

The Journal of Social Encounters

Volume 7
Issue 1 *Extractive Politics, Conflict and
Peacebuilding*

Article 32

2023

Review of Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization

Tom Cordaro
Pax Christi USA

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters



Part of the [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), [Religion Commons](#), [Social Justice Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cordaro, Tom (2023) "Review of Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization," *The Journal of Social Encounters*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, 334-335.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/vol7/iss1/32

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Social Encounters by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.

***Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization.* Elaine Enns and Ched Myers. Cascade Books, Eugene, Oregon, 2021, paperback 392 pp. ISBN: 978-1-7252-5535-7**

Tom Cordaro
Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace

Picking up a book to read can be dangerous business; it might just alter your worldview or challenge your long-held beliefs and assumptions. Just when you start thinking you have a pretty good grasp on reality, someone comes along with new insights and deep wisdom that challenge you to re-think everything you thought you knew.

This is how I often approached any book authored by Ched Myers. But while Ched's writing often challenged my thinking Elaine Enns' writing breaks open haunted memories and traumas in a way that brings tears that lead to wholeness. As William Faulkner write in his novel, *Requiem for a Nun*¹, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

Healing Haunted Histories explores how the history of genocide against indigenous peoples continues today in racist and inequitable practices and policies. It urges readers to learn their own family and community stories of complicity, and models how to navigate these difficult waters. And it calls Christians (and other people of faith and conscience) to build solidarity with indigenous communities, including experimenting with practices of reparation.

Focusing primarily on Enns' Mennonite family and community, who endured the Russian Civil War, fled the Soviet aftermath and settled on Indigenous land in Saskatchewan in the 1920s; the book tells the story of Elaine's family and community's experience as refugees, as settlers on the Canadian prairies, and as neighbors with Cree communities.

This work of remembering often involves uncovering and confronting repressed family traumas that too often get passed down from one generation to the next. There are also unacknowledged privileges and entitlements that we inherit and pass from one generation to the next. These repressed traumas and unacknowledged entitlements leave us unable to heal our relationships with the indigenous peoples who were displaced and destroyed upon our arrival, and make it difficult to properly root ourselves in the ecosystems we inhabit. These unhealed traumas also make it difficult to build a truly multi-cultural future for ourselves and our children.

To address these traumas and entitlements Myers and Enns invite us to reflect on three types of family storylines that can strengthen our response-ability to address the legacy of colonization:

Landlines (the "where"): Where did our families come from, and how did they get here? Were they forced or pushed from their places of origin? Who was displaced by their arrival in North America, and how does the land hold these stories?

Bloodlines (the "who"): What do we know about our family immigrant and settler histories? How might our communal stories be devised or distorted? What traumas or privileges have we inherited because of their experiences?

¹ *Requiem for a Nun*, by William Faulkner, Random House, 1951

Songlines (the “why”): What faith traditions and/or cultural practices fostered resilience in them, and which have been passed on to us? What touchstones feed our spirits, minds, and bodies today, and inspire our commitment to work for justice and healing?

Many of us, as we begin doing this work, will find huge gaps in our knowledge of our immigrant past. Often the ancestors who could help us understand our own stories are no longer alive or are unable to re-member because of the trauma involved. The authors are clear that this can be difficult work; not only emotionally but also practically. Anyone who has tried to better understand their family’s ancestry can attest to the difficulty in tracing their lineage. The work Elaine and Ched invite us to can be more challenging because it requires us to uncover and understand family traumas that often unconsciously haunted our grandparents, parents, ourselves and our children.

Enns and Myers make it clear that interrogating our own communal past and present takes us into often painful and complex terrain. But when it is done honestly and bravely it can move us toward personal and political transformation. They also make the point that this conversation between landlines, bloodlines and songlines is only complete as we enact practices of restorative solidarity; which includes re-schooling, reparations and repatriation that aspires toward a decolonized future.

Elaine’s family story, with its pains and triumphs, its un wounds and heroic struggles, reminds us that we cannot do this important work by staying at the level of social analysis. Like the trauma of patriarchy and white supremacy, we Americans need to come to grip with our colonial mindset and begin the process of acknowledging and healing our past – this time it’s personal.

Why should we bother starting this journey of uncovering past wounds and facing difficult truths about ourselves and our ancestors? One of the effects of cutting ourselves off from our past is that we often become rootless people; never able to ground ourselves in any particular place, always anxious and unfulfilled; looking for the next distraction as we plan our destination weddings and vacations to exotic places. Rootless people cannot heal the earth or give birth to the beloved community. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us, “then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32)