



ISSN 2754-5547

<https://doi.org/10.52230/CDZS3895>

‘David B. A. MacDonald and Emily Grafton (Editors), On Settler Colonialism in Canada: Lands and Peoples’

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To cite this book review: Jatinder Mann, ‘David B. A. MacDonald and Emily Grafton (Editors), On Settler Colonialism in Canada: Lands and Peoples’, *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 6 (September 2026): 143-145, <https://doi.org/10.52230/FQRE3436>

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David B. A. MacDonald and Emily Grafton (Editors), *On Settler Colonialism in Canada: Lands & Peoples* (University of Regina Press, 2025), 384pp. Paperback. C\$36.95. ISBN: 978-1-7794-0064-2.

This fascinating and significant edited collection by David B. A. MacDonald and Emily Grafton as the editors mention in their introduction to the book had a long genesis but it was most certainly worth the wait. It has got to be one of the most impressive works on settler colonialism in Canada that I have personally come across. One of the reasons for this is the considerable breadth and depth of the book, which is no easy accomplishment I know from my own personal experience, having edited or co-edited several books. And you definitely get your money's worth with the book including twenty chapters and an introduction (although the length of the chapters does vary). However, due to the limitations of space in this review I will focus on one chapter from each of the four parts of the book. The latter are 'Considering Violence and Genocide in the Canadian Settler State', 'Logics of Empire, Colonialism, and Unsettling', 'Settler Colonial Society – Relating, Reckoning, and Unreconciliation', and 'Asserting Indigenous Knowledges in Settler Colonial Canada'.

David B. A. MacDonald's 'Match and Exceed: Why Recognizing Genocide in Canada Is Only the First Step in Promoting Indigenous Self-Determination' explores the long journey it took for the Canadian federal government in 2022 to finally recognise the Indian Residential School (IRS) system as an act of genocide against Indigenous Peoples in what is now known as Canada. MacDonald rightly highlights that the IRS Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) had previously stated that the IRS was a form of *cultural* genocide. The chair of the TRC, the late Senator Murray Sinclair had wanted to go further and actually define the IRS as genocide (as per the definition of the Genocide Convention) but had been advised against it by his legal team at the time. As if he had proceeded the government might have insisted on parts of the TRC report being redacted and other important points made by them being prevented from reaching the public. However, even when the Trudeau Liberal government did accept that the IRS was actually an act of genocide by the Canadian state, the practical consequences of this were quite limited and there was some notable backlash from certain quarters. MacDonald aptly describes the former situation as giving with one hand and taking away with the other. Furthermore, the chapter highlights that despite the considerable effort it took and the controversy that followed recognition of genocide against Indigenous Peoples in what is now Canada, it is only the first step in facilitating Indigenous self-determination in Canada.

'Imperial Circulation, Implicatedness, and Co-Conspiracy: Racialized Interruptions of Settler Colonialism in Canada' by Liam Midzain-Gobin focuses on the role that non-Indigenous People of Colour can play in combatting settler colonialism in Canada. Midzain-Gobin who highlights in the chapter that they are of mixed Guyanese and Ukrainian descent certainly considers this background as informing their research and giving them a unique perspective to approach it. The chapter illustrates that non-Indigenous People of Colour have certainly faced and continue to face discrimination from the White settler colonial majority. This experience has certainly given many non-Indigenous People of Colour a unique empathy for the devastating experience that Indigenous Peoples have faced as a result of Settler Colonialism in Canada. However, at the same time non-Indigenous People of Colour have also been complicit in the propagation of that very system of Settler Colonialism, especially when it comes to the exploitation of resources and the

continued spread of certain stereotypes when it comes to Indigenous Peoples in what is now Canada. So, Midzain-Gobin emphasises that non-Indigenous People of Colour have a responsibility to not only acknowledge their own role in the harms of Settler Colonialism towards Indigenous Peoples but also step up as allies of the latter in combatting that long-entrenched system and furthering the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples in what is now Canada.

Jerome Melancon's 'Relying Upon the Colonial Project: Francophone Communities in Minority Settings Within the Bilingual Settler Colonial State' studies the relationship that French-speaking communities in what is now Canada have with settler colonialism. The chapter firstly outlines a story that many French-speaking Peoples in Canada would have heard (including Melancon personally) growing up. Namely that New France as it was then known was a very different colonial enterprise to the British (much more enlightened especially when it came to relations with Indigenous Peoples), the military defeat of their ancestors by the British, and the valiant struggle French-speaking communities then embarked upon to preserve their language and culture in spite of the yoke of British colonialism. However, Melancon then proceeds to tell a different narrative. This highlights that New France's relations with Indigenous Peoples were not as benign as the previous narrative would suggest, yes French-speaking communities in Canada's ancestors were defeated militarily by the British but the central role of the Catholic Church continued as the British were keen to appease their new subjects, and the Catholic Church took an active role in the expansion of settler colonialism in Canada, especially in the west. The chapter therefore strongly advocates for a real coming to terms of the French-speaking role in the establishment of the settler colonial system in Canada and the correspondent responsibility that French-speakers also have in dismantling that system.

Emily Grafton's 'Resistance and Resurgence: Asserting Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Settler Colonial Canada' looks at the myriad ways in which Indigenous Peoples in what is now Canada have fought against the Settler Colonial system. This includes lobbying for constitutional changes, most prominently Section 35 of the 1982 *Constitution Act*'s 'Duty to Consult' (which essentially requires the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Peoples when it comes to measures that affect them), the endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and its subsequent domestic legislative adoption. However, Grafton digs deeper and quite rightly illustrates that although Section 35 of the 1982 *Constitution Act* does stipulate that Canadian governments do have a 'Duty to Consult' with Indigenous Peoples when it comes to measures that affect them, this has not always meant the securing of FPIC of Indigenous Peoples in practice. Moreover, it is true that Canada did eventually endorse UNDRIP in 2016 after initially opposing it when it was first endorsed by most countries in 2007, and it did indeed subsequently domestically legislatively adopt it in 2021. But both of these were a direct result of considerable advocacy on the part of Indigenous Peoples themselves and the actual practical consequences of both for Indigenous Peoples have been debated.¹

I very much enjoyed reading this book, despite much of its emotionally challenging subject matter. It certainly makes a very valuable contribution to the field,

¹ For more on this see Jatinder Mann, 'The implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Australia, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand', *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 5, (September 2025): 51-104, <https://doi.org/10.52230/RVQH2862>.

and I can definitely see the book being utilised considerably in courses that explore settler colonialism in Canada. I therefore strongly recommend it to readers, although it will appeal more to specialists rather than general readers due to its specialised subject matter and sometimes quite dense language. And I am very much looking forward to reading the companion edited volume by the two editors.

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