# LAND GOD AND GUNS

## SETTLER COLONIALISM and MASCULINITY in The AMERICAN HEARTLAND

## LEVI GAHMAN

# Land, God, and Guns

## About the Author

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## Levi Gahman

ZED

All colonizers must die.
And why not masculinity?


For Anacaona and Frantz Fanon

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# Chapter 1

# There's No Place Like Home …

*In order for the settlers to make a place their home, they must destroy and disappear the Indigenous peoples that live there. Indigenous peoples are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories.*
Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Young

## Introduction

Land, God, and guns. Three aspects of the American nation, psyche, and cultural imagination that are both held sacred and relentlessly defended. For "Others," however, the terms are nothing but convenient ciphers used to mystify what actually serve as the three pillars upon which the United States of America (U.S.) was founded and rests: colonial-capitalism (land), patriarchal white supremacy (God), and imperial war (guns).[1] Noting, of course, the inseparable ties all have with dispossession, enslavement, racial hatred, attempted genocide, and empire—along with the subordination of women, difference, and all that is queer. Two other omnipresent components of what has come to be known as "America" in need of mention, each as confining as it is taken-for-granted, are the state and masculinity. Both, albeit in slightly differing yet eerily similar ways, constrain and repress as much as they impose and embolden.

Before getting too far into the substance of what is to come, I would like to offer an explanatory caveat about one of the terms I use throughout the book: "colonial-capitalism." In finding significant explicatory insight in the political analysis of Frantz Fanon (1963), I deliberately use and purposively stress "colonial-capitalism" to signify the symbiotic and inseparable relationships that exist amongst: (1) capitalist logics, economies, and subjectivities; *with* (2) colonial power, hierarchies, and worldviews. These relationships, i.e. those between the practices and processes of settler colonialism and capitalism, continue to be highly influential in how governance, the economy, social norms, and cultural mores have been fashioned and continue to operate not only across the U.S., but world writ large. I therefore feel it imperative to overtly signpost and consistently affix colonialism to capitalism. Primarily, because the form and function of colonial modernity and global capitalism, as humanity has come to know and exist under each, especially within the U.S., remain equally indissoluble and pervasive, not to mention patriarchal (Coulthard 2014, Dunbar-Ortiz 2014).

Specifically, I draw my rationale for using colonial-capitalism from Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), which lucidly explains the inextricable links that tie race, colonialism, and capitalism together. And while Fanon was from the Caribbean and living, revolting, and primarily documenting and diagnosing the historical moment and geopolitical situation faced by Algeria under French colonization, I believe his description and dissection of race, colonialism, and capitalism is, unfortunately, as applicable as ever—not only to the North African and postcolonial contexts he was writing about in the 1950s and 1960s, but also across geographies, to contemporary settler colonial states and realties. In particular, the United States. A few illustrative lines, of which there are myriad, highlighting these dynamics can be seen throughout the book, specifically where Fanon writes:

> After a phase of capital accumulation, capitalism has now modified its notion of profitability. The colonies have become a market. The colonial population is consumer. (1963, 26)

> Capitalism therefore objectively colludes with the forces of violence that erupt in colonial territories. (1963, 27)

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME …

Colonialism and imperialism have not settled their debt to us
once they have withdrawn their flag and their police force from
our territories. For centuries, the capitalists have behaved like
war criminals. (1963, 57)

In short, from my political standpoint, the settler state that is the U.S. has always and continues to treat the lands it subjugates as "colonial territory" and a "market," as well as views and endeavors to shape the population into productive capitalist consumers and docile colonial subjects. These dynamics, of course, were and remain mediated by the logic of elimination, practice of occupation, and violence that are hallmarks of settler colonialism. One key difference between the geographies that Fanon was writing about in the 1950–60s and present-day U.S., then, is the fact that the flag, police force, and war criminal behavior, which are disproportionately imposed upon negatively racialized groups, still remain.

And so goes the American status quo. If given a second thought, as well as if not too heavily invested in the perpetuation of any of these things, all this might prompt one to ask: Just how did we get here? And what can be done?

In turn, a ruthless critique of said status quo, along with the consequences and aftermaths of (ongoing) colonialism, has never been more exigent. This necessity is surpassed in urgency only by the need for an unyielding confrontation with colonialism's contemporary agents, acolytes, sycophants, institutions, and narratives. The present sociopolitical moment the world is experiencing, in particular the U.S., demonstrates this. Such a critique and confrontation will mandate holding to the fire capitalism, nationalism, liberal ideology, and even our notions of masculinity, in addition to the inherent racism, sexism, class stratification, deracination, and dispossession (i.e. violence) that constitute the bedrock of the U.S. state and its imperialist aspirations.

Notably, all the "ism"s and "tion"s (i.e. concepts, processes, systems) mentioned above, in one form or another, are mutually constitutive, inextricably linked, and *emplaced*. That is, they occur and operate, uniquely yet with similar effects, across and within differing *places*. Within the U.S., they all, also, symbiotically reproduce and in countless ways feed off one another. This makes the

social, cultural, and economic relations and hierarchies established by colonialism as difficult to root out and fight as they are to undo and end.

Colonialism, which has never functioned in either isolated or altruistic form, was and remains an equally deliberate, hostile, and continuing process, practice, and system. The same can be said of its partners in crime (e.g. capitalist logics, imperial ambition, heteropatriarchal norms, orientalist xenophobia, racial superiority, liberal/self-centric thought). Indeed, colonialism is a force that is historical and global in character yet differentially experienced both geographically and psychosocially—across regional, local, personal, and even intimate levels. The fact of the matter is that colonialism, as an act and structure, rages on. As does its social relations, worldviews, and lived repercussions. This is where the ruthless critique and unyielding confrontation come in.

The aim of this book, thus, is to offer both via an investigation into and critical analysis of quintessential rural America's settler colonial and gendered status quo. Accordingly, by applying postcolonial, feminist, anti-racist, and poststructuralist theories to empirical evidence gathered from nearly a decade of ethnographic fieldwork with over 500 men from the American Heartland (i.e. parts of what is now called Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, and Colorado), I will illustrate how prevailing constructions of (as well as claims to) land, history, and manhood are, at their core, fabricated frontier myths underpinning a heteropatriarchal and racist (dis)ordering of life. A (dis)ordering of life that, while alienating and socially degenerative across the board, concurrently privileges and harms, in one way or another, its main proliferators—white settler men.

This text then, most accurately, can be thought of as a diagnosis of and political intervention into a situated social geography and place-based culture of masculinity. Along with its associated products, problems, pratfalls, and perplexities. There will be no rhapsodic waxings-on about pioneer ancestors' past; no nostalgic tales of settler homesteading; no fond reminiscing of "the good ole' days"; no contrived sentiments about spacious skies and amber waves of grain that are devoid of historical-political-economic

realities; or whatever. Because, indeed, receiving a diagnosis and sitting through an intervention is neither a fun nor easy thing to do.

Noticeably, my investigative analysis is at once theoretically driven, conceptually anchored, and empirically based. This means, in addition to chapters that include "on the ground" evidence and "real world" stories, I will lay down an explanatory foundation towards understanding some of the theories, definitions, and concepts that are used throughout the text. I feel defining terms, as well as explaining and illustrating concepts and processes, is both pertinent and important towards comprehending what takes place "on the ground" and "in the real world." It is a matter of praxis. In turn, readers can expect a combination of theoretical and empirical chapters, although these are never mutually exclusive or divorced from one another.

There is risk in doing this. As an author of a peer-refereed scholarly manuscript attempting to draft a book that carries appeal and is worthwhile for both academic colleagues and extra-academic audiences. Some academics with specialist knowledge may feel the theoretical chapters are too cursory, prosaic, or pedestrian, and some extra-academic readers may find them too detailed, drawn out, or most devastatingly, boring. This is a risk I am willing to take. Primarily, because I think it is helpful to be provided with examples of what can go into an intersectional analysis, or how things like race, heteronormativity, masculinity, borders, and performativity are thought of and described from varying critical, political, and radical vantage points. My aim is to offer an explicatory and useful book that can be read by undergrads, activists, postgraduate students, research participants, senior colleagues, and my mother and nieces alike. Perhaps even by guys like my interviewees and informants. We will see, on all these fronts.

Admittedly, I make no claims to objectivity, something that does not exist in the realm of social critique, let alone data analysis conducted by humans. Rather, I state from the outset that this book is, quite simply, an account from anti-racist, feminist, and decolonial standpoints of shit settlers do (and say), particularly white men (of which I am one), in the way of proving they are "men"—and curiously, that they somehow have an entitlement to stolen land.

Regrettably, I must also confess I have been complicit with and am guilty of select oppressive offenses the audience will read about in this investigation and testimony. The point is not to rack with guilt but repair the damage.

In expressing these sentiments, I quite steadfastly believe it is important to steer clear of reducing the participants (whom readers are soon to hear from in the chapters to come) into essentialized backward oppressors and boorishly racist one-dimensional caricatures. The interviewees who appear in this research are, undeniably, people: complex, emotional, thinking, feeling, hurting, laughing, loving—people. In many cases, when asked about politics, culture, inclusion, and justice, most of my informants articulated they were "just trying to do the right thing." As many of us are. They deserve to have their dignity recognized, as we all do. Having said that, this qualification, by no means either excuses or condones any of the repressive behaviors they engage in, cultural norms they reproduce, or discourses they broadcast. The same goes for any of us, present company included. I (myself a white settler from Kansas, the ancestral territories of the Osage Nation) was born, grew up, and lived in the region for 25 years. I still have family and friends there. Several of whom took part in my research, earnestly and kindly offering to help. This book is therefore both deeply personal and political, not to mention complex.

The key thing I would ask readers to do, then, which has been the goal of my analysis from the outset, is to fixate neither on individual behaviors nor isolated statements, but on the types of social relations, cultural norms, historical conventions, and state institutions (i.e. systems) that are producing, as well as being reproduced by, said behaviors and statements. The interviewee quotes in each of the empirical sections are selective and indicative, not entirely representative of who each participant is as a complete, complex person. That is, the statements made by informants, from my orientation, are the products and expressions of a larger, more comprehensive, and more historical social environment, cultural milieu, and political-economic reality. A colonial-capitalist and heteropatriarchal reality. That said, it is undeniable that the behaviors and statements of individuals are important, absolutely matter (have effects), and we

are all culpable for the things we say and impacts they carry. The point is, though, to shift the focus away from the perceived personality profiles and discrete character traits of the participants towards the social structures and cultural systems that both comprise and operate within the given social geography I am diagnosing—the American Heartland—which is where we will now go.

## Positionality and Context

I grew up in a single-wide trailer house on a dirt road near a small family-owned sawmill in rural Southeast Kansas. The thunderstorms, tornadoes, and lightning strikes that unfurled across, struck down from, and lit up the vast open sky above the endless rolling plains were as magnificent as they were terrifying. I still relish those orchestras of electricity and thunderous lullabies when home. Home, Kansas, was a lovely place for sunsets and distinct seasons: cold, snowy, and cozy winters; hot and humid summers with waves of golden wheat; a brisk and pleasant fall with autumn colors ("Indian summer" as we knew it); and stormy green springs marked by the blossom and bloom of wildflowers. I had, and still have, an older brother and a younger sister there. We enjoyed a happy childhood and were cared for. We also learned to work, along with the requisite "value of a dollar," at an early age. I did not realize it at the time, but the "value of a dollar" was constantly on my parent's minds, as well as mediating much of what life looked and felt like.

Learning to work, thus, was paramount and took precedence. Household tidying, yardwork, and an assortment of country chores were on the itinerary, as was feeding animals, splitting firewood, and helping our dad with construction projects and moving furniture at my mother's behest, which my dad swore about endlessly and still happens when I return home for the holidays. It was tiring and I complained and tried to get out of a lot of it, but from time to time, the work was rewarding. Getting "all your chores done" helped out and was part of being a family. Our work, and family work ethic, created strong bonds and gave us something to share pride in but this was explicitly never something we were to brag or boast about, nor even really mention.

We, somewhat proudly, came from "peasant stock." We identified as "Catholic" mostly, mixed in with Irish, German, and even Jewish ancestry. Conceit and vanity were not to be a part of our family story, name, or metaphorical crest, but "humility" and "hard-working" were. The caveat being that we had to engender and earn those last two designations, neither advertise nor lay claim to them ourselves. To show, not tell.

Incidentally, of all the chores I was to complete, I actually liked cleaning and organizing the house, as well as mopping the kitchen floor, best. That's right, mopping the floor. I thought it was a blast. My forays and adventures in mopping were so intrepid that my mother felt the need to document and catalog them by drawing stick-figure comics illustrating them as heroic tales, with the end graphic story being plastered up on the refrigerator for the entire household to see. The magnets, of course, were an assortment of Sacred Heart of Jesus and Blessed Virgin Mary images. I felt important and useful. Something I did, mattered. It was not alienating in the least. The socially reproductive labor I was engaging in was being recognized, valued, validated, and even rewarded. Funny, too, how my practice and preference for domestic work of this nature would shift as I got older and started being exposed to and hanging around more men and masculinity. That is, once I began learning that an eagerness for diving headfirst into and enjoying household chores ("women's work") would "make me a good wife for somebody someday."

We were lower working class, not "dirt poor," and did our best to avoid "ruining our family name" or being marked as "white/trailer trash" or "scrounges." Two of the local community's most dreaded scarlet letter racializations. We wore hand-me-downs, shopped at rummage and garage sales, and grew up on the poor (west) side of the railroad tracks. My parents made enough for the occasional purchase of a pack of baseball/football cards, toy "action figures" (He-Man, Teenage Mutant Nina Turtles, GI Joe; i.e. never a "doll"), or trip to a fast food joint/movie with a couple of friends for a birthday outing or good report card. We would hop in the car and head to the neighboring "city," Parsons, Kansas. Parsons had a McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Wal-Mart, "juco" (junior college), and several stoplights, which made it a "city" by my standards.

My dad, the typical strong, stoic, silent type, was and remains a loyal family man and indefatigable worker. He toiled in a sawmill for over 30 years until it went under just after the 2008 recession. He then took up work driving semis for corporate oil, gas, and agricultural companies. I feel he has been severely taken advantage of, beaten down, and beleaguered by capitalism. A brief glimpse at the state of the political economy and options for working-class men across the region, along with their rising mortality rates and declining economic prospects, tells the same story.

Mom, whom dad always deferred to, was and is a stalwart yet nurturing worker and dedicated mother with contrarian tendencies à la Dorothy Day and Emma Goldman. She performed unpaid socially reproductive labor at home up until the time she became a librarian at our local public library. It resided on Main Street, was 2400 total square feet (half the size of a McDonald's), and sat directly across from the only quaint and not so well-lit bar/restaurant/"watering hole"/local haunt in town, "The Dugout." My parents were and remain thoughtful, selfless, and great. And while there were select struggles and some difficult times along the way, overall, we suffered no major familial fallouts, catastrophes, or traumas and were protected, provided for, attended to, and loved.

Eventually, we moved out of the trailer house on the outskirts/west side of town into a big drafty house, "the barn" (as we would call it). It was invested with brown recluse spiders and expensive to heat so dad got a second-hand wood stove. Meaning, my brother and I, along with dad, had to chop and split wood in the winter. During those winters, we heated only half the house. The toilet water would freeze in the cold part of the house and by the time we got relaxed from chopping, loading, and hauling the wood and stoking the fire, it seemed like it was time to start one part of the process all over again. All part of "doing your part," "pulling your weight," and "being a man."

Naturally, the sawmill is where I would stack lumber, shovel sawdust, and run chainsaws during summers and on weekends once I started high school and through college. Several of my friends worked with their dads during the summer too. Of all the luck, I was born into a sawmill family, which for me, was like drawing the short

straw. The farmers at least got to sit on tractors or in combines and listen to the radio occasionally. The only thing I could hear was the screeching head saw, the grinding debarker, or the whirring chipper, depending upon what task I was doing at any given moment. My first full day at the sawmill was during the summer; an excruciatingly hot summer. I was 13. I got dehydrated, ended up cramping-up all over my body, and started vomiting. Right there in the middle of the workday, while on the "green-chain" (factory line), in front of everyone. My dad helped me to the shaded breakroom, gave me some water, put on a fan, turned off the light, and told me to cool off and not to kill myself next time. He was tender and caring about it, but duty/production called, and he had to be off. I was writhing in stomach pain and fever, as well as thinking I should probably start eating and drinking something else during the day besides Nacho Cheese Doritos, Mountain Dew, and fried, greasy food slathered in ranch dressing.

More so, I was mortified. I couldn't handle working at the mill and there was proof of it, right there out in the open, in front of a whole crew of older working-class guys. Most were like characters out of a John Steinbeck novel. Plenty of jail time, prison stints, court dates, rap sheets, DUIs, charges, probation, homemade tattoos, chain-smoking, scars, and "chaw" (chewing tobacco) to go 'round. That is not a critique of any of their respective characters, just a reality of sawmill work and who performed it where I grew up. My dad was head sawyer. Kept the place in line, kept production going. Especially troubling to me, as I was reflecting upon all this while trying to sip water while sprawled on the particle board floor in the pitch-black stuffy breakroom with my stomach muscles clenching uncontrollably, was that my older brother (by three years) handled working at the mill ("putting in his time"), seemingly, with ease. "What kind of a man would this make me?" "I bet I embarrassed dad." "What would Papa [my beloved late grandfather] say about this?" "I hope my friends don't find out." I had a lot to think about, as well as "manning up" to do. I went on to work at the mill, seasonally, for the next ten or so years.

A few years after my debacle of a first day at the mill, my brother, at the age of 20 and as a father of a new-born baby daughter with

a new wife and a new (for him anyway) trailer house of his own, would have his leg severed in a horrendous construction incident. It involved a Bobcat bulldozer, an earth auger, massive blood loss, and a life-flight helicopter. Blunt force trauma. It was not a neat and clean severing, more of having one's leg smashed off. I cannot imagine the shock and terror. It was a Friday. I was 17 years old and playing in a high school football game at the time, for the St. Paul "Indians," the day it happened. At the time, I considered my brother and I to both basically be adults and "men." Now, nearly 20 years on, I realize we were just kids, which makes me also think of guys I know who were sent to war around the same age, by the state, and came back "in a bad way."

Doctors, after several surgeries and months in a hospital, were able to save my brother's leg. It involved multiple permanent steel pins and the removal of his latissimus dorsi out of his back and subsequent grafting onto his leg, where his calf would be. Twenty years old, a severed leg, bleeding out, in shock, and trapped inside a Bobcat bulldozer pinned under an earth auger somewhere along a rural highway just west of Wichita, Kansas. Panicked and in shock, trapped in Bobcat as the blood began to pool with two old high school buddies and co-workers (one stunned silent and standing still, the other, frozen yet crying in horror) waiting on a life-flight helicopter to arrive. Panicked and in shock, with a new wife, baby girl, trailer house, and the prospect of maybe catching a weekend NASCAR race or NFL game on TV also waiting back home.

My brother had told his boss and company owner, right before the incident happened, that the maneuver requested of him would not work. But the bottom-line, managerial authority, means of production's safety, and will (as a working-class man on a construction crew) to be a "good worker" and save face in front of the other working-class guys all argued otherwise and took precedent. One of the innumerable stories of how capitalism mutilates. I would argue "manhood" remains culpable too.

Growing up, my brother and I watched Star Wars and NFL games together (he liked the Washington "Redskins," my team was the Miami Dolphins). We bolted around the town and country playing "guns," football, and carrying action figures, as well

as fishing, swimming, and "golf ball hunting" together. Golf ball hunting, which for us was a highly technical skill to be honed, entailed reading and canvassing hedgerows, ponds, and cattails for errant golf balls lost off the tee at the Osage Hills Country Club golf course, which is next to the rural public swimming pool where we went swimming with friends. More about the Osage is to come, in Chapter 4. As we got older, he was considered "strong as an ox," intelligent, and an affable guy who could also drink, arm-wrestle, and fight well. I attached nearly all of my self-worth to being good at football and nearly entered the (Catholic) priesthood. Most of these respective devotions, for each of us, have since faded. Having three daughters apparently consumes a lot of both drinking and arm-wrestling time. We still watch Star Wars and football, as well as shoot guns together when I head back home, to Kansas, for Christmas. "Normal" things that brothers and "guys" do.

I loved sports growing up, especially Bo Jackson and NFL football. Played them all throughout high school and while being what I thought was a devout Catholic and dedicated altar boy. Playing organized sports in the rural Heartland can be a peculiar thing. Locker-room talk often focused on alpha-male posturing, one-upping each other, whether a girl was "fuckable," drinking plans for the weekend, and who either won or lost whatever most recent fight they had been in. A considerable amount of unspoken worry, too, often hovered in the air before football and basketball games about who was going to have to guard or match-up with the "black kid" (or "n-word") if the other team happened to have "one," which was quite rare. Debates about professional wrestling and playing Nintendo 64 games also took place. It was all so ordinary.

I graduated from high school in the year 2000 in a class of 17 kids, being football homecoming king and class valedictorian was important to me at the time, something "to hang my hat on" as we would say, but not so much now. Upon reflection, there were a lot of American flags, praying, and heteronormativity; more of which is also to come. Most of the parents and families around the place whom I knew were genial and good-natured. Most. There were also, of course, your typical small-town squabbles/politics,

behind-closed-doors judgments of others, hushed gossipings about neighbors, and standard rhythms of a small rural community's rumor-mill. So it goes. It was Friday Night Lights, Smallville, Little House on the Prairie, Dorothy's non-technicolor scenes from *The Wizard of Oz*, and the occasional episode of *Cops* or *Jerry Springer* all rolled into one. "Home Sweet Home."

St. Paul, Kansas, where I am from and the subject and setting of Chapter 4, was and remains surrounded by large swaths of farm-land (mostly wheat, corn, and soybeans) with long hedgerows/ windbreaks composed of hardwood trees, thorn bushes, and spiked blackberry shrubs. There are thousands of cattle and countless hogs roaming around and lazing about in the pastures and barb-wire-fenced, quarter-mile sections of parceled-off land. It was and remains a largely working-class farm community. Prides itself on having successful farmers and businessmen, though, so is a bit more middle class and even upper class in some parts of town, which is approximately one square mile by one square mile. More "plow-boys" than "cowboys," as a few of the guys around town used to say, although there were a few. St. Paul has around 600 people in it along with one gas station, one bar, one post office, an elementary-middle-high school (all housed in two separate buildings when I was growing up), two water towers, an on-again/off-again fried chicken joint, and a highly revered and quite conspicuous Catholic church, and no stoplights. St. Paul was/is 98% white (settler).

Any political consciousness I gleaned in my youth came mostly from my mother talking about a compassionate yet dissident Jesus flipping over tax collectors' tables, being kind to sex workers, and hang-ing out with lepers/outcasts. She also, on occasion, would inflexibly state: "That ain't right." regarding stories of what I now know as either structural violence or institutionalized oppression. John Steinbeck, George Orwell, and Ursula Le Guin also helped, as did the band Rage Against the Machine, ironically, whose albums I initially purchased to listen to before high school football games as a means towards put-ting my "game face on" and getting "amped up." Despite residing in the middle-of-nowhere, white-Republican, conservative-stronghold, "pro-life" rural Kansas, Rage Against the Machine introduced me to Frantz Fanon, Angela Davis, and the Zapatistas.

I was the first in our family to go to university, Pittsburg State University, "just down the way." It was 30 miles from home, in Pittsburg, Kansas (population 20,000). I teared-up during the first week because I kept getting lost on campus, was both panicked and disoriented by "city" traffic, and felt overwhelmed and out of place. All of which, at times, rather embarrassingly, still happen to this day as I cross borders, move from country to country, city to city, region to region, and try to comprehend the latest contingencies and fine print of the varying foreign work visas I am required to apply for, obey, and renew as I pinball around the global academic labor market. A lesson in the difficulties of being a migrant, first-generation scholar, and contracted worker, as well as the privileges of whiteness, Western/institutional credentials, and U.S. citizenship all at once. I majored in psychology and geography and later worked as a substance abuse counselor and trauma therapist. I was ground-up by this work, rather quickly, because of the underfunded, revolving-door state of the U.S. system of purported social welfare. Decided at that point to pursue more geography, of the political, social, and cultural persuasions, now radical, and after nearly 20 years of post-secondary education, as well as having to move and live in five different countries over the past ten years, here we are.

I mention all this not out of self-absorption and vanity (although this might be contested), but rather, because each and every one of the experiences detailed above, amongst countless others, taught me (and "us," i.e. the other young guys and boys I knew growing up, some of whom participated in this research) something about "being a man." Whether we consented to the lessons and premise or not. That is, during the course of our childhood, adolescence, and youth, we learned from our settler-patrons, surroundings, and the places we were respectively in—what it took to be a good Christian, to love football, how to fish, how to fight, and again, the "value of a dollar." Incidentally, we were also taught, quite plainly as I recall, that alcohol was used to celebrate life's good things, escape the bad ones, both commemorate and consume Jesus, measure one's manhood, and more tacitly, cope with heartbreak, insecurity, loneliness, despair, depression, and even boredom. But never to say as much. More on this in Chapter 6.

Our history books, authority figures, and older peers, by-and-large, all relayed the message to us that missionaries and "pioneers" were virtuous, altruistic, and often the "first" to do things; that sex with a woman gave you bragging rights; that being gay was a sin and cross to bear; that it was alright and sometimes even encouraged to use the "n-word" in a variety of fora, forms, and functions; that "America" was the best, nay, "greatest," country in the world; that there was a "right way" for Black people and "foreigners" to do things; that women should know their "natural" (subordinate) place; and that no one, particularly lazy people and "Indians," deserved a "hand-out." We also learned how to earn a "man-card" and perhaps just as importantly, how *not* to be a girl, a fag, a bitch, a pussy, queer, gay, a wigger (portmanteau of white and the n-word) … and the list goes on. Namely, rural life for us included being inculcated and imbued with a deep respect and deferential obedience towards our teachers, priests, coaches, foremen, military leaders, mayors, upperclassmen, bosses, and in short, white settler patriarchs.

There were and are, of course, exceptions to the oppressive things we learned. Care, concern, camaraderie, responsibility, reliability, and fidelity were also a part of the program. But the numerous caveats, qualifications, and asterisks associated with each, all ended up being a bit of a let-down, to put it lightly. The point is that racist, sexist, and xenophobic modes of thinking, both overt and latent, filtered down to us via social proxy, or maybe more accurately, though a type of cultural osmosis. And it is incredibly difficult to either see or stop cultural osmosis, especially if it involves repressive logics that one is taught, from childhood, makes their actions "right" and "just," as well as creates a community that is "safe" and "tight-knit" and a nation that was "great" and should be made so once "again."

In outlining all this, one might begin to think the entire region for white settlers is, overall, a rather benign, calm, and serene setting. That the white settler men in the Heartland are well-off, in control, and basking in privilege. On an array of cultural and institutional levels, this is absolutely true—and should be stated as such. Yet, despite all the enablement, entitlement, and authority (not to mention requisite comforts and opportunities that white privilege provides) white settler men are afforded within

my community and the surrounding areas, there has always remained untold nuances, contradictions, and corollaries.

That is, there is no shortage of anguish and trauma for white settler men in the region. Some of it, indeed, self-inflicted and, ironically, a product of unearned privileges reaped, and social currency earned, from both being white and proving oneself a "man." Some of the hardship and ramifications, though, systemic and structural (e.g. being working class/poor under capitalism). None of the *negative* upshots, however, are specifically due to the color of their/our skin.

Most the men I spoke to are rural working class or working poor, i.e. heavily exploited, rendered disempowered, and made disposable in the face of the driving forces of capital accumulation. Alienation, emotional repression, and less admittedly, feelings of emasculation, insignificance, and worthlessness are issues many were and are dealing and coping with. Although unfortunately, sometimes in far less than ideal ways (read: outwardly violent and/or self-destructive manners).

Growing up, and even to this day, myself, along with the hundreds of men I spoke to, all know/knew guys (from friends to family to acquaintances to sometimes even ourselves) who, in one way or another, fell into despondency, depression, alcoholism, substance misuse (methamphetamine years ago, opioids today), abusiveness, committed sexual assault, were molested as children, were paralyzed or died in drunk driving accidents, assailed others, have been arrested, locked up, spent time in jail/prison/psychiatric wards, murdered others, ended up being beaten to death themselves, or committed suicide. Moreover, countless men in the region have been maimed, humiliated, made insecure, financially destitute, and "put out on the street" as a result of the limited work and life choices they have faced under capitalism. That our time-honored ideas of "being a man" discourage seeking treatment or therapy and dictate silence about the toll these all take on the psychological, emotional, and mental health of men is not helping.

Put differently, white settler men are not immune to despair and hopelessness, despite the fact that there are myriad (structural) shields and (white) privileges in place for them. Ways of

relating to and treating others, too, have gone awry across our social geography. The proverbial boxes of child abuse, incest, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, pedophilia, rape, extortion, and emotional-psychological-financial abuse can all be checked. Domestic violence, victim-blaming, slut-shaming, gas-lighting, Islamophobia, anti-LGBTQ hate crimes, racial contempt, and even confederate flags (odd in Kansas as "we" were a "Free State") all blot the regional map as well. None of these are touchstones of "safe" and "tight-knit" communities. Obviously.

For me, all this is irrefutable evidence that colonial worldviews, capitalist social relations, and our orthodox heteropatriarchal notions of manhood (as well as the entire idea of manhood itself for that matter) are both patent failures and unequivocally perilous. The crux of the issue, thus, lies in how men respond to such phenomena, whether they are seeking to transform said circumstances, and crucially, where they are laying the blame. Or more precisely, who they are scapegoating. Often, blame is foisted, baselessly, upon Others—as reactionary, misguided, and misplaced as this is.

This is the context and reality, as well as the complexities, of the research I undertook in the American Heartland.

In outlining them, I note that several participants you will hear from are friends and family of mine, with many more being acquaintances and friends of friends. Most of the men I spoke with are heavily exploited, do strenuous manual labor, carry minimal influence outside of their homes and peer groups, and have little-to-no chance of accumulating the wealth, influence, or status that marks "success" in mainstream U.S./entrepreneurial capitalist culture. In many ways, they are being debilitated, abandoned, and warehoused, as well as have reason for anger and despair (e.g. falling wages, job loss, declining life spans, high relative rates of heart disease, substance misuse, suicide). Alienation and disempowerment, though, regrettably, do not necessarily create noble subjects. And the ways in which pain and rage are channeled and released (read: what, and who, they are taken out on) is paramount. Pointedly, there is urgent need for disempowered white settler men to develop better responses. Constructive responses that place blame on the culpable systems and structures responsible for

their hardship, as well as responses that are more health-enabling for themselves and Others.

Simultaneously, a point in need of reiteration is the fact that the participants are also the immediate beneficiaries of structural white supremacy (much like myself). They fit the normative mold on several fronts. This makes for a tremendous slate of privileges and securities to have in an imperialist country built upon the surveillance and punishment of difference. Their lives are validated by the state via citizenship, most own (historically dispossessed) private property, they are not being targeted for exploitation and incarceration solely because of inescapable visible aspects of their identity (e.g. gender and race), and they largely embody the optical litmus test against which Others in the U.S. are measured for belonging. They are, indeed, alienated. But alienated by a system and structure, colonial-capitalism, as well as a discourse and socio-cultural invention, masculinity; which enable them and see many continue to buy into. Just how they are propagating, complicit with, and reacting to the demands of colonial-capitalism and masculinity—even when not in their own best interest to do so—is what I am providing an account of.

It goes without saying, too, from my vantage point, that many of the opinions and behaviors you will read in the coming pages are undeniably heterosexist, xenophobic, and fanatical. Dangerous, destructive, and violent to be precise. What is to be expected, when diving deep into the bowels of manhood and belly of the beast that is the U.S. white settler society? But the point here is not to condemn and lock individual characters into rigidly bound categorical boxes and throw away the key, as colonizers, white supremacists, and male chauvinists would do. Rather, the purpose is to comprehend a constellation of situated, restrictive, and socially toxic modes of thinking and behaving, understand how they are generated and reproduced, and ultimately, prompt careful and informed action as to how they might be contested, dismantled, and left behind. By all parties involved.

The participants (both privileged and exploited on a host of differing fronts) you hear throughout are people with complex emotions, aspirations, and lived experiences, as well as deserving of dignity.

Despite the fact that at times they, arguably, make the decision to relinquish it. So, while some of the rationalities and actions of the interviewees involved are unconscionable and should absolutely be denounced and abolished, it is important to recall that they are agents being shaped by, as well as are reflections of, the contexts and cultures (i.e. social geographies) within which they exist. Just as they are conjointly forging, via their agency and actions, those same contexts and cultures—as we all do. In offering this caveat, I excuse nothing in the American Heartland (my home) from the participants (folks I know and met) and myself (as author), either discursive or material, that is repressive. That which is, be it at the level of institution (formal) or everyday (informal), must be confronted and put to end, including those things for which I am culpable. Because small things like behaviors, beliefs, facts, and quotes (of which you will come across in the chapters to come), speak to large concerns.

My qualification about recognizing the humanity of the participants, even in the face of some of their reprehensible opinions and actions (notably, not all were/are), is my way of leaving room for hope that things may one day change. That gender justice, anti-racist consciousness, socialist economic relations, anarchist socio-political relations, mutual aid, and diversity (which was/ is not wholly absent from the region), more than nationalist conservatism, settler entitlement, racial animus, and class hierarchies become the defining characteristics of the Heartland. Here, I agree with Sylvia Federici (2012) who argues the domain of social reproduction is "point zero" regarding transformative change (i.e. revolution). That is, none of us can either control or topple an empire, the state, or global capitalist economy. But we are in control of, as well as can collectively (re)define, (un)build, and (co)create the cultural norms, social relations, and notions of gender that we desire and want our communities to be characterized by. Interestingly enough, if politically educated about colonialism, capitalism, and gendered power relations, as well as exposed to enough of the healthful benefits that anti-racist consciousness and feminist ethics breathe life into, this just might be a pathway towards toppling empires, states, and the wasting machinations of capitalism (Fanon 1963).

Having said this, the raison d'être of this book is to demonstrate that any analysis of the cultural production and social practice of masculinity in the Heartland must take into account the U.S.'s trajectories of land dispossession and white supremacy, as well as its masculinist assertions of power, authority, and empire. More specifically, the chapters that follow will reveal how common sense, time-honored, and long-standing acts, rationalities, and rites of passage associated with manhood in rural America are founded upon and sustained by settler colonial norms, heteropatriarchal social relations, and the inherently exploitative rationalities and practices of capitalism. My fundamental political aim is thereby, to, in an admittedly very small way, contribute to anti-racist praxis and efforts being made to see entrenched colonial worldviews, capitalist logics, and subordinating gender relations be uprooted, torn asunder, and cast into the abyss— as well as be remembered as nothing other than the abusive and disgraceful relics that they are from shameful times—which must forever be avoided.

## Methods and Fieldwork

In order to revisit the cultural politics of masculinity in the Heartland, as well as maintain a recurring sense of the broader social landscape of the region, I began traveling home to rural Kansas for this project in 2010. Since that time, in addition to working as a farmhand for nearly a year in 2012 as part of my PhD fieldwork and traveling across several states and counties, I continue to make annual returns. This allows me to carry on speaking with men about their day-to-day routines, as well as get updates about their perspectives on masculinity, history, politics, and life in general.

In total and to date, I have spoken to over 500 men, conducted hundreds of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and held over a dozen focus groups (ranging from 5 to 12 informants). Along the way, I keep field notes about my daily work, leisure activities, social outings, and interactions. To initially recruit informants, I discussed the project with friends and family and asked them to spread word amongst their acquaintances. I also posted flyers in local businesses,

post offices, and on community bulletin boards expressing an interest in interviewing community members who identified as "men," were "from the country," and would be willing to participate in research being conducted on "masculinity and place."[2]

In selecting participants around the states I traveled to (Oklahoma, Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, Iowa, Nebraska, and eastern Colorado, primarily basing myself in Kansas), I used criterion sampling as I was specifically aiming for the perspectives of white settler men who described themselves as being from rural areas (e.g. "the country," "countryside"). The interviewees who have volunteered for the project were all U.S. citizens between the ages of 18 and 83, as well as described themselves as "American," "heterosexual/straight," "male/men," and "Caucasian/White." None specifically identified as "white settler." The vast majority of the participants described the region writ large, as well as respective communities they were from, as having a "slower pace of life" with "traditional" and "conservative" values.

Incidentally, most preferred identifying locally (i.e. gave precedent to being from their town or community) over regionally (e.g. using the Heartland, Midwest, Great Plains). This is partially a product of my growing up in the area and the shared familiarity we all had of the region, but is also instructive of just how ambiguous and distant regional identity is compared to both local and national identities. That is, being from one's hometown, as well as "American," was worth more mention and carried much greater weight than did a regional or even state affiliation, in most instances. Rivalries between or stigmatized reputations about certain states prompted strident disaffiliations on the part of some participants, more often from interviewees of older generations (e.g. Kansans versus Missourians; connotations about "Okies" [people from Oklahoma]). All told, nearly 80% were Christian (either practicing or non-practicing), with those who were not stating they were agnostic, atheist, or simply "not sure." Most (97%) had a high school diploma, roughly 35% had an undergraduate degree from a university, approximately 10% had vocational/trade school degrees, and 3% had dropped out of high school.

Interestingly, the vast majority (upwards of 85%) identified as "middle class" (as opposed to "working class" or "working poor"),

which is telling vis-à-vis the region's class consciousness (or lack thereof) given their individual incomes ranged from $10,000 to $77,000, with the average being $25,400. Their earnings are reflective of people from rural communities in what is largely an economically depressed section of the central U.S. Those who did not identity as middle class self-described as "working class," with a handful stating they were "poor," "down and out," or "wage slaves." Participants primarily earned their livings through blue-collar employment in the manufacturing, agriculture, livestock, oil and natural gas, construction, and trucking and transportation sectors. With specific work and job titles being farmers, construction workers, loggers, electricians, heavy equipment mechanics, mill/factory/warehouse workers, hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") crewmembers, firefighters, industrial plant managers, semi-truck drivers, welders, police officers, freelance carpenters, shop workers, "handymen," and high school teachers.

In addressing positionality, my age, race, gender, citizenship, presumed sexuality and religion, as well as ability (i.e. a white, able-bodied, cismale, U.S. citizen, with no visible mental disabilities, assumed to be heterosexual, late twenties–thirties, with a Catholic background) allowed me to navigate day-to-day interactions quite fluidly. That is, my "localness," having been born and raised in the region, "greased the wheels" (made interactions go smoothly) a great deal. This came to surface, along with a heavy dose of Christian discourse, when I arrived back in Kansas and was warmly greeted by several people as a "prodigal son returning home." More mundanely, too, were affable comments I was offered about being a long-time resident who had "roots" (i.e. kinship) in the area. As I was relatively young compared to many participants, and given many had known me for years, several of the men I interviewed took somewhat of a paternalistic, yet sociable and good-natured, orientation towards me. In this way, my interviews could be more appropriately called "visits," as many of the men labeled them as such.

The personal contacts I had in the area allowed me to easily connect with other informants in other counties and states for both purposive selection and chain-referrals, which unfolded into a process best described as "vouching." More precisely, several of the

visits I had in surrounding towns and across county lines were the result of participants stating "I got a buddy of mine you should talk to," followed by them contacting friends of friends, briefly introducing me as a "good guy" or "kid from around the area," and allowing me to "take it from there." Consequently, as a "local boy" who had "earned his stripes" it was relatively easy for me to fit in. This meant I could then tag-along in many of the common local pastimes (i.e. hunting, fishing, camping, golfing, drinking at pubs, horse-riding, shooting guns, gambling at casinos, vehicle maintenance, carpentry projects, etc.) of the area quite readily.

As a result of having lived in the area for more than 25 years, I wavered in a liminal insider-outsider researcher positionality depending upon the people I found myself with. Doing autoethnographic research and being marked as a "local" is rife with complexities and tensions, oftentimes producing both pros and cons in regard to navigating relationships with participants. As the majority of the informants I spoke with considered me local, I was granted a certain degree of immediate inclusion. Throughout the project, participants sometimes mentioned that responding to inquiries about relationships, emotion, and sexuality seemed a bit "weird" and (as was noted a handful of times) "kind of gay." There were also a few very intense conversations about the topics of race/whiteness, sexuality, colonialism, and migration with some of the participants I knew closely, which highlights how researchers can never maintain objective, disconnected positions when conducting fieldwork. Occupying tenuous "insiderness," as well as carrying widely contrasting political perspectives, thus can be quite an unpredictable and capricious experience as it lends itself to seemingly random and unintentional provocations and hesitancies in regard to the amount of self-disclosure participants offer. This illuminates how notions of place not only affect the conceptualization of research topics, but also, the practice of research itself.

Hence, my status as a "local boy" was both a catalyst and a hindrance when it came to the process of asking rural men to open up about their lives. This was particularly stark when juxtaposing the experiences I had during individual interviews with focus groups. During one-on-one conversations participants engendered a far

more contemplative and forthright, yet also vulnerable, disposition towards my queries. The intimacy of personal dialogue led to more candor, rapport, and nuance on the part of the participants, as well as myself. Men in focus groups, contrastingly, were more demonstrably assertive and fraternal, yet measured surrounding emotion (unless expressing anger or disagreement), in tone and tenor. The vast majority of my group interviews also saw participants engaging in more homosocial bonding and masculinist performativity (e.g. "good-natured ribbing"/joking, cursing, oppressive language, posturing) than the individual interactions. It was with all of these tensions, trappings, and trepidations, as well as occasional strange looks and intermittent head-shakings of disapproval (usually on the part of the participants), that I set about examining the convergence of settler colonialism, manhood, and rural life in the American Heartland.

## Aims and Rationale

It is sometimes quite helpful to define a book by what it is not. Doing so manages expectations, as well as signposts a few of the unavoidable limitations and omissions that some readers and critics will inevitably notice and be quick to call out. This is not to excuse any limitations and omissions, rather, it is simply a precaution I am taking because I don't want to let readers down. Markedly, some non-mentionings of names, texts, and events is neither a tacit expectation that they be forgotten, nor is it always a deliberate or unwitting act of erasure. Although, sometimes not mentioning names, texts, and events are, indeed, deliberate attempts to forget, erase, and bury. With this in mind, I offer a few caveats so the audience will know this book is limited in scope, yet solidaristic and encouraging of further anti-racist, feminist, and decolonizing theory reading in tone. I also qualify a few things simply so readers know what they are getting into should they decide to carry on.

This book is neither a comprehensive and thorough timeline of the historical trajectory of U.S. settler colonialism, nor is it a detailed account of gun laws, policies, and culture across the U.S. While both settler colonial historical events and American

gun culture are present, and given entire (place-based) chapters, this is not a history book. Fortunately, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz has penned two illuminating and enriching volumes on precisely these two topics, which I would never be able to top: *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (2014) and *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment* (2018). Notably, this book is also neither "about" Indigenous people (i.e. it does not place them as passive objects under a clinical academic microscope), nor is it an analysis of indigeneity. Jodi Byrd's *The Transit of Empire* (2011) and the edited collection *Speaking of Indigenous Politics* (Kehaulani Kauanui 2018), amongst several others by critical Indigenous authors, are revealing and consciousness-elevating texts here.

This book is also not solely and exclusively a dissection of masculinity as a social construct, nor is it an across-the-board deep dive into sophisticated postmodern identity politics and critical theories related to gender. It does, however, to some degree, put poststructuralist critiques of masculinity, sexuality, gender, and the body in the service of an intersectional postcolonial analysis and anti-racist diagnosis about the *material* and *discursive* effects of settler colonialism within the Heartland. With respect to masculinity and intersectional analysis, Bob Pease's *Undoing Privilege* (2010) and Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge's *Intersectionality* (2016) are both accessible and enlightening contributions.

Moreover, the text does not zero in, in any committed fashion, on the role the military plays apropos constructions of American masculinity. While undoubtedly influential, most participants I spoke with, if they had served in any branch of the U.S. military (less than 20% I conducted in-depth interviews with had), discussed and focused on far more local social and cultural relations than on wider geopolitical-military happenings in our conversations about manhood. Those who had served in the military, given the nature of my line of questioning and focal areas, while indicating the military's significance, conversed more about their experiences at or around "home." That is, while the role of the U.S. military arguably cannot be cleaved from the cultural fabrication and varied expressions of American masculinity, my aim remained on revealing the dynamics that took place across and within the quotidian social spaces men moved into and out of routinely.

Part of my rationale for placing my analysis elsewhere is also due to the attention that both academic and extra-academic writing already offers the nexus of American military, masculinity, and nationalism. For example, a Google search of the combined terms "military, masculinity, United States" results in over five million hits in less than one second. That said, the sway of the military, the U.S.'s standing as a "superpower," and the country's perceived reputation as an armed "force to be reckoned with" and "badass" (as several participants noted) is not to be understated. Undeniably, the influence and repercussions of the U.S. military, as well as service to it, for men from rural, working-class backgrounds are as broad as they are deep, geographically, physically, and mentally. Meaning, given the U.S. Department of Defense is one of the largest employers in the world and because its budget amounts to nearly 700 billion U.S. dollars (DOD 2019), it has become a lynchpin entity into which working-poor or working-class white men (as well as women and others) are economically recruited, drafted, and at times coerced.

Noteworthy, too, is how soldiers are culturally conscripted into the U.S. military via the inculcation of nationalism and narratives surrounding pride of service to the country and "protection of freedom." This cultural enshrinement and "drafting into" is partly evidenced in the habituated displays of American patriotism, pride, pageantry, and pledges of allegiance that are performed at most U.S. schools, holiday celebrations, homecomings, and sporting events, as well as remain ever-present across the nation's television, film, music, and advertising industries, not to mention within the country's social imagination writ large. What neither appears nor is mentioned as frequently as the lionization and glorification of the U.S. military in all of these settings is the economic, physical, and emotional toll that military service takes on soldiers (e.g. bodily injury, post-traumatic stress syndrome, suicidal ideation, suicide, substance misuse, federal funding being used for weapons rather than recovery) (Fischer 2009, Friedman 2019). Soldiers, many of whom are working-class white men, thereby suffer the consequences of empire and colonial power not only via their subsidizing of the U.S.'s war machine through their tax dollars, but also in the trauma and injury that is inflicted upon their bodies and minds as a result of serving and defending each.

This book is also not specifically about Trump supporters (per se), Trumpism, the alt-right, the Ku Klux Klan (or associated groups), neo-Nazi fascist groups, the right-wing militia movement, reactionary white rage, individual white supremacists, mass shooters, who are disproportionally white, or belligerent ethnonationalist bigotry. While all these wholly destructive, inexcusable, and grim entities are in urgent need of being exposed, taken apart, undone, and ended, my ethnographic research and analyses focus on the relationships and generative effects that (ongoing) settler colonialism, *systemic* white supremacy, and masculinity have in day-to-day life. The (re)production of place-based socio-cultural norms and notions of manhood, along with the formation and function of situated political perspectives and capitalist values, too, are examined. Granted, there can be a lot of overlap between all the things described above.

My main reason for not homing in on Trump is because, from a historical-structural standpoint apropos the realities of the U.S., once he is out of office, it is arguable on some fronts, that not much will change. That is not a call to give up, rest easy, or stop organizing against the alt-right, Republican propaganda machine, or ethnonationalists. It is more of a reflection of the fact that the U.S. state, be it steered by the Republicans, Democrats, or whatever party, is a colonial-capitalist one. While the manifestations of colonial power, racial contempt, male domination, and state violence might not be as bellicose or bombastic once Trump departs, is forced out, or quits, they will still remain and be as prevalent and lethal as ever. And while nakedly violent white supremacist worldviews and behaviors do make occasional appearances in one way or another throughout the book, I place my attention more on the mundane, the commonplace, and the subtle. That is, my concentration is fixed upon chronic banal fanaticism, which stays backstage and resides in the shadows, and in many ways, can be even more terrifying and dangerous than volatile acts of blatant fanaticism, which tend to seek and get the spotlight.

Ultimately, my analysis is an eclectic, intersectional, and "radical" one. Radical (from the Latin *radicalis/radix*, meaning "root/or from the roots"), because I am focusing on what lies at

the *roots* (i.e. causes) of manifestations of white rage, arrogance, ethno-nationalism, derision, entitlement, violence, and Trumpism (i.e. symptoms). Eclectic, because I am drawing from a wide array of critical theories and political-intellectual perspectives (e.g. anti-racist, decolonial, feminist, poststructuralist, Marxist, anarchist, queer, socialist). And intersectional because I factor power relations, political economy, and the politics of identity into my structural analyses (e.g. race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, citizenship, ability, age, religion). In short, I am attempting to cast light upon the foundation of that which has become routine, taken-for-granted, and unnoticed by many in the Heartland—yet is unbearable, suffocating, and pernicious for Others—in hopes that understanding what lies at the roots of the social geography might lead to change.

This book is not an argument that all working-class white men in the Heartland are racists, conservative, politically unconscious, Republican, or oppressors. Incidentally, most of the white settler men I talked to were not seething bigoted white supremacists and contempt-driven misogynists. Although, there were a few. Most men put a lot of sincere thought and contemplation into the discussions we had and questions I asked. They were neither retrograde churlish archetypes, nor without compassion, empathy, and conviction. I was appreciative of their time and thoughts, remain in touch, and am even still friends with several, despite the many points of departure that arose throughout the varying conversations we had. Accordingly, I am endeavoring to be careful not to homogenize or demonize individual interviewees in this book.

Notwithstanding this qualification, though, this book is an intervention into oppressive realities and broken social relations in need of transformation and repair. And as readers will see, evidence of the U.S.'s structural foundation of white supremacy, colonial worldviews, heteropatriarchal norms, and capitalist values certainly did emerge quite regularly in my discussions with participants. And much like a doctor who in diagnosing and seeking to treat an ill body must focus on infection and disease, I must do the same. The "body" I am focusing on, however, is social relations in the Heartland, with the disease being ongoing colonial relations and

worldviews (not individual people). Notably, for me, masculinity is the infection. And diseases and infections, along with their effects, be they bodily or social, are not always becoming to look at, treat, or put to scalpel. The underlying hope in probing, placing under the microscope, lancing, and attempting to excise them, though, is that the body/society can mend and be healed.

Lastly, this book is not an extensive overview of partisan politics, discourse, and electoral posturing in the American Heartland, nor is it a meticulously detailed account of the region's economic history or class struggle. Having said that, all these matter a great deal, particularly the (capitalist) economy and class struggle, and each of these aspects of life in the Heartland appear throughout the book, often, as well as factor prominently into my analysis. Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (2007), Arlie Hochschild's *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2018) (although set just outside the Heartland), and Ian Haney López's *Dog Whistle Politics* (2015) capture a great deal of nuance regarding what could be said about these issues, particularly if read in tandem.

My aim, then, is simply to add to all these conversations, as well as the many others I do not have the space to list and reflect upon at more length. Specifically, I feel (settler) colonialism and (racial) capitalism needs to be mentioned more in conversations (and schools) about what challenges people in the U.S. must overcome, as well as what we should be focusing on and trying to repair/atone for. The effects colonialism has had on gender and race relations in the U.S., too, I feel are more pronounced than what most of us hear in the day-to-day. And while there are scores of instructive books on the devastation that racial capitalism is generating in the U.S., as well as numerous others on the consequences of masculinity, there are far less on what I see as an equally influential and indissoluble process—settler colonialism, which is why I foreground it in the title.

That being said, this book is also very much about capitalism. As noted earlier, capitalism is inseparable from processes of racialization and exercises of colonial power, encroachment, and penetration. From my vantage point, capitalism, at its core, is rooted in a colonizing logic, and, when manifested in material form as a mode of production and set of relations, is inherently a colonial practice. Capitalism

dispossesses people of their land, labor, energy, time, health, hope, well-being, blood, sweat, tears, and spirit, not to mention the value they have as humans and wealth they create as workers. Capitalism captures and confines; limits life chances and forecloses futures; and punishes while exposing land and people to premature death, some of whom are purposely targeted more than others. And if this is starting to sound like colonization—it's because it is. Capitalism colonizes people, in addition to land, at once laying claim to and emptying out each. As alluded to by Fanon (1963) previously, they are inseparable.

Finally, while there exists a robust scholarly literature on manhood and masculinity, very few books have explicitly connected critiques of these to the historical-continuing arcs of land dispossession, capitalist subjectification (i.e. being fashioned into docile and obedient subjects that serve capitalism's ends), and *terra nullius* (empty land) myths that function across white settler societies. Moreover, even fewer authors have applied postcolonial and antiracist frameworks, in conjunction with insights from feminist and queer theories, to offer ethnographically based understandings of what lies at the foundation of long-established and reoccurring socio-spatial configurations of rural, American, and settler masculinities. Notably, this is not to suggest a total literary lacuna exists on these themes. Rather, I am suggesting this book will partially seal up some fissures in both academic and extra-academic literature, as well as add to the dialectic.

The ambition is to thus reveal and bring under scrutiny the constitutive components and concomitant practices of masculinity in the American Heartland that give rise to hierarchical gender orders, ongoing colonial social relations, white settler entitlements, capitalist cultural mores, and racial otherings. Components and practices that at once systemically enable yet often individually compromise men in the region, as well as are in need of change. Notably, I make no claims of "decolonizing" anything. This emancipatory end is far beyond the scope of what this/any book can do, not to mention is a process and project I have no right to lay claim to, as well as should neither be the leading voice for, nor face of. That said, decolonization, if it is even possible, is something I hope this book can contribute to.

In short, my aim is to take to task the Heartland's normative and tacitly binding (although not uncontested) practices, discourses, and prevailing notions of masculinity by exposing them at their settler colonial roots. And in sum, my overarching dual thesis is simple: (1) We need neither a better form nor less toxic version of masculinity—we need to rid ourselves of it altogether; and (2) All colonial power, worldviews, and institutions (i.e. "colonizers") must be abolished—along with their attendant hierarchies, economies, entitlements, states, statutes, social relations, cultural mores, land claims, holidays, narratives, and moves to innocence.

## Organization

The chapter that follows this introduction, "Settler Colonialism, Empire, Borders," provides a conceptual and explicatory synopsis of settler colonialism, early U.S. imperialism, the operation of racial capitalism, and how borders function to serve all these. In it, I offer a diagnosis of how colonial logics and the historical trajectories of U.S. settler colonialism and empire-building have led to a sociocultural and political-economic status quo founded upon deracination, dispossession, enslavement, and attempted genocide. In addition, the chapter underscores the inextricable links that the contemporary U.S. nation-state has with Western liberal worldviews and white supremacy.[3] I, along with my co-author Elise Hjalmarson for select sections of the chapter, also provide an extended overview of border imperialism,[4] as well as demonstrate the mutually reinforcing relationships existing between racial capitalism, the state, and nationalism in the U.S. The chapter ends by taking to task some common misconceptions and myths about migrants, along with a brief discussion of what justice and decolonization in the face of settler colonial borders and empire might entail.

Chapter 3, "Masculinity, Place, Intersectionality," is largely theoretical in nature and provides a comprehensive overview of how masculinity has been and is being researched, critiqued, and defined. It provides a summary of key concepts pertaining to critical perspectives on the formation of masculinity, as well as how masculinities emerge

across varying socio-geographic settings and are being represented and defined across differing scales. Its aim is to share how place and masculinity are recursively constituted and ultimately understood. In addition, I highlight the principal concepts applied in critical scholarship that aid researchers in conducting an intersectional analysis, as well as detail how race, gender, class, space, power, and embodiment work in conjunction with one another to produce social norms and hierarchies pertaining to masculinity. The goal of the chapter is to explain a variety of the terms and concepts that inform my gender analyses and provide clarity surrounding what my intersectional analysis will entail.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are where the rubber hits the (dirt) road. Each respectively forefront the empirical data I collected and generated during the time I spent across the American Heartland. The focus of these three chapters is to bring out of the shadows the normative and conventional quotidian practices that reaffirm what the prevailing notions of manhood in the rural Heartland are (and mean) for white settler men. Throughout each chapter, I illustrate how settler colonialism lies at the heart of many of their perspectives on land, property, work ethic, gender relations, political economy, race relations, sexuality, citizenship, emotions, rurality, and even bodies. The analysis, hence, foregrounds socio-cultural systems and processes alongside politico-economic structures and circumstances. In turn, each respective empirical chapter provides a critical discursive, structural, socio-psychological, and radical analyses of what the politics of gender, power, and belonging are across a particular social geography, the American Heartland.

In Chapter 4, "Kansas, Bled: Land, History, Violence," I provide a detailed account of what the historical trajectories of empire, settlement, and nation-building have produced within a specific community found within the heart of the Heartland: St. Paul, Kansas. St. Paul is a small, quintessentially American rural town that is located in the ancestral territories of the Osage [*Wah-Zha-Zhi*] Nation. I place this locale under the microscope because I grew up in the community, consider it my "home," and spent the majority of my time there during fieldwork. The telescoped attention I offer it enables me to provide an in-depth investigation into the nuances that exist in what

can be identified as a prototypical rural American (white settler) town. The chapter also elaborates upon how aspects of settler history, identity, and religion are massaged into justifications for land dispossession and occupation; woven into discourses of masculinity; and used for the routinized perpetuation of structural white supremacy. The chapter ends by casting light on the ambivalent emotions, rationalizations, and contradictions that arise within settler societies as they try to deny, disaffiliate, and forget the colonial violence upon which they were founded.

With regard to Chapter 4, I must offer an account of some of the fraught issues and politics of doing "research" (in many forms, an arguably colonial practice) on or about Indigenous people, territories, histories, and cultures, particularly for white settlers. My intention with the chapter is not to further subject Indigenous people and culture (in this case, the Osage Nation) to the interrogative magnifying glass of a white settler researcher who is not an authority on their customs, practices, or worldviews. Rather, what I set out to do is critically examine the conceptions and practices of masculinity operating within America's Heartland by concentrating on what white settler men have to say about land, history, and manhood in a unique and particular, yet archetypal, rural American setting.

Writers of all persuasions have a long and exploitative record of researching Indigenous people, as well as their cultural practices, traditional languages, spiritualities, and technologies, with neither permission nor adherence to cultural safety protocols (Mahtani 2014, de Leeuw, Greenwood, and Lindsay 2013, Tuck and Yang 2012, Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Research that further reinforces colonial power and perpetuates oppression via voyeurism, fetishization, cultural appropriation, and exposure (Hunt 2014, Morgensen 2011a). In many instances, the research stems from the most well-meaning of sources, with the best of intentions. Nonetheless, as the saying goes, "the road to hell is paved with good intentions," and more often than not, research about Indigenous people/histories represents a recapitulation of ethnocentric knowledge production, as well as can constitute the continued erasure, muting, and misrepresentation of marginalized voices and epistemologies (Hawthorne and Meché 2016, McKittrick and Peake 2005, Pulido 2002). It is

with this critical awareness, as well as these potential trappings in mind, that I conducted the research and write—with an ever-present commitment to avoid the neocolonial pratfalls noted above.

Chapter 5, "Frontier, Family, Nation," highlights the normalization of gun culture in the Heartland. In it, I provide an overview of the intimate ties that guns and masculinity have with rural space, settler colonialism, and nationalist discourse. The chapter also offers further elaboration upon my position as researcher, principally when encountering politically charged issues in the field. It then moves into an articulation of the main configurations of practice that men cite as reasons why they own guns (e.g. for protection, provision, and security; as rites of passage; as ways to honor and remember history as well as past ancestors; for leisure, recreation, and utility; as an expression of individual freedom; and finally, as an exercising of civil liberties). The chapter next underscores how (dis)ability, race, and gun use are employed in order to pathologize, denigrate, and criminalize negatively racialized Others. It ends with an examination of what is produced by hegemonic conceptions surrounding guns, rural space, American nationalism, and masculinity.

In Chapter 6, "Capitalism, Work, Respect," I offer an analysis of the empirical evidence gathered in the field by examining how capitalist ideology and (neo)liberal self-making (i.e. competition, individual work ethic, traditional "breadwinner" roles, "responsibilization," etc.) all play key parts in the formation of local hegemonic notions of manhood. The chapter also engages in a discussion pertaining to the links between patriarchal social relations, heteronormativity, conservative religious dogma, and conceptions of rurality. It reveals how the masculinist discourses, particularly in contexts of male homosocial fraternizing, rely upon reductionist narratives that essentialize women/femininity into distinct categories that are then framed as inferior and subordinate. The chapter also provides evidence of how embodiment, production, and self-discipline (specifically in the arenas of paid employment, American football, and alcohol consumption) also serve as influential elements in the production of rural masculinities in the Heartland.

Lastly, Chapter 7, the conclusion, "Looking Back, Going Forward …," brings together and recaps the central arguments

from both the theoretical and empirical chapters. It summarizes the key implications and consequences that settler colonialism, socio-spatially constructed conceptions of manhood, and American nationalism and exceptionalism have had upon people and society in the Heartland. To close the book, I finish with a broad overview of what the convergence of settler colonialism and masculinity has produced in the American Heartland, before finally offering a clear and definitive Fanonian solution to the problems, challenges, and realities posed by their continued perpetuation.

# Chapter 2

# Settler Colonialism, Empire, Borders

## (with Elise Hjalmarson)[1]

*This unfortunate race, whom we had been taking so much pains to save and to civilize, have by their unexpected desertion and ferocious barbarities justified extermination and now await our decision on their fate.*
Thomas Jefferson

*Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it.*
Arundhati Roy

### God Shed His Grace on Thee …

Inevitably, if you spend enough time in the American Heartland visiting quaint museums, traveling to small towns, and talking to local folks about land, history, and settlement, you are bound to hear some nostalgic and harrowing, not to mention quite grandiose, stories about heritage and times past. The setting for these stories is a vast, untamed (often purportedly empty) "New World" in need of discovery, with the cast of characters generally including daring trailblazers imbued with pioneering spirits, unsung heroes filled with honor and resolve, and altruistic religious leaders forging civilization via benevolence and nobility.

Plots and story arcs vary, but largely entail an intrepid individual or beleaguered family setting out to share knowledge and enlightenment, escape the religious persecution of repressive monarchies, strike out on their own for a fresh start, or just simply homestead on a modest plot of land and farm. Heartening stories of spreading the "good word" and overcoming hardship abound. Not to mention stories that do wonders for manufacturing a historical track record of purported innocence, good intentions, and a workable narrative that establishes and nurtures an enduring sense of righteous belonging. And so began a shameful imperial legacy of violent displacements and crimes against humanity. Consider, that from an impartial and celestial vantage point, the story of white settler colonialism and the formation of the United States reads more like a chilling account of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (War, Famine, Pestilence, Death) storming the Earth than it does of heartwarming vignettes about pioneers, priests, and persecuted believers triumphing through adversity and "helping/civilizing Others."

And if not already obvious, the protagonists of these stories are mostly men: white settler, able-bodied, heterosexual, and Christian, to be precise. But that is generally neither explicitly mentioned, nor thought to matter, despite the fact that it absolutely does. What is left out of these stories, or at best is grossly warped and distorted in them, is the genocidal onslaught, acts of carceral quarantine (be it plantation, reservation, or internment camp), enslavement of Others, cultural erasures, widespread suffering, and massive casualties that coincided with, and are inextricably linked to, these fondly reminisced upon frontier myths of arrival and settlement.

Accordingly, one cannot tell a story of the U.S. without mention of the dispossession, alienation, repression, and negligence wrought by white supremacy and settler colonialism. It is neither a history nor heritage to commemorate, celebrate, or for which holidays should be created. Just as it is a history that should no longer be either whitewashed or peddled as "truth," and must be recognized as never having ended. That is, the only real take away and lessons we can learn from bygone pioneer stories and state history books

lauding "discovery" is that settler colonialism and dehumanization in the U.S., which have been the means put towards the ends of domination and empire, remain ongoing processes to this day.

## Settler Colonialism and Dispossession

> *They made us many promises, more than I can remember.*
> *But they only kept one … They promised to take*
> *our land—and they took it.*
> Chief Red Cloud

Settler colonialism is made manifest when an invading population forces and coerces a group of people, typically Indigenous, from their traditionally lived-in territories through inculcation and/or extermination (Veracini 2010, Wolfe 2006, 1999). The settler-occupier populace that moves in colonizes in order to assert dominance; create political-economic systems and markets; implement its governance structure and rule of law; impose its worldviews and claims of ownership; install its cultural-ethnic communities; and create its own new, "modern," nation-state (Tuck and Yang 2012). The principal, but neither exclusive nor entirely independent, difference between colonialism and settler colonialism involves the permanent acquisition and occupation of land, coupled with an attempted elimination of certain (read: negatively racialized and Indigenous) people and groups (Tuck and Yang 2012, Veracini 2010). That is, white settler nation-states (e.g. the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa) came to exist not with the primary goal of exploiting and using Indigenous populations solely for profit and the primitive accumulation of natural resources, although these elements are present. Rather, white settlers came to purge and disappear Indigenous people from the landscapes and places they wanted and felt entitled to.

As Elkins and Pedersen (2005, 3) suggest, settlers "wished less to govern Indigenous peoples or to enlist them in their economic ventures than to seize their land and push them beyond an ever-expanding frontier of settlement." In many cases, upon arriving in what colonizers chose to view as "empty," "new," and "no one's"

land (*terra nullius*), white settlers pursued the project of concocting narratives that rationalized their strategies of dispossession by citing "freedom" and "discovery" as their justifications for occupation and plunder. Thus, the goal of settler colonialism was the eradication (via assimilation and death) of Indigenous people, coupled with the enslavement of otherwise free Black and Brown people, which it would capture, traffic in, confine, exploit, and later dispose of to generate wealth and build its institutions. In short, capitalism was going global, in its highest form (i.e. imperialism), as a means of overcoming its spatial fix in order to claim, take, colonize, and consume what it wanted: land and labor (Harvey 2018, Lenin 1999).

This was to be accomplished through the expropriation of Indigenous territories, implementation of permanent settlements, and burial of Others (both worldviews and bodies). All of this, in what were deliberate and meticulously crafted colonial schemes, would be fueled by acts of terror, racist logics, bigoted interpretations of religious doctrine, and white supremacist notions of "civilization" (Johnston and Lawson 2005, Razack 2002). A desire for nationhood (along with the invading populace's subservience to and bolstering of it), the consolidation of exclusionary political power, and the ability to exercise a monopoly on violence (i.e. the creation of a state), was also part and parcel to the settler colonial project. Meaning, settler nation-states did not set up shop for temporary economic gains that were to be left behind once profits dried up. On the other hand, settlers anchored themselves in Indigenous territories to claim rightful ownership over them while eliminating their original inhabitants.

From this perspective, it can widely be recognized that settler occupation was, and continues to be, an ongoing process of theft, i.e. accumulation by dispossession (Coulthard 2014). The incursion of white settlers into Indigenous lands can thereby be more accurately viewed as an iterative and evolving course of action that has never ceased and is still taking place in the current moment, rather than a series of isolated events which happened at discrete points in time in some far off history that has since been dispatched.

## Deracination and Genocide

*The destructive advance of Capital, always through war, demolished*
*the first fiefdoms and kingdoms. Upon their ruins it raised nation-states.*
Zapatista Army of National Liberation

The dispossession faced by Indigenous people in the U.S. commenced when settlers arrived in the early 1600s to take land and natural resources. Extensive migration from Europe into the "New World" was often driven by religious fervor, entrepreneurial aggression, uncompromising individualistic entitlement, and Western perspectives of what "ownership" (i.e. private) meant (Barker and Pickerill 2012, Veracini 2010, Wolfe 2006). The primary reasons, though, were capital, domination, and empire.

The vociferous appetite that white settlers had for the possession of land, inaccessible to them throughout much of Europe, meant that masses of them would make their way into the colonies in order to extract resources, impose belief systems, erect physical structures, establish their own cultural mores, and commit genocide (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007). Many of the settlers in the early 1600s were able to seize land without second thought upon arriving as a result of permanently having left their original countries (Hixson 2013a, Bateman and Pilkington 2011, Veracini 2010). They faced little regulation and few limitations upon reaching their destinations in light of fact that the aristocracies and monarchies they were departing from did not have immediate access to surveilling them, not that this would have mattered. Thus, white settlers were subjected to less bureaucratic authority from the kingdoms from whence they came as they reached the overseas territories they set out to "explore" and evangelize in (Hixson 2013b, Wolfe 1999).

The unregulated nature of settler presence facilitated an increase in land occupations, private property claims, prospecting ventures, human bondage, and the accumulation of wealth. In turn, the relationship amongst settlers, the European nation-states from where they were coming, and the Indigenous populations they were encroaching upon, assaulting, and attempting to lay waste

to serves as one of the touchstones of settler colonialism (Hixson 2013a, Wolfe 1999). Those white Europeans who were "discovering" foreign lands and "braving the frontier," while simultaneously distancing themselves from their own governing hierarchies throughout the 1600 and 1700s, widely did so with the intent to dislocate and supplant Indigenous people, as well as enslave and own African people (Horne 2018).

This constellation of phenomena, in turn, was a catalyst for settler efforts in building an empire. The hostile establishment of new communities, new economic markets, and new cultural (oft-puritanical Christian) norms all were rationalized as sanctioned by God; a justifiable and necessary "civilizing mission" (Veracini 2010). It must be noted that these colonial machinations stem from, as well as were offshoots of (albeit variant in form and source), Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean in 1492—when Western "modernity" arrived in the Americas. Markedly, and in need of explicit mention, is that from the moment "modernity arrived," whether it be in the Caribbean, what is now referred to as the U.S., or elsewhere—Indigenous, Black, and Brown resistance and agency have always been present (e.g. see the story of Anacaona or writings of Fanon, whose respective spirits this book is dedicated to).

Within what was to become the U.S., then, white settlers strategically shaped their colonies by anchoring them in territories from which Indigenous people were to be extinguished, and where Black people were to be yoked and enchained. In the eyes of many white settlers, Indigenous populations would gradually be annihilated, while their new colonies (eventual nation-state) and corporations would simultaneously and slowly go about withdrawing from dependency upon former central authorities. For the U.S., this was all made manifest in the Declaration of Independence, American Revolution, formation of a military, Doctrine of Discovery, Dawes Act, and subsequent jurdico-discursive edicts that the burgeoning nation-state would institute over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to further jettison Indigenous people from the land while privatizing it and claiming territorial sovereignty.

Notably, Indigenous and Black personhood, self-determination, and worldviews (not to mention land use and agricultural practices),

were deemed to be both anathema and irreconcilable under the state-building project of U.S. settler colonialism. An ethno-nationalist and political-economic foundation built upon white supremacist logics and insatiable cravings for profit, private property, commodifiable resources, growth, and domination guaranteed this. Conspicuously, the U.S. federal military was tapped to assist in seeing "Indian Removal" through to its fruition (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014). Hence, Westward Expansion, and war, become faits accomplis. So, too, did the construction of whiteness, which allowed more European settlers to participate in the imperial ambitions of the metastasizing U.S. state. Put differently, the invention of whiteness was a lucrative business deal for the settler ruling class, as were the state-sanctioned armed campaigns against Indigenous communities, establishment of plantations, legalization of chattel slavery, and domestication of women, all of which secured the necessary capital (and social reproduction) of the American empire's Westward Expansion. There was no shortage of complexities emerging at this time given that settlement was not exclusively white; that is, Chinese immigrants, Mexican farm labor, Filipino workers, and formerly enslaved yet "freed" Black people were also incorporated into the U.S.'s push west (Hixon 2013a).

Nevertheless, what resulted was a vigorous campaign of dispossession, enclosure, and genocide that swept over the countryside and decimated Indigenous populations and extracted wealth from enslaved (otherwise free) Black people (Blaut 2012, Tuck and Yang 2012, Alfred 1999). White settler colonizers sought to establish a capitalist state and empire through the imposition of private ownership, property boundaries, plantation estates, and borders. The subjugation and commoditization of nature and animals, scaling-up of sedentary agricultural production, entrenchment of heteropatriarchal authority, ritualization of perceived settler/Christian glory, and investment in the U.S. Armed Forces were key components. The construction of corporate manufacturing bases, industrial factories, urban centers, and large-scale environment-altering transportation networks (e.g. railroads) along with irrigation projects (e.g. the Ogallala Aquifer in the Heartland) also forged the physical and cultural landscape of the new nation (Elkins and Pedersen 2005, Wolfe 2006, 1999). Because

the elimination logics of white settlement typically infused "spreading civilization" with cultural erasure via boarding schools, reeducation/labor camps, laws banning Indigenous customs, and capitalist modes of production, the pace at which negatively racialized people were deracinated, enslaved, forcibly assimilated, or murdered—as well as land expropriated, occupied, and reified as private property—was astounding. And as America's ruling class and authors of history would argue, "exceptional."

## Racial Capitalism and the State

*I take advantage of the laws of the nation because*
*I'm running a company.*
Donald Trump

*We must shake our conscience free of the rapacious*
*capitalism, racism, and patriarchy that will only*
*assure our own self-destruction.*
Berta Cáceres

As U.S. empire began to expand over the course of the late-1800s, 1900s, and into the current moment, both in depth and breadth, as well as internally and externally, it needed to figure out a way to monitor, regulate, and quite simply deal with its Others. Conveniently and strategically, it had race at is behest. Racism in the U.S. has been fundamental to the historical justification of policies that confine, segregate, exclude, and deny/afford rights to differing people and groups; be they Indigenous, migrant, arrivant, or settler. Race, along with gender, has also been an overdetermining factor in terms of whose labor is (super)exploited in the U.S., as well as who bears the brunt of the driving forces of capital accumulation (Federici 2004, Omi and Winant 2014). Meaning, if the "modern" (colonial-capitalist) state is imagined as governing a "discriminable population, with a single, bounded space" (Rouse 1991, 10), the presence of diverse Others and international migration wholly ruptures this framework.

Traditionally, the modern U.S. state has claimed to embody a single people (citizens) who are tacitly required to speak a single

language (English), live together in a territory (sovereign) under a single governing power (federal), and are administered by single legal system (the Constitution/rule of law) (Tölölyan 1991). Against this backdrop, both Indigenous people/languages/social systems and foreign migrants are cast as endangering the U.S. state and all that it stands for—its homogeneity, unity, impermeability, security, safety, order, and "greatness." Migration and indigeneity represent chaos, heterogeneity, a return to the nomadic, a loss of control, or a sort of perdition. Migrants and Indigenous people, in turn, are perceived as feral, in that their very movement within the sovereign territory of the U.S., or across its national borders, challenges the authority and control of the state (Walia 2013). Ergo, they must be both disciplined and domesticated, if not eliminated.

Not to be overlooked, boundary crossing and migrant movement is largely mediated by global capitalism and the U.S.'s imperial aspirations. Bearing in mind that the development of capitalism (and the extraction, exploitation, and [de]valuation of humans inherent under its relations) necessitated the differentiation of people based upon their appearance and the places they were from, it is not surprising some groups in the U.S. became negatively racialized and made disposable more readily than others (Bhattacharyya 2018, HoSang, LaBennett, and Pulido 2012, Jackson 2012, Rodney 2018). A person's invented, racialized identity alone, however, is not the only factor that dictates their social position. Theorists that combine critical race theory with historical materialism such as Fanon (1963), Wallerstein (1996), and Jones (from Davies 2007) suggest that in Western (colonial-capitalist) societies like the U.S., race and class are conjointly procreant. That is, racial and economic inequalities tend to reproduce and reinforce one another in tandem. These inequalities are especially evident in the division and segregation of space. As Fanon (1963, 5) writes, in this "compartmentalized world … the cause is effect: you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich."

Gender, too, is a major component of who is exploited, compromised, and targeted under U.S. settler colonialism (Mohanty 2003). Black feminist scholars analyzing racial capitalism insist upon the interlocking nature of multiple, plural oppressions. In her enduring work on intersectionality, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) critiques

the dominant framing of discrimination as a product of discrete functions that occur along single axes involving either race, class, or gender. Such understandings, she argues, frame racism and sexism as neither simultaneous nor interlocking, but as singular, unidimensional, independent, and divisible. By contrast, Crenshaw (1989) contends that concepts such as race, gender, and class are not mutually exclusive, but rather, operate together to form a complex and multidimensional system of oppression. In her own engagement with Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins (1991) terms this intersection the "matrix of domination." Nationality and citizenship (or lack thereof)—that is, the legal relationship that one has to a particular state, evidenced by the possession of a passport—while undoubtedly racialized categories, also constitute discrete and powerful forms of globalized social capital in the twenty-first century.

Broadly, what these critical analyses demonstrate is that racial subjects were (and continue to be) constructed, classified, and appraised in a plethora of ways across an expanse of differing geographies under capitalist worldviews that organize both economic and social relations, not to mention hierarchies. Moreover, such processes, which in (colonial) modernity as we know it have been guided by Eurocentric and white supremacist rationalizations, paradoxically, have also negatively racialized certain white/white-passing groups. This, of course, has occurred in particular places at particular times, as well as has always, simultaneously, been rooted in anti-Black/anti-Indigenous logic.[2]

Consider, for example, Irish, Italian, Polish, Greek, and other Eastern European immigrants entering the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as the country's record of anti-Semitism. Moreover, as was evidenced by the research I undertook, there also remains the not uncommon dynamic of people who are labeled "white trash," "rednecks," "trailer trash," etc. in the American Heartland and Deep South to be assigned with what gets dubbed "n-word work" or will be "worked like a Mexican," to list a couple racialized turns of phrase I grew up around and about which interviewees testified. Here, I am by no means arguing the experiences of racialized subordination, violence, and trauma that marginalized white communities were exposed to across history and societies are commensurate in

magnitude with that of what Black, Indigenous, and other negatively racialized communities disproportionately faced/continue to face. I am simply drawing attention to these examples to illustrate how processes of racialization can operate amongst homogenous groups of white people apropos laboring under capitalist relations.

Effectively, despite being white, there are instances in which white people will further exploit, subordinate, and place at higher risk other white folks by suspending reality and treating them as if they are a Black person, assumed migrant, or perceived "foreigner." That is, despite being white, some white people are discursively framed/racialized as non-white, on occasion, in order to justify and more swiftly facilitate their devaluation and exploitation. Or more readily, capitalism as we know and exist under it—is racial capitalism, as well as cannot be divorced from colonial worldviews. Notably, white people in these instances, even if branded with a derogatory epithet, are neither permanently trapped by their phenotype, level of melanin, and skin color in what is a social geography (the U.S.) produced and defined by white supremacy and anti-Blackness/ anti-Indigeneity. Historically, white settlers as a group, were not specifically targeted for dispossession, deracination, enslavement, and genocide in the U.S. Contrariwise, even though many were oppressed and exploited under capitalism, they were also rewarded for settling America, as well as participating in the capture, dehumanization, and death of negatively racialized (non-white) people. As Gargi Bhattacharyya (2018, x) explains, "racial capitalism helps us to understand how people become divided from each other in the name of economic survival or in the name of economic well-being."

My avowal here, then, is that racial capitalism as a colonizing force and opportunistic predator is as adaptable as it is resilient. Bhattacharyya (2018, x) goes on to poignantly drive home the point about its shapeshifting nature when she writes:

> Racial capitalism includes the sedimented histories of racialized dispossession that shape economic life in our time, but is never reducible to those histories. There are new and unpredictable modes of dispossession to be understood alongside the centuries-old carnage that moistens the earth beneath our feet.

Indeed, racial capitalism and colonialism are enmeshed and interlocking, but this is neither to say that colonization was/is exclusively driven by the sole desire to accumulate resources and establish markets (Pulido 2017), nor is it to suggest that the differential (de)valuation and launching of race (and gender, for that matter) only arose with the advance of capitalism. More readily, in the context of the U.S., the creation of race and subsequent production of racial subjects offered the imperialist imagination a convenient justification and serviceable pretext to dispossess and enslave, to plunder and exterminate. Acts many in the country grow up not being told about or are taught that only exist in the distant past and now reside only in the annals of history (Blaut 1993, Horne 2018). As anti-racist scholarship continually reminds us, though, settler colonial power continues to shatter communities and alienate individuals to this day (McKittrick 2011, Melamed 2015, Robinson 2000).

The role the state plays under globalized racial capitalism, particularly as its lieutenant and attack dog, is paramount. Michel Foucault (2003, 254) characterizes (state) racism as the "break between what must live and what must die." The state, along with its borders, thereby frequently (re)make and maintain the difference between life and death. Writing specifically about the border between Mexico and the U.S., Chicana-feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, 25) describes the border as an open wound, a place "where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds." Her haunting portrayal of the necropolitics of racial capitalism that operate amidst settler colonial borderlands draws attention to the violence inherent in the confrontation between two states that are operating in the service of racial capitalism. Violence that is all the more intensified when one state, the U.S., is obstinately determined never to loosen the tight grip it has on the privileges and entitlements it has generated via the spoils of a colonial and genocidal war. And violence that is further accelerated by conceited broadcastings to the world that it, the U.S., will forever defend the land it stole and the borders it imposed, not to mention its self-ascribed "greatness" and "exceptionalism"—no matter the human cost.

## The Twenty-First-Century Color-Line?

*The colonized world is a world divided in two. The dividing line,*
*the border, is represented by barracks and police stations.*
Frantz Fanon

Writing on the social condition of Black people within the U.S. and continued segregation, Black sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois (2009, 4) distinguishes between two worlds—a white world and a secondary world "within the Veil." Little more than a century later, Du Bois's "color-line" (2009, 11) is becoming increasingly evident in today's "gated globe" (Cunningham 2004). At first blush, the uninhibited movement of transnational capital and the ease with which some bodies now circumnavigate the globe have fueled perceptions of state borders as carrying little and less weight in a globalized world. However, as Sharma (2006) demonstrates (and every migrant knows), the nationalized border affects certain bodies differently.

For a privileged few, the border is an administrative annoyance. It is comprised of wait times, baggage restrictions, strict discipline, and palpable discomfort under the probing gaze of humorless, brusque customs agents. For Others, the border is intransigent, insurmountable, and inescapable. It is the dividing line between life and death, freedom and bondage, peace and war. The border fractures families—spouses from one another, parents from children, mothers from infants still at the breast. It criminalizes survival strategies carried out in desperation, hope, ingenuity, and courage. Perhaps, as Newman (2006) poignantly surmises, "the 21st century color-line is the border."

The border partitions and segregates not only space, but people(s) and races. It clings stubbornly like a shadow to one's body, justifying panoptic watch, carceral governance, and the revocation of supposedly inalienable rights/freedoms. In the words of Sharma (2006, 7):

> Contemporary border control practices, therefore, are products of and produce a global regime of apartheid in which at least two different legal systems operate within the space of any given national state—one that regulates national subjects and another that regulates foreign objects.

Expanding upon this argument, Anderson, Sharma, and Wright (2009) contend that the border does not merely function to regulate entry and exit—first and foremost, it governs contingent inclusion by dictating the relationship between individual bodies and the state, capitalizing on a system of global apartheid to ostensibly include the negatively racialized so long as the state and the capitalist can harness and monetize their labor.

Notably, borders are not so geographically fixed as many of us come to believe. Rather, the border is fluid, flexible, and active. It comprises "processes, practices, discourses, symbols, institutions or networks through which power works" (Johnson et al. 2011, 62). With this in mind, conceptions of the border as a singular, static line at the edge of the nation-state are no longer tenable (Johnson et al. 2011). More readily, as Mountz (2004, 342) writes, "The border is everywhere." The border exists to regulate assemblages and *flows*—its purview is not only the management of discrete bodies, but the governance of group mobility as people traverse from one space to another. To draw upon Foucault (2009), the border's task is the superintendence of a multiplicity of kinetic individuals, which is an exercise of power that not only relies upon consolidated state power, but also orchestrates "regimes of truths" via who is acceptable through discourses about the nation, citizenship, and threat.

Within the settler colonial context of the U.S., the primary entity impelling populations to internalize and propagate ideas and discourses about citizenship, patriotism, "aliens," etc., is the colonial-capitalist state, along with its attendant extremities (e.g. legal, education, prison, social welfare, immigration systems, etc.). The state, via the concentrated coercive authority and monopoly on violence (both veiled and overt) it wields, takes on the responsibility for training and interpellating the obedient subjects and "good soldiers" it wants. It uses borders to accomplish this, with the endgame being the production of law-abiding consumer-citizens, a shared sense of binding and blinkered unity amongst the populace (American nationalism), and a biddable civil society that remains beholden to its (Western) laws, logics, values, and worldviews. The means through which it does this are at once obscured and naked. For example, the state acutely flexes its power via border security

patrols and detention centers, but irrespective of form, the state is often effective at inculcating loyalty and allegiance. It is therefore helpful to look at the role of biopolitics in the state's development of citizen-subjects and nationalism.

In detailing the ways in which people are socially governed and, in turn, personally govern themselves, Foucault (2003) offers the concept of biopower—a dispersed mode of control emanating from an array of concealed authorities (e.g. social norms, values, expectations, institutions). Biopower is thereby an oft-indiscernible yet influential means of managing, monitoring, and compelling social bodies to act, think, and behave in particular ways. Foucault elaborates upon the ordering and administering of society, as well as the reification of citizenship via biopower, by observing that people are influenced by the presence of multiple and pervasive, yet invisible and judgmental, *normalizing* gazes (Foucault 1994). That is, the state gets us to think about what it means to be a good citizen and lets us know we will be reprimanded if we are not. This omni-panoptic scrutiny is context-dependent, inducing people to either submit and conform to, or contest and refuse, differing societal norms and cultural mores. Characterized as continual (self-)surveillance that is quotidian, scattered, and immaterial, biopower ostensibly comes from everywhere yet is identifiable seemingly nowhere (Foucault 1994). Ultimately, the function of biopower, in the hands of the state, is to discipline and domesticate.

Notably, contestations or defiance of society's codes of conduct and taken-for-granted anticipations carry punitive ramifications of varying degrees. Biopower is therefore an external yet diffuse force *and* internalized mechanism of persuasion that conditions people to iteratively self-examine. Subsequently, they can either auto-correct to remain complicit with what norms are being foisted upon them (e.g. behaving as law-abiding, upstanding, model citizens, potential citizens, respectable Others, etc.). Or, they can resist subjectification and act in disaccord with the normative labels they are pressured to engender (e.g. risk becoming labeled as delinquent, deviant, queer, criminal, a threat, etc.)—and be punished. In linking biopower to both race and the state while providing an account of what repercussions may follow, Foucault (2003, 256) elaborates:

> In a normalizing society, *race or racism is the precondition that makes killing acceptable*. When you have a *normalizing* society, you have a power which is, at least superficially, in the first instance, or in the first line a biopower, and racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to be killed, that allows *others* to be killed. Once the State functions in the biopower mode, *racism alone can justify the murderous function of the State*. [emphasis added]

Taking into consideration Foucault's dissection of the concealed and overt operational dynamics of biopower provides clarity on how race (or more precisely the practices, methods, and techniques of racialization) becomes the cornerstone of any given society's production of citizen-subjects, as well as their justifiable castigation and even murder if they do not fit the mold (e.g. within the U.S.: the genocide of Indigenous people, enslavement of Black people, criminalization of certain migrant groups).

Similarly, thinking through biopower reveals how the state filters humans into categories of oft-arbitrary difference via processes of racialization, thereby levying upon each individual the responsibility of thinking of themselves, acting, and "knowing their place" as a particular type of (racial) subject who exists in a society of differing (hierarchized) classes. Classes determined and mediated by racial ideology and capitalist relations. What results is a social reality in which the life chances of some groups are enabled, while Others are foreclosed. Thus, for scholars focusing on the entanglements and interplay of settler colonialism, race, borders, and migration, Foucault's analyses of biopower and state racism are markedly germane when examining the classification, stratification, and (de)valuation of differing people and populations across contrasting sites and situations.

Foucault's insights are especially salient when studying bordering mechanisms given how the discourses of the state and civil society writ large set boundaries around the way (good) citizenship, criminality, belonging, borders, and Others are thought and spoken of. For example, consider stereotypes and suggestive phrases about "those people" and the inferences and connotations attached to them because of where they are from, e.g. "ghettos," "projects," "the

hood," "the barrio," "reservations/reserves," "trailer park," the "Third World," "developing countries," "shithole countries." As Razack (2002) argues, politically loaded labels like these demonstrate how spaces are racialized, and race is spatialized. Or, as Losurdo (2014) posits under the ideology of liberalism, certain spaces become elevated as "sacred" (e.g. white, Christian, Europe, the U.S., metropoles) whilst others are construed as "profane" (i.e. where "barbarous Others" are from or reside). Moreover, if we consider these phenomena in relation to the development of modern/colonial social hierarchies, they become, as Fanon (1963) contends, a foregone conclusion. That is, certain people and places, via socio-spatial racialization, are *imagined to be* and *made* "wretched," i.e. condemned by the state, hence—are killable. This should signify to scholars that any use of Foucault for a critical analysis of the state, migration, and citizenship that does not include a committed foregrounding of race is not a critical analysis at all. More expressly, in bringing Foucault's views on biopower into conversation with explicatory dissections of the operation of race and colonial power, as well as when deliberating what the constellation of settler colonialism, borders, nationalism, and human movement produces, it is not difficult to argue that the problem of the twenty-first century, indeed, still remains the color-line, i.e. border.

## Border Imperialism

> *Look at all these borders, foaming at the mouth with*
> *bodies broken and desperate …*
> Warsan Shire

An understanding of what settler colonialism has and continues to produce in the contemporary U.S. must include mention of borders and empire. The analytical framework and expanded concept of border imperialism largely emerges out of the work of organizer, activist, and South Asian author Harsha Walia. Writing from a white settler colonial North American context, Walia (2013, 35) succinctly defines the border as "a regime of practices, institutions, and discourses" that are used in a variety of regulatory ways to confine, monitor, discipline, and punish—as well as preserve and expand empire. Borders, then, perpetually

being (re)defined, imposed, and militarized across geographies, are undoubtedly more than meets the eye and a line the ground.

Walia's (2013) advancing, application, and development of border imperialism as a concept calls attention to the ways that borders are operationalized, as well as interrogates the inextricable links they have to colonialism and intensifying neoliberal policies of exploitation and abandonment. To speak of borders, Walia posits, is to speak of colonization and capitalism, as well as their heteropatriarchal, race-oriented, Other-generating, and symbiotic forms, functions, and foundations. On this front, Walia (2013, 5) notes an "analysis of border imperialism interrogates the networks and modes of governance that determine how bodies will be included within the nation-state, and how territory will be controlled within and in conjunction with the dictates of global empire and transnational capitalism."

In addition, the notion of border imperialism challenges us to think beyond national boundaries as mere static delineations of lands and territories while urging us to view the state not exclusively as tangible infrastructure and elected politicians that we can see and touch. But rather, to understand the state as both a power-laden *condition* and *relationship*—a relationship that everyone is in, one way or another (unique to their context, identities, and status[es]), regardless of consent or dissent. Furthermore, the state is a relationship everyone experiences differently on account of the prejudicial, discriminatory, and pathologically unjust ways the state thinks and behaves. Border imperialism consequently pushes us to make the necessary connections that borders have with Western worldviews, racism, dispossession, displacement, patriarchy, and ultimately, empire.

Walia (2013), likewise, reasons that our current understanding of borders is partial unless it includes a comprehensive analysis of how they function, both materially and psychologically. She suggests our grasp of borders is incomplete if we do not consider what borders produce across varying geographies for differing groups of people. To clarify, Walia (2013, 5) adds, "border imperialism depicts the processes by which the violences and precarities of displacement and migration are *structurally* created as well as maintained" [emphasis added]. Walia's diagnosis thereby takes specific aim at being able to precisely understand and explain how borders

govern, restrain, and oppress people at the foundational levels of society. That is, to see people who are navigating and trying to survive settler colonial, heteropatriarchal norms, colonial-capitalist modernity, and the long shadows cast by rapacious empires—as located in systems and structures.

Linking border imperialism to settler colonialism and paying close solidaristic attention to the experiences and treatment of Indigenous people and negatively racialized people, Walia (2013, 6) bridges the personal with the political, as well as points to common struggles across geographies, when she shares:

> Discussing border imperialism also foregrounds an analysis of colonialism. Colonially drawn borders divide Indigenous families from each other. Just as the British Raj partitioned my parent's homeland, Indigenous communities across Turtle Island have been separated as a result of the colonially imposed Canadian and U.S. borders. Indigenous lands are increasingly becoming the battleground for settler states' escalating policies of border militarization.

Incisive analyses such as these lay bare any claims of benevolence, charity, and good intention that are offered by Western states like the U.S. with respect to how they manage and administer borders, migration, and exclusion. As a concept, border imperialism defies relegating matters of immigration to that of any single "color-blind" government, and instead links the politics of borders to global systems of asymmetrical power, systems which find their roots in "Othering," white supremacy, enslavement, genocide, and the proliferation of war. Expounding upon this and how banal yet demonstrable the infliction of trauma has become at border zones, Walia (2013, 5) states:

> Border controls are most severely deployed by those Western regimes that create mass displacement and ... against those whose very recourse to migration results from the ravages of capital and military occupations. Practices of arrest without charge, expulsion, indefinite detention, torture, and killings have become the *unexceptional* norm in militarized border zones. [emphasis added]

Relatedly, another key element to understanding border imperialism is that, like modernity, the nation-state, the Westphalian order, and capitalist social relations—borders are neither natural, nor apolitical. Rather, borders are artificial constructions unjustifiably inscribed upon land and bodies through the violence of colonialism. From this perspective, it is essential to recognize the authoritarian exercises of regulatory control that borders perpetuate by analyzing the ways in which borders are used to surveil populations and administer punishment.

Border imperialism as an analytical frame enables us to understand how borders (re)instantiate colonial hierarchies, accelerate racial capitalist exploitation, and are deployed as instruments of segregation that are wielded as weapons of empire. In this way, Walia's (2013) reckoning with borders also demonstrates they are apparatuses of state repression and nationalist aggression, as well as can be used to humiliate, abandon, and kill. Put another way, the border is both a material and discursive mechanism used to do the dirty work of trapping people into having to navigate and withstand—constantly and inescapably—colonial power. Walia (2013) reinforces the links that imperial (b)ordering has with the deracination, stigmatization, and stratification of differing people when she writes:

> [B]order imperialism illuminates how colonial anxieties about identity and inclusion within Western borders are linked to the racist justifications for imperialist missions beyond Western borders that generate cycles of mass displacement. (2013, 6)

> Practices of incarceration and expulsion, often shared across Western states, demarcate zones of exclusion and mark those deemed *undesirable*. [emphasis added] (2013, 31)

Borders are not only the premeditated cause of de facto segregation and hierarchies of humanity, but also of spikes in toxic stress, acute anxiety, and despair (Linton, Griffin, and Shapiro 2017). That is, because of the way settler colonial authority is exercised at U.S. borders, disproportionate amounts of physical, psychological, and emotional trauma are being experienced by people deemed "undesirable" by the state. This is especially true of children, the

repercussions of which can be lifelong and are exacerbated if one is ripped away from their family (Van der Kolk 2015). The scope of U.S. border violence is extensive. As a recent study on U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) conducted by Flores and Salazar (2017, 2) shows: "The United States has the world's largest immigration detention system, detaining up to 442,000 persons per year; many are children." In offering an unnerving glimpse of this sobering reality, Linton, Kennedy, Shapiro, and Griffin (2018, 125), conducting research in pediatrics and medicine, illustrate:

> Once in U.S. custody, all immigrants, including single adults, families with children, and unaccompanied children, are transported to Customs and Border Protection Processing Centers. Almost 70% of all immigrants are processed through the Rio Grande Valley Sector Processing Center, located in McAllen, Texas. Temperatures in this facility are chilly (universally referred to as "hieleras" [ice boxes]), and children are initially in the same space with adults who may include the person who brought them through Mexico. "Processing" is the first step in U.S. reception and takes place in chain-link, locked enclosures (called "perreras" [dog cages]), where children and their accompanying caregivers (parents, grandparents, older siblings, or other family) are subsequently separated into short-term holding cells by gender and age. This can leave toddlers separated from their caregivers, siblings separated from each other, or spouses separated from their partners.

Further confirmation that U.S. borders are not only instruments of settler colonial power and racial division, but abuse.

"Defense" of the border and the "safety of the nation" are also obsessive preoccupations of the U.S. state, which it is both dynamically and ruthlessly committed to. In describing this Walia (2013, 29) explains, "Border securitization operates not at a fixed site but rather through structures and technologies of power across geographies." Markedly, the border is ground zero for purging the Other, and its state-sanctioned enforcers have effectively been handed a blank check, a loaded gun, and impunity when it comes to capturing migrants, expelling the "undesirable," incarcerating

travelers, fracturing families, and confining children in cages. And no one is safe in a prison or cage. Just as no one is illegal or "alien."

The justification to establish and enforce/arm a border necessitates a perceived enemy "Other." Preferably one that is menacing, or at least constructed to be. Historically, for the U.S., this has been precedent.[3] Presently, however, the U.S. government cannot levy bigoted epithets and chauvinistic legislation upon target groups as recklessly as it once could. As an alternative, the racially-coded rhetoric and rule of law in the U.S. now deploys a jingoistic phobia-inciting vocabulary of "threat," "crime," "illegality," "protection," and "security," with the term "alien" being especially damning (Jiwani 2002). Walia (2013, 6) details the socio-psychological influence alien carries as a discursive tool and device when she notes:

> Migrants' precarious legal status and precarious stratification in the labor force are further inscribed by racializing discourses that cast migrants of color as eternal outsiders: *in* the nation-state but not *of* the nation-state.

That is, the state arbitrates who belongs and who must be cast out. For the U.S., this has been the case since its settler colonial inception. In such a world, the construction of racialized Others as the "virtual enemy" (Balibar 2010, 319) is highly convenient. As Walia (2014) shows, the discursive construction of undocumented workers as "aliens" suggests that the state is the victim of illegal encroachment when, in fact, the opposite is true. This is especially hypocritical in the U.S. given it only exists as a state because of its genocidal advance and insertion into Indigenous lands.

More often than not, it is negatively racialized communities and foreign Others who are subjected to the state's neocolonial violence vis-à-vis the mobilization of a rhetoric about national security and sovereignty. As Jiwani (2002) explains regarding the flow of nationalist narratives in white settler societies, immigrants have been construed as a triple threat to society—economically, socially, and culturally. Immigrants "steal jobs" from citizens, "they" commit crimes, and "they" pollute white settler culture by bringing their own traditions and refusing to assimilate. As observed during the

U.S. 2016 presidential elections, as well as subsequently, no mention need be made of race at all when slogans such as "barbaric cultural practices," "bad hombres," "stone cold criminals," "rapists," and "animals" can be used to point to and exclude an entire, supposedly homogenous, group of racialized immigrants.

These divisions between citizens and states under a racialized regime of global apartheid are mirrored at the local, daily level. Where a system of global apartheid is characterized by a largely binary distinction between citizens and non-citizens, at a local level, one's possession of citizenship papers determines access to social services, employment benefits and rights, privacy, mobility, and legal representation. Negative (mis)representations of the im/migrant as freeloader, terrorist, or deviant fuel the recycling of exclusion through the further amplification of border security. The enforcement of legal and physical exclusion at the border is neither objective nor impartial.

As detailed above, borders are violent socio-spatial phenomena. It is thus vital to draw attention to how they and the driving colonial-capitalist forces behind them are situated and relational, as well as generating affliction and anguish within places and psyches. The U.S. has historically and continues to deracinate Indigenous people from their traditional territories, while also being culpable for the uprooting of "the darker races of the world" (Du Bois 1920) across the Global South/Majority World via imperialist wars and neoliberal policies that continue to dispossess and contaminate lands while stripping people of livelihoods. Often resulting in their (attempted) moving/immigration elsewhere; displacements and migrations that are caused by external forces.

Subsequently, those who have been deracinated are not uncommonly met with racialized stigma, and barred, at borders. Or, they are only allowed in, temporarily or tenuously, to be exploited as "low-skilled" laborers. Accordingly, race is further engraved into bodies at the behest of racial hierarchy, capitalist production, class division, and imperial ambition—by colonial borders. Borders that dispossessed invented Others via their imposition, e.g. the forced and oft-lethal removal of Indigenous people to establish and maintain the U.S. reservation system. Moreover, on socio-psychological,

spiritual, and kinship levels, to be allowed inside or continue to live within the U.S.'s imposed colonial borders, permanently, the state as well as civil society mandates that Others must perform or become "white" (i.e. they let go of their "roots") in some way.

Ultimately, while global in scale and habit, the aftermaths and effects of settler colonial borders and imperial bordering processes are undeniably emplaced and ongoing. Borders, thus, are equally unique yet ubiquitous, corporeal and psychological, as well as internalized both individually and socially. Fortunately, as countless negatively racialized people, ethnic minorities, and communities of color from any imperially instigated displacement or diaspora have demonstrated—the demands for submission and surrender made by any given white supremacist settler state/society are not, by any means, a totalizing force. That is, one's "roots" can very well, indeed, be strongly held on to and thrive in conditions of movement, migration, or diaspora; and that whiteness need not be complied with or acquiesced to.

## Migration and (non)Belonging

> *A nation that cannot control its borders is not a nation.*
> Tweeted by Donald Trump (2015)

> *I think Europe needs to get a handle on migration because that is what lit the flame.*
> Hillary Clinton (2018)

We exist on a planet where people crossing an arbitrary line, illegitimate and brutally imposed, without state[4] permission are constructed and condemned as "illegal." Imperial logic, law, and hostility, bolstered because of a tacit social agreement and sustained via a complicit settler colonial citizenry, has normalized the belief that some people are, in fact, "criminal aliens" that must be stopped from "invading" and "breeding." It sounds like a frenzied and frenetic scene out of a dystopian apocalypse, but then again, some argue that is precisely what authoritarian populism (Hall 1985) is creating (Davis et al. 2019, Gilbert 2016, Vourvoulias 2018). Blaming

migrants, though, is especially baffling given evidence they commit less crime than citizens in the U.S. (Vaughn and Salas-Wright 2018, Zhang 2014, Dinovitzer, Hagan, and Levi 2009).

Not unlike the "state," which tends to permeate research uncontested, the category "migrant" is frequently taken as a given. Rarely is any concrete definition provided of who constitutes a migrant. Conventional differentiations drawn by scholars and policy makers between refugees, immigrants, and migrants contribute to the (re)production of distinctions that often overlook the role of the state in the creation of these subjects/subjectivities. As Sharma (2006, 102) points out, the term migrant, as both a "legal *and* social category," is in fact produced by the state and reified by its borders. Nuanced definitions note that transnational migrants are made distinct from immigrants by their temporary status—that is, once their "legal" work contracts are complete, migrants must return to their countries of origin or risk becoming undocumented (i.e. *illegalized*). In contrast, immigrants are distinguished in principal by their "permanent" and therefore somewhat less precarious legal status vis-à-vis their potential right to remain.[5]

While the "difference" that motivates the discursive construction of "migrant" in contrast to "immigrant" or "refugee" ought not be totally disregarded, such definitions problematically forefront both choice and mobility, casting im/migrants as individuals or groups who *choose* to *move*. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) characterizes a "migrant" as:

> all cases where the decision to migrate was taken freely by the individual concerned for reasons of "personal convenience" and without intervention of an external compelling factor; it therefore applie[s] to persons, and family members, moving to another country or region to better their material or social conditions and improve the prospect for themselves or their family.

Put differently, whereas asylum seekers, refugees, or trafficked persons have been *dis*placed, migrants supposedly attempt to *emplace* themselves. The reality is, more often than not, less clear cut. While the movement of many im/migrant communities may not occur in response to some disaster or manifestation of physical violence

deemed newsworthy enough to capture the attention of the West, many migrants are nonetheless displaced. Satzewich (1991) notes that any definition emphasizing individual choice or, as in this case, convenience, mischaracterizes many migrants' reasons for moving. Instead, Satzewich (1991, 37) asserts that, "the decision to migrate either temporarily or permanently takes place in a context where *structural* constraints limit the degree of choice individuals or groups possess in the matter." That is, the decision to uproot and move or separate from one's family for months to years is far more a product of socio-economic situation and structural circumstance than it is an individual choice made in a vacuum immune to external influences (Holmes 2013). Understanding these realities will prove useful towards grasping fully the migration dynamics of systemic force(s) versus personal choice.

The criminalization of migration in the U.S. thereby stands as an especially inexplicable and irreconcilable injustice given it relies upon a worldview that christens the state, and corporation, with personhood. A status that is purportedly infringed upon or trespassed against if an otherwise freely moving human, who is not baptized in the name of the state with citizenship or given its blessing of personhood, exists in the same space. And to be made "illegal," undocumented, non-status, irregular, "alien," and "animal" is to be dehumanized. Relegated to the domain of the subaltern, scapegoat, underclass, and sub-human.

Moreover, the devaluing of human life at the site of the U.S. border is a reality that disproportionately impacts poor people, women, and queer folx, especially if they are Black, Brown, or Indigenous (Shadel 2018, Walia 2015). Subjecting them to not only blunt force trauma and possible incarceration, but chronic waiting, constant worry, and prolonged exposure (Conlon 2011). Additionally, when considering how militarization, detainment, and racial othering characterize U.S. bordering schemes, the terms "terrorists," "toncs," and "threats" are suddenly thrown into the xenophobic mix to rile up the nationalist fervor. Largely, again, at the behest of private capital and the imperial state, as well as to fuel the flattering illusion of history and "destiny" that are held by proud citizens and settler-patriots.

White ethno-nationalist panic and fear-mongering in the U.S. about migrants thinly veiled as concern about economic imbalances, local workers losing jobs, and citizens not getting a fair shake is particularly confounding given that it is not migrant labor that is driving down wages. Rather, it is the decisions and practices of governments and employers, imbued with capitalist logics and armed with colonial borders, who do. Principally, by engineering relations of production to create super-exploitable reserve pools of labor, which are disproportionately composed of negatively racialized people. A scenario both the state and companies attempt to facilitate and would profit by whether it be migrants or citizens in said standby labor army. As countless studies on neoliberalism have shown, the business interests and enterprises of the state, private security industry, power elite, and (neo)plantation owner are not all that threatened by migration (Anderson 2010, Preibisch 2010, Mullings 2011). In fact, they prey on and capitalize off it, placing migrant workers in conditions, according to Walia (2013, 6), akin to those of "slavery and servitude." The realities of which, too, are exceedingly devastating for women (Cohen and Caxaj 2018, Pratt 2009).

Private owners of the means of production, along with their often bought-and-paid for state officials (Klumpp, Mialon, and Williams 2016), regularly pay lip service to social responsibility and peddle narratives about hiring U.S. citizens and domestic job creation. Yet capital is far more likely to desire fewer regulations, more transnational circulation, and *fewer* borders for itself. Capital desires being unrestrained and going global (e.g. outsourcing, offshoring, bodyshopping, transfer pricing). That is, globalizing capital allows employers to extract more surplus value from workers with less labor protections in countries elsewhere; or hire precarious transient workers at cheap prices provided "legally" via state policies and free trade (e.g. foreign worker programs) (Braedley and Luxton 2010, Cohen and Hjalmarson 2018, Strauss and McGrath 2017).

There, too, remains the option of exploiting *illegalized* workers given the porosity of borders and that migrants will often risk death crossing them out of desperation (Clibborn 2015). If

they subsequently make it to the U.S., as undocumented migrant workers they are compelled to participate in unsafe exploitative arrangements (often jobs citizens will not do) with employers who exercise more control and intimidation over them given their lack of papers (e.g. being threatened with deportation) (Flynn, Eggerth, and Jacobson Jr. 2015). Solidarity from U.S. citizens in these scenarios would thereby not only benefit (migrant) labor, but also afford more leverage to citizen-workers who are concerned about "foreigners" crossing borders given it would result in more bargaining power.

Similarly, there remains a great deal of misinformation about resource use and allocation regarding migrants and refugees who arrive in the U.S. Outcry here hinges upon the assertion there is not enough to go around for "foreigners" and that distributions to migrants take away from deserving citizens. In some cases, which are qualified and envisioned to occur under strictly monitored circumstances, the argument is that social spending is not even being allocated to those (invented and imagined) "model" minorities and migrants who are "coming here/doing things the right way" (read: legal and "white"). "Model migrants/minorities" are those portrayed as reverently biddable, deferentially submissive, and willfully acculturative (Rojas 2009). Despite all these claims, immigrants are not the parasitic burden on government coffers they are purported to be (Orrenius 2017). In fact, according to longitudinal studies, immigrants in the U.S. add to the country's bottom line more than they subtract from it, particularly when it comes to healthcare (Blau and Mackie 2017, Flavin et al. 2018). Migrants who come to the U.S. are paying taxes, working jobs, starting careers, building lives, creating businesses, and investing in the communities where they arrive. Meaning, migrants are not a "net drain" (Lowrey 2018). Likewise, as Nawyn (2019) aptly points out:

> given the wealth and economic power of the United States, claims that the nation does not have enough resources to help refugees is really a claim that refugees are *not worthy* of state resources, or that *under neoliberalism the resources of the state are no longer available to people based on economic need.* [emphasis added]

All of this evidence makes for more of a devastating critique and damning indictment of colonial power, racial capitalism, and nationalism, than it does of migrants and border transgressions.

An important caveat to offer in dispelling myths about migration in the U.S. with regard to financial statistics and economic data is that irrespective of whether a migrant is "contributing" or not, and regardless of whether they are a "plus or a minus" in the figurative ledger sheet, it is imperative to view displaced people neither as possible human capital, nor as potential economic liabilities—but as people. The world is not a plantation. Humans need not be financial assets, obsequious supplicants, good capitalist subjects, well-behaved citizens, or fashionable consumers to be entitled to basic human needs, rights, and freedom.

The key issue at hand apropos U.S. borders and geographies of deracination, then, is not figuring out "what to do with" humans seeking passage and sanctuary who want or need to move. It is asking better questions and coming to terms with that which deserves more care, attention, resources, rights, and protection: colonial borders, private capital, or people? Thus far, the answer and evidence offered by both state officials and entrepreneurs has been made quite clear. As Bhattacharyya (2018, 136) explains, "given the centrality of im-migration control to the performance of statehood, the securitized border represents one of the most highly profitable opportunities for private corporations this century." Despite this U.S. border opportunism, human rights violations spurred by the nexus of Western worldviews, racial hierarchies, neoliberal policies, state capitalism, and colonial bordering (i.e. imperial power) must become a matter of making the decision to ask, and honestly answer, the threefold question: "Who has been uprooted here, who should be able to stay, and who should have a say?"

Crucially, responses to this query must be mindful of both history and geography. Specifically, Indigenous histories and geographies. Undeniably, the spread of colonialism, driving forces of capital accumulation, escalation of imperial aggression, diffusion of Eurocentrism, metastasization of white supremacy, and machinations of modern statecraft in the U.S. all targeted, took advantage of, dispossessed, captured, coercively displaced, enslaved, and

attempted to eliminate Indigenous, Black, and other negatively racialized people. This swept over a wide array of differing contexts, as well as has covered a lengthy, ongoing, timeline. Debates and clashes surrounding "Who belongs?" (as well as queries about who has the right to legitimately pose this question) vis-à-vis the complex products of diaspora and migration, along with the U.S.'s historical-contemporary practices of deracination, require caution and carefully measured consideration, as well as, as some convincingly argue, a mandate of non-metaphorical decolonization (Tuck and Yang 2012) and migrant justice (Walia 2013).

To end, the reality is that both race and borders have been constructed and subsequently weaponized by the U.S. to reap power, wealth, land, and a baseless and bizarre sense of white supremacy off of the displacement and dehumanization, as well as exploitation and elimination, of negatively racialized Others—be they Indigenous, migrant, or melanated. And despite the torrent of news stories, radio reports, television soundbites, and social media echo chambers doggedly banging the proverbial drum about "dangerous caravans" and varying "crises," the U.S. is not so much experiencing catastrophes related to migrants and asylum seekers as it is borders. Colonial borders, at once a cause, symptom, and consequence of violent deracination, dispossession, and division, serve as a justification for and byproduct of imposed imperialist will and forced uprooting—carved into ground and onto bodies.

Although arbitrary, borders signal to us who ought to matter versus who ought not; who is from a "great" place versus who is from a "shithole"; and who is human versus who is "animal." Hallmarks of stolen land, racial contempt, consolidated settler authority, and concentrated sites of a colonial vision of the world made manifest, borders confine and claim, enclose and exclude, discipline and punish. Undeniably, the "problem" to solve and the "crisis" at hand is neither migrants and asylum seekers nor assertions of Indigenous land and Black life—it is empire.

# Chapter 3

# Masculinity, Place, Intersectionality

*The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.*
Henry David Thoreau

### Just the Way It Is 'Round Here …

Masculinity is a complex, contradictory, and arguably, absurd thing—as a concept, practice, and discourse. It shapes opinions, modifies behavior, alters attitudes, forges values, sells products, and influences voting patterns. It can at once endorse hostility and violence while concurrently promoting love and camaraderie. As a form of social currency, masculinity has been used to entreat people to partake in fighting, football, firearms, fucking, and the free market; as well as encourage them to be faithful friends, fathers, family members, and followers, to name a few. The prevailing tropes surrounding masculinity convince many that aggression and risk-taking are innate to male bodies and men, while at the same time, compelling those same male bodies and men to care, cultivate, and nurture. Notably, to further complicate things, men and male bodies do not have an exclusive hold on masculinity.

Masculinity is thus both an abstraction (albeit one that comes with material effects) and an aspiration, and in some instances, an obsession or addiction. An aspiration that is impossible to live up

to and achieve, an abstraction that is unable to be pinned down and succinctly defined in a sentence or two (without contention), and an obsession and addiction that is in need of treatment and, disputably, an end. For countless men, nevertheless, earning, maintaining, and asserting masculinity has become a lifelong endeavor; although not always a conscious one. Indeed, the prospect of relinquishing, losing, or having one's masculinity questioned can trigger terror, fear, reactivity, and resentment in many a man, although most will never readily admit it. That said, the one thing that is certain about masculinity is that you know it when you see it. Kind of. But not really. And well, not always. I offer these last sentiments a bit facetiously to underscore the point that masculinity is as ubiquitous (some argue unbearable) as it is fickle.

What is crucial to realize about masculinity, then, is that its implications are far-reaching and significantly influence how social relations play out across numerous cultural contexts and political institutions, as well as public, private, and interpersonal situations. When attempting to define and mindfully think through masculinity, one is left with more questions than answers. For instance, what specifically is it that is being discussed when the term is used? Who does it, or should it, belong to and/or be performed by? Is it a one size fits all thing, or does it come in multiple forms? Does it change over time and space, history, and geography? Who decides what it is? Is it natural and something someone is born with? Or something earned and attained? Is it a social construction, invention, cultural norm, or even ruse? Who determines who has it, versus who does not? Is masculinity intended to apply only to men and male bodies, along with the roles each of these play in society? Are specific types of genitalia, hormones, chromosomes, and/or behavior required? Are notions of manhood, manliness, male domination, misogyny, and chauvinism necessarily included when analyzing the term? What significance do personality, race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, nationality, religion, ethnicity, and even location have in the production of masculinity? What role does masculinity play on differing structural, institutional, cultural, and interpersonal levels of society? And lastly, who and/or what produces masculinity, and what and/or who is masculinity producing?

The answers to all these questions about masculinity, of course, are contingent, largely, upon where you are and who you talk to. Incidentally, the most common refrain I received from men (in an given county, town, field, restaurant, garage, bar, or kitchen that I visited in the Heartland) about what masculinity is, as well as why men behaved, thought, and did the things they did to be "men," was: "That's just the way it is 'round here." There you have it. Case closed and blown wide open all at the same time. Essentially, what participants were telling me about masculinity is that what it is depends upon the *place* you are in.

## Geography and Hegemonic Masculinity

R.W. Connell formulated and expanded a broad conceptual foundation for examining gender relations that has had extensive appeal in theorizing masculinities as far back as the early 1980s. Her research on "hegemonic masculinity" and multiple masculinities has since featured prominently across a wide array of academic disciplines. In doing so, Connell used Gramsci's (1971) theorizations surrounding class dynamics, social consent, and hegemony to examine how the power relations and social posturings that exist amongst men (as well as women and others) generate differing formations and cultural norms associated with masculinity, as well as the subsequent societal acceptance and acquiescence to them (Jessop 2005, Joll 1977). The significance of ferrying Gramscian notions of hegemony and the recognition of diverse and variegating masculinities into a gendered diagnosis of society highlighted how men constitute a heterogeneous, as well as gendered, class unto themselves—as well as how struggle, conflict, and negotiation apropos masculinity and ascendency characterize this class (Connell 1983, 1982).

Connell (1995, 76) moves beyond focusing on men as a distinct monolithic category by stating that, "Hegemonic masculinity is *not* a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same." Rather, it is the expression of masculinity that occupies the most socially sanctioned position in a given pattern of gender relations, in a given setting. This definition moves the focus away from the notion that

men form a homogeneous and static group, and concentrates on the premise that multiple masculinities exist, are malleable in form, influenced by context, and laden with power relations. Meaning, certain masculine practices and ideas are permitted and venerated, while others are marginalized and subordinated (Gorman-Murray and Hopkins 2016). Research also emphasizes the point that men are not capable of enacting hegemonic forms of masculinity all the time, rather, there are certain instances when they choose, or are subconsciously compelled, to engage in practices that are customarily seen as hegemonically masculine at opportune times. Doing so, in turn, affirms their status as a "man."

Connell's work goes on to suggest masculinities are mutable in-and-of themselves, as well as operate across varying levels of society and shift depending upon the space one is in, as well as what other actors are present, or even in mind. Connell indicated that certain configurations of gendered practice will eventually yet tenuously be culturally approved and socially legitimated as masculine, i.e. win consent and become hegemonic (Gorman-Murray 2013, Connell 2005). Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, while contested over the past two decades and even revised (Anderson 2009), foregrounded the nuanced power relations of gender (particularly related to manhood and social hierarchy). It also challenged long-held notions that there is a solitary and fixed archetypical version of "masculinity" or model of manhood that can be attained or arrived at. Connell's conceptualizations, hence, proved to be a catalyst for interrogations into how masculinity is protean, pluralistic, and place-based all at the same time (Gorman-Murray and Hopkins 2016, Hopkins and Noble 2009).

Acknowledging that the formation of gender is historically contextualized and spatially situated, many gender theorists intimate that it is useful to look to how masculinity is both emplaced yet operates across varying scales (e.g. the global, regional, and local) (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Sites of masculinity at the global scale can apply to the realm of transnational finance and business, supranational organizations (e.g. the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization), multi-national corporations, and international media outlets (Ashe 2007,

Connell 2005, Ni Laoire 2005, Van Hoven and Hörschelmann 2005, Yeoh and Willis 2005, Myers 2002). Researchers suggest economic globalization and (neo)colonial worldviews continue to give way to consolidations of power that grant legitimacy to contemporary imperial states and patriarchal capitalism, which operate in conjunction with and continue to (re)inscribe masculinist gender regimes (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005, Connell 2000). For example, the resurgence of authoritarian white ethno-nationalism in the U.S. along with the lauding of Donald Trump's business acumen and his persistent sexist comments about women. Colonial power was, and currently still remains, the driving force that established many of the ethnocentric and heteropatriarchal policies, statutes, and social orderings, as well as contemporary norms associated with masculinity, that have been dispersed across the globe.

Ideals that were transferred through the imperial (oft-religiously parochial) project include compulsory heterosexuality, the exaltation of racial capitalist exploitation and accumulation, the reification of public (male) and private (female) gender roles, the "Othering" of non-white people (as well as construction of whiteness), and the assimilation and attempted elimination of Indigenous gender orders that differed from those of colonizers (Davis 2007, Lugones 2007, Mills 1996, Blunt and Rose 1994). When colonial worldviews were diffused across the globe and merged with and/or warped contrasting regional and local social mores, the result pushed non-Westernized gender relations in Eurocentric, puritanical, and paternalistic directions. Research also highlights how neocolonial processes continue to influence local cultures in the current moment, but do not entirely eliminate existing gender relations. On the other hand, colonial social relations often alter, modify, and merge with local norms, which can give rise to hybrid or ephemeral masculinities (Ostrander 2008). One of the major points stressed by researchers, thus, is that across the globe, there are gendered social hierarchies, many spawned by Euro-American imperialism, that continue to privilege men over women, castigate and exclude transgender people, and extol domineering (hetero) masculinity (Connell 2005, Demetriou 2001).

Masculinity also operates at the regional scale. The markers of regional masculinities are most often seen through processes

that occur at the level of the nation-state, province, territory, state, and region (e.g. the American Heartland, Caribbean, Pacific Islands). Regional masculinities are often indicated and shaped by national media advertising, domestic economic policies, federal partisan politics, sport, and leisure (e.g. fandom and past-times) (Ashe 2007, Connell 2005). More specifically, regional masculinities may include exemplary symbols of masculinity that are represented by charismatic politicians, professional athletes, celebrities, socialites, televangelists, movie characters, musicians, and high-ranking military officials (Via 2010, Weis 2006, Connell 2005, Malszecki and Cavar 2004). In addition, place-based studies on masculinity are demonstrating that regional masculinities are also heavily influenced by the local.

That is, gender as a social construct, while not immune from global and regional influences, is often situated in the day-to-day and reproduced via everyday interactions and relationships. Masculinity at the local level takes place in an assortment of social spaces ranging from educational institutions (schools and universities), places of worship, community centers, businesses and workplaces, the home, and family gatherings; to transportation routes (riding in a taxi, on a bus, carpool, farm truck, or school bus), participation in the informal economy, online spaces, digital forums, athletics, recreation, and hobbies (Richardson 2015, Lusher and Robins 2009, Smith 2007, McDowell 2003, Messner 2000, Pascoe 2007, McGann 2002, Morgan 2001).

While masculinity is often analyzed or categorized into one of the three distinct levels (global, regional, local), many scholars are right to quickly contest these scalar demarcations given they are reductive and static (Van Hoven and Hörschelmann 2005). Here, the key assertion is that global, regional, and local masculinities (not to mention scales) should not be conceptualized as independent from one another because of the manner in which they all mutually influence one another are inseparable and inextricably linked. Meaning, the reciprocal relationship of gender (masculinity) and geography (place) cannot be surmised as something that operates only at one homogenized scale, given that the lines between the local, regional, and global are so blurred and interwoven. Figuring out where one ends and the

other begins, is really rather a pointless task. Nevertheless, pointing out the global, regional, and local influences on gender relations is helpful in dissecting where they come from and how they operate. Connell (2005, 850) sums up this dynamic, along with the importance of geography in the construction of masculinities, when she states:

> Adopting an analytical framework that distinguishes local, regional, and global masculinities (and the same point applies to femininities) allows us to recognize the importance of *place* without falling into a monadic world of totally independent cultures or discourses. [emphasis added]

By establishing the suggestion that geography and differing social spaces factor into the formation of masculinity, Connell gives credence to the position that a range of masculinities can be present in disparate yet oft-connected places; and that a variety of masculinities may be forged across contrasting contexts and cultural settings. These insights ultimately allow us to understand that masculinities are constantly being contested, altered, and renegotiated into multiple forms, as well as that they are power-laden products of the social relations and places within which they exist and operate.

## Gender and the Body

> *My fingers are long and beautiful, it has been well documented,*
> *as are various other parts of my body.*
> Donald Trump

Masculinity is partially produced, and reproduced, through the material performances and actions of the body. I follow a line of thought proposing that any efforts made in conceptualizing masculinities needs to take note of the "expectations, norms, and assumptions that surround the body," and that the body is not naturally given, but socially constructed, reflecting society's values and power relations (Little 2006, 183). From this perspective, I suggest that material actions are spatialized and that space is a functional mechanism in the navigation of embodied practices and gendered

performances (Hopkins and Noble 2009, Gorman-Murray 2008, Longhurst 2000). With this in mind, it is also essential to point out that the body is relational, meaning it is inscribed with culturally produced meanings and values, which partially fashion identity/ies, and position individuals as subjects.

In taking this stance regarding the role the body plays in the production of masculinity, I want to be clear that the body should neither be thought of as one side of a dualistic mind–body coin, nor should it be considered to be a passive receptacle that becomes inertly marked by social norms. It is vital to realize that the body is not merely a blank canvas that cultural values are written upon, but rather, is active and involved in a process of "always becoming" via an individual's agency, as well as the connections our notions of bodies have with social conventions, cultural assumptions, and structural circumstances. It is equally important to steer away from biologically deterministic and essentialist perspectives that argue the body is imbued with innate and natural characteristics that cause particular behaviors and actions, e.g. eschewing old adages like "Men fight because it's in our D.N.A." I find these critical perspectives, as offered by numerous social theorists, useful towards understanding how bodies, and their relationships with gendered social constructs, are key elements in the reproduction and performance of differing masculinities and femininities (Nunn 2013, Rose 2011, Lawler 2008, Hopkins and Pain 2007, Grosz 1994, Butler 1990, Foucault 1977).

It is also crucial to understand how power influences embodiment and masculinity. That is, the body is a space where the expectations of social norms (obscure forms of power in-and-of themselves) are partly made manifest through concrete actions. Contrariwise, the body is also a medium through which the contestation and challenging of such expectations (at once resisting and exercising power) can also occur. This is where bodily categorizations come into play, particularly those based upon a fictive and reductive female–male binary. That is, orthodox labels imposed upon gender and sex, and the presumptions that come with them, are restrictive and dangerous. What all this goes to say is, quite simply, that bodies matter. And more accurately, bodies matter

not because they are the inherent origin or genesis of masculinity and femininity, rather, they matter because they are the sites where masculinity and femininity are signified, implied, and assumed to be (Abrahamsson and Simpson 2011, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, Butler 2004, Longhurst 2001).

This outlook similarly echoes Butler's conceptualization of performativity (1990). Butler infers bodies are not merely the objects that are covered by gender, rather gender is "a continuing performance between bodies and discourses" (Brook 1999, 14). As such, the body, and its association with gender, is a site of iterative social construction and individual agency that is discursively and materially produced by the complex interlocking relationships of social identification (e.g. race, class, age, nationality, religion, sexuality, ability, etc.) and, as is argued more recently primarily by geographers, place. Using the concept of performativity as an analytical lens allows us to recognize that biological sex is indeed tied up in the discursive production of gender, and as such, both sex and gender simultaneously govern the body, as well as interpretations of what it is, and what it should do (Butler 1993). One aspect of these relational dynamics that radical geographers are positioned particularly well to explore is the mutual constitution of place and gender, as well as how both of these are performed and embodied. This is due to recognition of how places influence how bodies are used and regulated, while those places are simultaneously shaped and defined by the presence of the bodies within them (Simonsen 2013, Longhurst 2001, Gregson and Rose 2000).

The interlocking composition of place and the body is particularly salient in specific regard to exploring the convergence of rural geographies and social gender relations. In making the argument that places are shaped by embodiment, and that embodiment is shaped by place, scholars have turned to rural contexts as a source of rich information where bodily practices and gendered discourses can be seen to produce cultural values and social norms (Hopkins and Noble 2009, Little 2007, Campbell, Bell, and Finney 2006). For many white settler societies, images of the rural maintain a distinct place in the cultural milieu. The rural signifies a setting of bucolic, agrarian serenity and is often perceived to be

a site of natural purity, calm family life, idyllic safe communities, as well as a place where, what one participant I spoke with noted, "good, hard-working, salt-of-the-earth folks make honest livings." While perhaps accurate from a certain settler colonial vantage point, we must forever be suspicious of universal "truths" like this.

## Embodiment, Dis/Ability, and Representation

When it comes to questions of embodying masculinity, Judith Butler's (1990) concept of performativity is useful towards analyzing how the body is used to express masculinity and earn masculine legitimacy (Pascoe 2007, Smith 2007, Connell 2005, Longhurst 1995). Butler's concept posits that gender is a "performed social identity, rather than a state of being" (Van Hoven and Hörschelmann 2005, 186). This approach recognizes that bodies (often men's, but not always) are the medium through which masculinity is channeled, articulated, and represented. It is with the body that people engage in behaviors and actions that can be characterized as masculine. Thus, in order to assert authority within patriarchal societies, men must continue to perform acts of manhood given the status of being masculine is fleeting and temporary (Pascoe 2007, Peralta 2007, McGann 2002).

By engaging in things such as manual labor, assertions of (hetero)sexual prowess, competitive athletics, risk-taking activities, emotional repression, taking charge of a business meeting, being a committed father, refusing medical attention, and delivering a punch that lands, to name a few, men are able to claim credibility within a gender hierarchy that privileges what has come to be viewed as normative masculine behavior (Anderson 2009, Connell 2000, Messerschmidt 2000, Collinson and Hearn 1996). Notably, not all explicit corporeal acts, practices, and performances of manhood are necessarily destructive or repressive per se (e.g. being a "good dad/husband"), but they all signify and reproduce masculinity.

In using Butler's concept of performativity to analyze gender it should also be noted that the construct of masculinity is contradictory in nature (Anderson 2009, Connell 2005, Butler 1993). The continual reiteration of gendered practices boxes those individuals who are striving to be masculine into a corner where they can never

fully attain it permanently or in totality (Connell 1995). Masculinity, as a cultural norm, is not something that is arrived it, so much as it is something that is chased and has to be reasserted. That is, performing masculinity, in many ways, is a continual, protracted, and perpetual quest to prove that one is a "man." It never ends yet shifts over one's life course. This pursuit of manhood directly involves the body, as it is the conduit through which such practices are brought into being.

While the assertion of "being a man" typically implies one possesses a male body, it should be recognized that masculinity can be attached to a wide variety of bodies and social groups outside the boundaries of conventional binaries. The term masculinity induces images of manhood, yet the meaning fluctuates significantly amongst men and may also be attributed to women and transgender people (Connell 2005, Halberstam 2002). Critically examining masculinity via Butler's work thereby enables theorists to unsettle reductive binaries and challenge assumed norms regarding gender orders, particularly those that arose out of Western, puritanical, and colonial worldviews. Moreover, it sheds light on multiple forms of emerging masculinities that are being formed and altered, consequently allowing us to more fully recognize the significant impact that body reflexive practices have on asymmetrical power relations and the development and mutability of situated cultural norms (Shilling 2003).

In analyzing gender in the U.S., drawing upon Gramsci's theory of hegemony is helpful in gaining a sense of how masculinity is linked to authority, consent, and social control. Given the state-sanctioned and institutionalized emphasis placed on patriotism, American pride, rule of law, God, and colonial nostalgia, it becomes apparent that inculcating a sense of affinity and duty of obligation towards the U.S. settler-state, as well as its free-market economy and imperialist version of history, creates conditions in which people feel compelled to fall in lockstep with the desires of the state. To be good Christian-citizen-consumers and nationalists. The effect for many Americans is that both individuals and entire social groups consent to regulatory policies and cultural edicts that are rooted in white supremacist logics and hierarchical governance.

Notably, many groups resist, providing sound evidence that the U.S. state is at once winning hegemony on one front (when it

successfully creates "patriots," nationalists, and convinces people that America was once great and should be made great again), yet is also engaged in explicit acts of domination and supremacy on another (when it exercises authority over political dissidents and communities who oppose state authority). Consequently, living up to notions of being loyal to the nation (state), of being a man, and of being a patriot all have become powerful constructs that render *some* people and groups docile or complicit in serving and upholding a colonially established and structurally white supremacist status quo.

Several anti-racist, feminist, and postcolonial scholars note that identity, social difference, and processes of "othering" predominantly operate along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, citizenship, religion, age, and nationality (Pease 2010, Razack 2002, Tuhiwai Smith 1999, Mohanty 1984). Their point is that the power and politics of identity, alterity, and social categories matter and have material consequences. In stating this, numerous argue that any analysis of identity politics must be intersectional/interlocking (take into account how differing axes of identification influence and mediate one another), avoid falling into reductive optics and cherry-picking, and pertinently, place an emphasis on material effects and tangible impacts. I note here that emotional well-being, psychological distress, and mental health are, undoubtedly, materially tangible.

For settler societies like the U.S., rural identity, too, plays a significant role. The representation of what is thought to be pioneering and patriotic, characteristics of "discovery" and "Founding Fathers" tropes, are judged masculine (Little 2003, 2002). That is, penetrating and asserting power and control over nature and the frontier, as well as Others, were framed as masculine acts, i.e. what men did/do. Since the genesis of the U.S., breaking ground on a homestead, a nation, an Empire, and a new (slave) economy was the work of men. It is the ability to demonstrate physicality, then, that lends particular importance to framing rural spaces and activities as masculine. From the onset of European settlement in the U.S. up to this day, depictions of rural manhood have commonly included images of homesteaders, missionaries, rough-and-tumble cowboys, weathered outdoorsmen, hardened workers, dutiful soldiers returning home, and enterprising

explorers in bucolic landscapes that are vast, untamed, and distanced from the hectic lifestyles of the frenzied cosmopolitan metropolis. The vast majority of the men, and agency, in these rural scenes have been white.

Research shows that what is typically understood as hegemonic with respect to rural American masculinity can incorporate a host of actions, inclusive of but not limited to working land, hunting, fishing, heterosexual intercourse, drinking alcohol, eating meat, riding horses, shooting guns, succeeding in athletics, working on farm equipment, handling power tools, starting a fire, being a father, and even swinging an axe (Campbell, Bell, and Finney 2006). Individual displays of physical strength, stamina, endurance, and technical expertise are consequently linked to how the male body is used in differing social spaces (Lobao 2006, Cloke 2004, McGann 2002, Law 1997). In other words, for much of the rural U.S., as many interviewees I spoke to asserted, "real men know how to work" and "can get shit done." The connotations associated with just who men work for (e.g. themselves, corporations, the state, other men, women), why they work hard (e.g. capitalist production versus social reproduction), and what their work produces (e.g. care and well-being versus commodities and industrial outputs) were often both gendered and linked to capitalist values.

The relationship between bodily practice and rural space also was linked to and reified landscapes with gendered characteristics. That is, men, particularly in Western settler states, often earn masculine status by exercising control over land and extracting from nature. Consequently, the association masculinity has with dominance, penetration, and authority over the frontier, outdoors, and landscape, conversely, has meant that femininity (attributed to women) is constructed as private, submissive, irrational, weak, and unpredictable (Little 2002). Furthermore, the positioning of male bodies "against the elements" in activities such as homesteading, farming, ranching, extraction, mining, competing, and hunting means dominance in and over the rural becomes masculine by proxy. Consequently, if men do not participate or fail in such endeavors, they are deprived of or lose "man points" and are relegated to a position of lower societal status. A drop on the rung of

masculine hierarchy. It is this surveillance and scrutinizing that gives masculinity and the assertion of dominance (i.e. conquering) a great deal of sway in how rural space has been perceived and thought of in the U.S. Hence, if men do not surmount/conquer the obstacles (and Others) they face in life, they are often framed as weak, soft, feminine, or gay and may become temporarily, or permanently, exiled from the ranks of masculinity, and by extension, social acceptance.

Building upon critical discussions of normality, embodiment, and (dis)ability, Robert McRuer (2010) introduces the concept of "compulsory able-bodiedness." This concept is an often-obscured arrangement of cultural ideals and social environments that mandate people be able-bodied, or face ostracization (Puar 2013). That is, McRuer's (2006) theorizations suggest being able-bodied is routinized across society, in the same way that heterosexuality is assumed to be natural regarding sexuality. McRuer and other critical disability theorists point out that able-bodiedness, like masculinity, is an illusory, ephemeral, and elusive construct, yet a tacit obligation given many of our built environments. Having an able body, then, is used as a litmus test to measure normality (Snyder, Brueggemann, and Garland-Thomson 2002). As such, being able-bodied is a powerful influence operating across a host of differing spaces when it comes to masculinity.

For men living in the Heartland, a significant and regularly overlooked aspect of masculinity is, indeed, able-bodiedness, as well able-mindedness. Participants who I spoke to noted using their bodies for a wide variety of activities. The vast majority also said, in one way or another, how one uses, holds, and carries their body, shapes their beliefs regarding how much of a "man" a person is. Whether it is participating in sports, hunting, fishing, lifting weights, doing construction work, taking care of chores on a farm, performing religious rituals, drinking beer, running mechanical equipment, working on cars, fighting with other men, playing with their children, performing physical labor, having sex, not crossing their legs like a woman, and not carrying themselves in a "limp wrist" (effeminate) way— men gauge masculinity by what they do with their bodies, especially the phallus (Leyshon 2005, Saugeres 2002). Moreover, it is not uncommon for men, as many of my interviews also confirmed, to be

proud of their scars, compare injuries, and romanticize the notion that when it comes to women, land, and interactions with other men, that they use their bodies for conquering, controlling, and comparing (Saugeres 2002).

When ideals related to conquest, dominance, and alpha-male invincibility surrounding the body are venerated across society, it results in serious implications for individuals who do not have the ability to use their bodies in the same, taken-for-granted, ways. That is, disabled men, on a host of fronts, remained marginalized, pitied, pathologized, and subordinated as a result of normative masculinity. Furthermore, men with physical and/or mental health problems (depression, anxiety, personality disorders, anger management issues, substance misuse, poor health, etc.) face alienation given the emphasis prevailing notions of masculinity place upon emotional repression and *not* being sensitive, vulnerable, insecure, or in dire need of help/treatment. The consequences here are equally widespread and devastating, both socially and individually, especially for men themselves (e.g. opioid addiction and suicide rates amongst white men in the U.S.). Arguably, the belief in and capitulation to masculinity, as well as capitalism, has and is ever-increasingly letting the vast majority of white settler men down.

## Race, Whiteness, and "Othering"

Race is a multifaceted social construction that has substantial material and psychological effects for the whole of humanity, in particular negatively racialized groups. The underlying motive driving invented notions of race was to divide and dominate populations, as well as argue that an individual or population's capabilities and aptitudes correlates to skin color, ethnic practice, or spiritual belief (Goldberg 2009). Racial classifications were at one time thought and reported, erroneously and in bad faith by bigoted colonial "experts," to be verifiable as natural differences and objective facts. Racism, in its most basic form, is the thought that personal and group characteristics are determined by ethnicity or skin color, that one race is inherently superior to others, and that humans, effectively, are

and should be sorted into differing species (Schaefer 2008). A key component of racializing a group is essentialism (Spivak 2013, hooks 2000, Said 1978). Essentialism is the process of attributing the same characteristics to an entire population based upon biased observations and behaviors of a token or select few. One egregious historical example that has since been disproved is scientific racism. The supremacist notion that intelligence could be linked to the color of a person's skin (West 2002, Collins 1991). Research has since challenged and disproved these antiquated perspectives on race, as well as the concept of race as a whole. Studies also point out that there was and is neither biological evidence, nor logical reason to categorize and separate people based upon melanin level and ethnic background.

Social theorists note that the racial classifications we know today, as well as their requisite hierarchies, were primarily created by European colonizers as an attempt to maintain power, control, and dominance over, as well as a rationalization to exploit, extract, and accumulate from, Others (McClintock 2013, Bond and Gilliam 1994). That is, racists created race. In doing so, they made rigid racial categories seem normal and natural. Critical perspectives emphasize that divisions based on race have no underlying biological cause-and-effect relationships when it comes to personality, demeanor, or behavior (Kobayashi and Peake 2000). Despite the fact that no scientific evidence exists for race-based taxonomies, it remains a powerful and over-determining force. Meaning, race carries significant weight in the formation of hegemonic and subordinate groups, as well as the wielding of political clout and accumulation of wealth. This is particularly germane to the white settler social geography that constitutes the U.S., where racial hierarchies have been operating since settlers started trying to eradicate and dispossess Indigenous people and enslave Black and Brown Others (Elkins and Pedersen 2005). In the context of the U.S., as hooks (1992, 174) contends, white supremacy is at the foundation of (anti-Black/anti-Indigenous) racism and "we have to constantly critique imperialist white supremacist patriarchal culture because it is normalized … and rendered unproblematic."

The implications of such processes were that exclusionary laws and social norms were manufactured in order to justify the

suppression of particular groups. Remnants of the naturalization and invisibility of racism can still be seen today as the historical trajectories of colonialism serve as the structural foundation of the institutions that settler societies like the U.S. are built upon (Tuck and Yang 2012, Mullaly 2010, Mohanty 2003, hooks 2000). Such dynamics continue to have a significant foreclosing effect on the life chances of negatively racialized people today, as well as a privileging upshot for white people (Wiegman 1999). Notably, whiteness was/is socially constructed too. It is a quite dynamic and flexible designation, which affords a great deal of privilege, that was invented in the U.S. as a means towards building empire and enrolling certain groups into this process, i.e. along the way, some groups were allowed to become white (e.g. consider how Irish and Italian migrants were negatively racialized at points in U.S. history, yet are now deemed white) as a means of pitting them against others (e.g. Black, Brown, Indigenous bodies) who were not.

While white privilege was shored up by the U.S.'s white supremacist foundations, there remain gradations and degrees of white privilege amongst white people (i.e. some white folks are indeed struggling and oppressed) (Hartigan 2003). Nevertheless, on the whole, white people have not been targeted by hostile settler colonial forces and U.S. empire solely and exclusively because of their skin color. That is, white skin and whiteness is not an over-determining factor for the experience of structural violence, institutional repression, and cultural exclusion, whereas Black, Brown, and Indigenous skin, as well as being negatively racialized, is. It goes without saying that the resultant systemic and social marginalization from racism permeates all spheres of life, ranging from employment, education, income, housing, and welfare; to disparaging stereotypes that suppress and harm members of minority racialized groups (Mullaly 2010, hooks 2000, Roediger 1999, Davis 1981).

It is important to note, also, that negatively racialized people do not comprise a universally homogenous group (just as white people do not). There is a great degree of heterogeneity among people who are subjected to racial classification. Meaning, things like gender, class, sexuality, ability, religion, nationality, geography, etc. all arbitrate and influence life chances and opportunities. In turn, due to

the widespread diversity of subject positions amongst people who are negatively racialized, a complex matrix of experiences is created that does not make all instances of racial oppression take the same form (hooks 2000, McClintock, Mufti, and Shohat 1997, Collins 1991). To put it another way, negatively racialized people may experience racism differently as a result of the cultural contexts and social circumstances they find themselves in and/or face, which will be mediated (possibly aggravated or perhaps attenuated) by other aspects of their identities and social locations (Jiwani 2006, Razack 2002, hooks 2000).

Racism is not solely found in individual/personal experiences but permeates social structures and systems and functions at cultural and institutional levels (Pease 2010, Mullaly 2010). At the personal level are personal xenophobic and bigoted beliefs, thoughts, and actions that individuals might have, engage in, or hurl at others. At the cultural level, racism takes the shape of repressive and/or exclusionary norms, ideals, images, stereotypes, rhetoric, and representations that target particular groups. And at the institutional level, racism is evident in government administrations, state laws, hiring and wages in the private business sector, the judicial system, environmental policies, and restrictions on immigration, as well as in the areas of access to social services, employment, and health care (Pease 2010, Kobayashi and Peake 2000). Moreover, racism affects the human psyche. Historically, in the U.S., negatively racialized groups have been and continue to be inferiorized yet are often perceived as more tolerable/suitable if they surrender to Western/white settler values and cultural politics of respectability. Anti-Black/anti-Indigenous racism thereby attacks mental health via its capacity to strip away a person's sense of self-worth and right to exist as they are (Fanon 1963, 1967).

Wineman (1984) describes the debilitating psychological effects of racism aptly when he states, "when you are taught from birth that you are inherently inferior, you are taught in the same breath that you are inherently powerless." Meaning, the more whiteness is imposed and subsequently mimicked (e.g. patterns of speech, holiday celebrations, dress and attire, family lifestyles), the more acceptable a negatively racialized person or group can

become. As a result, racialized communities and individuals are often placed in situations in which, if desiring a less harassed and antagonized existence, they have to acquiesce to white settler notions of normality. This is due to the fact that the systemic and cultural barriers produced by white supremacy restrict the ability of negatively racialized people to live on their own terms (Phoenix 2004, West 2002). Correspondingly, negatively racialized minorities are expected to conform to the cultural expectations of whiteness, or be cast to the margins (hooks 1992, West 2002).

Whiteness and religion have historically been two of the most powerful influences factoring into the development of the U.S. empire, as well as the socio-cultural values present within the rural U.S. In many white settler societies, of which the U.S. is par excellence, not to mention postcolonial nation-states, Christianity, not uncommonly conservative or evangelical, informs the perspectives of many individuals regarding how they should act, what political policies they should support, and what codes of conduct are acceptable (Kwok 2009, Hopkins 2007, Albanese 1999). The implications of conventional religious beliefs can be seen in the obedience that is offered to colonially established institutions across large sections of white settler societies. Oftentimes, oppressive and exclusionary beliefs go unquestioned simply because they are distributed by privileged settlers in positions of authority or at the pulpit (Pease 2010, Razack 1998, hooks 2000). That these authority figures are generally white and male is neither an accident nor inconsequential. Compliance to myopic and reductive dogma here can be seen in the ways being gay or queer is pathologized by fundamentalist streams of Christianity, as well as the ways that women are expected to assent to a social system based upon patriarchal governance (Anderson 2009, Hearn 2004, Bell 2000).

The ubiquity of whiteness and Christianity also factors into the construction of masculinity. Within the U.S., the vast majority of missionaries, ministers, merchant "adventurers," "pioneers," "Founding Fathers," cowboy heroes of the past, and even military leaders have been and continue to be white men (Kimmel and Ferber 2003, 2000, McIntosh 1990). This is both instructive and should be cause for reflection. Recently, there has been a revival in

the confidence of xenophobic ethno-nationalists (i.e. the alt-right) making claims that the U.S. is a White Nation, the founding principles (which enshrined rights for white property-owning men and withheld them from negatively racialized groups, women, and "foreigners") of the country should be aggressively protected, and chanting Nazi "blood and soil" hate anthems. Stark evidence of the U.S.'s foundation of white supremacy/nationalism can be seen in the audacity of isolated militias and factions of white settler fascists who, since the election of Donald Trump, are more ardently resisting gun control, deploying hate speech to intimidate, opposing legislation that allows immigration, and even committing homicide.

Clearly, whiteness in the U.S. is a major influence on the lives of people, even if dismissed and refuted by white deniers who refuse to engage in institutional and structural analyses. It is not incorrect to state that, within the U.S., job opportunities, access to healthcare, recreational choices, purchasing patterns, political elections, the ability to exercise self-determination, and even how people engage in everyday social relationships and share and learn their value systems continue to be marked by systemic white supremacy.

## Sexuality and Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is a social system that naturalizes heterosexuality and suggests it is the only acceptable way of being (Griffen 2007, Warner 1991). Heteronormative views are those that presuppose heterosexuality and deem sexual preferences outside of heterosexuality as anomalous, unusual, dysfunctional, or even criminal. Heteronormativity is promulgated across society through a number of mediums. Television, movies, music, literature, advertising, the entertainment industry, holiday celebrations, the education system, religious institutions, the business sector, everyday language, and other daily interactions all ubiquitously promote relationships that feature heterosexual men with heterosexual women (Guantlett 2008, Gill 2007). As heterosexual relationships are subtly worked into the everyday lives of civil society so frequently, relationships

that fall outside of this paradigm are rendered hidden or obscured. In turn, heterosexuality is established as a conventional standard and implicit norm.

One powerful result of heteronormativity is the prejudice, marginalization, and discrimination that people who are non-heterosexual in general face, referred to as heterosexism. This targets people who demonstrate behavior that subverts the taken-for-granted notion that people are supposed to be heterosexual (Campbell, Bell, and Finney 2006, Butler 1990). Another dynamic operating within heteronormative social environs is homophobia. Homophobia is slightly different than heteronormativity and heterosexism, in that it is the unfounded hate, fear, and/or contempt of homosexuality. The same dynamics are applicable to transgender people and transphobia. While the concepts are all slightly different, there is considerable overlap amongst all as they are evident in both the structural oppression and individual prejudices, not to mention violence, that people who are non-normative become subjected to.

On individual levels, homophobic reactions to people who are gay manifest themselves in a wide array of oppressive acts. Such vitriol towards homosexuality can take the form of hate speech, physical attacks, bullying, passive-aggressive exclusion, harassment, the damaging and defacement of personal possessions, character defamation, and intimidation tactics. These oppressive backlashes are predominantly rooted in the fact that homosexuality is often viewed as unnatural and deviant within heteronormative cultures (Griffen 2007). Instances of homophobia that have permeated institutional levels of society within the U.S. can be evidenced in the fact that homosexuality was classified as a psychiatric disorder by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* until 1973. The U.S. military also maintained a "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy (banning people who were gay, lesbian, and bisexual from military service, as well as restricting closeted individuals who were serving from openly discussing their sexuality) until 2011. It was also illegal in many states for consenting adults to engage in "homosexual activities" until 2003 (U.S. Sodomy Laws), and all 50 states in the U.S. did not allow or license same-sex marriages until 2015.

Religious fundamentalism, too, judges queer sexualities to be abominations. Often deeming them immoral and sinful in the eyes of God. These condemnations have a particularly commanding influence for people who are followers of conservative currents of the Christian faith (prevalent in the Heartland) as many of their social values, political opinions, and cultural attitudes support the messages they receive from their religious leaders. The most influential people in some Christian churches support the belief that the only relationship that is natural is one based upon the union between man and woman (Bell 2000). From some fundamentalist standpoints, the sole reason for engaging in sexual intercourse is for procreation. Any other reason for having sex is seen as a personal failing, and taught to be a source of guilt, remorse, and shame. Authority figures at the helm of inflexible religious denominations have thus labeled people who have sex outside of heterosexual marriage as socially destructive and corrosive to "traditional family values."

Beliefs of this nature pathologize sexuality and denigrate people who are queer/not heterosexual. Moreover, they become widely accepted truths for large tracts of people who uncritically listen to the governing voices of fundamentalist dogmatism. As a result, queer people are resented for their rejection of the divine doctrine of God, or they are pitied due to the fact that they were born with (or as some believe, have chosen) a condition that needs to be cured. As opinions that promote fear and intolerance regarding queer sexualities become instilled in a congregation, so continues the perpetuation of oppressive ideals in the cultural norms and institutional structures of a society for generations to come. As justification, homophobic members of society rationalize the subordination that people who are queer experience as necessary and inevitable (i.e. "God's punishment").

Notably, not all members of the Christian faith adhere to such authoritarian and fanatical interpretations. Some groups who identify as followers of Christ are, indeed, progressive, understanding, and encouraging of people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and transgender. And in the interest of avoiding reducing all Christians into intolerant and bigoted caricatures,

it is important acknowledge that Christianity, too, exists along a continuum of inclusion, acceptance, and interpretation. The key point here is that the dominant principles backed by an overwhelming number of Christian church leaders in the rural U.S. are based upon the principle that being gay, queer, and/or trans is wrong, with those members of the Christian faith who dissent from such perspectives constituting the minority.

In analyzing the Heartland, prevailing social norms are heavily influenced by Christian values, as well as their patriarchal/masculinist foundations. It is understood that if you are a boy you will be masculine, which tacitly means being heterosexual. Girls are subjected to the same obligatory heterosexuality; however, it is expected to be modest and "pure." Perspectives based upon these dualisms leave no room for people who do not correspond to conventional notions of male/masculinity and female/feminine performances. Embedded within puritanical religious doctrine, there was and remains widespread agreement that people are innately heterosexual. Any type of love or desire falling outside of heterosexuality thus runs the risk of being considered abnormal, perverse, or deviant (Morgensen 2011a, Foucault 1991). Consequently, individuals who are intersex, gay, bisexual, transgender, Two-Spirit, genderqueer, or asexual are subjected to ostracism, marginalization, or closeting. A product of fabricated social constructions and parochial belief systems operating at the nexus of biological sex, gender, sexuality, and colonially-imposed Western Christianity (Butler 1990).

More recent conceptualizations have unsettled the binary constructs of both biological sex (male/female) and gender (masculine/feminine), as well as have decoupled them from sexual orientation/preference. It is now recognized that gender, sexuality, and bodily composition (e.g. genitalia and hormone levels) alike, as well as human desire in general, fall along continuums (Anderson 2009, Halberstam 2002, Grosz 1994). As many poststructuralist and queer theorists point out, sexuality, like biological sex and gender, is fluid, flexible, and can take a variety of forms (Foucault 1998, Lorber 1996, Butler 1993). Place matters here too. Bell (2000) argues that the ascription of weakness to femininity and being gay situates rural masculinity as unquestionably heterosexual.

He notes the normalization of heterosexuality pervading many settler societies is further engrained in a region's social consciousness through legal institutions, places of worship, nuclear families, and education systems (Campbell, Bell, and Finney 2006).

Taken-for-granted routines of domestic life, too, make heterosexuality seem natural and mandatory, with the body being the key site of norms and social conventions regarding sexuality. To further explain this dynamic, Richardson notes:

> Heterosexuality depends on a view of differently gendered individuals who complement each other, right down to their bodies and body parts fitting together; "like a lock and key" the penis and vagina are assumed to be a natural fit. (1996, 7)

Despite the powerful force that processes of heterosexual naturalization and the normalization of gender/sexuality binaries have on the construction of rural manhood, such formations are not without contradiction. Authors here have showed that the rural/nature can be a queer space that provides calm and serene settings for non-heterosexual activities (Little 2003, Bell 2000). This troubles notions of the rural as an aggressively heterosexual space. Further destabilizing the arrangement of rural masculinities as domineering, aggressive, and controlling, various researchers have conducted studies that challenge conventionally accepted notions of what it means to be a "man" by highlighting that male bodies in the countryside can also be viewed as nonthreatening, unrefined, playful, inane, and humorous (Little 2002). Meaning, masculinity is neither an irresistible force nor an immovable entity, and can be both queered and subverted.

To end this chapter, it is worth noting that critical studies on men, masculinity, and rurality have recently become an increasingly significant area of interest for scholars and theorists (Riley 2012, Carrington, McIntosh, and Scott 2010, Brandth and Haugen 2005b, Cloke and Little 1997). Although the focus on masculinity has only been a growing topic of concentration for the past 30 years, it is nonetheless a key area of research as it allows us to broaden our understanding of social relationships and cultural ideologies

(Van Hoven and Hörschelmann 2005, Connell 1995). In discussing the production of rural masculinities in particular, it is important to consider how research relates to the politics of everyday life. It is with these understandings of masculinity and settler colonialism that I set off to the American Heartland to investigate.

# Chapter 4

# Kansas, Bled: Land, History, Violence

*The Pioneer has before declared that our only safety depends upon
the total extermination of the Indians. Having wronged them for
centuries we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow
it up by one more wrong and wipe these untamed and untamable
creatures from the face of the earth. In this lies future safety
for our settlers and the soldiers.*
L. Frank Baum (author, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*)

### What's the Matter with Kansas?

Settler history; ongoing.

In rural southeast Kansas and the American Heartland, as well as across the whole of the U.S., the glorification of a settler colonial past is deployed widely and readily, often in feel-good, quaint, and innocuous ways. Many of the men I interviewed in and around my hometown community of St. Paul, Kansas, spoke with pride about the community's missionary history, the virtuous goals of the white Europeans who arrived there, and the pioneering attitudes that many of the town's original settlers were imbued with. What was often missing in many of the narratives of the participants was recognition that the area the community is located in is the ancestral territories of the Osage Nation.

The Osage, who hunted, planted, played, and lived in the region well before missionaries arrived were mainly located in the Ohio River Valley until the mid-1600s (Burns 2005, 2004, Rollings 2004, 1995). They shifted into what is now known as Missouri and Arkansas as a result of white settlement and compulsory dislocations during early colonial advancement throughout the eastern U.S. (Burns 2004). As settler expansion continued westward during the early 1800s (a time of intense land dispossession and ethnic massacre that included the Indian Removal Act and the Trail of Tears) the Osage were forced into Southeast Kansas. They resided in the region until the early 1870s, when they were again pressured into ceding their lands and being forcibly displaced into present-day Oklahoma (Osage County) where they currently are based (Burns 2005, Rollins 1995).

If the settlers I spoke with did mention the Osage Nation, the conversations quickly made reference to the "good" and "kind" work that the Catholic missionaries were doing for the "Indians" by protecting, educating, and helping them. Several interviewees spoke of the priests who arrived in Southeast Kansas as being the best examples of what the history of the community represented. Two priests mentioned in particular were Father John Schoenmakers and Father Paul M. Ponziglione. Father Schoenmakers is admired for his Catholic "zeal and perseverance," and still referred to by some locals as the "Father of Civilization in Southeast Kansas" and "The Apostle of the Osage." In addition to the propagation of Christianity on the frontier that he is credited with, Schoenmakers also happened to be headmaster of the *Manual Labor School for Osage Boys and Girls*. This institution was built in 1847 to further "integrate," "educate," and I would argue intimidate children of the Osage Nation in the ways of the "white man" (Graves 1916). There are perhaps no colonial weapons as cutting and effective as terror and authoritarian (re)education. In the U.S., these became one and the same.

Father Paul M. Ponziglione, another bygone stalwart in the area, is known for being an "extraordinary and prolific" missionary. Ponziglione's arrival has subsequently been valorized and lauded by the local community over the generations. One local historian,

W.W. Graves (who the town's public library happens to be named after), is widely cited in the community's historical records and writes that the arrival of Father Ponziglione meant:

> The coming of one who was to liberate the natives from the bondage of savagery and bring them to the ways of civilization, Christianity, peace, happiness and plenty. (Graves 1916: 9)

It was in discussing figures and narratives such as these that men spoke fondly of how far back their settler ancestry in the area went, as well as how much significance land, history, and the Catholic Church had to the community. Many also spoke of the generational ties they had to the region and how a "rugged pioneer mentality" and "pull yourself up by your bootstraps work ethic" are still passed on as core values in the area.

In this way, the narratives the participants held about the spaces that their white settler ancestors trespassed upon, as well as the subject positions they occupied as men themselves, were dependent upon links to private property, individual landholding, and the incessant drive for "freedom," "progress," and "production" as defined by Western law and worldviews. What can be gathered from such admissions is that the local hegemonic ideals of the area are rooted in liberal (individualist) conceptions of the self. In turn, many of the practices (e.g. rugged individualism, private property ownership) those liberal subjectivities promote were initiated, and continue to be carried out, in the name of God. As a consequence, colonially established Christian discourses remain the means though which settlers rationalize belonging and lay what they described as "rightful claim" over the spaces they occupy.

In the U.S., the justification for purging Indigenous people from the landscape was tied to claims of knowledge and progress. More specifically, settlers often asserted they better knew how to use land and resources, as well as that they needed to educate savages, save an inferior race, and protect themselves from the barbarity of Indians (Veracini 2010, Taylor 2006). Upon spending time in Southeast Kansas, it was evident that these perspectives still remain highly influential, as reflected by the comment of Ray, 19 years old, who when asked about the history of the area explained:

Well, I know the Indians were treated badly in some parts of history, but you cannot say they were not always kind to the guys coming here. I mean, sure lots of them died, but that is what happens when a more powerful group of dudes starts to grow and expand … just look at all of history, its full of war and death. And I am sure that if the Indians owned everything nowadays we would be telling stories of how white guys were massacred and this and that. It just happens that in the U.S. a lot of the pioneers had better technology, were smarter, better at doing things, and more advanced. Naturally those things are going to take over. And it's not like all of them came here looking to start shit, here in this area the priests were just trying to help out, you know, just to build churches and spread the message.

Reflected in the comment above is the reliance upon a discursive regime of truth that suggesting white settlers who were perpetrating violence and taking land in order to further their nation-building project were doing so with moral and noble intent.

Also signified is a normalization of the belief that conquest, accumulation by dispossession, and genocidal onslaught are natural and inevitable. This is accomplished, in part, through the seemingly palatable use of terms like "pioneer" and "settler." Many of the participants referred to white colonizers in these ways, and often cited stories they had heard during their upbringings and schooling that pointed to the freedom-seeking, hard-working, self-reliant qualities of those men who were dislocating Indigenous populations. Benevolent claims of adventure, exploration, and "evolution" thereby allow settlers to disaffiliate from the declarations of racial superiority and imperial violence perpetrated by their community's founders, and that white supremacist colonialism has always and continues to sanction.

## Space, Law, and Borders

*Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography.*
Edward Said

Illusory cultural constructions of space also factored significantly into white settlement's scheme of asserting ownership and dominion over land, Indigenous communities, and enslaved Black and Brown people. The roles socio-spatialized power relations and geography play in colonial processes are crucial. As Massey (1994, 265) notes, "space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation." Numerous other critical scholars have also noted the significance that space plays in the development of racialized and gendered colonial hierarchies, particularly in regard to law and governance (Chatterjee and Subramanian 2014, Blaut 2012, Alfred 2010, Johnson 2005, de Leeuw 2007, Razack 2002). Thus, the ways in which space is invented, conceptualized, discussed, and ruled (via law) gives credence to the importance it has apropos exercises of power, dominance, and belonging. As a result, the interplay between and ability to define spaces, laws, and governance structures become key battleground areas where struggles for and assertions of control and authority, as well as resistance and rebellion, are carried out.

For white settlers arriving in what is now called the U.S., space was viewed to be an unknown and empty frontier. This meant the Indigenous people who were found in those spaces needed to be reigned-in, assimilated, confined, removed, or killed. Either way, what settler colonialism demanded of the spaces it desired was that Indigenous people and cultures be cleansed from them. Thus, the proprietary perspectives regarding land and space, as viewed from the lens of white settlers, saw their own arrival, presence, claims of discovery, and eventual ability to control land and space—as fait accompli. This colonial prejudice, along with the weapons and diseases settlers carried with them, facilitated their imposition of legal doctrines of enclosure and enabled them to levy declarations of ownership as they saw fit. Conveniently, as colonial settlement continued to spread across the landscape and state-building exercises began to escalate, those legal doctrines would then be deemed "rule-of-law."

White settlers also developed fabricated meanings regarding their possession of space that fortified the rationale they used in

legitimating the construction of their new nation-state (McClintock 2013, Marcos 2011, Mohanty 2003). Imperialistic expressions such as "Empire of Liberty," "Manifest Destiny," "The American Frontier," as well as legal policies codifying homesteading, annexation, discovery, "Indian Removal," enslavement, and the relegation of Indigenous people to reservations known as "domestic dependent nations" and Black people as chattel on plantations, all carried and continue to have significant cultural, legal, and material ramifications (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014). Notably, all also require the installation, regulation, and securitization of borders.

Borders are used in myriad ways to assert sovereignty, broker deals, neglect bodies, kill Others, build empires, craft racist narratives, whip-up nationalism, and "claim the center" (Walia 2013). Borders exist not only tangibly where two territories physically meet, but also discursively via racial ideologies in rhetoric, policy, law, and quotidian social relations. Colonial borders, which are arbitrarily generated, also affect people psychologically in how they shape identities, fashion subjects, and were/are "carried" and "worn" by the Indigenous communities, migrants, and refugees whose lives and territories have been disordered by them. For the U.S., settler borders were imposed to organize and structure the relationships that Indigenous people and "foreigners" had/have with the state, political economy, and citizen body politic.

Consequently, groups that are negatively racialized under the purview of the state have been and continue to be rendered more vulnerable to the exploitative, dispossessive, and dehumanizing practices of empire building, racial capitalism, xenophobic nationalism, and even ableist heteropatriarchy (Shadel 2018). Borders, then, when considered fully, were and are primarily used by the U.S. as racially coded disciplinary tools to prohibit and neglect, rather than secure and protect, humans expressing their right to land, mobility, and self-determination. Markedly, colonial border-craft also facilitated enclosure, privatization, and the promulgation of Western notions of individual property and land ownership.

In addition to validating white settler notions of private property as official rule-of-law, colonial bordering manufactured strong emotive connections for settlers who benefitted from the dispossession,

marginalization, and deaths of Indigenous people. Ed, 57 years old, touches upon this when gazing out at *his* farmland and property:

> This land has been in our family for generations … I've been working it for over 40 years myself now. I have quite an attachment to it. Guess it's a pride-of-ownership thing.

That is, the emotional affinity settlers developed for the places they were occupying further reinforced their entitlements to, as well as defensive assertions of, ownership over Indigenous territories.

Largely missing from the white settler-colonizers' definitions ascribed to the land and nature, as well as their legal statutes, were the perspectives and viewpoints of the Indigenous people who originally inhabited them, as well as the enslaved Africans who were being trafficked into them (Barnes 2013, Marcos 2011, Tuhiwai Smith 1999). As such, the development of the settler nation-state that imposed its will, exercised disciplinary power when it saw fit, and defined its own rules through force and violence on its own terms, convinced itself that it was the legitimate governing authority. Several participants, when discussing their thoughts on who had rightful claim to land in the area, expressed enduring sentiments of American nationalism and liberal notions of ownership. Karl, 28 years old, summed up the prevailing sentiment of one focus group area by arguing:

> We have every right to be here and I don't feel bad about it at all. I was born here, I didn't steal anything from anybody, and a lot of Indian tribes signed over their land anyway. It pisses me off to hear somebody say this land is not ours, or that it is stolen. A lot of good people (settlers) worked their asses off trying to make a simple living when they got here and I don't think they complained one bit. That is what America is all about. These Indians nowadays need to get with the program. They got their tax breaks, they got their reservations, they got their free hunting and fishing licenses, and they got their casinos.

As is the case with the historical colonial practices of settler societies, it was not uncommon for men in the area to defend and contest

any countervailing perspectives that arose when their possession of land was questioned. A few men did express sympathy about the way Indigenous people were treated "in the past," but those instances were predominantly surrounding what was often framed as one-off isolated events (e.g. The Trail of Tears), and there remained little recognition, and much rebuttal towards viewpoints arguing, that the violence and aggression of white settlement was part of a wide-spread and ongoing process of eradication.

There was also a good deal of rationalization surrounding the oppression that Indigenous people faced under the colonial project. Mack, 54 years old, emphasized his point when he stated:

> I think there were just as many violent Indians as there were Caucasians. I mean, people are people. To say white guys are more violent than any other groups is flat out wrong. I mean look at the inner city (e.g. referencing Black and Latino people). Back in the day Indians had braves and chiefs and warriors that were kidnapping, stealing, raping, and burning things themselves. I realize some of them were peaceful, but some of them were out for blood. The open frontier was a brutal place. It was not an easy life for anyone … and in times like that only the strong survive.

Ethnocentric conceptions of white superiority, misplaced beliefs about natural selection and species diversification amongst humans (based on race), alongside the perceived threat posed by racialized Others enabled settlers to justify genocide and the building of a new, and as consistently mentioned by interviewees, "great" nation. It also remains readily evident that such perceptions still remain a common trope in and across those spaces that have been colonized. White settlers in the past, as well as numerous participants who I spoke to while conducting this research, often dismissed and devalued the "simple," "crude," and "primitive" manner in which "Indians failed to use the land to its maximum potential" or were "picking fights they could not finish" with settlers who were innocently wanting to "homestead," knew "how to use land," and have "more advanced ways of doing (i.e. capitalist production) things."

Accordingly, a discursive binary could be drawn between land and natural resources misused and squandered by Indigenous people, and the purportedly advanced techniques settlers used in preparing and organizing the land for production and economic development. Matt, 49 years old, reflects these polarized and hierarchical dichotomies when he contends:

> Sure, an Indian can use all the parts of the buffalo, but who do you think brought him electricity, technology, education, and even those guns to shoot that buffalo? … they should be thanking us in my opinion.

Stereotyping Indigenous people as stolid, senseless "primitives" or as archaic, stoic warriors and coupling such perspectives with a sense of entitled gratitude for what was magnanimously "given" to Indigenous communities by colonizers as a result of dispossession and occupation continues to reaffirm the racial superiority that white settlers used as justification for the widespread theft of land and concurrent genocide they engaged in.

## Religion and Sexuality

Most people are taught from an early age that biological sex individuals fall into one of two categories: male or female. From that point on, the socialization of individuals into gender roles is determined by whether a person is a boy or a girl, and later, a man or a woman. Despite that biological sex and gender are widely thought to be inherently linked, critical theorists have stressed for decades they are not (Foucault 1998, Butler 1990). Biological sex is the fraught description of people as male or female as a result of the physiological features, secondary sexual characteristics, and reproductive organs that comprise a particular body. Gender, on the other hand, has been typically theorized (in Western medical models) as the behaviors, attitudes, and roles that are assumed by individuals based on being female or male (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). These binaries and couplings are reductive, inaccurate, and dangerous. The vast majority of participants I spoke to, however, noted they were "facts."

Cultural norms also serve as a catalyst for hardline demarcations that attempt to neatly align biological sex with gender. Butler (1990) contends that binary roles associated with sex and gender construct heterosexuality as innate and normal. Conversely, sexualities that are not heterosexual are labeled abnormal or deviant and subjugated by hegemonic cultural norms and discourses regarding sexuality (Rich 1980). Butler (1993, 3) explains the process of marginalization of non-conformist sexualities when she states:

> This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires *the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings*, those who are not yet "subjects," but who form the constitutive outside the domain of the subject. [emphasis added]

The quote above emphasizes Butler's stance that processes of sexual othering maintain legitimacy through the discursive subordination of queer and non-conformist sexualities. This is due to the fact that queer sexualities fall outside of (hetero)normalized notions of acceptance. Consequently, essentialist discourses operating within particular contexts have the tendency to signify that people who contravene heterosexuality are depraved, maladjusted, or depraved, thereby relegating them to the peripheries of society. "It's just not natural, not what God designed us to do … sinful," as Edward, 28 years old, asserted when speaking about gay people. This gives rise to heteronormativity.

In discussing the settler colonial landscape of Southeast Kansas, it is fitting to further focus on the nexus of two of the most noticeable, yet ordinary aspects of the region's social geography: religion and heteronormativity. Upon traveling around the countryside and while conducting interviews within differing towns it became quite clear, via both the optics and discourses, that two of the most powerful influences in the area are Christian values and nationalistic "American" pride.

Critical research on the rural U.S. shows that conservative Christian perspectives have the tendency to heavily inform what politics individuals have, what moral codes they deem acceptable, as well as how they behave (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2014). This was

reflected numerous times in my research as many of the participants noted: "If Jesus were alive, he'd vote Republican." What regularly followed this statement were heteronormative assertions explaining that "being gay was a cross to bear," there is nothing "more sacred than (nuclear) family," and "God made Adam and Eve—not Adam and Steve."

Further to these declarations, Rick, 52 years old, offered his overview of the region's cultural landscape by characterizing it as:

> nothing but fields and farms, with an occasional outpost that has the three things all good American towns should have: a church, a bar, and a fried chicken joint … the church should be Catholic and the beer cold [*laughs*] … I don't reckon you'll find a lot of queers hanging around any three.

Despite widespread empirical evidence I have gathered both formally and informally over the past 20 years, across multiple countries and numerous contexts, that queer folx, do indeed, frequent all three, the process of heteronormative connotations coding particular spaces remains. That is, Rick's reference to a Christian church, along with bars and fried chicken restaurants, setting a homophobic tone across the Heartland illustrates the implications that conservative religious beliefs carry across large sections of white settler societies like the U.S.

Routinely, oppressive and exclusionary dogmas go unquestioned and become hegemonic simply because they are disseminated by privileged white settlers in positions of authority (Razack 2002). I found this to be the case amongst many of the participants, as their most highly respected individuals were frequently white (heterosexual) men heading Christian churches, the majority of whom will only endorse a relationship as "natural" if it is between a (cisgender) man and woman.

Mike, 37 years old, performed the duty of policing heterosexuality that numerous feminist and queer scholars have identified in their research (Gottschalk and Newton 2009, Woodward 2000, Plummer 1999) by explaining the importance of his church's perspective on sexuality when he stated:

> I'd rather listen to someone who knows what they're [his pastor]
> talking about tell us the rules [about sexuality] … not some
> confused fag on YouTube [referencing a video he had seen
> on YouTube featuring a transgender woman discussing anti-
> oppressive practice] … Trump gets it too. It's why he banned
> transgenders in the military. It's just fucking weird; I don't get it.
> Can you imagine trying to focus on winning a war while having
> to worry about re-doing all the bathrooms and what barracks
> are going to trigger a guy or girl or "a whatever"?

Mike later jokingly went on to explain he and his wife had a "good" marriage because "she (his wife) paid attention to the part of the [wedding] ceremony when the priest said women have to submit to their husbands." Mike continued by noting the three most important things in life were "God, family, and country," that "the U.S. is going to hell in a hand-basket because of liberals and gays," and the current state of the nation is "not what the 'Founding Fathers' would have wanted." Sentiments similar to these came up in several, yet not all, of my interviews and focus groups. They demonstrate how certain interpretations of Christian doctrine pathologize queer and transgender people, mandate acquiescence to a social system based upon heteropatriarchal and cisnormative ideals, and also glorify a settler colonial past/present.

I note here neither all members nor denominations of Christianity adhere to inflexible understandings of gender and sexuality. Some Christian assemblages, as well as a few of the interviewees I spoke with, are certainly quite progressive, understanding, and accepting of people who are queer and non-conforming. But for the particular social geography of Southeast Kansas, as well as vast majority of men I spoke to across the Heartland, rigid heteronormative perspectives emerged, ranging from forcefully to pityingly to sheepishly, as hegemonic. And in the interest of avoiding reductionist framings of Christianity as a homogenous group solely espousing intolerance across the region, it is also important to acknowledge that adherents to Christianity in the region practice their faith along a continuum of inclusion and acceptance. Nick, 29 years old, diverged from the majority of participants in his opinion on sexuality by stating:

> I remember growing up thinking gay marriage was wrong and being taught in religion class they [gay people] were sinning because they were giving into "pleasure of the flesh" [*laughs*] … we were taught it was sinning, "unnatural," and God would judge those who did immoral things. Seems a bit ridiculous now, but priests and teachers and parents and even coaches have a lot of pull with young kids growing up. When it comes down to it, I think people are people, plus, everyone does weird shit behind closed doors [*laughs*], not sure why we have to condemn everyone to hell for being different. It actually makes me mad at the adults we kids were around, feel like they misled us a bit, and were ignorant themselves. Even seems like they were not even in control, almost like something bigger was making people think in certain ways. Who knows? … but I do know most people around here still think like that though. I just kind of keep my views to myself … catch less hell that way. I actually like it here for the most part, despite the bullshit—it's home.

Nick's comments reflect the complexities arising from encountering "difference" and accepting it while simultaneously navigating a conservative rural community largely governed by repressive heteronormative views that he considers "home." His statement also emphasizes how hegemonic discourses backed by church leaders in the area are based upon the principle that non-conforming sexualities are immoral and sinful. Moreover, Nick appears to be reflecting upon, just as many queer and feminist theorists do, how societal institutions (e.g. churches, schools, family) and structural forces ("something bigger") remain influential in shaping the ideals of communities through discursive reaffirmations of heteropatriarchal "truths" (Hunt 2016, Little and Leyshon 2003, Mills 1996). Finally, what Nick also touches upon, which radical thinkers and theorists have been pointing to for decades, if not centuries, is how people with dissenting opinions regarding the status quo are socially scrutinized and rendered silent in certain spaces for their contrarian views (Ahmed 2006, Crenshaw 1991, Kafer 2013, Lorde 2012).

## Enclosure, Elimination, and Nation-Building

> *I have come to kill Indians, and believe it is right and honorable to*
> *use any means under God's heaven to kill Indians.*
> Colonel John Chivington (United States Volunteers—
> Union Army; former Methodist Pastor, in Kansas)

Settler colonialism advances in conjugation with the discursive and material construction of the nation-state. As settler societies take shape, people are categorized, marginalized, subordinated, and privileged on account of their race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, and citizenship (Kobayashi 2013, Wolfe 2006, Warrior 2005, Mohanty 2003). These hierarchical processes of acceptance and rejection allow colonial states to galvanize due in part to how the social axes of identification interlock with ideals surrounding the "nation." In the case of white settler societies, settlers have taken up the task of defining citizenship themselves, as well as bestowing authority upon the nation-state they are fabricating. The settler state then claims the right to exercise territorial sovereignty and self-determination in expanding, surveilling, and regulating its invented borders, boundaries, and constructions of citizenship. The racial hierarchies and gendered social orders the state set about developing then become reified over space. Markedly, this reification comes with social consequences and acute material impacts. The progression of settler colonial statecraft in manufacturing its state, as well as attendant version of nationalism, in turn, produces "othered" people, bodies, places, and discourses, while simultaneously enabling those who are able to fit into hegemonic notions of what is acceptable and tolerated (Spivak 2013, Said 1978, Fanon 1967, 1963).

In reality, social categories of identification, and my focus here, race, remain cultural constructs that are used as tools to constrain, segregate, and confine those who are not enrolled in or endorsed as part of the normalized national standard, i.e. afforded citizenship. The essentialized "Indians" that many of my interviewees spoke of in the Heartland, whether inferiorized and degraded through latent or overt racist tropes, or in some cases acclaimed as "noble savages,"

do not in fact exist. In actuality, those "Indians" that hegemonic currents of mainstream culture in settler societies like to put on display in their colonial histories, movies, and mascots are rooted in white settler fantasies, myths, and imaginations formed by an imperialist and corrupted worldview. Indigenous people, however, as a heterogenous and geographically dispersed group, do remain.

What is produced from the racialized inventions of a given settler society, then, is their own delusional perception of a nation-state and its contrived Others. More specifically, colonial framings of "newly discovered peoples," and enslaveable or irredeemable "savages," as inferior attracted settlers from all walks of life to rally around the call of embracing their "pioneer spirit" for the purposes of exploration, discovery, and progress. Colonial narratives that take a tone of gallant adventure mask the actually existing imperial conquest that was and continues to take place in settler geographies. These narratives also authorized the oppression, domination, bondage, and attempted extermination of entire populations of Indigenous/Black people. Racist lore of this nature has been successfully reproduced over the course of white settlement and still persists. This can be noted when looking at the statement of George, 30 years old, who in regard to Indian reservations and inner cities maintained:

> Those places (reservations) are fucking awful. I think they are breeding grounds for poor, lazy, drunks. A lot of them have shit houses and nobody is working, I do not think they (reservations) should have ever been a part of the project (U.S. nation-building). The government should have done a better job absorbing the Indians into American way of life when they had the chance. And the Indians should have got on board with it … it would have been better for everyone. … Trump hit the nail on the head when he was talking about the inner city. Its an issue. Blacks and Mexicans *are* living in hell, I wouldn't want to raise a family there, let alone get stuck there. Could get robbed or shot in broad daylight.

Comments such as this underscore, again, how space becomes racialized, and race becomes spatialized. It also demonstrates that

U.S. settler society did not become plagued by racism and exclusion, but in fact, was founded upon racism and exclusion. This foundation of white supremacy also highlights just how large a part racial superiority played in the founding of the U.S. as a nation-state. Violent white supremacist formations seeking to isolate, segregate, and quarantine negatively racialized people were not simply aspects of the U.S. that came to exist only after curious explorers landed on an undiscovered open frontier, rather, they were part of the settler colonial project from the outset.

Hierarchies of class also become intimately enmeshed with racial politics as white settlers carried out their land and resource takeovers (Blaut 2012, Razack 2002, Bannerji 2001). Part of the appeal of coming to the "New World" for European colonizers was the prospect of securing economic stability and accumulating wealth. Thus, upon their arrival, settlers held the notion that prosperity and financial gain awaited them. Although the expulsion of Indigenous people from their native lands and enslavement of Black bodies did foster greater profits for some settlers, there were still numerous white settlers who remained poor and in precarious positions. This led to intensifying expansionism across the American countryside through the deployment of liberal doctrines of "patriotism," "rugged individualism," religious proselytizing, and "conquering" the frontier. Rhetorical moves that convinced white settlers because they were "hard working" "good" people designing a nation that they were then entitled to the wealth and resources that could be extracted from the countryside and communities who were already there.

Other settlers, who simply desired a small plot of land upon which to homestead and farm, or who were seeking to convert others to Christianity, were not as violently capitalistic. Nonetheless, they did still carry the same sense of entitlement with them and saw fit to usurp land as it was deemed "open" by colonial authorities. This meant more and more Indigenous people would be displaced, subjected to forced removals, and massacred. Thus, the class tensions that arose between different groups of white settlers often meant the subsequent backlash, an amplification of colonial policies expropriating property, fell squarely upon the Indigenous people who were residing in the areas settlers "needed."

Southeast Kansas was not immune to the trappings of the individualism, enclosure, and dispossession running rampant across the open "frontier." Chris, 28 years old, explains the historical sentiment of the local area when settlers arrived by noting:

> The early priests and pioneers who got here were not trying to get rich or anything. They had good intentions, were doing the right thing, and were simply trying to save people. It is part of the faith you know, you go out and spread the gospel. It's not like they were trying to outright take anything from the Indians, or even kill them off. They actually wanted them to stay, convert, and become a part of the community. They were there to help.

Despite this account of altruism, the outright confiscation of land from the Osage Nation, as well the ensuing deaths of a large percentage of their people, is precisely what took place as a result of white settlement. A brief look at the timeline of dispossession the Osage faced shows that in 1808 they were coerced into signing a treaty that ceded nearly all their territory in Missouri, as well as the majority of the land they had in Arkansas. Only a few years later, in 1818, a second treaty took the remaining land they were living on in Arkansas. That treaty was followed up by another forced secession in 1825 causing the relinquishment of their title to land in western Missouri and sending them to a reservation near the Neosho River, in what is now Southeast Kansas.

Thus, by 1825, a total of three treaties had forced the Osage to give up over 96 million acres of land. Over the next half a century another series of land annexations, including the Canville Treaty of 1865 and the Drum Creek Treaty (also called the Sturgis Treaty) of 1868, would send the Osage Nation to Indian Territory (present-day Osage County, Oklahoma), where they are currently based. It was also during this period that a series of epidemics wreaked havoc on the Osage population (Rollings 1995). From the early 1800s up until the Osage Nation's relocation to Indian Territory, members were subjected to an ongoing series of epidemics that included influenza, cholera, scurvy, measles, typhoid, smallpox, tuberculosis, as well as droughts and insect invasions that resulted in crop failures and

famine (Burns 2004, Rollings 1995). In total, the Osage population went from an estimated 12,000 members in the early 1800s, to just over 3000 at the time of the forced removal into Indian Territory shortly after 1870 (Burns 2004). What this signifies, is that despite the good intentions and generous benevolence that missionaries and "pioneers" thought they were offering, colonial settlement meant dislocation and decimation for the Osage Nation.

## Gender, Race, and Hierarchy

Gender regimes also interlock with racial formations in contemporary settler societies (McClintock 2013, Mohanty 2003, Razack 2002, Mills 1996). The pervasive subordination and oppression that many women currently face in colonial nation-states is due in part to the masculinist ideologies that formed the subjectivities of the settlers arriving in the "New World." The work of settlement was seen as a weight yoked upon the shoulders of men (in the case of the U.S.: white, Christian, able-bodied, male), "good," "Salt of the Earth" men who were deemed fit and right for the job. The white settler's burden.

As a consequence, patriarchal notions of superiority and righteousness were embedded in their colonial structures of governance, economy, and education, in addition to the everyday social hierarchies that developed across their communities (Hunt and Holmes 2015, Coulthard 2014). These gendered power dynamics allowed settlers to valorize "manliness," thereby leading to the creation of spaces (as well as an entire nation) founded upon notions of masculine supremacy. Chris, 44 years old, elaborated upon the participation of men in settler colonial history in Southeast Kansas by noting:

> Picking up everything, moving a family overseas, providing for the kids, and protecting a wife was not something that just any ole' guy could do. The pioneers who came here to build homes and make honest livings were cut out of different cloth. They were a different breed. They had balls. It took a lot of guts to walk into something unknown like that. Those guys were badasses back in the day … they were real men.

This statement highlights how the defining characteristics of colonial settlers are conspicuously daring and masculinist. Self-reliance, austere individualism, defensive aggression, and the exercise of power all became trademarks of settler masculinity. All, based upon the accounts of the men I spoke to, continue to be revitalized through the preservation and promulgation of colonial histories and settler myths.

Several conversations with the participants referenced settler men who were "taming the frontier," as well as who were "tough," "brave," and "courageous." Many were also concerned with empha-sizing the humility, modesty, and devoutness of the white men who originally settled the area, as well as how these attributes were legacies and still present. Carl, 64 years old, affirmed the perceived magnanimity of settler occupation by suggesting:

> Well, history around here is still with us you know. The area is built around the church, and that church was built by a lot of good, respectable, hard-working men. I don't think they were trying to conquer anything … just here to build a home, raise a family, and practice their faith. The priests were only trying to help out, educate, and take care of others. I think that is still what the community stands for—a lot of guys around here come from "good stock."

These perspectives underscore how settler masculinity is both romanticized and idealized within local spaces and histories. They also shore up justifications for white settlement by disaffiliating from the violent erasure of Indigenous people from the region by omitting the several acts of forced removal and captive institution-alizations that took place. Those aspects of colonial aggression are conveniently muted by making reference to the reputable nature of the men who were carrying out and contributing to the forging of a new nation, i.e. imperial project of conquest.

Of particular interest, in many of the conversations, was the place-specific nature of these rationalizations. While some men were aware of the fact that colonialism had posed devastating con-sequences for Indigenous people, they were also careful in pointing out that the local rural assemblage they were a part of (St. Paul/

Osage Mission) had a history of white male settlers controlling the region who were exceptions to such violations. A few noted that the Jesuit priests, sisters, and settlers who arrived in the area were unique because of the compassion, understanding, and care they offered the Osage (Burns 2004), as well as how they knew some members of the Osage Nation remained Catholic to this day. The aim here is neither to dispute the last account, nor is it to suggest that any member of Osage Nation who is Catholic or Christian has been colonized, it is to point out the myriad complexities, as well as what they stem from, that constitute the area's current social-political geography.

What was also overlooked in many conversations was recognition that, despite the "good intentions of the pioneers and priests," white settlement/occupation did occur, and an Indigenous society and way of life was disrupted and deracinated. Moreover, members of the Osage Nation were dispossessed, displaced, forced to assimilate, and numerous died as a result. Perhaps these are seen as externalities under the settler colonial rulebook? I know not and must speculate, because participants did not speak to their deaths directly. The cultural landscape, however, did. There is one weathered headstone, in the northeast corner of the St. Francis Cemetery, on the east side of town (St. Paul) just off Highway 47, marked: "Indian graves," which does signify the Osage. The faded concrete block sits upon a mass grave. It practically lies in the shadow of a prominent Catholic church (where I was an altar boy), is adjacent to a local high school's practice field (where I went to recess as a boy and played high school football as a "man"), and is right across the highway from a billboard proudly announcing to drivers: "St. Paul, Kansas, Over 150 Years of History. Visit our Museum." If you should pass through, the worn headstone and mass grave is right next to Flat Rock Creek, in the section of the cemetery that sometimes floods. Notably, most of the "artefacts" in "our" museum belong to someone else.

What's the matter with Kansas? That headstone, billboard, museum, and story, not to mention colonial history and present. More specifically, the problem is local whitewashings of history and contemporary settler claims to innocence that obscure the

fact that colonialism did remove Indigenous communities from their ancestral territories, regardless of whether or not those who were a part of the dispossession were "nice" or "well-intentioned" during the entire process. I maintain there was far more settler hostility than hospitality woven into our/St. Paul's local history, but evidence of this is sparse given the missionaries and white settlers kept a far more detailed account of their purported benevolence and good deeds than their folly and violence. Upon asking Lex, a 71-year-old, quite good-natured historian who seemed to grasp the gravity of the issue, about the mass grave, he introspectively responded, "We don't talk about it that much around here, I think there would be a lot shame." It seems the broad issue of Indigenous dispossession and death, at the hands of the established of "time-honored" communities, is not yet something many white settlers are prepared to deal with, or repair.

In addition to lionizing white masculinity, settler colonialism bifurcates social relations through the imposition of oppositional gender binaries (McClintock 2013, Oswin 2008). White men were positioned as the "providers" and "defenders" of new settlements and women were often framed as defenseless and vulnerable, thereby relegating them to the realm of domestic servitude (McClintock 2013, Morgenson 2011a). This gender regime resulted in the assertion that the decision-making, protection, and labor performed by men was more valuable, essential, and vital for the stability of the family, community, and burgeoning nation.

Consent to a gendered hierarchy like this, in turn, led to the devaluation and/or outright dismissal of the value of socially reproductive work (i.e. childcare, emotional labor, educating children, household chores, gardening, foraging, etc.). Work that was and remains typically performed by women (Hixson 2013a, Lugones 2007). That is, the domain of social reproduction continues to be shaped by the patriarchal mores established by white settler colonialism. Gender oppression, in turn, has become normalized. Participant interviews highlighted how the gender essentialisms of colonial patriarchy reverberate to this day, particularly on the issue of capability and work. Earl, 32 years old, elaborated on the division of labor in pioneer families:

> Women were just not as capable of doing a lot of the things men were. I mean, men are naturally stronger so a lot of the more important work and heavy lifting back then was stuff that men had to do. Imagine that! There was a lot of danger and physical work to do. I mean fighting off threats and building things is basically what men are born to do—and that is what life back then basically was. Plus, it would not be fair to send women out to defend the home if things got bad or war broke out. Women are better at some things than us, and have a proper place, just as we men do. We're (men) a bit better cut out for work, and they're (women), overall, better with the kids. There's exceptions, but its plain as day … I really do not see anything wrong with that.

These inegalitarian, naturalized binaries were mentioned quite often during conversations in Southeast Kansas, and despite the fact they are reductive and marginalizing, what intensifies the prejudice and subordination that women encounter in the face of them is that they diminish work women do, simply because it is women doing said work.

Further complicating the cultural relations of settler societies is that despite the fact that women were subjugated within patriarchal colonialism, they were also a part of the abusive undertakings of settlement (Hixson 2013a, McClintock 2013). Numerous missionaries across the Heartland, including those in rural Southeast Kansas, relied upon white women settlers to serve as teachers in boarding schools, endorse assimilation programs, and contribute to child removal policies that separated Indigenous children from their families (McClintock 2013). In this way, white women were both complicit with and actively taking part in patriarchal colonial violence. While this served as a way for white settler women to exercise agency in the face of the patriarchal oppression, it also meant they were colonizing and doing the dirty work of the imperial state at the same time. Dynamics such as these show just how intimately racial formations, white supremacy, patriarchy, and colonial domination interlock and mutually constitute each other within settler societies.

Land, and the way it was conceptualized, also became gendered under settler colonialism (Winchester, Kong, and Dunn 2013,

Hixon 2013a, Marubbio 2006). Landscapes were feminized with men often referencing land as something that could be "domesticated," "nurtured," "tamed," "raped," or was "virgin and pure." Settler colonialism in the U.S. included the objective of enabling white settler men to control and regulate both the harsh frontier they were "plunging into," as well as eliminate the perceived savagery of Indigenous people that was contaminating the virgin and pure landscapes they were going to "penetrate and plant their seed in." Settler colonialism's aggressive policies of land seizure, assimilation, and genocide thus became highly gendered.

This is evident, too, in fetishized representations of Indigenous women that were often symbolized as alluring nubile Indian princesses, or half-naked exotic eroticized primitives (McClintock 2013, LaRocque 1996). As Mick, 53 years old, elaborated upon during a particularly jarring conversation, "I mean look at the story of Pocahontas and John Smith … some of those native girls wanted a bit of 'white meat.' I bet some of them still do." This statement, in addition to its racist misogyny, was offered despite the fact that the story of Pocahontas, as we have been taught and typically know it, is wholly refuted and widely debated on a host of fronts (Custalow and Daniel 2007, Manksy 2017, Schilling 2017).

As white settlers expanded across the country, the repressive perspectives on sexuality associated with conservative Christianity often spread with them. Consequently, settler colonialism, and its largely Christian contingent, was threatened by speculative ideas surrounding the perceived deviant sexualities and unnatural gender continuums of Indigenous communities (McClintock 2013, Eisenstein 1996). The (heterosexual) white settler men who were colonizing the area then took it upon themselves to safeguard their white women from the contrived hyper-aggressive threats of rape, kidnapping, and violence they believe stemmed from feral Indigenous (and Black) men who were imagined to be wildly running rampant across a foreign and brutal land. In totality, and up to the current moment, the bifurcated gender socialization of white savior-men and damsel-in-distress-women imported by settler colonialism, as well as the pride taken in being rural, American,

and white "protector," continues to (re)produce many of the Manicheanistic cultural ideals (e.g. white/black, good/bad, strong/weak, man/woman) and heteronormative social values of countless communities across the region.

Another aspect of white settlement was how "uncivilized Indians" were going to be "educated," "dealt with," and assimilated. Colonialism employed parochial and paternalistic narratives that framed Indigenous people, and their families and children, as backward and anachronistic (Coulthard 2014, Veracini 2010, de Leeuw 2007). This rationale allowed Christian missionaries to justify their presence, perspectives, and eventual structures of indoctrination as being part of a project of enlightenment. As many of the Christian settlers believed their journey was divinely inspired, it meant the people, children, and minds of those who did not share the same belief systems required re-education and needed to be "brought to Jesus."

Settler colonial "education" experienced by Indigenous children in the 1800s, often held in missionary boarding schools that amounted to labor camps, used detention, discipline, punishment, and capitalist logics to "lift" Indigenous people out of their putative uncultured existences and into "civilization" (de Leeuw 2016, Hixon 2013a, Wolfe 1999). Captive education, put at the service of industrial production and empire, in addition to directly hammering into the minds of Indigenous children their identities, cultures, and belief systems were inferior, also indirectly ensured that they would not learn how to either socially or economically reproduce themselves, as their ancestors had, once they were older (e.g. parent; develop traditional kinship ties; care-take; tell stories in Indigenous languages; plant/prepare food as their Elders had; hunt/use buffalo; share/exchange goods, services, resources as older Indigenous generations did) (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014, Fixico 2003).

Settler colonial worldviews of this persuasion, which were concurrently soldered to capitalist logics, are still reflected to this day. Randall, 59 years old, informed me that, according to a sesquicentennial volume released in St. Paul to celebrate the town's 150-year anniversary, the establishment of Osage Mission served as a "gateway for commerce and exploration in the frontier territory."

He noted, too, that the same volume, as a testament to the town's rich pioneer and Catholic history, referred to the settler community as the "Great Distributing Center of Civilization in Southeast Kansas." A moniker the town took upon itself as a result of the Catholic missionaries having arrived in the region during the mid-1800s.

In light of the historical and contemporary settler narratives that pervade Southeast Kansas, it can be seen that white settlers, in conjunction with puritanical interpretations of Christian doctrine, reaffirm gendered subjectivities and practices in the area. As conservative religious views served as a central part of the colonizing and settling process, the social relations of the area reflect the culturally imperialistic tendencies that stem from patriarchal colonialism. As a result, at the time of this writing, there were no members of Osage Nation in the community, or surrounding area. Participants knew of no Indigenous spirituality being practiced around the area, and none were regularly exposed to the historical perspectives of the Osage people, nor had heard or seen much of any of the Osage Nation's language, art, or cultural practices. Aside from what was in the local museum.

What has been produced in the community as a result of settler colonialism is a massive Catholic church that serves as the pillar of the community. The church is referred to as the "Beacon of the Plains" and stands upon the open plains as an imposing verandah of power that both represents the most widely accepted historical narrative of the area, as well as the town's most influential, respected, and revered symbol.

In mentioning the lack of indigeneity in Southeast Kansas, as well as the Christian hegemony that operates there, I should note select "Indians" can found in the community. However, the "Indians" that can be seen are only seen in very particular ways, which will be explained in the next section. But before the ways in which Indigenous people remain a part of the community are elaborated upon, what can be surmised about Southeast Kansas is that the markers of gender, race, class, religion, and space all interlock to shape its cultural landscape, a cultural landscape that has profoundly been scarred and continues to be awash and dominated by masculinist settler colonialism.

## Emotion, Paradox, and Monster

Colonialism settles upon the minds and discourses of those whom it serves, in addition to lands and people it lays waste to. Any thorough analysis of a white settler society needs to take into account subjectivities and affective experiences, along with the economic capital, territorial acquisition, and political influence that is gained and lost when describing the repercussions of what colonization produces. In looking at the subjectivities and emotional dispositions bound up in settler legitimations of colonial invasion, what surfaces is a series of paradoxes and inconsistencies.

Frantz Fanon (1967) makes the argument that, under European colonialism, there exists an existential complex in which those who are being subjected to colonizing forces are offered no other destiny than that of becoming "white." In his writing on imperial aggression, Fanon (1963, 311) notes that the enlightened and benevolent Anglo-centric project of colonial settlement stemmed from Europe, "where they are never done talking of humanity, yet murder people everywhere they find them." Fanon (1963, 236) continues his analysis of colonial nation-building by stating:

> A former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the sickness and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions.

As Fanon rightly articulates, this "monster" was and is the settler society that is the U.S., which saw fit to impose its will, culture, and rules upon the original inhabitants of the lands it wanted. What this produced for Indigenous and negatively racialized people was trauma and death. And as noted earlier, what efforts to build a "great"/imperial nation provided for the white settlers implicated in colonial endeavors was a series of rationalizations, justifications, and excuses that were and are deployed as attempts to wash their hands of the violence and dispossession that occurred. As seen in the comments of the men throughout the chapter, defensive narratives of denial continue to echo today. Consequently, what has resulted from

the complex interplay of the historical trajectories of colonialism, the discursive constructions of masculinist white supremacy, and the enclosed and expropriated spaces that settlers now reside in is both contradiction and ambivalence.

Homi Bhabha (1994) elaborates on ambivalence by deconstructing the rigid lines of demarcation that separate those who are colonized from those who are colonizing. He also suggests that the identities of the colonial settlers are in actuality, dependent upon the purportedly docile and disempowered colonized Other (Bhabha 1994). What this relationship intimates is that, in white settler societies like the U.S., white settlers are positioned as subjects themselves, and thus rely upon those whom they deem inferior and want to erase for the formation of their own subjectivities. In this way, settler societies, and the socio-spatial processes of subjectification that occur iteratively within them, are never static or fixed, as well as are contingent upon land. Hence, the colonial identities that are produced as a result of white settlement are socially constructed, tenuous, and demand both territory and continual reaffirmation in order to be legitimized as active and existing. Such dynamics create social conditions in which colonial ambivalence and emotional contradictions become routine and widespread within settler societies. For example, what goes on in one's mind when confronted with the fact, and history, that their "safe," "civilized," "good," "Christian" community, as well as the land they own, was founded by and built upon, quite literally, a mass grave, captive manual labor school for children, dispossessed land, and acts of genocide?

The colonial ambivalence that occurs within Southeast Kansas, as within most settler societies, sees fit to simultaneously patronize, cherish, appropriate, praise, and exploit the Indigenous culture that it has infringed upon. While some of the participants in Southeast Kansas remarked that the treaty violations, death marches, and massacres that Indigenous people faced were horrible aspects of colonial settlement, they also maintained narratives that suggest the white settlers and Christian missionaries in their local area were propelling members of the Osage Nation into civilization and guiding them towards salvation. And while none of the men interviewed stated that Indigenous people had "lawful" claims to the land they themselves

had acquired through settler colonialism, they did suggest that Osage culture and history was important to them. Glenn, 46 years old, summed up his perspective on why Indigenous people did not have legitimate claims to land in the area when he stated:

> Well, I remember a few years back there was some sort of a proposal being talked about because a few Indians wanted to build a big casino close to here. But I mean, if you honestly look at it—they signed over their land and left a long time ago. Plus, what we built here, it kind of gives you a good idea of what their priorities are compared to ours. We have a beautiful church, a great school, a safe community, successful businesses, and good family farms … they wanted to come in and build a giant place to gamble so they could make a quick, easy buck.

Several men also claimed they were paying respect to the Osage Nation because the high school mascot, in particular the football team, carried the name "Indians." They noted the way it "honored Indians" was because it was rekindling and paying homage to the warrior mentalities "Indians" had. Numerous interviewees also referred to the Indian mascot as a symbol of the "fighting spirit" they embodied when they took the football field because they were preparing to "go to war and do battle." For the record, a scant two decades ago I was saying the same thing, not to mention leading and yelling the "That's Tribe Football baby!" and "Who's Next!?" call-and-response chants as a Team Captain and Homecoming King. Further appropriating indigeneity in what participants suggested was a respectful manner, many told stories of how important home games were because opponents were coming into "our house." Rick, 27 years old, asserted, "No one came into our territory and took what was ours—that is what St. Paul Indian football was all about."

Also falling in line with typical patterns of paternalistic notions of caring about and respecting Indigenous people that exist within settler societies, participants often conveyed pity and sympathy for the Indigenous people of the area due in part to the recognition that the Osage Nation had been displaced and suffered thousands of deaths due to a series of epidemics. These sympathies were not without qualification. Interviewees

suggested that the Catholic missionaries in Southeast Kansas were "different from" other settlers because they were willing to help, care for, and teach the Indigenous people whom they encountered during periods of settlement, displacement, and dispossession. This rationale was often referenced as a way the community "remembered and held on" to the Indigenous culture that was present during the time of settlement.

The feelings of affinity, pride, satisfaction, and safety that were articulated in interviews have also become a major ongoing theme in the production of the community's traditional lore. Terry, 59 years old, demonstrates this when commenting about a local historical marker detailing the Osage Nation, and the nation's eventual removal to Oklahoma, as well as in explaining the town's annual heritage celebration, "Mission Days," which uses images of Osage people and artefacts for its advertising and marketing campaigns, when he states, "We have a wonderful history and still remain very respectful towards the culture those Indians had … they are big part of why we are here, so we do our best to honor them." Upon asking other participants from what sources of information they received their local history, all men stated it was taught to them in elementary and middle school; from their parents, relatives, and going to church; from displays and documents at the local museum; as well as during the town's annual Memorial Day celebration ("Mission Days" noted above). Based upon these sources of historical reproduction, it can be gathered that a highly unstable and ambivalent exercise of disaffiliation from colonial violence, along with the simultaneous maintenance of a white messiah complex, is an ever-present element in the subjectivities and hegemonic discourses of the settler community. This was not dissimilar to what I heard from numerous other men from other communities across the Heartland.

## "Safe" Communities, Authoritarian Populism

*All things are subject to interpretation. Whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power—not truth.*
Friedrich Nietzsche

Nearly every participant I spoke to explicitly described St. Paul as "safe" and "a good place to call home." The immediate question this should prompt is: For whom? Incidentally, the vast majority of all the informants I interviewed across the region felt the same about the respective communities they were from, as well as the Heartland in general. Alternative perspectives regarding the social geography, especially if considering its past, suggest otherwise. The beneficent Christian narratives that dominate the historical tales of communities like St. Paul, which are scattered across the entire Heartland, when historicized and analyzed from a postcolonial perspective show that "safe" is by no means an accurate descriptor of the region.

The contradiction is recognizable on a litany of fronts: the lack of Indigenous histories, worldviews, and accounts that exist about the region's past; the chronological displacements and attempts at assimilation/Indigenous erasure that took place across the area; the segregation and quarantine of Indigenous people that occurred and still remains across the Heartland as a result of the U.S. reservation system; and both the de jure and de facto marginalization, exclusion, and criminalization experienced by Black, Brown, and migrant communities. In light of this information, and when juxtaposed with texts like "America, the Beautiful," "The Star-Spangled Banner," and mainstream history textbooks, it is readily apparent that myriad local communities across the Heartland continue to both peddle and bask in colonial frontier myths and white supremacist narratives that deliberately silence the voices of the (non-white) oppressed. Epistemic burial, the foreclosure of Indigenous worldviews, and the suppression, exclusion, and evacuation of negatively racialized Others are touchstones of neither a "safe" community nor "a good place to call home."

A panoramic read of the landscape, particularly the confinement and enclosure it is marred by, clearly demonstrates that a massive dislocation of human life occurred once European settlement and bordering began. Representations of white frontiersmen protecting their families and making their way across a harsh landscape, nevertheless, have resonance in the production of masculinity during contemporary times. Throwbacks to the personality traits and characteristics that America's "Founding Fathers," "pioneers," and

"adventurers" were imbued with during these times can still be heard in the rhetoric and analogies of today, across a host of differing business settings, military endeavors, sporting events, and even classroom lectures (Woodward 2003, Connell 2000, Messner 1992). Such stories, while commonly touted and accepted as conventional wisdom, continue to reproduce colonial and patriarchal norms when woven as "truths" into the cultural fabric of any given society. In this way, countless people, even those outside the Heartland, are exposed to myth-histories that continue to venerate white settler colonialism and frontier masculinity in one form or another (Veracini 2010, Tuhiwai Smith 1999).

And while perhaps not every member of every society is directly exposed to the most overt and tangible elements of rural manhood on a regular basis (i.e. not everyone finds themselves in a rustic agrarian setting surrounded by heavy machinery, livestock, agricultural crops, farm equipment, and "country boys" daily), they are subjected to representations of rural masculinity through both history and media. Widespread swaths of society are fed images of the archetypal "hard-working man" (usually in the serene settings of the natural landscape) through a wide variety of broadcasting avenues. Advertisements selling products ranging from beer and cigarettes, to trucks, jeans, technology solutions, and even perfume and cleaning products, can be seen on a daily basis in both urban and rural settings (Campbell, Bell, and Finney 2006, Cloke 2005, Jackson, Stevenson, and Brooks 2001, Jackson 1994). The prevalence of rural masculinity is indeed something that has become engrained in the collective consciousness for many settler societies. Hence, rural masculinity is an influential cultural token that is at once imagined and real, in discourse and practice, and is something that most have encountered in one form or another at some point.

In addition to the symbolic representations that the rural masculine signifies (e.g. strength, authority, control) in the realm of religion, history, and marketing, it also carries a great deal of significance in partisan politics and state elections. Countless political officials have had campaign stops and town halls in rural counties in attempts to distance themselves from the notion that they are a part of a "liberal elite," exclusionary, upper-class who primarily work

in offices, wear suits, and do not "get their hands dirty" (Messner 2007). Taking time to shake hands with the locals, chat with the "Average Joes," and perhaps appear at a local sporting event, bar, or church service has resonance for individuals who may be undecided in their political choices.

Many of the participants I spent time with appreciated this. By "cowboying up" and experiencing a little bit of "country life" candidates can manufacture an approachable, down-to-earth, populist persona that can influence voters, and subsequently, state policy. Oftentimes, this can even sway members of civil society, especially in the Heartland, to select candidates making legislative decisions that are not in their best interest (Frank 2007). As Jake, a 41-year-old from my hometown told me:

> Trump is kind of an ass and sure he pops off to trigger the left, but I like what he's doing. It's kind of funny watching liberals get all riled up about some of the shit he says. That pussy-grabbing line is something we've all said. Just locker room talk like everyone pointed out. I don't take none of it too seriously. I like how he's not afraid to call it like he sees it. He gets it. We need more of that nowadays. [The] country's [the U.S.] going to shit because all the crime we let in [referencing migrants] and handouts it keeps giving [welfare and affirmative action policies]. [He] understands what it's like here [rural Heartland] more than most.

The irony here is that Trump is a billionaire from New York City who comes from a monied and rentier-capitalist class and has been accused by over 20 women of sexual assault. Nevertheless, his "populist" facade in the Heartland and appeal to characteristics commonly attributed to rural masculinity carry emotional sway. Further demonstrating that colonial orthodoxies surrounding white nationalism, heteropatriarchy, rugged individualism, and a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality are all very much alive and well in the region.

Notably, the current nationalist fervor and zeal for authoritarian populism in the Heartland, which proved to be a Trump stronghold in the 2016, and country writ large is partially a result

of the U.S.'s intensifying class stratification and decades-long dwindling rural economy (Giroux 2017). As Berlet and Sunshine (2019, 481) point out:

> Ninety percent of Americans between 1980 and 2012 received no rise in salary while dividends from a rising GDP rose dramatically for the top 10% (Economic Policy Institute 2014, Political Research Associates 2017). Since the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980, the 1% has enriched itself while pushing most of us into a downward spiral of exported jobs, lower wages, unsafe working conditions, and tax breaks for the wealthy. Government social services such as public health and food stamps have been slashed. Public works projects, from bridges to sewers, have been gutted. Shifting tax dollars to private charter schools has strangled public education.

These dynamics have generated a considerable amount of anxiety, resentment, and despair in the Heartland over the past 30 years given they are debilitating much of the region (Devega 2015), compromising the economic security and well-being of numerous white working-class people (Chen 2015), and seeing the collapse of small family farms (Davidson 1996). As Randy, 49 years old, states:

> You think they (politicians) care about us? They could [not] give two shits what happens to the average working man … more concerned about giving handouts to lazy assholes and our [U.S. citizens'] jobs to illegals. It's not right. Trump rolled in and said shit's gotta change … tipped his cap to the working man, said we matter. Liberals don't like hearing that but it's true. Guys like us built this country and now we're getting kicked around like we were the one's sucking off the system. Thanks for nothing … Trump knows it, [and that's] why he gets so much support 'round here. Protecting borders, reducing crime, cracking down on radical Islamic terrorists, and exposing those rich politician assholes like Clinton [Hillary] and Obama for what they are, frauds and liars. He put the issue of abortion back on the table too. About damn time. All the liberals are pro-abortion, he's standing up to them because it's the right thing to do. He's not backing down either … I can respect a guy like that.

Randy's comments, in short, demonstrate how Trump's appeal to members of the rural white working-class in the region are economic, emotional, moral, masculinist, and racial. Studies both leading up to and after Trump's victory demonstrate that the convergence of racial animosity, anti-abortion politics ("being pro-life" as noted by interviewees), opposition to LGBTQ rights, and uncertainty surrounding the experience of financial loss and/or job instability factor heavily into the voting decisions of similar groups (Gayle 2018, Price 2018, Scher and Berlet 2014). Unsurprisingly, then, Randy's sentiment was shared amongst numerous interviewees, with migrants, Muslims, and recipients of welfare benefits (often racially coded when described) being scapegoated as the cohorts who "politicians," "the government," Democrats, and "liberal elite" were catering to and concerned for. From the vantage point of the participants, the attention and favor Others received, at what they felt was their expense, was what was responsible for the region's economic decline and their own financial precarity.

Ultimately, the resentment and despair experienced by the men is understandable and, arguably, justifiable—not to mention nothing new. However, the response of blaming communities of color, migrants, and recipients of social entitlements—instead of the corporations and large-scale businesses whom federal farm and extractive policies were designed to enrich—is not. Notably, the neglect and hardship many interviewees were attesting to has been what Indigenous communities and negatively racialized groups have been experiencing, disproportionately, for generations under racial capitalism (Chen 2015). Of note, too, is that the rural white working-class in the U.S. is by no means the sole demographic responsible for Trump's electoral college victory (Monnat and Brown 2017, Roper Center 2018). In offering an explanation and alluding to what lies at the roots of Trump's rise to power, Berlet and Sunshine (2019, 502) offer the following précis:

> Too often media reports of new research into the Trump phenomenon, the rise of the Right in the United States, or the relationships between right-wing populism and neofascism, promote mono-causal explanations. This is distracting us from a

deeper and more historically grounded and complicated analysis that can be traced back decades *if not to the original founding settlers.* [emphasis added]

In sum, what Trump offered participants in the Heartland, as well as supporters across the board, was approval, affirmation, and validation. Approval of their conservative (patriarchal-Christian) politics, affirmation for their obedience to a capitalist ruling class and racist state (nationalism), and a validation of their white (settler) identities—as well as the underlying entitlements, privileges, and feelings of exceptionalism they are imbued with (sometimes overtly, sometimes subconsciously) on account of each. In short, countless working-class white settler men across the Heartland were starved for attention and hope, both economic and emotional, and Trump promised them each. This all makes for a particularly peculiar situation given several participants noted "hating identity politics" and despising "underserving" people "being rewarded" for "work they didn't do" or "given" things they did not "earn." Trump blowing the "Make America Great Again" dog whistle was merely the latest and most punchy, yet not all that subtle but diabolically effective, way to conjure imperialist nostalgia and summon settler colonial rage at their white supremacist roots.

## Denial, Disavowal, and Disaffiliation

> *I think it's just time for them to get over it … and get on with their lives at some point.*
> Rob, 52-year-old factory worker (speaking about Indigenous people)

As a white settler society attempts to create and reproduce its own version of "history," there then arises the need to pen the saga of that nation's beginnings and borders. Through the discursive act of writing history, in addition to conceptualizing and defining space and land, indigeneity is often removed and excised from the colonial authors' story. Negating, modifying, and refuting history have thus developed into some of the most routine practices of settler

societies. In manufacturing serviceable historical records, settler colonialism often validates and reaffirms its biased versions of past events by diluting its violent tendencies down into benign stories of pioneer homesteading.

For the settler nation-state that is the United States, a fairy-tale pathos of Manifest Destiny, American Exceptionalism, and patriotic frontier myth often displaces the historical accounts and oral traditions of the varied Indigenous cultures that one point freely lived and thrived across the land. These fabricated settler narratives then serve to continue the imperial project that was initiated some 500 years ago, while denying that it is actually taking place. Wiegman (1999) refers to such processes as "white liberal disaffiliation," and based upon the accounts gathered during the project, "America" is serving as one of its practitioners par excellence. Consequently, the colonial hostilities that target Indigenous people and cultures today are banal and less visible, but nonetheless, they do remain.

Despite the numerous ongoing attempts of white settler societies to wash themselves clean of the people and cultures they deem inferior, they have not been able to do so. The resistance and resilience of Indigenous people and negatively racialized groups all across the world, and in the case of this study of what is now the U.S., still remain an enduring part of the story. As Indigenous people continue to contest imperialism, confront genocide, and refuse to be abolished from existence altogether, settler societies then turn to disaffiliation as an alibi for the traumas they have inflicted and benefitted from. What disaffiliation produces on the part of the settler societies are spurious attempts to sterilize history and refute the suffering and anguish they have caused. And if settler societies fail to purge their pasts of the colonial violence they have perpetrated—they simply try to forget.

However, the process of forgetting is no easy endeavor. It requires the constant expenditure of extensive amounts of energy, effort, and emotion on the part of a settler society and state, and results in a futile race to innocence that will never be realized. Despite the uselessness those claims to innocence and attempts at forgetting are imbued with, they do remain permanent tasks on the agendas of settler societies. Disavowal and negligence have thus

become some of the most effective contemporary maneuvers that colonialism has at its disposal. And it is evident that these moves are made quite readily. Denial thus remains an omnipresent specter floating across the solemn fields of the American Heartland, just as it also permeates the highest and most powerful levels of government, military, and corporate industry within all colonial nation-states.

The indisputable reality that remains is that settler societies have the propensity to indifferently overlook their roles in profiting from, and reproducing, colonial deracination, borders, and suffering. Such propensities perpetuate white settler fantasies of nationhood, individuality, and benevolent altruism—assertions that remain an oft-utilized tool that is frequently taken out of the colonial repertoire. But because settler societies still deem it necessary to employ the logics of white supremacy, it means that Indigenous resistance and anti-colonial struggles in the face of such imperial practices will also continue. In the final analysis, Indigenous people have survived colonialism's onslaught of forced enclosure, dispossession, ethnic massacre, and genocide for over 500 years, so it is safe to say that they will also survive colonialism's, and settlers' violent attempts at forgetting. The only real question that remains is what role settlers will decide to play in the story going forward.

# Chapter 5

# Frontier, Family, Nation

*You want to know when a gun becomes dangerous?*
*When someone tries to take it from me.*
Ryan, 34-year-old truck driver

## Don't Tread on Me …

The body of scholarly work regarding gun use and masculinity has steadily been expanding over the past three decades given more exposure to and media attention on issues of "terrorism," war, military culture, suicide, and school and mass shootings (Fox and DeLateur 2014, Kellner 2015, 2012). Following the U.S. gun violence archive, as well as trying to list the pertinent hate crimes, white supremacist attacks, and domestic homicides involving guns is overwhelming. Literature is focusing more and more on how the gun and its use have become increasingly gendered, illustrating the relationship that firearm possession has with cultural formations and assertions of masculine authority (Stroud 2012, Leonard 2010). Scholarship also suggests that guns, in certain contexts and much like manhood, signify strength, maturity, and a capacity for violence (Felson and Pare 2010). The symbolic power of a gun has thus become wedded to masculinity as a result of the connotations each has with power, control, dominance, and self-reliance. This all

makes for a volatile situation when alienation, disempowerment, and rage are thrown into the mix.

With that said, this chapter is neither an argument against guns, nor a critique of those who hold them. John Brown did some quite fine work, with guns, in the Heartland (Bleeding Kansas to be precise), just over a century and a half ago. And there is, from what I have gathered from afar and my more recent jaunts home, a progressive group of predominantly white settler anarchists and socialists with anti-racist politics who are engaged in grassroots organizing against white supremacy and heteropatriarchy in the Heartland (The "John Brown Gun Club"), who have guns. Of note, too, is that this chapter is not a categorical argument for guns. While I feel it was and is perfectly appropriate for Zapatistas in the EZLN, women in the Yekîneyên Parastina Jin (YPJ), and the Black Panthers to arm themselves, I do not, under any circumstances, think the alt-right, ethno-nationalists, neofascists, or state should be able to have guns, let alone even exist.

Rather, then, this chapter is a portrait of what guns meant to the participants I spoke to in the rural Heartland, as well as what guns symbolize and have produced in the region. An entire chapter was necessary simply because guns were a topic, as well as activity, that emerged frequently over the course of my fieldwork. Moreover, guns were a big part of my childhood growing up and I wanted to see if they were still as influential in the lives of men in the region as they were mine. The discussions I had with informants about guns were expansive: gun use, gun rights, gun ownership, gun safety, gun comparisons, technical knowledge of guns, guns as hobbies, and even gun apologetics surfaced. The point is, guns are ubiquitous in the area. They were mentioned in nearly all the conversations I had related to recreation, history, politics, fathering, family provision, self-defense, and protection, as well as individual rights, civil liberties, and personal freedoms. "Don't tread on us," as Matt, 52 years old, along with several others summed up to my queries about guns, as well as the laws, regulations, and potential restrictions surrounding them.

What follows, then, is an investigation into masculinity and gun culture as it pertains to the rural men I visited during my time

in the Heartland. Before diving into the empirical data, though, it is necessary to briefly mention research ethics and what many critical theorists call the "crisis of representation" (Nagar and Geiger 2007, Bondi 1998). That is, the position I write from is biased with my own perspective and politics. It is, admittedly, an account from my standpoint and political-theoretical under-pinnings. What I experienced and critique in regard to the social relationships of the area, as well as gun culture, is subject to scru-tiny in itself. The interpretation that some participants may have regarding my analysis might very well depart, significantly, from the account I provide. I stand by it, nevertheless, but also realize it is important to signpost my biases/politics regarding how men and gun culture in the region are represented, characterized, and constructed. In order to steer clear of the trappings of overgener-alization and stereotype, then, I stress keeping cultural mores and historical structures in front of mind.

Guns can be a triggering and flashpoint issue when researchers start poking and prodding around, especially if participants know said researcher is dissecting masculinity. I therefore am doing my best to describe accurately what I experienced and noticed about gun culture in the region, from anti-racist, postcolonial, and femi-nist perspectives. In an attempt to be as transparent as possible, I am emphasizing that participants' relationships with guns stem from a variety of contrasting sources. All of which are influenced by their personal histories, as well as the cultural and institutional conditions they find themselves in.

These detailed qualifications may seem like a bit of overkill at this juncture, but interestingly, they emerge out of participant requests, as well as research ethics, I am beholden to. Several, by no means all, interviewees whom I spoke with asked (demanded?) that if I quoted or analyzed particular statements they shared about guns that I, as author and analyst, needed to "let know people where you are coming from." I feel this is fair and am trying to do right by the request, as well as participants. Thus, the caveats above. With that, what follows is my diagnosis of how the gun influences masculinity for rural men in the American Heartland.

## Frontier Masculinity: Protectors and Providers

In contemporary settler societies like the U.S., it is difficult not to avoid symbolic representations of rugged individualism and rural white men (e.g. settler-pioneers, ancestors, cowboys, hunters, farmers, missionaries, etc.). They are part and products of the colonial imagination (Wright 2001). Numerous social institutions (e.g. schools, state legislatures, museums, history lessons) found within settler societies commonly valorize conquest by manufacturing narratives that suggest "explorers" bravely set sail on an unforgiving sea to "discover" and conquer a new and untamed land (Mills 1996, Blunt and Rose 1994, Slotkin 1973). For the U.S., these historical accounts include images of white settlers courageously bringing civilization to and defending their (manifest) destinies/empire against "savages" by either enslaving or assimilating them. The setting? The open frontier (Wolfe 2006, Kimmel 1996, Mills 1996).

Scholars subsequently have theorized notions of "frontier masculinity," which feature prominently in (gendered) narratives that forged and continue to reinforce American nationalism (Via 2010). In many cases, U.S. frontier narratives make use of the gun as a signifier of both manhood and empire. Guns, in addition to being weapons that kill, carry a substantial discursive weight as emblems of power, security, and self-reliance. Guns thereby serve as key iconic accoutrements in glorified accounts of white settlers setting out to tame, conquer, and homestead upon a wild frontier, not to mention the people who resided in it (Carrington, McIntosh, and Scott 2010, Via 2010).

Related to studies about fabricated American histories and imagined frontiers, it was not uncommon to hear participants fondly tell stories of playing "Cowboys and Indians" or pretending to be characters from their favorite war movies and popular Westerns. Many recalled, with sentimental nostalgia, the happy times they had with friends playing with toy guns, pretending to embody the wholesome qualities their cowboy idols and military heroes stood for. Protecting and defending the nation and world from "bad guys" was necessary, important, and fun. Incidentally, I too still remember, with quite a bit of disconcerting wistfulness, doing all of these things while

meandering alongside the MKT and Union Pacific railroad tracks in Kansas. Playing war, creating tactical operations, and then setting off to scamper around, shoot enemies, and take cover amongst the tall grass pastures, sparsely forested meadows, and open backyards of neighbors with my brother and friends while growing up were some of the most anticipated, and regular, activities we did. We were the "Americans," the "good guys,"—protecting, peace-keeping, and prowess-flexing. Further evidence of the power of (hi)stories, especially the colonial ones, as well as how they resonate, particularly in the minds of the young.

Critical scholarship points out that settler myths of national defense and safeguarding private property, via the gun, are linked to historical conceptualizations and American dreams of Manifest Destiny and border securitization (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014, 2018). That is, "discovering the New World" and "spreading civilization" via homesteading, establishing churches, and assimilating or eliminating "backward savages" was a functional justification for the acts of genocide and enslavement that were perpetrated against Indigenous and Black populations by American settler colonialists, with their guns. As several interviewees I sat down with attested to, in the current moment, narratives linked to gun use have shifted predominantly towards the need to secure America's borders, "protect what is ours," "stand our ground," and "protect your castle." As Randall, 38 years old, half-jokingly noted, "We've [white settlers] conquered the frontier, it is ours, now we must defend it."

Discourses surrounding destiny and defense such as this are especially interesting given research shows that the promotion of gun ownership and use for the purposes of "safety" and "peace of mind" contradictorily ends up eroding a society's overall sense of security, and often peace for that matter (Cornell 2006). This paradox can be observed in the fact that as gun possession rates rise in communities, so too do fear, suspicion, and paranoia (Cornell 2006). That is, the proliferation of guns in a given context ends up reducing the peace of mind it is meant to afford. A result stemming from an increase in weapons that creates a more heavily armed, defensive, assortment of disparate individuals who are being governed by mistrust and doubt. Incidentally, the vast majority of the participants I interviewed stated

that the reasons they owned guns were safety, security, protection, and defense.

In myriad contexts, tangible items and concrete objects signal masculinity. For the vast majority of the men I talked to, one of these items is the gun. Earl, 42 years old, speaks to the emblematic power and cultural meaning of guns when asked about why gun ownership was important and what meaning it carried:

> Owning a gun around here means something, not many people are gonna fuck with a guy who is carrying. I've got a family to provide for and protect … a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do … aside from all that, they were part of growing up. Me and a lot of guys went out with our dads and uncles and grandpas. Still do … and with the way things are going nowadays people need to know who not to fuck with. It's like Trump said after that school shooting down in Florida, if that coach who ran in there and saved those kids would have had a gun, it would have been the end of it. I still think he's a hero, but had he had a gun, I bet he'd still be alive too.

Being considered a "good family man" and fulfilling the role of "protector and provider" of the home were major themes that surfaced in nearly all of the interviews I conducted with men who were married or fathers. The pressure men feel in relationships, whether from external or internal sources, to achieve the role of provider for the family is well researched (Brandth 2016, Bridges and Pascoe 2014, Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). This dynamic was largely explicit amongst men in my research, with heterosexual and protector being more implicit. All (protector, provider, heterosexual) were presumed as naturally what men should be, or are, by interviewees. In turn, they became requisite roles and subject positions men were expected to engender in order to demonstrate they were "men." Ryan, 34 years old, articulated what seemed to be common sense to him and many others in his community:

> As a man, it's my duty to make sure that my family is the most important thing. Family comes first. There are certain jobs that I have to do, and there are certain jobs my wife has to do. God

basically designed it that way, that's just the way it is. I can't have a baby, and she is not as strong as me … so it's like we were made to be able to do different things. I'm not saying one is worse than the other, it is just natural for it to be that way. I do not try to control my wife or anything like that, but she knows that she is better cut out to do some of the mothering stuff, and I am cut out to do other things. I can work harder, I don't have to miss work to raise a baby, I can support the family by earning a paycheck and making sure they are safe. Maybe it's just the way I was raised, but that's the way I see it. Call us crazy or whatever, but a lotta the other guys I know pretty much see it the same … And say what you want about Trump, I personally think he's a bit too over the top, but if you look at what he does, who he trusts, and the way he arranges things, you can see that he cares about his family. Trusts them. That's a sign to me he has been there with them all along the way. There is something to be said for that.

Due to the fact the region I was traveling around was predominantly Christian, cultural norms surrounding marriage were based on conservative interpretations of bible stories. Consequently, marriage is meant to be between a man and woman, who are categorically different in nature; is permanent and in need of being recognized as "pure" in the eyes of God; is a union, based in love, in which a woman "submits" to a man; and should typically involve procreation and the rearing of a nuclear family. Regarding Christianity in the region, denominations varied but the sources of each, if traced historically, were typically rooted in European colonization and white settler occupation/imposition.

The effect of conservative Christianity's gendered division of existence, as well as its associated stratification, were pronounced for participants. Rigid sex roles, sanctioned and made ritual by organized religion, were rationalized as "facts." Marriage was recurrently described by interviewees as a shared vow between a "man and *his* wife," i.e. defined in heteropatriarchal and possessive ways. In turn, men and women were implored, from on high, to both concede to and perform traditional, Western gender roles (Lugones 2007). The re-entrenchment of a bifurcated gender hierarchy is the result, with women, and what several participants described as

"womanly qualities" (e.g. emotional, nurturing, irrational, gossipy, fragile, sensitive), being situated at the bottom. Plainly, it is from the pulpit, pastor, and pontiff that some of the Heartland's most seemingly commonplace yet confining edicts are imparted.

Men, on the contrary, were typically styled as being tough, rational, aggressive, silent, calm, and strong. This essentialist reasoning, also supported by the region's pervasive conservative Christian doctrine, further bolstered the underlying belief that men are and ought be both breadwinners and guardians of the home and family. Women, in turn, were cast as incomplete, bodies to be owned, leaving unfulfilled their biologically determined "purpose" if not partnered with a man and bearing children, and repeatedly, in need of some form of protection. John, 44 years old and a father of two, highlights these discursive formations when he states:

> Part of making sure my family is safe and taken care of is to protect them, and if owning a gun helps me protect my wife and kids, as well as provide for them, then I'm surer than shit going to have one. Don't get me wrong, I know guns can be dangerous and all, but I took hunter's ed. (education) and I respect the hell out them. I keep them around just in case I ever need to use them cause you never know when a criminal may be on the loose, or all drugged up, or when a pervert may come sneaking around. It's those times when a guy has to "cowboy up" and protect what's his. And if that requires shooting some nutcase then that's what he's got to do.

Gun ownership and proficiency, in turn, became a means of embodying the role of "protector." By extension, they also earned men both social and spiritual currency with respect to exhibiting masculine prowess and adhering to "traditional family values," respectively. In short, guns were a surefire way for a man to defend his family, which "is the Christian thing to do."

The vast majority of participants not only mentioned having guns "just in case," but also because they were living in the rural. Residing "out in the country" allowed participants to justify owning firearms as a way to protect "what is theirs" from possible criminals given police were not nearby. In addition, guns were a farm/country tool. That is,

interviewees noted the necessity of having a firearm on ready given that outside threats including wild animals, stray vermin, or rabid predators may attack or spread disease amongst their livestock, garden, or crops. "They [guns] are a way to hold down the fort" and "help rid the place [farm] of pests," as Everett, 54 years old, and Ricky, 48 years old shared; which are statements connoting that gun use makes men empowered and active agents.

Interestingly, recent literature on gun use and manhood suggests the reasons men sometimes own guns are because of disillusionment, powerlessness, despair, and alienation they are experiencing as a result of their social standing, economic situation, and/or just "getting older"/ less "able" (Page 2009, Cooke 2004, Resnick and Wolff 2003). Despite such studies, from the perspectives of the participants, gun use was not an attempt to compensate for feelings of helplessness, insecurity, and vulnerability resulting from either the exploitative position they were placed in under capitalism or the prospect and experience of aging. Rather, owning a gun served a purpose and was a necessary piece of equipment for the duty of safeguarding their family, possessions, and way of life. While these reasons for owning guns are by no means mutually exclusive, what is foregrounded in the narratives of men with respect to why they own guns is telling. Namely, it tells us that men, in the name of masculinity, are compelled to neither articulate their vulnerabilities nor admit to feelings of helplessness.

## Ideology: Liberal, Capitalist, Colonial

To further explain how normative masculinity is (re)produced in the Heartland, it is necessary to look at the development of liberal-capitalist thought in the U.S. "Liberal," in this instance, refers to classical liberalism and the emphasis it places on economic freedom, rule of law, private property rights, and personal responsibility, which is argued by some as being colonial ideology (Losurdo 2014, Maldonado-Torres 2008). Specifically, how economic well-being has been fused with individualism, the values of conservative Christianity, and narratives of defense and protection.

For many participants, the discursive formations and convergence of liberalism and conservative Christianity have manufactured

subjectivities that hold fast to the belief that what one does in life (or does not do) in relation to Christian doctrine, work ethic, and the ability to provide, determines one's social standing. They also dictate what happens to one's soul in the afterlife. As a result, many participants expressed a desire to be seen as "successful," "good," and "respectable," both on God's as well as capitalism's terms. Numerous men noted that achieving these is exclusively a matter of personal responsibility/choice, based upon the decisions they make, and is closely linked to religious devoutness.

Also woven into the fabric of America's prevailing forms of (white settler) Christianity, and their brand of "traditional family values" and notions of protection and self-reliance, are capitalist social relations. Researchers looking at the link capitalism has with masculinity have shown how paid labor, industrial production, and participation in the formal economy are tied to social constructions of manhood (McDowell 2015, Brandth and Haugen 2005b). Numerous men I spoke with noted that "earning a paycheck," being able to "fend for yourself" (in the market and world writ large), and a "competition-improves-us-all" mentality (i.e. capitalist self-discipline) mediated much of their daily lives. The majority of interviewees also noted feeling "not comfortable being laid off, even if drawing benefits [unemployment]," not respecting men who did not work, and wanting "nothing to do with people on 'welfare'" (described as freeloaders, bottom-feeders, scrounges, white trash, etc.).

Participants, nearly across the board, were far more critical of the unemployed, non-working, and those receiving social benefits than they were of owners of the means of production or the ruling class. Many, although about as socio-economically dissimilar from Donald Trump as it gets, stated supporting a "guy like him" because he was "unlike most big wig politicians," appreciates "hard workers," "knew how the economy ran (due to his 'successful' company)," and "wanted to get jobs (for Americans) going again." Likewise, men were afforded more social status and masculine capital for their presence in the paid workforce ("clocking in") and being able to "pull their weight." Maintaining a steady job (waged and indeterminant), rugged individualism, and (weaponized) self-defense thereby

became expected and valorized, with engagements in all three offering evidence of "contributing to society" or "getting it."

Morally bound, liberal subjectivities of this nature leave little room for factoring in the larger socio-political structures and cultural institutions that impact the decisions some people and groups have the ability to make within a given society. As a result, interlocking social influences of race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, age, nationality, and citizenship—in conjunction with how they generate systemic privileges and/or oppressions—within local communities often go unnoticed, are dismissed out of hand, or are scorned outright. As was joked to me on more than one occasion by several interviewees when asked about issues of gay rights, institutionalized sexism, systemic racism, feminism, and even environmental justice: "Those sound like things" a "liberal," "commie-pinko-fag," "social justice warrior," "snowflake," or "earth muffin," "would care about." These sentiments are instructive indicators about what liberal ideology creates in white settler (colonial) contexts.

Across the Heartland, then, the process of *responsibilizing* individuals generated by liberal ideology, as well as the ascription of dualistic gender roles upon individual bodies, means "protecting" and "providing" generally become the duty of a man. A conferment of individuated obligation that strongly impacts men's emotions and identities given the well-being of a family is framed as an extension and marker of his dedication, commitment, concern, and character. This is an inculcation of patriarchal-capitalist cultural values resulting from communities being subjected to conservative clergy members, a colonial education system, and liberal/Western ideals. My main assertion here is not that these are necessarily "bad" per se, but that they are productive. That is, many of the men have opted to see the Heartland as a place where "if a guy [individual] protects and provides for his family, then his family will take care of the man [individual]"; instead of viewing the region as one in which society and communities were taking care of families, with families taking care of communities and society. That the focus remained on individuals and families, rather than communities and society, is telling. Fractured social relations and reflexive disaffiliation from the struggles and well-being of unknown Others is the consequence.

Consequently, increasingly atomized subjectivities and cultural mores, in which participants believed they were solely responsible for their own socio-economic standing and long-term well-being (and largely no one else's), become status quo. "It's not really my problem" and "I don't have a dog in that fight," as shared by numerous interviewees when asked about things like migrant struggle, racial discrimination, gender injustice, and gay/queer rights. Notably, several participants, without hesitation, also stated they would support these things, as long as people "worked for it," "earned it," or it did not "take away from those of us who put in our time and pay our fair share." Some, too, offered unqualified support, but admitted, "I don't know how to help" or "That all sounds great, but I've got my own shit to handle."

For rural men in the Heartland, liberal ideology is made manifest in the perspective that they, and everyone else, are primarily in control of their own life choices/chances (a fraught belief that is also levied against Others), as well as their family's ability to succeed and thrive. As the protection and security of family was a core value for many men in the area, the subsequent safeguarding of, and "being able to pay for," "the wife and kids" was paramount. Owning a gun, in conjunction with being a productive capitalist subject, thus, was understood as an act that ensured said physical protection and provision while simultaneously reaffirming the gun's symbol of masculine conviction, devotion, and contribution. Men stated owning guns gave everyone "peace of mind" knowing "the man of the family" would protect them.

## God, Fathering, and Nationalism

Various research has noted that gun ownership is closely tied to the role a man has in providing for his family, educating his children, and making sure to pass on knowledge, expertise, and know-how to future generations (Carlson 2015, Stroud 2012). The role of the gun for many young children has become a prominent rite of passage and symbol of time spent with their father. In the Heartland, such narratives of father–son/daughter bonding are usually couched with qualifiers

noting that "safety and respect for guns" are first and foremost when handling guns. Several men mentioned being taught (and teaching this to their own children) to respect guns and that firearms are to be used primarily for sport/hunting. Handling a gun with caution was always stressed in order to ensure safety. As Jeff, a 39 years old, shares:

> Oh, it's better nowadays for kids to learn how to respect a gun at an early age. We learned that when we were kids. I think it just makes everything safer to teach them while they're young. They'll [kids] get used to being around them and know how to use them. That's important nowadays, just watch the news. Plus, I get to spend time with the kids. Makes the wife happy and I get to "play with my toys" [guns].

While precautionary, these narratives decouple firearms from both violence and the word "weapon," positioning firearms as symbols of familial wisdom and inherited skill, as well as embedding them in social reproduction. Discursive positioning like this equates guns to "toys and tools" and frames them as innocuous objects used for kinship, bonding, and rites of passage. Ron, 32 years old, when asked about his thoughts on guns and violence stated:

> I really think of them as tools … they can be used for good or bad. They can lead to violence, but don't always. Personally, I have been around guns most of my life. Always been for shooting clay pigeons, target practice, or hunting. I, like most of the kids around town who hunted, took a hunter's safety course and have always treated guns with great respect. My Grandad and uncle were the ones who got me into hunting and shooting. My uncle was in the military and both he and Grandad always stressed the importance of safety in handling guns. We never carried loaded guns in vehicles … we never had a shell in the chamber, and always kept the clip away from the gun so it would not go off accidently. Most of the hunting I did was for deer, turkeys, doves, and quail. That is why we had different guns—rifles for the bigger game, and shotguns for some of the smaller stuff. As for guns being violent … guns can be fun, but they can be extremely dangerous … most of what we do around here is safe stuff, we go out hunting or shooting,

it's a way to get outside, relax, and get back to nature. It's just something that has been passed down through the generations you know. When we go out to hunting we are walking around on land that's been in the family since the 1800s, we use it and take care of it … so hunting keeps that connection going. I went out shooting with my dad, grandpa, uncle, and cousins over the years—still have a rifle that's been in the family for years—it's something I'll pass on to my son, or my daughter if she's interested, and it's probably something they'll pass down as well … I don't really see a whole lot of violence in all that.

As can be gathered from Ron's quote above, the ownership and use of guns signifies a tie to family history, a link to past relatives, an appreciation for land, and a connection to the "pioneer spirit" of settler-ancestors who homesteaded in the area. Such bucolic and sentimental images of guns mask settler colonialism and effectively negate the attempted genocide and enslavement that occurred during the time of settlement. Settler history has a function and serves a purpose, to whitewash. Somewhat imperceptibly, too, the statement implies that when guns are used to kill animals it does not register as violence.

Narratives like this, while not overtly bigoted, do create a regime of truth that venerates colonialism and expresses admiration for white settlers, as well as for guns. For men in the Heartland, the regime of truth constituting American history and the "Wild West" has been suffused with images of settlers taming a chaotic landscape into tranquil agrarian homesteads. The ties to the past that men reference in speaking of the region's frontier history, as well as the gun culture that is a part of that history, veil the underlying colonial violence that deracinated and dispossessed local Indigenous populations. Numerous participants also spoke fondly about the number of previous generations of ancestors they have had in the area, what land has been passed down through the years, and how the pioneer mentality of protecting and providing for the family (involving the use of the gun) is still retained and passed on.

The justification for gun ownership in the U.S. is often directly linked to the Second Amendment, which states: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of

the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." The interpretation of this clause has spawned widespread debate and a plethora of analysis and research (Hobbs 2012, Tweedy 2011, Burkett 2008, Cramer 2006). From a postcolonial perspective, the Second Amendment can partially be seen as a jurdico-discursive rationalization that aided the sanctioning of a violent and oppressive colonial project (Brown 2008). A colonial project that is steeped in racist logics and has included the attempted annihilation of Indigenous people and cultures, as well as the enslavement and hunting down of Black and negatively racialized people, i.e. slave patrols (Dunbar-Ortiz 2018, Hadden 2001). Colonial discourse framed what is now is now the U.S. as the "Wild West," a "Frontier Nation," and an "Empire of Liberty" (Brown 2007). The narratives settlers (and the state) have developed about the Heartland rely upon mytho-poetic sagas of missionaries, pioneers, and peace-seekers arriving in undiscovered lands to domesticate/penetrate nature, conquer the wilderness, attain territory from the "uncivilized," bestow Christianity upon the "primitive," and eventually control the area through moral codes of honor and gritty self-reliance (Hao 2012, Tweedy 2011, Wright 2001, Slotkin 1992, Kennett and Anderson 1975).

On its surface, the Second Amendment was developed as an assurance for the newly invented American citizenry to bear arms against the state, or against potential state violence. Such sentiments were a libertarian reaction against Britain, which the recently fashioned U.S. defined itself against, and saw as a paternalistic and authoritarian overseer. For subjects who were disenchanted with rule in Great Britain, the establishment of a new "free" republic, in which consolidated power would be in the hands of white settlers, was incredibly attractive. However, the formation of the U.S. as an independent and free republic was charted in deeply discriminatory terms and carried out by white settlers with patriarchal and racist conceptions of what full citizenship meant (e.g. voting was only for propertied white men, the Three-Fifths Compromise, *Dred Scott v. Sandford*). Such suspicions led white settlers to draft the Second Amendment to ensure their right to take up arms against anything that infringed upon

their personal (white male) freedoms, regardless of whether it was the state, a different aspiring ruling class, or perceived threats they saw from freedom-seeking Indigenous, Black, and other negatively racialized people.

As time has passed, the rhetoric of social Darwinism and conquering/settling the frontier, with guns in tow, has galvanized a sense of "settler nationalism"; a shared feeling of identity, cultural practices, and national unity, developed by and amongst settlers, in which settlers and their nation will survive, thrive, and achieve greatness because it is the "fittest" to do so. The Heartland, arguably, is ground zero for white settler nationalism, whether it manifests itself in bloviating or banal form. Participants I spoke to about local and national history often expressed unified ties to the past, as well as each other, that were rooted in Christian moral traditions, market-based work ethic, the belief in meritocracy, and shared characteristics with pioneers from (settler) generations past. These perspectives have spanned the entire process of white settlement in the Heartland. And when subsequently tied to gun ownership, have produced a shared American national identity that extols the virtues of defending individualism, freedom, property, and religion, often, as Mack, 51 years old, asserted, "with fire power." Despite the region's historical narratives being discussed as righteous and well-intentioned, they have nonetheless been used to inflict colonial trauma, which is intergenerational and ongoing. The esteem bestowed upon the gun, along with its association with settler history and rural culture and status as a symbol of American dominance, still resonates with many men.

Critical research on U.S. nationalism illustrates how conventional notions of American "pride and patriotism" are rooted in colonial discourses, androcentrism, and conservatism, yet in the present-day are also deeply suspicious of the state (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014, Hixson 2013b, Zinn 2003). "I love my country, but not the government," as several interviewees said. American pride saturated many of my transcripts, as did participant's acute distrust of the government. Interviewees pointed to gun control, paying taxes, precarious employment situations, affirmative action, restrictions placed on Christianity being taught in schools, and

fake news (created by the liberal elite or deep state) as "unfair," "not right," and "discrimination."

A review of past literature shows that notions of white male victimization are prevalent when men seek to justify the oppressive systems and marginalizing practices they are enabled by and from which they benefit (McIntosh 2003, Kimmel and Ferber 2000). Allegations of persecution while simultaneously claiming innocence and disaffiliation from the privileges of interlocking systems of structural white supremacy and patriarchy were present in many conversations in the Heartland (Jiwani 2006, Razack 1998). Hank, 68 years old, aptly summed up the widespread disillusionment and sense of victimization some men feel when he stated:

> I pay my fair share of taxes, and that is my hard-earned money. I busted my ass for it and I need to feed my family with it. I don't think it should be given to some lazy freeloaders on welfare who are working the system looking for a handout. And the same people taking our money are the ones saying we shouldn't have guns. I just don't get it—it's even in our Constitution—we have the right to bear arms, it's what the founding fathers wrote, wanted our country to be, free to do what we want, and owning guns is a part of that freedom. They were also looking to freely practice their Christian beliefs—that's why they came over here. And now you see "under God" being taken out of the pledge of allegiance, you see the ten commandments being removed from schools, you see abortion being legalized and said it is okay to do … it's all connected. Obama and people running the government are trying to make America socialist: they are trying to take our guns, take our money, and make schools more anti-Christian. Don't get me wrong, I love my country, but I don't trust the government. I'm interested to see where Trump goes with things, he's shaking it up a bit. That's good. I don't follow politics all that much because its all a crock a shit, but I like what I'm hearing from him so far. You can tell he knows socialism will screw working folks over, just look at Venezuela and China. Think he knows where this country's bread is buttered … guys like us who put our heads down and work. Show up and do our work without whining about how hard everything is asking for a handout. It's about time we (white working-class men) had to stop carrying others on our shoulders.

The emphasis on being a liberal (read: individual and *responsibilized*) subject or being "free to fail or succeed on our own" as described by one participant, thus serves as an influential ideological force for many men in the region. Subjectivities of classic liberalism like this, particularly when suffused with currents of fundamentalist Christianity, do not come without repercussion.

As Foucault (2010, 1988) emphasized in his comprehensive analysis of technologies of the self and biopower, nothing is more suited to be subjected to and (re)formed by power and hegemonic discourses than extreme individualism. Liberal subjectification, a process in which people become positioned as and internalize that they are atomized subjects, generates extreme individualism. Paradoxically, then, people who perceive themselves to be free individuals, as well as think personal choice determines one's lot in life, are much more likely to unknowingly conform to manipulation and obey power. The consumption of news and formation of opinion from isolated sources and echo chambers (e.g. Fox News, church officials, colonial history books) are examples.

One major factor in shaping the individual identities of many participants was citizenship. Several interviewees spoke at length about having a shared sense of pride about being "American." Many noted reverence for the country's religious heritage and the U.S.'s standing as a military superpower. Numerous, too, provided glowing accounts of American history, describing the perceived Christian values and imperialistic practices of the country's forefathers as "patriotic," "visionary," "just," and "good." Such accounts can readily be seen in the comments of Billy, 30 years old, who when asked to describe his thoughts on the history of gun use in the area stated:

> Well, the missionaries and priests came here to help people— they built the church, started educating people, and shared their way of life. Then, when others started arriving they basically were here to do the same, I'm sure the guns they had were mainly for protection and hunting. And it's still like that to this day— guys know each other, we know our neighbors, our families get along, and overall, we have a safe, tight-knit community. It's

a great place to raise children and have a family. It's what our country was founded on. The pioneers that came over here were not treated too well, they were looking for freedom, and they needed guns to protect themselves from some of the Indians, or other criminals that would attack them. And I know not all the Indians were dangerous, but you can't say that some innocent people were not attacked. Our ancestors were looking for a place to be free, work hard, and own some land to live off of. You can't fault a guy for that.

When we got here it's not like the Indians were all living peacefully with each other anyway—just look at the history, it's a fact. There were tribes stealing and attacking other tribes, and if you look at how big the country is I think they (Indians) could have done a better job of living with each other. It wasn't like it was some paradise before our Founding Fathers got here. In the end, pioneers were protecting their families and defending what they believed in.

Scholars have noted how the gun is conspicuously entwined in the U.S.'s historical tapestry (Brown 2008, Cramer 2006, Wright 2001, Slotkin 1992). As reflected in Billy's account above, the perceived threat of aggression and hostility from Indigenous people on the vast open plains meant that from its genesis, America was and still remains a nation that relies upon being heavily armed. Consequently, the historical endorsement for and ongoing normalization of gun use has had significant impacts on American society, both in discourse and in concrete practice.

## Good Guys versus Bad Guys

In looking at the social hierarchies operating across the Heartland, I again borrow from Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity (1995) suggesting that discourses surrounding manhood produce marginalized, subordinated, and complicit masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). If an intersectional frame is applied to the Heartland vis-à-vis hegemonic masculinity, this establishes white, heterosexual, male, able-bodied, citizen, Christian, and middle to upper-class as the norm. This orthodoxy, in relation to the

place-based and pliable hegemonic modes of demonstrating masculinity that permeate the region, can be used to observe how marginalizing and subordinating processes operate in everyday language, interactions, and assertions. Meaning, people who are marked as "deviant," "bad guys," "criminals," and "thugs" are made this way because they are juxtaposed against a taken-for-granted white, male norm. This allows certain men/identities to attain higher degrees of acceptance, masculine status, and privilege, while keeping others on the periphery. Such policings of masculinity can readily be seen in the exclusionary statements of Tom, 22 years old, who when asked about news stories pertaining to gun violence stated:

> I mean hell, look at all these crazy people doing all these shootings here lately. A lot of the shootings I hear about are done by guys from the city, you don't see a bunch of farm boys murdering each other all the time. Most of the people killing each other are either psychopaths or terrorists with radical views who hate America. You can't tell me they had good Christian upbringings. The guns ain't the problem, it's the criminals who get a hold of them and use them that cause the problems. And think about it, if guns were outlawed people like that would still find a way to kill other people. They'd just use homemade bombs, or knives, or rocks, or something else. Look at ISIS, Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and you name it. Muslim extremists would probably be happy if the government took our guns. Islam is not a peaceful religion … most people on TV keep blaming the guns, but that is just an excuse. We've gotta get our priorities right.

One discursive formation in Tom's statement that is particularly salient regarding place is his mention of violence being perpetuated more frequently by "guys in the city." Violence, in particular gun violence that was perpetrated by guys "from the city," for Tom, carried racial connotations. When asking for elaboration, Tom, as well as several other participants, noted that there were more Black and Mexican men and gangsters in the city, as well as that cities were more "liberal" and less moral. International fears, too, were stoked, particularly via the rhetoric of Donald Trump, with the majority of men supporting nativist policies, "the Muslim ban," and noting

that "our" borders should be secure because "9-11 was not that long ago" and there was "no chance in hell" that Muslim terrorists were just going to go away.

Critical scholars have shown that the ways in which difference and place are constructed can lead to oppressive and exclusionary effects (Kobayashi 2013, Goldberg 2009). While not explicitly stated outright, the inference of what being "from the country" versus being "from the city" means is, at times, rife with essentialist or xenophobic tendencies. That race is spatialized and places become racialized. The frontier, from a U.S. settler colonial standpoint, is a patently white place. These racialized and subordinating discourses are further highlighted by a follow-up statement offered by Tom, who when probed to expand upon who he thought was responsible for gun violence stated:

> It's not that I'm a racist, but most of those guys shooting each other from the city are criminals. Thugs. I bet most of them are "n-word," or spic drug dealers, or gang bangers. I bet they were never really taught how to treat a gun, or that you need to respect them. And when I say "n-word" I don't mean all blacks, I've worked with some good blacks, I've also been around some hard-working Mexicans … when I say "n-word," I mean that anyone can be a "n-word." It's more of how someone acts you know—a white guy can be a "n-word," a Mexican can be "n-word," an Asian can be a "n-word," it's not just a skin thing, just a way to describe how a guy goes about the way he acts. Most of those shootings are guys trying to be tough, or hard, or whatever. Trump talks about this a lot, its why he is trying to secure our borders and stop illegals getting through. You can't tell me the President of the United States of America is not the most well-informed guy on the planet. He might be laying it thick when he gets up there on stage, but he's got a point. MS-13 are animals. This country needs to wake up. We can't let criminals come and go as they please, I mean, come on.

Stroud (2012: 22) highlights the significance that race, class, and gender have in relation to masculinities and gun use when she states that the gun can be "a symbol that at once signifies violence and protection." Other critical scholars researching gun culture suggest

that the meaning attributed to gun use can be interpreted differently depending on who is holding the gun, the place in where it is being held, and subsequently, who is allowed to assign meaning to the context where it is being used (Stroud 2012, Brown 2008, Cramer 2006, Wright 2001).

Realizing how violence is narrativized and ascribed to negatively racialized identities is key in understanding how white supremacist discourses come to dominate both national news stories and local understandings of gun use. Scholarship has shown that white people often experience an increase of fear or anxiety when encountering people of color, oftentimes causing them to brand non-white bodies as criminal, threatening, animalistic, hypersexual, or aggressive (Feagin 2009, Ferber 2007, Collins 2005).

In analyzing the quote from Tom above, then, we can see that the process of subordinating other people based upon the racial epithets of "n-word," "spic drug dealers," "thugs," and "gang bangers" homogenizes Black and Latino masculinities as "criminal." That is, certain racialized bodies and ethnicities become criminalized, while the norm against which they are measured (whiteness) remains respectable and trustworthy by default. Whiteness, in turn, is used to judge others from a position of privilege while concurrently remaining veiled and going free from scrutiny. From the seat of being the norm, then, white masculinity enjoys a certain type of luxury, one of obliviousness. White masculinity, in turn, remains obscured, is safeguarded, and can either comfortably go unnoticed or be deployed as imperiously as possible because it is the baseline identity against which all Others are measured. This is also not to say people who engender white masculinity cannot experience hardship or suffering along other intersecting lines, it simply demonstrates that white masculinity is not being specifically targeted and structurally repressed because it is white.

## The Banal Weaponization of the Rural

A major line of reasoning that arose in many of my interviews for gun use was that it was "not that big of a deal." Numerous participants

felt media stories involving gun violence often seemed overblown, biased, or exaggerated. "Typical liberal propaganda" or "fake news," as described in several instances. Many men noted the presence of guns and lack of violence in their own lives as a counterpoint. They cited the fact that, aside from the occasional freak accident or violent outburst by someone who was "fucked up in the head" (i.e. mentally ill) or "fucked over by a woman," that guns were not as bad as they were portrayed. Being "misrepresented" and "misunderstood" was especially applicable to both gun owners and "what life's like out in the country" (i.e. rural white settler communities).

Karl, 40 years old, on a shooting outing we took to a recently harvested soybean field with an assortment of assault rifles, shotguns, pistols, and even a sniper rifle, matter-of-factly summed up the prevailing sentiment, "It's a hobby and a pastime for a lot of guys around here, just kind of a normal thing to do." These rationalizations were quite common amongst participants. From their standpoint, "sometimes a gun is just a gun." These statements, be they deliberate or unwitting, are obfuscations of the social trauma guns have created, particularly when offered in a settler colonial context, and reify guns as tools, instruments, and hobbies (i.e. not weapons). In a sense, participants were absolving guns from violent acts that guns were and are involved in, making their presence appear routine, anodyne, and harmless. This is a convenient pretext that renders the stockpiling of guns less alarming and more socially acceptable. Accordingly, the banal weaponization of the rural was one of the more noticeable themes that surfaced during my time investigating guns while in the Heartland.

Foucault writes of how the power of normalizing judgments within a society can produce socially acceptable arrangements of practices, actions, and standards (Foucault 1977). Normalizing gazes force people to learn what practices are deemed convention and, in contrast, what practices are thought condemnable. Nearly all of the men (nine out of ten) involved in the project owned guns (the average number was five), the vast majority had started handling them in their childhood (most younger than the age of ten), and most rarely described gun use as violent, unless an outlier. Keeping in line with Foucault's (1977) suggestion of the power

of normalizing discourses, social consensus backed by the state's historical narrative can generate constructed "truths," which give individuals permission to do and believe, or castigate and refute, certain things. For the vast majority of the participants I spoke to, gun caches were widely seen as permissible, and in some instances, gun use (e.g. hunter's education) actively promoted in their communities while the gun's link to violence was minimized.

Societal consent, endorsement, and defense of gun use is rooted in emotion as much as in logic (as contradictory and contested as certain logics may be). Gramsci (1971) contends that the routine approval of cultural ideals found within particular social orders can reaffirm a status quo that runs counter to the best interests of the members of the society endorsing said cultural ideals. In offering widespread support to gun ownership, members of the rural assemblages found in the Heartland reify gun use as natural, normal, and ordinary. Consent to the gun is highlighted by Ed, 55 years old, who when asked about how many firearms he thought there might be in his community stated:

> Oh, I don't know a specific number in total, but I reckon most guys have a handful or so (around five). Kids (adolescents) nowadays probably less. It's pretty common around here. Some of mine were passed down from my dad, and some of them are presents I got for birthdays, anniversaries, and such. I don't use them much, I hang on to them 'cause they mean something, or have been part of the family. Things like that. I use a couple of them from time to time, to shoot wild animals, and I have a .22 pistol that is handy in case something happens, but other than that they more or less just stay in the gun cabinet. When we was younger we carried them in our pickups and stuff, would go out and shoot stop signs for fun, or hunt, or shoot bottles … shooting turtles used be real fun. Hell, I remember even having them (guns) in the pickup at school. That'd probably get a guy in a lot of trouble right now, but I would not be surprised if someone had one under their front seat or something, not for anything bad, just that it probably got left there.

Blasé and nonchalant descriptions of gun possession happened numerous times over the course of the research and give one a

sense of the ubiquity of guns in the area. The statements also draw attention to the normalized position that the gun holds in the region. Many participants also lauded guns for their significance, pointing out they were generational heirlooms, tools for protection and provision, carried symbolic historical meaning, and were part of their "pioneer heritage." What can be surmised from these perspectives is that the social sanctioning of guns for this situated rural social geography falls directly in line with Gramsci's notion of hegemony, as well as Foucault's articulation of the normalizing gaze. Consequently, gun use is viewed as an ordinary, commonplace, and inevitable occurrence.

Over the course of my fieldwork, patterns began to emerge regarding the rationalization of gun ownership. Statements both normalizing and defending guns were numerous and primarily offered in relation to the Second Amendment, as well as being a "man." The most common reasons included the right to self-defense, guns being a part of the Constitution, having the "God-given right" to bear arms, helping "feed my family," that "guns don't kill people, people kill people," and even that "the apostles of Jesus carried swords, which was like carrying a gun back then … so it's nothing new." This last argument being a biblical reference to the arrest of Jesus during which one of his disciples cuts off the ear of an officer with a sword. Alan, 58 years old, along with Jim, 22 years old, (as well as many others) each stridently defended guns by affirming they would "bet abortion kills more people per year than guns."

Justifications of this nature reinforce gun ownership as a quotidian reality of the rural Heartland. These assertions, also, when coupled with statements that describe guns as "just like cars, they can be dangerous so people should be trained to use them," or "like a hammer, you can build a house with it, but you can also smash someone in the face with it," suggest that guns are benign, not inherently associated with violence, and that it is the person who is using the gun that is violent. That is, guns exist in an apolitical vacuum and are perceived to be neutral objects severed from historical, social, and cultural processes and realities. In this same vein, participants noted that guns can be better thought of as collector's items, recreational hobbies, or tools to be mastered. This

move towards innocence is highlighted in the statement of Don, 47 years old, who stated:

> When we was young kids we played guns, army, war, Cowboys and Indians, and things like that, so we always wanted to own real guns. At first it was beebee guns, then air rifles, and then when we got old enough we could get real guns. I still have the first rifle my dad bought me for my tenth birthday, I don't use it at all much now, but it has a lot of sentimental value for me. After that, around junior high and high school, I got into hunting and shooting clay pigeons with my buddies. We'd go out depending on what season it was and hunt ducks, deer, quail, or turkey … those were fun times. And the guns you use for each different type of animal can be different, so that's why we ended up owning more than one. Before long you start knowing more about them and you build up a collection. Hell, I have even traded them with friends, kind of like baseball cards from when we were kids. Everyone wants the coolest gun, or the most powerful one, or the most accurate, so it sort of becomes a hobby as well. Over time your collection grows but eventually most of us had to kind of move on, you know, when you get more responsibilities and things to take care of. When I got married and had kids I couldn't go hunting as much, but I still have my guns, still love to hunt, but I don't have a lot of time for it now. Plus, if my son shows an interest in hunting it's something we'll probably do. I want him to be safe and know that guns need to be respected—so I'll show him the ropes and teach him how to handle it and how to treat it.

What this passage signifies is that owning guns is not anything out of the ordinary. It is conventional, tradition, and everyday. Accordingly, the perception of gun ownership as "no big deal" is readily allowed to reaffirm itself from generation to generation. For many men in the Heartland, the quantity of guns is not the problem; it is the quality of the individual who possesses a gun that matters. Disconcertingly, "quality of individual," in numerous instances, was tacitly linked to race, ethnicity, religion, and/or mental illness. With the responses of many intimating an individual is only fit to own a gun if they are "trustworthy," "a law-abiding citizen," "has Christian values," and in many cases, has a connection to, along with a respect

for, the local community. Consequently, those people who are most often seen as "good guys" are men who look the same, have the same values, and engage in the same practices as the men offering the descriptions of what being a "good guy" means.

## Violence and Criminalization

The issue of violence and gun culture in the U.S. was a theme participants spoke about at length. While interviewees identified guns as having the potential for being used for violence, scenarios were qualified. That is, their analyses pointed out that individuals who use guns for harm are typically "crazy," "criminal," or a "radical terrorist." The inferred correlation placed upon gun crime being committed largely by people with mental health issues, who are "broken," have "screws loose," or are "fucked in the head" at their core underlines the embedded ableist norms that exist across the region. It also dilutes the possibility of discussing gun violence that emerges in domestic disputes and hate crimes because individuals who have not been defined as "crazy" are not subjected to as rigorous of a critique. The vast majority of participants were also predisposed to ascribe mental illness to white and Christian mass shooters, while mass shooters from other ethnic or religious backgrounds (Black, Latino, Islamic) were thought to be "criminals," "terrorists," or "radical Muslims," which is a trend literature demonstrates is linked to where people get their news (Duxbury, Frizzell, and Lindsay 2018). Incidentally, over 90% of the men I interviewed noted their primary source of national news was Fox News, with many adding that other sources were rife with fake news or liberal propaganda and could not be trusted. Moreover, many of the participants thought of themselves, and the people who they know, as "good, law-abiding, Americans" and were quick to disaffiliate from anything that would associate them with being defined as "unstable," "not right in the head," or a "nut (mental) case."

Critical research on (dis)ability outlines the significance that masculinity and (neo)liberal thought have in the formation of ableist social relations (Puar 2013, Ostrander 2008). The act of pigeon-holing people as more likely to commit acts of gun violence because they have mental problems both pathologizes and

criminalizes individuals, rather than societies, each of which are hallmarks of ableist norms. It also absolves the state from the obligation it has to provide healthcare to its populace, as well as underscores the unseen and non-acknowledged influence that whiteness carries. This was made evident because interviewees frequently shared that the people in their local communities, as well as in the news and media, whom they "trusted" and "respected" most were predominantly other white men who were not also able-bodied, heterosexual, Christian, and citizens.

The effect of ableist discursive formations results in depictions of mental illness that induces fear and often endorses quarantine and exclusion. "They should be locked up in an asylum," as Matt, 26 years old, stated, or "tossed in a looney-bin," as Jim, 56 years old, asserted. In other words, people with mental disabilities, in a culture of ableism, become perceived as potential threats, objects to be guarded against, and have bodies that are more likely to be aggressively violent. These framings thereby bolstered participants' rationales for carrying guns, as they would circle back around to say they "needed" the weapons to protect themselves, their loved ones, and others from what they saw as victimization waiting to happen at the hands of people with mental illness and/or criminals or terrorists (Stroud 2012, Felson and Pare 2010, Ferber 2007, Kimmel and Ferber 2000). In many instances, participants avowed that carrying a gun is an "equalizer," something that can "level the playing field," or as Ray, 19 years old, asserted:

> If someone fucked up in the head or a god damn terrorist starts shooting up a school, or a theater, or a business, or whatever, everyone else is going to be real damn happy that one of the "good guys" had a gun on him.

The presumption of society needing to be defended by ever watchful and diligent (white male) "good guys" and saviors points to the influence that patriarchal and individualistic modes of thinking have upon the subjectivities and social relations in the Heartland.

As can be seen from the responses above, the desire to earn the label of "good" family man who "protects and provides" reaffirms

the liberal subjectivities that men have in relation to gun ownership and masculinity. The outcome of these subjectivities leads to the widespread acceptance and normalization of gun use, for particular bodies, while others face exclusion, marginalization, and criminalization. The influence of the gun as an integral component of the community, its culture, and its customs is summed up quite explicitly by Henry, 52 years old, who when asked about gun use instructed:

> What people need to understand is that it's not really a big deal. I mean a lot of us grew up around guns, we've been around them all our lives and we know how to handle and respect them. A lot of what you see on TV and the news seems to be unfair. I think a lot of people from the city think we are dumb rednecks just shooting up the place. That's not really how it is at all. We've all taken hunter's education courses, we all learned how to treat a gun, and a lot of guys around here know a hell of a lot about how guns work, what the laws are, and how they should be used. But what you see on the news is some fucking crazy asshole go off on a rampage and people want to blame the guns. I know it gets said a lot, but it gets said because its true: "Guns don't kill people, people kill people." There is a reason that saying has stuck around so long. So I don't think we need to take guns away from people, I think we need to keep criminals from getting them. And think about it, if a criminal does get a gun, and all the other people around the place have guns, do you really think he's going start shooting people up? Hell no, I think having guns around and in the hands of good guys is a smart idea—it gives us more protection cause you just never know. It'll make crime go down and those psychos who fly off the handle will think twice before killing a bunch of innocent people. It just makes us safer if people who know how to use guns have them around, that's just the way it is.

The continual reference to crime, violence, and attack occurring "at any time" cited by participants, along with their professed need to own guns because "you just never know" is central to Kimmel's (1996) argument that being a man is not necessarily about dominating or controlling other people, but rather, achieving masculine status is something men attain by *not* letting others dominate, control, or

exercise power over themselves. And as scholarship demonstrates, the traits that are regularly associated with masculinity: being assertive, tough, domineering, aggressive, imposing, courageous, and physical are not innate characteristics of male bodies. Rather, they are learned impulses and oft-reactionary manifestations men have when experiencing threat, fear, instability, paranoia, or vulnerability in their lives. The symbol of the gun is thereby quite influential in relation to masculinity because both symbolically represent power, control, and dominance. Yet despite these associations, gun use can alternatively be seen as one possible way men respond to, or cope with feelings of weakness, disempowerment, and insecurity.

## Complicity and the Status Quo

In analyzing my empirical data, it is evident that the gun's political and cultural meaning carries significant weight for rural white settler men in the Heartland, particularly when situated in the "frontier." What remains unanswered is a seemingly untenable debate surrounding the gun. Gun rights, gun control, gun culture, and gun politics are all common topics that make their way into the everyday experiences of people at all levels of society, especially the Heartland. In paying attention to the media, be it global, national, or local news, it is not difficult to find mention of the gun being discussed in relation to homicide, government legislation, police reports, domestic violence, mass shootings, suicide, and trafficking, as well as stories of war, sport, adventure, and leisure. Guns also find their way into the arena of pop culture through movies, books, video games, websites, chatrooms, and advertising. Guns permeate many of the images we come across, both historical and contemporary, on a daily basis.

Point is, guns are ubiquitous. They are present in conversations ranging from international arms deals to small-town childhood air-rifle adventures. And while no consensus remains as to what the correct answer is regarding gun use, gun control, and gun rights in America, what is left, is the fact that violence, death, and suffering all remain a part of the conversation as well. Little progress has

been made in the way of curtailing such violence in the U.S., and there will seemingly never be unanimity as to what can be enacted or done to most effectively prevent it. I do not claim to have a silver bullet solution to debates surrounding gun use myself, but what I can give account of, is that based upon my experience in the rural Heartland, what needs to be added to the conversation is a more comprehensive and critical interrogation into what lies at the roots of and reproduces, masculinity, neoliberal ideology, and colonial social relations, particularly with respect to power relations involving race, gender, and the gun. Until the commonplace practices and normalized modes of thinking and behaving associated with all are held to the fire, what will remain, quite simply, is the status quo.

# Chapter 6

# Capitalism, Work, Respect

*We don't have time to fuck around out here, money doesn't grow on trees … Time to "man-up" and get to work.*
Rick, 27-year-old farmhand

### Take Me Home, Country Roads …

I received the brusque but congenial comment quoted above in jest (along with a couple of hearty slaps on the back) from a smiling, long-time friend of mine from Southeast Kansas as we prepared to start work for the day. After being away for nearly eight years, I had just returned to my home community to conduct participant observation research regarding "land, work, manhood, and country life." The statement caught me off guard (much to the delight of both Rick and my co-workers), as I had not been exposed to such directives in quite some time. It caused me to falter a bit in my thoughts as I was still in somewhat of a "researcher" frame of mind, or what was referred to several times by my friends as "being up in my head too much." Thus, after abruptly redirecting my behavior so that I was no longer "standing around and daydreaming," nor was I "burning daylight" anymore (as I was apparently prone to do from time to time), I began physically moving once again and started loading up the truck with gear and fencing supplies.

As we finished tossing in the dull, dented, and grime-caked tools, my current boss and long-time acquaintance started the choking, sun-faded, tan, 1987 Ford F-150 pick-up while the rest of us jumped into the back, took our respective seats along the truck-bed, gripped the rusty side-rails tightly with our worn and beaten cowhide gloves, and headed down a dusty gravel road towards one of the many sprawling wheat fields and enclosed cattle pastures that lay ahead. It was during this moment (and what would prove to be several to follow) that I began to further examine the statement I had just been offered.

I realized that the comment, while highly laden with gendered essentialisms, capitalist subject positioning, and masculinist conceptions of production, did very much resonate. It made sense to me. I had heard it before. I had grown up amidst such assertions, and at one point have probably said it myself. Such axioms had become normalized over the course of my childhood, teenage years, and early twenties. And up until my introductions to feminist theories and critical discourse studies, served, for the most part, as the edifice upon which many of my worldviews were built.

As it was my first morning of work back in rural Kansas, I quickly realized that the tacit meanings and material actions associated with "manning up" in my rural context were loaded with a host of complex socio-spatial expectations and practices, all of which both explicitly and covertly reinforced a score of cultural assumptions regarding gender, work ethic, and respect. What follows is an examination of how hegemonic notions of masculinity are constructed spatially and temporally (read: via geography and purported history) through the discourses of neoliberal capitalism and rurality that flow through the Heartland.

## Capitalism and Masculinity

Recent writing on masculinities, work, and geography has tended to center upon the gendered power dynamics existing amongst corporate hierarchies, transnational corporations, and the professional-managerial class, particularly those comprising the

technology, information, and financial sectors of the global economy (Pollard 2013, Cowen and Siciliano 2011, Yeoh and Willis 2005, Dixon and Grimes 2004). Often times, these studies analyze the influence neoliberal rationalities have on the relations of power, privilege, and exploitation that are concentrated in cities and across urban settings (e.g. office spaces, marketing firms, boardrooms, corporate headquarters, universities, the halls of government, tech industries, factories, sweatshops, *maquiladoras*, etc.) (Mackintosh 2012, Hubbard 2004, McDowell 2003, Herod 2000). What is lacking, although not entirely absent from these illustrative conversations, are more empirical investigations and in-depth analyses of gender relations across rural geographies, as well as how masculinities are mutually constituted by neoliberal ideals within them.

With this in mind, and distinct from those studies that investigate corporate, academic, cosmopolitan, and military masculinities, this chapter adds to the literature pertaining to rural masculinities and (neo)liberal self-making. In doing so, I shed light upon the relationships that rurality has with work, as well as how aspects of "country life" influence people to think of themselves as "men." In foregrounding constructions of masculinity within the social geography of the Heartland, one of the major terms/themes that arose upon talking to men and analyzing my interviews with them afterward was "place." In particular, rurality (i.e. "the country") and the seemingly taken-for-granted connection it had as a determining site for the development of a "good/strong" work ethic. More precisely, "work ethic" was framed as a source of pride, respect, and status for all of the men I spoke to throughout my fieldwork. The ability, not to mention individual decision, to be "a hard worker" was emphasized in numerous conversations pertaining to a wide array of contexts, including labor, athletics, history, politics, fathering, family, and overall contributions to society in general.

Another theme that surfaced in the vast majority of the exchanges I had were comparative evaluations and judgments of others against what a given interviewees model image of a "hard worker" was. This archetypal "hard worker" subsequently then served as a litmus test in terms of adjudicating the degree of acceptance, belonging, and respect that other men would earn. That is,

it was not uncommon to hear interviewees speak of feeling anger, resentment, disrespect, and contempt towards men whom they judged to be "lazy," "dishonest," "freeloading," or "sucking off the (welfare) system." With this place-driven and (neo)liberal-oriented social psychology in mind, the discussion that follows is centered upon how work, liberal self-making, social conservatism, and bodily practice influence rural men in their social constructions of what it means to be a "man."

What I signpost and demonstrate throughout the chapter is that hegemonic notions of masculinity in the Heartland can be best thought of as socio-spatial configurations of varying cultural practices and discourses that produce, and are (re)produced by, (neo) liberal ideals and socially conservative perspectives related to work ethic (capitalist production) and life in the countryside. The following analysis will thus highlight the influence of rurality in the localized production of place-based perceptions of masculinity by focusing on embodiment, labor, and competition. As such, each section will analyze how men use their bodies, viewpoints, and rhetorical assertions to position themselves as productive, worthy of respect, and masculine. More pointedly, what follows is an examination of the discourses that are deployed by individuals in framing their actions and practices as guided by attempts to be "good," "hardworking," "respectable," and "men."

## (Neo)Liberal Self-Making

> *Hard work … some guys are cut out for it, some guys ain't.*
> Jeffrey, 58-year-old mill worker

The notion of individual work ethic is intimately implicated in the production of masculinity in rural America. How work ethic becomes a measure of manhood is varied and complex, but at the same time it does have generalizability in terms of the rhetoric men used when defining it. One common theme that all the men mentioned in conversations is being able to "provide," "pull their own weight," and "contribute" in some way. Their focus on the ability to provide was largely tied to capitalist production; attaining

waged labor, working for a living, and what many stated as "earning a paycheck." A fitting example was offered by Jack, 47 years old, who in reflecting upon his property, work, and the countryside in general, reminisced:

> There's a lot to love out here, I started working this land with my dad when I was kid. He taught me if you don't show up for work, if you can't be accountable or responsible, you ain't worth a damn for nothing.

In short, the conversations we had surrounding work were what I would identify as neoliberal in form (e.g. individualistic, capitalist market-oriented, preoccupied with foreigners taking American jobs). Many of our chats about work related to auto-commodification (seeing themselves as a financial asset to a company/the economy), responsibilization (viewing people as individuals accountable only to themselves in lieu of seeing people as part of a collective whole, i.e. society), and self-capitalization (weighing what one does in life against chances for making money or reproducing the capitalist economy). Notably, most the rural working-class men I spoke to saw themselves as discrete individual workers who were detached, atomized, and fragmented from other workers.

In describing the discussions as "neoliberal," then, I am suggesting they were neoliberal in an ideological and psychological sense of the term (Smith and Stenning 2010, Giroux 2008). That is, numerous were concerned with the practice of individual self-making and being good capitalist subjects (obedient workers), even though they were less neoliberal with regard to global economic strategies and programs. The vast majority of participants preferred more protectionist and nativist economic policies and were wary and critical of migrants and "illegal" workers "taking" jobs. Most also supported tax reductions, privatization, and deregulation; the holy trinity of neoliberalism, while simultaneously holding conservative views on social and cultural issues (e.g. opposed to gun control, affirmative action, undocumented migration, access to abortion, gay marriage, queer/trans rights, nationalized healthcare). Perhaps a bit of a complex and peculiar set of opinions to maintain, but it makes

sense when considering that many saw themselves, by and large, as individual agents responsible only for themselves (as well as their immediate family/household if they had one). That is, there was indeed enthusiasm about "making American great again" on the global economic stage, but most articulated support for a version of "roll back" neoliberalism instead of "roll out" neoliberalism.

With regard to neoliberalism, the perspective from which I work proposes, just as various scholars across disciplines have, that it is not solely an arrangement of economic policies, but rather, produces ways of thinking and configurations of practice that condition people to understand social relations as discrete, individual choices that operate within a global capitalist market (Springer 2016, Fraser 2013). Attendant market maxims like "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps," "business as usual," "a rising tide lifts all boats," "being an entrepreneur," "competing to win," "letting the market decide" are all emblematic of the neoliberal ideology I am getting at. Notably, these turns of phrase made countless appearances in the discussions I had across the Heartland, despite the fact that many of the interviewees identified as being socially conservative.

Several participants, too, noted that success, achievement, competition, pride-of-ownership, and having an entrepreneurial spirit, "especially the way the world is today" (referencing economic globalization), were important goals to have, part of being a "man," what they wanted to attain in life, and ultimately, are what earns one respect. An instance of this is reflected by Gary, 52 years old, who upon driving me around the countryside and showing me the land and cattle he owned, stated:

> These (cattle) are basically my bank account. Running a farm and owning property is the same as managing any other business. I work hard at it, and it takes a lot of smarts to make it in today's economy. I actually think it's a little more work for a guy to make a profit running a farm than it is for a paper-pusher in a business suit [laughs]. We don't quite get the credit they do, but I'm basically running a successful commercial enterprise out here in the countryside … I know how to make money, and I get to live the American Dream while doing it. I also know how to put my land to use. Nowadays a guy's got to learn to do that.

> Hell, some of it I use for ranching, some of it I plant on, some
> of it I lease, and some of it I even rent out to rich city guys who
> want to come down here and play "hunter" on their vacations.
> They pay a pretty penny to do that shit, and I'm more than
> willing to let them. You see, I had to diversify my land … I got
> pretty innovative with it and now it's turning a profit for me.

The neoliberal ambitions expressed in this comment and links they
have to settler colonialism, masculinity, commoditization, and
nationalism, are distinctly entrepreneurial. They, too, illustrate how
the work performed in rural settings is deeply meaningful, yet medi-
ated by market-oriented notions of success and intelligence.

In addition to his nationalistic sentiments regarding the
"American Dream," what is particularly telling about Gary's testi-
mony (which was echoed almost across the board by many of the
land and business-owning participants I spoke with) is just how
neoliberal thinking in the area has become. This is highlighted in
his description of colonially appropriated rural land and how he is
"managing it as a business," "diversifying it," has gotten "innovative
with it," and how he has transformed it into a "commercial enter-
prise" that is "turning a profit." Assertions such as this were not
also uncommon amongst working-class/poor participants, whether
about land, or themselves (i.e. self-commodification). This is under-
scored by the several instances in which the participants stated they
regularly thought about, and discussed, ways in which they could
"capitalize" on the hard work they did or the private property they
had in the face of foreign workers "taking jobs."

Growing scholarship on political economy and gender are
detailing the ways in which the ambitions and ideals noted by
Gary are embodied and linked to masculinity and neoliberalism
(Cornwall, Karioris, and Lindisfarne 2016, Walker and Roberts
2017). Research here suggests this is a result of the global economic
processes being increasingly absorbed into processes of socio-
spatial subjectification, i.e. how identities are shaped in particular
places through material practice (Gorman-Murray and Hopkins
2016, Larner, Fannin, MacLeavy, and Wang 2013). Embodying
neoliberalism, then, becomes observable.

Participant statements in the rural Heartland reflected this given they often positioned and prided themselves on contributing to the national economy/making American great again, aspiring to attain the American Dream (in the face of foreign incursion, e.g. China, Russia, migrants), and supporting policies that privatized and deregulated state spending, as well as cut corporate taxes, so that money could be used by "job creators" (corporations) to kickstart the economy and ensure American workers were employed. Moreover, the occupations (e.g. hydraulic fracturing, bridge-building, highway-construction, heavy equipment operation, auto-mechanical, trucking and transportation, factory work, logging, carpentry, and farming) of the participants were described on several occasions as jobs that "guys from the country" (rural areas) typically do, and the work they performed was framed as being "what the country (U.S.) was founded upon," "what keeps the economy going," and what is "good for all Americans."

## Work Ethic and Pulling Your Weight

In describing their work, many men pointed out that the labor they performed was heavy, dangerous, hard, difficult, tiring, demanding, that "it was not for everyone," and that it "separates the men from the boys." The majority also asserted being "not afraid to get their hands dirty," and described their mentality towards work ethic as "blue-collar," "lunch pail," and "roll-up-your-sleeves." What it took to perform the type of tasks many did, was someone who was hardworking, dedicated, tough, and took pride in their work. In making these statements, nearly all the participants specified that there was underappreciated value in their efforts, acumen, and skills, which is reflected by the fact that several noted that other people, even co-workers, "can't do what I do."

In this regard, the participants' perspectives surrounding their status as exploited laborers having surplus value extracted from them was readily acknowledged, however, their general disposition to workplace relationships was not oriented towards class/race/gender solidarity and common struggle. Rather, much of what was spoken

about in terms of the working environments the participants found themselves in was dominated by reflections about the pressures and anxieties they felt to prove they were productive individuals who "were worth keeping around."

Many, but not all, of the participants also confessed to being less inclined to take time out of their shift to support a co-worker because it disrupted their own productivity and they needed to prove to the "bossman" (or "brass") that they were distinctly a "hard worker," as well as irreplaceable. Several disclosed "just not having the time to worry about everyone else." This dynamic, that of becoming competitive, anxiety-riddled, and making sure to "cover my own ass," was iterated countless times and often elevated above the practice of mutuality, interdependence, and camaraderie, despite the fact that collaboration and cooperation amongst workers might otherwise benefit the whole company through overall productivity, as well as a healthier workforce. This contradiction was not lost on several of the participants, as numerous noted that it was "bullshit" their bosses told them that "teamwork" was essential because when it came down to it, as one participant affirmed, "you know god damn well that you're being watched individually … and they'll find ways to 'can your ass' [fire] if you start missing days 'cause you're hurt or sick."

This is not to say that every instance of the participants' lives was dictated by alienating, market-centric, survival-of-the-fittest practices. There was a great deal of affinity, friendship, and fraternal bonds expressed by the men, particularly in regard to leisure (e.g. sports, cars, hunting, fishing, and even commiserating about their jobs), as well as family (e.g. fathering, religious practices, home renovation projects, yard maintenance, rites of passage). What neoliberal notions of work ethic and efficiency often produce for working-class men, then, is a fragmented sense of being in which "pulling your weight" and embodying competitive self-reliance is given precedence over collective unity, mutual aid, and even personal and/or community well-being. This occurs despite the paradoxical fact that an environment of cooperation may actually lead to potential boosts in production efficiency and output, as well as worker morale and health. As a consequence, many of

the participants reproduced social fragmentation by complaining about, and negatively critiquing their co-workers more often than their bosses, managers, or even the capitalist economic system as a whole. As such, the narratives operating within the area shore up the relational bonds that masculinity, rurality, and neoliberal self-making practices share.

Notions of manhood, respect, and rural life were also tied to discourses extolling the virtues of individualism, self-reliance, and independence. Many of the men intimated that the ability and aptitude for "hard work" was primarily something that someone had in them, or that they learned, especially in rural settings, at an early age and made a conscious decision to embody and take upon themselves. Given reliance upon the belief that people are assumed to be disconnected individual subjects, the influence neoliberal self-making characteristics (i.e. internal discipline, self-control, and a motivational drive to perform in the marketplace) wield insinuates that "work ethic," "pulling your weight," and "holding down a job" are personal choices that everyone has the option of making.

These ideals are eerily reminiscent of the infamous (neo)liberal dogmatic decree of Margaret Thatcher who proclaimed "there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women," and also gives credence to Marx's famous analysis of capitalism in which he suggests it turns a critical mass of exploited workers into nothing more than "a sack of potatoes" (read: pile of lifeless things and inanimate objects to be stored, consumed, then disposed of) (Margaret Thatcher Foundation 2018). The "there is only individuals" interpretation of society, or rather entire dismissal of it, negates any recognition of structural obstacles and institutional barriers people face due to structural repressions generated by systemic racism, classism, (hetero)sexism, and ableism that marginalize and subordinate multitudes of people on political, economic, and cultural levels of society, not to mention affect them in everyday life.

What this demonstrates is that the individualized ambitions of the participants regarding work ethic are linked to both masculine subject positioning and capitalist production. While I steer away from archetypes and generalizations when it comes to masculinity, it was clearly evident that discourses pertaining to work ethic and

employment provided opportunities for men to define themselves as competitive, entrepreneurial, reliable, skilled, and independent, widely reminiscent of those characteristics associated with ideas about being a "self-made man" (Kimmel 1996). Of the many values stressed, "being competitive" featured prominently. George, 30 years old, noted that his financial stability and "success" in life was attributable to being raised in a competitive household. This is underscored in his statement:

> Everything we did was competitive … we were taught to win, we were taught to push hard, we were taught to be better than the other guy. I mean everybody likes to win, it's in our blood. Being competitive is natural and I work hard in all that I do … if a guy sticks with it long enough eventually all that hard work will pay off.

When asked whether he thought any form of privilege (race, class, gender, able-bodiedness, religion, nationality, etc.) was a factor in any of his success, George responded accordingly by stating:

> No one gave me shit in life. I worked my ass off for all I have … never complained, never was on welfare, and never asked for a damned handout. I got too much pride and self-respect.

Assertions of this nature exalt the capacity to work hard, compete, and attain status as an individual actor (i.e. liberal subject), thereby denying the existence of privileges and benefits that being a member of the dominant bloc has when living in a white settler supremacist structure. In turn, the neoliberal self-making practices of responsibilization, auto-commodification, and self-capitalization are propped up and promoted by personal narratives of achievement given the power they have to imply that complex and interconnected social relations exist in a vacuum. Success or hardship in life, then, is the result of individual choices, actions, and behaviors, with structural and systemic forces factoring little in the equation and being cast, as various participants saw them, as "excuses." Consequently, any social order that could potentially be based upon mutual aid, public welfare, and the equitable

redistribution of wealth/resources (socialist principles or solidarity economics) remains anathema to the (neo)liberal ethos governing settler colonial (capitalist) societies.

## Rurality, Religion, and Heteronormativity

Rurality has implications for local culture, gender relations, and more specifically, the construction of masculinity and how men navigate differing social spaces (e.g. home life, the workplace, leisure activities, places of worship, school settings, locker rooms, garages, bars and pubs, etc.) (Brandth and Haugen 2016, Little 2017, Leach 2016, Kneafsey 2017). Literature here has concentrated primarily on the association identity and manhood has with the countryside (predominantly "nature") (Gibson 2016, Little 2002, Campbell 2000, Brandth 1995). Related work on colonialism has also touched upon the connections that remote, secluded, and agrarian landscapes have with masculine discourses and displays of taming, controlling, penetrating, and impregnating (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014, Horne 2018, McClintock 2013, Shohat and Stam 1994). There, too, is research illustrating how the countryside can be a liberating sanctuary for queer eroticism, in that the rural can be an unregulated place where non-conformist sexualities can seek refuge and be freely practiced (e.g. *Brokeback Mountain*) (Kayzak 2011, Little 2003, Bell 2006, Bell and Valentine 1995). Taking account of these scholarly discussions, this section seeks to add to these conversations by examining how religion, rurality, and notions of manhood sustain and reproduce heteronormativity.

Across America's Heartland, orthodox perspectives pertaining to sexuality and bodily autonomy are heavily influenced by the doctrines of conservative Christianity, which socially generates compulsory heterosexuality. Both sexualities and bodies are measured, rather mechanically, as either complementary or not, with prevailing ideas about each assuming a heterosexual male–female binary. Prevailing ideas presume that male bodies desire female bodies, and that female bodies are incomplete without the unifying

bond/penetration of their male counterparts. The normalization of (cisgendered) heterosexuality across the region is largely rooted in the Christian "family" value that monogamous, marital, and procreative sex is the only type of "natural, moral, and virtuous" sex that can be had. As a result, discussions surrounding gay, bisexual, queer, and/or non-conforming sexualities are castigated, pathologized, pitied, denigrated, and in some cases vilified. The heteronormative, and at times homophobic, regimes of truth governing sexuality are highlighted in the statement of Jesse, 28 years old, who noted:

> I do not think you are really a "man" if you want cock, you know … that is something that women should want … it is just not right to want to take it in the ass. It is not a mechanical fit, God did not make us that way—just look at biology and nature.

At a fundamental level, a reliance upon static binary opposites in theorizing and moralizing bodies and sexuality reaffirms hierarchies that reify heterosexuality as "right/natural" and label anything else as "wrong/abnormal." I also came across the frequent underlying patriarchal presumption that the male body is dominant, authoritative, and possessive, while the female body is lacking, and in both need and want of a penis and insemination. This is evident in the statement of Chris, 44 years old, who affirmed:

> [W]ell, womenfolk have a clock ticking you know. They get older and want to start making babies. Nothing wrong with that, but they need a good, strong, man to take care of them and give them what they need … if you know what I mean (laughs)? I don't reckon a fag is much good for that at all.

From a statement such as this, which represented a shared sentiment across multiple interviews (although not always offered with as stark homophobic epithets), we can glean that the overriding perspective regarding male bodies is that if they are not "giving them (women) what they need" that male bodies/men are not fulfilling their predetermined purpose. As such, any attraction, stimulation, or desire of a male body that is not directed at a female

body is consequently positioned as deviant, abject, or as I heard numerous times "sinful." These perspectives were not uncommon throughout the majority of the interviews I conducted across the area, as most of the men I spoke with regarding sexuality noted that gay, lesbian, and any non-hetero sex was "unnatural," "abnormal," "wrong," or "a sin." Notably, however, there were also numerous instances in which participants simply did not weigh in, offering responses like "none of my business," "I don't really care what people do behind closed doors, that's their business," and "what folks do in the bedroom is between them and the lord." These rather laissez-faire approaches about the private sexualities of others, though, became far more strident when asking about social, institutional, and/or cultural inclusion and acceptance. That is, there were hard lines drawn by many of the participants when it came to queer-positive education in schools and things like rainbow flags being flown in public spaces.

Time-honored "truths" surrounding sexuality that are based in patriarchal Christian values and puritanical respectability politics generate, prescribe, and routinize heteronormativity. Markedly, place is a determining factor with respect to where and how heteronormativity is reproduced and operates. A dynamic that is particularly salient when it comes to how masculinity is socially constructed, embodied, and performed. Fred, 33 years old, highlighted these undercurrents when he asserted:

> I just do not understand gays. It is not what we were created for and it is not what men are supposed to do. It does really fly *out here* either, we like to keep things simple 'cause it just makes more sense … I guess they cannot really help it, but in reality, it is not right and it is their cross to bear. At the end of the day they will have to answer for their choices when they meet their maker. [emphasis added]

Statements such as these, when affirmed as tenet, underscore how pervasive heteronormative subjectivities are in the area by emphasizing that sexuality, particularly anything not heterosexual, is deviant and something to be controlled, disciplined, and punished.

Moreover, it essentializes rural settings as places that purportedly "make more sense" because they are thought to be free from the perceived corruption of gay and queer sexualities.

Over the past 20 years, feminist and queer theorists have been concerned with how non-hegemonic sexualities are marginalized across-and-within varying contexts (Oswin 2008, Binnie and Valentine 1999, Knopp 1992). Research here also demonstrates how assumptions reaffirming bodies as either distinctly male or female are spatialized (e.g. consider how much the body and social space matters when needing to use a public, male or female, bathroom) (Lewis 2013, Myrdahl 2013, Gorman-Murray 2009). Taking up from this research, what I discovered over the course of my time returning to the Heartland sheds light on the fact that sexualities and bodies which do not fit the normative dualistic mold (e.g. intersex, queer, or vary from cisgender norms widely) remain subordinated and pushed to the social periphery. The crux of the issue here is that there is no evidence of societal degeneration or abnormality existing as a result of bodies and sexualities that do not conform to arbitrarily invented orthodox standards. They are simply not as common.

While not an explicit focus of the research, but a topic that did arise several times in my queries about bodies and norms, those interviews that did touch upon the topic of corporality and people who have intersex conditions produced responses, some quite jarring, that typically centered either on pathology or pity. Walter, 22 years old, speaking in a focus group, summed up the general perspective of the participants regarding intersex people and rural life when he explained: "I understand some people are hermaphrodites, and I feel bad they were born that way, but they have ways to fix it now." Walter later went on to state:

> I feel bad for them (people who are intersex), and I know if I were that way I would feel like I was not man enough you know … I mean seriously, I do not think you could work as hard, or take a hit, and growing up in the country means you got to be able to do both … plus, what girl is going to want a guy like that? Seems like it would be embarrassing.

When asking Walter to elaborate on what "taking a hit" meant, he noted that it applied to playing football, and more generally, fighting and physical strength. He explained that (American) football was an important part of growing up in the area and that one had to be "tough, strong, and physical" in order to succeed in it. He continued by stating:

> They (people who are intersex) just would not fit in. I think being born abnormal and having woman parts is weird and that everyone would probably notice. No one may say anything to be nice about it … but I just don't think that type of thing … or set up … or whatever, would be able to as much as a normal guys body.

When queried why someone who was intersex would not "fit in," he said it was because "hermaphrodites are so different." Walter also explained:

> I don't think most guys around here would be violent or hurt someone like that, but they would definitely get made fun of a lot and have to take a lot of shit. Probably get called a fag or a queer … especially in school, at work, or out at the bar, but I think most of it would just be good-natured ribbing—person would just have to have a thick skin you know.

Through exclusionary and oppressive statements such as this, along with fixations on the phallus and penis size alluded to by Walter earlier, we can see how the body's composition becomes directly tied to both assumptions about sexuality and conceptions of gender, expressly, masculinity. Comments like this also tell us something about space. In particular, what social spaces are key sites for the monitoring, measuring, and adjudication of masculinity—by other men. Walter's offering also highlights the places and situations that would be potentially unsafe and possibly dangerous for intersex persons, many of which are public.

## Competition, Pride, and Tradition

Ironically, despite the countless conversations I had about individual responsibility, numerous men stressed the importance of

the "tight-knit *communities*" they came from, which they chalked up to the small, intimate, and rural nature of each. However, in doing so, most interviewees felt their respective community would be stronger if "kids these days" or "other guys" in it "bettered themselves" by becoming more competitive, hard-working, complaint-averse, and non-expectant of "free rides" and "handouts" (e.g. social welfare). Participant community attachment and affinity was therefore contingent upon whether other men were engaging in practices typically associated with what is socially and locally agreed upon as "respectable": devout religious belief, waged employment, heterosexuality (e.g. if single, having multiple sexual partners who were women; if married, being a "good" father/husband in a nuclear family), and for many, playing sports, primarily American football. There was also concern about the changing complexion of certain communities, in which participants were remiss and/or worried about the number of others/ foreigners who were moving in, which suggests that whiteness (i.e. "keeping things the way they are") offers a certain degree of comfort to many settlers across the Heartland.

Several men suggested their communities/hometowns were safe and tight-knit because they learned their values at an early age as a result of their parent's (in many cases father's) work ethic; the guidance and moral lessons of the church/Christianity; and the life lessons/character they built as a member of a football team. Steve, 31 years old, expounded:

> Some of the most valuable lessons that we learned in life came on the football field. We learned discipline, we learned what hard work was, we learned that we all had to do our individual job if we wanted to succeed, and most importantly, we learned to compete.

The emphasis placed upon self-discipline, competition, and individual effort featured very prominently in my discussions surrounding manhood and earning respect. In many instances, self-discipline and being personally competitive was tied to liberal self-making. That is, not shying away from competition can earn a man a great deal of masculine capital, so to speak. In turn, men are compelled to

engage in alpha-male status-seeking practices to prove themselves and "earn their stripes." Notably, the phallus features prominently in these processes. Numerous participants were both candid and upfront (as well as even humorously critical) about this, often testifying that there was, indeed, a lot of "dick measuring," "pissing contests," and "peacocking" (i.e. male posturing) taking place "'round here" amongst men. Several used the terms "ridiculous," "dipshit," and "dumbass," amongst numerous others to modify their descriptions.

Nevertheless, the overarching consensus from participants was that individual responsibility, personal work ethic, and "earning respect" was paramount. Carl, 64 years old, elaborated on success in life when he explained:

> I learned from an early age that if you are going to succeed in life you have to look out for yourself … you have to pull yourself up by your bootstraps to make a go of it. That goes for all walks of life. If you want to be a stud on the football field, if you want to do right by the Lord, if you want a good job, if you want to be a good father, if you want to be respected; you got to put in the work. No one is going to do it for you. There are a lot of people out there nowadays who want something for free … not much honor in that.

A statement of this nature highlights how masculinity operates within the Heartland and is arbitrated across varying social spaces (e.g. the football field, church, workplace, home). Carl's perspective also demonstrates how hegemonic practices of masculinity are at once spatialized, surveilled, and re-inscribed across-and-within rural contexts. That is, a result of the direct association that masculinity has with place, men become positioned as subjects that are implored to remain compliant with certain actions and behaviors so as to legitimate themselves as "men." Consequently, the practice of competitively "earning respect" becomes a vital and seemingly never-ending part of the socio-spatial production of manhood.

The men I spoke with held "pride and tradition" in high esteem. The reverence and veneration offered to both was consistent amongst participants, and each was regularly declared as being of

high importance in terms of their respective (white settler) heritages, cultures, and communities. Two rural spaces in particular where pride and tradition were passed down from generation to generation were described as *fields*. One field related to athletic competition, as many men spoke of how they learned the value of hard work, as well as "a lot about life in general," on the football field. The other field reflected upon by many related to agricultural production (wheat, corn, soybeans, hay, etc.).

Nearly all the men I interviewed had spent at least some time in their childhood or adolescent years working in the countryside: feeding animals, bucking hay, fixing fences, docking tails, "working" (castrating) pigs, bushhogging (mowing overgrown weeds), helping with the harvest, herding cattle, gutting/cleaning fish, driving a combine, or performing maintenance repairs on farm equipment (tractors, combines, farm trucks, etc.). Having shared these experiences meant conversations were relatively easy to dive into. Through their experiences of working in the fields, they maintained the perspective that hard work was cultivated in rural contexts, that it was part of a rural "tradition," that being from the "country" is something to be proud of, and that they were carrying on a "legacy" of sorts. These proverbial badges of honor were evident in a variety of the statements from most participants, and summed up aptly by Bruce, 66 years old, who noted:

> Growing up out in the country you learn what hard work is when you are young. Hell, we were probably doing chores from the time we could walk. When we got to junior high and high school we would go help out in the fields … it was backbreaking work, but I will tell you what—we were all better for it. It kept our priorities straight, we learned the value of a dollar, and we could go to sleep at night knowing we were earning our keep. Most everybody around here knows what it's about, that is what I like about this area, guys know how to man-up and work.

Bruce's statement sheds light on the disciplinary capitalist practice of "learning the value of a dollar," as well as the liberal expectation that individuals "earn one's keep." Regulatory axioms like these have become commonplace across many settler colonial rural

settings, and in the case of the Heartland, have consequently become obligatory rites of passage for men. Bruce's comment also exposes how masculine subjectification is intimately associated with the acts that men/male bodies perform in rural contexts. Meaning, the individual actions tied to economic production, manhood, and being a "hard worker" are simultaneously enfranchised as being an inherent part of "growing up out in the country."

The other "field" where masculinity is established and legitimized is the football field. Based on my interviews and focus groups, it was evident that football is a site where a man can earn a great deal of respect or ridicule. I could relate as it was a life passion, as well as a formative force, for me growing up. As critical scholars have reported, the places (e.g. locker rooms, practice fields, workout facilities, weight rooms, conditioning camps, etc.) associated with sports and athletics become concentrated spaces of masculine assertion, bravado, and subject positioning (Kidd 2013, Anderson 2009, Guttmann 2006, Gems 2000, Messner 1990).

In discussing the prominence of football, Earl, a 32-year-old who graduated from a typical high school, explained that young guys benefit from football because they learn valuable lessons (e.g. "discipline, hard work, dedication") that can be applied to all things in life. He stressed that these values were bestowed upon young men from coaches and upperclassmen (older adolescents also attending the same school), describing them as "the guys who came up before us and set high standards" and "the men who taught them how to compete." Seemingly innocuous statements, but influential, nevertheless, as discourses surrounding masculinity are wont to be. Earl continued by emphasizing:

> The practice [football] field is where you find out what you are made of, it is where you learn who you are deep down inside … and it is where you find out what guys you can count on, what guys can produce, and what guys will puss out. Taking a hit, running gasers [sprints] out in the 90-degree heat, making it through two-a-days … its a gut check. A lot of guys can't take it. But your better for it in the end. Something you can hang your hat on.

Earl's statements reveal how self-reliance, discipline, and pain endurance are indispensable qualities required of young men in order to eventually succeed, gain a sense of self-efficacy, and "make it" in life. The seemingly innumerable football stories offered by numerous participants accentuated the same points, as well as illustrate how discourses related to masculinity, football, visceral high-impact acts, and overcoming adversity/others mutually constitute one another.

The gendered idiom of "pussing out" (i.e. "giving up," "quitting," "being weak") used by Earl surfaced in several interviews. A man who is guilty of it faces heavy social repercussions. The ramifications of which were reflected in many conversations via normative statements pronouncing that "being a puss" (or "bitch") was *not* acceptable for a male body/man. Glenn, 36 years old, stated that adolescents who could not overcome the physical and mental challenges of football practice, "two-a-days" (training sessions that are held in both morning and afternoon sessions daily), or the off-season strength and conditioning program were "pussies who couldn't take it." Those who could take it were afforded respect, usually being described as "stacked," "yoked up," "country strong," "a hoss," or "as strong as a bull." David, 30 years old, referenced adolescent males who did not remain on the team by stating: "Quitters are the worst … I can't respect a guy who quits." And finally, Tom, 21 years old, expressed his dismay for "quitters" and the negative association it has with femininity, by asserting "that is one of the worst things you can do—a *man* does not just quit. Plain and simple—it's a total bitch move. And like the old saying goes: 'Quitters never win.'" Tom also coupled this sentiment to why he was a Trump supporter, noting:

> You can say what you want about the guy, but no one thought he was going to win, and he did. Could've just gave up, he didn't. I can respect that. I think he deserves to keep reminding the people who are bitching about him of it.

These types of discursive formations surrounding discipline, competition, "not quitting" (which dangerously translated to "dedication" for most interviewees) and football emphasize how all have become

essentialist and hierarchically gendered. That is, men who fail or quit are equated to women ("pussing out," "bitching") and have no one (nor social structure or system) to blame but themselves. As gender theorists have corroborated, statements of this nature signal that masculinity is defined in opposition, and relation, to femininity/female bodies, as well as other masculinities (Hopkins and Noble 2009, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, Longhurst 2000, Mac an Ghaill 1996). That is, what gender, and hence masculinity, is and becomes, is a relational and social process. In this way, football within the Heartland, even though taking place in the context of a team sport, becomes a social arena where the liberal ideal of personal responsibility is elevated, lauded, and linked to hegemonic practices of masculinity (e.g. individually overcoming adversity, exhibiting power, being aggressive). In turn, the stories about what people achieve, or do not achieve, in life become divorced from social forces, while both reductive gendered cultural norms and stratified gender regimes are reaffirmed, married to place, and naturalized.

The resultant social hierarchies suggest gendered subject positions and bodily practices that are *not* masculine are flawed, lacking, incomplete, or weak. Consequently, anything perceived as "feminine" is heavily regulated, ridiculed, and denigrated, which in turn, reinforces the patriarchal belief that what men do as work is more substantive and significant than what women do as work (Federici 2012), which occurs even in the realm of leisure activity. As Clyde, 49 years old, shared, "We [men] like to watch football, build shit, and fish, they [women] like to gossip, do their hair, and watch Lifetime [a channel that is marketed as "Television for Women"] or God knows what." The connotation here being what men do (even in play) matters, while what women do is trivial and of no substance.

These notions, when historically and spatially consented to, lead to a devaluation and dismissal of the day-to-day socially reproductive labor that women are typically tasked with and often uncompensated for under patriarchal capitalism (Bhattacharya 2017). The implication, then, is that if one comes up short in terms of being a man or is not "doing the things that men do," as several interviewees mentioned, they are relegated to a subordinate (gendered) rank, i.e. woman. Several participants also reminisced about their time

on the football field and the satisfying feelings they got when using their body to assert dominance over other men. Comments here described the body as an instrument for "making a good hit," "putting it to someone," "lighting a guy up," "bringing the wood," and "laying the lumber" (all colloquialisms for making a particular type of high-impact football tackle). Anthony, 47 years old, felt the perennial success that his local football team enjoyed was due in part to the condition that men (male bodies) were in as a result of the community's old-fashioned and rural sense of work ethic, as well as what they consumed:

> When you think about it, most of us were "hard." We grew up eating meat and potatoes, we busted our asses in the summers, and we earned most of our victories in the weight room and practice field. Our coaches made sure of that. Looking back, it was probably the best shape most of us have ever been in. The older guys on the team set a good example for us, they were good leaders … we were basically just a bunch of fired-up country boys out there looking to bust heads and kick some ass.

Ben, 58 years old, picked up on Anthony's point by emphasizing the importance of football when he stated:

> It is all about pride and tradition … you want something to hang your hat on, you want to leave a legacy behind, and at the end of the day, you want to be satisfied with what you did.

Ben went on to explain that the success of the local football team was something that galvanized the community, brought people closer together, and is where "boys learned to be men." Several other interviews and focus groups across the region addressed the proud tradition of football in their respective communities by valorizing the patriarchal figures (i.e. fathers, older brothers, school board members, local business owners, and most significantly coaches) who passed down these traditions and values. As can be seen in the statements of the participants, the ritualistic customs of football, as well as the social bonds, connections, and camaraderie football affords them, are contingent upon how they use and calibrate both

their bodies and emotions, in addition to the ways in which they individually disciplined themselves under the shadows cast by those "men" and "leaders" who came before them.

## Emotion and Relationships

The patriarchal regulation of masculinity does not come without consequence, especially when it comes to emotions and relationships, be they in the workplace or home. Vince, 34 years old, when asked how respect is earned in the workplace, as well as why work ethic and "respect" each carried so much social currency, explained:

> Some guys bitch a lot about having to work, some guys don't. I mean, if you don't want to do the work then don't sign up for the fucking job—it's as simple as that. I don't have a lot of respect for guys who complain … They'll never make foreman or go anywhere in life. Plus, if I wanted to hear someone bitch all the time I'd just go sit around in the office with all the secretaries. I listen to enough complaining at home.

What is particularly interesting about Vince's statement is that it offers "respect" to men who submit to the rules, dictates, and regulations of workplace managers, supervisors, and on-the-job foremen. It also shows us that if a man does not acquiesce to the demands of capitalist production, they are not afforded as much respect and face the prospect of receiving negative critiques from co-workers. Or worse, being labeled someone who "bitches." Vince's quote carries the assumption that women are naturally more inclined to "bitch and complain." This became evident because upon asking who the secretaries were—four women—and why they were bitching and complaining, Vince followed up with, "you know how women get."

Mediating gendered reductions such as these, numerous participants also offered stories of knowing women who were "just like one of the guys" or could "put most men to shame" (outwork them), as well as who "got into it more" or "could scrap better" (i.e. fight) than most of the men they knew. Most also admitted, sometimes while sheepishly laughing, that their spouse was the one who actually

"ruled the roost" or "called all the shots" (was in charge at home), as well as that a "happy wife means a happy life." These aphorisms, on one level, ruptured the prevailing essentialist gender dualisms that pervaded most conversations given they offered women pathways out of the subordinate categorical boxes they were typically placed in (e.g. passive, weak, deferential). However, the condition placed upon women for being accepted as "one of the guys" was that they must engage in what were perceived to be masculine acts (e.g. working hard in blue collar settings, fighting). Likewise, if a woman's authority and dominance was to be recognized—it would only be so in the domestic socially reproductive setting of the home, as well as on heteronormativity's terms.

I also inquired as to what "complaining" Vince had to listen to at home. He stated his wife "gave him grief" about not contributing to housework/unpaid domestic labor ("cleaning the house, vacuuming, folding clothes … you know, a woman's job."); spending too much time with his buddies; as well as the amount of "drinking" (alcohol) and "chewing" (tobacco) he did. Instances such as these, in which men referenced being scrutinized for non-contributions to socially reproductive household labor, arose in numerous conversations. Many, just over the majority of, participant rebuttals come in the form something to the effect of, "I bust my ass to earn a paycheck, not sit around the house all day, you'd think a guy would have some time off." Despite this tendency, I do want to be clear to note that there were numerous contrary responses, as well as several that were critical of this orientation towards social reproduction. Many participants spoke very enthusiastically about cooking and not being bothered in the least by, as well as about doing and even enjoying, domestic work (e.g. laundry, washing dishes, reading to children, changing diapers, preparing supper). This was especially the case when they spoke of their children and their role and "duties" as fathers.

That being said, the reductive essentialisms related to "how they [women] get/are" emerged in the vast majority of my conversations. That is, women were deemed to be programmed, innately, as a fixed entity entirely different than men. "They just have different wiring" was a common participant refrain about women. Markedly, the

topic of "how women are" also emerged readily in discussions about relationships and intimacy. This is highlighted in the conversations I had with Jeff, 36 years old, regarding a relationship he was in that ended, at the woman's behest, abruptly and without expectation. When speaking to Jeff individually he confided:

> When she decided to leave I was totally stunned. It hurt and confused me at first because I tried to treat her right. I guess there were some things about me that were not so great. I still think about her from time to time … she is the only woman to ever really break my heart. It sucked, I was tore up … just like all those [country music] songs we listen to.

In a subsequent focus group, Jeff described the situation in the following manner:

> [T]he crazy bitch could not make up her mind so things didn't work out. I think she ended up whoring around. You know how women get, sometimes they get so caught up in their emotions they don't appreciate a good man when they have one.

While such dynamics are not generalizable to every situation, the diametrically polarized accounts that Jeff provided about his breakup emphasizes the capacity that male peer group policing has to influence gendered narratives, masculinity, and how women are defined.

Several other participants attested to dating and/or knowing women who were "batshit crazy" or a "psycho bitch." Notably, these monikers were rarely, if ever, pinned onto other men, even those of whom participants were critical or did not like. The starkly contrasted accounts of what happened in Jeff's relationship also illustrates the self-surveillance and tacit pressure he felt, as a man, to *not* admit being wounded, heartbroken, or insecure. The physical presence of other men in the room, along with the invisible yet influential normative standards of masculinity, prompted emotional repression and a reluctance to admit pain. This is not to mention how the homosocial male-dominated space impelled Jeff to become complicit in the reproduction of sexist discourses about women.

Tellingly, numerous other participants spoke in similarly contradictory terms regarding their emotions about relationships that had ended or fell apart. In follow-up discussions, if comfortable with talking about the inconsistencies, many of the participants went on to explain their variegating accounts, along with reticence to share what they did during individual interviews in group settings, was due to not wanting to "catch hell" or "deal with bullshit" (from other men). Admitting vulnerability was "blood in the water."

When asking other participants to reflect upon their perspectives on women and relationships after similar instances, responses included and ranged from, but were not limited to: "Yeah, that wasn't alright"; "Probably shouldn't have done that"; "Didn't really mean anything by it"; "I don't hate women or anything, my anger just gets the best of me sometimes"; "Well, you can't trust them [women], you know, all they want is your god damn money"; "I hate women—nothing but snakes with tits." There is, indeed, a lot of range here, spanning from remorse and regret, to seething misogyny and malice. Notably, and perhaps a key take-away to bear in mind going forward, is that all of these types of temperaments, responses, reflections, and triggered reactions, regardless of whether marked by contrition or malevolence—remain quite hidden in the everyday. These quotes also demonstrate that the potent confluence of emotion, masculinity, and men's feelings towards women can make for a highly volatile situation, not to mention psyche, as well as ones that are potentially very dangerous.

As critical research has shown, emotions and identities are dynamic, unpredictable, and sometimes irrational, yet, carried by all (Hall 1993). That is, in light of the evidence above, we can note well that men are emotional, wildly at times, often getting credit as "men" if said emotions are anger or rage. But essentialist framings of men as static, emotionally repressed, overly aggressive, sexist oppressors in critical analyses such as this are limiting and problematic. In particular because of the manner in which these framings box men in and foreclose possibilities of them being something else, behaving differently, or responding to provocations and hurt in alternative, constructive ways.

That said, men, in fact, are so emotional that there is abundant scholarship revealing that, in some settings and situations, it is not

uncommon for them to candidly speak about emotions, affect, and feelings (Coen, Oliffe, Johnson, and Kelly 2013, Aitken 2012, Smith, Davidson, Cameron, and Bondi 2012, Barlett 2006, Parr, Philo, and Burns 2004, Talbot 2008). Numerous men in my project spoke quite tenderly and with sensitivity about their relationships, affinity, and the appreciation they have for their partners (all of whom were women). This is in addition to the countless instances in which they talked about the love they have for their families, as well as touched upon their desires for intimacy and affection. And while participants were willing to engage in discussions surrounding emotion, personal attachment, and vulnerability, they often only did so privately, in one-on-one interviews, where no other men were present. The tone that was taken in focus groups surrounding the topics of emotion, desire, and the relationships men were and had been in were far more indicative of the heteropatriarchal structure and sexist discourses upon which the U.S. was built.

What I gathered from my travels and interviews across the Heartland, then, was that the denial of vulnerability, disavowal of personal insecurities, and repression of emotion that men were demonstrating are heavily influenced by normative standards of masculinity, as well as what it meant to be from a rural area. Place, rurality, mattered. More specifically, the rules governing what men ought say/not say were typically policed and enforced by other men (both overtly and implicitly). Similarly, what men were allowed to feel and expected to suppress was mediated by their internalization of what manhood is, as well as tacit conventions denoting that certain dispositions, postures, and performances (e.g. being vulnerable, emotional, overly sensitive, "soft") were not acceptable in the American countryside. In light of this compulsory self-surveillance, I gathered that men in the Heartland, by and large, are expected to remain poised, calm, cool, and collected in the face of pain, anguish, grief, and yearning, especially if these were "because of a woman," lest they lose their "man card."

## Social Reproduction and Consumption

Generally, when queried, interviewees frequently identified social reproduction as "woman's work." There was a great deal of discussion

about cooking they did, though. Typical stories shared on this theme regularly featured animals (deer, duck, turkey, quail, pheasant, dove, chicken) they hunted or fish (bass, crappie, catfish, spoonbill, occasionally trout) they caught. That is, the cooking they did was directly connected to rural outdoor pastimes, and involved specialist knowledge, technical skill, and both acumen about and dominance over nature and animals. Of particular interest, was how popular barbequing, "grilling out," and "cooking meat" were for the men. They described their passion for barbeque, noted watching reality television programs about techniques and competitions, with some painting verbal pictures of the local, regional, and national competitions they entered. Several participants, too, prided themselves on the aptitude and expertise they had apropos preparing, cooking, and *understanding* meat as amateur "grill masters." Incidentally, a handful of my interviews took place while grilling outside, and I was even "paid" in frozen beef for farm chores I did while a participant-observer with some local farmers during my fieldwork. Drinking beer, for participants, went hand-in-hand, both literally and thematically, with the topic of grilling and barbecuing meat.

Alcohol consumption is a practice often associated with hegemonic notions of masculinity in a wide array of cultural contexts and social settings (Jayne, Valentine, and Holloway 2011, Carrington, MacIntosh, and Scott 2010, Alston and Kent 2008, Campbell 2000). Throughout the Heartland, "drinking," in addition to the places where alcohol is consumed, serve as important factors in the formation of social bonds for countless men. When asked about alcohol, all the interviewees, whether they drank or not, stressed that the ability to "hold your liquor" was something that young men learned from an early age. For the participants who did consume alcohol, the average age they noted actively seeking it out, or getting "drunk" or "buzzed" for the first time, was grade seven. An average age of 13.

Of particular interest was the tie that consuming alcohol had to working. In conversations about the reasons why participants drank, men often discussed reasons primarily in terms of "deserving it" and rewarding themselves. The commonplace and pervasive consumption of alcohol amongst participants was summed up quite aptly in the account of Ed, 55 years old, who clarified:

> Oh, I do not think it is as bad as everybody makes it out to be. I mean, I drink after work most days, more during the summer, a guy has got to cool off somehow, so I will work on a 12-pack or so after work into the evenings. I don't get shitfaced or sloppy drunk … I just drink to relax a bit, helps take the edge off after a hard day's work.

Ed's quote underscores a point several others brought up during interviews regarding alcohol use, that for them, drinking was "not a problem." Yet, the majority of the participants mentioned "problems" they had seen, and in some cases experienced, from alcohol use/misuse. These ranged from "guys thinking they were bullet proof" to facing criminal charges of DUI (Driving Under the Influence), DWI (Driving While Intoxicated), MIP (Minor In Possession), to much more serious and traumatic events such as the paralysis and death of local friends, family members, and acquaintances. When asking a focus group of five men whether alcohol consumption by men was a noticeable problem in the area, John, 44 years old, illustrated the general perspective for the group when he summed up:

> There are a few guys around with alcohol problems, just a handful … they will get aggressive, or fly off the handle, stick their chest out, make a bunch of noise, and shoot guns—stupid shit like that. Every once in a while you'll hear about a guy hauling off and hitting his wife you know, that shit does not fly around here though. I mean, sure, we can put a few back, but we are not hurting anyone with it, we are not beating our wives, and to be honest, I do not think one guy here is an alcoholic.

Statements such as this illustrate how the embodied regulation of emotion, physicality, and aggression is critical in determining what is suitable masculine practice in the context of homosocial bonding involving alcohol. Many of my discussions surrounding alcohol were prefaced with rationalizations regarding why participants drank, with a strong emphasis on the fact that it did not create "problems" for them. Interestingly, as well as disconcertingly, many interviews made mention of alcohol not leading to domestic

violence because wives and/or children were not being "beaten" or "hit." This suggests that direct physical assault may be the only type of violence that is taken into consideration in certain relationships. In turn, the significant threat that financial, emotional, sexual, and psychological abuse and manipulation pose to intimate partners, particularly women and children, are all negated.

Several participants noted that drinking did not make them "violent." However, there where numerous stories in which men described fights, brawls, "dustups," "throw-downs," and physical altercations in which they did engage in violent acts, many of which involved alcohol. Somewhat ironically, men who identified as not being violent as a result of drinking would often then go on to detail an alcohol-involved violent event, which they had to engage in, because doing so was "necessary," "deserved," "appropriate," or even considered "just war" to them. Accordingly, men who did become violent in spaces where alcohol was a factor disaffiliated from it by associating blame to men who "could not hold their alcohol," were "popping off at the mouth," or who were "stirring up shit they could not handle." More specifically, violence that occurred as the result of challenges to manhood, which were fueled by alcohol consumption, took place because of the failure of certain men to regulate their emotions and behaviors in socially acceptable ways as determined by other men. As such, the participants who noted being involved in violence, oftentimes, took it upon themselves to adjudicate what was acceptable for other men to do and say when they were under the influence of alcohol.

The consumption of alcohol mentioned by many was also linked to the capitalist self-making (and coping) practices mentioned earlier. This was evident in the explanations men offered about their drinking habits. Typically, alcohol consumption was directly related to, in one way or another, having "worked hard and earned it." They informed me, too, that drinking was regularly done at "beer thirty" (after work) as well as coincided with "shooting the shit" (yet never "gossiping"), "blowing off steam," or "relaxing after a hard day's work." Other contexts men spoke of involving the alcohol consumption referenced leisure activities and homosocial fraternizing with other men, including catching a game (e.g. watching American

football, basketball, baseball), golfing, playing cards, working on cars, gambling, or shooting "skeet/clay pigeons" (projectile targets shot with guns), to name a few.

Participants also noted drinking on their days off and in scenarios related to (male dominated) recreational activities that were often described as "typical guy stuff," or as Ray, 19 years old, cracked, when doing things that were "in our genes." When asked to elaborate on what those activities were, Ray, along with other men in the focus group, listed fishing, camping, hunting, watching sports, playing pool, hanging out at the bar, "country cruising" (driving, leisurely, around the outskirts of town on gravel roads), shooting guns, doing yardwork, and "fixing things and building shit" as pastimes "encoded in our [rural men] DNA." Correspondingly, in reiterating Ray's point, Rick, the 27-year-old farmhand whom we heard from at the outset of the chapter, slyly laughed and matter-of-factly stated "boys will be boys."

In sum, I found that the reification of socially constructed, gendered, and spatialized "truths" regarding innate characteristics deemed to be at the core of men and women, respectively, were as banal as they were reductive. There was little to no mention of others who blur, breach, bend, or break these categories. And based upon this now nearly decade-long research, which has included hundreds of follow-up interviews querying how widespread participants feel these beliefs span, it is evident that hegemonic discourses pertaining to gender in the region continue to presuppose that women are naturally more sensitive, emotional, hormonal, hysterical, and passive. Men, conversely, were considered more logical, "hard," poised, rational, and productive. Beliefs of this persuasion are nothing new, really, especially in the U.S. Both gender constructions, though, in particular ideas about manhood and masculinity, were and remain heavily influenced by rurality, liberal ideology, capitalism, nationalism, and whiteness. Whiteness, contrariwise to the overt things that participants explicitly noted as being linked to manhood (e.g. being "from the country," "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps," American pride, being a "good/hard" worker), was mentioned very little. This silence surrounding whiteness is instructive. It offers insight into who has to

worry about their race in the Heartland—and who does not. Such silences also give rise to questions about what race is "settled" in the region, versus what races are "unsettling."

Of note, is that there were several instances in which participants were opposed to some, if not several, of the discursive and material practices that reaffirm patriarchy, heteronormativity, and white supremacy. Several, too, discussed at length feeling complicit with and culpable for contributing to and benefitting off overarching systems that they knew compromised others. While perhaps small in the grand scheme, structure, and culture of things, I believe it is worth mention. It provides evidence that male domination, institutionalized racism, homophobia, and transphobia are neither encoded nor inevitable. It also demonstrates that men have the ability to exercise politically conscious agency in, influence, and shape the cultural relations and social spaces they are co-creators of, regardless of what systems, and *places*, they have been raised and fashioned in.

# Chapter 7

# Looking Back, Going Forward …

*I am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty*
*land can never be purged away but with blood.*
John Brown

### Looking Back

My goal with this book has been to diagnose a social geography, the American Heartland, with the ultimate aim being to contribute, in one small way, to efforts being made to unsettle and eventually undo a settler colonial status quo. A status quo that is wreaking havoc upon and damaging both humanity and the planet. The primary objective, thus, has been to cast critical light on the formation and operation of masculinity in the American Heartland as a situated social practice while underscoring its discursive and material products and connections to settler colonialism.

In addition, I have tried to illustrate the influence that the recursive relationships amongst discourse, power, and place have on the development of local cultures, as well as on the ways we socially reproduce both ourselves and our notions of manhood. The more pointed political focus has been to expose, as a means of comprehending, the power relations and processes of socio-spatial subjectification at the nexus

of rural masculinity, American nationalism, settler colonialism, and structural white supremacy.

The key insight my investigation into the American Heartland provides is an understanding of how the mutually constitutive relationships between (white settler) masculinity, (neo)liberal-capitalist ideology, and colonial worldviews (re)create common sense "truths" and taken-for-granted cultural norms. "Truths" and norms that carry material effects, which at once privilege and repress, as well as generate and sustain heteronormative, patriarchal, and racist social relations. That is, my analysis offers both a glimpse and political intervention into the silencings, oppression, enablement, and entitlements that have emerged within the white settler society that is the U.S. Oppressions and enablings that are a direct result of the ongoing practices and logics of heteropatriarchal (settler) colonialism and racial capitalism. My interrogation of the region and its gender, race, and class relations also illustrates the complexities and contradictions that emerge due to the cultural politics of manhood in rural America.

In using an intersectional approach, as well as via critical discourse analysis, I have also attempted to explain how white settler histories, narratives, and worldviews reproduce colonial borders (broadly defined), American nationalism, and conservative Christian hegemony/domination, alongside arbitrary and illegitimate social hierarchies. The evaluation of the empirical data exposes how all of these formations are reconstituted through the normalization of imperialist discourses and the naturalization of unequal gender binaries. The data additionally informs us as to how place, identity, and the construction of manhood in the Heartland are bound up in manufactured settler histories and frontier myths emphasizing the importance of rugged individualism; protecting what one "owns" (be it family or land), often via the gun; being competitive and productive on capitalism's terms; and laying claim to while "earning" private property and respect.

My examination likewise suggests that masculinity in the American Heartland stresses the material and discursive preservation of being a "good" and "hard-working" agent of (Western and

white settler) knowledge, authority, and Christian values. These aspirations became clear as a result of discussions that took place regarding past accounts of "pioneer" settlement. Discussions that attested to the purported righteousness of the area's founding fathers, settlers, and missionaries, all of whom framed colonialism, enslavement, and attempted genocide as a process of "exploration," "discovery," and "civilization-bringing," as well as deemed them to be equally natural and necessary. The book thereby demonstrates how white supremacist feelings of racial superiority were and remain mystified, deployed, and institutionalized under the guise of altruism and virtue as a means towards preserving settler entitlements to land and history. It also lays bare how veiled claims of innocence provide a serviceable narrative that allows settlers to disaffiliate from the violent acts of deracination, dispossession, enclosure, enslavement, forced assimilation, and targeted death campaigns—i.e. empire, of which they are the beneficiaries—and that were and continue to be perpetrated by their state (the U.S.). Settler moves to innocence (Tuck and Yang 2012, 3) that continue even though many white settlers are simultaneously exploited and alienated by, to some degree, the same colonial-capitalist forces and imperial state they are supporting and defending.

Furthermore, the research underscores how the reproduction of gendered hierarchies are part of the quotidian experiences of people living in the Heartland. Patriarchal social relationships were made obvious in numerous interviews given they included gender essentialist discourses that paternalistically framed women as fragile, weak, emotional, irrational, and less capable than men. My analysis also reveals how the capitalist logics, labor relations, and social relations of the U.S., which compromise and harm working-class men in myriad ways, are depoliticized, valorized, and upheld by settler nationalism, deeply entrenched socially conservative ideals aligned with the values of liberal ideology, and fundamentalist currents of Christianity.

Ultimately, my research illustrates how settler colonialism and masculinity operate in conjunction with one another across a wide array of local contexts and social spaces within the American Heartland. It also casts light on how masculinity has become a

socially fabricated and fraught social currency that can be cashed in for social status, influence, authority, and rank, as well as leveraged against Others for exclusion and subordination. Finally, this work reemphasizes the point that masculinity is not a single, static, entity, but rather, remains fluid, flexible, relational, and place-based, not to mention restrictive and in many respects, harmful.

In closing, it seemingly goes without saying at this point in the book that both history and geography are inseparable from the formation of masculinity. As we have seen across the American Heartland, a context where (neo)liberal and nationalist ideals are being peddled and proliferated at will, masculinity is, undeniably, inextricably linked to and mutually constituted by both time and place. Time that is a settler colonial past and present, and a place that is a capitalist and patriarchal America. In the face of all the pre-ceding evidence, then, perhaps the most worthwhile assertion and queries that remain, especially for white settler men like myself, are that it is time to reject the irresponsible and reckless settler histo-ries and gender regimes we have been caught up in and continue to uphold, as well as begin, in the face of such a reality, to earnestly ask: What is an appropriate response? And what is our role in repairing the damage?

## Going Forward

*Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.*
*On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.*
Arundhati Roy

Colonialism penetrates. Land and lives, territories and cultures, as well as bodies and psyches are targets. With the dual end of domi-nation and accumulation as motive, the preferred means have been dehumanization, dispossession, enslavement, exploitation, humiliation, disappearance, death, and empire, to name a few. In short, alienation followed by annihilation. For over 500 years, the fanatical contempt, rapacious greed, and unadulterated violence of colonialism has been codified and globalized to such a magnitude there is virtually no geography it has not shattered or (dis)ordered.

Nowhere is this more true that what is now known as the United States of America. Indeed, the world, modernity, and in particular, the U.S. as many have come know and exist in each, have been (re)arranged and compartmentalized via a colonial imagination lacking neither in malice nor mendacity.

Correspondingly, to speak with accuracy about colonialism is to recognize its inseparability from capitalism and heteropatriarchy, along with their arbitrary hierarchies, borders, gender regimes, racial orders, and attendant exercises of illegitimate authority and control. Gender, skin color, desire, language, and worldviews taken in vain, colonialism fabricated its Others and has set about damning them as it pleases. It is paramount, here, to recognize that these condemnations, desolations, and burials of lives, cultures, and histories continue and occur in places. That is, while global in scale and resonance, the machinations and aftermaths of colonialism are unquestionably situated and unique, all be they interconnected. Thus, historicized and socio-geographically contextualized political analyses are necessary towards facing, foiling, and finding solutions to the ongoing structural violence of colonial, capitalist, and heteropatriarchal social orders.

And when it comes to seeking and discussing said solutions, a focus on confrontation and non-compromise—as well as on resistance and relationality—is vital. History shows us there is nothing tender, humble, or meaningful, nor joyous, playful, or inspired about the institutions, discourses, states, economies, gender regimes, and social relations that have been imposed by colonizers, capitalists, and settlers. Just as there is nothing either "natural" or "normal" about the cultural mores and notions of masculinity established by heteropatriarchy and white supremacy. This simply means it is urgent to start centering those humanizing aspects of tenderness, humility, meaning, joy, and heart in the alternatives and forms of social change we pursue.

As Sylvia Federici (2012, 3), pointing to social reproduction and our everyday interactions as fertile ground for revolutionary change in the face of colonial-capitalism, articulates:

> [I]t is through the day-to-day activities by means of which we produce our existence, that we can develop our capacity to

> cooperate and not only resist our dehumanization, but learn to reconstruct the world as a space of nurturing, creativity, and care.

We, in particular white settlers, need to start caring about something other than colonial nostalgia, settler nationalism, and genuflecting before an imperialist state. To start socially reproducing ourselves, our families, our neighborhoods, our communities, and our social geographies—differently. We had our chance to do the right thing. To listen respectfully and become beholden to the Indigenous principles, laws, rules, worldviews, and epistemologies of the lands upon which we arrived (Tuck and Yang 2012). To think of Other places, Other societies, and Other people as having their own sovereignties, stories, and souls—rather than seeing them as "shitholes," "savages," and "subhuman."

To let Others *be.*

We missed the mark, violently, and our moment is over. It is time to let go and let perish our settler institutions, economies, histories, narratives, and weapons. Because to carry on with the way things are, knowing what we now know, is to defend a history of contempt and ruin, and secure a hostile future filled with nothing other than petty hate, more suffering, and both a shameful settler sense of self-righteousness and an abhorrent state (of things). Thus, for those of us who are non-Indigenous, especially white settlers, instead of claiming entitlements to and asserting ownership over land, history, knowledge (production), and masculinity, we must begin to seriously question to what degree our respective presences and senses of belonging, morality, local heritage, and expertise are justifiable if they include a chronicle of enclosing and expropriating land; quarantining certain people and children in re-education and labor camps; shackling and commoditizing human beings who looked different than our ancestors; and are predicated upon the incarceration and elimination of Others.

"Salt of the Earth," settlers are not. Kill the colonizer—and the notion of manhood—save the person, the spirit, and the society. Dare we envision the death of both, and a future world maimed by neither? Strong words for hard truths. A veritable "Come to Jesus moment," as many of the men I spoke to across the Heartland would say, if there

ever was one. And for those of us settlers who reflexively and reactively doth protest: "It's all in the past"; "That was not me"; "Not all men"; or "But what about …"—we must swallow our moves to innocence and earnestly consider what it means to be the settler-beneficiaries of stories, histories, and a contemporary state/state of things founded upon war, racial animus, male domination, enslavement, and attempted genocide. If not active perpetrators of ongoing colonial social relations of domination, then the vast majority of us, are at best, complicit with and reaping privileges off of them. Even if we are being exploited by, as well as even suffering from, other things at the same time. Future history will look kindly upon neither disavowal nor disaffiliation, and history's right side is not something we will find ourselves on. Unless, of course, "right side" is interpreted as fascist, fanatical, or authoritarian, then it is precisely the side we will end up on.

Let us, in particular white settlers, not feign purity, piety, and non-culpability about our own entanglements in the unceasing disruptions that occur in the lives of Indigenous people and negatively racialized communities due to the violations and violences created by colonial dispossession, racial capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. Let us also not deny the deracination and deprivation Others face because of our own settlements, declarations of civilization, penchants for going with the flow of "business as usual," and parrotings of the feckless and insulting buffoon phrases "Get over it" and "Make America Great Again."

Rather, let us earnestly consider what a politics and story of accountability, atonement, and reparation with Indigenous communities and other negatively racialized groups might entail. To contemplate what redemption might look like and mean a commitment to. Admittedly, putting ourselves in the service of drafting such a story, as white settlers, will require time, sacrifice, modesty, and not be easy. Moreover, contributing, on the terms of preferences of Others, to the composition of a redemption song is bound to be unsettling, destabilizing, humbling, difficult, and jolting to the entitlements and status quo that the U.S. has spawned and that we as white settlers continue to sustain and enjoy. But then again, as I heard countless times during my fieldwork in the American Heartland when asking fellow white settlers about issues of justice

and judgment: "Turnabout is fair play" and "What goes around comes around." Brace (y)ourselves.

Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), outlines humanity's potential for building a better, more evolved and emancipatory, politically conscious world in the face of colonial institutions and capitalist social relations. An anti-authoritarian world democratically co-created and characterized by both the mutual recognition of dignity and an advanced form of humanity that is at once anti-racist and gender-just, as well as accepting and inclusive of difference, material equity, and meaningful work for all. In proposing a pathway towards achieving such a harmonious world, and version of humanity, Fanon, appealing primarily to hearts and minds across the "Third World," writes:

> We must abandon our dreams and say farewell to our old beliefs and former friendships. Let us not lose time in useless laments or sickening mimicry. (1963, 235)

> [L]et us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions, and societies that draw their inspiration from it. Humanity expects other things from us than this grotesque and generally obscene emulation. (1963, 239)

I would suggest Fanon's revolutionary assertions can be applied to both white settler societies and all notions of masculinity, not to mention the American ("First World") Dream. A dream that has always been more of an apocalypse and nightmare than anything else.

Let us abandon the lamentable social invention and obscene cultural institution that is masculinity and say farewell to our old beliefs about and friendship with what we all know is a grotesque and sickening settler history. It is high time to arrest the disgraceful mimicry, emulation, farce, and abuse that have proven to be inherent in both settler colonialism and the pursuit of manhood. To end, I call back to the question raised at the outset of the book regarding what can be done about the violent travesties that are settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. The answer and struggle, whenever we are ready, is as clear as it is concise: All colonizers must die, and so too, must masculinity.

# Notes

## 1 There's No Place Like Home …

1 Numerous voices have noted that the title "United States of America" is an illegitimate and imperial place name given it is a colonial imposition that at once erases and does not acknowledge the Indigenous territories it has dispossessed. I use the term "United States" throughout not to recognize it as the rightful sovereign authority, rather, for the purpose of signifying that it is the settler nation-state currently exercising the most control and violence over the land it has stolen and continues to occupy, as well as the people it has displaced and continues to oppress. Readers will also note the use of "American" throughout the text, which is fraught and can be offensive/imperialistic given the U.S. does not have an exclusive hold on the term. I use it apologetically given it was stated so often by participants, and because "American," while problematic, has vernacular signifying power and carries particular connotations that are necessary to take to task.

2 In a concerted effort to ensure that I did not exclude anyone from the project who was gender variant or non-conforming, I used the phrase "identifies as a man" throughout recruitment. Despite the deployment of this inclusive phrasing that would have allowed for a range of people of differing genders to participate, all of those who volunteered were normative, cisgender "men."

3 For a deeper understanding of these see: de Leeuw and Hunt (2018), Nunn (2018), Pulido (2018), McClintock (2018), Radcliffe (2018), McKittrick (2017), Bawaka Country et al. (2016), Bonds and Inwood (2016), Daigle (2016), Kermoal and Altamirano-Jiménez (2016), Wolfe (2016), Women's Environmental Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network (2016), Melamed (2015), Moreton-Robinson (2015), Simpson (2014), Goeman (2013), Walia (2012), Byrd (2011), Morgensen (2011b), Simpson (2011), Tuck (2009), Johnson et al. (2007), Alfred (2005), Robinson (2000), Smith (1999).

4 For a committed use of the concept see: Fu's (2015) "What will it take to end gender-based violence?"

## 2 Settler Colonialism, Empire, Borders

1 I offer my continued gratitude here to Elise Hjalmarson, whose contributions remain invaluable and who co-wrote select sections with me. Accordingly, should content from this chapter be cited, she should be credited as co-author.

2 Following Jackson (2014): "To be anti-Black is also to be fundamentally anti-Indigenous." "Anti-Blackness" here also means anti-Indigenous. With recognition they are neither one and the same, nor mutually exclusive.

3 To name only a few in the US: Naturalization Act of 1790 (citizenship solely for: "free white persons of good character"); "Indian" Removal Act of 1830; Dred Scott v. Sanford case of 1857; Anti-"Coolie" Act of 1862; Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; Immigration Act of 1924; "Mexican Repatriation" 1929–1939; Filipino Repatriation Act of 1935; Executive Order 9066 of 1942; Operation "Wetback" 1954.

4 I also contend the state is illegitimate and brutally imposed.

5 We want to be careful not to overemphasize the difference between migrants and immigrants before the law. Without a doubt, the legal status of permanent residents in the United States (as well as other places), even that of citizens who possess citizenship elsewhere, is still highly precarious.

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