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Decolonizing landscape

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ABSTRACT

If decolonization truly begins with land, then it can be said that landscape studies—as a field concerned with the study, design, and ordering of land—has at least some stake in on going processes of decolonization. Repeated contestations for Indigenous land rights in North America suggest that settler-colonial contexts present a distinct and pressing concern for decolonization. The landscapes of colonialism are also deeply racialized, converging on extractive capitalism and environmental racism. Historically, landscape has been used as a disciplinary tool to facilitate the control of land and to naturalise colonial hegemonies, including the cultural framing of landscape through art and architecture. Current approaches to the built environment (including development, conservation, and management) also routinely perpetuate colonizing logics. For landscape studies, the prospect of decolonization (and of a decolonizing landscape praxis) demands the critical reconciliation of underlying coloniality within the field and a complete reorientation towards anti-colonial subjectivities.

KEYWORDS

Landscape; decolonization; colonialism; settler-colonialism; North America; Canada

For a colonised people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread, and above all, dignity.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

In 2012, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang published the essay ‘Decolonization is not a metaphor,’ contending that the meaning of decolonization has become misappropriated. Tuck and Yang asserted that the language of decolonization has been subsumed into broader discourses on ‘social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches which decenter settler perspectives’ (2012, p. 2), without regard for the fact that decolonization is a distinct political project from these other forms of justice. Because metaphorical decolonizing discourses—usually led by non-Indigenous peoples—generally attempt to mitigate the effects of colonialism rather than strive for the complete abolition of colonial power structures, these moves ultimately serve to uphold rather than dismantle colonialism. Tuck and Yang’s paper also highlights how moves towards decolonization require an understanding of settler-colonialism as it operates in the North American context from which they are writing. Drawing from the work of Patrick Wolfe, Tuck and Yang emphasise the distinct structure of settler-colonialism as being founded on the dual logics of Indigenous elimination and territorial appropriation. Furthermore, these foundations are historical and on going; as Glen Coulthard has concisely stated, settler-colonialism is ‘territorially acquisitive in perpetuity’ (2014, p. 125). Land is the most essential aspect of all forms of colonialism—whether to extract its resources or to impose sovereignty over a delineated piece of it (Wolfe, 2006). Decolonization is most definitely *not* a metaphor, especially not in the context of landscape studies—a field primarily concerned with the study, design, and agency of land. If colonialism is about the control of land, then conversely,

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decolonization requires the complete subversion of the power(s) controlling that land. Decolonization starts with land.

There has been a recent emergence of critical literature in cultural geography which has called into question the theoretical framing of landscape as narrowly Euro-American. Tariq Jazeel has noted in his work the limitations, partialities, and exclusivities of landscape theory, often revealed through untransmutable postcolonial tensions between research field sites culturally and geographically distant from the academic institutions where researchers are based (see Friess & Jazeel, 2017; Jazeel, 2013). Michelle Daigle has furthermore remarked upon the tendency of geographers to focus studies of coloniality on places in the 'South' whilst ignoring the 'unsettling and discomforting reality of settler colonialism' in the 'North' where they themselves are based (Naylor et al., 2018, p. 201). Barring some notable exceptions, including literature on the construction of wilderness and conceptions of nature,¹ landscape studies has too thus far largely overlooked the issue of colonial difference within settler-colonial contexts. This tension is in part a structural reluctance by the field to address its underlying Euro-colonial hegemonies. Landscape is both a product of and repository for shared cultural experiences and histories (see Schama, 1995), and as contemporary literature in critical landscape studies aims to address how landscape representations—whether visual, textual, material, or otherwise—have power and agency over land, attention must be given to the field itself in order to understand not only the geopolitical power of landscape in systems of colonization, but also its underlying coloniality.

I. Land back

In early 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic gripped the world, I was anxiously following a different crisis unfolding in my home country of Canada. On Wet'suwet'en territory, located in a remote part of northern British Columbia, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were arresting protesters and detaining reporters along a small forest service road. The police were acting on an injunction issued by the British Columbia Supreme Court to remove protesters blocking construction of the Coastal GasLink liquefied natural gas pipeline. In response, solidarity protests broke out across Canada, with demonstrations outside of government buildings, blockades on major transportation networks, and even a national university student walk-out. Social media was awash with the hashtags #WetsuwetenStrong, #StandWithWetsuweten, and #AllEyesOnWetsuweten. Ultimately, the nation-wide civil disobedience only dissolved with the imposition of social-distancing measures in mid-March, placed in response to increasing COVID-19 cases within Canada.

Superficially, this conflict is easily mistaken for an environmental one, spurred by widespread opposition to a pipeline. However, a broader historical perspective reveals how long-standing colonial land contestations underpin the clash between Wet'suwet'en and Coastal GasLink. Eleven years ago, members of the Wet'suwet'en Nation established the Unist'ot'en Camp on the shores of the Wedzin Kwah River near where it meets its tributary Talbits Kwah.² The Unist'ot'en Camp is an active re-occupation of ancestral Wet'suwet'en lands dispossessed by over a century of settler-colonialism. In the last decade, the Unist'ot'en Camp has expanded, and today it includes several solar powered buildings, a permaculture garden, and a healing centre hosting a variety of social and cultural services. The Gidimt'en Checkpoint, located several miles down the road to the east, controls access to Unist'ot'en. This place is the planned river crossing point for a number of proposed pipeline projects, including Coastal GasLink. When construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline was ultimately scheduled to begin, construction crews found themselves unable to reach their construction sites, as access to the small service road running parallel to the Wedzin Kwah was now controlled by Wets'uwet'en. According to the Wet'suwet'en Nation and their allies, the Coastal GasLink pipeline project is being illegally undertaken on unceded Wet'suwet'en land. Although permission to construct the pipeline had been negotiated with the Wet'suwet'en Band Council, the consent of the Hereditary Chiefs had never been sought. Accordingly, as workers arrived to begin construction, the Hereditary Chiefs issued an eviction notice, asking them to leave Wet'suwet'en territory.

The right to colonial land title in North America traces back to the Royal Proclamation of 1763, issued by King George III of Great Britain and Ireland. The underlying goal of the Proclamation was to amass territory for the British Empire by declaring that land west of the Appalachian Mountains could not be obtained directly by settlers without first passing through the hands of the Crown.³ Land would be acquired by the Crown through the negotiation of treaties with Indigenous peoples; and only once ceded to the Crown, could land then be sold or otherwise distributed to settlers.⁴ With the Proclamation, Britain acknowledged that Indigenous peoples of North America indeed had rights to their land; in 1973, the precedent-setting case *Calder v. British Columbia* was brought to the Supreme Court of Canada by members of the Nisga'a Nation, which used the Royal Proclamation of 1763 to assert that the Indigenous people of North America indeed hold title to their lands. Because no land treaty has ever been signed between the Canadian Crown and the Wet'suwet'en Nation, the claim that Wet'suwet'en territory is unceded—that is, not under the jurisdiction of the government of Canada—can be made. The central point of conflict between the Wet'suwet'en Nation, Coastal GasLink, and the Province of British Columbia is, in essence, a centuries-long dispute over the right to land. By neglecting to negotiate consent from the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs, granting Coastal GasLink approval to begin construction, and directing the police to remove the Unist'ot'en Camp, the Canadian government is demonstrating its refusal to recognise Wet'suwet'en territorial sovereignty and instead asserting its own, revealing an unsettling colonial reality. The entire country of Canada exists within a settler-colonial landscape imaginary predicated on the continuous—yet deliberately invisibilized—settler occupation of Indigenous land.

II. Spatialising coloniality

In spite of the strong social media presence and online support of the Wet'suwet'en Nation's fight for territorial justice, there is in fact no cellular signal or reliable internet access at the Unist'ot'en Camp itself. As the crow flies, Unist'ot'en is 620 km north of central Vancouver; by road, the distance is nearly double—a two-day trip with an overnight stop for most drivers. However, nationwide civil disobedience actions taken in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en Nation brought the remote territorial conflict into urban space. On 6 February 2020, protesters blocked a rail line in Ontario near Tyendinaga Mohawk territory, kicking off a wave of demonstrations across Canada. This suspended all passenger rail service between Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa—Canada's most significant financial and urban corridor—and did not resume regular service for nearly a month. Substantial disruption to the movement of goods, passengers, and necessities ensued as strategic rail lines, highways, and ports were blockaded across the country. As national transportation infrastructure became increasingly destabilised, a new hashtag emerged on social media: #ShutDownCanada.

The landscape of colonialism is vast, extending thousands of kilometres from the headwaters of the Wedzin Kwah to the global cities of Toronto and Montreal, and even beyond. Political and economic power is concentrated in central cities, produced by the exploitation of resources on the periphery. In this way, a historical understanding of the relational power landscape of colonialism shares some similarities with neo-Marxian theories of urbanization—there is an inextricable relationship between the concentrated development of urban centres and the prevalence of extractive landscapes and other forms of primary resource development in the peripheries. That being said, urban discourse cannot and does not cover the scope and influence of colonialism on spatial realities of settler states like Canada, which play out over a nested and overlapping variety of scales usually, but not necessarily, between urban and rural regions (see Jacobs, 1996). TC Energy, the company behind the Coastal GasLink pipeline, is headquartered in the city of Calgary, a financial centre of Western Canada's extractive resource industry. Toronto's financial district, home of the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX), in turn serves as the financial centre of all of Canada's extractive industries, including TC Energy, which is publicly traded on the TSX. On an international stage, Toronto is itself subject to more powerful capital exchanges, including New York and London.

It is impossible to separate the conflict between Wet'suwet'en and Coastal GasLink from the settler-colonial structure of the Canadian state. Under structures of colonialism, the spatial formations of uneven urban and rural development are further shaped by various historical forms of biopower and racialized dispossession. Colonization and racialization are both constitutive of and contiguous with capitalism (see Byrd et al., 2018). From the beginning of European colonization, the 15th-century papal decree of *terra nullius* directed and empowered colonial land acquisition through a grossly racist formulation of land entitlement which continues to structure settler spaces today. The very sovereignty of Canada—and other settler-colonial states—is bound to historical processes of white supremacy and Indigenous territorial dispossession. As Sherene Razack (2002) has noted, the national story of Canada as a settler-colonial state is both racial and spatial. Within this deeply racialized landscape, Indigenous and other dispossessed people are systematically pushed into the peripheries of colonized nations—formalized in North America through the creation of reserve systems for Indigenous people, and other means of state control and confinement of racialised bodies such as the prison system. Even within cities, racial segregation by redlining has long been part of the North American urban planning tradition. Moreover, gentrification in urban areas across North America has led to yet another form of colonial capital accumulation which dispossesses Indigenous, Black, and other communities of colour from the lands where they live (Blomley, 2004; Smith, 1996). This model of biopower transcends settler-colonial states, as Scott Lauria Morgensen (2011) has observed, the near universalisation of European governance systems around the world occurred largely due to the success of many settler-colonial states as modern liberal democracies. Failure to address these racist formative histories potentially hinders critical analysis of present-day colonial power structures.

Appropriation of and access to land, coupled with the devaluation of non-white labour are the primary processes associated with racial capitalism, which is derivative of colonialism (see Pulido, 2017). A brief history of colonial labour regimes in the Americas reveals how racial capitalism has shaped landscapes on the continent. The transatlantic slave trade enabled widespread plantation economies which required the mass conversion of rich native ecosystems into agricultural monocultures. Following the abolition of slavery in the 19th century, bonded labourers from various parts of Asia were imported to facilitate capital accumulation. This workforce of indentured 'coolie' labourers contributed to the radical transformation of mobility and infrastructure as cheap and exploitable labour for the construction of railways across the Americas from Argentina to Cuba to Canada. As the 2020 Wet'suwet'en solidarity protests spotlighted through the mass disruption of transportation networks, the making of national infrastructure is key to the formation and success of colonial states. Infrastructure also has a significant role to play in bringing about processes of landscape change. In Canada, the British-funded development of the Canadian Pacific Railway and other lines in the national network facilitated British access, control, and settlement of vast swaths of land (see Cowen, 2020). The Canadian railway is at once an infrastructure of Indigenous dispossession, a chronicle of racialized labour regimes, and a symbol of British imperialism. Coercive treaties were signed to requisition land for building the railway, resulting in Indigenous dispossession; construction was made possible by the exploitation of Chinese migrants⁵; and Black porters were widely employed to serve white passengers on the transcontinental service until the middle of the 20th century.⁶

In parallel with entrenched systems of racial capitalism, environmental racism is also embedded in and inseparable from the underlying structure of settler states (see Pulido, 2017). The international rallying which transpired in early 2020 in support of the Wet'suwet'en Nation echo the events which occurred at Standing Rock Reservation in the United States over the Dakota Access Pipeline four years earlier. Sioux scholar Nick Estes has written on the two-hundred-year history of violent conflict between the Oceti Sakowin (Great Sioux Nation) and the U.S. Military. In Estes's view, the 2016 Standing Rock Protests were only the 'most recent iteration of an Indian War that never ends' (2019, p. 20). Stretching 1,886 km from North Dakota to Illinois, the Dakota Access Pipeline had been originally proposed to cross the Missouri River near Bismarck, North Dakota—a city which Estes is

quick to note has a 90% white population. Eventually, the crossing was moved to a point just 800 m from the Standing Rock Reservation—directly upstream from ‘an 84% Native residential area’ (Estes, 2019, p. 20). Standing Rock, like Wet’suwet’en, saw Indigenous people and their allies defending land and water from extractive projects permitted by the settler state in violation of Indigenous land rights. That environmental pollution is a problem which systematically impacts Indigenous and Black communities more than white communities is no accident of fate (see Pulido, 2000; Waldron, 2018). Environmental racism is rooted in colonial social evolutionary logics pertaining to race and white supremacy, not altogether unrelated to theorizations of racial capitalism. As the protest movements at Standing Rock and Wet’suwet’en show, the structure of the settler state is set up to privilege extractive capitalist endeavors over Indigenous rights to land and livelihood.

III. Landscape, a colonising discipline

Land, fashioned as colonial property, is a central aspect of the power structure of colonialism. In settler-colonial contexts especially, the control of land is the most ‘specific, irreducible element’ (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). As I have attempted to demonstrate, under regimes of settler-colonialism, a structural relationship between settlers, Indigenous peoples, and landless workers plays out over colonized lands; settlers arrive on Indigenous lands to live permanently and claim exclusive sovereignty over the land, which in turn becomes the settlers’ main source of capital. Capital is produced by extracting value from the land, generally through the use of exploitable labour. White European hegemonies endemic within the settler state are supported by the systemic oppression, segregation, disappearance, and incarceration of non-white Others. The continuation of settler societies necessitates the active erasure of violent histories of colonization, the quashing of on going fights for Indigenous self-determination, and the exclusion of non-white people of colour from the settler body politic. Contemporary settler-colonial contexts—such as Canada and the United States—present a unique, distinct, and pressing concern for decolonization.⁷

While it may be slightly reductive to refer to the broad interdisciplinary field of landscape studies as a discipline, I would like to prompt a reflection on the power of landscape as a form of discipline⁸—that is, the discipline of land. Art historian Charmaine Nelson has postulated that forms of landscape representation can be understood as ‘spatial discipline’:

Discipline refers to the ways in which various actors (soldiers, geographers, etc.) used cartography and processes like mapping to exert control over geography, nature, and human inhabitants (often indigenous peoples) who were regularly seen as expendable or an obstacle to some Eurocentric notion of progress. (Nelson, 2017, p. 51)

Since at least the 15th century, the discipline of landscape has played a crucial role in European colonialism. While the technologies of landscape and geography have been used to seize, settle, and control vast tracts of Indigenous land around the world, the cultural aspects of landscape have served in parallel to naturalise European colonialism. In 2002, the special issue ‘Shaping Colonial and Imperial Landscapes’ was published in *Landscape Research*, highlighting some of the ways in which European—and especially British—colonialism have shaped landscapes around the world. The issue contends that the pairing of landscape technologies (such as mapping, surveying, resource management, property ownership regimes, and development) with landscape imaging (i.e., the application of colonial frameworks onto the landscapes of the colonies) has had significant impacts on colonized landscapes and the people who inhabit them. However, in my view, it would be naïve to approach colonialism as something that was *done to* landscapes, rather than exploring the more radical contention that the discipline of landscape itself *is* colonizing.

As a discipline, landscape not only reflects social and political power relations as a symbolic aesthetic medium; it is itself an instrument and agent of power. This has been established by a number of scholars since the late 1980s, including in Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove’s *The Iconography of Landscape* and W. J. T. Mitchell’s *Landscape and Power*.⁹ Daniels and Cosgrove (1988) assert that landscape, as a cultural image, simultaneously represents, structures, and symbolises

space. Mitchell (1994) contends that landscape has a 'double role,' akin to ideology, in naturalising cultural constructions and by realising cultural relations. Landscape has the capacity not only to influence cultural perceptions of space, but also to transform space materially. Topographical mapping projects, taken at a national scale, are a method of asserting the territorial sovereignty of a nation (see Taylor, 1994). In the European tradition, distinct national styles of cartographic rendering reflect the broader significance of landscape representations in promoting nationalism (see Cosgrove, 1999, 2004). By abstracting vast tracts of land, represented as orderly grid squares on paper, colonization can be systematically implemented, facilitated by maps (see Corner, 2011; Harley, 1988; Monmonier, 1991). Beyond cartography, the rendering of land as landscape through any representational medium enacts colonial power formations onto that land.¹⁰

The core tenet of colonization is access to and control of territory, and this is achieved through not only the physical seizure and occupation of land, but also an ideological process of cultural engineering, which fits land into a colonial imaginary, projecting settler value systems onto Indigenous lands. The imposition of colonial practices of relating to land as resource justified Indigenous dispossession through the flawed conclusion that "we" could use the land better than they could' (Wolfe, 2006, p. 389). Specific to the context of settler-colonial nations, landscape representations can serve to sustain settler hegemonies, by framing the land as belonging to the illegitimate, yet largely naturalised, settler state rather than Indigenous societies. The active erasure and replacement of Indigenous relationalities to land with settler-colonial orderings is a form of violent cultural genocide. Curator and visual historian Jolene Rickard (2016) has asserted that from an Indigenous perspective, landscape painting can be understood as a visceral expression of colonial violence. Cultural forms of landscape representation such as painting and architecture act in correspondence with technological methodologies of mapping, surveying, and cartography to produce colonial hegemonies ranging from Indigenous territorial dispossession to urban redlining. Drawing from the related disciplines of art history and architecture, a comparative critical analysis can be made to further investigate the relationalities between landscape and colonialism.

IV. Framing landscape

Between 1820–21, English architect James Hakewill visited the colony of Jamaica, producing upon his return to London a series of 21 prints depicting the island's landscape. Containing illustrations of picturesque plantation estates juxtaposed with urban scenes from Kingston and Spanish Town, *A Picturesque Tour in the Island of Jamaica* depicts Jamaica as an economically productive British colonial outpost. Art historians have observed Hakewill's collection as a product of the pro-slavery attitudes prevalent in the 19th-century British elite (Higman as cited in Nelson, 2016). While Hakewill's text describes in statistical detail the economics of sugarcane production and many prints feature plantation estates, there are few detailed depictions of sugarcane crops or enslaved people labouring in the fields, purposefully omitting what Charmaine Nelson calls 'the intimate plantation geographies of the enslaved' (2016, p. 21) in favour of aestheticised pastoral landscapes. That being said, Hakewill's selective depiction of Jamaica does not make entirely invisible the transatlantic slave trade. Rather, the few pieces in the collection which depict enslaved people serve to reinforce racist ideations of social evolution underpinning colonialism. In this way, landscape paintings such as those collected in *A Picturesque Tour in the Island of Jamaica* (1825) represent a perspective of great colonial privilege, imposing a level of British aristocratic comfort and control over the Caribbean island. The Jamaican landscape as rendered by Hakewill is colonized, 'improved' by the widespread utilisation of the island for industrially scaled sugarcane production by British plantationists and the development of urban centres of colonial power.

Nearly a century after Hakewill's tour of Jamaica, a group of painters in Toronto assembled to put on a collective art show in 1920 at the Art Gallery of Toronto. The collective, known as the Group of Seven, came together intent on defining a distinct landscape art tradition for Canada, unique from European and American styles. During this period, there was an emerging interest in Canada to

develop a national identity independent from the influence of British imperialism. In the wake of the first World War, the British Dominions entered a period of increased independence from England, culminating in the 1931 Statute of Westminster, which gave Canada—along with Australia and New Zealand—more sovereignty and control over their own foreign affairs. Land, as the ‘irreducible element’ of settler-colonialism, naturally became key in the forging of new national settler identities (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388).

Breaking with the traditions of English and European landscape painting, the Group of Seven developed a style imbued with ideologies of what they (as male settlers of European ancestry) perceived as Canada’s national landscape. In stark contrast to European picturesque landscape painting—which sought to project order, harmony, and control onto land—the Group of Seven depicted Canada’s landscapes as wild, uncultivated, and even dangerous. Their work contains strong foregrounds, bold uses of colour, and high contrasts, diverging strongly from the European picturesque stylistic canon of soft perspectival views depicting pastoral landscapes with rolling hills, quaint villages, and calm skies. Group of Seven landscapes are also notably devoid of human presence, imparting a colonial perception of Canadian land as *terra nullius*. With no evidence of Indigenous (or settler) presence, Group of Seven paintings serve as not only a visual enactment of Indigenous erasure, but also a representation of a non-existent anachronistic past where nature exists in a world completely without humans.¹¹ Through the crafting of a Canadian landscape imaginary characterised by vast uninhabited wilderness, Indigenous histories and societies are denied space in the national imaginary, establishing settlers as the naturalised inhabitants of an empty land ‘discovered’ by them (see Deloria, 1998; Mackey, 1998). By eliminating Indigenous peoples from the landscapes of the nation, these paintings perform and reinforce colonial violence and Indigenous dispossession. Furthermore, the depiction of non-urban landscapes as places where people do not live or exist, perpetuates problematic colonial spatialities of economic and political power.

Coloniality is expressed not only through the representation of land but can also be inscribed into land itself. Landscape architecture has the power to embed colonial metanarratives into physical space. One such project of landscape architecture is the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis, Missouri. The Jefferson National Expansion Memorial is a public park on the western shore of the Mississippi River and the site of the Gateway Arch monument, erected in 1965 to memorialise American territorial expansion to the west. Specifically, the memorial commemorates actions taken by former President Thomas Jefferson—the 1803 Louisiana Purchase and subsequent expedition led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark—to obtain and survey land west of the Appalachian Mountains for admission into the American union. The location of the park marks the starting place of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Landscapes carry political weight, and the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial is no exception. Not only does the memorial commemorate problematic histories of land appropriation, but the very ground on which it sits reflects a topography of violent colonial dispossession. As landscape architect Rod Barnett explains, ten miles to the west of the Memorial lie the Cahokia Mounds, ‘the largest and most complex archaeological site north of Mexico’ (2016, para. 9), created by the Mississippian culture over a millennia ago. Prior to the establishment of St. Louis, several Oneota and Mississippian tribes lived in the region along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. The land on which St. Louis stands was once the site of over 40 native mounds, only one of which remains today, as the rest were flattened for settlement and development (Barnett, 2016). In 2010, the New York City-based landscape architecture firm Michael Van Valkenburgh and Associates (MVVA) won a competition to renew the design of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. Part of the new landscape design includes a significant addition to the Museum at the Gateway Arch. In the new masterplan, the museum extension lies under the land at the base of the arch, hidden beneath a gently sloping, grass-covered mound. Whether intentional or not, the topographic design choice of an earthen-mound-as-museum-cover prompts some reflection on the colonial transformations of the landscape. Barnett certainly offers one: ‘Perhaps some of the grading operations are an echo of this topographic feature [of native mounds]. Perhaps not.’ Furthermore, ‘the memorial effectively removes Indians

from public space and relocates them in another geography—this time underground as cultural objects on display' (2016, para. 22).

According to their website, MVVA's recent renewal of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial landscape upholds many of the original design intentions of Dan Kiley, the landscape architect responsible for the original design in the 1950s. A leading American post-war landscape architect practicing in the modernist style, Kiley is responsible for some of the most iconic modern landscapes in the United States. Kiley's landscape plan for the site utilised a cross-axial geometry centred below the arch, featuring two prominent ash tree-lined allées which cut through a wilder forest grove-type planting on the west side of the arch—a not so subtle gesture to westward expansionism.¹² MVVA's renewal maintains the modernist language of Kiley's design by replanting the historic allées with nearly a thousand pest resistant London planetrees.¹³ Neither Kiley nor Van Valkenburgh have meaningfully addressed the colonial transformations of the landscape, not the fate of dispossessed Native American communities who continue to fight for self-determination nor the racially charged social landscape of St. Louis, marked by decades of urban redlining, racial segregation, over-policing, and now, gentrification. Their acritical approaches warrant a reflection on the responsibility of designers of the built environment to address the historically complex and often violent histories of our shared landscapes.

Today, demographic data for St. Louis suggests that residents of colour outnumber white residents, with African Americans and other Black people forming the largest ethnic groups. This peculiar context wherein a memorial which celebrates the triumph of white European settlers sits within a city of predominantly Black residents is no doubt significant, and a topic worthy of its own paper. By choosing which histories to memorialise, maintain, and otherwise make legible, national memorials—and their designers—play a significant role in characterising the founding myths, and thereby the collective values, of societies. A critical reading of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial landscape reveals how contemporary designed landscapes can—whether intentionally or not—maintain settler hegemony through the promotion of settler-centric histories.

V. Landscape re-alignments

Further from the cultural tools of landscape art and architecture, current approaches to the built environment—naturalised through the practices of landscape professionals—regarding development, conservation, management, and reclamation largely maintain problematic colonising logics. The persistent spatialised hegemony between places *to be developed* and places which *are developed* continues to marginalise and oppress peripheral communities for the benefit of mainstream (usually white) societies.

In 2007 when the United Nations issued the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, settler nations Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States all refused to support the resolution, citing concerns over provisions regarding self-determination and free, prior, and informed consent. With free, prior, and informed consent, Indigenous people could theoretically have the power to permit or deny any and all development projects on their lands. This is of course completely and fundamentally contradictory to the underlying sociopolitical framework of settler-colonialism, which denies Indigenous land rights and maintains power through the extraction of capital from appropriated lands through exploitative means. Although all four countries have since endorsed the Declaration, its aims are understood to be non-binding and aspirational (see Boutilier, 2017). In other words, the biopower of settler-colonialism remains very much intact.

As widely acknowledged by scholars of native studies and Indigenous activists across the globe, the primary political agenda of decolonization is the return of colonised lands to Indigenous sovereignty, coupled simultaneously with a radically transformed appreciation for non-colonial ways of relating to land (see Todd, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012). The discipline of landscape has played an important role in inscribing value systems ingrained with coloniality onto seized lands. Un-inscription is part of the process of decolonizing landscape. Recovering landscapes plundered and

devastated by colonial economies is also part of the process of decolonization. Most significantly, any moves towards decolonizing landscapes must centre anti-colonial politics and embrace active departures from colonial hegemonies, ultimately contributing towards a common goal of reinstating Indigenous sovereignty through self-determination. In the context of landscape studies, decolonizing requires a long process of undermining and dismantling the colonial structures on which a vast majority of contemporary and historic landscapes are predicated. On the precise formulation of a decolonizing landscape praxis, I wish to leave this open for discussion and interpretation. As a non-Indigenous, non-white, Cantonese-Vietnamese-Canadian currently based in the UK, it is not appropriate for me to lead this development at this time. Nevertheless, priorities of a decolonizing landscape praxis must be re-aligned away from colonial spatial constructs of urbanism, development, and other forms of concentrated land control, instead following a ground-up pedagogy informed by engaging in reciprocal relationships with land, water, and air. Ultimately, decolonised landscapes accept Indigenous self-determination and refuse colonial power structures. Decolonial landscape praxis works towards undoing and repairing (literally, by re-growing) living landscapes damaged by centuries of colonial control. I hope that this article prompts all of us to reflect on our responsibilities and relationships to the lands and landscapes on which we live and work. To this end, I wish to close this piece with an account of a recent landscape development which I believe can inspire some further ruminations on the potential for decolonizing landscapes.

Coda

It is questionable whether non-Native people may fully understand photographs made by Indians, because it would require an ideological power shift.

Jolene Rickard, et al., "Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand"

Decolonization is not an 'and'. It is an elsewhere.

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor"

In an awkward parcel of land at the base of the Burrard Street bridge in central Vancouver, a new residential development is expected to break ground in 2021. Situated on just ten-and-a-half acres of land, the development is being designed to house 6,000 residential units comprised of 11 towers, the tallest of which will be a staggering 56 storeys—even for Vancouver, the densest city in Canada, this concentration of development is unusual. However, height and density are not the only features which make this development unique. This new \$600 million residential development—named Senákw—is being developed by the Squamish Nation on a piece of Squamish reserve land known officially as 'Kitsilano 6'.¹⁴

'Kitsilano 6' is one of a number of so-called 'urban' reserves in Canada, Indigenous reserve land situated within municipal boundaries.¹⁵ The land was first designated as a reserve for the Squamish nation in 1868. Several decades later in 1913, the city of Vancouver annexed the land, dismantling the Squamish village of Senákw and displacing the residents north to Howe Sound. For decades following, the land was occupied by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company and a battle to return the land to the Squamish ensued until 2003, when after decades in the courts, a small parcel was given back to the Squamish nation. Although 10.5 acres represents only a fraction of the original reserve land, this small piece of land presents a unique site for an urban residential project, due in large part to the laws dictating the administration of Indigenous reserve lands in Canada. According to the Indian Act, reserves fall under federal jurisdiction, even if they are located within municipal boundaries. As a result, the Senákw project has been able to operate independently from municipal zoning and planning regulations set by the city of Vancouver, resulting in its height and density. Senákw also contravenes municipal regulations requiring at least one vehicle parking space per residential unit, as only one in ten apartments will have a parking space. One of the aims of Senákw is to provide

'transit-oriented' and 'primarily purpose-built rental' developments for the city (Nch'kay West, 2020), which has for decades suffered from an extreme affordable housing crisis. Overall, between 70–90% of Senákw's units will be rental units, with special provisions to provide affordable housing for members of the Squamish nation.

By virtue of its ownership and design, Senákw represents a disruption to the settler status quo. From the beginning of colonial settlement, Indigenous people have been systematically displaced into reserves outside of cities, literally pushed to the margins of settler society. As an Indigenous-led development project un-bound by municipal building regulations, Senákw represents a small beacon in the pressing need for the dissolution of settler hegemony over urban landscapes. Because the Squamish nation has been able to maintain a majority stake in developing their urban land, Senákw inverts settler-colonial power dynamics, placing Indigenous people in control over the future of their land.

Nevertheless, several aspects of the Senákw project raise important points for discussion regarding the project's decolonizing sentiment. Regulations regarding the administration of Indigenous reserve land in Canada deserve some scrutiny. According to Section 18 of the Indian Act, 'reserves are held by Her Majesty for the use and benefit of the respective bands for which they were set apart, and subject to this Act and to the terms of any treaty or surrender'. Furthermore, Section 20 states that 'no Indian is lawfully in possession of land in a reserve unless, with the approval of the Minister, possession of the land has been allotted to him by the council of the band'. In other words, Indigenous nations do not own their reserve lands; the land is designated to them for their exclusive use by the federal government of Canada, who ultimately owns the land under the auspices of settler law. Section 89 of the Indian Act restricts the ability for reserve land to be mortgaged or seized. For over a century, this legislation has led to the structural financial oppression of Indigenous nations, by severely limiting access to capital due to the difficulty of leveraging land as financial collateral. This has affected Indigenous livelihoods in Canada at all levels, from communities to businesses to individuals. In the case of Senákw, Nch'kay Development Corporation—the Squamish nation's development corporation—has requested the federal government for a lease on the reserve land, which can be used to acquire loans for the project. Also ensuing from regulations in the Indian Act, residential units in Senákw will be sold and rented as leasehold properties.

It is no question that despite its nature as an Indigenous-led project, Senákw is still a capitalist endeavour. Capitalism is inseparable from the structure of settler-colonialism which maintains settler-state power over Indigenous societies (see Coulthard, 2014). However, given centuries of systematic dispossession and oppression, Senákw nonetheless presents an opportunity for the Squamish nation (and perhaps for decolonizing landscape). The sustained multi-generational revenue stream from Senákw would allow not only for improved 'housing, education, and social service needs ... improved health care, culture, language, arts, ... employment opportunities' (Senákw) for the Squamish nation, but also potentially fund lengthy and expensive land claims processes in settler courts. In British Columbia, the majority of provincial land is actually unceded Indigenous territory. Land claims processes can take decades to go through the settler court system, and the financial burden for nations is substantial. With revenues from Senákw going to the Squamish nation projected at up to \$10 billion over the life of the project, there are huge possibilities for funding court cases, land claims, and even land purchases. Ultimately, Senákw contributes to decolonization because it supports Squamish self-determination on Squamish land.

Senákw exists at the intersection of multiple ruptures in the colonial fabric of urban settler-colonial landscapes. In creating the development project of Senákw, the Squamish nation has subverted restrictions placed on them by the settler state to generate long-term financial security which will last for generations. When it is completed, at 56 storeys high, Senákw will quite literally be a force of disruption to the urban fabric of Vancouver.

Notes

1. For instance, see Cronon (1995), D. Mitchell (1996), and Spence (2000).
2. The English names for these waters are Morice River and Gosnell Creek. They form part of the Skeena River Watershed, which flows from the Spatsizi Plateau into the Pacific Ocean.
3. The Proclamation also attempted to reduce violent territorial confrontations between Indigenous nations and settlers, such as the Pontiac's Rebellion (1763).
4. Public land in Canada belongs to the Canadian Crown and is known as 'Crown land'. This land is registered to the monarch and is administrated by either Federal or Provincial governments. The current monarch is Queen Elizabeth II. Approximately 89% of all land in Canada is Crown land.
5. See Karuka (2019), Lee (1983), and Stanley (2016).
6. See Carson (2002), Mathieu (2010).
7. This is not to diminish the prevalent effects of colonization in other contexts, only to highlight a significant difference between post-colonialism and decolonization.
8. Here, I invoke two meanings of 'discipline': i) to chastise or control, and ii) a field of study.
9. It is significant to acknowledge the large body of neo-Marxian landscape scholarship which emerged during the 1980s-90s including Daniels, Cosgrove, Mitchell, and others.
10. I would like to draw attention to W. J. T. Mitchell's contention that 'landscape' can be better understood as a verb than as a noun. See W. J. T. Mitchell (1994).
11. Mary Louise Pratt has described a similar process of human erasure in travel writing. See Pratt (1992).
12. The plan I reference is the modified 1959 plan by Kiley. In its final implementation, further changes were made by the National Parks Service, although many of Kiley's intentions remained.
13. Another notable point of colonial landscape coalescence, the London planetree (*Platanus x acerfolia*) is so named because of its high pollution tolerance. It gained favour and popularity amongst landscapists in Victorian Britain for its suitability to polluted urban sites.
14. Senákw (2020) will be built in a 50/50 partnership with the development firm Westbank. The partnership and development plans were approved in a vote by the Squamish nation on 10 December 2019 (Denis). See articles in the Tyee, Guardian, and the Senákw website for more information.
15. Kitsilano 6 has different origins than the typology of urban reserves common to the Canadian prairies which have arisen more recently. See Barron and Garcea (1999).

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