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Dreaming Ourselves Out of Settler Colonialism (Episode 19)

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Dreaming Ourselves Out of Settler Colonialism

0:00-0:42 <<**OtterPod theme music**>>

0:06-0:11

This is an episode of the OTTERPOD from CSU Monterey Bay.

0:12-0:16

Our names are Isela Delgado, Deborah Williams, and Lesley Solano, and today we will be discussing: Decolonization.

0:17-0:39

What it is and isn't, why it matters for all of us, especially those of us on colonized land, and the importance of leaning and dreaming into a different worldview centering Indigenous futurity.

0:42 <<**(end of)OtterPod theme music**>>

0:39-2:34 <<**Ocean sound**>>

0:44-2:32 **Land Acknowledgment**

Before we dive in,

We want to acknowledge that CSU Monterey Bay is located on the traditional homeland of the Indigenous People past and present, specifically the unceded land of the Ohlone and Esselen people, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations. This calls us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of the land we inhabit as well. To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory we reside on and a way of honoring the Indigenous people who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial. It is important to understand the long-standing history that has brought us to reside on the land and to seek to understand our place within that history. Land acknowledgments do not exist in a past tense or historical context: colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation. Acknowledging the land is an important Indigenous protocol that we are honoring here today.

It is on the rich homeland of the Esselen, where CSUMB not only thrives as an institution of higher education but also provides an education abundant with service and experience to a diverse community of learners. We must acknowledge that we are able to hold this educational achievement on stolen land where indigenous people have been unjustly removed through

physical and cultural violence. In addition, we also wanted to acknowledge that Indigenous communities respected, celebrated, and honored all forms of love, and expressions of gender, and gave reverence to 2spirit identities, and it was in part that their acceptance of these identities further led to the violence against them.

So as we speak today, we recognize that we are the beneficiaries of their removal. We must strive to go beyond acknowledging that land we are on, and honor the Esselens', and all other Indigenous folx who have been affected by settler colonialism, and their continued legacies through our current and future work.

We Are Here - Let Ka Lai

2:34 <<(end of) Ocean sound>>

2:34-3:10

Robin Wall Kimmerer, mother, scientist, professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation on the gift of strawberries:

"Even now, after more than fifty Strawberry Moons, finding a patch of wild strawberries still touches me with a sensation of surprise, a feeling of unworthiness and gratitude for the generosity and kindness that comes with an unexpected gift all wrapped in red and green.

"Really? For me? Oh, you shouldn't have." After fifty years they still raise the question of how to respond to their generosity" (2013, p.23).

3:10-4:19 <<Sound of wind in trees and bushes>>

3:17-4:01

Imagine a world where capitalism doesn't exist, where heteronormativity is gone, where the patriarchy is no longer in control. A world in which humans can live in a reciprocal relationship with our land and environment. What will that look like? Through this podcast, we will explore that question and the possibilities that arise when we try to decolonize and dream ourselves out of the settler mindset and into an elsewhere.

And disclaimer, we acknowledge that dismantling settler colonialism is a heavy conversation.

We are not seeking to solve it, we are simply allowing ourselves to envision an alternative.

We hope this conversation brings you an unexpected gift.

4:02-4:24

As we begin this conversation on Decolonization we believe it is necessary to start by defining Settler Colonialism's relationship with Indigenous people and Land. It is necessary to understand its impact to attempt to find liberation from it within Decolonization.

4:19 <<(end of) Sound of wind in trees and bushes>>

4:20-4:23

Lesley will lead us in this conversation.

Lesley...

4:24-4:33

Yes. In order to begin to discuss decolonization, it is important we define what settler colonialism is and the context of settler colonialism in our current society.

4:34-4:37

So, What is settler colonialism?

4:38-4:47

Settler colonialism is the colonization of indigenous populations, specifically through the use of displacement, erasure, and dispossession, since settlers are ultimately after their land.

4:48-4:54

As Patrick Wolfe puts it; "Settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event." (2006, p.388)

4:55-5:04

And it is important to distinguish settler colonialism from other forms of colonialism because settler colonialism is more specifically oriented toward a fight for the land itself.

5:05-5:11

Well colonialism has always been about others taking over and claiming land...

5:12-5:32

Sure, but in contrast to other forms of colonialism ...

which are often geared towards the exploitation of labor; by making use of people for the purposes of slavery,

or for the exploitation of resources such as precious metals and agriculture,

or even for gaining territory and sovereignty for their metropole. Such as we have seen through British colonialism worldwide... Ahem.. Africa, India...

5:33-5:49

A settler mindset is one in which the land must be completely dominated by settlers, leaving no room for other identities. They are looking to create a permanent settlement. Likewise, the goal here is to actually replace the natives of the land so that they can then claim to be natives themselves, further reassuring their claim on the land they are colonizing.

5:50-6:12

And so, Settler colonialists carry their ideas of sovereignty with them, forming their own identities (Wolfe, 2006, 388).

Within this, there exists a mindset of being “others”. In their minds, they are working to free themselves from their imperium. They have taken some of the ideals and principles from their original sovereignty, but they are forming a new sovereignty on the land they are conquering. They are not them, they are different, better, smarter (Wolfe, 2006, 388).

6:13-6:46

They are also technically not natives, but they have come to stake their claim on this land because they are more deserving of it. In their minds, they are the “true inhabitants” of the land. As opposed to natives, who either “misuse” the land or in some cases, were not “actual” inhabitants of the land before the settlers arrived (Tully, 1994).

The main thing ingrained within settler colonialism is also this idea of land as property. As opposed to an appreciation of the land, which Natives have always held and respected, settlers see land only as an object of conquest. The land is there to serve a purpose, to serve them. They want the land. And that means removing the Natives (Tully, 1994).

6:47-6:54

So how is this still impacting us right now? The land has already been conquered, this is all in the past ...

6:55-7:36

Settler Colonialism is an ongoing structure of Indigenous erasure, elimination, and displacement. By looking at the United States, we can see how settler colonialism is still an ongoing system. As settler colonialism was enacted through the displacement, dispossession, and marginalization of indigenous groups, it has persistently displaced and controlled Natives in a manner in which they continue to be oppressed on their own land. This violence and control towards Natives has taken shape in many forms; through the physical violence towards and murder of indigenous folk, through the erasure of native culture and practices, and by the forced socialization and education of natives which have in-turn made them lose their identities, lose their ways of being, and become assimilated into a country that does not respect them or their rights.

7:37-7:51

Leanne Simpson, author of *As We Have Always Done* says;

Quote: “Colonizers wanted the land. Everything else... was part of the machinery that was designed to create a perfect crime--a crime where the victims are unable to see or name the crime as a crime” End quote (2017, p.15).

7:52-8:08

And so, yes Settler colonialism is an ongoing project, and it now takes form and prevails in many ways. The land has been taken, that much is clear. But it continues to have its hold on the United States through the oppressive practices of heteronormativity, patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, and more.

8:09-8:13

How is this reflected in current society?

8:14-8:55

Settler Colonialism, especially here in the United States, is a failed project. A settler mindset is a winner-takes-all mindset, and so this has become a continuous battle since the continued existence and resistance of native identities in the US has proven that its goals have yet to be fully realized (Veracini, 2010).

Within the settler mindset, there are also so many self-contradictions, hypocrisies, and false justifications. Their principles are based on some of the most self-righteous and hypocritical ideologies, and this continues to honestly — bite them in the ass — when they try and justify themselves even now.

And although settler colonialism is so embedded into our current ways of life, there is still room to undo it. This would take a completely different approach to life as we know it, but it is possible.

8:56-9:01

Lesley can you share how Settler Colonialism is part of our story?

9:02-9:04

Settler colonialism IS our story.

9:05-9:33

As Latina and indigenous women, we personally feel the impact of settler colonialism. In looking at our own HERstories as women, we have also been adversely affected by the oppressive practices of settler colonialism. The structure of our society as we know it today, which was formed through Settler colonial ideologies, has made it so that women of color will never truly be able to succeed or be fully recognized for the work they do. The legacy of settler colonialism has left an enduring mark on the way our society views and treats women of color, perpetuating systemic barriers that impede our progress.

9:34-10:10

And yet, the way I see it; we are both the oppressed and the oppressors in the complex system of settler colonialism.

How are we to fight for our own rights and place in society, knowing that we are on stolen land. And that as much as we are oppressed, so are the Indigenous people whose entire lives were uprooted and disrespected through settler colonialism. And we also must acknowledge that a lot of the work that is done for indigenous rights comes from Indigenous female activists and continue that work as the benefactors of their ongoing struggles. Through solidarity and shared understanding, we can collectively work towards a future where women of color can thrive, unhindered by the constraints of a system that was never designed with our success in mind.

10:11-10:18

In reality, everyone is affected, and this influence persists due to the framework established by settler colonialists.

10:19-10:29

Beautifully said, Lesley, you articulated that perfectly. How do we direct our attention towards imagining and enacting a future for Indigenous people?

10:30-10:50

To be an ally means to stand with Indigenous people and support their voices.

We can direct our attention towards an equitable future for indigenous people by ensuring that the future of decolonization takes care of the land and restores the balance that once was. The *rematriation* of indigenous land and lives is key in this process, and how we decolonize and dream ourselves out of settler colonialism is one place to start.

10:51-10:58

Isela, what do you feel decolonization could look like? And is it so far-fetched to dream of decolonization?

10:59-11:31

First and foremost, I believe it is important to note what decolonization does NOT look like. It does not look like everyone going back to “where they came from” or maintaining the same exploitative hierarchical relationships with a different group on top. This way of thinking is only relevant when viewing decolonization within the mindset of a settler. The reality is the structure of settler colonialism holds the idea that it is a winner-take-all, zero-sum situation. Meaning there is no room for a decolonized future within settler colonialism.

11:32-11:53

With that being said I don't believe dreaming of decolonization is a far-fetched idea. Rather it's a very unsettling idea for settlers. When looking at decolonization, settler interests, and settler futurity are no longer centered. As Deborah will talk about later on, decolonization is accountable for Indigenous futurity.

11:54-12:19

Part of dreaming ourselves out of settler colonialism is dismantling systems of oppression such as hetero-patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, and so forth. These systems were set in place by colonial powers to ensure and reinforce power dynamics and facilitate the subjugation of certain groups deemed a threat. Those systems intersect and mutually support each other in oppression.

12:20-12:32

Native scholar Leanne Simpson invites Indigenous communities to envision decolonization as a multifaceted process that entails going beyond simply evoking changes in the political systems. The dream is bigger!

12:33-13:04

She notes the importance of indigenous resurgence to achieve decolonization. Which means allowing indigenous communities to reclaim and assert their ways of life. Embracing a radical transformation of relationship between individuals, communities, and the land. A future where all relationships and connections look vastly different from what they are in the present day. As settlers, we can learn from that and we must allow ourselves to listen and learn from the indigenous communities.

13:05-13:10

What does the relationship with land look like?

13:11-13:50

Under our current system, our relationship with the land is very exploitative. We have been trained to view the land and the planet as mere commodities at our disposal to exploit and extract from for-profit and for our benefit. That way of thinking must change to lean into decolonization. Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* invites us to reject this harmful structure. She invites us to develop respectful and reciprocal relationships with the world. This means acknowledging and being grateful for all that the earth provides for us and viewing it as a gift. The Land provides and cares for us, and we in turn need to care for it as well (2013).

13:51-13:56

How do we go about decolonizing?

13:57-14:37

The essence of decolonization lies in recognizing and honoring indigenous sovereignty. As I stated earlier it is not about serving the interests or visions of settlers but rather acknowledging the self-governance and futurity of indigenous groups. Settlers must begin to recognize and

dismantle the oppressive structures set in place by colonialism. There needs to be an empowerment of indigenous voices, and acknowledgment of and support for indigenous land rights. As settlers, we must unlearn a lot of harmful colonizing habits. We are not indigenous nonetheless we can learn how to exist alongside indigenous communities in non-harmful ways.

14:38-14:41

Deborah, is decolonization possible?

14:42-15:18

I feel like maybe there is a better question to ask. Within decolonization, we desire to counter colonialism, so posing the question as if an alternative does not currently exist, is in itself a colonial mindset, it assumes alternative ways are already gone, they have never been gone. Instead, we should ask ourselves who is currently practicing alternative ways and how we can join those practices of resistance and refusal. The important parts of this question are what allyship looks like for those on settler land and what steps can be taken to ensure a future for those who have been targeted by settler colonialism. (Tuck & Yang 2012, p.13,36 ; Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill 2013, p.24)

15:19-15:23

So how do we practice Decolonization?

15:24

Decolonization is not a formula, Decolonization is the return of indigenous land and life. There are other things we need to do to make that possible, but there is not one set way, and as we mentioned above we are still grappling with this process, so I defer to those who have come before me and have been fighting this struggle for longer. Leanne Simpson writes that Indigenous theory and practice are done together in what she calls grounded normativity (Simpson, 2017, p.17).

15:52-16:43

While attempting to practice decolonization, I also believe it is important to incorporate decolonial theory. We must acknowledge the damage settler colonialism has done and is doing, while also taking responsibility for our complicity in settler colonialism through actionable steps. Liberating ourselves from the colonial mindset comes from the acknowledgment of settler colonialism's history and through practicing responsible, reciprocal, alternative ways of being that are wholly different from settler colonial ways. Ways that do not buy into the scarcity mindset that has worked to destroy and erase Indigenous futures for a settler future. Rather, a mindset that sees the abundance there is all around us, and within us, that imagines and sustains an Indigenous future as vital to any future on our planet.

16:44-17:22

Tuck and Yang (2012) call on settlers to step out of the scarcity mindset by giving up land, power, and privilege in order to embrace a world of abundance for those settlers would eliminate (p.3, 21). This looks like land back policies and gifts for Indigenous people. Tuck and Yang emphasize the importance of tangible actions like land back, so as not to get caught up in practices that allow us to stay comfortably or uncomfortably, in the current system. This commitment to structural change is what allyship looks like, according to Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill; “One of the most radical and necessary moves toward decolonization requires imagining and enacting a future for Indigenous peoples - a future based on terms of their own making” (2013, p.24).

17:33-18:09

So, Lesley shared with us how destructive and pervasive settler colonialism is, it's the water we swim in, it's the air we breathe, it's what we are born into. We must acknowledge it. Then Isela shared with us alternative ways of relating to one another and the land, by bringing in Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) who calls on us to listen to the world around us. She reminds us how much plants, our oldest teachers, give of themselves out of an abundance of generosity. They give us breath, medicine, food, beauty, community, and diversity. And plants guide us (Kimmerer, 2013, p.213).

18:10-18:18

Plants lead me to the place I want to focus on, the future, specifically a future in the elsewhere.

18:19-18:30

Future? In the elsewhere? Ok, we are going to need you to explain, do you mean how we can direct our attention toward imagining and enacting a future for Indigenous people?

18:31-19:09

Yeah, so leaning into the idea that plants are our teachers, and are abundantly generous, as Kimmerer wrote, I feel their push towards generosity can lead us out of a scarcity mindset, and into an elsewhere. Tuck and Yang (2012) call decolonization “not an ‘AND’ but an elsewhere” (p.36). Decolonization doesn't look like our current system plus missing things, and I want to emphasize this, IT LOOKS LIKE A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT SYSTEM, a whole other place (p.21). It is not a system based on scarcity, it is a completely different system, one based on generosity.

19:10-19:43

This can be disorienting at first but I think it is helpful to remember that this other place, this whole other system is anchored in respect for diversity, responsibility towards one another, and reciprocal relationships. Also if we get to elsewhere, it is not a Utopia, there will be struggles,

but its system is not centered around taking, it is a place that leans into the continuous alternative ways of Indigenous people, it is a place of Indigenous futurity and it is a place where the Earth is not a commodity.

19:44-20:46

It looks nothing like we expect because it is not within a settler framework, and as Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill (2013) say it is not determined by settlers (p.24). It is okay for settlers to feel unsettled, that's the point, but that is the beginning point. We all start as strangers in a new world. (Kimmerer, 2013, p.206). As we attempt to step out of one world, the settler world, and into somewhere else, the elsewhere, we become immigrants and while there are no do-overs, it gives us a chance to position ourselves differently. Tuck and Yang give us a definition of what it means to be an immigrant rather than a settler, an immigrant is "beholden to the Indigenous laws and epistemologies of the lands [they migrate to]" (2012, p.7). If our posturing is not one of respect and adherence to Indigenous value systems of elsewhere, posturing that loosens itself from the grip settler colonialism has had on us, we aren't in the elsewhere. Again both theory and practice are required.

20:47-20:57

It seems like it would be easy to get stuck in the cycle of trying to break free from settler colonialism and never find the elsewhere.

How do we fight the conditioning settler colonialism has placed on us?

20:58-21:32

I think it is important that we recognize there is no easy way out of settler colonialism, but it is necessary. It is easy to slip into centering our struggle as settlers, but I think when we realize the way out is by centering Indigenous futures, that knot loosens a little. If our values are responsibility, reciprocity, and relationship it will motivate us to look for an exit, and to take action steps towards that exit. However, it doesn't hurt to be aware of the ways the settler mindset tries to protect itself.

21:33-22:36

Tuck and Yang (2012) call the ways that settlers deal with their guilt and complicity in the system, without having to leave the system, "settler moves to innocence" (p.3). This can look like "settler nativism" where settlers imagine a Native past and a settler future instead of NATIVE FUTURES WITHOUT A SETTLER STATE (p.13). It can look like "adoption fantasies" where settlers are passed Indigenous wisdom and carry on for Indigenous people who are NO LONGER PRESENT (p.14). It can look like getting stuck in "Conscientization" or the idea that CRITIQUING IS ENOUGH, it is not. Disruptive actions that unseat settler colonialism are required to break free from the system. When looking at these moves a pattern starts to become clear, the settler mindset does not include Indigenous future, it does not want to let go of

land, power, and privilege. Decolonization looks like Indigenous sovereignty, it looks like land back, and it must include an Indigenous future.

22:37-22:44

We must not settle into settler ways, we must be looking for the exit.

22:45-23:04

As we resist the lies of domination, extraction, and elimination and lean into relationships, relationship with the land, and relationship with each other, it opens up a way, a sort of map to the elsewhere, like Joy Harjo's (2002) map in the poem *A Map to the Next World*;

Here are some lines from the poem:

23:05-23:19

“Fresh courage glimmers from planets.

And lights the map printed with the blood of history, a map you will have to know by your intention, by the language of suns...

We were never perfect.

(Harjo, 2002, Lines 38-40)

23:20-23:37

Yet, the journey we make together is perfect on this earth who was once a star and made the same mistakes as humans.

We might make them again, she said.

Crucial to finding the way is this: there is no beginning or end.

You must make your own map.” (Harjo, 2002, Lines 48-53)

23:38-24:20

For those of us who lean into the journey of decolonization, a good place to start is reframing our mindset through actionable steps centered around Indigenous sovereignty and futurity. Although difficult, it is essential work. Indigenous people, too, are having to imagine what land back looks like in our current system. Corinna Gould, Ohlone co-founder of Sogorea Te' Land Trust in the Bay Area says "You can't protect the living until you protect the dead" (NoiseCat, 2021). In Emeryville, the Ohlone are using legal structures to reclaim and steward Indigenous land that holds sacred burial sites. This is what honoring and reclamation look like.

24:21-24:56

So what should the posture be of the unsettled?

Listening intently,

learning names,

waiting patiently,

acknowledging empty hands,

honoring responsibilities,

carrying healing,

bringing gifts,

bowing heads, and

following footsteps are beautiful examples Kimmerer (2013) gives us.

Practices of how to be part of diverse, reciprocal, responsible, relational practices that work towards and sustain Indigenous futurity (Kimmerer, 2013, p.208, 211-212).

24:57-25:03

We are generously invited to humbly find a place of belonging in *elsewhere, even if that starts with us dreaming*.

25:04 <<**Ocean Sounds**>>

25:08-25:25

The executive producers of the OtterPod are Dr. Sara Salazar Hughes and Dr. Sriya Shrestha.

Theme music by Eric Mabrey [May-bree]. Sounds by Zapslat.

My name is Lesley and thank you to my wonderful cohosts today Isela and Deborah for hosting this conversation.

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