

**A Literature Review of Settler Colonial Family Paradigms in
Early 20th Century British Columbia**

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This literature review will attempt to look at the discourse around the research question: What were the paradigms of settler colonial families in early-to-mid 20th century British Columbia? Its purpose is to examine the theoretical underpinnings of life in Victoria and on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, before delving into the archives of a white, middle-class family of British descent (herein known as the research subject family).

There were several themes that emerged in the reviewed literature: settler colonialism, family as settler colonial structure, and the manifestations of “settler futurity” (Ishiguro, 2016) established in mid-19th century colonial British Columbia. Before diving into family history, it’s essential that the researcher knows the context in which their settler ancestors lived. This context, early 20th century British Columbia, is undeniably rooted in settler colonialism. The previous generation of this family had arrived in a city that in the late 1800s had only recently been established. This location was colonized by British people, while uprooting and displacing the Indigenous peoples who were already living there (Edmonds, 2010).

The following questions are at the heart of this literature review: What is family within settler colonial British Columbia in the early-to-mid 20th century? How did settler families benefit from the social structures put in place in the proceeding century? How did ideas of family perpetuate the goals of settler colonialism? This review of settler colonial and family literature will attempt to get an overview of the structural determinants of settler colonialism

To attempt to answer the broad questions underpinning this research, this literature review will take on several tasks. First, this review will define settler colonialism and examine the formation of the colonial settlement that became what is now known as British Columbia. Next, it will look at the family as a settler colonial structure, as informed by contemporary therapy theory, and how families reinforce the

colonial project to help determine the future and success of the emergent nation state. Finally, it will look at the concept of “settler futurity” (Ishiguro, 2016) and how this manifested in the 20th century and beyond.

The Settler Colonialism Project

Settler colonialism is commonly defined as “connected practices of racialization, dispossession, and violence” in the name of European imperialism (Ishiguro, 2018; Phillips, 2009). The settler regime of what has become British Columbia began when the West Coast was “discovered” by British explorer Captain James Cook in 1778. Shortly thereafter, the region was set up as a centre of commerce for fur traders, became a British colony, and then was finally established as a province of the burgeoning country of Canada in 1871. Like all settler regimes, the province was developed by taking possession of land, attempting to eliminate Indigenous peoples, and replicating the social and governance structures of the home country, creating “institutions of settler colonialism” (Mamdani, 2015). These institutional structures were a way of asserting dominance and controlling Indigenous peoples, who were relegated to concentrated areas (reserves) and whose movement and culture were regulated.

Although the province of British Columbia may have been “settled” more than two centuries ago, it is still a settler colonial state (Edmonds, 2010). Victoria, where the research subject family has lived since the late 1800s, is the capital of the province and the place where colonial laws and governance were established and disseminated from. The legacy of settler colonialism is embedded in the city’s urban design and historical institutions. This design is part of the strategy of how the colonizers placed claim on the land and overrode Indigenous methods of tending the land that had existed for millennia, replacing them with the Eurocentric structures that still prevail (Simpson & Bagelman, 2018). “Processes of city making and the everyday reproduction of urban space are dependent on sustained practices that reproduce, maintain, and enforce settler colonial space,” note geographers Michael Simpson and Jen Bagelman.

A well-known refrain in the field of Settler Colonial Studies is “settler invasion is a structure, not an event” (Veracini, 2019). Settler colonialism is an ongoing process, and it continues to happen around the world. Its presence exists on a visceral level within the city of Victoria and the province of British Columbia. As Timothy J. Stanley notes in his discussion of the implications of the removal of a John A. MacDonald statue in Victoria: “Settler colonialism is built into the concrete of the streets, the grid pattern that shapes the city, the design of the buildings; it is in the European-derived fashions that people wear; and it is even in the genetic composition of the bodies of the people of Victoria, most of which traces back to Europe” (Stanley, 2019).

Nuclear Family as Settler Colonial Structure

Relationship to place plays an important role within the research subject’s family lineage, which is rooted in the areas of Metchosis and Esquimalt within the Victoria regional district. Inherent in this sense of rootedness is the impact of colonialism on the family, particularly as beneficiaries of the fruits of settler colonialism such as farmland and social standing in the community.

There is a body of work that looks at settler colonialism’s effects on family (Jordan, 2022). The idea of “family” is a core value of settler colonialism, and the nuclear family – which consists of a mother, father, and children – became necessary for the nation state’s establishment. “The nuclear, white, heterosexual family was reproduced over decades to become the 'natural' way of being” (Jordan, 2022), even while disconnection from extended family destabilizes children and places extra burden on parents. In a sense, this disconnection forces families to become more dependent on settler colonial structures and systems.

Just as there were laws regulating land ownership and business, the settler state created laws that regulated marriage, child rearing, and child protection, making it possible for nuclear families to take root in the “new world.” The nuclear family was essential to the creation and future of the settler regime (Phillips, 2009), becoming the primary “beneficiary and pillar of settler colonialism” (Jordan, 2022).

This connection between the foundation of settler colonialism and the research subject family is a lens to understanding “how settler colonialism has structured multiple social identities and institutional meanings of ‘the family’” (Walsdorf et al., 2020), and in particular how this family interacted with the world and with each other.

Manifesting “Settler Futurity”

The research subject family flourished in British Columbia in the late 1800s and into the 20th century. Although there is plenty of literature on the establishment of the settler state that became British Columbia in the mid-19th century, it was difficult to find robust research on early 20th century life. Patterns established in mid-19th century British Columbia continued into the new century, along with attitudes toward the family and the purpose of the nuclear family in settler life (Buddle, 2010). Historian Laura Ishiguro conducted extensive research on the central role that children played in establishing the colonial structure of British Columbia life, claiming they were essential to a “collective politics of aspiration” that she called “settler futurity” at the heart of settler colonialism (Ishiguro, 2016). She notes that children ensure “enduring settler political and social order” on the development of settler colonial society (Ishiguro, 2016).

With the benefit of historical hindsight, we can see that this nurturance worked – the settler colonial society took shape and continues to thrive today. The seeds that were planted in the mid-19th century were reinforced during the early 20th century, particularly during the time between the two world wars, 1918 and 1939, when “Canadians... were still choosing to wear the mental chains of colonialism even as they assumed greater political independence” (Spruce, 2018).

Some of these seeds sprouted through legal reforms in last half of the 19th century which gave property ownership and inheritance rights to women in BC (Buddle, 2010). These reforms were created with white settler women in mind, in an effort to erode Indigenous land ownership and power. “White women gained some legal headway while Indigenous populations lost out as British Columbia developed legally and politically,” notes historian Melanie Buddle.

Beyond Buddle's book *The business of women: Marriage, family, and entrepreneurship in British Columbia 1901-51*, it's difficult to find scholarly research on women's public and personal lives. She addresses this in her book, noting that studies on BC women's lives centred on the 19th century, with little to no research on early 20th century lives and experiences. Nevertheless, Buddle's extensive research contributes to an "understanding of women's family obligations in twentieth-century British Columbia."

Her research reveals that by the turn of the 20th century, there was an imbalance in British Columbia – there were far more men in the province than women and a prevailing "frontier nature" in the province (Buddle, 2010). This imbalance evened out by 1950, when census records show that there were relatively equal numbers of women and men. This had to do with the impact of World War 2 on gender distribution, which in turn impacted women in British Columbia by increasing wage-earning opportunities as the province modernized and the labour force changed, ultimately giving women more options for work and life.

Even the limited available research on early 20th century family structures in British Columbia sheds some light on the social context of the research subject family. Three girls were born just after World War 1 and they came of age as the province entered a period of post-World War 2 modernization, increased numbers of women in society, and growing opportunities for young women to create the lives they wanted.

Conclusion: Building a Portrait of White Settler Family Life

This review scratches the surface of the available literature on settler colonialism and the structure of the nuclear family. While there was no shortage of literature on 19th century social dynamics in British Columbia, it was more difficult to find research and studies on early 20th century life and society. This is perhaps because the mid-19th century, with the establishment of the settler colonial state, was a more dynamic time. During the early 20th century, structures had been put in place and settler society entered a period of stability, even with great upheaval on a global scale (two world wars, the rise and defeat of fascism, the explosion of modernity, etc.).

The research subject family undoubtedly benefited from the settler colonial paradigms established during the previous century, and they embodied the “settler futurity” that the colonizers strived to manifest. As settlers who made the choice to leave their home country and replicate settler colonial family structures, the research subject family created a template for future generations. This overview of literature on settler colonialism and its inherent family structures contributes to setting the scene for a portrait of white settler family life in the early 20th century.

It is hoped that the research subject family archives will be able to contribute to the available body of public and social history on settler family narratives in early 20th century life in British Columbia, through the personal and intimate stories of young women.

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