

Contradictions of Solidarity

Whiteness, Settler Coloniality, and the Mainstream Environmental Movement

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■ **ABSTRACT:** In this article, we trace the racialized history of the environmental movement in the United States and Canada that has defined the mainstream movement as a default white space. We then interrogate the turn to solidarity as a way to escape/intervene in the racialized and colonial underpinnings of mainstream environmentalism, demonstrating that the practice of solidarity itself depends on these same racial and colonial systems. Given the lack of theorization on solidarity within environmentalism, we draw on examples of solidarity work that bridge place and power and are predicated on disparate social locations, such as in accompaniment or the fair trade movement. We conclude that the contradictions of racialized and colonial solidarity should not preclude settler attempts to engage in solidarity work, but rather become inscribed into environmentalist practices as an ethic of accountability.

■ **KEYWORDS:** decolonization, environmentalism, reconciliation, solidarity, whiteness

In late 2016, thousands of water protectors, Indigenous and settler, celebrated a hard-won victory. They had temporarily stopped pipeline construction at the Oceti Sakowin Camp, near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation. Months before, Indigenous youth put their bodies on the line to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). Over time, the encampments grew to include as many as 12,000 people, including Indigenous people from nearly 300 nations, environmental justice activists, mainstream environmentalists, military veterans, and others committed to stopping the DAPL from being built (CBC News 2016)¹. The news of their victory was a rare moment for celebration, not just because the easement to enable pipeline construction through Indigenous land and under Lake Oahe had not been granted (DA 2016), but also for the relationships that were built across different communities over the course of this fight. Leaders of the Standing Rock Sioux had invited settler and Indigenous people from around the world to stand with them to protect water, land, and future generations. Thousands of well-intentioned people arrived at Standing Rock to, very much imperfectly, put their solidarity theory into action.

In the past several years, there has been a rise in this type of alliance. Multiracial coalitions have been built that take up Indigenous sovereignty as a central piece of climate change work targeting pipeline infrastructure. In November 2015, we saw former US President Barack Obama's administration reject the Keystone XL pipeline after large-scale mobilizations (CP 2014). From the moment Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau approved the Kinder Morgan pipeline in November 2016 (Tasker 2016), Indigenous peoples and environmentalists have promised to

block pipeline construction through legal strategies (TWNSLT 2016) and legislation (Harrison 2016), as well as mobilizations, encampments, and other direct action strategies (Hudema 2016). These partnerships are significant in that they bring together historically distinct social movements: the mainstream environmental movement, the environmental justice movement, and Indigenous resurgence and sovereignty movements. They represent the potential for a shift toward reconciliation and solidarity,² rooted in critiques of settler colonialism and racialization.

The anti-pipeline alliances and other land-based fights have forced mainstream environmentalists to confront the racialized and colonial implications of environmental work. For some, though certainly not all, it has decentered white, settler approaches to environmentalism. Yet, even as these campaigns have grown and often thrived, the relationships are difficult to navigate as different ideas about the environment and its relationship to settler colonialism and racialization surface. Different ways of knowing and being, different relationships to land and community, different exposure to risk, and long histories of mistrust have created a difficult environment for reconciliation work. Indeed, Indigenous people reflecting on their experiences at Standing Rock noted the challenges of working with settlers. White settlers who were unfamiliar with the histories of settler colonialism and racialization and were unprepared to recognize and check their own Eurowestern ways of knowing and being, or often inadvertently perform white saviorism, proved to be particularly problematic (Cram 2016; Gray 2016; O'Connor 2016).

We are interested in how settlers do solidarity in these spaces. In this article, we start by situating environmental activism as a white, settler space. We then recognize the racialized history of the environmental movement in the United States and Canada, pulling together histories of colonial and racializing processes that have defined the mainstream movement as a default white space. We look to theories of solidarity to examine the ways in which solidarity resists and reproduces processes of racialization, colonialism, and whiteness, exploring the contradictions of solidarity work. In our conclusion, we argue that the contradictions of racialized and colonial solidarity do not preclude settler attempts to do solidarity work. We encourage settlers and white people to deeply engage the contradictions of solidarity while continually working to understand and challenge racialization and settler coloniality within the environmental movement.

Whiteness and Settlerhood in Environmentalism

Mainstream environmentalism has historically been a white, settler space. The term settler “denaturalizes and politicizes the presence of non-Indigenous people on Indigenous lands, but also can disrupt the comfort of non-Indigenous people by bringing ongoing colonial power relations into their consciousness” (Flowers 2015: 33). The term recognizes different people’s responsibilities and culpability/complicity in the colonial project. There is debate over the use of “settler,” as it can collapse the different histories and responsibilities that differently positioned non-Indigenous people carry (Byrd 2011; Lawrence and Dua 2005; Sharma and Wright 2008). We agree that specificity is critical to communicating about the different responsibilities and differential access to power and privilege settlers have. At the same time, like Sherene Razack (2015) and Jaskiran Dhillon (2015), we stress that any move to account for that complexity must not eclipse “what it means to live in a settler colonial state, [where] people of color and white settlers alike must confront our collective illegitimacy and determine how to live without participating in and sustaining the disappearance of Indigenous peoples” (Razack 2015: 27).

In this article, we theorize the complexity of how settler environmentalists might navigate racialization and colonialism in order to do solidarity, especially in a movement that has been

so thoroughly marked by (and critiqued for) whiteness. Mainstream environmentalism, which in itself encompasses work ranging from raising awareness about ocean acidification to participating in a tree sit, includes settlers of color, and they/we are implicated in the settler colonial project as well, though differently. However, the existence of diversity does not preclude the domination of white culture (Ward 2008). Our goal in using particular terminology is to stress the role that whiteness plays in the mainstream environmental movement, understood through the logics of racialization and settler colonialism simultaneously. We are not trying to erase or collapse social relations or experiences. Throughout this article, we are thinking about the ways in which racialization is enacted and resisted—and enacted through resistance—within a white, colonial movement.

So how do settlers do environmentalism differently? How might we engage in decolonial, antiracist solidarity? Coming out of our long history of a racist and racializing movement and immersed in dominant social relations, how might mainstream environmentalists rethink our movement and our participation in solidarity? We arrive at this work as activists who worked in the environmental and global justice movements for more than a decade before coming to academic research. As scholars, we have been surprised at the lack of literature that acknowledges the whiteness of the mainstream environmental movement head-on, since this is a widely understood critique in the movement. As settler activists,³ our experience in movements drives our questions, as we seek to understand how activists, and environmentalists in particular, can learn to do solidarity in the context of racialized, colonial social relations. We take up this work not to be unsympathetically critical but to contribute to greater awareness of the ways in which solidarity frameworks can reinscribe racialized and colonial dynamics even as they seek to overcome them.

Environmentalism as a White, Settler Movement

In this section, we give a brief overview of the history of the mainstream environmental movement in Canada and the United States. Rather than providing an in-depth history of the movement(s),⁴ we focus on aspects that build environmentalism as colonial. We also provide greater detail on the mainstream environmental movements than on Indigenous or environmental justice movements, since we are problematizing racialization and settler colonialism in the mainstream movement.

Some historians locate the beginnings of Western environmentalism within the colonial project, explicitly tying it to dispossession and imperialism. Richard Grove (1996) links early versions of environmentalism explicitly to colonial expansion, starting from techno-administrative projects within the colonial apparatus of the East India Company, along with its Dutch, German, and French analogues. Scholars have also tied environmentalism to the theological-pastoralist reaction to the enlightenment (Worster 1994); revolutions in the organization of agricultural and extractive capital (Henderson 1998); vigorous and sometimes violent disputes over evolving and precarious land tenure relations (Mitman 1992); the invention of “recreation” and labor discipline in the nineteenth century; and the financialized booms, busts, and crises of westward rail expansion and settlement, abandonment, and resettlement of the hinterland of the Americas (Kohler 2013). These historians situate what we would understand as environmentalism within racialized colonial logics that use environmental discourses as a ruse for the expansion of capital, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, and the exploitation of slaves and workers. This legacy is important to acknowledge, as it is often unwittingly woven through the ideologies of the environmental movement today.

While the implied virtuousness of conservation work in the present can make it seem unrelated to the violence of settler colonialism (Isaki 2013), these roots of modern mainstream environmentalism continue to impact the movement. From the beginning, conservation was tied to racist, sexist, and classist notions of wilderness protection in order to serve urban, bourgeois, white men's desire to construct themselves as rugged frontiersmen (Aguiar and Marten 2011; Collier 2015; Thorpe 2011). Claims of ownership over "wild" spaces were used to justify land theft based on the concept of terra nullius—that land was empty and available for the taking. The ideological underpinnings of terra nullius, which cannot be separated from the larger project of Indigenous dispossession and erasure (Dowie 2011), are foundational for conservation movements today that "protect" land through separation from people living with/on it. Tens of millions of people have been displaced by conservation efforts, and conservation organizations have failed to effectively respond to widespread criticism of their efforts on human rights grounds (Agrawal and Redford 2009). Even the official doctrine endures: it was only in 2014 that terra nullius was declared invalid in Canada (Fine 2014), and the 1964 US definition of wilderness from the Wilderness Act as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" persists to this day (Dowie 2006).

In recent decades, environmentalism has shifted and grown to include ecological approaches combating pesticide use; fighting toxic waste contamination; launching Earth Day; protecting endangered species, especially whales, and forests; fighting the seal hunt; and promoting recycling and ethical consumerism. Most recently, mainstream movement has taken up the discourse of climate justice (Curnow and Gross 2016; Goodman 2009) to respond to critiques that the climate movement has ignored the disproportionate impact of climate change on communities of color, especially postcolonial coastal states, that have been severely impacted for years (Adger et al. 2006; Our Power Campaign n.d.). In this context, many climate activists have looked to bridge environmental justice ideas with climate activism. However, in the context of mainstream environmentalism, this shift often remains largely semantic, with many of the policy solutions that are advocated for staying at the level of technocratic management of fossil fuel emissions.

Environmentalism and Indigenous Peoples

Attention to relationship between peoples and lands is one of the coordinating worldviews common to many Indigenous peoples (Little Bear 2000). These worldviews are nation and place specific, and Indigenous scholars continue to document theories, teachings, and land/water-based practices (Atleo 2010; Basso 1996; Borrows 1997; Fermentez 2013; Hill 2017; LaDuke 1999; McGregor 2004; Simpson 2014; Todd 2014; Whetung 2016) in ways that center sovereignty and relationships to land and water but that are not typically considered within the environmentalist canon. Tsimshian and Nuu-chah-nulth scholar Clifford Atleo argues that environmentalist ideas of preservation and conservation are incongruous with an Indigenous worldview (2010), as the logic of needing to protect the land from humans/oneself is nonsensical within Indigenous teachings and practice. Rather than highlight the differences in worldview, however, we want to stress that these are not ideas about the land existing in parallel. Nishnaabe scholar Madeline Whetung argues that "colonial land relations have settled over top of Indigenous land-based relations, not beside them" (2016: 11). These are layered ideas, with colonial ideas about land, place, and environment emerging on top with the effect of disappearing Indigenous intelligences. Environmentalism contributes to Indigenous erasure and dispossession by perpetuating colonial relationships to land.

The mainstream environmental movement has also often used Indigenous people as props rather than engaging as partners. As early as the 1970s, mainstream environmentalist organizations aired ads featuring “the crying Indian” to promote antipollution campaigns (Krech 1999), deploying racialized images of Indigenous people as noble yet powerless victims of environmental degradation. This image of the “ecological Indian,” which simultaneously creates an equivalency of Indigenous peoples with nature and asserts Indigenous nonuse of it (Harkin and Lewis 2007), has been strategically taken up by environmentalists in providing an argument against contemporary Western industrial society and a romanticized view of the past (Nadasdy 2005; Willow 2009). It is within this same trope, however, that colonialism is made invisible and settlers can become the rightful stewards of the land. The “ecological Indian” can only exist in the absence of modern Indigenous people, since it harkens back to a time before the present, implying that Indigenous people and nature are both currently disappearing/disappeared (Ray 2013). Mainstream campaigns have also clashed directly with Indigenous people’s livelihoods, most notably in Canada in the case of the campaign against the seal hunt (Arnaquq-Baril 2016; Kitossa 2000).

Understandably, Indigenous peoples have not taken up the frame environmentalism offered. Instead, Indigenous environmental work in Turtle Island has often taken place within sovereignty movements, where returning the land or managing extraction fits within a larger decolonial frame (LaDuke 1999; McGregor 2004; Varese 1996; Whetung 2016). Recent examples of this work include the mobilization around Standing Rock, an ongoing blockade at Unist’ot’en against oil exploration, and opposition to fracking at Elsipogtog First Nation. Indigenous communities are claiming their rights to refuse and rejecting bids for recognition by the settler colonial state. Instead, they are drawing on arguments rooted in sovereignty.

Environmentalism and the Environmental Justice Movement

In contrast, Black and Latinx organizers started naming their work environmental justice (Bullard and Wright 1987; Taylor 1997). The environmental justice movement defined itself by its attention to relations of racialization and class and explicitly disidentified with the environmental movement. Much work of the environmental justice movement has focused on the health of communities in relation to environmental hazards. The movement has grown astronomically in recent decades, and there is extensive academic work documenting environmental racism and resistance (Bullard 1993, 2000; Cole and Foster 2001; Pulido 2000; Taylor 2000, 2014).

In contrast, the mainstream environmental movement has prioritized campaigns that ignore the disproportionate racialized and classed impacts of environmental damage, particularly in the siting of toxic waste (Bullard 2000). Campaigns have prioritized solutions that reproduce colonial relations of exploitation and dispossession, like buying up tracts of rainforest (Cox and Elmqvist 1993; Lizarralde 2003) and UN REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries) strategies (Cabello and Gilbertson 2012), which locate the solutions to environmental damage caused by those in the Global North in the Global South. These approaches to carbon credits allow wealthy Northerners to buy the “right” to pollute more, while Southerners have land use dictated and constrained in specific ways in order to “make up for” pollution generated in the Global North. For decades, mainstream environmentalist organizations have faced public criticisms for these approaches, yet they have largely continued to frame the goals of the environmental movement in narrowly constructed, technocratic, and dehistoricized ways.

This brief overview of the colonial and racist roots of environmentalism in Canada and the United States may be atypical conversations within mainstream environmentalism. However, it

is a history that environmentalists need to acknowledge and engage with in their present-day work.

Environmentalism and Solidarity

Solidarity is not a foundational element of the environmental movement. Despite this, over the last decade we have seen a rise in discourses of solidarity as movement participants strive to meet the critiques stemming from racialized and colonized communities about the limits of environmentalism. One way this has been mobilized is through coalitions. Environmentalists have also turned to the possibilities of work in solidarity in an effort to enact the principles of climate justice, centering coalitional work that takes on broader social relations than the environmental movement has tended to engage in the past. Environmental coalitions have varied widely based on their context but have often included coalitions on anti-logging campaigns (Takeda and Røpke 2010; Willow 2012), anti-pipeline work (Bradshaw 2015), and labor rights (Frundt 2010; Mayer et al. 2010; Obach 2004; Rose 2003).

Coalitions between environmental groups and other social movement or labor organizations are often complex because of differing reasons for organizational involvement in a particular issue. However, these coalitions are possible and have been particularly successful on a more local scale where members experience the same social and environmental impacts (Mix 2011) or between groups that have a common local target and put effort into generating mutually supporting narratives (Black et al. 2016). Other successful collaborations have taken place between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities that are geographically proximate and therefore have a common interest in a particular local effort (Sherman 2010) or between Indigenous communities and a group created for the explicit purpose of working in solidarity (Da Silva 2010; Land 2015). That said, even in the context of coalition efforts, environmental organizations may take up colonial or paternalistic behaviors (Pickerill 2009).

While there are examples of productive and generative solidarity work from within the environmental movement, research also documents how fraught these relationships can be. For example, activism around Clayoquot Sound in the early 1990s stemmed from Nuu-chah-nulth sovereignty work to assert sustainable forest management, with environmentalists joining that campaign to protect “pristine wilderness” (Braun 2002) from deforestation. This is one of the most cited examples of environmentalist-Indigenous solidarity, yet Nuu-chah-nulth community members and researchers have argued that the campaign was neocolonial (Atleo 2010; Braun 2002). The collaborations were contingent and short lived; not long after the campaign, the Nuu-chah-nulth asked Greenpeace to leave because of conflicting goals, tactics, and epistemologies (Atleo 2010; Braun 2002). Across these stories, we can see the challenges that coalition work poses as different political commitments, cultural resources, and access to power come into tension. These instances show us how philosophies and practices of solidarity can be contested and contradictory, as well as fluid and flailing.

On Solidarity

Given the racialized and colonial history of the mainstream environmental movement, it is particularly interesting that academic discussions of solidarity in the environmental movement rarely engage the politics of racialization and colonialism. Nowhere in the literature do we find a substantial exploration of how race and colonialism shape the context of environmental solidarity, either making solidarity all the more necessary in response, or reflecting on the

ways in which solidarity itself may remap racial and colonial logics (Gaztambide-Fernández 2012). Because this is largely overlooked in the writing on environmental coalitions, we look to other social movements that were founded explicitly to do solidarity work. We take this up with the goal of offering participants in the mainstream environmental movement an expanded language with which to think about how we disrupt the whiteness and settler coloniality of environmentalism.

The idea of solidarity is taken up in vastly different ways across literatures, from philosophy and political theory (Bayertz 1999; Hooker 2009; Scholz 2008), to feminist theory (Dean 1996; Mohanty 2003), to curriculum studies (Swalwell 2013; Gaztambide-Fernández 2012; Lissovoy and Brown 2013), and beyond. The most common thread connecting these ideas is the shared belief that “solidarity” is used inconsistently and is in need of more systematic theorization (Bayertz 1999; Gaztambide-Fernández 2012; Power and Charlip 2009; Sundberg 2007; Wilde 2007). We can see that diversity across articles on solidarity rooted in movement contexts, many of which are written by scholar activists embedded in solidarity campaigns. These articles explore movements including Latin America solidarity (Finley-Brook and Hoyt 2009; Olesen 2004; Power 2009; Sundberg 2007), accompaniment (Coy 1997; Koopman 2012; Mahrouse 2014; Weber 2006), anti-sweatshop (Armbuster-Sandoval 2005; Cravey 2004; L. Featherstone 2002; Traub-Werner and Cravey 2002), fair trade (Hussey and Curnow 2016; Polynczuk-Alenius and Pantti 2016; Wilson and Curnow 2013), Palestine (Bakan and Abu-Laban 2009; Gale 2014; Pollock 2008; Stamatopoulou-Robbins 2008; Tabar 2017), HIV/AIDS (Klug 2005), and other movements. In this article, we focus on solidarities that bridge place and power—there is extensive writing about solidarity in the labor movement, recent histories of South-South solidarities, especially those sustaining anticolonial revolutions (Tabar 2017), as well as what Nishnaabe scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) labels “co-resistors,” including Black-Brown solidarity (Tuck et al. 2014). While these solidarity praxes may prove quite instructive to environmentalists, they operate from distinctive sets of politics. These examples foreground shared experiences of exploitation across impacted groups, whereas the ideas of solidarity we take up here are predicated on disparate social locations, as we will interrogate in subsequent sections.

Works taking up solidarity rooted in movement usage rarely make their definition explicit. In most of these discussions, solidarity is understood to be activism in one place—geographical, socioeconomic, political—that works to defend the rights of people in a different place (Passy 2001; Olesen 2005; Sundberg 2007). Various authors outline the core philosophies of solidarity work, suggesting that solidarity is defined by its attention to work on behalf of others (Finley Brook and Hoyt 2009; Gould 2007; Power and Charlip 2009; Sundberg 2007), though they also stress that solidarity should be differentiated from charitable work on behalf of others (Kraemer 2007). Sara Koopman (2012) recognizes that the difference is foundational to solidarity activists, though arguably difficult for the untrained eye to recognize. These articles suggest that while charity makes no effort to disrupt oppressive systems or imbalances of power but rather helps people within existing systems, solidarity is constructed as a process of amplification (Hechter 1988, Koopman 2012) or standing alongside (Brown and Yaffe 2014, Shohat 2001). These campaigns are understood as being based in shared political vision (Finley-Brook and Hoyt 2009; Gale 2014; Gill 2009; Hussey and Curnow 2016; Mahrouse 2014; Power and Charlip 2009; Rippe 1998; Tabar 2017), though this is not without complication. Solidarity thereby avoids reinforcing power imbalances through mechanisms of empowerment or help, but instead recognizes that the work undertaken is a shared goal of all participants in the solidarity effort (Pickerill 2009). With this understanding, North-South solidarity work is not solely for the benefit of Southern activists: it is in service of a more just and livable planet for all, or shared liberation (Routledge 2003).

Across the strategies for solidarity, the distinguishing features are a recognition of inequitable power relations and an attempt to prefigure different kinds of relationships. This means that solidarity strategies explicitly attempt to use disparate access to power and privilege as part of their strategic interventions (Koopman 2012; Mahrouse 2014). Others have discussed obligation (Gaztambide-Fernández 2012) as a motivating feature of solidarity work, suggesting that people have a requirement to participate based on the ways that they benefit from and/or are implicated in the systems they seek to challenge (Wilson and Curnow 2013). Also within this framework is the idea of the importance of people who benefit from structural privilege in current systems working within their own communities to spread understanding of privilege and broaden the community of people working to counteract systems of oppression (Finley-Brook and Hoyt 2009; Gill 2009; Hussey and Curnow 2016; Koopman 2012; Kraemer 2007), or to strategically focus on advocacy work within their own countries in support of campaigns elsewhere in the world (Finley-Brook and Hoyt 2009; Klug 1995).

Many articles that trace how solidarity collaborations break down highlight the unequal power relations that define solidarity relationships, as people strive to work across difference. Juanita Sundberg (2007) critiques the “paternalistic relations,” arguing that these continually mark those receiving solidarity as subordinate and erasing the work and agency of impacted communities. Other authors also highlight the tensions that can arise when different allied groups’ goals come into conflict or are not closely aligned (Black et al. 2016; Finley-Brook and Hoyt 2009; Gill 2009). They demonstrate how the power imbalances noted become highly salient when there is incongruity or lack of communication about goals, since the privileged group’s framework and tactics tends to trump the group they claim to be in solidarity with (Gill 2009). They also argue that these asymmetric relationships have the potential to inadvertently reduce productive participation of members of the more privileged group in the solidarity relationship who abdicate decision-making roles for political reasons (Petray 2010).

In the next section, we further explore the racialized and colonial implications of undertaking solidarity work, and problematize the assertion that solidarity dismantles oppressive systems. We argue that solidarity fails to offer redress for racialized and colonial logics within the environmental movement and instead may plunge us deeper into these logics.

Paradoxes of Racialized Solidarity

Though environmental activists may turn to discourses of solidarity as a way of addressing the racializing and colonial practices of the environmental movement, the philosophy of solidarity is still deeply embedded in the dominant relations of racialization and colonialism. Indeed, as Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) argues, solidarity strategies often reinscribe colonial logics and obscure complicity in colonization. Gada Mahrouse argues that whiteness is intrinsic to solidarity activism: solidarity is “a strategy built around the notion that people in positions of power are more likely to take notice of the brutality and injustice going on in various places if white and/or First World citizens become involved” (2014: 4). For the scholars who attend to the racialized logics of solidarity, critiques circulate around the idea of solidarity as a type of “jiu-jitsu” (Mahony and Eguren 1997) that simultaneously recognizes asymmetrical power relations and attempts to use power to transform these very relations (Coy 1997; Koopman 2012; Weber 2006). These scholars gesture toward several paradoxes embedded within this logic, tracing how solidarity frames rely on and reinscribe racial and colonial ideas.

While solidarity tactics tend to be framed as antiracist, they also recenter white/settler/privileged people. Problematically, those purporting to act in solidarity are not always aware

of this centering. The logics of solidarity require the presence of a privileged person in order for the work to proceed. At the same time, paradoxically, the privileged presence is framed as peripheral and in support (Koopman 2012; Mahrouse 2014). In this way, the whole repertoire of action hinges on privileged people's participation, making them the linchpin of such strategies. Solidarity is predicated on the fact that in a white supremacist society, white bodies and white voices matter more. While seeking to leverage this logic, activists leave it uncontested and, in fact, trade on the logic (Mahrouse 2014; Tabar 2017). Leey'qsun scholar Rachel Flowers argues that the logics of settler privilege are particularly visible in settler-Indigenous solidarity work. She argues that in deploying their privilege to support Indigenous peoples' resistance, settlers often fail to recognize their ability to choose when to support decolonial struggles. Through this mobilization of privilege, Flowers argues, "Indigenous sites of resistance also become sites where our domination is sustained rather than interrupted" (2015: 35).

The critiques of race, white privilege, and solidarity also point to how this makes doing whiteness—a position that many solidarity activists reject as a political stance—central to the performance of doing solidarity, because in order to reap the benefits of privileged people's positions, they must be legible as white, so they must play up aspects of whiteness that are valued under white supremacy (Koopman 2012; Mahrouse 2014; Weber 2006). This is particularly complicated for those involved in solidarity action who are mixed or people of color. In order for them to participate in these strategies, they often must explicitly try to perform whiteness (Mahrouse 2014) in order to access the benefits of privilege and thus mobilize the strategic interventions. This dynamic places people of color in situations where they are unable to engage the same tactics as their white colleagues because they cannot or will not pass as white. We also see instances in which settler activists of color must position themselves as similarly responsible for settler violence as white settlers, which can erase the colonial violence that is and has been enacted on non-Indigenous racialized people (Byrd 2011; Lawrence and Dua 2005; Morgensen 2015).

For solidarity strategies predicated on the idea of amplifying the voices of impacted communities, a whole other set of contradictions arises. While privileged activists claim that more people will listen to their voices based on their social locations—often correctly—they then speak for others, a practice that they argue against (Mahrouse 2014). And when they do receive disproportionate press coverage or attention, they then have to stress that the stories of the directly impacted are, in fact, most important. The very presence of privileged solidarity activists belies that point: if the stories of impacted communities are more important and are the ones that should be heeded, why are solidarity activists in front of the cameras? Other scholars have also worked to negotiate and articulate this contradiction, arguing that there is a difference between speaking for and speaking alongside (Shohat 2001), or that these strategies draw on problematic ideas of conquest, exploration, and objectivity (Tilley and Cokley 2008). Sara Ahmed (2007) criticizes the move, suggesting that only the privileged have access to others' narratives in this way and that the privilege to document others' lives reinforces rather than undermines the logic of white supremacy. Along similar lines, Mahrouse (2014) argues that the "speaking alongside" approach to solidarity is a racialized privilege that is obscured through the logics of neutrality and exceptionalism, both of which become reified as white or privileged people step in and speak for. In doing so, they suggest to other similarly situated people that the political struggle matters because of the privileged person's exposure to risk and that reports can now be trusted because the situation is being documented "objectively" by a privileged person. These ideas actively reinforce supremacist notions of who is credible and valuable. Solidarity strategies that use these approaches are implicated in reinforcing deeply problematic societal structures.

Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) have stressed the need to recognize incommensurability in solidarity or coalition-based collaboration. They suggest that while there

may be some desired common outcome that overlaps across movements, the foundational reasons for the movements' existences are fundamentally different. Without recognizing this, attempts to collaborate closely can replicate colonial practices by subsuming Indigenous sovereignty, or the rights of other impacted communities, under a more powerful or privileged movement. Sally Scholz (2008) makes a related, though separate, argument about the significance of epistemological privilege. This points to what Geonpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2004) labels epistemologies of whiteness, where we can trace how dominant Eurowestern ways of knowing are mobilized in solidarity relationships despite the intentions of privileged activists, and that these undermine opportunities for decolonial solidarity.

Dhillon argues “that without an *explicit and deep* anti-colonial analysis we run the risk of reinscribing the narrative of white settler benevolence . . . and a colonial subjectivity that keeps white settler power intact” (2015: 6). The scholarship in this area notes that solidarity activists are often aware of these contradictions and their complicity in reinscribing racial hierarchy, yet they continue taking up strategies that place them in these paradoxes (Mahrouse 2014; Weber 2006). Mahrouse (2014) demonstrates that the existence of privileged people wanting to work in solidarity, follow the leadership of impacted communities, and not be in a position of asymmetric power does not change the power relations but instead makes them more visible and more uncomfortable. For example, activists on the ground know that the rejection of a charity model as condescending can also contradict requests for philanthropic support. In these instances, solidarity activists are caught in a paradox of not wanting to mobilize their economic power over impacted communities while also intending to follow the direction of the community (Weber 2006). They know that they are participating in struggles that are not their own, and that this is a potentially problematic position, yet they participate, arguing that the invitation of communities soothes some of the contradictions inherent to their participation. These contradictions do not resolve themselves and persistently pose problems for antiracist and anticolonial allies to try to navigate.

In part, the choice to continue amid so many contradictions is a conscious political strategy, though it may also be embedded in what Razack (1998) calls the “race to innocence,” a process of differentiation wherein white people seek to avoid implication or complicity in racial hierarchies through strategies which will earn absolution. Activists are conscious of the paradoxes they find themselves embroiled within and are navigating political realities on the ground. Their moves to innocence are not cynical strategies but rather agentic and imperfect attempts to prefigure other social relations. However, Flowers argues that “settler decolonization is itself a self-interested process in the desire for recognition by the colonized” (2015: 37) and that this move by settlers to seek affirmation repurposes Indigenous activism in service to resolving settler shame. She argues that this renders Indigenous struggles “intelligible so as to consume them” (38), words that echo bell hooks’s (1992) warnings that by “eating the other,” power and privilege are reasserted. These contradictions are inherent to solidarity work, pointing to the difficulty of intervening in racial and colonial processes, even from positions of critique and relationship. The work to uncover these paradoxes is helpful for laying bare the terms of participation so that activists can be aware of the landscape and their precarious positions within it.

Immersed in these contradictions, we are aware of the impulse to disengage from solidarity work, yet this too is a paradoxical position. Turning away from the contradictions inherent in making use of resources and privileges of the environmental movement to work with Indigenous peoples because it causes too much anxiety for environmentalists also serves to maintain these privileges, and does nothing to escape them. Ahmed (2000) challenges the idea that withdrawal is a valid approach. She suggests that this too confirms the privilege of those who refuse to participate. Mahrouse (2014) critiques this stance as well, suggesting that unreflectively assuming

a position of silence does nothing to work toward antiracism and decolonization, and instead centers whiteness and white comfort.

Moving Forward in the Contradictions

The contradictions of solidarity create a conundrum for mainstream environmentalists who are hoping to do work that disrupts the long histories of colonialism and racialization that have, in many ways, defined the movement over its history. Solidarity has been offered as a strategy for navigating the racialized and colonial ugliness, a way to acknowledge and transform the asymmetrical power relations, and a way to center accountability to impacted communities. Yet if solidarity itself reinscribes racial and colonial relations, centering white settlers and soothing white settler anxiety, that does not, in and of itself, enable us to interrupt the problematic features of environmentalism or do environmentalism differently. Our project here is not to condemn solidarity initiatives as bad, evil, or irredeemable. Nor is it to take up solutioning, ranking the interventions highlighted in the literature and providing a list of rules for how to do solidarity. Indeed, lists such as these are widely circulated, indicating that rules alone are not enough to address the paradoxes. Our purpose here is to acknowledge that solidarity, like environmentalism, is an imperfect strategy, embedded within the dominant social relations of colonialism, racialization, and capitalism.

Solidarity scholars recognize that global conditions require action, and action that is informed by an understanding of the ways in which racialization and colonialism structure the lived realities of injustice. Through this lens, these scholars argue that, while failing to meet antiracist and decolonial ideals, solidarity interventions that rely on inequitable power relations and mobilizing individualized privilege may still result in changed conditions on the ground. Despite how race and colonialism are leveraged in solidarity work, each author, in their own way, argues that “activists need to recognize that certain global conditions demand that they utilise whatever available options exist, including those that are not necessarily transformative,” (Mahrouse 2014: 147). Drawing from the work of scholars of solidarity, we suggest that environmentalists who want to engage in solidarity strategies need to do so fully aware of the contradictions they are embedded within.

For us, this is not an analytic shrug or platitude; it is an ethic. It is an intentional effort to avoid moves to innocence—to acknowledge that environmentalists are immersed in contradictions and that we still have a responsibility to engage, and to engage accountably. This may feel unsatisfying, even unsettling, in that it offers no tidy solutions. This position requires us, as settlers, to constantly reckon with the contradictions of our work and our positionality on stolen land in a movement that is foundationally quite problematic.

To take up this ethic, we must consider what Whetung (2017) theorizes as “unreconciliation”⁵—a political act that recognizes colonial violence and dispossession and starts from the premise that there is limited possibility for repair. Drawing on Nishnaabeg teachings, Whetung’s argument for “remaining unreconciled” asks settlers to sit with the violence, the realities of what we have done and are doing, and to accept the magnitude and senselessness of what we have done. Remaining unreconciled holds potential in the context of environmentalism, pointing us toward an approach that does not gloss over the racialized, colonial roots or ongoing damage the movement is implicated in. It points us to work that does not seek absolution but sits and works within the realities of racialized settler colonialism while constantly attending to the ways in which our work is implicated in the very logics many of us attempt to work against. This requires settlers to “reveal ourselves as vulnerable ‘not knowers’ who are willing to examine our

dual positions as colonizer-perpetrators and colonizer-allies” (Regan 2010: 28). Whetung (2017, p. 18) argues that remaining unreconciled is a way “to hold space to imagine a different type of relationship from where we are.”

For mainstream environmentalists to engage the contradictions of solidarity is to open possibilities of remaining unreconciled. This requires that we grapple with the racism and colonialism tied up not only in environmentalist histories but also in the reconciliation processes of solidarity. It requires us to inscribe the wrongdoings of environmentalism into our everyday activism and in our ongoing relationships. It is unsettling and it is paradoxical, yet it is a foundation from which we might try to build a different type of relationship.

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■ NOTES

1. For a more thorough treatment of Standing Rock activism, see Dhillon and Estes (2016, forthcoming).
2. Reconciliation and solidarity are both imperfect strategies for engaging in settler colonial and racialized relations of power, which call on people from dominant groups to work alongside those in marginalized groups to redress violence and dispossession. Post Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC 2015), we can see how the politics of reconciliation are being consumed by the Canadian state while at the same time doing little/nothing to destabilize the status quo (Coulthard et al. 2014; Simpson 2011, 2017; Whetung 2016). We see the way settlers are taking up the work of reconciliation—beyond the empty “apologizer’s apology” (Mackey 2013) and state retrenchment—as fundamentally a discussion of solidarity.
3. Joe is a white woman of Cuban, Swiss, and British descent. Anjali is a mixed race woman of Indian and Irish descent.

4. While we recognize and appreciate the broader mobilization of environmentalism that arguably encompasses environmental justice and Indigenous environmentalism, as well as other movements and campaigns, it is outside the scope of this article to do a thorough treatment of these bodies of work. Our goal here is to demonstrate the ways in which the frames of mainstream environmentalism erase and foreclose other approaches. Our references to these bodies are thus (unfortunately) cursory, intended to point to important bodies of work, while focusing on our argument about the mainstream movement.
5. Maddy shared this framework recently while walking with Joe and her dog (and arguably over years of discussion), pointing to what Hunt and Holmes (2015) call relationships of everyday decolonization as sites for solidarity and radical theorization.

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