

**TITLE:**

White Settler Society as Monster:  
Rural Southeast Kansas, Ancestral Osage (*Wah-Zha-Zhi*) Territories, and the Violence of Forgetting

**ABSTRACT:**

This article provides a critical analysis of the practices and discourses of white settler 'men' in Southeast Kansas (Ancestral Osage Territories) by examining the inextricable links rural masculinity has with settler colonialism. I begin by underscoring how efforts in erasing Indigenous histories have been sanctioned through processes of dispossession, bordering, and nation-state building. I then explore how hetero-patriarchal, rural hierarchies are assembled via capitalistic desires for private property; conservative Christianity's rhetoric of altruism and good intentions; white supremacist conceptions of race; and masculinist perspectives regarding work and gender. Next, I highlight how the spatial assertion of white settler masculinity reproduces colonial oppressions/privileges based upon interlocking subject positions and notions of difference. I continue by suggesting denial and disaffiliation are banal exercises of disavowal employed by white settler societies as attempts at forgetting colonial violence. I then finish by illustrating how a masculinist status quo might be disrupted, resisted, and transformed.

**KEYWORDS:**

Settler Colonialism, Masculinity, White Supremacy, Discourse Analysis, Feminist Geography, Rural Geography

*I think its just time for them to get over it, they need to quit feeling sorry for themselves  
and get on with their lives at some point.*

Rob, 32-year-old 'Kansan'  
(speaking about Indigenous people)

*They had been wiped out in the worst way, through the greatest kind of human crime...  
Through forgetting.*

Subcomandante Marcos, former spokesperson of the EZLN  
(speaking about Indigenous people)

One cannot tell an honest history of Southeast Kansas<sup>1</sup> without mentioning the violence of settler colonialism, nor can its ties to masculinity and whiteness be ignored. As such, the goal of this paper is to critically analyze the role white hetero-settler masculinity plays in reproducing gendered social relations and racial hierarchies in current day 'Southeast Kansas,' the ancestral territories of the Osage [*Wah-Zha-Zhi*] Nation. My discussion addresses the colonial assertion of hegemonic (rural) masculinity by white, working-class, 'American' (United States citizen) 'men' in relation to spatiality and the dispossession of the Osage Nation.<sup>2</sup>

I emphasize here it is not my aim to subject the Osage people to the probing magnifying glass of a white settler researcher (myself), who is not an authority on their culture or knowledges. As several critical voices have pointed out, this type of research, oftentimes despite good intentions, reinforces colonial oppression through fetishization and tokenism, as well as ongoing material and discursive exposures (de Leeuw, Greenwood, Lindsay 2013, Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Rather, my examination sets out to interrogate the socio-spatial production of masculinity in rural Kansas in order to contribute to ongoing scholarly discussions applying decolonial perspectives to gender, sexuality, race, and power across settler colonial geographies (Hunt and Holmes 2015, Barnes 2013, Morgensen 2012, Coombes 2006). I do so by drawing from empirical data gathered during a research project I directed in Southeast Kansas.

For the research, I moved back to the rural community I was raised in and obtained worked as farmhand. Southeast Kansas is largely viewed by participants as having a 'slow pace of life' where 'a lot of down-to-earth country folk' live. As it is situated in an economically depressed region of the central United States, incomes are largely dependent upon industrial mono-cropping, livestock production, resource extraction, highway and warehouse construction, factory processing, and millwork finishing. I lived in the area as a participant observer for nine months and interviewed 30 individuals, visiting each person at least twice. I also held eight focus groups (each with five contributors), had 15 men keep photo-journals, and recorded field notes during my day-to-day work.

The participants all classified themselves as male, white/'Caucasian,' heterosexual/'straight,' Catholic/Christian, working or middle class, and their ages

ranging from 19 to 77. In addition, all of the informants self-identified as ‘American,’ ‘from the country,’ and ‘local.’<sup>3</sup> Upon collecting the data, I then conducted a Foucauldian discourse analysis of the participants’ interviews, reflections, and photographs, which was primarily informed by feminist and decolonial theoretical perspectives.<sup>4</sup> I analyzed the data by iteratively examining the transcriptions, comparing them to my field notes, and looking for the emergence of themes relating to power, place, ‘manhood,’ emotions, social identities, relationships, ideals, values, history, politics, everyday practices, notions of difference, and silences (i.e. what ‘men’ were not talking about).

From this vantage point, what I offer is an interlocking overview of what many transnational, anti-racist, and poststructural feminists have recognized as mutually constitutive processes of socio-spatial subjectification (McKittrick 2011, de Leeuw 2009, Jiwani 2006). In conceptually framing my approach as interlocking, I am not implying ‘identities’ are fixed categories that occasionally intersect, rather, I theorize subject positions as fluid, indissoluble, and spatialized relationships, which never exist in isolation from one another (Razack 2002, Collins 1991). My analysis of Southeast Kansas suggests the marginalizing/enabling tendencies positioning subjects differently on account of masculinity, settler colonialism, and place are relational, and in constant states of transition. This paper simply aims to tell a story, from one particular perspective and set of experiences in Southeast Kansas, of what produces masculinity, as well as what masculinity produces.<sup>5</sup>

## **Settler Colonialism, Dispossession, and the Negation of History**

Settler colonialism involves progressive invasions of settlers coercively removing Indigenous people from their traditional territories (Veracini 2010, Wolfe 2006). The settler population then forcibly imposes their own structures of governance and claims of property ownership. The principal, but not exclusive, difference between colonialism and settler colonialism involves the acquisition of land and the eradication of people (Smith 2012). White settler nation-states (e.g. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, United States) came to exist not with the primary goal of exploiting Indigenous populations for profit and resources, although these elements were/are very much present, rather, white settlers came to eliminate Indigenous people from the places they wanted.

As Elkins and Pedersen (2005: 3) suggest, settlers ‘wished less to govern Indigenous peoples or to enlist them in their economic ventures than to seize their land and push them beyond an ever-expanding frontier of settlement.’ In many cases, white settlers viewed land as ‘empty and unknown’ and rationalized their strategies of dispossession through the rhetoric of ‘discovery.’ Thus, the goal of settler colonialism was the expulsion (via assimilation or death) of Indigenous people. This was done through confiscation, and was oftentimes fueled by desires for nationhood in conjunction with imperialistic interpretations of religious doctrine (Blaut 2012, Wolfe 2006).

Settler nation-states did not establish themselves for temporary economic gains

to be left behind when profits evaporated; conversely, settlers occupied Indigenous lands in order to claim ownership over them. From this perspective, it can be recognized that settler occupation was, and continues to be, an ongoing process. The incursion of white settlers into Indigenous territories can thereby be more accurately viewed as iterative and evolving courses of action that have never ceased, rather than isolated events that happened at different points along a fictive linear timeline that gets called 'history.'

**[INSERT IMAGE 1]**

**Image 1: 'We have a long, rich history here, and are proud of our traditions.' (A local teacher commenting on a highway billboard that greets travelers upon entering the town.)**

In the context of rural Southeast Kansas, the negation of history and veneration of a masculinist settler colonial past is deployed widely and readily, and it is done so in banal ways. As reflected in the photo above, many participants spoke with pride about the community's missionary beginnings and the pioneering attitudes of the town's original settlers. What was often missing from participant narratives was recognition that the community is located in the ancestral territories of the Osage [*Wah-Zha-Zhi*] Nation. The Osage, who lived in the region well before missionaries arrived, were mainly located in the Ohio River Valley until the mid 1600s (Burns 2004, Rollings 2004). As settler expansion continued westward during the early-to-mid 1800s (a time of intense compulsory dislocations and ethnic cleansing that included the Indian Removal Act and the Trail of Tears) the Osage were pushed into Southeast Kansas. The Osage resided in the region until 1870, when they were forcibly displaced into present-day Oklahoma (Osage County) where they currently based (Burns 2005, Rollins 1995).

If the settlers I interviewed mentioned the Osage, the conversations quickly made reference to the 'good' and 'kind' work the Catholic men/missionaries were doing for the 'Indians' by educating and helping them. Two priests mentioned in particular were Father John Schoenmakers and Father Paul M. Ponziglione. Schoenmakers is noted for his Catholic 'zeal and perseverance,' and is still referred to as the 'Father of Civilization in Southeast Kansas' and 'The Apostle of the Osage.' In addition to the propagation of frontier Christianity he is credited with, Schoenmakers was headmaster of the *Manual Labor School for Osage Boys and Girls* built in 1847 to further 'integrate' and 'educate' members of the Osage Nation in 'the ways of the white man.'

**[INSERT IMAGE 2]**

**Image 2: 'The Catholic Church is the foundation of everything here ...you can see it from miles away – it's what we are known for.' (A 33-year old truck driver commenting on a photo of the local Catholic Church)**

Father Paul M. Ponziglione, another bygone stalwart in the area, is known for being an

'extraordinary and prolific' missionary. The community has lauded Ponziglione over the generations, and one widely cited local historian, W.W. Graves (namesake of the town's library), extols Ponziglione's arrival by noting:

...it meant the coming of one who was to liberate the natives from the bondage of savagery and bring them to the ways of civilization, Christianity, peace, happiness and plenty. (Graves 1916)

It was in instances such as these that participants spoke fondly of their settler ancestry, as well as how significant the land, history, and church was to the community. Many men spoke of the generational ties they had to the region, and how 'faith,' 'pride of ownership,' and a 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' mentality are still core values. In this way, the narratives the participants relied on regarding the spaces their white settler ancestors encroached upon, as well as the subject positions they occupied as men themselves, were dependent upon links to religious superiority and private property. What can be gathered from such admissions is the area's hegemonic ideals are rooted in colonially-established Christian regimes-of-truth, which continue to serve as justifications settlers employ in laying claim to the spaces they occupy.

### **'The White Settler's Burden'**

The dispossession Indigenous people face in the United States<sup>6</sup> commenced in practice when settlers arrived to expropriate land and natural resources. Entrepreneurial aggression, individualistic perspectives of ownership, and religious discipleship drove extensive migration from Europe into the 'New World' (Veracini 2010). The appetite white settlers had for land not accessible to them throughout much of Europe meant masses of settlers would make their way into the colonies in order to privatize nature, extract resources, chase profits, and establish chattel slavery (McKittrick 2011). Many of the settlers in the early 1600s were able to colonize land quite freely as a result of permanently leaving their original homelands. This meant they faced little regulation upon arriving because the aristocracies they were departing from did not have immediate access to surveilling them (Batemen and Pilkington 2011). Thus, as white settlers reached the overseas territories they set out to 'explore,' they were subjected to less bureaucratic authority from their imperial governments (Hixson 2013).

This unregulated nature of the settler presence facilitated an increase in land occupations and private property claims, and also served as the driver for intensifications in the transatlantic slave trade (McKittrick 2006). In turn, the conflicting relationships amongst settlers, the monarchies from where they were coming, and the Indigenous populations they were invading serves as a hallmark of settler colonialism (Hixson 2013, Wolfe 1999). Those white Europeans who were 'discovering' land and distancing themselves from their own governments throughout the 1600 and 1700s, widely did so with the intent of supplanting Indigenous people and enslaving black people (Smith 2012, McKittrick 2006). Put another way, white settlers strategically shaped their colonies by anchoring them in territories in which Indigenous people were

to be extinguished, while the colony would slowly withdraw its dependency from its former central authority. In the United States, this process was made manifest through the Declaration of Independence, the American Revolution, and numerous other juridico-discursive edicts the new 'nation' would institute in order to privatize land and further remove Indigeneity from the 'New World' it claimed dominion over.

What resulted was a vigorous campaign of dispossession and enclosure sweeping over the countryside and decimating Indigenous populations, whilst enslaving black bodies (Hixson 2013, Blaut 2012, McKittrick 2006, Smith 2005). Multitudes of white settlers sought to establish their 'nation' through the imposition of ownership boundaries, sedentary agricultural practices, the commoditization of nature and animals, as well as the construction of environment-altering transportation networks, manufacturing bases, urban centres, and plantation economies (Elkins and Pedersen 2005, McKittrick 2006, Wolfe 1999). Because the logic of settlement typically infused 'spreading civilization' with capitalistic conceptions of production and consumption, the pace at which land was expropriated, and people enslaved, was astounding.

In the United States, the rationale for cleansing Indigenous people from the land was tied to racist assertions of knowing how to better use resources, saving inferior 'savages,' and white settlers protecting themselves from the 'barbarity of Indians' (Veracini 2010, Smith 1999). More precisely, colonial subjectivities largely relied upon distorted 'the white settler's burden' narratives justifying the violent accumulation of land by citing altruism as their motive. Upon spending time in Southeast Kansas, it was evident that such perspectives remain influential as reflected by the comment of Ray, a 24-year-old participant who noted:

Well, I know the Indians were treated badly, but you cannot say they were not always kind to the guys coming here. I mean, sure lots of them died, but that is what happens when a more powerful group of dudes starts to expand ...just look at all of history, its full of war and death. And I am sure that if the Indians owned everything nowadays we would be telling stories of how white explorers were massacred and this-and-that. It just happens that in the U.S. a lot of the pioneers had better technology, were better at doing things, and more advanced. Naturally those things are going to take over. And its not like all of them came here looking to start shit, here in this area the priests were just trying to help...

Reflected in the comment above is the white supremacist notion that settlers, who were slaughtering Indigenous people as an exercise in nation-building, were doing so with noble intentions. It also signifies a normalization of the belief that conquest, accumulation by dispossession, and genocidal actions are natural and inevitable. This is accomplished through the seemingly innocuous use of masculinized terms like 'pioneer' and 'explorer.' Many of the participants referred to white settlers in such ways, and often cited stories they heard during their childhoods pointing to the freedom-seeking, hard-working, self-reliant qualities of those 'men' who were dislocating Indigenous populations. Hence, it is through benevolent claims of exploration that settlers

disaffiliate from the declarations of racial superiority they are proliferating.

### **Colonial Geographies and the Rural 'Frontier'**

Illusory cultural constructions of rural space as a 'frontier' also factored into white settlement's project of proclaiming dominion over land. The role geography plays in colonialism is crucial because as Massey (1994: 265) states: 'space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation.' Numerous other critical scholars have also noted the significance space plays in the development of racialized and gendered colonial geographies (Hunt and Holmes 2015, Chatterjee and Subramanian 2014, Alfred 2010, de Leeuw 2009, Johnson 2008, Razack 2002). Thus, it is the ways in which rural space is discursively produced that gives rise to the political power it is imbued with. Consequently, for white settlers arriving in the 'New World,' the entire continent was viewed as an 'unknown frontier,' primarily because of its rurality, which also meant the Indigenous people in it needed to be reigned-in and assimilated, or killed. Either way, what settler colonialism demanded of the spaces it so desired, was Indigeneity be erased from it.

[INSERT IMAGE 3]

**Image 3: 'This land has been in our family for generations, it was just open country before we arrived ...I've been working it for over forty years myself now. I have quite an attachment to it - guess it's a pride of ownership thing.' (A 57-year-old farmer commenting on a photo of his property.)**

White settlers also applied fabricated colloquialisms to rural space that were used to condone the construction of their artificial nation-state (McClintock 2013, Marcos 2011). Imperialistic expressions such as 'Empire of Liberty,' 'Manifest Destiny,' 'The American Frontier,' as well as laws backing homesteading, annexation, discovery doctrines, 'Indian Removal,' 'domestic dependent nations', and 'wards of the state' all carry significant cultural and legal ramifications. In addition to validating white men's notions of governance as official rule-of-law, these discursive constructs manufactured strong emotive connections for settlers who benefitted from the dispossession, marginalization, and death of Indigenous people. Thus, the emotional affinity settlers developed for the places they were occupying further reinforced their defensive assertions of ownership over those spaces.

Largely missing from the white settler definitions of land and nature, as well as the legal statutes they were imposing upon both, were the perspectives of Indigenous people (Marcos 2011, Tuhiwai Smith 1999). As a result, the settler government of the United States convinced itself it was legitimate, and then went about exercising disciplinary power how it saw fit. Several participants expressed enduring sentiments of American nationalism and liberal notions of ownership when discussing their thoughts on who had rightful claim to land. Karl, a 28-year-old participant, summed up the

prevailing sentiment of one focus group area by noting:

We have every right to be here and I don't feel bad about it at all. I was born here, I didn't steal anything from anybody, and a lot of Indian tribes signed over their land anyway. It pisses me off to hear somebody say this land is not ours, or that it is stolen. A lot of good people (settlers) worked their asses off trying to make a simple living when they got here and I don't think they complained one bit. That is what America is all about. These Indians nowadays need to get with the program. They got their tax breaks, they got their reservations, they got their free hunting and fishing licenses, and they got their casinos...

As is the case with the colonial practices of settler societies, it was not uncommon for men in the area to contest any countervailing perspectives that arose when their ideas regarding land possession were disputed. A few participants did express sympathy about the ways Indigenous people were treated in the past, but those instances were predominantly surrounding what were often framed as isolated events (e.g. The Trail of Tears), and there remained little recognition the belligerence of white settlement was part of an ongoing comprehensive process of annihilation.

Participants also rationalized the violence Indigenous people faced under colonial aggression. Mack, a 54-year-old participant, emphasized his point when he stated:

I think there were just as many violent Indians as there were Caucasians. I mean, they had braves and chiefs that were kidnapping, stealing, raping, and burning things themselves. I realize some of them were peaceful, but some of them were out for blood too. The open frontier was a brutal place. It was not an easy life for anyone ...and in times like that - only the strong survive.

White supremacist conceptions such as these assert false notions of survival-of-the-fittest, thereby enabling settlers to carry out malignant nation-building projects guilt free. It also remains evident such perceptions still remain a common trope in settler societies as numerous participants often dismissed the 'simple,' 'crude,' and 'primitive' manner in which 'Indians failed to use the land to its maximum potential.' Accordingly, a binary was drawn between resources 'misused and squandered' by Indigenous people, and the adept techniques settlers used in preparing and shaping the land for production and economic development. Matt, a 49-year-old participant, reflects these polarized dichotomies when he contends:

Sure, an Indian can use all the parts of the buffalo, but who do you think brought him electricity, technology, education, and even those guns to shoot that buffalo? ...they should be thanking us in my opinion.



Stereotyping Indigenous people as stolid primitives and coupling such perspectives with an expected sense of gratitude for what settlers 'gave' them via colonization thus reaffirms notions of racial superiority white settlers use to justify widespread land theft, assimilation, and eradication. A rhetorical tactic that was, and is, deployed readily in oppressing people through the exclusionary construction of the nation-state and borders.

## **Bordering and Nation-state Building**

Settler colonialism advances in conjugation with the discursive and material construction of borders (Walia 2013). As settler nation-states take shape, people are marginalized and privileged, sometimes concurrently, on account of manufactured social identities (Kobayashi 2013, Garbutt 2011, Wolfe 2006, Warrior 2005, Mohanty 2003). These processes of exclusion, inclusion, and (un)belonging allow settler societies to galvanize due in part to the how social identities interlock with ideals surrounding the 'nation.' In the case of settler colonialism, settlers take up the task of defining boundaries, deciding who belongs within them, and subsequently, exacting authority in expanding, surveilling, and regulating the borders they have invented (Walia 2013). What results is the reification of hierarchical social orders across space, which have acute material impacts for those peripheralized by borders, particularly racialized groups. In turn, the exercise of colonial exclusion in the construction of a settler nation-state thereby produces 'othered' people, bodies, places, and knowledges, while simultaneously enabling those who fit into hegemonic notions acceptability (Spivak 2013, Said 1978).

In reality, racial categories of difference remain cultural constructs used as mechanisms to constrain, segregate, and confine those who are guilty of not being the normalized standard. What such contrived processes of racialization produce is a delusion that gets called a nation-state, which settlers then set about defending. In the United States, colonial framings of 'newly discovered' peoples as inferior attracted settlers from all walks of life to rally around the call of embracing their 'pioneer spirit' for the purposes of exploration, discovery, and evangelization. Those narratives of opportunity and magnanimous proselytization cloaked the actual existing conquest taking place, thereby sanctioning the repression, enclosure, enslavement, and extermination of entire populations of Indigenous people and racialized 'others.'

Such perspectives have been successfully reproduced over the course of white settlement and still exist across Southeast Kansas. This can be noted when looking at the statement of George, a 30-year-old participant, who in regard to Indian reservations stated:

Those places are fucking awful. I think they are breeding grounds for poor, lazy, drunks. A lot of them have shit houses and nobody is working, I do not think they (reservations) should have ever been a part of America. The government should have done a better job absorbing the Indians into American way of life when they had the chance. And the Indians should have

got on board with it ...it would have been better for everyone.

Comments such as these underscore how settler societies do not become racist and exclusionary, but in fact, are built upon racism and exclusion. This scaffolding of dehumanization also highlights just how large of a role racial superiority played in the founding of the United States as a nation. Violent white supremacist formations seeking to segregate and quarantine racialized people were not simply aspects of 'America' that came to exist only after curious explorers landed on an undiscovered open frontier, rather, they were part of the settler project from the outset.

Hierarchies of class also become intimately enmeshed with racial politics as white settlers carry out their land and resource takeovers (Walia 2013, Blaut 2012, Bannerji 2001). Part of the appeal of coming to the 'New World' for Europeans was the prospect of acquiring wealth. As removal of Indigenous people from their traditional territories did foster greater profits for some settlers, there were still numerous white settlers who remained financially precarious. This led to the intensifying expansion of the American countryside because it was believed 'conquering the rural frontier' would bring economic stability to impoverished white settlers, as well as more profit for the settler business elite. This westward extension of the United States as a nation-state meant the poor, white, working-class (in addition to the more affluent classes) felt it necessary to 'defend' the new borders they imposed. In turn, militaristic discourses of patriotism, protection, and 'standing your ground,' converged with the imperialistic Christian dogma of 'spreading the word' and convinced struggling white settler men they were entitled to land because they were 'good' and 'doing the Lord's work'.

Other settlers, who simply desired a modest homestead, or who were seeking to convert others to Christianity, were not as violently profit-driven. Nevertheless, they still did carry the same sense of colonial entitlement with them. And because settlers believed they were engaging in a 'civilizing' project, and due to the fact rural land was deemed 'empty' by their imperial authorities, they saw fit to occupy it. This meant Indigenous people would be displaced, subjected to forced removals, 're-educated,' and in some cases massacred. Thus, the class tensions arising amongst differing groups of white men often meant the subsequent backlash, an amplification of colonial policies expropriating property and sequestering racialized bodies, fell squarely upon the Indigenous people who were in the areas settlers 'needed.'

**[INSERT IMAGE 4]**

**Image 4: 'We pay respect to the veterans who lost their lives defending our country (the United States of America), and we honour the soldiers who died protecting the freedoms the founding priests wanted... ...I'm proud of the history here; the fact that it was a Catholic Mission means something. (A 57-year-old farmer commenting on a photo of a Memorial Day Mass held at a local Catholic cemetery.)**

Southeast Kansas was not immune from the discursive erasures of Indigenous people attempting to empty out the rural landscape. Chris, a 28-year-old participant,

explains such historically spatialized sentiments by noting:

The early priests and pioneers who got here were not trying to get rich or anything. They had good intentions, were doing the right thing, and were simply trying to save people. It is part of the faith you know, you go out and spread the gospel. Its not like they were taking anything outright from the Indians, or even killing them. It was wide-open territory and there was plenty of space for everybody...

...and on certain occasions they (priests and pioneers) had to protect and defend what was theirs. But in reality, they (pioneers and priests) actually wanted to them (Indians) to stay, convert, and become a part of the community. We were basically here to help, as well as farm some of the land not being used.

Despite this account of altruism, the outright confiscation of land from the Osage Nation, as well the ensuing deaths of a large percentage of their people, is precisely what took place. A brief look at the timeline of intrusion the Osage faced shows that in 1808 they were coerced into signing a treaty ceding all their territory in Missouri, as well as the majority of what they had in Arkansas (The Osage Nation 2006). In 1818, a second treaty took the remaining land they were living on in Arkansas. This was followed up by another forced secession in 1825, which caused them to relinquish their territory in western Missouri and sent them to a reservation near the Neosho River in Southeast Kansas. Thus, by 1825, a total of three treaties had forced the Osage to give up over 96 million acres of land (The Osage Nation 2006). Over the next half a century another series of land annexations, including the Canville Treaty of 1865 and the Drum Creek Treaty of 1868 (also called the Sturgis Treaty), would send the Osage Nation to 'Indian Territory' (present-day Osage County, Oklahoma), where they are now based.

It was also during this period that a series of epidemics wreaked havoc on the Osage population (Rollings 1995). From the early 1800s until the Osage Nation's relocation to Indian Territory, members were subjected to an ongoing series of epidemics that included influenza, cholera, scurvy, measles, typhoid, smallpox, tuberculosis, as well as droughts and insect invasions that resulted in crop failures and famine (Burns 2004). In total, the Osage population went from an estimated 12,000 members in the early 1800s, to just over 3000 at the time of the forced removal into Indian Territory shortly after 1870 (Burns 2004). What this signifies, is that despite the benevolent 'good intentions' the missionaries and 'pioneers' were offering, colonial settlement meant decimation for the Osage Nation.

In looking at the historical arc of settler colonialism in Southeast Kansas, as well as how it has been intimately linked to masculinity, it is undeniably apparent the malevolent logic of heteropatriarchal dominance has been in operation since settlement in the area began. Consequently, what the assertion of settler colonial masculinity constitutes is nothing less than deliberate acts of cultural genocide and discursive erasures of the Osage Nation.

## Assembling Rural Hierarchies

Gender regimes also interlock with racial formations in contemporary settler societies (McClintok 2013, Mills 1996). The subordination many women currently face in colonial nation-states is due in part to heteropatriarchal subjectivities arriving with colonialism (Smith 2006). The 'work' of settlement was viewed as something that fell upon the shoulders of white, able-bodied, men, which consequently saw patriarchal notions of superiority become embedded in structures of governance, economy, education, and everyday social practice (Smith 2006, Razack 2002). These gendered power dynamics allowed colonialism to venerate masculinity, thereby leading to the creation of spaces (as well as an entire nation) founded upon capitalistic, white supremacist, heteropatriarchal relationships (hooks 2000). A 44-year-old participant named Chris reflects this reality when he noted:

Picking up everything, moving a family overseas, providing for the kids, and protecting a wife was not something that just any ole' guy could do. The pioneers who came here to build homes and make honest livings were cut out of different cloth. They were a different breed. It took a lot of balls to walk into something unknown like that. Those guys were badasses back in the day ...they were real men.

This statement highlights how the defining characteristics of white settlers are conspicuously masculinist. Self-reliance, rugged individualism, and defensive aggression all became lauded traits of settler masculinity, and continue to be promulgated through colonial histories. Several participant conversations referenced white settler men who were 'taming the frontier,' 'tough,' 'brave,' and 'courageous.' Many of the interviewees also emphasized the piety and devoutness of the white men who originally settled the rural area, as well as how 'salt-of-the-earth' attributes were still present. Carl, a 64-year-old participant, affirmed this by suggesting:

Well, history around here is still with us you know. The area is built around the church, and that church was built by a lot of good, respectable, hardworking men ...ranchers, farmers, country boys, and such. I don't think they were trying to conquer anything ...just here to build a home, raise a family, and practice their faith. The priests were only trying to help out, educate, and take care of others. I think that is still what the community stands for - it's a safe, tightknit community in a small country setting ...a lot of guys around here come from good stock.

These perspectives underscore how white settler masculinity is often romanticized because of its rurality. Statements like this also shore up justifications for white settlement by omitting the forced removals and captive institutionalizations that took place in Southeast Kansas. Those aspects of colonial aggression are conveniently muted through references to the reputable natures of the men who were arriving to

‘homestead’ and ‘farm.’

Of particular interest in many of the conversations was the place-specific nature of such rationalizations. While some participants were aware of the fact colonialism had detrimental consequences for Indigenous people, they were also adamant the local rural assemblage they were a part of was an exception to such violations. Several participants noted the priests and settlers who arrived in the area were unique because of the compassion, understanding, and care Catholics offered the Osage. What was also overlooked in many conversations was recognition that despite the goodwill of the pioneers and priests, members of the Osage Nation were dispossessed, suffered, and died as a result of white settlement. Thus, claims of white innocence obscures how the Osage were forced from the region, regardless of the fact that settlers were ‘nice’ about doing so.

In addition to lionizing white masculinity, settler colonialism bifurcates social relations through the imposition of oppositional gender binaries (McClintock 2013, Oswin 2008). White men were positioned as the ‘providers’ and ‘defenders’ of new settlements, and women were often framed as defenseless and vulnerable, thereby relegating them to the realm of domestic servitude and sexual reproduction (McClintock 2013, Smith 2005). This gender regime resulted in the assertion that the decision-making, protection, and labour performed by heterosexual white men was more valuable, essential, and vital for the stability of the family and community. Conversely, women were scrutinized, doubted, and positioned as objects needing to be surveilled and controlled (Morgenson 2012).

#### [INSERT IMAGE 5]

**Image 5: ‘A lot of the values we have today stem from the values that were established by the Catholic missionaries... ..everyone is given the opportunity to make decisions in life, and around here, women choose life.’ (A 42-year-old teacher commenting on one of the local ‘Pro-Life’ billboards surrounding the town)**

This consent to a spatialized gendered hierarchy led to the devaluation of socially reproductive work performed in-and-around the home – work typically performed by women (i.e. pregnancy, birthing, childcare, emotional labour, educating children, household chores, gardening, etc.) (Hixson 2013, Lugones 2007, Smith 2005). This masculinist regulation of women’s movements and bodies remain an ongoing remnant of white settler colonialism, and continue to reaffirm contemporary heteropatriarchal social relations. Such normalized gender oppression was evident in several participant interviews, and these reverberations of colonial patriarchy resonated most loudly in discussions surrounding ‘capability.’ Earl, a 32-year old participant, elaborated on the spatialized gendered divisions of labour:

Women were just not as capable of doing the things men were. I mean, men are naturally stronger so they do the more important work and ‘heavy lifting’... There was also a lot of danger and physical work to do and fighting

off threats and building things is basically what men are born to do. Plus, it would not be fair to send women out to defend the home if an attack occurred. Women are better at some things and have their proper place, just as we men do. It was just better for men to work outside and away from the house, and for women to do their thing inside and close to the house ...I really do not see anything wrong with that.

These dichotomous gender binaries were mentioned in the vast majority of conversations I had in Southeast Kansas. And despite the fact these framings are essentialist, what intensifies the oppression women face in light of them is how they diminish the work of women outright, simply because it is 'women' performing it. More precisely, it was not necessarily the type of work that was belittled; it was the bodies (i.e. women's) doing it that were subordinated. It is also crucial to note the degradation of women's work is also attached to place, or rather; the spaces where women work, often associated with the home and 'the private,' are targets of masculinist domination. Thus, the spatiality of gendered labour also becomes a repressive instrument used to discredit the work of women. Consequently, women face blanket marginalization because of the formation of a gendered hierarchy granting masculinity, and economically reproductive labour, ascendancy.

Further troubling the gendered relationships within settler societies is that despite the fact women are oppressed by patriarchal colonialism, they also played key roles in settler hostilities (Hixson 2013, McClintock 2013). Numerous missionaries, including those in area where the research took place, relied upon white women and nuns to teach in boarding schools, endorse assimilation programs, and contribute to child removal policies that separated Indigenous children from their families (McClintock 2013). While these served as ways for settler women to exercise agency in the face of the patriarchal oppression, it also meant they were complicit and actively taking part in colonial violence. Dynamics such as these show just how intimately racial formations, white supremacy, patriarchy, and colonial domination interlock and complicate each other within settler societies.

### **Cleansing the Land, Cleansing the 'Other'**

Conceptualizations of land also became gendered under settler colonialism (Hixson 2013, Razack 2002). Rural terrains were often feminized and referred to as entities to be 'nurtured,' 'tamed,' 'raped,' or were 'virgin and pure.' The objective of white masculinity was to control and regulate the landscape, much similar to the desires it maintained regarding women's bodies. In turn, once land was transformed into property, white settlers felt compelled to defend it from the perceived savagery of Indigenous people. As a result, colonialism's aggressive policy of land seizure and ethnic cleansing amplified, whilst also becoming highly gendered. This can be seen in images of Indigenous women who were represented as exotic Indian princesses or eroticized primitives living in the rural wild (McClintock 2013, Smith 2005).

As white settlers expanded across the country, conservative Christianity's rigid

perspectives on sexuality spread with them. Consequently, settler colonialism, and its largely Christian contingent, was threatened by speculative ideas surrounding the imagined sexualities of racialized people, and saw fit to discipline them (McClintok 2013, Smith 2005). The heterosexual white men who were settling the area took it upon themselves to safeguard 'their' white women from the contrived hyper-aggressive threats of rape and kidnapping they believed stemmed from the 'other.' And in the United States, the 'other' predominantly included Indigenous (and black) men who were allegedly rampantly stalking white women. Further amplifying the horrific contradictions settler colonialism gave rise to was the hetero-masculinist practice of 'protecting' what white men asserted was 'theirs' (i.e. women's bodies and private property). This is because in doing so, it meant they were at times engaging in the sexual violence they claimed to be preventing (Smith 2005).

Another problem white settlement invented was how 'uncivilized Indians' were going to be educated and assimilated. Colonialism employed paternalistic narratives framing Indigenous communities as backward and anachronistic (Veracini 2010, Wolfe 2006). This reasoning allowed Christian missionaries to justify their masculinist apparatuses of indoctrination as necessary for bestowing 'enlightenment.' As some settlers believed their efforts were divinely inspired, it meant the people, children, and minds of those who did not share the same beliefs required 're-education and rehabilitation.' This 're-education' was held in boarding/residential schools utilizing arbitrary detention, castigatory discipline, and corporal punishment to 'lift' Indigenous people into 'civilization' (Hixon 2013, de Leeuw 2009, Churchill 2004) Such sentiments are still reflected in Southeast Kansas to this day. One participant noted that during the mid-1800s the local Catholic mission was referred to as a 'gateway for commerce and exploration into the frontier territory,' and was also denoted as the 'Great Distributing Center of Civilization in Southeast Kansas,' a title the community still prides itself on today.

In light of the historical and contemporary narratives of Southeast Kansas, it can be seen that heteropatriarchal interpretations of Christian doctrine recurrently sustain gendered hierarchies, racial myths, and masculinist white supremacy. Consequently, as a result of settler colonialism's efforts in purging the landscape of Indigenous people, there are now no members of Osage Nation in the community. Participants knew of no Indigenous spirituality in the area, and were unaware of the historical perspectives of the Osage people. Additionally, no interviewees were regularly exposed to the Osage Nation's language, art, or cultural practices, and none agreed with the stance the community was founded upon coerced dispossession. A 46-year-old participant named Glenn summed up the prevailing perspective on why Indigenous people did not have valid land claims when he stated:

Well, I remember a few years back there was some sort of a proposal being talked about because a few Indians wanted to build a big casino close to here. But I mean, if you honestly look at it – they signed over their land and left a long time ago. Plus, what we built here it kind of gives you a good idea of what their priorities are compared to ours. We have a beautiful church, a

great school, a safe community, successful businesses, and family farms  
...they wanted to come in and build a gambling den so they could make a quick buck.

Comments of this nature highlight the discursive cleansing settler colonialism is responsible for, and also point to what has been produced by white masculinity in the area – racist stereotypes and a massive Catholic Church. A church denoted the ‘Beacon of the Plains’ serving as the pillar of the community and representing the town’s most influential historical and contemporary symbol. In mentioning the lack of indigeneity in Southeast Kansas, as well as the Christian hegemony circulating there, I should point out ‘Indians’ can indeed be found in the community; however, those ‘Indians’ are seen in very particular ways that will be explained in the next section. But before those ways in which Indigenous people remain a part of the community are elaborated upon, what can be surmised about Southeast Kansas is markers of gender, race, class, religion, and rural space all interlock in its current cultural landscape - a cultural landscape profoundly scarred and traumatized by masculinist settler colonialism.

### **White Settler Society as Monster**

Colonialism settles upon the minds of those it serves, in addition to lands and people it lays waste to. Any thorough analysis of a white settler society needs to take into account the emotional repercussions of what it produces. In looking at the settler subjectivities that legitimize invasion, what surfaces is a series of contradictions and inconsistencies. Frantz Fanon (1967, 1965) argues that under colonialism there exists an existential complex in which those being subjected to colonization are offered no other destiny than that of becoming ‘white.’ In his writing on imperial aggression, Fanon (1967: 311) notes the project of ‘enlightenment’ stemmed from Europe ‘where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them.’ Fanon (1967: 312) continues his analysis of colonial nation-building by stating:

A former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the sickness and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions.

As Fanon articulates, this ‘monster’ was the white settler society within the United States that saw fit to impose its will upon the original inhabitants of the lands it wanted. What this produced for Indigenous people was death. And what this created for white settlers implicated in those colonial endeavours - was property, followed by shallow attempts to claim innocence. As seen in the comments of the participants throughout the paper, discourses of denial continue to echo today. Consequently, the historical trajectories of settler colonialism and masculinist white supremacy have resulted not only in genocide, but also in ambivalent paradox.

Homi Bhabha (1994) elaborates on ambivalence by deconstructing the rigid demarcation between those who are colonized and those who are colonizer. He



suggests the identities of the settlers are dependent upon the purportedly docile and disempowered colonized 'other' (Bhabha 1994). What this relationship intimates is white settlers are positioned as subjects themselves, and thus rely upon those whom they deem inferior for the formation of their own subjectivities. In this way, settler societies, and the socio-spatial processes of subjectification operating iteratively within them, are never static or fixed. Rather, the colonial identities produced as a result of white settlement are socially constructed, tenuous, and demand continual reaffirmation in order to be validated. Such dynamics therefore create social conditions in which colonial ambivalence and emotional contradictions become routine and widespread.

[INSERT IMAGE 6]

**Image 6: 'I bleed "Indian" blood.' (A 28-year-old white 'Kansan' speaking about playing for his former high school football team, whose mascot is the 'Indians')**

The colonial ambivalence present in Southeast Kansas is simultaneously repulsed by, yet enamored with, the Indigenous culture it has encroached upon. While some of the participants in Southeast Kansas noted the treaty violations, death marches, and massacres Indigenous people faced were atrocious; they also maintained narratives implying that white settler men were guiding the Osage Nation towards civilization and salvation. And while none of the men interviewed stated Indigenous people had 'lawful' claims to the land they themselves had acquired through settler colonialism, they did suggest the presence of Osage culture was important to them.

Several participants noted 'respect' was being paid to the Osage because the town's high school mascot, in particular the football team, is the 'Indians.' The majority of men I questioned in regard to the mascot stated it was a way to 'honour Indians' because of the 'warrior mentality they used to have.' Numerous participants also referred to the mascot as a symbol of the 'fighting spirit' the local team embodied when preparing to 'go to war and do battle' (i.e. play a football game). Further appropriating indigeneity in what they suggested was a reverential manner, many participants told stories of how important 'home games' were (games taking place in the local town as opposed to traveling to an opponent's venue) because they were coming into 'our house.' One 27-year-old participant named Rick asserted: 'No one came into our territory and took what was ours ...we were the St. Paul Indians, and everybody around here knows what that means.'

[INSERT IMAGE 7]

**Image 7: 'Football was a religion for us... ..and we had a reputation. Other guys knew they were in for a dogfight when they had to plays us ...that was what "tribe football" was all about.' (A 30-year-old former graduate of the local high school commenting about the team's playing style, widely branded by players as 'Tribe Football.')**

Akin to typical patterns of paternalistic notions of 'respecting' Indigenous people

that exist within settler societies, a few participants conveyed pity towards the Osage Nation because of the displacement and deaths their people faced. These sympathies were not without qualification as participants suggested the Catholic missionaries in Southeast Kansas were 'different from' other settlers because they were willing to 'help, care for, and teach' Indigenous people. This rationale was referenced as a way the community 'remembered and held on' to the Indigenous culture in the area during the time of settlement.

The feelings of affinity, pride, and satisfaction articulated by participants have also become a major ongoing theme in the community's traditional lore. Upon being asked from what sources of information they received their local history, many participants stated it was taught to them in elementary and middle school; from their parents, relatives, and going to church; from displays and documents at the local museum; as well as during the town's annual Memorial Day celebration known as 'Mission Days.' Based upon these historical sources, it can be gathered a highly unstable exercise of disaffiliation from colonial violence, along with the simultaneous maintenance of a masculinist-driven white messiah complex, is an ever-present specter looming over settler communities and permeating their subjectivities.

## **The Violence of Forgetting**

In returning to the opening lines of this article, we can note that as a white settler society attempts to (re)produce its own version of 'history,' there then arises the need to draft the saga of a nation-state's beginnings. And when colonial narratives, primarily written by white settler 'men,' are presented as fact, Indigenous people are often grossly misrepresented, or omitted altogether. For the rural community in Southeast Kansas where I conducted my research, as well as the settler society compromising the United States as a whole, it is apparent fictive myths about intrepid white settlers have become endorsed as 'truths' – truths now glorifying white supremacist discourses of patriotism, masculinity, nationhood, and war. Such 'truths,' also serve to both justify, and valorize, the colonial violence that began some 500 years ago. In many circumstances, in lieu of praising white hetero-masculinity aloud, settler societies simply dismiss, or try to forget, the dispossession and death they have exacted upon Indigenous people. And forgetting the struggle of Indigenous people - is violent.

What we have also seen from this research is that when it comes to the wounds inflicted by colonialism; settler societies, white supremacy, and hetero-masculinity mutually constitute, and protect, one another. This is practiced routinely via warped stories of 'frontiersmanship' and the 'pioneer spirit,' as well as by demanding that people suffering from the intergenerational trauma of colonialism 'get over it.' These discursive claims to innocence and disciplinary admonishments are maintained for no other reason than shoring up the comforts a white supremacist social order offers to those who deny, and remain complicit with, ongoing exercises of masculinist settler repression. And for rural Southeast Kansas, as well as countless other colonial geographies, denial and complicity remain the status quo.

## [INSERT IMAGE 8]

**Image 8: 'We have a wonderful history and still remain very respectful towards the culture those Indians had...they are big part of why we are here, so we do our best to honour them.' (A 59-year old business owner commenting on a local historical marker, as well as about the town's annual heritage celebration, 'Mission Days.')**

Despite the silencing(s) white settler masculinity imposes upon others, alternative responses to the heteropatriarchal social assemblages produced by colonialism do exist. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003: 215), in her thoughts on building transnational feminist solidarity in the face of global capitalism, masculinist structures of privilege, and colonial social arrangements suggests we build 'cultures of dissent,' which will expose power while allowing us to 're-envision and reshape communities' in more socially just fashions. A like-minded approach is offered by Sara Ahmed (2010: 11), who in her writings on disrupting the happiness 'systems of power' are afforded, notes:

To be willing to go against a social order, which is protected as a moral order, is to be willing to cause unhappiness... ..and to be willing to cause unhappiness means immersing ourselves in collective struggle.

A final response, shared by Comandanta Ramona of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation regarding resistance to neoliberalism, patriarchy, and colonialism, is to: 'Organize yourselves ...and reflect the dignity of "others" in doing so.'<sup>7</sup> Given these sentiments, it seems an appropriate response to the disavowals that white settler masculinity employs will include organizing ourselves, fostering dissent, collectively struggling, recognizing the dignity of 'others,' taking to task our own local colonial geographies, and ultimately, unsettling the happiness settler societies, as well as masculinity, so comfortably enjoy.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Southeast Kansas' is the colonial name of a vernacular region in part of the ancestral territories of the Osage Nation. I rely upon it because it was the identifier used by participants, and because of the utility it has a frame of reference.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'men' appears in quotation marks to signify it is a social construct. I use it throughout the paper not to erase transgender or intersex people, but because I sought out those who self-identified as 'men.'

<sup>3</sup> This research was approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board. All participants have been given aliases.

<sup>4</sup> There exist a diverse array of feminist and decolonial perspectives, thus it is not my intention to suggest feminist implies decolonial, or decolonial implies feminist. I am also not suggesting they are mutually exclusive either.

<sup>5</sup> In my position as a researcher returning 'home,' I am not suggesting I have elevated understandings because of problematic claims to epistemic privilege or perceived permanent "insider" status. Accordingly, any mistakes, misrepresentations, or errors are my own.

<sup>6</sup> Numerous voices have noted the 'United States of America' is a problematic place name as it is a colonial construct that does not acknowledge the Indigenous territories it has taken possession of. I use the label (problematically) due to its ubiquity and because it is one 'relationship' I am taking to task.

<sup>7</sup> Comandanta Ramona (1959-2006) was an Indigenous Tzotzil (Maya) woman who served as a commander in the EZLN and was one of the primary organizers, and main authors, of the Zapatista's 'Women's Revolutionary Law.' The quotation appearing here is taken from my time as a student in the Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Education System of National Liberation (SERAZLN).