

Reimagining Girlhood in White Settler-Carceral States

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We are deeply honored to have been given the opportunity to edit this special issue of *Girlhood Studies*, given that it is dedicated to rethinking girlhood in the context of the adaptive, always-evolving conditions of white settler regimes. The contributions to this issue address the need to theorize girlhood—and critiques of girlhood—across the shifting forces of subjecthood, community, land, nation, and borders in the Western settler states of North America. As white settler states, Canada and the United States are predicated on the ongoing spatial colonial occupation of Indigenous homelands. In settler states, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang remind us, “the settler never left” (2012: 20) and colonial domination is reasserted every day of active occupation. White settler colonialism functions through the continued control of land, resources, and racialized bodies, and is amalgamated through a historical commitment to slavery, genocide, and the extermination of Indigenous nationhood and worldviews. Under settler colonial regimes, criminal justice, education, immigration, and child welfare systems represent overlapping sites of transcarceral power that amplify intersecting racialized, gendered, sexualized, and what Tanja Aho and colleagues call “carceral ableist” violence (2017: 291). This transcarceral power is enacted through institutional and bureaucratic warfare such as, for example, the Indian Act, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the child welfare system to deny, strategically, Indigenous claims to land and the citizenship of racial others.

Responding to the need to rethink gender formations through situated analyses of gender activism in Western settler states, authors examine how racialized, Black and Indigenous girls negotiate intersecting forms of violence shaped by underlying questions of racially stratified, genocidal settlement and migration policies, and steadfast white settler hegemony (de Finney 2017). Across our own work as community-engaged, politicized Indigenous and race-radical scholar-activists, we see how colonial politics of deserved-



ness, disposability, and necrowarfare function to position racialized, Black, and Indigenous girls and gender-fluid bodies as targets of interminable settler state capture and we live this out (de Finney 2017; de Finney, Palacios, et al. 2018; Krueger-Henney 2016; Palacios 2018). In editing this special issue, we see ourselves as accountable politicized witnesses and actors documenting and contesting the elastic conditions under which abjected bodies are intimately linked and contained by their geopolitical locations in Western settler states, despite their situated differences. We offer a diversity of radical onto-political solidarities that fray the ties that suture together multitudinous institutional sites of extermination of marked bodies.

This collection comes at a time when the stakes have never been higher for gender-based activism. Settler states—including Canada and the US—face epidemics of gender-based violence against Indigenous, Black and Brown girls, girls of color, and 2Spirit, non binary, gender diverse, trans, queer, and gay young people, fueled by pervasive state-sponsored gender-based genocide (Hunt 2015; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019). In this context, we are confronted with critical questions about the sexual and gender citizenship of the Other who have been bypassed in dominant settler colonialist institutional approaches to violence prevention. We link disposability to colonial artifacts of girlhood, gender, sexuality, education, property, and violence—all functions of the settler state transcarceral continuum (Razack et al. 2010). Biopolitics and necropolitics function simultaneously under settler modes of incarceration and extermination by managing, policing, and criminalizing marked bodies through paradoxical invisibility and hypervisibility, while insisting on the sanctity of white life (de Finney, Palacios et al. 2018; Palacios 2018). An analysis of the settler necropolitical brings to light the kinds of adaptive regimes, practices, and policies settler states deploy and how they affect our relationships and struggles with state-sponsored and community-driven violence, and our own intersectional solidarities. These are questions taken up by the articles in this special issue. Writing as Indigenous and race-radical feminist scholar-activists, we interrogate our work with communities that have experienced settler-carceral forms of violence through various embodied, political, and conceptual anticolonial transgressions put forth by and for girls and nonbinary youth. These articles offer applied, methodological, and theoretical approaches that transgress settler state logics and generate vital discussions about girls' and young people's engagements with allyship, collectivity, resistance, love, land, and decolonial resurgence.

New Theoretical Frameworks

One of the rationales for this special issue is to address the limited interdisciplinarity in girl studies and Indigenous and race-radical feminisms, so as to center anti-settler struggles in girl studies. We are mindful of the appropriation of decolonization frameworks in feminist studies that reduces decolonization's true aims to a metaphorical settler "turn to innocence" (Tuck and Yang 2012: 10) that mutes possibilities for anticolonial transgressions. The articles propose timely dialogue between and among girl studies, feminisms of color, Indigenous studies, borderland, migrant, transnational, and intersectional feminisms, analyses of whiteness, settler regimes, and decolonization, critical disability studies, and queer and trans studies. We explore potential coalitions of divergent historical strands of feminism in support of anti-carceralist, anti-settler struggles, to provoke a more nuanced account of what a politics of anti-colonialism might mean for feminist, gender, and girl studies.

Beyond Colonial Girlhood

Importantly, this special issue also calls the notion of girlhood to task. The very notions of girl and girlhood are embedded in a colonial privileging of white, cis-heteropatriarchal, ableist constructs of femininity bolstered by Euro-Western theories of normative child development that were—and still are—violently imposed on othered, non-white girls, queer, and gender-non-conforming bodies. Colonial developmental frameworks of race, gender, sexuality, age, and class that shape these normative constructions of girlhood and femininity continue to dominate girlhood studies and girl-centered practices. Across the articles, contributors identify how, in each particular context, white hegemonic girlhood formations normalize the settler state and obstruct 2spirit, queer, trans, and gender-fluid lives. What does disrupting these formations mean for analyses of interlocking forms of violence, oppositional forms of justice, and decolonization in girlhood studies? How do we honor both the relevance of girlhood and how and why it is claimed and taken up by girl-identified young people in girl-led community and girl-focused academic projects? How is girlhood also contested and amplified at individual and collective levels, and what other gender and sexual formations need to be (re)centered in girlhood studies? These questions bring to light how young people's diverse engagements with gender and sexuality work to transgress carceral settler claims to girlhood.

Transcarceral Settler Systems

As we have argued, the colonial state is emboldened by its commitment to transcarceral institutional violence, operating across social systems such as schools, foster care, juvenile and migrant detention centers, mental health, and institutions dealing with special needs. Marked, racialized, disabled bodies captured in these systems become targets for interminable necropolitics, while carceral states deploy carceral and police humanitarianism (Gilmore 2017) to portray institutions as spaces for rehabilitation (de Finney, Palacios, et al. 2018). The transcarceral state apparatus is sustained through multiple kinds of difficult-to-contest deaths that fuel the extraction of illegitimate bodies, including deaths in custody such as uninvestigated prison deaths, what are known as stand-your-ground assaults, migrant/border capture, death by containment and neglect in child welfare and detention centers, death by bureaucratic violence such as the Indian Act, and death by medicalization and psycho-pathology when, for instance, sexual violence trauma is reduced to a mental health issue, and suicides in custody (de Finney, Palacios et al. 2018).

Several articles highlight how girls and their learning and relational spaces are debilitated by current settler structures in colonial systems. Responding to the lived experiences of institutionalized violence requires an intersectional framework for transformative research and pedagogies in spaces of participatory and community-led knowledge production for and with girls and LGBTQ2S youth (Goeman 2013; Krueger-Henney 2019). Several authors highlight how racialized, queer, and immigrant girls who are systematically affected by interlocking forms of interpersonal and state violence are spearheading regenerative and transformative anticolonial strategies and models.

In “Pathologizing Latinas: Racialized Girlhood, Behavioral Diagnosis, and California’s Foster Care System,” Isabella Restrepo, using ethnographic interviews with agents of the foster care system, explores the ways in which foster care pathologizes Latina girls’ quotidian acts of resistance and survival. Restrepo argues that California’s foster care system, as part of the transcarceral continuum, marks girls of color and their strategies of resistance as always already pathological, and therefore criminalizes them through the diagnosis of behavioral disorders, including Oppositional Defiant Disorder.

Through the application of a critical Black feminist autobiographical approach to examining desegregated (public) schooling structures and practices in white settler education today, Kandice Sumner, in “There’s Some-

thing About *HER*": Realities of Black Girlhood in a Settler State," presents a lived-experience (self)examination of a Black girl through an autoethnographic, critical race and feminist theoretical framework to consider the deleteriousness of existing as a Black female in the white educational US settler state. Sumner argues that the Black schoolgirl in a white settler state is in dire need of personal healing.

In "Beyond the Body Count: Field Notes as First Responder Witness Accounts," Patricia Krueger-Henney repositions critical ethnographic researcher field notes as an opportunity to more ethically and intimately document the physical and ideological violence that white settler states and their institutions on the school-prison nexus inflict on the lives of girls of color generally, and Black girls specifically. By drawing on her own field notes, she argues that critical social sciences researchers have an ethical duty to move their inquiries beyond conventions of settler states' colonial empirical science if they are wanting to create knowledges that transcend traditions of body counts and classification systems of human lives.

In her Blackgirl feminist autoethnographic article "BlackGirl Geography: A (Re)Mapping Guide Towards Harriet Tubman and Beyond," Loren Cahill traces her own socio-spatial-sensory reflections experienced during a visit to Harriet Tubman's home in Auburn, New York, to unsettle the under-theorized renderings of Tubman by interrogating her personal freedom dreams, liberation geography, and womanist cartography. Cahill maps and curates the contemporary and intergenerational solidarity that Blackgirls have forged with Tubman through their own Black Feminism, geography, and space and place making.

Indigenous Sovereignty-Making

As responses to the current context of gender-based genocide in Canada (see National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019), several articles examine how Indigenous girls and young people unsettle ongoing incursions onto Indigenous lands, bodies, and sovereignty through everyday presencings that engage resurgence. Given the colonial landscape of dispossession from land, detribalization, and the outlawing and dispiriting of our community gender teachings that further the cycle of interlocking body and land exploitation, the connection between body and land sovereignty is critical to addressing colonial gender violence in Indigenous communities (de Finney 2016; de Finney, Moreno, et al. 2018). Several

authors examine how Indigenous girls and young people of all genders disrupt sustained assaults on Indigenous lands, bodies, and sovereignty through everyday practices of storytelling, dreamwork, centering community knowledges, and political critique and action. Far from romanticized reenactments, these presencings contend with underlying questions of Indigenous traditions, intertribal exchange and diaspora, the impact of religious and colonial assimilation, self-determination and nationalist identity politics, and the violence of state-governed identity categories under the Indian Act.

In “Red Ribbon Skirts and Cultural Resurgence,” community-based Indigenous scholars Kari Wuttunee and Jennifer Altenberg, along with Sarah Flicker, a settler academic, explore the practice of reclaiming ribbon skirts to illustrate how Indigenous girls and their mentors living in deeply racialized urban settings engage ceremonial, embodied Indigenous resurgence through an arts-based research project. Their collective making and wearing of red ribbon skirts challenges colonial enactments of gender-based dehumanization through acts of resurgence in which both contemporary and historical teachings and ceremonial practices coalesce in powerful ways.

Three articles by members of “Sisters Rising,”¹ an Indigenous-led community-based research study focused on Indigenous teachings for gender wellbeing and sovereignty, follow. As part of this community of practice, these authors describe the ethics of doing participatory politicized research with youth of all genders as a challenge to the systematic dehumanization, criminalization, and victim-blaming climate of racialized gender violence by recentering Indigenous teachings of gender wellbeing and linking body sovereignty to decolonization.

In “Rekinning Our Kinscapes: Renegade Indigenous Stewarding against Gender Genocide,” de Finney and colleagues describe how practices of kinship-making, re-homing, stewarding, and self-determination contribute to a much-needed ethical framework for anti-settler movements. These authors propose rekinning as a means of sovereignty-making, challenging settler colonial logics of binary gender, and honoring youth as leaders in their own anti-settler engagements. Engaging creative and land-based materials, offering healing, accessible infrastructures of care for participants, and fostering deep intimacies between relatives and ancestors animate the work of “Sisters Rising” across partnerships with rural and urban Indigenous communities.

Anna Chadwick’s “Imagining Alternative Spaces: Re-researching Sexualized Violence with Indigenous Girls in Canada” draws on borderland and Indigenous feminist perspectives through reflexive arts- and land-based methods. Chadwick reflects on witnessing as a form of enacted struggle

against the hegemonic “repetition of norms” (Ahmed 2004: 12) of Canadian politics of rescue that position Indigenous girls as damaged and at risk. Working across intellectual, liminal, and affective borderlands, she uses visual methods to examine the complexities of researching, witnessing, and foregrounding Indigenous sovereignty and resistance from the standpoint of a diasporic researcher and witness.

In Shantelle Moreno’s “Love as Resistance: Exploring Conceptualizations of Decolonial Love in Settler States,” citing Ferguson and Toye, she engages with love as an “ethical, social, and/or political force” (2017: 5) against ongoing colonial violence. Moreno articulates love’s intricacies alongside Indigenous and racialized young women and LGBTQQ2S participants, taking up Leanne Simpson’s (2013) concept of decolonial love to explore how intimate solidarities function for racialized allies. With guidance from Indigenous, queer, and racialized feminist scholars, Moreno offers nuanced conceptualizations of decolonial love as a fundamental element of resistance to settler colonial futurity.

Conclusion: Resurgent Imaginaries

Since the subordination of girlhood and nonconforming genders is inextricable from gender hierarchies in Western settler societies, the articles in this special issue explore disruptive applied, conceptual, and methodological frameworks that offer potential openings and epistemological interruptions to rethink and rework girlhood. Examples woven from diverse everyday spaces document how girls and youth engage in intimate, politicized, scholarly acts of decolonizing through unsanitized tellings and radical doings. Given how racist, classist, cis and heteropatriarchal, and ableist frameworks undergird institutions in which girls are required to move and live, many girls learn through collective mentoring in communities of practice about how to maneuver strategically within a multiplicity of socio-political movements challenging police and settler brutality, rape culture, and colonial logics of abjection. Building on these vital movements and our collective scholarship/activism, each of the articles proposes strategies of radical survivance, reinvention, and disruptive engagement.

Clearly, to decolonize and unsettle girlhood under settler regimes, rogue non-settler onto-political frameworks are needed by which to understand gender, sexuality, body, and land. As we enter an era of significant anthropocentric environmental disruptions that will increasingly stratify resource,

land, and body politics, girlhood studies will require cogent, versatile analyses of ongoing settler presence in occupied territories and postcolonial contexts, as well as alternatives to ever more mobile forms of neocolonial settler exploitation, such as national and supranational corporate and environmental violence. In this struggle, we engage in intersectionality and inter-movement praxis as we rage against the romance of community. In considering what solidarities are possible and not possible across the many communities besieged by settler states, we seek to create dense and unwavering activist networks that operate despite lateral forms of violence and policing. Through it all, we remain deeply committed to intense restorative community engagement and relational ethics and solidarities. While methodologies such as (re)storying, politicized art making, cross-community solidarity, institutional advocacy, and land-based ceremonial practices are certainly not new, it is in the contested labor of their implementation that their impact comes to matter materially—particularly when we put our bodies and spirits at stake as race-radical and Indigenous scholars and activists.

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Note

1. sistersrising.uvic.ca

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