

Contested Citizenship Education in Settler Colonies on First Nations Land

Sophie Rudolph, sophie.rudolph@unimelb.edu.au, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Melitta Hogarth, melitta.hogarth@unimelb.edu.au, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Abstract (250 words)

Citizenship education in British settler colonies is no straightforward issue. The history of colonisation, imbued with racism, and the ongoing presence of settler peoples and their institutions and government on unceded First Nations land, creates deep citizenship dilemmas. For many years British settler states, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and America, have sought to silence and subdue First Nations peoples through policies and practices that marginalise Indigenous languages, knowledges and histories. The institution of education has played a key role in these acts of marginalisation. This chapter explores the ethical and political dilemmas of citizenship and education in these contexts. It examines the citizenship tensions produced by settler colonies occupying First Nations land, the making of the settler citizen through education systems dominated by whiteness, and the limit points for citizenship education under these conditions. It is argued that justice and citizenship education may be incompatible and that a stance of ‘anti-citizenship’ may be the only possibility for a pathway towards justice in these settler colonial contexts.

Keywords: Indigenous sovereignty, settler colonialism, whiteness, self-determination.

We want hope, not racialism,
Brotherhood, not ostracism,
Black advance, not white ascendance:
Make us equals, not dependants.
...
Make us neighbours, not fringe-dwellers;
Make us mates, not poor relations,
Citizens, not serfs on stations.
Must we native Old Australians
In our own land rank as aliens?
Banish bans and conquer caste,
Then we'll win our own at last.

Excerpt from *Aboriginal Charter of Rights*, Oodgeroo Noonuccal¹

Introduction

In the above poem famous Australian Aboriginal poet, Oodgeroo Noonuccal calls to attention the racism of the settler state and the marginalising effects of such racism. The full poem is worth a read. This draws attention to the way in which ‘citizenship’ is attributed differently to the people held within a settler state and how certain characteristics have counted towards citizenship recognition. In this chapter, we argue that these contexts of the settler state raise ethical and political dilemmas for citizenship education that can have challenging consequences in the classroom.

¹ This poem can be viewed in full here: <https://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/noonuccal-oodgeroo/poems/aboriginal-charter-of-rights-0719030>

Citizenship education has already been proven to be a difficult thing to define. For example, it may refer to teaching about democracy, governance, and parliamentary and legislative processes. Smyth describes this as curriculum ‘about’ citizenship and a kind of learning that is frequently passive (2016, 308). Other conceptions of citizenship education focus on ‘active’ citizenship or youth civic and political action (see [chapter in this handbook by Peterson, Black & Walsh](#)). As Zembylas ([this volume](#)) points out, an interest in ‘affective citizenship’ has also emerged in recent years. Affective citizenship is linked to the idea of belonging to the nation and the feelings that are encouraged and experienced in relation to such belonging (Zembylas, 2018, 2). This present chapter is also interested in the notion of belonging, however, and therefore it centres on the dilemma of belonging within the context of settler colonial states and in particular, settler states connected to the British empire.

What we hope to do in this chapter, therefore, is to firstly in the section following the introduction illustrate the ways in which settler states produce an unsettled citizenry due to the tensions produced by invasion and occupation of First Nations land. Next, we will examine some of the silences and erasures in education systems in settler colonies that contribute to the making of the settler citizen. In the third section, we will raise and discuss some of the ethical and political dilemmas for citizenship education that arise in settler colonies. And we will conclude with a contention that in order to address these dilemmas, anti-citizenship education is a possibility worthy of consideration. We will outline what we see as some options for anti-citizenship education and what this may enable in terms of creating a citizenry in settler colonial contexts that is more aware of the tensions of belonging and more able to navigate the knowledge and relationships necessary to shape futures in which First Nations peoples experience justice.

Citizenship within a settler state is complex because sovereignty and belonging is contested. As Canadian scholars Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang have pointed out, settler colonialism insists on making a home and asserting sovereignty over land that has not been ceded by Indigenous communities (2012, 5); ‘settler colonialism is the specific formation of colonialism in which the colonizer comes to stay, making himself the sovereign, the arbiter of citizenship, civility, and knowing’ (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez 2013, 73). The settler state, therefore, creates a set of citizenship requirements that overlook the settler relationship to First Nations communities and the laws, lore and obligations such communities uphold on their land. The strong ties between citizenship, sovereignty, laws, rights and belonging, therefore creates many tensions to navigate in settler colonial states. As Australian First Nations scholar, Aileen Moreton-Robinson has pointed out,

Citizenship is more than a status associated with a bundle of rights; it is also the formal contract by which the sovereignty of a nation is extended to the individual in exchange for being governed. Who can and who cannot contract into this status and what rights are able to be exercised is also shaped by who possesses the nation.²

Moreton-Robinson has argued that the settler nation is socially, culturally and politically constructed as a white possession such that settlers within this nation derive a sense of belonging from ownership of land/property understood within the logic of capital (2015).

New Zealander scholars Alison Jones and Te Kewahau Hoskins (one Pakeha and one Maori), working within these tensions of the settler state, point out that these conditions and operations of a settler state mean that speaking to (or writing to) an audience of both Indigenous and non-

² Aileen Moreton-Robinson (30 May, 2017, para 14), Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/citizenship-exclusion-and-the-denial-of-indigenous-sovereign-rig/10095738>)

Indigenous people has challenges (2016, 78). This is a dilemma for us here too. For a sense of belonging in a settler state for a non-Indigenous person rests on the denial of belonging by the settler state for an Indigenous person. Indeed, even in our writing team we confront these tensions as each of us is positioned differently within the settler state and its governing apparatus. The first author is a white, settler Australian, who is positioned within the ‘Australian citizenry’ as belonging to the Australian settler state. She has been schooled as ‘fitting in’, speaking the ‘right’ language and having the right to speak. However, while officially belonging to the settler state she also feels the tension that exists through having been born on, and now living and working on, unceded First Nations land. The second author is an Aboriginal woman whose experience of the settler state is frequently one of denial; silencing of Indigeneity, denial of sovereignty and so forth. However, she also must work and act within the institutions, laws and governance of the settler state and vote in a system that does not recognise her peoples’ sovereignty or adequately represent her peoples’ views and voices. In this chapter we explore the effects of these positionalities and how education might better attend to and understand the ways citizens are shaped and how they might imagine new relationships.

O Canada!
Your home’s on Mi’kmaw land
True genocidal drive
By all your Queen’s command
...
O Canada, our Nation is still here
O Canada! We stand guard against thee.

Excerpt from *Oh Canada! Your Home’s on Mi’kmaw Land* by Pamela Palmater

First Nations Sovereignty and Settler Colonies: an Unsettled Citizenry

The persistent denial of Indigenous sovereignty and the usurpation of Indigenous lands by White settler states maintains a narrative of ‘salvation’. As the poem by Canadian First Nations poet, Pamela Palmater above demonstrates, the sovereignty and survival of Indigenous peoples continues. Palmater reminds the coloniser that they are on the unceded lands of Mi’kmaw land. The relationship with, and responsibility to, Mother Earth does not cease because of the presence of non-Indigenous peoples, their laws and governing apparatus.

Maaka and Andersen make apparent the complexities produced by colonisation stating that “understanding both historical and contemporary forms of colonization is essential to understanding Indigenous Peoples, as their place in both national and global societies has been framed by their displacement by other more dominant political-ethnic groups, a process commonly referred to as colonization” (Maaka and Andersen 2006, 13). British sovereignty over what it claimed as its colonies created a situation in which Indigenous sovereignty was overwritten. First Nations people have never ceded their sovereignty to Britain, however, through domination and exploitation British colonists set up a ‘home’ (Tuck and Yang 2012) on Indigenous land.

This ‘home-making’ is perhaps most stark in the case of Australia in which the claim of ‘terra nullius’ was made in order to justify colonial occupation (see Moreton-Robinson, 2011). Colonists in each of the British colonies, therefore, chose to ignore the rich cultural and educational practices that already existed on the lands they invaded.³ Over time they would make Indigenous peoples

³ While the interactions between colonisers and Indigenous peoples were different in the various British colonies with some negotiating treaties, the overarching experience was one in which British systems, knowledges and laws

subjects of the British Crown and then enable them to vote and ostensibly hold the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. However, deep tensions remained and violences perpetrated by the settler state towards Indigenous peoples have not ceased.⁴

The acts of domination that characterised invasion and occupation in British colonies created the settler colonies of today in which the presences of First Nations communities - their survival, strength and ongoing reminders that they have not ceded sovereignty - creates tension for the settler state. Settler colonial theorist, Patrick Wolfe, has proposed that settler colonialism has relied on a 'logic of elimination' in which Indigenous peoples are seen to be in a process of assimilation into the settler state, effectively removing their presence (1994). However, while the settler state may be governed or propelled by this logic, First Nations communities have defied the settler state, and refused to be assimilated and it is this tension that illuminates the problems of the authority of the settler state.

Drawing on the notion of self-determination advocated within the United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous peoples have the right to "freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (United Nations General Assembly 2008, 4). While the power of the settler state may make this right difficult to enact, First Nations communities in British settler colonies have found creative ways to refuse and resist the settler state's definition of their status and subjectivity within the settler colony.

For example, Canadian Mohawk scholar, Audra Simpson, examines the complex process of political sovereignty and governance practiced by the Kahnawà:ke Mohawks of the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacy in North America (2014). She argues that these sovereign practices exist within the settler colonial sovereignty and create challenges and tensions over power and recognition (Simpson, 2014). Similarly, Indigenous peoples asserting their self-determination and resistance are evident with the occupation of Alcatraz Island on the west coast of the United States. The island was occupied in 1964, albeit briefly by five Sioux men and then two occupations occurred in November of 1969 (Johnson 1994). The initial occupation occurred with a misinterpretation of the 1868 Sioux Treaty whereby Alcatraz was reclaimed as traditional lands because of administrative tardiness by settler colonial governmental institutions. Despite only lasting four hours, the protesters called for a cultural centre and an Indian University to be established. In doing so, the protesters unsettled the settler state and established their sovereignty on stolen lands.

Zoe Todd, Métis anthropologist and scholar of Indigenous studies and human-animal studies, has examined the ways that First Nations people in Canada continue to use Indigenous legal orders and philosophies to maintain relationships and responsibilities to place (2018). She recounts how 'Paulatuq is where I learned about how people and fish, together, work to disrupt, refuse and challenge the ways in which the Canadian state imposes its understandings of land, property, conservation, and law' (2018, 61). Thus the relationships and responsibilities envisioned through settler citizenship are disrupted and disputed through First Nations practices. In similar ways Megan Bang and colleagues explore the urban spaces of what is now known as Chicago, re-storying the city as Indigenous lands (2014). These creative First Nations responses to colonisation mean the settler colonial logic of elimination cannot be realised and this positions the settler state as always less settled than it imagines it might be.

dominated, while First Nations peoples, their knowledges and practices were oppressed and frequently suffered deep violences.

⁴ Indigenous peoples in all of the British settler colonies discussed in this chapter continue to be over-represented in the prison system and experience racism in a range of settler institutions, including schools, hospitals and aged care (see Moodie, Maxwell & Rudolph, 2019; Blagg, Anthony & Stanley 2018).

In Australia, Aboriginal nation-building projects have emerged in recent decades that assert Indigenous sovereignty. The Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority in South Australia exemplifies how nations (re)building has been operationalised; their traditions and knowledges are listened to and respected by countering colonial governance structures and entities through the privileging of their rights as traditional custodians of Country (see Bauman, Smith, Quiggin, Keller and Drieberg 2015, Hemming, Rigney, Bignall, Berg and Rigney 2019). This refusal of settler citizenship privileges an Indigenous notion of belonging through responsibilities to Country.

Further examples of resistance have sought to proffer provocations about Western education systems illustrating how dominant ideologies and practices become common understandings through education. Hogarth (2019) calls attention to the prominence of Standard Australian English within the Australian education system. While Australia does not have an official national language, it is assumed within the public sphere that all citizens will speak, write and learn in the coloniser's language. She questions the acts of citizenship and the position of the settler state within education spaces where Standard Australian English is an expectation and measure of success.

These examples demonstrate how unceded First Nations sovereignty in settler colonies produces a settler state that is constantly unsettled by First Nations resistance and survival. The presence of First Nations communities reminds the settler state that it is on stolen land and therefore the settler citizenry is unsettled and uncertain. The First Nations community, that refuses to be defined and captured by the settler state, but still has to function within their governing practices much of the time, may also be unsettled by this unresolved tension and the constant struggle for justice.

The unsettled citizenry that is produced by the largely unresolved tension of settler states existing on unceded First Nations land raises questions for education, and citizenship education, in particular. For example, what are the options for asserting belonging and citizenship in Australia for both Indigenous and settler people? How are these options for belonging and citizenship constrained for both Indigenous and settler peoples by the unresolved and ongoing colonising forces of the settler state over First Nations land? We will explore these questions in greater detail below. In the next section we examine what happens in the education system to enable settler citizenship to be made and maintained.

And no matter what happens in these times of breaking
No matter dictators, the heartless, and liars
No matter—you are born of those
Who kept ceremonial embers burning in their hands
All through the miles of relentless exile.

Excerpt from *For Earth's Grandsons*, by Joy Harjo⁵

Silences and Erasures: the Making of the Settler Citizen

The excerpt from the poem by American First Nations poet, Joy Harjo, that begins this section, highlights the violence of the colonial process, the losses and the grief, and yet also the continuing strength of First Nations ancestors. The institution of education is known to have contributed to the violences of colonialism through silencing and erasing Indigenous histories, knowledges, languages and cultures (see Herbert 2012, Rose 2012). And it is through the systematic denial of Indigenous sovereignty, cultural, intellectual and spiritual traditions that the schooling system in settler colonial contexts became a place to produce the white settler citizen (and not only through citizenship education).

⁵ This excerpt can be found on this website: <https://www.americanindianmagazine.org/story/strong-words>

The settler state thus uses education – in particular schooling, but also other forms of education – to shape the settler citizen. This can happen through citizenship education curriculum and in the form of particular civics and citizenship initiatives, such as ‘values education’ that was introduced into Australian schools by the Howard government in the early 2000s.⁶ However, the school curriculum is also designed to ‘normalise’ and protect certain kinds of knowledge and values that uphold settler subjectivity as ‘superior’ to other ways of knowing, being and doing. This was evident in the review of the Australian National Curriculum in 2014 in which (conservative, white, settler) reviewers appointed by the government called for a renewed emphasis on Judeo-Christian values and knowledge (see Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014). As discussed in the previous section, American school systems also bolster the settler state through the silencing of histories such as the reclamation of Alcatraz Island in 1964 and later by the larger organised grouping known as Indians of All Tribes (Johnson, 1994).

The curriculum in settler contexts is not only making the settler citizen, but a certain kind of settler citizen. By focusing on and defending schools and school curricula as places for Western knowledge and values, the settler state uses the education system to bolster white supremacy. White supremacy is shaped through domination. As North American scholar Zeus Leonardo explains, it is made through an historical process and, ‘it does not form out of random acts of hatred, although these are condemnable, but rather out of a patterned and enduring treatment of social groups’ (2004, 139). Thus the historical and sustained treatment of First Nations communities in settler states as inferior to Whites - an idea enhanced through the education system - means citizenship education, and education more broadly sees and acts for the white, settler citizen. And in doing this, it also tries to make those deemed ‘non-white’ fit into its citizenry through assimilation.

Leonardo uses Charles Mills’ theory of the racial contract, to argue that part of this contract involves an ‘epistemological sub-contract’. He suggests,

In Mills’ estimation, the RC [Racial Contract] is an agreement among Whites to misinterpret the world as it is. It is grounded on an epistemology that lacks consistency and defies logic but does not produce cognitive dissonance because it remains consistent with the RC [Racial Contract]. (2015, 92)

And through this process it is argued that a ‘willful white ignorance’ is produced (Leonardo 2015, 92-93). This can be seen in the research discussed by Licho Lopez Lopez and colleagues in which a school in Melbourne, Australia enacted curriculum that privileged a settler perspective, encouraged students to take on a settler subjectivity and erased Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination (Lopez Lopez, De Wildt and Moodie, 2019).

Another example of the willful white ignorance used to produce the settler citizen in schools is research carried out by Gumbaynggirr scholar, Lilly Brown, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in New South Wales, Australia. Here, high school students reported the continued silencing and erasure of Aboriginal history and knowledge and the violence of colonialism in their classrooms (Brown, 2018). They also reported experiences with teachers who enacted wilful white ignorance, demonstrating the intergenerational power of a schooling system to maintain the dominance of a white settler citizenry.

These circumstances of settler schooling have resulted in many First Nations communities calling for schools and universities to be part of a ‘truth-telling’ process in which students learn about the

⁶ See Battlelines drawn on values. (2005, September 5). *The Age*. <https://www.theage.com.au/education/battlelines-drawn-on-values-20050905-ge0t1o.html>

history of their nation-state that has been wilfully held away from schools and curricula (see for example Appleby & Davis 2018). In the next section, we demonstrate how this situation creates ethical and political dilemmas for citizenship education in these contexts, and education more broadly.

So tell us to be quiet and know that we won't.
This is our language. We are reclaiming it. We will speak it.
Because our bodies weren't built for silence. We will speak it.
Until every ear drop is bruised. We will speak it.

Excerpt from poem by Ngā Hinepūkōrero⁷

Ethical and Political Dilemmas of Citizenship Education

The poem excerpt that begins this section is by a collective of young Maori women who perform poetry in Te Reo Maori and discuss the importance of language for building strong identities and asserting self-determination on Indigenous land, governed by the settler state. This poem demonstrates their defiance and highlights the violence that settler citizenship education can do if it does not account for the issues we have raised above.

The situation that these British settler colonies we have discussed are in, where the settler state cannot fully recognise the sovereignty of First Nations peoples due to the risk of unsettling and undermining its imposed sovereignty and governing power and authority, creates some major challenges for citizenship education in settler schools. The most basic of these is the question of who is actually considered a citizen. If the settler institution and curriculum only ever recognise a citizen as one who has assimilated into the processes and practices of the settler state then First Nations students will be marginalised by the citizenship curricula, somewhat like the students who Lilly Brown spoke to about the history curricula in Australia (2018).

Citizenship curricula that is premised on a stable and authoritative settler state both undermines First Nations sovereignty and, as we have discussed above, reinforces white supremacy. This creates a problem for schools that are both trying to include Indigenous knowledges, histories and cultures in the curriculum and also teach citizenship education that denies the value of Indigenous knowledges, histories and cultures. This may also point to why the inclusion of Indigenous content in the curriculum in British settler states has been difficult to achieve in any deep and lasting way (see for example Maxwell et al 2018). These unresolved sovereignty matters even make it difficult to name nations, as to talk of Australia, Canada, America or New Zealand, is to invoke the colonised land and to talk of a settler state within these contexts is also to reinforce the dominant frameworks and practices.

Another problem that emerges through citizenship education that focuses on the settler state and does not address the tensions of ongoing First Nations sovereignty and knowledges in the current nation states, is that the colonial binary of 'us' and 'them' is reinforced. As First Nations Australian scholar Shino Konishi has shown, subjectivity in settler governed contexts is not often straightforward (2019). She points out the challenges of accounting for the diversity of local histories and the 'supple and complex nature of both Indigenous identities and the ways in which we form connections to country, culture, kin, and newcomers' (2019, 20). At the same time by creating the colonial binary of us/them, or Indigenous/settler, those who are settlers in these contexts (which is also an incredibly diverse and complex subjectivity) may decide they do not want a part in citizenship that continues to do the violence of the settler state.

⁷ This poem is performed by a slam poetry group and can be accessed here: <https://www.renews.co.nz/reo-read/>

Citizenship education that does not or cannot engage with these complexities of subjectivity, identity and belonging in contemporary First Nations/settler colonial environments risks reinforcing colonial binaries and continuing the silencing and erasure of First Nations knowledges and sovereignty. Thus, we suggest citizenship education that is actively interested in these tensions, complexities and challenges should consider teaching also about anti-citizenship. When citizenship is about upholding the violences of the settler state through the continual denial of First Nations sovereignty, self-determination, rights and recognition, we see citizenship education as unviable in our current moment. Citizenship education asks young people to foster a sense of belonging to a nation state that does not take responsibility for its history and allows institutional racism and violence to continue. Anti-citizenship education is opposed to the requirements of belonging that are written into the citizenship contract in settler colonial settings.

Anti-citizenship education would therefore open a space for confronting the truth-telling that First Nations communities have called for, it would highlight the acts of resistance and refusal from First Nations communities, and it would demonstrate the limitations of the authority of the settler state. It also gives settler students a way of standing in solidarity with First Nations communities, rather than their belonging as citizens resting on the denial of the rights of their fellow community members. In this way, anti-citizenship education provides a much more likely path to justice and reconciliation, than does citizenship education. It also allows for the tensions of settler governance on First Nations land to be visible rather than covered over or pushed aside.

Anti-citizenship education may not be a long-standing educational necessity. It may instead be a short term project, in which students are exposed to the histories of violence that were perpetrated by the settler state (truth-telling) and to the acts of resistance by First Nations communities that defy assimilationist logics (survival and endurance). Anti-citizenship education may, therefore, be a door into a future that imagines citizenship differently, that seeks relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, between First Nations communities and the state, that do not repeat the violences of the past, but takes account of those violences and seeks to remedy them. This would be a future in which belonging was not predicated on the authority of the settler state but also a future that does not ignore the history, politics and complexities of belonging.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the thorny problem of citizenship education within the context of British settler states on First Nations Country. It has examined the complexities that this situation poses for citizenship and belonging. The challenges that arise through an unsettled citizenry in these contexts were illustrated through looking at both the ways the settler state maintains its authority and the ways First Nations communities have refused the confines of settler governance. The way in which the education system in settler contexts works to shape and maintain a settler citizenship was demonstrated through examples of curriculum silencing, erasure and white dominance. Finally, the chapter explored some of the ethical and political dilemmas that arise for citizenship education within the contexts of First Nations/settler colonial spaces. While it is difficult to resolve these challenges easily, it was proposed that an anti-citizenship element to citizenship education might better enable the tensions discussed here to be present and explored in the classroom. It was also suggested that this orientation to citizenship education may enable stronger possibilities for the inclusion of Indigenous content in the curriculum and the pursuit of truth-telling initiatives in schools, opening up a better avenue for justice for First Nations communities in British settler states.

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Author/s:

Rudolph, S;Hogarth, M

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