Abstract

Place, Attachment, and Feeling: Indigenous Dispossession and Settler Belonging

Sarah Kizuk, M.A.

Marquette University, 2023

This dissertation looks at Canada as a set of places. That is, the problem I examine is how and why settler colonial countries like Canada have defined what places are as well as how their meaning and importance is both generated and maintained. It is my thesis that settler understandings of place, specifically the way emotion and affect have served to reify settler place, are a foundational part of the structure of the settler colonial state and of the settler self. For my purposes, therefore, I track the ways in which settler senses of belonging and attachment to place are a mechanism of settler colonialism bent on (unsuccessful) eradication and genocide. That is, affective and emotional elements give fundamental structure to those senses of belonging and attachment from within a colonial structure, themselves often occluded by forms of settler ignorance to the function of place-making.

Further, this dissertation is doing an ameliorative conceptual analysis of settler affects, specifically focusing on developing an account of the role that what I am calling emplaced affects play in the maintenance of the settler colonial state and on-going land theft from Indigenous peoples. I show that emotional responses to challenges of settler emplacement are not benign but political sites that exemplify both settler ignorance and settler privilege. The problem this research traces is thus not a definition of what place is, but, rather, how emotional attachments to place function politically to both structure place and ‘placed-identities.’ I argue that settler place-attachments are thus a crucial prong of the settler colonial system and ought to be more deeply studied.

The latter chapters of the dissertation examine two affective responses to place-attachments being challenged by the colonial reality of settlement in Canada, specifically Indigenous resistance and resurgence movements. Settled place-making and myths, once challenged, can result in affective responses such as settler fear and panic as well as settler shame. I argue that these emotional dispositions to Canadian identity and land are evidence of the emotional mechanisms through which settler populations keep settler place-attachments and settler places functional and, even at times, thriving. The dissertation closes by thinking about the political and emotional commitments required by settler peoples who wish to disengage in both in the project of settler place-making and the affective re-making of settled identity.