Decolonial Geographies

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> If I am against colonialism in particular, then I must also be against colonialism in general. (Maracle 1996:123)

> I am struggling to find the language for this work, find the form for this work. Language and form fracture more everyday. (Sharpe 2016:19)

Throughout our five years of collaboration, we have been building a language for decolonial geographies. Yet, as reflected through Christina Sharpe's quote above, there is an impossibility to defining this work, for there is no clearly defined structure that neatly traces and binds decolonial geographies. Harkening the words of Gloria Anzaldúa (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981), we are building this bridge as we walk; these are constellations in formation.

Part of this impossibility lies in the incompatibility of decolonial geographies with colonial knowledge projects. It is counter-intuitive to attempt to classify or systematise Indigenous, Black and other cultural knowledge systems into neat synopses. We also acknowledge that we, a cis Mushkegowuk (Cree) woman and a cis Xicana settler woman, do not have the authority to proclaim a definition of decolonial geographies that will steadily travel through time and space. We both operate within the North American context, and our theorising is rooted and routed in the places and genealogies we inhabit: Michelle from her home territory of the Mushkegowuk nation located in what is now commonly known as northern Ontario, Canada, and who has been living as an uninvited visitor on Coast Salish territories for the past decade; and Magie from the Ohlone territories now called Oakland, California, a place defined by its Blackness for the past 70 years where Black residents are currently undergoing rampant dispossession. We understand decolonial geographies to be a diverse and interconnected landscape grounded in the particularities of each place, starting with the Indigenous lands/waters/peoples from which a geography emerges, and the ways these places are simultaneously sculpted by radical traditions of resistance and liberation embodied by Black, Latinx, Asian and other racialised communities. The decolonial shapeshifts depending on the land you stand upon, including the differential decolonize desires layered into a place (Tuck and Yang 2012); this is therein the central anchor and tension of decolonial geographies that informs our thinking and praxis.

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In the following, we theorise decolonial geographies as a constellation in formation. We trace this language from Nishnaabeg scholar, activist and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's (2017) work on constellations of co-resistance, while our spatial framing stems from bringing Indigenous geographies into dialogue with the geneologies of Black geographies envisioned by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (2007). We situate decolonial geographies within embodied theories and praxes of liberation to elucidate the connective fabric of various decolonial struggles. We conclude by elaborating on constellations in formation, as embodied in the present, to envision radical spatial visions of the future.

Spatial Weavings

> Constellations exist only in the context of relationships; otherwise they are just individual stars. (L.B. Simpson 2017:215)

Drawing from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, we conceptualise decolonial geographies as constellations of co-resistance and liberation. Simpson anchors her thinking on constellations within Nishinaabeg cosmologies, and draws on Cree media maker and writer Jarrett Martineau's (2015) work on affirmative refusal, as well as Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's (2013) work on fugitivity, to reflect on how constellations of co-resistance provide a flight "out of settler colonial realities into Indigeneity" (L.B. Simpson 2017:217). Centring relationship-building across Indigenous, Black and other racialised communities, she asks Indigenous peoples who they/we should be in constellation with. In doing so, she cautions that Indigenous resurgence risks "replicating anti-Blackness without solid, reciprocal relationships with Black visionaries who are also co-creating alternatives under the lens of abolition, decolonization, and anti-capitalism" (L.B. Simpson 2017:228–229).

We understand constellations in formation as the embodied knowledge of Indigenous peoples coming into dialogue and relationship with those of Black and other dispossessed peoples. For Indigenous peoples, this includes a knowledge of the place, the lands and waters, that they have roots in and have been the caretakers of for generations (Coulthard and Simpson 2016; L.B. Simpson 2014). This includes urban space, reaffirming that these sites are part of Indigenous geographies despite relentless reframings by white proprietary logics and practices. As Simpson states, decolonial geographies must form "as place-based constellations in theory and practice", to foreground Indigenous intelligence that is generated from the ground up (L.B. Simpson 2017:231). These grounded practices remain a crucial tenant to Indigenous geographies as they are pedagogical pathways into relationalities with the human and non-human world. Embodied intelligence systems, Simpson says, make up the radical resurgence that has always existed across diverse and interconnected Indigenous landscapes.

Indigenous geographies are spatially woven in relation to those of other dispossessed peoples, and Black geographies in particular inform our theorising of decolonial geographies. McKittrick and Woods rendered the language of Black geographies, building a rich body of spatial theory that both locates the plantation economy as a central node of racial capitalism in the Americas, and

demonstrates how "the geographic knowledges that black subjects impart … inform black lives" (2007:6–7). As McKittrick articulates, "the knotted diasporic tenets of coloniality, dehumanization and resistance" structure a Black sense of place, "wherein the violence of displacement and bondage, produced within a plantation economy, extends and is given a geographic future" (2011:949). We situate the theorising of decolonial geographies, drawing from McKittrick and Woods' spatial method, from this notion that space is perceived and produced differentially. A constellation in formation thus takes the shape of multiple stars, multiple roots and routes—embodied conceptualisations of space coming into formation in pursuit of a decolonial vision.[1]

The decolonial, we contend, is an affirmative refusal of white supremacy, anti-blackness, the settler colonial state, and a racialised political economy of containment, displacement and violence (Coulthard 2014; A. Simpson 2014a; L.B. Simpson 2017). As Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson (2014a) elucidates, a politic of refusal fundamentally repudiates colonial dispossession and violence on Indigenous lands and bodies and makes up the very foundation of Indigenous nationhood. As reflected through Indigenous and Black movements for liberation throughout time and space, this refusal requires the dismantling of systems of oppression such as the racial capitalist carceral system, state militaries, white proprietary landholdings and colonial capitalist resource exploitation (Fabris 2017; Gilmore 2007; Hunt 2015; Maynard 2017; Robinson 1983). Refusal is also a comprehensive politics of resistance that is vigilant to the ways interconnected violences against racialised lands, spaces and bodies get reproduced in the most mundane and practical ways (Cowen 2017; Million 2013; A. Simpson 2016).

Refusal *is* liberation from the violent fractures of settler colonialism and white supremacist structures. Yet, liberation also builds on refusal through a resounding affirmation and embodiment of alternative relationalities. We contend that abolitionism, a liberatory praxis rooted in the Black radical tradition, needs to be understood in relation with decolonisation when weaving decolonial geographies in the Americas (Anderson and Samudzi 2018; Johnson and Lubin 2017; Kelley 2002). Fuelled by Black geographies, abolitionism is a struggle for a society free of prisons and policing; as a movement it seeks to uproot the anti-blackness inherent in the white supremacist power structure and envisions inter-relational alternatives that are premised on the affirmation of Black humanness (Davis 2003; Harney and Moten 2013). As Anderson and Samudzi state, "Black liberation poses an existential threat to white supremacy because the existence of free Black people necessitates a complete transformation and destruction of the settler state" (2018:8). Meanwhile, Indigenous movements for radical resurgence call for a comprehensive transformation of the settler colonial present guided by Indigenous political and legal orders that have been renewed throughout time and space in spite of colonial dispossession and violence. Together these movements envision a society beyond criminalisation, extraction, militarised borders and violence, by demanding and embodying structures and relationships centred on principles of restorative and transformative justice and relational accountability (Berger 2014; Kaba 2012; Loyd et al. 2012).

Drawing on the brilliance of Indigenous and Black feminist, queer and Two-Spirit theorists, we understand liberation as a refusal of heteropatriarchal violence and the surveillance and criminalisation of gender variance and intimacies in Indigenous and Black communities (Crenshaw and Ritchie 2015; Hunt 2015; Maynard 2017; Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network 2016; L.B. Simpson 2017). Although in many ways distinct, Indigenous and Black women, youth, queer, Two-Spirit and trans individuals continue to be subjected to interconnected forms of gendered colonial and anti-black violence in settler colonial contexts, thus bodily sovereignty is essential to liberation, particularly as it is a crucial site of knowledge and self-determination (Simpson and Maynard 2918). As Audra Simpson (2014b) powerfully asserts, Indigenous women's bodies *are* political orders and by their very existence, pose a threat to the settler colonial order. Along similar lines, Latinx feminism theorises how Latinx peoples imagine and create decolonial spaces from the same colonial fissures that dismember their lands and bodies (Anzaldúa 1987; Pérez 1999; Sandoval 2000). Colonialism created the fissured mestizx body, and Latinx migration across colonial borders further complicate their relationship to land and place. Latinx queer and feminist writing emphasises how the Latinx body refuses the violence of the colonial border through its embodied in-betweenness, and how decolonial possibilities emerge from the in-between or borderland space that Latinx peoples inhabit. As Alan Pelaez Lopez powerfully articulates, the X in Latinx is a visible wound that forces the Latinx diaspora to contend with the legacies of settler colonialism, anti-blackness, the femicide of cisgender and trans women, and a collective inarticulation due to colonial histories of erasure. As Pelaez Lopez (2018) explains, "the X is attempting to speak to the violences of colonization, slavery, against women and femmes, and the fact that many of us experience such an intense displacement and silence that we have no language in which to articulate who we are", encouraging Latinx peoples to envision liberatory futures that also centre Black, Indigenous and Trans peoples.

In weaving a fabric of decolonial geographies in the North American context, it is necessary to consider these multiple geographies of Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples in relation to one another to illuminate the interconnected struggles for land and space, and how these become foundational sites for self-determination and freedom. In the following we consider how the interconnected terrain of decolonial geographies is embodied as constellations in formation.

Constellations in Formation

In the wake of the Trump administration's anti-Muslim travel ban, Indigenous activists such as Melanie Yazzie (Dine) and Nick Estes (Kul Wicasa, Lower Brule Sioux Tribe) embodied powerful assertions of Indigenous jurisdiction at the LAX airport by demanding "no bans on stolen lands" (Monkman 2017). Led by the Tongva people, the original and lawful caretakers of this area, they proceeded to carry out welcoming ceremonies for a number of refugee and Muslim families. In doing so, they made legible the interconnected struggles of xenophobic racism, settler colonial policing of borders, and the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous

lands and bodies. Indigenous presence was crucial as anti-Muslim protests across the country risked erasing Indigenous authority. As Estes stated:

> [i]t means that the United States, as a settler nation, does not have the final say on who or what comes into the country because it's not theirs to own … When we do that as Indigenous people, it's reclaiming our sovereignty, our citizenship, and more importantly our kinship. (Quoted in Monkman 2017)

Holding welcoming ceremonies at LAX airport, Indigenous activists forged constellations of co-resistance through an ethic of relational accountability to their lands and peoples. This ethic is a mutual one in which Indigenous peoples are urged to practice what some scholars such as Glen Coulthard (Dene) (2017) have called "radical hospitality". In this way, the neoliberal economic logics of the settler colonial border and what Iyko Day (2016:172) calls the "contradictory promise of settler colonial hospitality" are refused. Radical hospitality compels Indigenous peoples to welcome other dispossessed peoples into their/our homelands, according to their/our own laws, as they become displaced through the violence of racial capitalism. However, as South Asian activist and writer Harsha Walia (2012) argues, racially displaced migrants' struggle for justice must also be in solidarity with Indigenous resistance against settler colonialism, and embody a thorough and comprehensive accountability to place and its people.

As Coulthard (2017) reminds us, these constellations, like the ancestral knowledges and political traditions that they are based on, are nothing new. Through tracing the global anti-imperialist dialogue that emerged between Black and Red political thought in the 1960s and 1970s, he elucidates the spatio-temporality of radical critiques of colonialism and visions of liberation that have co-emerged across Indigenous and Black geographies. Recent dialogues on Cedric Robinson's theory of racial capitalism build on these understandings by not only tracing the global and interconnected terrain of radical thought and resistance across transatlantic Black geographies (Kelley 2017), but by, crucially, reasserting the African continent as Indigenous space.

Constellations are in formation all around us, re-envisioning and re-embodying a politics of place by interweaving spatial practices of resistance, refusal and liberation. These historical and always emerging relationships across decolonial struggles transcend colonial boundaries by disclosing the interconnected terrain of racial capitalism, colonialism and white supremacy from one space to the next. More than this, through the spatial concept of constellations, differentially situated peoples are renewing and creating futures that have always been present in their/our own communities. These spatial formations of resistance and creation draw from the histories and geographies of Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples to re-root and re-route toward more accountable relations. And this what we see as the heart of decolonial geographies: that these stars form constellations to guide us toward decolonial futures.

Endnote

[1] Our intention is not to foreclose the expansiveness, mobility and complexity of Indigenous geographies, nor the embodied land-based knowledge of Black and other racialised

peoples. Rather, our aim is to centre the spatial weavings of decolonial geographies as they take form on stolen and occupied Indigenous lands and waters.

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