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Studying With, Without Guarantees

Reflections on the Risks of Taking Learning from the Classroom to the Land

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Abstract

In this paper, we discuss an assignment we developed with the goal to "unsettle" settler consciousness and critically foster a grounded politics of location amongst our postsecondary students. We analyze some of the important and sundry risks of taking learning from the classroom to the land, focusing on some of the assignment's assumptions, effects, contradictions and complications. Drawing upon Moten & Harney's urging of a "studying with and for," Stuart Hall's "politics without guarantees," and Leanne Simpson's "land as pedagogy," we present our experiment in teaching as an exciting opportunity for learning – one that though rooted in aspirations towards more decolonial presents in our classrooms, is still always also deeply implicated in who gets made as a subject with access to the goods and protections of the colonial present within and outside of the university.

> "To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality" (hooks, 2000, p. 110).

> "…it cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, *to be in but not of*—this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university" (Moten & Harney, 2004, 101, italics added).

> "Like governance, leadership and every other aspect of reciprocated life, education comes from the roots up. It comes from being enveloped by land." (Simpson, 2014, p. 9).

In 2016, we were awarded a small internal university grant to develop specific and hands-on tools for unsettling settler colonialism in our university classrooms.[1] We are settler faculty – and we use the term "settler" to denote a noun/adjective/subjectivity that voices relationships to structures and processes in Canada today. It is a word that "turns us toward uncomfortable realisations, difficult subjects, and potential complicity in systems of dispossession and violence" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, 2). We work in a small Canadian university in the disciplines of Sociology and Women & Gender Studies and we regularly include discussions of settler colonialism in our course material. We seek to develop approaches in our teaching that are feminist, that acknowledge complicity and that critique forms of objectifying thinking that have situated Indigenous peoples as the Other. As teachers in disciplines that encourage critical thinking about societal power arrangements, we seek to develop learning resources in ways that build accountability to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action[2] and to Indigenous scholars' calls for decolonization that foreground "the settler problem" at the heart of why reconciliation is needed in the first place (Reagan, 2010, p. 11). However, there are still too few resources allotted towards the development and elaboration of such tools within our everyday academic schedules.

Our small project proposed to develop pedagogical tools that would more tangibly speak to the colonial politics of knowledge production, trouble the idea that settler colonialism is of the past, and 'unsettle' the racial and heteronormative colonial logics of identity and belonging. We aspired to "unsettle" settler consciousness and critically foster a grounded politics of location amongst our students. It merits mention that, in hindsight, our goals were too grand given the limits not only imposed by a linear/colonial model of time, the structure of the university (ideologically and practically), and perhaps most importantly, by our own imaginations. Nonetheless we are encouraged by bell hooks here, and we identify our development of teaching strategies as attempts to do just what she proposes – to imagine within the "concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality" (2000, p. 110). In the conversation piece that follows, we reflect on one particular and popular student assignment that we see as the outcome of such

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[1] The "we" in discussion of the background refers to the first two authors. The third author was an MA student, Research Assistant on the grant, and a Teaching Assistant in one of the courses described.

[2] See http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

constrained but important imaginings and an impetus to further such imaginings.[3] Our reflections on this assignment, which had a multitude of effects that we could not have anticipated and which we will explore, leave us eager to continue in the development of pedagogical tools that aim to dismantle the colonial underpinnings of the University even and perhaps especially where the guarantee of transcending such persistent foundations cannot be made. We suggest that working and writing without guarantees requires a willingness to teach in discomfort and in fact necessitates a disruption of the usual authority attributed to teachers and to settlers.[4]

Pulling the Weeds: Risks, Potentials, Unsettlings

The land we teach on is Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot) territory.[5] The post-secondary institution dug into this land lies in close proximity to the largest land-based reserve in the nation.[1] We say that the University is *dug into* because to say it 'sits' on Blackfoot territory (or in the terms imposed by the settler state, a specific numbered Treaty) reflects settler colonial assumptions about "the nature" of property and disavows the various removals required for it to take up the space it presently occupies: Concrete displaces worlds and relations with coyotes, rattlesnakes, mice, prairie grasses, and other living and non-living things; it is an institution founded on top of political orders that precede its existence and remain alive. The destruction and exile required for the building and expansion of the university is not metaphorical; such literal removals of land and life belie the ontological and epistemological foundations that support this institution and render other orientations to the world and knowledge incoherent (Watts, 2013).[6]

Situated as we are, in the southern prairies of the province and Siksikaitsitapi territory, we have a student body that seems to experience settler colonialism in a variety of ways, including

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[3] An early reflection on this assignment is available on www.reconcilliationsyllabus.wordpress.com and was published in the Light on Teaching Magazine.

[4] We want to be clear that we cannot step out of or shatter the various discourses currently in circulation. So we perhaps confoundingly assert that 1) we *are* settler colonial subjects, 2) that it is through enactments that such structures and subjectivities are continually renewed, and 3) assert that through our use of various discourses we may confound, unsettle, surprise, or produce new effects. Ontology is not perspective but is the word used to describe the assumptions through which worlds become. Our being recognized as humans with agency and autonomy *is* part of the ontology we share for any of this work to be intelligible.

[5] The Kainai (Blood) reserve has been, since the 1970s, in the middle of a large land claim with the federal government in which it asserts that the reserve should have encompassed a much larger territory than what was originally designated. See: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/blood-tribe-court-federal-land-dispute-claim-alberta-kainai-1.4934806 [Accessed December 17, 2018] as well as the Indian Claims Commission Report (2007), "Blood Tribe/Kainaiwa Big Claim Inquiry" http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2007/icc-cri/RC31-44-2007E.pdf [Accessed June 15, 2018].

[6] As a means of challenging the assumption of singularity at the core of the EuroAmerican ontological foundations of the University itself (Law 2004; Blaser 2013; Little Bear 2000), we conceptualize the University building as multiple and as subject to a range of potential enactments which may or may not frame buildings as inanimate, made by and for the use of humans. Alternate enactments might be of the building as an agent, or embedded in relations with animals and land and sky, all of which are perhaps themselves agents of education as well. At the same time as we refuse the notion of a singular University, we do not engage in the task of describing nor asserting the existence of another specific enactment/reality here. We have neither conducted the kind of praxiographic research that would be required to describe the multiplicity we are asserting exists (See Mol), nor are we certain of the ethics of reporting on other enactments, when those enactments may be sacred, not *for* consumption as "knowledge," or not there for settler colonial subjects at all (See Law 2004, p. 135).

very directly, materially, and/or recognizing its importance, or as if its structures are completely disconnected from their everyday life and individual pursuits. It is this full and mixed range of student experiences that we sought to invite into an 'unsettling' pedagogy. As part of our project we developed in-class activities and assignments that would bring our students and ourselves to consider our various and varied present-day investments in settler colonialism. We titled the assignment we discuss here, "Pulling the Weeds." This assignment was designed to foreground land repatriation as crucial to decolonization and to provoke student thinking on the relations between themselves, land, property, and nationhood in a local context (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The inspiration for the assignment came in part from a published conversation between Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel (2014) wherein Corntassel describes efforts, largely on the part of Cheryl Bryce of the Songhees First Nation, and a "Community Tool Shed", to revive Lekwungen "foodscapes and landscapes" (p. 25). The Community Tool Shed, located in what is now commonly called Victoria, B.C., is a site that brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks who work to rid Lekwungen homelands of invasive plant species and to foster traditional plant growth. This ongoing project is an act of resurgence that highlights "the terrain of Indigenous struggles to restore and reconnect a place-based existence" (p. 25). As we developed assignments towards an unsettling pedagogy we saw embedded in the goal of the Community Tool Shed what Anishinaabeg and Mohawk scholar Vanessa Watts (2013) calls an "Indigenous conception of Place-Thought" – a concept that compels a consideration of place and thought as inseparable (p. 20). Watts' articulation of Place-Thought is "based upon the promise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency though the extensions of these thoughts" (p. 21). Humans *derive* agency from land that is alive. Land loss, displacement, or any other kind of disruption in ability "to communicate with place" means a compromised capacity to "think, act, and govern" (p. 23). The notion of Place-Thought stretches our capacities to imagine and, in the context of our classrooms and the ongoing physical expansion of the university, we wondered what it might mean and how it might be approached with our students. Watts' description of this aspect of Indigenous ontologies urged us to get our students to the land, and Snelgrove et. al.'s description of the community tool shed gave us something for them to do there.

It is perhaps important to note that this exercise did not function as an opportunity to instruct students on Indigenous ontology(ies) or worldviews.[7] We are not qualified to deliver such knowledge ourselves and are skeptical of attempts to transmit such knowing even when the strategies utilized seem to employ some "proper" politics of epistemology (bringing in a "genuine" or "true" knower, for example). These too are fraught practices – they are often exploitative and reflect and reinstate a colonial privileging of presence and an assumption that it is actually possible to trade in and out of "worldviews" as if simply stepping from one vantage point to another. Moreover, we think there is good reason to question the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of knowledge. To critique settler colonial ontology means that we question the premise that universal knowledge is possible, inherently good, and an object for consumption. We see the critique of Euro-American ontology and epistemology as separate from the provision of an alternative(s), arguing that there is important and necessary struggle in examining deeply held convictions without their quick replacement.[8] So rather than proffering a replacement worldview for that which

[7] For some scholarship on this question see Battiste 2017; Corntassel 2012; Hunt 2014; Little Bear 2000; McCoy, Tuck, McKenzie 2017; Todd 2016; Simpson 2017; Tuck, McKenzie, McCoy 2014; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, Coulthard 2014; Watts 2016; Watts 2017)

[8] In part, because no replacement exists outside of "modern" discourses.

would have been deeply held convictions at the crux of the humanist subject itself for *all* students ushered through 12 years of mainstream schooling in Canada, we sought only an opportunity for students to explore a less determined moment of critique.[9]

"Pulling the Weeds" was assigned to students in several different courses: a second-year feminist theory course, a third-year sociology of race and ethnicity course, and in a graduate level methods course and theory course. The readings that students were required to complete prior to their prairie walk varied from course to course, depending on the central focus of the course, but always included one or more of Leanne Simpson's (2014) *Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation*, Adrienne Rich's (2003) *Notes Toward a Politics of Location*, and chapters from Audra Simpson's (2014) *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. After completing the required readings, students were to complete the next four tasks: (i) read the Wikipedia entry for spotted knapweed, marking the text with notes and/or highlighting of relevant aspects; (ii) go out on to the prairie and find the weed; (iii) document the experience of being on the land and picking the weed; and (iv) write short responses to versions of the following questions:

1. Describe the experiences of seeking out the weed.
2. Describe the sensory elements of picking the weed (how did the soil smell, what was the texture of the weed, etc.).
3. Where did you pick the weeds? Whose land were you on?
4. What is your relationship to the patch of land that you picked the weed on?
5. Write on your (dis)identifications with the knapweed or the plants that you left in the ground.
6. Why do you think I asked you to pull an invasive plant species in this course?
7. What connections can you make to this week's readings?

Upon completion of these steps students were required to submit a final paper, a printed copy of their annotated Wikipedia page, and some form of documentation of the weed.[10] In anticipation of some uncertainty among students in response to this assignment, the description encouraged students to be creative and to try to respond even if they were unsure of a question's meaning. Despite this encouragement, students had a lot of questions and some were quite bewildered by what had been asked of them. We answered all student questions. We avoided directly linking the readings to the assignment so that students might make their own connections between what they were reading and what they were doing. In spite of their uncertainties students did not let the physical nature of the assignment or the concern about not being able to 'find' the weed, prevent

[9] We understand that pulling the weeds was an activity that went beyond critique and entered into the realm of doing learning differently. Ours was not an attempt at practicing Indigenous Land-Based Pedagogies. Instead of asking how our activity might be classified as such a pedagogical exercise and then working toward the fulfillment of that classification, we committed to a non-directed, trial by error approach that was intentional in its open-endedness as a critique of what it usually means to learn in Western contexts. At the conclusion of this reflection we find ourselves ensnared by a trap Watts anticipates -- asking the questions we asked students to answer in this assignment (re)produces a human-centric agency (Watts, p. 29).

[10] When we assigned and returned this work, we informed students that this assignment was experimental in nature and that assignments may be used in future publications with appropriate measures taken to protect anonymity and confidentiality. The university's Research Ethics Board approved the use of this student work for publication.

them from writing rich, varied, and thoughtful papers.

Pulling the Weeds was an activity limited by the very structures through which it was assigned, i.e., by virtue of being developed and carried out in the context of a post-secondary institution. More specifically, the "call to order" (Harney & Moten, 2013) of a 12-week semester structure impacted the possibilities for student study here. We asked students to pick the weed only once, but now wonder about requiring multiple knapweed pulls over the early fall months of the semester as part of an ongoing reflexivity-praxis assignment. Leanne Simpson (2014) writes in "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation" that theory is not just an intellectual pursuit – "it is woven within kinetics, spiritual presence and emotion, it is contextual and relational. It is intimate and personal, with individuals themselves holding the responsibilities for finding and generating meaning within their own lives" (p. 7). This beautifully captures the aspirations and anticipates the limitations of our assignment. We know that walking through prairie grasses and pulling a weed isn't on its own anticolonial.[11] We wonder, then, what effect(s) several weed pulls might have on students, on their intimate engagements with the prairie, on their meaning-making of social locations, on fostering the process of an 'unsettling' pedagogy? Moreover, how would a focus on the restoration or identification of native plant species (rather than only on the removal of an invasive one) shift the performative and meaning-making axis of this assignment? Yet, as Simpson also reminds us, neither the practice of picking weeds nor the restoration of native plant species can be performative of *land as pedagogy* when the necessary conditions are not in place. For Simpson, such conditions include the requirement that our post-secondary institutions ensure "the full, valued recognition of [Indigenous] freedom, sovereignty and self-determination over bodies, minds and land" (p. 17). Such a vision would require an 'undoing' of universities in Canada as we know them. It would require, among other things, a divestment from the neoliberal language of inclusion that currently animates the post-secondary institutional landscape in Canada, including our own, where First Nations, Metis & Inuit (FNMI) students (in particular) are subjects to be "included into", and where the labour of doing the work of such inclusion disproportionately falls on the shoulders of a handful of Indigenous faculty members.

We required students to identify knapweed with the help of a Wikipedia article that, among other things, describes the weed's 'systematics and taxonomy.' We chose this website because we thought it was likely that it would be among the first sites a student might visit to learn more about the weed if they were simply curious. Our decision to assign Wikipedia's web page on knapweed quietly relied upon colonial enactments of the land as it rendered the plant inanimate and reduced it to the same system of classification and organization through which racial difference is biologically and hierarchically produced. Systems of classifications have historically been and are still today often conflated with 'knowledge production' in the neoliberal and colonial university, but they are never value neutral and are always imperfect. In some cases, the Wikipedia taxonomy

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[11] As one of our reviewers pointed out, we offered no specific facilitation of several of the components deemed so necessary for Simpson -- e.g., we offered no deliberate fostering of spirit or emotion. But we are also skeptical that such potential is not already there in human lived experience, though not enacted within an ontology that divides the mind from the body, the spiritual from the material, and the subject from the object. Reading Simpson's work, one learns about a land-based approach to education that is not over-determined by the "teacher," a "knower" who is hierarchically positioned in relation to the "unknowing" learner. Instead, the relation is one of support from a distance, and one that hinges on "individuals themselves holding the responsibilities for finding and generating meaning within their own lives" (Simpson 2014, p. 7).

became an invisible and re-naturalized order in student writing. In others, students astutely drew parallels between the taxonomies made of plants and those racial taxonomies created of people. Either way, the use of this system of classification in this assignment offered an opportunity for seeing an uncanny parallel through which settler colonial worlds are enacted and ordered by various knowledge schematics.

But meaning is not stable and the possibility for seeing this parallel as uncanny was not always realized. This is something that we frame as among the risks posed when working within this particular situation while attempting to imagine otherwise, with and for students. It was a risk that, in some cases students would rely on the taxonomic language of the Wikipedia entry to explain their processes of weed identification and thereby unwittingly reproduce and reify colonial systems of classification. In other cases though, students would see that those very systems of classification that seem so disconnected from who they are, are at once also at the heart of the matter. Although not all students described this parallel in their papers, we see the set up and the risks inherent to it as necessary for the kind of understanding it might compel. But again, such meaning is not guaranteed. The use of a scientific system for classifying life was not a new schema introduced to students in our courses – many already came equipped with such schema as their ontological commonsense. This assignment, we hope, may have opened up a way for students to think critically about that commonsense. If it succeeded in this, it was more through our facilitating or setting the conditions or context for student learning, and less through the "overt coercion and authority" so conventional and "so normalized within mainstream western pedagogy that they are rarely ever critiqued" (Simpson, 2014, p.7).

We hoped that pulling invasive species from local lands might help illustrate the material relationship between students, land, property and nationhood in our more local context.[12] We hoped that students would reflect on their presence with the land and on the material effects of pulling such an assertive entity up with its seemingly individual plant roots. Several students who were required to read Simpson's *Land as Pedagogy*, referred to the land as a kind of teacher and, indeed, all of our students expressed that they learned *something* via their engagements with the weed. This was one of the complicated aspects of this assignment for us: what was learned was commonly framed as symbolic not material. While students were obviously tuned into the land in material ways while completing the assignment – they described the heat of the sun, the toughness of the weed's roots, the itchiness of the weed, the pleasure of being outside – because of the commonsense frameworks already deeply learned prior to arrival in this class, few students wrote of the experience of pulling the weed as anything other than symbolic or metaphorical.[13] Students read the knapweed *as representative of something else*. We see this complication also as a result of the difficulty of imagining something else within the contours of the present (hooks). Many student papers, for example, represented the land in colonial terms, that is, as owned/ownable; as

[12] We focus here on the "material" relationship because we are compelled by Indigenous scholarship that demands land repatriation and because land enacted through typically EuroAmerican practices is as property not relation. Opening up opportunities for thinking via the land, as Watts' work has us try to do, we hope prioritizes actual land repatriation and challenges understandings of the land as a thing. An extension of this, would be a critique of the supposed discreteness of "the material" from "the spiritual," which again is specific to a singular ontology and is not necessarily a universal component of ontologies.

[13] Our focus on how metaphor works is informed by Tuck and Yang and is concerned with how it problematically might work as a mode of thinking that delivers us from the work required for decolonization.

a site for exploration and adventure; as knowable, especially via taxonomic categorization. Others thought of the weed in more individualized terms as white settlers or as men. One student suggested that knapweed might represent European colonization of Indigenous land or that it could also represent marginalized and racialized groups that are assumed to pose a threat to white communities, thus needing to be picked. Others thought the weed might represent Indigenous peoples (i.e., picked, removed from their territories). Others discussed the weed as symbolic for gendered systems of inequality, where knapweed served as a metaphor for the toxic effects of heteropatriarchy on women. Some students thought the weed might represent the processes of colonization, with parallels drawn between the tenacious ability of the weed to stunt the growth of other plants and the white settlers who attempted to invade and take over Indigenous bodies, lands, and lifeways.

Many of these metaphors powerfully illustrated important understandings of the emergence of a settler colonial nation and city on stolen lands. We also notice though, that a number of the papers relied upon and reproduced a settler/Indigenous dyad as ahistorical. Such metaphors risks casting settlement as something that is acted upon Indigenous bodies, obscuring its location as a phenomenon that shapes also *contemporary* non-Indigenous subjectivities, intimacies and sensations. Moreover, it risks naturalizing a hostile relationship between the two, the outcome of which is both anticipated and assumed final, thereby normalizing settler presence, privilege and power. These risks again pose something of a challenge for us: Are they avoidable within pedagogical attempts to set the stage for possible alternative imaginings?

Several of the students articulated their experience as mattering in material, immediate and anti-colonial ways, and a few others seemed to know that acting upon the land was more than metaphorical. Several students refused to complete the 'pulling' component of the assignment. One Indigenous student left an offering of tobacco while another student did not pick the weed because, as she expressed "I didn't need it". Another student expressed concern over having disrupted the lives of insects that might have organized their societies amongst the weed and still another hoped that their act of removing knapweed would allow for native species to flourish and seemed to link this hope with having learned about the "importance of lived engagement with decolonization in our everyday lives." Then there were the many for whom the hot sun and scratched skin – the relationship between the land, the plants and their bodies – were of central concern.

The assumption of a metaphorical understanding is likely tied up with dominant conceptions of land as object, as property - valued not in relations, or as relationship, but for its use. In their papers, many students articulated a 'relationship' with the land that was based mostly on its use for leisure activities or enjoyment, or on living in close proximity. Some students said they had no relationship with the land and framed this in terms of knowing little about the history of the place. Students who did write on their relationship to the land sometimes did so in terms of belonging to a particular descent group, whether immigrant or Indigenous. Others wrote on their lack of knowledge of place as a sign of 'settler mentality' or something similar. Many students were fairly certain that the land they picked on was owned by the City and simultaneously that the assignment was about getting them to think about strategies of colonization, including land theft. In some cases, interpreting the weed as representative of early settlers eclipsed the possibility of understanding the City's supposed ownership of Blackfoot territory as a consequence of colonization. In our reading, being certain of land-theft-through-colonization and simultaneously being certain of the City's ownership were not contradictory certainties. As Tuck and Yang explain,

it is the metaphorization of decolonization that allows us to focus on unsettling our minds rather than on "relinquishing stolen land" (p. 19). Even for many students who knew they were pulling weeds *on* Blackfoot territory, the assignment was assumed to be symbolic. We wonder then, whether among what emerged through this assignment was "an extrapolitical relation to space", one that *defers* "the possibility of reckoning with Indigenous sovereignty or ongoing processes of settler occupation" (Rifkin 2014: xviii). We wonder whether, given this risk, this assignment still works as an 'unsettling' pedagogy or as a pedagogy for problematizing settler colonialism "as a living phenomenon?" (Monture, 2007, p. 207).

Another of the risks posed by our attempt to reimagine within the constraints of the present might have been that we inadvertently *re-centered precisely that which we hoped to unsettle*. One of the risks in attempting an 'unsettling' pedagogy is producing communities of individuals who embody and enact another version of settlerhood, that of the enlightened settler. Students did sometimes explicitly express their enlightenment (for example, "I didn't know about the history of this place and now I do"). Mostly, however, this expression of knowledge came in the form of strong assertions of the bad settler/good native binary, perhaps most keenly expressed with the sentence, "I feel I am the invasive weed", which we assume that, as professors/course instructors, we were meant to read as a sign that students had 'gotten it', thereby fulfilling another institutional "call to order", that of fostering critical thinking and engaged citizenship via the tenets of liberal education. If the neoliberal university is a key site for the production of normalizing knowledges, then what such knowledges did this assignment unwittingly produce and perpetuate? We consider that perhaps the "normalizing knowledge" produced by and through the Pulling the Weeds assignment is the ordinariness of settlement. This assignment was designed in part to increase student's intimacy with their place of inhabitance, namely lives lived through Siksikaitsitapi territory. Yet such a framing can still reaffirm and normalize settlement as the "ready made against which new information, sensation, experience are managed" (Rifkin, 2014, p.16).

Leanne Simpson's (2017) theorizing of settler colonialism is instructive here. She writes that settler colonialism's present structure, as one of perpetual disappearance of Indigenous bodies for perpetual territorial acquisition, is formed and maintained by a series of complex and overlapping *processes* that work together as a cohort to maintain the structure. This insight of settler colonialism-as-process, and thus as not singular, asks us to pay attention to the myriad and multiple ways by which settler dominance is actively reconstituted and to attend to how the regularities – the everyday life of settlement – are "materialized in and through quotidian nonnative sensations, dispositions and lived trajectories" (Rifkin, 2014, p.10). In this current moment of 'Truth and Reconciliation' in Canada, the assignment is perhaps caught up in a web of power that produces an enlightened settler subjectivity, one that is a subtle and less obvious stabilization of settler colonialism, one that does not necessarily disrupt nor unsettle: We worry that success in teaching about colonization that leaves any room for a redeemable enlightened and benevolent settler subject (including ourselves as teachers), whose governments have apologized and who now 'know better' than earlier generations, is part of the ongoing remaking and renewal of settlement.

We want to foreground the unexpected, unintentional potentials embedded in hooks' aspiration for change. In practical terms, and as indicative of what Simpson (2017) calls "overlapping *processes,"* pulling the weeds put people in relation to the colonial state in material ways. We learned *after* assigning this activity, that there are legislative restrictions on who can pull what from the land. What we knew theoretically – that there is no true or pure "natural" realm

outside of that which the colonial imaginary "culture" requires – we learned in material terms when we were questioned about our assignment by the local nature centre and informed of the *Weed Control Act*. We were reminded by this communication that our attempts at thinking with the land were undercut by enactments of the land as an object under the jurisdiction of the state. The assignment may have been commonly deemed symbolic by the students, but it was always also more than symbolic – it was always also a literal violation of legislation established to control land and its lives. This leaves us wondering about how metaphor is indistinct from the literal or the real. The land had to be enacted as an object – first metaphorically – for it to be made subject to this legislation.

Complicating whatever success might have been realized with this potential as resistance, we see now that it was precisely because of our *own* relation to the land that we imagined this assignment as possible and as impactful in the first place. We each grew up on the prairies, roaming these plains and forests as if they were our own. As if our access to the lands were unrestricted, open. As if we had the right to be there. As if, even in our childhoods, this place was *Terra Nullius*. It wasn't and it isn't. But perhaps key here, is that regardless of the legal (i.e., ontological) status of the land, *some* people were allowed to roam as if it were theirs, and others were not. Ours was not every kid's experience. The system of land reservations was imposed with, through and for the legitimate enactment of a nation of "Canada", alongside ongoing resistances, subversions, and alongside other worlds entirely, outside and beyond the settler state (See Simpson 2014; Simpson, Nanibush, Williams 2012). Enactments of "Canada" operate within a larger system of practices for repeatedly re-naturalizing the nation's claim to the land (Vowel, 2106). The introduction of the Pass System in the place where we now teach, was in 1885, an attempt by government officials to contain Indigenous peoples to the Treaty 7 reserve lands (Smith, 2009, 2014). The pass system was based on the same assumptions of *difference of type* that is embedded in the taxonomies of plants displayed by Wikipedia, although the pass system enacted this through the construct of race difference. With the imposition of the pass system, those defined as "Indian" through the *Indian Act* could no longer move freely off reserve lands without obtaining "a pass" – a permission slip issued by the local Indian Agent (an agent of the colonial government) once the purpose and duration for the absence had been approved by that same agent. The pass system was unevenly administered but effective; through enforcement by Indian Agents and the North West Mounted Police, the land was no longer open to roam (Smith, 2009, 2014). When we asked our students to walk through prairie grasses seeking an invasive weed, we asked them to embody the same assumption of the right to a place that has become a deep part of our comportment here. Recognizing this now we see, too, how the challenges of performing this task of pulling a weed could have been profoundly personal, though also linked to a heritage in which one's (and one's relations) movement on the land was either facilitated and supported, or constrained and controlled. If, as Simpson (2017) describes, the overlapping processes and structures of settler colonialism are at play in the present, we wonder too, now, about the likelihood that our students would have been differentially subject to the application of colonial law here, even today. The act of pulling a weed in the face of legislative restrictions might have political potential as a mode of resisting colonial presumptions of jurisdiction, but it is likely that such potential would not be realized equally or universally. For whatever potential the assignment might have offered, this realization gives us serious pause.

Studying With, Without Guarantees

At the onset this was an experiment in teaching, and one of our intimate attachments was to be 'good' teachers, that is, to teach anti-colonization and antiracism on the Siksikaitsitapi territories occupied by the university in a way that avoids the pitfalls of pedagogies of inclusion and the fallacy of 'safe spaces'. Perhaps we thought such success would redeem us, despite our being regularly positioned to take up the privileges of citizenship so often afforded us. We cannot rely on *our intentions* to save us from re-enacting settler colonial processes. "Intentions" are themselves tied up within a particular enactment of subjectivity. Reading Harney and Moten's (2013) incisive critique from within the university has us rethinking this attachment; as Harney said, "The first thing I made every day when I went into the university was myself, and the university these days is not necessarily the best place to make yourself" (p. 148). Arguing for relations of study they call "the undercommons", Harney & Moten instead advocate study "with and for:" "studying with people rather than teaching them, [meaning] study with people in service of a project" (p. 147-8). Our aim is that our collaboration will become just one such a project - a project that is "with and for" the people we encounter in the university, though "within and against" the university as an institutional structure itself; one oriented towards breaking those parts of the institution that normalize our knowledge and subjectivities, and that fortify colonial and capitalist economies of extraction and exploitation, even as our salaries are dependent on revenues generated from Alberta's extractive resource economy of pipelines and tar sands. We share our experience of this assignment because we think that the moments of risk that arise within our teaching practices might be components of studying *with and for*, but they are never guaranteed. Such practices may propel us towards imagining other, perhaps less colonial, ways of being in and of the world. We keep at the fore, though, a recognition that they are also only made because of the colonial foundations on which our presence here within the institution of the university, resides.

We could not know about the effects of the assignment in advance. We could not know exactly what our assignment would *do.* There were no guarantees that the politics of this activity would come out on the side of the ethical, or the "good." Indeed, as appealing as it is, such a purist orientation to thinking about contemporary settler colonial relations in Canada or of the possibility for a singular 'outcome' offers a false freedom from the difficulty of working *with* each other and *for* a less violent and more equitable world. Even in the absence of guarantees, and perhaps even because of the risks, a number of our hopes for student thinking were realized with this assignment; students wrote complicated and thoughtful reflection papers. Yet requiring students to write on their experience of weed picking was risky because it was unfamiliar, it seemed unrelated to the explicit topics of the courses, it was not (always) in keeping with those "overlapping processes" (including legislation) that normalize settler colonialism, and perhaps most importantly, its outcome could not be reliably predicted. Such difficulties however, we see as profoundly important in our foregrounding of the relations of study towards a project. It was clear that more than in any other assignment, students did not know what to do and so they talked to each other and tried things out together, they themselves sometimes seeking the information that would guarantee them a grade, but finding no guarantees, they walked, looked around them and wrote anyway.

Stuart Hall proposes a "politics without guarantees" (Hall, 1997; Gilroy, Grossberg & McRobbie 2000), Leanne Simpson (2014) advocates a pedagogy in which the outcome is not dictated by a hierarchy of teacher and student, but supported as an empowering process engaged in with others and with roots in the land, and Moten and Harney (2004) urge a studying with and for. In the context of this assignment we want to integrate Hall, Simpson, and Moten & Harney, to

advocate a studying with, without guarantees; that is, we work towards developing pedagogical tools that, though offering no guarantees for transcending settler colonial formations so foundational to universities, still assert this goal as the priority in a tireless effort. And, within a strong network of established discourses such an orientation allows us to accept and try to work within our own investments, while concurrently working to sever or dismantle them. We hope that by orienting our aspirations to studying with and towards decolonial presents through an ethos of a 'politics without guarantee', we might be prevented from becoming too comfortable in the grounds upon which (our) authority (as teachers and settlers) has been granted. Advocating for the abandonment of guarantees – even as we govern ourselves through them (i.e., through the power of teaching *evaluations* to ensure "quality of teaching" which of course means one should use teaching tactics that *do* guarantee)– might throw into relief the ways we produce ourselves as governable subjects within the neoliberal academy, might throw into relief ways in which the 'ordinariness of settlement' is made and remade even in attempts at resistance, and might open paths towards the not yet here.

We warn that such a politics introduces risks, including a deep uncertainty, and challenges to established hierarchies of knowledge, and that such introductions, in the context of neoliberal postsecondary education look and often feel like failures – both our own and institutional. In a context where "truths" have been historically taught, or more accurately, have been made to be memorized, the introduction of uncertainty – studying with, without guarantees - is/feels akin to failure. Nonetheless we think it might be a key component of anticolonial pedagogies. We see such a politics as slowly fostering environments less subject to colonial control and colonial ordering within our pedagogy, and we see this as among the necessary preconditions to any kind of realization of less colonial learning places.

As a final note, we want to add that at the conclusion of the courses in which Pulling the Weeds was assigned we asked students to share their reflections on the assignment. Some students articulated a kind of transformative learning that occurred from this assignment, suggesting that we delivered in fulfilling our university's institutional motto, "Fiat Lux" (Let there be Light). This adage speaks precisely to *the good* assumed embedded in the infrastructure of our, and perhaps all universities' beginnings and unending expansions. The relationship between the University's institutional motto and a larger discourse in which *light* and *dark* circulate with definite, unequal, racialized, and polarized meanings, is both easy to ignore and blatantly specific. But it is the case that in general, "we"— those of us who work to maintain and support postsecondary education in its current form – have agreed: who would turn away from light and the knowledge it is supposed to endow? Yet this motto imparts a specific ontology and epistemology that are not necessarily tied to a generalized or universal good. And it is precisely the teleology of European enlightenment promised by this binary that we argue needs to be troubled and undone in an "unsettling" pedagogy. So although student responses to the assignment were largely very positive, specifically as an exercise in enlightenment and an opportunity for students to come to know in a transformative way, it is precisely this framing that suggests that this was not an assignment unfettered from the logic which gave it rise in the first place. The freedom seemingly granted through "higher" education, our classrooms, and the work students do there, is a constraint, a mode of ordering through the deployment of power in neoliberal institutions, and we are not equally subject to, or the subjects of that power. There are invariably limits on what we can do in the classroom that are posed precisely by the neoliberalism that characterizes postsecondary education in North America and Europe; as Harney & Moten (2013) describe, even calling a class into order limits our capacities to "study". For these reasons, we seek to understand the varied effects of our

experiment in teaching and to consider how we might work towards an anti-colonial mode of teaching -- what we see as a strategy of refusing the colonial ordering -- from within a neoliberal institution grounded (or ordered) firmly within colonial ontology and epistemology.

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