that needs to be ongoingly disavowed to ensure the realization of a politically perfected, if ever receding, future world. As one anti-racist scholar concludes, critiquing Sharma's earlier, closely related work (Sharma and Wright, 2008), whatever her stated commitments to anti-imperialist politics, her arguments ultimately "need Indigenous peoples to disappear, which is an inherently conservative and imperialist logic" (Dhamoon, 2015: 22–23; see also Byrd, 2011: 204; Saranillio, 2013; Wolfe, 2013). Sharma's political vision demands and depends on the characteristic settler colonial need for unhindered access to Indigenous lands and so on the active production of Indigenous absence from the lands and from the future.

Prefigurative Practices beyond Settler Colonialism

Indigenous peoples and their allies challenge the tropes of settler colonialism through a defensive mobilization of reasoned argument; a "talking back" to Flying Heads ideologies. Against Social Darwinist narratives, they expose the civilization or savagery trope as a form of hate speech that denies Indigenous peoples' coevalness (LaRocque, 2010). They contest the terra nullius claims that Indigenous relationships to the land are primitive, hence negligible, instead pointing to the complex, meaningful life-sustaining relationships that diverse Indigenous peoples develop with humans and other-than-humans (Asch et al., 2018; Cajete, 2000; Henderson, 2000; Kimmerer, 2013; Ladner, 2003, 2005; Starblanket and Stark, 2018). They reject claims that Indigenous peoples have no meaningful laws and governance systems, describing diverse modes of governance and diplomacy present among Indigenous peoples and enduring in various renewed forms today (Borrows, 2010, 2017; Borrows and Coyle, 2017; Henderson, 1994, 2002; Ladner, 2005; Napoleon, 2007; Pasternak, 2017). They observe that Indigenous people are not vanishing despite genocidal policies seeking those ends (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Canada et al., 2019; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015) and emphasize that their civilizations have resisted (Estes, 2019; Simpson, 2014) and are engaged in diverse acts of resurgence and revitalization (Coburn, 2015b; Corntassel, 2012; Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2008a; Starblanket and Stark, 2018). They challenge the idea that more socially just futures demand their disappearance as distinct peoples, instead suggesting that renewed and revitalized Indigenous political imaginaries and praxis point to ways of being together that hold promise not just for Indigenous communities but for all who might choose to critically engage with them (Asch, 2014; Asch et al., 2018).

To those ends, various Indigenous scholars and activists, including Simpson (2008a), Coulthard (2014), Corntassel (2012; Corntassel et al., 2018), Alfred (Alfred and

Corntassel, 2005), and Estes (2019) among others, argue that rather than talking back to the settler state, Indigenous peoples should—and in fact already—refuse the "death dance with the colonizer" (Simpson, 2008b: 16). We follow these theorists and actors of Indigenous resurgence, by emphasizing that defensive reasoning that challenges the Flying Heads is necessary but not in itself sufficient for transformative change. Our prior analysis of the ideological dynamics of settler colonialism leads us to join them in arguing that, ultimately, such transformation depends upon prefigurative practices (Coulthard, 2014: 159); that is, acting in the present as if the world that is imagined and wished-for was already in existence.

Such prefigurative practices are about the revitalization of traditions, for both old and new purposes. This demands critical engagement with the best of traditional knowledges and practices, renewing Indigenous languages, practicing ceremony, relating to lands and revisiting diplomatic practices between Indigenous nations with an aim of renewing Indigenous ways of being, doing, and knowing. Although they focus on tradition, resurgent practices are neither romantic idealizations of the past nor resurrections of no longer existing worlds. As Aguirre (2015: 197, italics in original) explains, "Tradition is engaged not to recuperate the past, but to *renew* a life-giving force that sustains peoplehoods." Importantly, the revival of tradition is not uncritical, since, as Green (2008) observes, tradition is not axiomatically benign and may, for instance, perpetuate harmful heteropatriarchal relations and norms. Furthermore, changing contexts, including urbanization, may require that traditional practices be reimagined and take on new forms (Recollet, 2015).

In short, as political possibilities, resurgent practices draw from long-standing Indigenous imaginaries to side step the settler colonial present, actualizing a different, already existing world, that has been and is targeted for elimination by settler colonialism, but that may be revitalized and renewed. In centering these practices in the daily individual and collective lives of Indigenous peoples, the settler colonial present may be transcended, progressively disempowered and replaced. In this spirit, we very briefly engage in the normative exploration of one Indigenous political imaginary, the Dish with One Spoon, exemplifying one possible reorientation that may counter dynamics associated with the Flying Heads. This imaginary can ground practices that transcend the settler colonial focus on bounded sovereign states with exclusive territories, as defended by Flanagan and challenged by Sharma.

As Abenaki historian Brooks (2008) observes, the Dish with One Spoon is diversely elaborated within specific, place-based contexts; there are changing, sometimes conflicting understandings of what the Dish with One Spoon signifies. Sometimes a metaphor in political discourses, sometimes referring specifically to a Wampum belt recording a treaty between the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe, the most politically salient accounts are grounded in commitments to healthy, peaceful relationships among peoples and with the land, where the land is the concrete, living context for all relations. As Brooks (2008: xxiv) explains, "what I am talking about here is not an abstraction[7] [. . .] but a physical, actual, material relationship," implying responsibilities to the land and to all those sharing it. Koleszar-Green (2019: 166) explains the teachings associated with the Dish with One Spoon, understood as a treaty:

> The Earth we live on is a dish and we, as people, all eat out of the same dish using the same spoon. It is important as we live our lives, we never take more than we need, we ensure that we leave something in the Dish for others, and we keep the Dish clean.

Through these teachings, the Dish with One Spoon emphasizes the possibility for distinct peoples to share the land—we all eat from the same bowl—and to establish new peaceful relationships with each other and with the land—there is only a spoon and no knives (Lytwyn, 1997).

This demands political negotiation and a commitment to seeing others as kin with the reciprocal responsibilities of care that kinship demands. In the early nineteenth-century Pequot leader William Apess, for instance, recalled the possibilities and responsibilities of the Dish with One Spoon: "the most important lessons of the common pot [are] to think as a body about the consequences to the whole—of greed versus equal distribution, of unexamined action versus deliberation, and of division versus unity" (summarized by Brooks, 2008: 217). Taken together, these brief accounts suggest a holistic vision that emphasizes responsibilities to the Earth, to future generations, and to other peoples who depend on the Dish for survival and well-being; achieved by a refusal of greed, of division and through commitments to careful deliberation.

The Dish with One Spoon opens up possibilities to conceptualize how different peoples can peacefully access the same land. Rather than a hindrance to a more just future, perspectives like this one recenter Indigenous political imaginaries as possible pathways to better relationships with each other and with the land that neither require unhindered access to Indigenous lands nor erase Indigenous presence.

Conclusion

We began by observing that many of today's most economically and politically powerful states are settler states. Since settler colonialism is an ongoing, never-fully-perfected social and political reality, the authority of these states depends upon ideologies seeking to justify and legitimate settler occupation and sovereignty. These legitimations must be constantly renewed, no matter how often their self-interested logics are unmasked. If the Flying Heads are increasingly contested, they nonetheless recur in recognizable tropes. More problematically for political scientists and theorists, these tropes function as ideologies; they shape the forms and content of allowable political discourse about the past, present, and desirable future of these societies. Notably, we argued that terra nullius and the Vanishing Race ideologies are taken up or reproduced by academics as different as the liberal Flanagan and the no borders scholar Sharma, in their respective articulations of a just world.

We suggest that the Flying Heads of settler colonialism are unlikely to be defeated primarily through reasoned argument, in its Western or Indigenous forms. Critique is necessary, but insufficient. This is because the Flying Heads do not reflect rational argument; they are not a system of ideas whose virtue is truth. Instead, their function is precisely to disavow and erase Indigenous peoples, their ways of being, doing, and knowing. Called into being by settler colonialism, they are its servants. This explains the apparent paradox that opposite political projects, grounded on diametrically opposed premises, lead to the same Flying Head conclusions. Thus, Flanagan argues that Indigenous peoples are not civilized enough to have nation states, while Sharma argues that Indigenous peoples imagine themselves as territorially bounded nation states, yet both conclude that Indigenous peoples are a threat to politically promising futures. Despite their divergent political premises, both rely on the same endpoint, the erasure of Indigenous presence.

As Veracini (2015: 108) suggests, "[t]he way out [. . .] is to undo the settler's sovereign charge." For actors, including political scientists and theorists, within

contemporary settler states, this means paying attention to the ways in which their political theorizing and normative projects may build, often unintentionally, on the allowable erasure and disavowal of Indigenous peoples and their title to the land. Furthermore, we suggest that overcoming the settler colonial present also depends on reinvigatoring political theory and practices through a critical engagement with Indigenous political imaginaries and practices like the Dish with One Spoon that have been suppressed but never disappeared. We contend that diverse Indigenous worldviews, although they may never be perfectly realized, are worth critically engaging with and exploring. This is part of the movement beyond settler colonialism and associated Flying Heads, since they will only be vanquished when the structures that sustain them have finally been transcended.

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Notes

1. In retelling the story, Sioui refers to the "Wendat" and Barbeau to the "Wyandot." The Huron-Wendat and the Wyandot are now two distinct but related peoples, sharing a common heritage in the Wendat Confederacy. We quote and therefore follow Barbeau.
2. One co-author, a member of the Huron-Wendat First Nation, suggested that the Flying Heads offered an alternative metaphor to the "zombie colonial" ideologies described by Coburn (2015a: 35) as recurrently rising up despite being thoroughly debunked, thus centering Wendat cultural heritage. Interestingly, it is not uncommon for the monstrous, the supernatural, or the pestilent to be mobilized to theorize colonial dynamics. Byrd (2011: 221–229) also refers to zombies but to capture the mindless and necropolitical features of imperialism, while Belcourt (2016) writes about the queer Indigenous poltergeist, noisily shaking up settler colonial relationships, and Veracini (2015: 7, 13–31) likens colonialism to viral and bacterial infections.
3. In keeping with Asch and others, we use terra nullius to refer to the array of past and present reasoning and legal discourses, like "res nullius" (Vowel, 2016: 237), that normatively affirm that Indigenous lands are empty, and thus claimable.
4. Such rationalizations and the use of "violence to remove people from land was an English way of doing things," traceable to the early-nineteenth century English settlement of Ulster and later re-deployed "against North America's Indians" (Lyons, 1992: 26).
5. Berry (1960: 57) insists that many "Indians" still live in 1960, so that they are far from a "vanishing race" as is so often claimed; nonetheless, he stereotypes them as often "poor, isolated and pathetic."
6. See, for instance, Asch (2014: 48), who rejects Flanagan's claim that "our [colonial settlers] way of living is objectively better at providing for our material well-being than is theirs' and that therefore we 'have a right to impose it so long as those on the receiving end obtain the requisite benefits'." For Asch (2014: 54), this is "nothing more than a self-serving rationalization designed to justify European powers."

7. This contrasts sharply with Sharma's claim that Indigenous National-Natives conceive of the land abstracted as state space.

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