

# Dismantling Historical Hardscapes: Unsettling Inclusion as Solidarity

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We have been invited into a conversation about how history can become a welcoming home to many who have found ourselves erased and eradicated throughout history, from written histories, and from historical disciplines. Our work leverages our respective embodied connections to communities historically targeted for erasure. Here, instead, we share our emergent engagement with ongoing violence that predicates homemaking of any kind on stolen land. We begin where Tuck and Yang’s oft-quoted article ends: operating instructions for settlers seeking to unsettle.

Our goal in this essay is to remind readers what is unsettling about decolonization—what is unsettling and what should be unsettling. Clearly, we are advocates for the analysis of settler colonialism [...] and we position the work of Indigenous thinkers as central [...]. We, at least in part, want others to join us in these efforts, so that settler colonial structuring and Indigenous critiques of that structuring are no longer rendered invisible. Yet, this joining cannot be too easy, too open, too settled. Solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict.<sup>1</sup>

To paraphrase: Get uncomfortable. Stay uncomfortable. Learn. Lay bare. Be uncomfortable. Bear witness. Do not “help” those whom we have harmed. Acknowledge genocide. Make reparations. Perpetually and painstakingly recognize and dismantle our structures and practices that continue to harm. Work hard with those leading decolonization efforts. Resist all seductions of saviorism. We are not the Hero of this story. Nor of our histories. This is not a happily-ever-after story. Not in our lifetimes. We must divest from hope as foreclosure.

Tuck and Yang’s call is not for settlers to lead the revolution. It is for solidarity. In recognition of that call, some scholars and institutions have rigidified certain practices of acknowledgement and inclusion into structures that are founded upon the opposite. The defining feature of a solid is its substance: neither hollow nor empty. So, too, our solidarity must be substantive: not the work of

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including within colonial structures but of dismantling, of laying bare. We cannot solidify our good intentions without substantive indigenous-led, anti-colonial action. If our work of laying bare is not perpetual, what was solid is likely to turn rigid. If our work of acknowledgement is not present and alive, our acknowledgements become procedural rather than substantive: a means to an end (to end the need for transformation, a means to secure settler futurity). If our work of witness and dismantling is not painstaking—that is, uncomfortable, unsettling, conflicting—it is likely to become hollow. Certainly, we cannot do this work with any hope that our jobs, our institutions, our scholarship, our disciplinary attachments, or our ideas of knowledge will remain recognizable in the process.

As researchers working from lived alterity, our credibility for speaking to h/History<sup>2</sup> is often undermined. We have been thinking about history, intensively, collectively, and individually, for twenty-four years. Nathan's research and creative work in trauma, speculative nonfiction, and somatic and literary automythography has them thinking about lineage, inheritance, and what compounds in bodies through ongoing and accumulated disregard across generations. Danielle's genealogical research into paralimpism, disability movement cultures, and White spectacles of tolerance mobilizes historical archives toward questions of emergence.

Through our shared work in axiology, methodology, supporting survival, and mutual flourishing, we question who and what come to be materialized as real and as really mattering, through what processes, and with what opportunities for strategic interruption and rupture. We consider historical record(s) as means to contextualize present-day affect and effects and to consider what our present actions, inactions, and intentions could mean toward shared future(s).<sup>3</sup> We treat memory as the past tense of intention and presume memory, intention, and records as creative and political acts. History is a multiplicity of shared and unshared experience as well as aggregated technologies of cohesion deployed toward and/or against particular consolidations of power. In the settler-colonial context, it is useful to consider the literality of historical record (for its admissions and omissions), a record of whom and what settler-trespassers have taken and have taken advantage of and from, and how this relates to what we continue to take for granted.

One of our most uncomfortable, formative learnings about *doing* history came through a genealogical project. The work was sparked by contradictions in Canada's celebratory relationship to (athletic) disability (e.g., Terry Fox) and its concomitant legacy of disability eradication through perpetual eugenic institutionalizations, sterilizations, and immigration bans. It started with tracing changing discourses and technologies of disability in Canada, engaging with intersectional theorizing "where relevant." We are horrified that it took over a year (and many conversations) to learn that the original question and methodology were not only genealogically naïve but also a classic White supremacist project of inclusion. Disability is not a subject of study wherein intersectional analysis begins only where racialized bodies are specifically mentioned. Whiteness cannot be taken for granted, rendered natural, rendered neutral, nor ignored as a technology of the eugenic histories and present we occupy.

The project shifted from a history about how Canada differentially produced and governed disabled people through technologies such as sport. Instead, it focused on how technologies and discourses of (athletic) disability have been used

to produce, govern, and legitimize the Canadian nation: how they obscure and justify our ongoing White supremacist, settler-colonial, ableist, and eugenicist violence and the resulting mistreatment of so many—including and beyond those who identify as disabled. Inspirational athletic disability has been mobilized as a colonial and White supremacist call to innocence, a spectacle of tolerance, and a form of virtue signaling. The project taught us a lot about historical inquiry, about White complicity, and about how technologies of inclusion can serve more to conceal, justify, and reproduce violent structures than to support those being targeted for (incremental) inclusion.

As we learned from a collaboration of Indigenous, racialized, and disabled scholars,<sup>4</sup> Tuck and Yang's most famous quote warns precisely against such cooptation through incremental inclusion in favor of transformative and revolutionary approaches:

Decolonization offers a different perspective to human and civil rights based approaches to justice, an unsettling one, rather than a complementary one. Decolonization is not an "and." It is an elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

Unsettling is unsettling, precisely because justice-oriented transformation may well be incompatible with our legacies and the models of inclusion that fit too comfortably within the very cultures and histories that enact(ed) the genocidal and eugenic erasures.

The title to Tuck and Yang's essay, "decolonization is not a metaphor" is one of the most quoted, and least heeded, lessons by trespasser scholars. The authors address this as a motivating force for the article itself:

There is a long and bumbled history of non-Indigenous peoples making moves to alleviate the impacts of colonization. The too-easy adoption of decolonizing discourse (making decolonization a metaphor) is just one part of that history and it taps into pre-existing tropes that get in the way of more meaningful potential alliances.<sup>6</sup>

The metaphors we use matter. It strikes us how many of our academic metaphors relate to land and its settlement: pioneering and exploring new frontiers in research, fields defined by their foundations. Colonial (re)capture of land is so integral to White culture, it permeates both our material and linguistic practice: and importantly, the practices through which language materializes and is deployed.

Adams calls for sport historians to "interrogate the conventions of the field as well as its ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations."<sup>7</sup> Philosophical foundations: a phrase we have both used many times and never again after today. Because in this same editorial, Adams cites Abenaki scholar Christine O'Bonsawin, who offers a profound intervention we intend to undertake (in) ourselves. O'Bonsawin states, "The academy has not been a safe haven for Indigenous bodies, nor the epistemologies, methodologies, and practices *we bring into such places*"<sup>8</sup> (emphasis added). What might be enabled in our dialogues and actions across and within existing power relations if we followed O'Bonsawin in reconceptualizing paradigmatic attachments as carried with(in) us, not hardscapes into the places we have claimed through our knowledge claims? What might be enabled if we were to stop claiming anything at all?

It is telling, as settler–trespassers, that we metaphorize our guiding beliefs as rigid, ideally impermeable and unmoving, concrete structures dug deep into clearcut earth: taking up space in the field regardless of who occupies (and we do not use this word lightly) the space in years to come. What if we took O’Bonsawin’s articulation not as an ask for “Us” to make space, to build a larger structure, to claim more land, to add an extension to our concrete foundations that could accommodate, annex, and domesticate “Them” but as a transformational call to lay bare and dismantle our settler foundations? A call for every one of us to paradigmatically pack out what we pack in, to treat these sets of beliefs less as static places we live and more as animate, relational, and responsive ways of living (together).

## Notes

1. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 3.
2. h/History is an attempt to acknowledge the distinctions between historical event, historical record, and what is captured, promoted, valued, and deployed by History as a discipline.
3. See Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Essential Foucault: Selections From Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984* [Selections], eds. Michel Foucault, Paul Rabinow, and Nikolas S. Rose (New York: New Press, 2003), 351–369.
4. Tricia McGuire-Adams, Janelle Joseph, Danielle Peers, Lindsay Eales, William Bridel, Chen Chen, Evelyn Hamdon, and Bethan Kingsley, “Awakening to Elsewheres: Collective Restorying Embodied Experiences of (Be)longing,” *Sociology of Sport Journal*, Advance online publication (2022). Accessed August 1, 2022. <https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/ssj/aop/article-10.1123-ssj.2021-0124/article-10.1123-ssj.2021-0124.xml>
5. Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” 36.
6. *Ibid.*, 3.
7. Carly Adams, “‘Home’ to Some, But Not to Others: It’s Time to ‘Step Up,’” *Sport History Review* 53, no. 1 (2022): 2.
8. Christine O’Bonsawin, “‘Ready to Step Up and Hold the Front Line’: Transitioning from Sport History to Indigenous Studies, and Back Again,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 34, no. 5–6 (2017): 422.