Decolonizing Pathways towards Integrative Healing in Social Work

Taking a new and innovative angle on social work, this book seeks to remedy the lack of holistic perspectives currently used in Western social work practice by exploring Indigenous and other culturally diverse understandings and experiences of healing.

This book examines six core areas of healing through a holistic lens that is grounded in a decolonizing perspective. Situating integrative healing within social work education and theory, the book takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from social memory and historical trauma, contemplative traditions, storytelling, healing literatures, integrative health, and the traditional environmental knowledge of Indigenous Peoples.

In exploring issues of water, creative expression, movement, contemplation, animals, and the natural world in relation to social work practice, the book will appeal to all scholars, practitioners, and community members interested in decolonization and Indigenous studies.

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**A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are
on the ground.**

– Cheyenne Proverb

**For Aune, Arundhati, Solana, Paacipiriin’U,
and Hunaaneeka**

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
Introduction	1
1 Grounding modern social work	23
2 Postcolonial trauma and memory work	47
3 Confronting professional imperialism and moving towards integrative healing	70
4 Water	86
5 Creative expression	105
6 Movement	126
7 Quiet and contemplation	138
8 Fellow creatures	151
9 Mother Earth	169
Epilogue: dreaming a decolonized futurity	183
Discussion guide	186
<i>Index</i>	189

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work. I was one of the recipients of his mental health training grant program. Dr. Lewis was, and remained throughout his life, a fierce and intelligent critic of colonialism. Through his research, academic commentary, and policy analysis, he helped to identify and conceptualize the oppressive artefacts of settler colonialism embedded in professional social work practice and then provided a roadmap of how to decolonize and indigenize social work to serve the interests of Indigenous Peoples.

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Introduction

The world we live in today is fraught with daunting challenges arising from a long history of the colonization and exploitation of one another and the planet. The Western values that have arisen from the legacy of colonialism have created a world of contradictions: While some enjoy a life of privilege due to their gender, skin color, sexual orientation, or income, others are embroiled in struggles that range from the pounding of daily microaggressions to life-threatening circumstances steeped in gender, sexual, and racial violence. There is no question that we are entrapped in social, political, and economic systems of our own making that undermine healthy relationships, that divide us into fearful and conflict-ridden factions, and that make us sick.

Our damaged systems are burdened by another major issue: book after book and study after study have meticulously described the environmental crises in which we are now living. Many of us are witnessing, firsthand and in real time, the increased natural and unnatural disasters that are unfolding around us. There are serious concerns as to whether human beings are willing to change their behavior to alter climate change, growing inequality, ceaseless divisions, and war. As community members and social workers, we are explicitly tasked with being agents of social change, but how can we meet these overwhelming challenges to create a more equitable world, while protecting and living in balance with Mother Earth?

It may be that the fate of humanity lies with the decisions we make from this point forward. This book invites social workers, students, and community members to imagine decolonizing pathways towards integrative social work. The relentless and invasive politics of hate, fear, racism, and neoliberalism indicate that the present social work paradigm is not equipped to engage in meaningful structural change and is in desperate need of transformation. While there are grassroots movements engaging in positive, meaningful change, the journey is challenging, and setbacks are frequent. More often than not, we are estranged from one another, from our environment, and from the sustainable practices and wisdom of our ancestors that we have not fully brought into social work practice, research, policy, and education. While we as the authors of this work hold a great deal of hope and optimism, we also accept that we live in a troubled world where optimism and solidarity appear to be in short supply, especially for the most

2 *Introduction*

marginalized of our sisters and brothers. Though the poet W. H. Auden already wrote in 1947 about people living in the age of anxiety, isolated and purposeless amidst material wealth, the issues facing contemporary humanity appear ever more stark and existential. We are now living in the shadows of a man-made, unnatural, mass “sixth extinction” (Kolbert, 2014). As we stand by or ignore these realities without engaging in clear solutions to reverse our course, it is little wonder that anxiety, depression, and panic disorders are among the most common psychological issues of our time.

Many people know what is happening but appear to be paralyzed and resigned to the belief that fundamentally transformative changes are not possible. This is certainly not a view to which we, as social workers, should subscribe. We must remain hopeful and engaged in social change. But a constant problem is that we in social work typically do not frame our practice as one of big, structural changes. Instead, we tend to regard tackling the big issues, such as climate crisis, institutional racism, colonialism, and predatory neoliberalism, as the duty of others. It is safer and more acceptable to work on a smaller scale, where we are rewarded by treating the current traumas of our service users, as a series of medicalized disorders managed by helping practices that are often indistinct from methods of social control. We can even thrust our clients into further distress by entangling them in colonized systems of care. To address the epidemic of disconnection, angst, fear, worry, and loss of hope, we discuss in this book how the consequences of historical trauma are intertwined with cultural repression of healing practices. We consider ways to use memory work and decolonization approaches to build pathways towards integrative healing at the individual, community, and natural environmental levels. Without any intention of cultural appropriation, we respectfully ask what sustainable beliefs and practices of Indigenous Peoples, in this present time, can help social work reconsider and reform its ways of being, knowing, and acting? How might we build truly participatory and democratic alliances between settlers and Indigenous Peoples to accomplish this task?

Social work emerged as a “modern” Western profession in step with settler colonial nation-building projects in the late nineteenth century. Its aim has been – paradoxically – to challenge state policies and advocate for social justice while supporting and operating with oppressive colonizing structures. Indeed, social work practices have sought to integrate citizens into the norms of dominant society by enforcing state policies that have routinely ignored diverse differences, needs, and experiences. Long before the US Department of Homeland Security was established in 2003 to track terrorism, treason, border security, customs, and emergencies, social workers were mandated by the state to use surveillance tools such as investigations, documentation, and case management to monitor whether individuals are eligible for benefits or services or in violation of their bureaucratically prescribed behaviors and responsibilities. Whether they want to or not and whether the rules violate the social work’s core values of service, dignity, and the intrinsic worth of a human being, social workers are required to utilize professionalized techniques of boundary setting and rapport building to ensure clients’ compliance (a code word for obedience, submission, and subordination).

Continually subjected to these conflicting demands, the social worker is expected to serve two masters: the state and the client. It is little wonder, then, that pervasive stress, anxiety, and burnout increasingly characterize the profession across borders. The intrinsic contradictions of the demands of expanding complex case-loads, diminishing capacities and resources, long working hours with little sense of solidarity and support, and the lack of a radical vision for social transformation in these uncertain times often feels like more than one can bear. Fighting for the interests of the most vulnerable is difficult when social work is funded and tasked by the state to implement austerity measures that hurt the well-being our communities, as the state increasingly retreats from ensuring people's basic welfare.

To understand and address the epidemics of uncertainty and angst, we are convinced that as we face the existential threat of climate crisis, we must fundamentally reimagine what social work is. We must go outside the social services industrial complex and think creatively, revisiting the older cultural and environmental philosophies and practices of our ancestors and with this knowledge mindfully challenge the oppressive structures and thinking confronting and being reproduced in social work. It may be that we no longer have to occupy small spaces with protest signs and march down the streets and ask the system for change. Social workers are part of the system, and perhaps the most successful and subversive act in creating change could be for them to be actively engaged with the decolonized practices of our ancestors. Rather than focusing efforts on trying to change the colonizers, social workers might start instead with our own transformation as individuals and as a profession. Decolonizing pathways to holistic thinking and integrative healing are often untraveled, forgotten, and avoided but are as relevant today as they were many generations ago. We also believe that if you heal the person, you can heal the planet.

In this book, our paradigm shift is the interrogation of a major scientific and philosophical heritage that underlies the discipline of social work: the idea that human beings are the most significant form of life in the universe. Anthropocentrism holds that few things in their natural state are sacred and that everything is here to be sold and profited from and exists for the benefit of humans. We are guided by Indigenous wisdom that this is not so and that if we wish to continue as a species, we must learn from the past and apply that knowledge to the present. In this spirit, we use our decolonizing lens to examine how six core practice areas – water, creative expression, movement, quiet, fellow creatures, and Mother Earth – can guide, reshape, and decolonize the present social work practice and knowledge paradigm.

Our approach is aimed at decentering the dominant settler colonial Western viewpoint by unfolding the complexity of each of the six elements that we discuss (though we recognize that there are many more that could have been included). Each chapter in this book begins with a nonfiction story that encapsulates the contradictions surrounding each core area. The stories are also meant to heal and to inspire us not to stop at healing the human but also to create practices that help to heal Mother Earth. We explore the meaning of the story through the gaps between the current state of affairs, wellness, and the dominant structures that define our

4 *Introduction*

action. We then discuss alternative ways of considering these core areas as healing mechanisms and provide examples to explore the possibilities of how integrative social work approaches can become useful decolonizing practices. We write this book with the hope and optimism that social work as a field can increasingly embrace diverse ways of knowing and being – that it can reconnect itself to the sacred and resist efforts to narrow our vision of what constitutes evidence and support acting in conscious social solidarity.

We do not address solely social workers with this book but seek to reach out other professionals and grassroots community leaders as well as to general readers interested in issues of social justice, collective change, and healing. Just as these complex contemporary social problems have compound, multifaceted, and deep roots resisting narrow solutions, we must also broaden discussions beyond our inner circle and familiar discourses. We make no bones about presenting our discussion of decolonizing integrative social work and healing from our own perspective. Our goals are to extend a discourse that recognizes that much is at stake for all of us and to encourage broad conversations that include those who are committed to transformation at the local and global levels.

We need our courage and action to overcome the continuous background noise of pontificating pundits, dismal economic news, mass shootings, and never-ending war. We must not become bystanders or preoccupied merely with the virtual realities of voyeurism, performing, heckling, and shaming on social media. Inaction reduces our everyday lived experience into fearful episodes of hypervigilance, torpor, and evasion. Despite social welfare systems crumbling and inequality growing, social workers can transform their profession to fulfill its mission to act in solidarity with those suffering most in society. Social work as a field can reimagine its ways of being, knowing, and acting to drive transformative environmental, social, and personal change.

We start this introduction from an Indigenous point of departure, acknowledging that we are writing this work on the lands and territories of Indigenous Peoples. Kris wrote half of this text in Fresno, California, on the traditional territories of the Yokuts, Miwok, and Mono Peoples and the other half in Finland, whose northern territories are Sámi land. Michael wrote his sections while at North Dakota State University in Fargo, North Dakota, which is located on Dakota and Anishinaabe territory, and in Winnipeg, Canada, which is located on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Dakota, Oji-Cree, Cree, Dene, and Metis Peoples. We consider our acknowledgement to be an act of decolonization and a demonstration of our respect for the Indigenous custodians of these lands. We encourage readers to share this message and practice of always acknowledging the Indigenous Peoples whose territory that they (you) are visiting or occupying.

Decolonization means undoing the effects of colonization by consciously considering to what degree we and the world we live in have been manipulated, controlled, misled, and silenced by the processes and structures of colonialism. With this knowledge, we seek to engage in truth-telling, intelligent and calculated resistance, and decolonized nation-rebuilding that honors people, the stories, and the environment. We see decolonization as a critical process that challenges absences in

prevailing histories, dominant anthropocentric frameworks of knowledge, governing conceptions of human diversity, and oppressive structures of managing needs and caring in society. In this book, decolonization also refers to the repatriation of what was taken from Indigenous Peoples, such as lands, waters, sacred items, their stories, their dignity, and histories. The challenge is whether social workers can be part of this legacy of justice; we believe that we can.

The path of this book

The path of this book leads us on an exploration of holistic pathways towards integrative healing: How can we in the field of social work, along with community members, imagine ways of healing ourselves and our communities and be free from the toxic legacy of settler colonialism in the current context of global neoliberalism? Can we shift social work from executing the demands of imperious bureaucratic policies to actively creating spaces of healing? Can we challenge the oppressive structures that perpetuate trauma by restoring memory and therapeutic cultural practices?

We start this book in Chapter 1 by exploring how being, knowing, and acting have been historically and deliberately constructed in Western social science to advance the canon of settler colonialism. The aim of our approach is to better understand the context of how ideas and practices of social work emerged under conditions of settler colonialism and white supremacy. We consider how the rise of various persecuting societies in Europe and the enactment of the Doctrine of Discovery combined to produce a system of settler colonialism that continues to dominate our ways of understanding ourselves and others.

We then move on in Chapter 2 to examine the impact of postcolonial trauma and the role of memory to open up the significance of speaking truth and remembering as healing acts. Postcolonial trauma continues to resonate down through the generations at a high cost to individuals and communities. By using the term “postcolonial,” we do not mean to imply that colonial trauma ends and a distinct after-period begins. The trauma is continuous. We use the term to mean that the colonial trauma of genocide, removal from one’s lands, and the loss of territories is translated into new kinds of trauma, such as heightened rates of alcoholism, suicide, and violence. We explore the burgeoning field of trauma studies and argue that we cannot cure symptoms without addressing the root causes of distress. We look at the progression from settler colonialism to contemporary neoliberalism to better understand the evolutionary links between the two historical moments.

The notion of professional imperialism is discussed in Chapter 3 along with Indigenous approaches to healing. We examine decolonizing social work as a means of interrogating the instruments and methods of contemporary social work practice. We explore how a decolonized and integrative social work practice rejects the diagnostic approaches to distress and illness generally taken by modern Western behavioral sciences, practices that often do not serve even the dominant and most privileged populations. Drawing on Indigenous sources, integrative approaches seek to unify the diverse aspects of the self, nature, and society to promote personal

and collective healing. In exploring these issues, we want to be clear that our intention is not to appropriate or misuse Indigenous knowledge but rather to expand our professional repertoire for understanding and accessing healing practices.

The core of this book consists of six chapters that briefly examine distinct aspects of healing that are often excluded from mainstream social work interventions but which play a central role in decolonization and healing: water, creative expression, quiet and contemplation, fellow creatures, and Mother Earth. We explore these diverse elements to open up some of the critical dimensions of distress and healing that cannot be tackled piecemeal or through the narrow confines of diagnostic criteria. In exploring these elements, we consider the role of healing in relation to place, identity, physicality, mindfulness, inter-species connection, and the wholeness of our existence. We consider ways that these aspects of healing can be integrated into social work practice along with suggestions that incorporate an active resistance to the ideological and material forces of settler colonialism.

We end with a discussion of futurity, recognizing that decolonizing social work is really about radical social transformation. With the book, we aspire to open a conversation with activists, academics, social workers, and citizens of the world. Neoliberalism has become the nuclear option of settler colonialism and has commodified and monetized systems of care and help. We aim to contribute to the development of resistance to our colonized realities by encouraging new ideas and opportunities for healing as we move towards a more hopeful, participatory, and egalitarian future.

Decolonizing starting points

The history that most of us know about the modern West is a settler history; it is an unending story of exploration and settler triumph that has successfully eliminated the Indigenous voice, presence, settlement, and knowledge of lands around the world. These histories bolster settler identities and achievements but are very problematic for Indigenous Peoples. These narratives are embedded in systems of knowledge that depart from the certitude that Europeans ‘discovered’ a ‘new world’ that needed to be ‘claimed,’ and ‘civilized.’ To challenge and decolonize settler history is therefore an act of intellectual liberation that corrects a distorting chronicle of imperialist discovery and progress that has been maintained far too long by Europeans and European Americans, Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders, among others. Thus, we open this book with a brief decolonized acknowledgment of the original peoples and cultures that have been here since time immemorial. While in this section we focus mostly on the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, we acknowledge that similar processes and achievements have occurred around the world.

Prior to invasion and colonization by Europeans and their American descendants, tens of millions of Indigenous Peoples resided throughout the Western Hemisphere, forming hundreds of diverse groups and speaking thousands of different languages. Indigenous Peoples established individual, group, and

confederated territories across the continent. They built complex networks of transcontinental trade and commerce that converged in ancient urban centers such as Cahokia, the largest city north of Mexico, which was as large as London and had a population of 10,000 people (Kehoe, 2013). Like other earthworks by the Ohio Hopewell people and Newgrange in Ireland, the people of Cahokia made constructions aligned with the lunar cycle representing complex cosmologies and astronomical capacities (Pauketat, Alt, and Kruchten, 2017). Indigenous Peoples were builders of great structures, many of them having deep spiritual significance. Indigenous-engineered pyramids, ancestral temples, and earthen mounds memorialize their interactions with animals, deities, and spiritual forces of the earth. Many of the mounds built by Indigenous Peoples in North America were effigies of serpents, panthers, and other sacred creatures and dated back from 3000 B.C.E. to 1600 C.E. (Milner, 2004).

Before the invasion of Columbus and his antecedents, the Western Hemisphere was brimming with trade and contact between different Indigenous Peoples. In what is now the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Central and South America, Indigenous Peoples created extensive trade routes. One of the more traveled and impressive is the ‘Old North Trail in North America,’ which stretched 2,000 miles from Canada to Mexico (Milner, 1998; Slater, Hedman, and Emerson, 2014). It is said that different tribes traveled this route to trade, marry into other tribes, and exchange ceremonies, knowledge, and culture. Indigenous Peoples have left many signs and symbols to show they were there. In North Carolina (Eastern Cherokee country), carvings on the famous Judaculla Rock, the largest example of an American Indian petroglyph, date back 3,600 years. Petroglyphs are found in the United States stretching from Alaska to the US Virgin Islands.

Indigenous Peoples weathered, survived, and adapted to drastic climate and environmental changes. The sustainability of ancient North Americans was based on their understanding of and long-term interconnectedness with the ecosystems they inhabited (Munoz, Gajewski, and Peros, 2010). In California, for example, Indigenous Peoples used prescribed burns for millennia to maintain forest health (Hankins, 2013). As conditions of drought and wildfire have grown with climate change, the US Forest Service has been increasingly interested in exploring Indigenous ways of managing forests (Lewis, 2015). For thousands of years, Indigenous Peoples have thrived by altering their behavior as drastic climate changes have occurred. Rather than fade away and die out during these periods of ecological disaster, the evidence shows that the material and agricultural cultures of Indigenous Peoples evolved to ensure their survival. Contemporary scientists are increasingly examining many of the sustainable practices of local Indigenous cultures to better understand ways of adapting to a rapidly shifting environment (Mistry and Berardi, 2016).

The archaeological and anthropological record reveals that, amongst Indigenous Peoples around the world, complex societies existed, featuring diverse social organizations spanning centralized and decentralized democracies, empires, monarchies, and inherited governance, all embedded within patriarchal, matriarchal, or shared systems of power. Many varieties of complex ideas, philosophies,

technologies, mathematics, engineering, and sciences of various groups cycled through periods of zenith and nadir long before invasion. And although there was much diversity in this part of the planet, there is a clear, unmistakable symbolic and moral convergence among socially and geographically disparate peoples, indicating a broader homogeneous alliance of thought and culture.

When Europeans arrived on the American continent, they found survival difficult at best. Settlers in the early colonies would not have managed had it not been for the local Indigenous groups they encountered (Takaki, 1994). Inadequate supplies, unfamiliarity with the climate and landscapes, food shortages, and disease created starvation, illness, and high rates of mortality among the newcomers. Seeing the pitiful, destitute condition of the strangers, various Indigenous groups brought them sustenance, taught them how to survive the harsh winters, provided them with medicine, and gave them seeds for planting (Takaki, 1993). The historical record is clear: While Indigenous Peoples felt compelled to help the new colonists, they were unambiguous in stating that that the colonists should advance no farther into their territory. But, of course, colonialism and expansionism know no such limitations, nor do they respect such language.

In less than 500 years' time, European and American diseases, warfare, enslavements, and invasions had destroyed, plundered, displaced, and reduced the number of Indigenous Peoples by 50% to 90% (Dobyns and Swagerty, 1983). The complex, vibrant, and thriving Indigenous worlds progressively fell into disarray and disintegrated, some beyond repair, and some completely vanishing without a full accounting of their history and existence. Based on plenty of evidence, historian David Stannard (1992), among others, has framed the consequences of this period of the settler colonial invasion as the "American Holocaust."

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, groups of Indigenous Peoples found themselves deeply embroiled in heroic but unsuccessful attempts to protect their way of life, lands, and children. At the hands of American colonizers, they experienced great losses of traditional lands, waterways, and hunting and gathering territories; indeed, every treaty struck to protect the lands and territories of Indigenous Peoples was violated by the United States. During this era, they were removed, relocated, moved again, hunted down, denied occupation of their sacred sites, and finally confined, in destitution, to reservations, rancherias, and other small parcels of marginal, often uninhabitable, lands. Ceremonies that had sustained and healed them were banned, as were the languages and traditional practices that served to give them identity, connection, and well-being. In time they began to lose their tradition-keepers to disease, loneliness, starvation, and neglect. Soon they had little agency over the lives of their own children, who were taken from their villages and sent to boarding schools sometimes hundreds and hundreds of miles away. The goal of these schools was to destroy the culture of Indigenous Peoples by "killing the Indian and saving the man" (Churchill, 2004). In the boarding school environment, children were at the mercy of their new guardians, many experiencing numerous acts of racism, hate, and physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse. Often parents were prohibited from seeing their

abducted children, and for some, it would be years before they would be reunited; for others, it would never happen (Adams, 1995). The kidnapping and enslavement of Indigenous children is a hallmark of settler colonial societies, and this pattern was repeated with the Sámi in Lapland, Aboriginal Australians, and First Nations in Canada.

The genocidal systems of oppression put in place by settler colonists served to subjugate the Indigenous and enslaved and forced oppressors to dehumanize themselves for the sake of the profits of extractive capitalism and privileges of racist colonial ideologies. As we discuss in the next chapter, the traditional ties of communities built around a shared commons with mutual assistance were atomized through the settler-colonial capitalist process, causing social anomie and estrangement. Alienation became the hallmark of the emerging settler-colonial extractive capitalist system in ways that have continued to dehumanize us and harm our environment.

Our stories

Decolonizing research means that we must shed the illusion that our own stories are detached from the perspective that we hold. By interrogating how we have come to be, know, and act as social work professors and researchers, we use our stories as an Indigenous methodology, situating ourselves in a web of relationality that shows the seamlessness of the life journey and ways of knowing. We take seriously what Sara Ahmed (2006, 2) has asserted: “It matters how we arrive at the places we do.”

Kris

Words have long been a primary means of interacting, dreaming, and thinking for me. I was born into middle-class white privilege as the daughter of two schoolteachers in Fresno, a culturally diverse, highly unequal, and socially conservative city that sprawls in the center of California. Books surrounded me from birth, and some of my most vivid early memories are of the colors and textures of the volumes that lined my father’s shelves. I can still recall many of the titles of the books and even conjure up a mental image of some of the illustrations. From a young age, I spent many hours in the local library, voraciously reading everything from dog adventure books to narratives of slave uprisings to the tales of seafarers.

My family’s settler colonial routes to the United States were as tradesmen, miners, and immigrants. Our family roots are in Ireland, Scotland, Denmark, and Norway, where my relatives worked as petty officials, farmers, and teachers. My Irish origins are enmeshed in the complex weave of Scottish and Viking invaders with Celtic peoples before they relocated to California in the twentieth century. My Nordic origins run deep in rural areas, where emigrants left an agrarian society transformed by growing urbanization in the late 1800s. Traversing these migrations and invasions have been intergenerational experiences of war trauma, abandonment, and crimes that shamed and exiled families propelling far-flung

diasporas that separated siblings and parents. My family has benefited from the settler colonial state, which placed me in a privileged position in US society compared with people from many other groups. Though I have sought to continuously challenge the implicit bias that I have learned in American society from a young age by trying not to be silent about oppressive situations large and small, I am always learning more about the deep layers of settler colonial ideology and white privilege that shape my sense of being in the world. An important part of my personal and professional growth has been working towards becoming a conscious and active ally in solidarity with people oppressed by the settler colonial systems that have so often benefited me.

Growing up in an era when children were allowed to roam, I was expected to walk by myself or with my brother to catch the school bus. In the late 1960s and into the 1970s, the first local, fledgling attempts were made to desegregate schools in Fresno. My parents ensured that I attended largely ethnic minority schools as a youngster, which opened my eyes to how differently people lived in the impoverished San Joaquin Valley. I passed through industrial zones with rusted machinery next to rundown apartment buildings bursting with residents, down quiet streets with small Craftsman bungalows abutting tidy porches, and past grand mansions manicured by an army of gardeners laboring in the hot sun. The arid Central Valley region, with its grapes and fig orchards, ghostlike shopping malls, and multi-lane avenues, languorous warm summer nights and chilly winter mornings, created a tactile landscape amalgamating bucolic nature and human folly. These daily childhood journeys inculcated a lifelong recognition that how we live in places reflects the powerful forces that shape our distinct lived realities.

Catching city buses and walking through the neighborhoods of Fresno on my own gave me the freedom to linger. Consequently, I was often truant from high school while on my extended explorations. I spent hours at the downtown library, watched trials at the courthouse, and wandered through the pawn shops, lunch counters, and the fading department stores of the local Chinatown – all of the strange and pedestrian spaces housed in this mosaic-like community. Having time to think, time to walk, and time to be bored allowed me to imagine a complex and deeply layered sense of community and place. Walking is still the way that I feel most connected to places and how I heal during difficult times.

Despite my having gone to an elementary school that strongly embraced the emerging awareness of African American and Chicano history in the 1960s, there was a silence surrounding Native Americans. We were taken on field trips to visit the California missions and learned a narrative of local history as a story of white pioneers shaping a desolate wilderness into a landscape of modern industrial agriculture. Many years later, when asked whose land I was on, I realized that I did not know, and I could not name any of the local tribes despite all of my years of meandering walks through the spectrum of wealthy and working-class neighborhoods. This glaring ignorance has compelled me to learn more about how settler colonialism has infiltrated my own perspectives, my ways of seeing and working with others, as well as evaluating and understanding the world. It has also made me aware of how social memory is intimately tied to the power relations of the present and how a sense of place can be filtered through false collective memory or social amnesia.

I was raised with race and class privilege, but I had my own challenges growing up as a queer woman in a community that was deeply instilled with an ethos of fundamentalist religion and heteronormativity. I did not come from a religious family (indeed, my parents vehemently opposed institutionalized religion), but I grew up acutely aware of the social power of judgmental and moralistic beliefs. Being bullied in school and feeling excluded at various occasions because I did not fit the dominant perceptions of feminine gender expression has given me some sense of how prevailing prejudice, stigma, and oppression can stifle us and prevent us from being our own authentic selves – and how these experiences can sit with us for a lifetime. Homophobia in Fresno is not only reflected in attitudes, behaviors, and policies but has also been enacted in violent acts such as the burning of gay bars and the gay student booth on the Fresno State campus by arsonists. In 1991, the Ku Klux Klan turned up to threaten celebrants at the first Fresno Pride Parade. Since 2000, several transgender people have been murdered in seemingly random street attacks. Despite the advance of legal rights for LGBTQ+ communities, places like Fresno remain a patchwork of safe and unsafe public spaces. I grew up acutely aware of the ever-present potential of street violence directed at people like me at any time.

I came of age during the AIDS pandemic, which claimed the lives of a dozen of my friends and made me see the existential threat that the LGBTQ+ community faced not only from a virus but also from the society around us. Many of us struggled against bullying in school and made our first steps toward embodying our open and proud identities as young adults by exiling ourselves from Fresno. During this time, my mother quietly visited a fellow teacher in Fresno dying of AIDS each night in the hospital even though her colleagues shunned him and kept telling my mother that she would end up being infected because she held his hand. From my mother, I learned about resisting oppression through concrete acts of kindness and solidarity.

I attended several universities. Reed College in Portland, Oregon, with its unique humanities courses made me realize that all knowledge crosses disciplinary borders. When I spent a year at Howard University, I was involved with various community groups calling for the end to US militarism in Central America and the invasion of Grenada. It was a time of intense reading, thinking, and discussing with fellow students about the relationship between knowledge and political action. I also studied in courses that were Afrocentric, giving me my first experience of decolonized learning. During a year at University College, Cardiff, Wales, I was involved with groups that supported the miners during the strike and visited the Greenham Commons Women's Peace Camp, where I began making the connections between gender, militarism, and the environment. On a visit to Greenham Commons, I was barred from the door of the local Berkshire village pub because I looked "like a dyke" and "one of those women," which showed me how many view the confluence of political expression and diverse gender expression as dangerous. All of these experiences made real the connections between diverse approaches to knowledge and the importance of participating in political action against oppression.

When working as a bartender after college graduation and anguishing about my future, a customer gave me an advertisement for teachers from a group of

12 *Introduction*

international folk high schools in Northern Europe. I decided to apply and accept the first offer. I moved to Finland because I had no idea what I wanted to do, and it was the first place to answer my inquiry. Folk high schools are uniquely Nordic: They combine participatory and holistic learning with a communal working community. I arrived at Viittakivi Folk High School in Hauho, Finland, with no winter coat and a pair of tennis shoes. Viittakivi was owned by the Finnish Settlement Association and was founded in 1951 in collaboration with American Quakers after the Second World War. Dedicated to world peace and international understanding, Viittakivi hosted a number of African National Congress (ANC) and Southwest African People's Organization (SWAPO) scholarship students bound for university in Finland. The isolation and foreignness of the place brought both wonder and intense friendships. I learned about the struggle against apartheid from the deeply painful and personal stories shared by my schoolmates. As many of my African friends were heading next to the University of Tampere to study in the first English-language master's course in international relations, I decided to tag along because there was no tuition, and I had no idea of what to do next with my life. My real education in international relations came from the many hours I spent in the smoking lounge on the sixth floor of the red brick Attila Building, not the classroom. It was there that I debated for hours with my multinational classmates and learned about Amílcar Cabral, Stuart Hall, Nicos Poulantzas, Patricia Hill Collins, and Michel Foucault.

When I immigrated to Finland in 1985, I had my first experience of being a complete stranger. During this time, it was not common for Finnish people to speak English. Not knowing the language, I had to learn to be a keen observer of people to try to deduce the meaning of statements and gestures. I was largely silent for two years until I dared to venture my first words in Finnish. Finland of the 1980s was still somewhat provincial, with few foreign visitors and almost no immigrants. Finns talked of going to Europe when they visited neighboring Sweden. They lived modestly and owned few excess material items. And they rarely spoke. I learned to become comfortable with silence and to listen more carefully before reacting.

Living in Finland was the first time that I ever experienced not assuming a certain degree of privilege, though my whiteness and nationality as an American citizen certainly placed me in the category of a far more welcome outsider than most other immigrants. The police managed immigration permits, and I had my first experiences with being at the mercy of authorities to receive the right to reside and to work. Being a queer foreign woman in Finland in the 1980s meant living with a large degree of invisibility. At that time, there was a dense shroud of silence surrounding LGBTQ+ identities in Finland. Hence, I was rarely asked about my identity or family life because most people did not want to know or pry in the strongly heteronormative Finnish culture of the 1980s, an attitude that only began changing at the turn of the millennium. What being invisible in society brings is the recognition of how dominant assumptions can limit one's opportunities and possibilities to live as a full human being. It also brings the knowledge that silence can be a protective strategy to create safety in a hostile situation. From

visits to the doctor to parents' night at the day care center to registering my immigration status with the police, I became acutely aware of how power, language, and institutional practices can combine to exclude.

I did not take a social work course until I was thirty-five years old. I had actively avoided them in my postgraduate studies because they seem so detached, controlling, and oriented toward bureaucratic systems. I thought that being a Finnish social worker was akin to being a paper pusher. However, having seen the central role social work played in the lives of the entire population, I became interested in entering the field as an immigrant. I thus began my postgraduate studies in social work at the University of Tampere. In keeping with the Finnish system, much of my postgraduate social work education took place through reading for book exams. The Department of Social Policy and Social Work was strongly oriented toward qualitative research, which opened up new and complex ways of conceiving social work theory and practice. We had an international seminar made up of students from Estonia, Japan, and China, in addition to Finland, which brought multicultural voices and experiences to the study of social work. As we all came from different places and experiences, the seminar atmosphere was one that encouraged deep reflection on the word and observation because there were no common assumptions about the meaning of well-being.

At the same time that I was studying for my two postgraduate social work degrees, I was also working in a European Union project called AIDS & Mobility based in the Netherlands. It sought to advocate for migrants¹ throughout the continent who were living with HIV/AIDS. In moving across borders and in meetings with various migrant organizations, I became aware of the possibilities of social work as a community capacity-building activity. I worked with people throughout the European Union who saw activism as synonymous with social work and public health. I thus became interested in developing projects that bridged the gap between the academy and migrants. I noticed that so much of the social science research produced by ethnic Finns shaped policies towards migrants. Migrants themselves, while the subjects of these immigration and integration policies, were silenced often facing complex layers of discrimination and social exclusion both from the university and societal discourse. Social workers were not always seen as natural allies by migrants because issues surrounding child protection and counseling were often entrenched in ethnocentrism and many times outright racism. Working collaboratively with fellow migrants, we wrote two of the first studies of our communities in Finland in which we explored migrants' own experiences and views on a variety of social and health interventions. A glass ceiling always seemed to shut migrants out from the university community, and therefore discussion on migrant policy issues continued during this time largely without migrant participation. These experiences opened my eyes to how academic practices tend to mirror dominant power relations and can be just as exclusionary.

The Finnish social welfare state is comprehensive in a way that is hard for people living in the United States to imagine. It touches the lives of all people who live there. Each resident has social rights to care, and there is a great deal of

trust in the system; even the conservative party supports the welfare state. Yet the heavily branded Nordic welfare state is being rapidly transformed by the prevailing headwinds of global–local neoliberal socioeconomic forces and right-wing populism. These shifts have brought austerity policies and growing inequality to Finland, as well as even more blatant racism.

Finnish social work values and ethical principles are based on the concept of equality. In discussions with many Finnish social work experts, they expressed concerns that diverse practices run the risk of creating differences in equality. But equality does not mean equity, and ‘best practices’ can reinforce culturally and socially normative ways of seeing and being in the world. Raising a child with my partner, for example, sometimes brought challenges for a foreign and queer parent, particularly when I was trying to participate in the usual milestones of children’s lives, such as parents’ night at day care. The social care workers who collaborated with health care professionals to assess and provide support to young families usually ignored me and called me ‘auntie.’ I saw firsthand how prevailing practices can reinforce societal norms and prejudices through erasure and by withholding recognition. Invisibility goes hand in hand with everyday discrimination. My experiences have made me think about how social work sometimes comfortably embodies a professional imperialism through its emphasis on having expertise on people and their relationships because I have experienced how expertise can be used to compel adherence to oppressive practices.

I returned to the United States in 2007 to help my aging aunt as she started down the path of Alzheimer’s disease and because I could not see a place for myself as an immigrant in Finnish social work education. Coming from a Finnish context into American social work was eye opening. Although I perceived a much higher degree of comfort with diversity in all of its forms in US social work education, I also observed how encroaching neoliberal risk management in the field of social work increasingly engulfs and silences critical thinking through the worship of evidence-based expertise. In the United States, there appeared to be much greater emphasis in practice on following checklists, decision trees, and scripts. For a short time, I worked as a counselor in a methadone clinic where we were regularly required to fill out a detailed questionnaire on each client’s life and substance use habits. Many clients appeared exasperated because they had to keep repeating painful details of their lives with an assortment of different counselors for seemingly little purpose. We recorded the information and filed them in large binders in a locked closet. In return for sharing their stories, which were always left untouched like specimens in a jar, clients could get their methadone, which made it possible for them to function. It often felt that being a social work professional meant spending an inordinate amount of time recording various narratives in detached clinical language to bestow a treatment that did little to alleviate the cause of suffering. Writing the narratives felt more like surveillance and voyeurism than deeply engaging with people and their stories to consider different future routes. There seemed to be no time or space at work to relate to the client without a script and no tools to work with the underlying pain and trauma that led to their current situation.

My serendipitous meeting with Michael Yellow Bird came at an important time for me as I wondered how and whether I wanted to fit into the expert-driven landscape of American social work education. Returning to the United States with my interdisciplinary European social work background was a bumpy road: Many in the field viewed me as an outsider because I had not followed the American path to becoming a social work expert. My credentials and degrees were scrutinized, my competency to teach was questioned, and I struggled with what I felt was a banking system of social work education, in Paolo Freire's (2000) words. In returning to where I originally came from, I also had to think deeply about my own story, my family, my communities, the places I have been, and my identity in relation to what I cared most about in social work. The reality around me seemed layered with the weight of social memory, class warfare, oppressive ideologies, and a great deal of human pain. Yet as social workers enmeshed in complex systems, I felt we viewed the people we worked with clinically, often without considering their context. We had little to offer them beyond minimal risk management, and this was a cause of distress for many social workers.

Learning about Indigenous perspectives and decolonization through conversations and retreat work with Michael opened my eyes to broader links between the historical legacy of colonization to how we exist, think, and act as social workers. In seeking to recapture the soul of social work, which I have always felt is deeply connected with local communities in the struggle for social, environmental, and economic justice, I have begun to understand that we must recognize and relinquish the settler colonial legacy which continues to haunt us. Otherwise we will continue to seek colonized solutions for problems created by colonization. Exploring decolonization has made me think more deeply about my own prejudices that tend to center Western knowledge and my own narrow definitions of healing practices. I am grateful for the discussion and exchange of ideas with Dr. Yellow Bird, who has started me on my path of learning more about decolonization and Indigeneity (and unlearning the settler colonial bias instilled in me), especially as I have returned to Finland to take up a social work position at the University of Helsinki. This new path represents a rounding of the circle in my continuing exploration of the connection of social justice activism to the evolving field of social work.

Michael

I have always been deeply moved by the origin story of my tribal nation, the Arikara. It is a sacred narrative about respect for all things and provides us with a sense of humility regarding our place in the Great Circle of Life. In the story, we are reminded that humans do not occupy the center of all things. Instead, all life on the planet has its place in the universe; everything is sacred and must be treated respectfully. In the language of my people, to display *sakuunu* (reckless, unacceptable, and foolish behavior) towards the natural world is the action of a contrary – one who acts in a manner opposite of what is considered to be acceptable, wise, and thoughtful. Our elders say that displays of *sakuuna* towards that which is sacred will bring hardship and catastrophe.

The first words of our origin story, shared by Four Rings, an elderly and deeply respected holy man, point out the role of humans in the grand scheme of things and the sacredness of all life:

And [the Creator] blessed all the living creatures on the earth, the trees and vines and flowers and grasses, all the growing, living things upon the lap of Mother Earth which look up to the Sun; all the animals on the earth and in the waters, and the fowls of the air. He blessed all the plants and animals, and said that they are all friends of human beings, and that we should not mistreat them, but that all creatures have their place in the universe, and should be treated with respect. It was taught that the pipe should be used to offer smoke to all things which [the Creator] had blessed. And so, it has been done from ancient time through all the ages till the present time.

(Gilmore, 1924)

I am a citizen of the Sahnish (Arikara) and Hidatsa tribal nations and an enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara). I was raised with eleven brothers and four sisters. However, my extended family comprises many relatives. My surname, Yellow Bird, comes from an ancestor who was a highly respected individual and who was deeply involved in the village, helping others and supporting and participating in sacred rituals and ceremonies. My traditional personal name, "Chief Among Many," was given to me by my grandfather, John Fox, Sr. (deceased), a military veteran and an eminent, respected elder among our people. A traditional name is not just simply given to a person; there is an order and context in which this must be done. First, the one giving the name (in this case, my grandfather) has to be a person who is wise, honest, respectful, and humble. She or he must demonstrate knowledge of and respect for our customs and culture and be acknowledged by the community as one that has both the spiritual and cultural authority to give the name. Second, the one receiving the name has to be deemed worthy and demonstrate the potential to reflect the traits of what the name means. The naming is generally done in public for the community to witness, so that they may call upon the person being named whenever help is needed.

A ritual prayer is offered in acknowledgement that all of creation is observing the ceremony, reminding the person being named and all in attendance of our relationship and duty to the natural world: "The heavenly powers above are listening. All the powers on this earth are listening, And Grandfather Stones on all the hillsides are listening. Our Mother's, this river and the ones on her banks are also listening. The Chief Above knows it. He is listening to this person who wants to carry a name. He is listening" (Parks, 1991, 37). As the name is being given and the prayers are being said, the individual giving the name uses their hands to physically press the name into the person in order for their body, mind, and spirit to always remember their responsibilities to the people, to the culture, and to all that is sacred.

I grew up on the “Fort Berthold Indian Reservation” in what is now called North Dakota in the United States. The name of our reservation has nothing to do with our tribes. Like so many of the names of American settler towns, cities, streets, rivers, and monuments in the United States, it was named after a foreigner, the Italian-born Bartholomew Berthold (1780–1831), who was involved in the exploitation of the fur trade on the upper Missouri River in the United States.

Indians and *Native Americans* are the terms most frequently used to identify Indigenous Peoples on the mainland of North, South, and Central America. However, we did not refer to ourselves as “Indians” or Native Americans or our lands as “reservations,” “Fort Berthold,” or “North Dakota.” These names are the invention of settler colonialism, which in order to establish its legitimacy had to dispossess us of our Native identity and lands by referring to us and our territories in terms that support the principles of settler colonialism – elimination of the Native, white supremacy, and American empire building.

I was born in the mid-1950s, during the time when the US Army Corps of Engineers, with the blessing of the US Congress but in violation of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, illegally confiscated and flooded over 152,000 acres of our lands to build the Garrison Dam. The theft and destruction of Indigenous People’s lands has long been the hallmark of American settler colonialism. Much as with other tribal nations, the stealing of our lands devastated our tribes and left us with a legacy of loss, disruption, high rates of mortality, sickness, and cultural collapse. Throughout my years growing up on our reservation, I experienced many beautiful and happy moments with friends and relatives. However, I also witnessed high rates of alcoholism, violence, rage, trauma, and many sad, untimely deaths.

Although I have learned of the traditional ways of our people, I was not raised in a traditional village nor deeply immersed in my culture. Like many of my contemporaries, my introduction to how the world worked and our place in it was transmitted through the eyes of a white settler school system, constructed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The BIA is the federal agency in the US government authorized to carry out the colonial relationship between the United States and Indigenous Peoples.

Most of my memories of my BIA school years are filled with humiliation, shame, anger, and abuse, which all started very early. In 1960, shortly after I entered the first grade, my teacher viciously beat me with a large wooden ruler because I had lost my place when I was reading. This happened to me more than once and to several of my little Indigenous classmates. However, we were not the first Indigenous children to be beaten, humiliated, and tortured by the white man’s education system. It happened over and over and over again to many others, from many tribes, all throughout North America.

Settler schools and racist teachers failed to destroy my passion for learning. Although my family owned very few books, I loved to look at books and could read at a very early age. When I was too young to attend school, I would wait excitedly for my older brothers and sisters to return home so I could listen to them read their books, look at the pictures, and ask them questions. I became very attached to the stories

and information in the books they brought home and to read them as long as I could, I would sometimes hide them so they couldn't return them to school so soon. Before there was an open library in our community, I would check out books from the traveling bookmobile that would come to our community every two weeks during the summer. I was always the first person in line to get on the bus and the last to leave.

During the summers, it was customary for the children in our community to band together and explore the hills, valleys, river, streams, and grasslands in our part of the reservation. Our world was teeming with all varieties of life: plants, grasses, flowers, rains, winds, animals, insects, snakes, birds, flowers, stones along the river, fossils, arrowheads, horses, and rez dogs. Throughout the rez dog days of summer, we swam in the river, which was about a twelve-mile round-trip hike from our community. We would walk the distance on gravel and dirt roads, a ragged band of brothers and sisters, playing for hours along the way and at the river. The older kids would supervise the younger ones to keep them safe, while those who could swim would float out far from the shores riding on huge tree trunks that had surfaced from the bottom of our lands that had been flooded out.

When the day ended, we headed for home, choosing different byways so that we could pick wild berries and dig wild turnips and onions to eat and to quench our thirst with the cold, sweet water at a secret spring that we had discovered. As we walked along, sometimes one of the younger kids would get tired, which prompted my brother, Loren Lee White, to pick them up, put them on his back, and run ahead and drop them off a good distance from us and run back to do the same for any others who might be feeling the effects of the long day. We felt connected to our world, and at our young age, few of us ever dreamed of leaving the reservation. We loved our lands, our lives, and what we knew of our culture.

However, there were times during the early part of the summer when the reservation Catholic priest would abduct us and take us to a three-week summer catechism camp, where we stayed in dorms, ate unhealthy food, and were under the watchful eyes of Catholic sisters and brothers who forced us to pray intensely for our little pagan souls so we would not go to hell. Most of the time when the priest caught us, we would be walking down the road enjoying the summer day telling stories, sharing our dreams, and looking for places to explore. When we saw him coming in his Volkswagen bus, loaded with other captured kids, we knew there was nothing we could do to escape. When we arrived at the summer camp destination, the nuns would take us to the church basement and dress us in someone's second-hand donated clothes, which were sometimes badly worn and often oversized and smelled like mothballs, except we didn't know the smell came from mothballs — we just thought because these were white peoples' clothes, this is how white people smelled. Although most of us were only grade schoolers and missed our parents, we had to learn to adapt and engage in various tactics to amuse ourselves and "spent a good deal of time trying" to subvert the white man's religion and his God by pretending to pray when we were in church, or quietly talking about our own Indigenous beliefs and telling tribal stories about the supernatural when we were out of earshot of the nuns.

After several years of attending the local BIA day school, I wanted out and chose to attend a Catholic boarding high school. I have a lot of good memories

of the friends that I made there and had some wonderful experiences. But what stands out most for me were the constant challenges to my Indigenous spiritual beliefs and values. More than once, the priests made it clear that the Protestants were probably going to hell and Catholics to heaven. As Native people we were assured that we were going to hell for sure if we were not Christians; but we had a better chance at paradise if we were Catholics, though we probably had to do a lot of time in Catholic purgatory (the cosmic holding cell that we would occupy following our deaths). In this place, we learned that we would have to expiate or atone and make amends for the sin of being born Indigenous and having our cultural beliefs.

When I began my undergraduate studies at the University of North Dakota in 1972, I had already read Vine Deloria, Jr.'s *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969), which was an excellent critique of the failures of US federal Indian policies, treaties with American Indians that were broken by the United States, and the disruptions and interference by Christian missionaries and anthropologists in the lives of American Indians. Deloria's book helped to sharpen my critical thinking skills, enlarge my worldview, and reaffirmed the importance of speaking out and educating others about the injustices American Indians had suffered at the hands of the United States. It wasn't until I was nearing the end of my undergraduate studies that I decided to pursue a degree in social work. I had been taking social work classes and found the social work faculty in the department to approachable and supportive of my views.

After receiving my Bachelor of Social Work degree, I applied for an American Indian mental health fellowship and admission to the Master of Social Work program at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. This part of my education proved to be an important validation of my activist beliefs, and it provided an understanding and support for my ugly personal experiences that I had had with racism and subjugation. Ronald G. Lewis (Cherokee) was the director of the fellowship program and the American Indian social work program at the university. Dr. Lewis was considered by many in the social work community to be a leading expert on American Indian social problems, child welfare, mental health, and culturally appropriate services. He understood the language of American colonization and the devastating impacts it had and continued to have on Native Americans.

In 1981, I graduated with my Master of Social Work degree and returned to my reservation and was hired by my tribal government to serve as our human services administrator and tribal health director. I loved being home, around people who I was familiar with. It was a joy to rediscover ceremony, connect with relatives, and attend different cultural gatherings. Working on our reservation was fulfilling but very demanding. Funding was always inadequate, the needs were always great, and the number of social and human service workers was never enough. My MSW training was helpful in some ways, but at other times, the individualistic Western mainstream helping ideologies – such as professional distance, neutral affect, serving the individual, and best interests of the child rather than the best interests of the family, group, or community, whom the child was an integral part of – deeply conflicted with the collectivist customs, beliefs, and values of our tribes. What helped most through this time were Dr. Lewis's words to me: that

I should always look to the wisdom of our ancestors to see how they solved the different challenges in their lives.

At the end of 1985, I reluctantly left my position at home and began a PhD program in social welfare at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. During those years (1986–1992), I also became deeply reengaged with my cultural traditions and systems of belief. As I returned home each summer, many of my relatives helped me to return to the sacred. Through stories, songs, and rituals, I learned a great deal about the purpose and meaning of the ceremony and how it was meant to protect us and give us guidance as we dealt with the chaos of the past and present time. I was fortunate to be present when many of our elders and spiritual leaders told heartbreaking stories of how missionaries and the state and federal governments had worked together to destroy our ceremonies and beliefs, but through the efforts of both young and old people, they were returning as had been prophesied.

In 1992, I left Madison, Wisconsin, for my first academic appointment, with the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. In this position, I learned a great deal about the language of colonization and decolonization. I began studying colonialism, postcolonialism, and decolonization movements – which were completely absent in my PhD program studies. Writers such as Franz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Memmi, Joseph Conrad, Paulo Freire, and Edward Said had a profound influence on my thinking. I also learned about the consequences of colonialism and the power of resistance reading the works of many Indigenous studies, history, and social work scholars.

In the early 1990s, First Nations peoples in Canada were engaged in a cultural revitalization and spiritual healing following their long, painful experiences with Canadian colonialism. I made friends and relatives with many First Nations folks and heard story after story about the brutality of residential schools, cultural genocide, dispossession, torture, and racism. All of it was painfully and heartbreakingly familiar and traumatic to listen to, and I often felt a sense of deep sadness, shock, anger, and resentment.

In my academic career, I have held faculty appointments at five major universities (four in the United States and one in Canada), some as a social work professor and others as a professor of Tribal and Indigenous Studies. Currently, I am Dean and Professor of the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba, where I am fortunate to be engaged with my faculty, students, staff, and university community in decolonizing and Indigenizing our campus and Faculty of Social Work curriculum, policies, mission, and vision. While there is still much to be achieved in regard to justice for Indigenous Peoples in Canada, there is an open national dialogue at local, provincial, and national levels to acknowledge Canada's history of oppression and colonization of Indigenous Peoples as well as ongoing efforts to remedy that history.

Decolonizing frameworks have guided much of my scholarly analysis and activist life. Over the years, relying on cues from my many mentors, I have continued to stress the importance of activism and the need to confront and decolonize the structures of settler colonialism and empire. I continue to privilege the cultural knowledge and survival and resilience of Indigenous Peoples, and I

speak out and resist settler colonialism by writing or talking back to US empire as often as I can.

Living in this world of conflict and resistance is emotionally and spiritually draining, which is why engaging in my traditional healing practices is so important to me. My healing also comes from my practice of mindfulness meditation, which I have practiced since 1975. Mindfulness practices have helped me deal with past traumatic experiences, racism, colonization, and the ongoing resistance that comes with the fight for the rights of Indigenous Peoples. I have used my knowledge of mindfulness meditation to teach my students and Indigenous Peoples from my own and other communities. To use mindfulness approaches as a tool for addressing systemic racism and colonialism, I created The Centre for Mindful Decolonization and Reconciliation (CMDR) in 2019 in our Faculty of Social Work. The goals of the CMDR are to assist Indigenous Peoples and settler allies to engage in mindful decolonization practices and strategies to heal the traumas of settler colonialism; advance truth and reconciliation between the groups; deepen cooperation to address structural oppression and social injustice; and create progressive, emancipatory ideas and actions for the sake of liberation.

In 2008, I met Professor Kris Clarke at a meeting in Burlington, Vermont. We were attending the Global Partnership for Transformative Social Work (with the Vermont Group). Through our conversations, we soon discovered we shared similar interests. Both of us spoke of the need for a social work approach that was integrative and aimed at healing rather than expert-driven and reactive. Some months later, Kris created the Integrative Healing and Decolonization Retreat Series to respond to the suffering that several of her students were experiencing and invited me to be part of the effort. We invited a number of participants to the retreat to share what had and was happening to them and to provide a forum where they could decompress, debrief, and decolonize themselves from the toxic colonialism in their lives. The gathering enabled all of us to discuss our perspectives about healing, decolonization, and community organizing and to develop strong bonds and commitments to challenge the oppressions of colonization.

I am happy that my journey has brought me to this place in my life. I feel an immense gratification from the early influences of my family and community that pushed me to do what I do, and I have high hopes that this book and the future work that I do with Kris will serve as an inspiration to Indigenous Peoples, social workers, activists, settler allies, and communities of color to continue to hold on to hope and heal through the decolonizing ideas that we put forth in this work.

Note

- 1 'Migrants' is often the term used in the European Union rather than the word 'immigrant,' which is far more common in nations such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. The concept of migrant reflects a more complex non-linear path to the country of residence than that of an immigrant, who intentionally makes a move from country A to country B.

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- 1 In this section, I use the terms *neurodecolonization* and *mindful decolonization* interchangeably.
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