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### Disrupting Settler Stories: learning to live with respect, intimacy, and reciprocity on colonized land

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# *DISRUPTING SETTLER STORIES*

*Learning to live with respect, intimacy, and  
reciprocity on colonized land*

ANNA FAVOUR

# RESEARCH QUESTION

*These essays seek to explore how to form a meaningful connection to place and care for a place when the land is colonized; when the creation of the place is rooted in harm.*

*How might we live without furthering harm?*

# METHODOLOGY



*Drew on existing research and writings on settler colonialism, storytelling, U.S. history, and my own family history.*

*Drew on experiences from my semester with the Wild Rockies Field Institute.*

*Spent 4 months compiling research, outlining, drafting, rewriting, and illustrating.*

*Compiled a small book of essays and illustrations to address my initial research question.*



*Terra Nullis & Wilderness*

*Palimpsests of Storytelling*

*Sand Bay*

*COVID-19 as a Threshold*

## Terra Nullis & Wilderness







## *Palimpsests of Storytelling*

*I propose that we should look to the lessons of the land to inform a truthful retelling of our nationalistic narratives.*



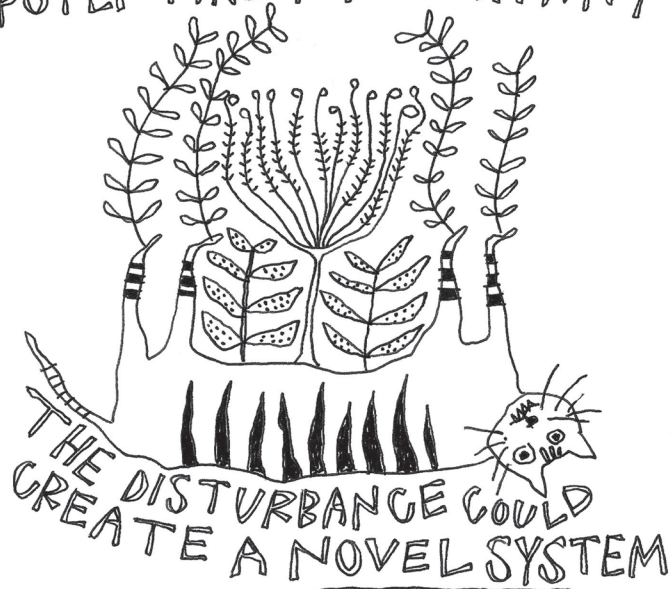
# *Sand Bay*

*Addressing my own personal settler history and complicity in the harmful system to create a “critical family history”, which is “applying ‘critical theoretical traditions to an analysis of how one’s family has been constructed historically within and through relations of power” (Sleeter as quoted by French et al, 3).*



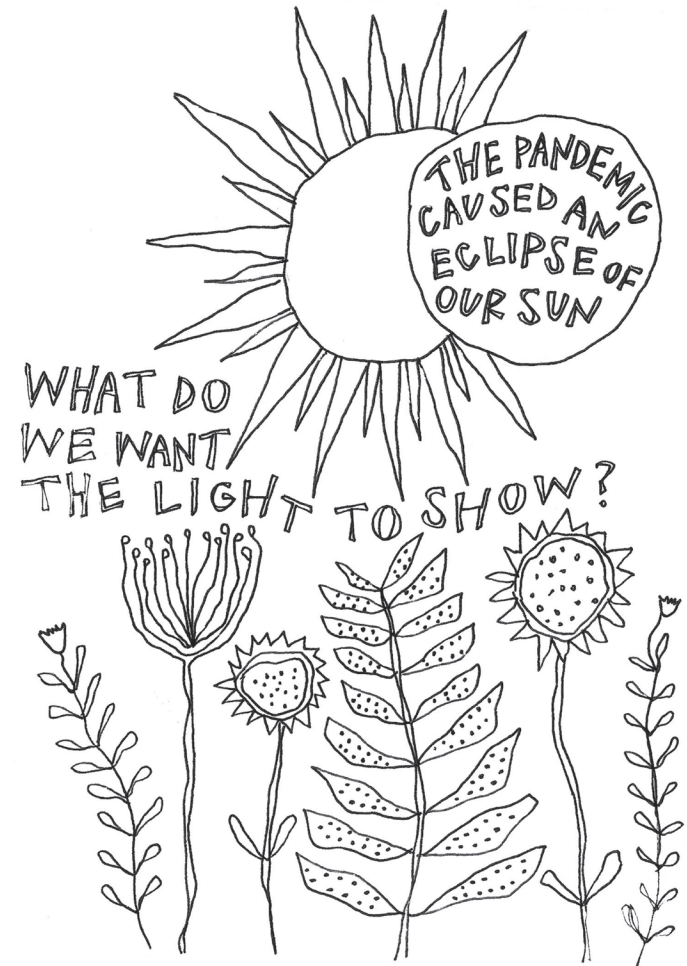
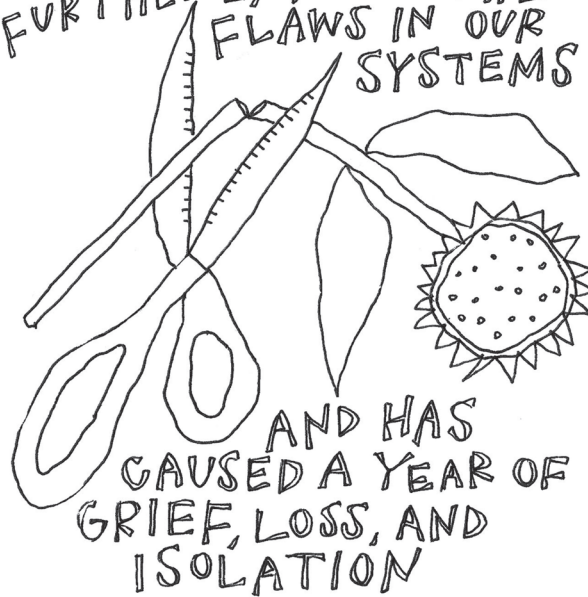
# COVID-19 as a Threshold

THOMAS HOMER-DIXON SAYS,  
THE DISTURBANCE "LIBERATES  
THE ECOSYSTEM'S ENORMOUS  
POTENTIAL FOR GREATIVITY"



A NOVEL SYSTEM OCCURS  
AFTER WE REACH A TRESHOLD  
OF CHANGE - "A CHANGE IN  
ECOSYSTEM PROPERTIES BECOME  
DIFFICULT OR IMPOSSIBLE TO  
REVERSE, DISTINGUISHING A  
NOVEL SYSTEM FROM ITS  
PREVIOUS STATE

THE PANDEMIC HAS  
FURTHER EXPOSED THE  
FLAWS IN OUR  
SYSTEMS















# SIGNIFICANCE

*The stories we tell are crucial to how we choose to live.*

*I hope that this collection will encourage others with their own settler histories to rethink the stories they tell themselves.*

*I hope this collection inspires others to re-examine their relationship with the land and their connection to place in order to live with respect, intimacy, and reciprocity.*

# PALIMPSEST ESSAY EXCERPT

Palimpsests allow us to recreate narratives in ways that are honest and truthful, to look towards the future with hope while still remembering the stories that brought us here. The “multifarious and diverse vision projected by the palimpsest, despite being the product of an attempt of destruction and erasure, demands a revision of the conceptual systems based on the notions of linearity, centre, and hierarchy. It impels us to replace these systems with new foundations that privilege the conceptions of ‘multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks’ (Chicago school of media theory). The notions of linearity and hierarchy inform the stories that Western culture embraces, and they are wildly different from Indigenous stories. Although Indigenous cultures are not a monolith, Sium and Ritskes explain that generally, “Stories in Indigenous epistemologies are disruptive, sustaining, knowledge producing, and theory in action. Stories are decolonization theory in its most natural form” (II). They are not driven by linearity, but are cyclical in nature.

In order to uphold systems of Western culture, we must destruct and erase. Destruct the environment, destruct our relationship to the natural world, erase the livelihoods of Indigenous peoples and marginalized groups. The ecological crises that we have arrived at are grounded in our culture; our culture is upheld by the stories that we tell ourselves. Our stories make us complicit in harm; they create narratives of inevitability. Our stories make us apathetic because they tell us that this is who we are, that this is who we have always been, and there is no way to change. An obsessive infestation of stories has taken over the consciousness of settlers in the United States. These obsessions are perpetuated because settler colonialism is not a singular moment in time, but an “enduring structure requiring constant maintenance in an effort to disappear Indigenous populations” (Wolfe as cited by Bonds and Inwood 716).

We have convinced ourselves that settler ideologies are the singular truth through the retelling of narratives that uphold our beliefs. We are intent on rewriting the American past. That is the obsession that the settler psyche lives by. The United States, as a settled country, was stolen through unimaginable violence; its resources were mined for personal wealth; and the truth of the matter is hidden underneath stories of rugged individualism, perseverance, and the mask of religion.

Our stories ground us in a fiction, a fiction of supremacy that goes unchallenged and is therefore perpetuated. If we can embrace the concept of palimpsests we can create malleability in our systems, replace the “linearity, centre, and hierarchy” of Western thought with those of “multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks” (Chicago school). This would mean exposing the narratives of white supremacy and domination and acknowledging their falsehoods.

During my time on the Colorado Plateau with the Wild Rockies Field Institute, we had the opportunity to stay in the Hopi Nation with a woman named Dorothy. Dorothy told the story of Hopi history, and then talked about her own family; those two stories were told in the same sitting, together in the same breath, the same voice - they are equally important in different ways. We are all carrying big stories and little stories, and they can all be told and intertwined. Dorothy’s stories tell of a commitment to the land, of the Hopi people staying in one place, even though it was harsh and seemed inhospitable, they stayed and learned and adapted, forging a relationship with the land that allowed for survival. The people nurtured the land, and the land gave back in return. Both became resilient as they supported each other – the earth feeding the people while the people nourished the land with water and life. This relationship was not reliant on concepts of progress or linearity.

Similarly, palimpsests do not depend on progress. Things don’t move forward, but additions are important. Yet Western culture is stuck in a cycle of hierarchy and progress. Our stories aren’t layering old with the new; they are replacing old with the new. Our stories allow us to live without recognizing the past. On January 20, 2021, Joe Biden was sworn in on the Capitol steps on which rioters had stood days earlier. Biden’s inaugural speech was an opportunity to introduce a new story into a damaged American psyche, dismayed by violence and pandemic fatigue. In his speech,

Biden noted the importance of stories, announcing, “We shall write an American story of hope, not fear. Of unity, not division. Of light, not darkness. An American story of decency and dignity. Of love and of healing. Of greatness and of goodness. May this be the story that guides us. The story that inspires us” (Biden). It was a moment of hope; yet the speech that preceded this wish made me weary of the possibility of change. Joe Biden became the first president to denounce white supremacy, yet did so in the same speech in which he upheld the nationalistic narratives that allow for this thought to occur in the first place. The United States is a settler colonialist country, and, as Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz explains, “Settler colonialism is a genocidal policy” (6). Biden did not acknowledge the harmful foundations of the settler history of the United States, which makes it difficult to believe that a value that defines America is “the truth”. Barker explains, “Even as settler colonisers deny their complicity, they exercise massive power and privilege to rewrite history according to their preferences and beliefs” (Barker 12). In honoring the truth, it is essential to acknowledge the harmful foundations of the country.

The red rock cliffs of Southern Utah loom large over the canyons. Erosion has carved out their shapes over millions of years, and the scars of the land are apparent. The natural landscape does not cover its tracks, the palimpsests of ecology are bare and exposed, the petrified wood nestled close to the roots of a sapling. Recent landscape erosions contrast with the millions of years of environmental change that the region has undergone. The evidence of meandering rivers on a dry desert landscape laden with fossils of plants overlaid by broad strokes of sandstone, speckled with tafoni, create a palimpsest on the desert canvas. The land stands exposed; at first it is singular – a canyon wall. When we learn to look at it the right way, when we put our foreheads to the sandstone and see remnants of an ancient ocean, we can begin to see the way that the land has layered its own stories and its history becomes apparent.

Might we heed the lessons of the canyons of the Colorado Plateau to guide our experiments in adding to the palimpsest of our historical narrative? It is a rearrangement, a “remapping”. When the rocks fell from the canyon wall, it became exposed, vulnerable. That is essential in our own retelling of our harmful history.

Stories of progress and linearity do not make room for love for the land, for reciprocity, for embrace of community, or intimacy. The current nature of our national stories is head down, plow forward, don’t look up, don’t look around. Learning from the palimpsests of the land allow us to live in this culture while trying to create change and break out of the system, they allow for us to hold contradictions. They sketch together, through links and networks, our communities. Palimpsests allow us to hope, because they show where we began, they show how we can grow towards a sustainable future, nurtured through critical honesty and respect.

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