

## Abstract

Dumas, Daniel (2024). "We Have to Get Really Uncomfortable to Get Comfortable": Critically Assessing Narratives of Colonialism and Reconciliation in Representations of Indigenous Peoples and Geographies in Canada.

Recognizing that representations are constructed and not mimetic, this dissertation considers how objects such as postage stamps, pipelines, and beads circulate narratives of Indigenous Peoples and geographies in Canada to both domestic and international audiences. Far from essentializing the experiences of the three main groups of Indigenous Peoples in Canada—First Nations, Metis, and Inuit—three distinct case studies, grounded in human geography, illustrate how specific groups of Indigenous Peoples and their geographies, which constitute unique configurations of people, places, cultures, and environments, have been, currently are, and are striving to be represented, while critically assessing the narratives of colonialism and reconciliation they circulate.

Three types of representation are privileged, notably visual, media, and self-representation. How did a postage stamp issued in the 1950s featuring an Inuk hunter attempt to symbolically assimilate Inuit and their geographies into the Canadian body politic while bolstering Canada's *de facto* sovereignty in the High Arctic? How do Indigenous views for and against fossil fuel extraction, as exemplified by the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project, come to be represented and communicated across media geographies? And how can forms of Indigenous self-representation, such as the practice and wearing of beadwork, both portray one's identity and create strong social and cultural networks in urban areas, which have historically marginalized Indigenous Peoples and geographies?

As the title suggests, answering these questions requires getting uncomfortable to get comfortable. To achieve this, three sets of methodologies are adopted to unsettle and advance these processes, namely the use of archival material, media content analysis, and semi-structured qualitative interviews. Picking up on the work of geographers to actively engage in the decolonization of the discipline, new methodologies and concepts are proposed to develop novel ways of "sensing" geography, through seeing, listening, and feeling different objects, while understanding them as vehicles of representation. Ultimately, by centring the voices of Indigenous Peoples, it is suggested that researchers can further develop anticolonial research frameworks, which meaningfully engage with Indigenous Peoples and geographies.

The main contributions of this dissertation include 1) advancing the term *banal colonialism* to describe how the land-centered narrative of colonialism is circulated to a wide audience through unassuming and banal objects such as postage stamps, 2) the development of a new methodology for analyzing media content relating to the views of Indigenous Peoples, where media representation is cross-referenced with sources coming directly from the actors themselves over a long period of time, and 3) proposing the term "brave space" to characterize the spaces where Indigenous Peoples can access social and cultural networks of learning, exchange, and solidarity, which contribute to the formation of a sense of identity and place. Brought together, these case studies demonstrate how representations construct colonial imaginaries and imaginative geographies, and how present and future forms of representation can unsettle them, while advancing the project of truth, reconciliation, and healing.