

International Indigenous Voices in Social Work

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Edited by

Michael Anthony Hart,
Amanda Dawne Burton,
Kimberly Hart,
Gladys Rowe,
Deana Halonen
and Yvonne Pompana

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INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL ANTHONY HART
AND AMANDA DAWNE BURTON

As nations of Indigenous peoples throughout the world, we have faced a barrage of colonial oppressive acts that have impacted our nations, communities, families, and people. From the moment we are born to the moment we die, we live a political reality where acts of oppression are perpetrated against us daily in conscious and unconscious ways. These acts, from unconscious marginalization to purposefully imposed violence, are meant to remove our presence and have resulted in disconnections for many Indigenous peoples from our lands, waters, cultures, histories, knowledges, and dreams. These disconnections are evident in the negative statistics related to our health, socio-economic status, and psychological well-being. Worse yet are the deaths of our people through colonial oppression that is rarely recognized (Razack 2015). Despite these depressing factors, the real story for our people throughout the world is one of strength, effort, ability, knowledge, and inter-generational commitment.

While colonialism remains in place throughout the world; we have always been confronting the oppression, decolonizing from its impacts, and growing from our Indigenous foundations. Unlike the history books and other texts that either ignore us or marginalize our efforts, we have never stopped standing up for our beliefs, our connections, our rights, and our ways of being in the world. While our Indigenous knowledges¹, values, beliefs, and practices have been maintained to varying degrees, it is readily apparent that we have all maintained something that connects us to the skies, lands, and waters, as well as to our roots, ancestors, and peoples' visions. In our hearts, we remain Indigenous regardless of the efforts of others to disconnect us from our source of identity.

This book is a reflection of what we carry in our hearts and our efforts

¹ The term "Indigenous knowledge" is pluralized in order to make a political statement that reflects the decentering of control over knowledge by colonial powers. Some social work programs and positions have purposely used the "s" for this reason.

to stand strong as Indigenous peoples. It is based on presentations given at the Second International Indigenous Voices in Social Work Conference held in Winnipeg, Canada. The conference had over 125 presenters and these chapters are a cross-reflection of the amazing people who came from various Indigenous territories from around the world. The conference had a central theme of Indigenous Knowledge with three sub-themes: resurgence, implementation and collaboration. These themes stem from efforts to work against the colonial projects that continue to operate, and create space for Indigenous ideas, perspectives, values, and practices.

Colonialism, resurgence, implementation, and collaboration

Hart (Hart & Rowe 2014) has defined colonialism as shifting processes where Indigenous peoples face impositions of other peoples' views, ideas, beliefs, values, and practices at the costs of their lives, views, ideas, beliefs, values, practices, lands, and/or resources. It includes processes where Indigenous peoples are stopped, hindered, cajoled, and/or manipulated from making and enacting decisions about their lives and their traditional lands. These decisions include how they are going to be, who they are and how, if at all, they are going to incorporate Settler peoples' ideas, beliefs, values, and practices. More specific to Indigenous peoples in such territories that are now called Canada, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and South Africa is Settler colonialism. Settler colonialism disputes that these territories are decolonized and explains that they are populated with a Settler society that internally directs the colonial oppression (Veracini 2010). The intent is to remove Indigenous peoples' claims of sovereignty and remove their claim to the land and resources. As explained by Lowman and Barker (2015), Settler colonialism is characterized by: (1) invasion as a continuing structure that includes social, economic, political, and cultural norms and practices created to privilege the colonizers; (2) the colonizers' intent to stay; and (3) the transcendence of colonialism through the elimination of Indigenous people and/or their connection to the land and the so-called naturalization and normalization of Settlers and their so-called home.

Colonizers attempt to legitimize their usurpation by creating a narrative that has the Settler populations believing in a mythical portrait of Indigenous people (Memmi 1967). Drawn negatively, this portrait objectifies Indigenous people with such descriptors as lazy, incompetent, abusive, wasteful, and stuck in the past. This allows Settlers to be at ease with their oppressive treatment of Indigenous people and justifies viewing

them as either deserving or having brought oppression unto themselves. Colonizers are able to remove any remnants of guilt by performing what they consider to be benevolent acts that help the colonized overcome, what the colonizers perceive as, their limitations. Colonizers fail to see how these acts actually reinforce the marginalization and removal of Indigenous people, and reflect the self-supporting decree that colonizers are the makers of order and progress (Steward-Harawira 2005; Razack 2015). Any protests against these acts are seen as unfounded and ungrateful reactions to the colonizers' progress, order, and benevolence.

While colonial efforts work to stop us from expressing a full range of emotions, such as our hurt and anger that stem from the oppressive acts of Settlers, we continue to counter this silencing. As explained by Coulthard (2014):

What implicitly gets interpreted by the State as Indigenous peoples' *resentment*—understood as an incapacitating inability or unwillingness to get over the past—is actually an entirely appropriate manifestation of our *resentment*: a politicized expression of Indigenous anger and outrage directed at a structural and symbolic violence that still structures our lives, our relations with others, and our relationship with land (109).

Our mourning, anger, and shouts are reflections of our work to shed the inter-generational and current colonial oppression (Linklater 2014). Indeed, more and more people are overcoming the internalized oppression we all face to varying degrees as Indigenous people, and reconnecting to their identities and communities. Many people reflect on this ongoing process, including Boldo, who, in Chapter One, outlines the impact of colonialism on her and her efforts to stand strong in her identity as a Cree/Métis woman.

This self-recognition as Indigenous persons who have cultural histories, practices, shared ideas, values and beliefs is a key aspect of resurgence that is emphasized by many authors (Lucero and Bussey 2015; Simpson 2011). Resurgence also involves Indigenous people working together, particularly within their own traditional territories, to take control and re-create new realities for themselves. This work requires Indigenous people to redefine, on their own terms, their relationship with other people with whom they interact, specifically the Settlers on their territories. In other words, while resurgence certainly means continuing to protect ourselves, the lands, waters, air, and other lives, it also means looking at how we are interacting with one another as people. Blaser, de Costa, McGregor, and Coleman (2010), Coulthard (2014), Simpson (2011) and others, emphasize the need for the resurgence of our practices, beliefs and

ideas throughout our social, political, cultural, and economic structures to re-establish a foundation that can serve as a basis for interactions with others.

For many Indigenous people working in social work, this aspect of resurgence has meant standing up for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in education, laws, policies, ethics, and standards governing social work. There are existing and emerging frameworks and programmes that emphasize Indigenous knowledge as the foundation for social work education at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Examples include the report *Getting It Right Teaching and Learning Framework 2014* (Bessarab et al. 2014), the Bachelor of Bicultural Social Work programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, the Baccalaureate Social Work degree offered through Salish Kootenai Tribal College, the Masters of Social Work Aboriginal Field of Study programme at Wilfred Laurier University, and the Masters of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledges at the University of Manitoba (Hart et al. 2014).

The role of Indigenous knowledge within the profession has been recently recognized and highlighted internationally. According to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW 2016):

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and Indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being.

The definition was approved by both the IFSW and the International Association of Schools of Social Work in July of 2014. The IFSW goes on to explain:

Social work seeks to redress historic Western scientific colonialism and hegemony by listening to and learning from Indigenous people around the world. In this way social work knowledge will be co-created and informed by Indigenous people, and more appropriately practiced not only in local environments but also internationally.

This recognition and explanation can be seen as an attempt by the international social work community to catch up with the work of Indigenous social work scholars and practitioners who have been incorporating Indigenous knowledges into their research, teachings, and practice. There are many efforts to research and present Indigenous

approaches within social work (Baikie 2015; Hart 2002, 2008, 2009; Kolawole 2011; Muller 2014; Munford and Saunders 2011; Ross 2010; Weaver 2014). These efforts are far reaching, with efforts in such places as Taiwan, Norway, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand.

While the bulk of the work of bringing forth and centering Indigenous knowledge and practices into social work rests, rightfully, with Indigenous people, it is clear that Settler societies also have work to do. This work is ideally anti-colonial and decolonizing, and involves Settler societies working collaboratively with Indigenous people to challenge the boundaries implicit in colonial mindsets. Settlers must actively contribute to challenging the marginalization of Indigenous ontologies, the epistemological oppression of Indigenous knowledges, and the ignorance of Indigenous helping practices. Additionally, it should actively confront the dehumanization of the mythical portrait of Indigenous people, and acknowledge Settler violence against Indigenous people and the constructed deaths of Indigenous people within colonial structures (Razack 2015).

As a Settler critiquing the colonial State and its terror, Razack (2015) states that:

In failing to confront the material basis to colonial logic head on, Settlers reveal their investment in the fiction that colonialism is a thing of the past. If we start with the reality that of an ongoing colonialism we can better reflect on the inhumanity that such a project requires (210).

While there are many recent efforts by Indigenous people to directly address the ongoing issue of colonialism (Baikie 2015; Leland 2015; Coulthard 2014; Hart and Rowe 2014; Linklater 2014; Muller 2014; Simpson 2011; Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird 2012), some Settlers have also been addressing it (Lowman and Barker 2015; Razack 2015; Regan 2011). There is recognition that addressing colonial oppression and making room for Indigenous knowledges, ethics, theories, practices, and protocols within social work cannot be based solely upon such concepts as cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness and cross-cultural practice (Hart and Bracken 2016). Using these concepts could result in populations of Settler social workers using superficial awareness of concepts such as *mana* and sweat lodges to continue with conventional Settler practices. These concepts can also lead to Indigenous social workers disconnecting from themselves as Indigenous people to work cross-culturally according to conventional Settler practices (Sinclair 2004). Cross-cultural practices do not provide Indigenous social workers with insight into the oppression as it *presently* operates within themselves or the field of social work.

Settler social workers need to be critically reflective, as suggested by Carlson in Chapter Nine, and Simms in Chapter Ten, and confront how they have internalized the stance of dominance and privilege. Both Indigenous and Settler societies need to be fully aware of not only the historical colonization, but also its present manifestations so when they do to work together, they can be prepared to address the oppression within their personal relationships with one another and within their working relationships. Without addressing one's own internalization of colonial oppression or domination, the root causes of issues cannot be truly addressed. Failure to address internalized aspects of colonialism often result in oppressed persons being directed to tend to the hurt feelings and guilt of Settlers when their privilege is brought to light; conversely, it can result in self-congratulatory pride in Settler people for the smallest of achievements in so called decolonization. Without recognizing the bigger picture, Settler society cannot understand how their perceived achievements are only very small steps in the overall anti-colonial processes.

True collaboration between Settler and Indigenous societies requires ongoing critical self-assessment and personal development that addresses internalized processes. Since oppression evolves and comes to manifest itself in new ways over time, this kind of self-assessment work must continue until oppression is eradicated. There will be times when Indigenous and Settler people will come to work together and efforts to address oppression must continue so that there is space for Indigenous ideas, knowledges and practices to emerge and grow within social work. When Settler and Indigenous people are working together, the knowledges and practices involved may be Indigenous centred. At other times the practices may work from the middle ground; this needs to be carefully considered. Without critical self-reflection, what is believed to be the middle can often be a retreat back to the Settlers' comfort zone (see Chapter Twelve for a discussion on how what is said is not always what is practiced). Collaboration is not an easy, straightforward process, but it has the potential to become part of anti-colonial processes.

Overview

International Indigenous Voices in Social Work: Resurgence, implementation, collaboration is a snapshot of the themes of Indigenous resurgence, implementation and collaboration within social work. While it is a contribution to the centering of Indigenous people, ideas, knowledges, and practices in social work, the themes and content within this text are relevant across disciplines where Indigenous people are involved, whether

as knowledge developers, practitioners, or the recipients of services. The text is divided into the three thematic sections and has twelve chapters in total.

In Chapter One, Vicky Boldo, a Cree/Métis woman, lays bare her personal journey through transracial adoption. She traces her path of being raised in an environment of *total denial* of her Aboriginal heritage. She recalls the abuse and mistreatment in her adoptive home, as well as her difficult adolescence during which she struggled with promiscuity, which resulted in pregnancy, her struggle with alcohol and drug abuse, and her journey on to metamorphosis in which she reclaimed her identity as a proud Aboriginal woman. Vicky credits this transformation to many factors including: reconnecting to her biological family, the land, her language, culture and tradition, as well as completing narrative therapy and attending higher education. She concludes by outlining traditional parenting practices and argues for the necessity of customary adoption, in which child rearing responsibilities are shared amongst family and community members, as an important method of decolonization.

Adesayo Adelowo was the first graduate researcher in New Zealand to make use of an African methodology in her work. In Chapter Two, she provides a vivid description of the storytelling process: how it involves the storyteller, and the audience, as well as the physical and spiritual space in which it occurs. Adesayo recounts the variety of stories that are told in African cultures, and advocates for the use of storytelling as a fundamental research methodology for African researchers as it makes use of African languages, allows freedom from dominant cultures and understandings, and promotes social change using African peoples' own experiences.

The development of Indigenous social work in Taiwan is explored in Chapter Three. Kui Kasirisir argues that the history and cultures of Indigenous Taiwanese people has been ignored, leading to flawed perceptions and unsuitable interventions by mainstream social workers. With the occurrence of two natural disasters in the past decade (in which the majority of those impacted were Indigenous), Indigenous social work issues have been brought to the forefront. Kui shares how the lack of formal education opportunities in working with Indigenous peoples prompted him to explore his own tribal living experiences and understanding. He believes this could be the core of effectively helping Indigenous service users. He asserts that cooperation between mainstream and Indigenous social workers is critical in creating space for further development of Indigenous-based social work.

In Chapter Four, Gunn-Tove Minde and Randi Nymo explore the question of how health care personnel can best support Sámi patients

throughout rehabilitation processes. Qualitative interview data is used to illustrate the patients' experiences in coping with an illness and their subsequent rehabilitation processes within the framework of traditional Sámi knowledge. Crucial to this process is the goal of feeling like a complete person after recovery rather than simply *getting used to* living with a disability. While there are individual life experiences and strengths amongst the patients, the commonalities among rehabilitation processes are outlined and include: care systems, self-care and faith, the relationship between care provider and patient, and the importance of returning home to their Sámi cultural landscape to recover.

Carolyn Leblanc explores the connection between the recidivism rates of Aboriginal offenders and their choice of correctional programming while incarcerated. In Chapter Five she questions if there is a difference between Aboriginal offenders who choose culturally specific programmes and those who choose alternative programmes. Despite efforts to make progress, Aboriginal offenders continue to be vastly over-represented in the criminal justice system. Carolyn cites the contextual factors that contribute to this over-representation and identifies several approaches that can mitigate against some of these factors, including culturally specific programmes and activities, and Elder services. She further examines whether there is sufficient and appropriate access to culturally specific programming and services within Canadian correctional facilities.

In Chapter Six, Moana Eruera and Leland Ruwhiu share "critical reflections and experiences as Indigenous social work practitioners, thinkers, strategists, researchers and theorists" with regard to traditional Maori parenting practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. The authors emphasize the importance of reclaiming and strengthening service delivery for *mokopuna* (reflections of their ancestors: offspring) and their *whānau* (extended family) in a context of poverty, post-colonization trauma, dispossession, loss of language, identity and cultural practices. Leland outlines his familial story to illustrate *Tiaka Mokopuna*, which is a cultural principle that "asserts the collective roles, responsibilities and obligations to care for, make safe, support and protect...children and young people within healthy families." The use of this principle is seen as having "transformative potential" to promote positive *whānau* networks, cultural beliefs, and processes for supporting the well-being of *mokopuna*. Moana and Leland end the chapter with five recommendations that focus on regenerative practices and the gathering of Indigenous data to guide practice.

Dawn Bessarab, Sue Green, Joanna Zubrzycki, Victoria Jones, Katrina Stratton, and Susan Young trace the development of the Getting It Right

project in Australia in Chapter Seven. They examine the degree to which Indigenous content has been included in mainstream social work curricula in Australian social work schools. Currently, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and practices occupy alternative status, rather than a more central role in the curriculum, governance, and leadership structures and processes. An Action Research process was undertaken in an effort to move toward epistemological equality, cultural responsiveness, and the centering of Aboriginal and Torres Strait pedagogies. The authors assert that a *middle ground* must be sought between traditional and Western practices, in which both engage in a respectful manner to create a new path for social work education and practice in Australia.

Chapter Eight continues the discussion of social work education in Australia with author Suzanne Jenkins outlining how education continues to be steeped in white culture, and despite plans to address issues, remains a “tool of assimilation” for Indigenous students. She provides an overview of colonization processes in Australia and makes the argument that historical policies meet the criteria for genocide. Using this context as a starting point, she shares her research findings on the experience of Indigenous students who have left their communities to attend post-secondary education. An overarching theme is that students were required to live “between two worlds.” Suzanne advocates that the mainstream education systems need to create opportunities for Indigenous students to succeed in the mainstream system, yet allow them to maintain their traditional values and culture so that students can live “not between, but within two worlds.” This requires non-Indigenous people to question their institutions and ways of doing things. She offers a five-stage decolonization process that maps a way to a better future for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

In Chapter Nine, Elizabeth Carlson challenges mainstream social work to examine its participation in colonial practices such as *othering*, surveillance, and *pathologizing*. She argues that these practices have played key roles in colonization processes in Canada, particularly in terms of past and present child welfare systems. Elizabeth asks the question “what would happen if we fashioned social work interventions for, and studied ‘the Settler problem’” and its emphasis on hierarchy, control, violence, coercion, and superiority? She contends that both Indigenous and white colonial Settler people are harmed by these practices and ideologies, and concludes the chapter with several recommendations to move toward decolonizing social work with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous social workers working together in the spirit of solidarity.

Tom Simms continues this conversation in Chapter Ten, addressing the necessity of confronting white privilege and identifying sources of domination in today's society. He explores obstacles in challenging white privilege: "privilege blindness," in which white people can choose not to confront issues of racism, fear of change, and personal discomfort. In order to overcome these challenges, Tom outlines numerous opportunities for dismantling white privilege and becoming an ally, including the willingness to take personal risks, practicing humility and self-awareness, particularly for those in helping roles, and taking responsibility for the privileges one has. In order to gain people's attention and raise hope, he promotes the use of storytelling as a course of action in the journey toward social justice.

Chapter Eleven serves as an example of collaborative research between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers, as well as a reflection on this process. Liz Orr and Kenneth James Walker outline the research approach that was used in the Aboriginal Family Well-Being training programme in Australia. This project was a collaborative effort to address family violence. Indigenous women in Australia face six times more intimate partner violence than other women and tend to be "silenced or overlooked" in the search for solutions. While recognizing the colonial context in which the research was undertaken, the authors detail the ways that Aboriginal research frameworks, beliefs and traditional concepts, and input and decision-making were imbued throughout the project. Liz and Kenneth share their reflections on the process that they describe as a "deep emotional commitment" to a respectful, inclusive, relationship-based, and ethical collaborative effort.

In the final chapter of the book, Silvia Straka, Rose Ella Cameron, Lisa Kisch, and Judy Syrette share their experiences as a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women navigating the "Eurocentric, colonial, patriarchal and hierarchical nature" of the northern campus in which they work. They outline the contradictions between the programme's professed Indigenous values and the structural resistance they face in realizing those values. From an Anishinaabe worldview, the authors began implementing sharing circles as a way to return ceremony and spirituality to its central role, as well as to "disrupt and transform" power relations. They share their reflections on this transformative process as a way to Indigenize a mainstream institution and speak to both the challenges and opportunities that it presented.

The success of the conference upon which this book is based clearly shows that not only are we as Indigenous peoples contributing to social work, but we are shaping social work with Indigenous peoples on our

peoples' own terms. This book is a continuation of this Indigenist stance and practice of self-determination.

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PART I:
RESURGENCE

