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À propos du PhiLab | About PhiLab

Le **Réseau canadien de recherche partenariale sur la philanthropie** (PhiLab), anciennement Laboratoire montréalais de recherche sur la philanthropie canadienne, a été pensé en 2014 dans le cadre de la conception de la demande de financement du projet développement de partenariat CRSH intitulé « Innovation sociale, changement sociétal et Fondations subventionnaires canadiennes ». Ce financement a été reconduit en 2018 sous le nom d'« Évaluation du rôle et des actions de fondations subventionnaires canadiennes en réponse à l'enjeu des inégalités sociales et des défis environnementaux ». Depuis ses débuts, le Réseau constitue un lieu de recherche, de partage d'information et de mobilisation des connaissances des fondations canadiennes. Des recherches conduites en partenariat permettent la coproduction de nouvelles connaissances dédiées à une diversité d'acteurs : des représentants gouvernementaux, des chercheurs universitaires, des représentants du secteur philanthropique et leurs organisations affiliées ou des partenaires.

Le Réseau regroupe des chercheurs, des décideurs et des membres de la communauté philanthropique à travers le monde afin de partager des informations, des ressources et des idées.

The **Canadian network of partnership-oriented research on philanthropy** (PhiLab), previously called the Montreal Research Laboratory on Canadian philanthropy, was thought up in 2014 as part of the conception of a funding request by the NRCC partnership development project called “Social innovation, social change, and Canadian Grantmaking Foundations”. From its beginning, the Network was a place for research, information exchange and mobilization of Canadian foundations’ knowledge. Research conducted in partnership allows for the co-production of new knowledge dedicated to a diversity of actors: government representatives, university researchers, representatives of the philanthropic sector and their affiliate organizations or partners.

The Network brings together researchers, decision-makers and members of the philanthropic community from around the world in order to share information, resources, and ideas.



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COMPTES-RENDUS DE LECTURE | BOOK REVIEWS

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Quel rôle pour l'ouverture et la transparence dans la transition vers un modèle philanthropique plus collaboratif?

What role do openness and transparency play in the transition towards a more collaborative philanthropic model?

COMPTES-RENDUS DE LECTURE | BOOK REVIEWS

A Review of *Pollution is Colonialism*

By Alana Javanainen, Research assistant at Nipissing University and at Simon Fraser University



Alana Javanainen has recently graduated with her Master of Arts in History from Nipissing University (2022) and received her B.A. (Hon.) in History at Nipissing University (2020). She is currently working as a research assistant for both Nipissing University and Simon Fraser University, on projects related to philanthropy, history, and social welfare.

Pollution is Colonialism, by Métis/Michif author Max Liboiron confronts us with several major topics, such as pollution, colonialism, methodology as ethics, and ways of doing scientific research. But how can we relate this to the world of philanthropy? Liboiron, a professor of Geography at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, centres this book around their research on plastic pollution at the Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR). Liboiron argues that pollution is not a side effect of colonialism, instead, it is an act of ongoing colonialism. Ultimately, they outline how they are working to conduct scientific research with anticolonial methods and how this can be used by other researchers. Despite the focus on scientific research methods and plastics pollution, the overarching narrative of practicing anticolonial work is applicable to all different fields, including philanthropy.

Looking specifically at Liboiron's research at CLEAR, their research refuses colonial theories of pollution, which assume access to Indigenous land and turn it into a resource and something to be used for settler colonial goals. In the first two chapters, Liboiron highlights the difference between what they consider to be two notions of 'land'. With a lowercase 'l', land, conveys the general colonial concept of land as a fixed geographical and universal physical space, and Land, with a capitalized 'L', Land refers to "the unique entity that is the combined living spirit of plants, animals, air, water, humans, histories and events recognized by many Indigenous communities" (p.11). Colonialism is fundamentally about land and access to land, so it is no surprise that western pollution science is premised on colonial land relations that assume access to Indigenous lands by settlers for settler goals. Western ideas of carrying capacity and universalism, which take away from the importance of situated relationships and local contexts, are commonly used in scientific discourses surrounding land and pollution. For example, Liboiron highlights the Streeter-Phelps theory of assimilative capacity, which claims that environments can handle a specific amount of contaminants before any harm occurs. This not only permits humans to pollute land by designating

it as a “sink”, but it also gives them the right to do so. Liboiron stresses that threshold theories, such as assimilative capacity, “strip away the complexities of Land – including relations to fish, spirits, humans, water, and other entities – in favour of elements relevant to settler goals” (p.40). Theories that use threshold capacities also rely on measuring the “harm” of pollution. According to Western science, pollution is okay as long as it is within a certain limit and is being used for colonial goals. Liboiron suggests that science should instead look at “violence,” instead of “harm.” For example, instead of trying to understand how much pollution a given piece of land can take, which is looking at the harm pollution is doing to the land, scientists should be asking how plastic pollution got here in the first place, the violence. Looking at violence means examining the root cause of the problem, and not simply treating the symptoms.



Liboiron outlines how they practice feminist anticolonial research methodology in their work at CLEAR, in Newfoundland, Canada. Part of this methodology is understanding accountability and asking why and how we do things differently.



One of the highlights of Liboiron’s book is the premise of methodology as ethics. In the last chapter, “An Anticolonial Pollution Science,” Liboiron outlines how they practice feminist anticolonial research methodology in their work at CLEAR, in Newfoundland, Canada. Part of this methodology is understanding accountability and asking why and how we do things

differently. Rethinking our connections to people and land is crucial to this type of methodology, we need to be willing to make mistakes, apologize, and then change practices that no longer work. For example, Liboiron writes that “CLEAR no longer uses chemicals that require hazardous waste disposal, because hazardous waste disposal assumes access to Land as a sink” (p. 135). While this limits the lab’s ability to complete certain research, it is a necessary measure to ensure that CLEAR is not practicing against its ethos of anticolonial work. Liboiron demonstrates for the reader that there are ways to practice anticolonial research.

The next two paragraphs will discuss two of the more prevalent themes that I think can be applied to the field of philanthropy. The first is good intentions. *Pollution is Colonialism* reminds the reader that even with good intentions, many actions are premised on a colonial worldview. Environmentalism, for example, often replicates colonialism. Liboiron uses the example of Ocean Conservancy, a US-based environmental NGO that released a report in 2015 looking for solutions to marine plastic pollution. The report suggested that Southeast Asian countries should build incinerators to burn plastic waste. However, Liboiron points out that these suggestions are a part of a larger trend of colonial acts that ultimately, “point the finger at local ‘foreign’ and Indigenous peoples for ‘mismanaging’ waste imported from industrial and colonial centres” (p.13). It is pointless for donors to pour money into well-intentioned solutions that don’t benefit the people that they are supposed to. Grantmakers and organizations alike should make the effort to reflect on their work and practices so that harm and violence are more easily recognized and stopped.





The second relevant theme is the role of community. Philanthropic organizations should work to maintain good Land relations based on humility, obligation, and connections to their local area. Focusing on the importance of situational context, one of the most effective ways that grantmakers can contribute to anticolonial practice is by supporting organizations and projects built around community-driven solutions. It is important to note that the concept of community should also extend to “people who aren’t human, materials, landscapes, events, obligations, and other types of relations” (p.141). If everything is situated in local contexts, then philanthropy must also be rooted in the local context. When Liboiron found plastic in Cod for the first time during their research process, CLEAR created a community peer review process so that this knowledge could be shared and discussed with the local community. According to Liboiron, the community peer review process is about, “creating a way to recognize more forms of harm and violence beyond those usually thought about by science professionals or captured in scientific research designs; making space for narratives about fish, food, and pollution beyond deficit models and damaging narratives; making space for guidance, analysis, and collaboration from experts outside of academia; and, perhaps most importantly for anticolonial science, setting the stage so that communities can refuse our research” (p. 141). Allowing community members to look at and take part in CLEAR’s research, examine the samples, understand these findings, and then decide when and how this



information is shared. If the community decides that it does not want the research to be published, then CLEAR would not publish it. Liboiron tells us that if colonialism is a force that assumes access to Land for its own goals, then community peer reviews are one way of stopping that entitlement (p. 139). Community is vital to philanthropic initiatives. Organizations need to take the time to listen to community feedback, invest in local leaders, and ultimately create a healthy relationship between the people providing the service and the people using the service.

Pollution is Colonialism allows readers a chance to reflect on and challenge colonial relations and infrastructures in their own practices. As Liboiron points out, it is important to consider our relations to people, human and non-human, in order to determine why and how our actions affect others. Philanthropists, grantmakers, and donors alike would benefit from taking a step back, and critically examining how their work is related to colonialism. Reflecting on your own role in colonial structures is never easy, but it is necessary. Following the events of the past couple of years, including the COVID pandemic and the reawakening of the social justice movement in North America, investing in social good has never been more important than it is now. Supporting inclusive and durable solutions is essential to the future of Canadian philanthropy.

Liboiron, Max. (2021). *Pollution is Colonialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

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