



Ecologies of De/colonization: Embodied Caribbean Diasporic Perspectives

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ABSTRACT *In this photo essay, we take readers through ecologies of de/colonization that we engage with in our creative methodology of walking and talking. As academics called upon to do equity, diversity and decolonization work in colonial institutions, we reflect on our location in ləkʷəḡən and W̱SÁNEĆ lands (“Victoria, BC, Canada”) and the circuits that extend to the Caribbean archipelago of our origins and families (Borikén/Puerto Rico and Jamaica). We take up the tasks of collectively reflecting on how to care for our communities and for each other in an interconnected world amidst socio-ecological crisis. Our method that emerged during the pandemic is specific to our embodiments “here” as settlers of Caribbean roots whose family histories “there” include both complicity with and domination by colonization, trans-Atlantic enslavement, and forced migration. We are attempting to learn, as we hold the messiness of institutions who want straightforward paths to remediate racism, colonization, and the like. Our walking and talking follow a meandering and re-visiting process prompted by our institutional contexts and circumstances, and also by serendipity, surprise and beauty offered through non-human elements on our walks. The photos evidence these moments and the connections to “here-there” in ecologies of de/colonization. We invite readers on our circuitous paths that involve deconstructing, and building or affirming, noticing, following literal paths and those in scholarly-activist circles. In the creative process of drawing relations of the here-there, and attending to serendipity, ancestral spirit, and more-than-human agency, we witness and imagine worlds otherwise (King et al., 2020). These circuitous roots and routes offer possibilities of reckoning, repairing and re-worlding.*

KEYWORDS coalitional decolonization; ecology; walking methodologies; critical university studies; Caribbean diaspora

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Embarking Together

In this photo essay, we take readers through ecologies of de/colonization that we engage with in our creative methodology of walking and talking. Beginning with our location in Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ lands (“Victoria, B.C., Canada”) and extending to the Caribbean archipelago of our origins and families (Borikén/Puerto Rico and Jamaica), we take up the tasks of caring for each other and collectively reflecting on how to care for our communities and for an interconnected world in a seemingly constant socio-ecological crisis. To make explicit our intention in this piece, we do not wish to (re)colonize the space by suggesting any kind of universality in these relational encounters. The process that emerged is specific to our embodiments here as settlers of Caribbean roots whose family histories include both complicity with and domination by colonization, transatlantic enslavement, and forced migration. By naming ourselves as “settlers of Caribbean roots” in structured systems, we are thinking with Beenash Jafri (2012) on the move from privilege (which she has noted is unevenly distributed to settlers of different “stripes”) to the notion of complicity. Complicity generatively orients action towards dismantling colonial systems rather than to static notions of identity (Jafri, 2012). Rather than imposing upon local protocols and ways of walking on the land from time immemorial (Bryce, 2010, 2020), we offer an invitation for those similarly positioned, grappling with similar complexities. We are attempting to learn from our positions and to hold the messiness of institutions that want straightforward paths to remediate racism, colonization, inequities, gender-based violence, and the like. Our walking and talking follows a meandering and revisiting process that is anything but linear, so the attempt to capture it in this linear document has left us unsettled in generative ways. As mentioned below, prompted by the photos taken, we drop pebbles (or threads) that we pick up in subsequent photo prompts and thematic writing. In this way, we invite the reader on our circuitous paths in deconstructing, building, affirming, noticing, and following literal paths and those in scholarly-activist circles (sometimes going down rabbit holes) that have been purposely blocked off in our colonial education-to-date. In the creative process of drawing relations to the here-there, we attend to serendipity, ancestral spirit, and more-than-human agency to witness and imagine worlds otherwise (King et al., 2020).

Serendipitously, we found each other 10 years ago as fellows at a research centre within the privileges of Global North academia while finishing our doctoral degrees. The day we met foretold the practices that would, in part, inform our methodology: a rare lightning bolt struck a tree outside Astrid’s office – an office that we later shared. In our subsequent walks together, we talked about how this force of lightning and tree attuned us to the larger-than-human forces on ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ lands.



Figure 1.

This photo (Figure 1) shows the remaining stump of the tree – a seemingly mundane marker of an episodic event that remains as a structure and is involved in ongoing social-ecological processes in and outside of this research centre in a university built upon a dispossessed land-based community. In naming this tree a marker of structure and process, we are mobilizing the well-known formulation of “colonization as a structure, not an event” (Kauanui,

2016; Wolfe, 2006) with the additional understanding that the structure is also involved in ongoing *processes* (Dhamoon, 2015). This tree, we believe, is JSA,IEĆ in the SENĆOFEN language (SENĆOFEN Word List, n.d.) and is used by Indigenous people in building structures, fishing hooks, handles, and for ceremony. It is also known colonially as a Douglas Fir, after David Douglas, a Scottish botanist who travelled the Pacific Northwest in the 1820s-1830s (Tyrwhitt-Drake, 2003). Like his contemporaries, Douglas extracted trees for British botanical and industrial timber interests. The presence of the tree here in its complex political-environmental ecologies, reminds us that while colonization is a structure and process, *so too is decolonization a structure and process* built upon land-based relations that continue in the present. Without romanticizing the violence of colonial extraction that led this tree to be taken across the globe – as commercial timber, seed, and as knowledge about the tree as a natural resource – we note the complexity of the roots and routes of its movements. As we revisit this tree and its seemingly mundane presence anew, we wonder how it is involved in complex transnational conversations. *What other mundane events, structures, and processes may be made present or absent through walking and witnessing the complex ecologies of de/colonization?*

Because doctoral studies are not mundane in our families (in the sense of expected or the norm) we were keenly aware of the privilege of time and space, as well as sacrifice of self and family, that afforded prolonged study. At the research centre where we met, we were grateful to be nurtured to finish the grind of doctoral work, but we were also ambivalently marked, othered, and disciplined in university spaces and sometimes conflated with and mis-addressed as each other's name despite our clear differences – reminders of the operative norm of white, colonial Eurocentrism.

From our current pre-tenure faculty positions in different institutions, we note the privilege of and joy at our arrival (at an older age) out of precarity. However, we also witness the ongoing and ambivalent ways that we and other minoritized people are hailed to do specific work that interferes with our health and accountability to communities with which we aspire to work. With this complexity in mind, we regularly return to a set of questions that animates our weekly process:

- What does it mean to be positioned in this context (white, colonial Academia on unceded land), in which we must nurture land connections and solidarities to decolonize in a place where the state (Canada) and our legal citizenship are also actively colonial?
- How do we do justice to the responsibilities of being connected with the here (ləkʷəŋən and WŚÁNEĆ land in “Canada”) and there (the Caribbean and beyond) in nuanced and complex ways?
- How do we remain open and attuned to the generative energies of more-than-human agents as we walk, talk, and listen?

We note that as we were processing these questions, Billie Allan and Rhonda Hackett were tackling similar questions in a book called *Decolonizing Equity* (2022). This book resists institutionalized boundaries drawn between work perceived as equity work and work perceived as decolonizing work. It does so without simply conflating equity and decolonizing, but by drawing into conversation shared histories, concerns and coalitional possibilities. In our own work, our paths reveal no easy answers, but we humbly share this methodology noting the shared movement happening in different ways and registers. Indeed, the evocative call of this collection and the plurality of responses demonstrate the coalitional impulse behind sharing a load that can happen even on a micro level between friends and colleagues while walking and talking.

In addition, even as we attempt to name as methodology that which has simply been our way of relating to each other and responding to the contexts we are in, we are aware that translating relating to methodology flattens the complex ways we engage in what Stuart Hall (2020) has called “conjunctures” that contain “histories of the present” (p. 9). Our role as mothers and teachers of generations of students orients us to multiple intersecting social and ecological crises of our time.

Deep Histories of Walking and Recent Scholarly Interest

Although we came to the practice by intuiting what our bodies and spirits needed through connecting with the histories of our communities, we recognize multiple walking practices that have long existed in Indigenous contexts. In these lands, Anita has benefitted from the teaching of Cheryl Bryce’s (ləkʷəŋən) “Colonial Realities” bus tour of Victoria, B.C. While the bus travelled the necessary ground over four to five hours so that settlers can unsettle normalized colonial imaginaries and built environments, Bryce (2010, 2020) gave a good sense of how much walking is implicated in taking care with the relations that sustain life. In a walk and talk, Bryce (2020) urged people to “remember the land you’re walking on has a deep history that goes beyond what you’re seeing now” (21:59). In another context on Turtle Island, Dwayne Donald (2021) (nêhiyaw Cree) has insisted on “walking as a life practice that has the potential to enable relational renewal” (p. 52). Similarly, Somerville et al. (2019) followed the practices of songline walking among the Darug people in Australia:

A songline is a walking trail that links story events in the path that the creation ancestors followed as they lived out their daily lives: walking through country, collecting food, living out the events that are marked forever in the landscape. (p. 15)

As we are not Indigenous to the lands we are walking, we respect those essential land-based practices as sovereign and distinct from our ways of

walking, even as we honour the teachings that have been shared with us as a call to learn and *do* more.

In scholarly sites, walking has garnered increasing attention. Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman (2018) have created a Walking Lab that “draw[s] on feminist-queer, anti-racist, anti-ableist, and anti-colonial thought and practice to question who gets to walk where, how we walk, under whose terms, and what kind of publics we can make” (WalkingLab, n.d., para. 1). We share such questions and commitments but come to the practice slightly differently. Our emplacement in university contexts and in Lək^wəŋən and WŚÁNEĆ lands as settlers of Caribbean roots infuse our particular needs-based practice from which our walking and talking has arisen. We also acknowledge that we each walk and talk with friends and colleagues in ways that inform our nascent learning in this land and other sites of Turtle Island (Sy, 2016).

As we gradually walk toward knowledges and practices that have been erased or dismissed as folkloric or parochial in our formal education, we are also learning about Caribbean practices of rerouting through movement. Caribbean poet-scholar Kei Millar (2014), for example, has consulted with “trees and blue fences and whatever else might prove a landmark” to “imagine the widening of the unfamiliar and also the widening ache of it” (p. 16). Millar (2014) has asked the question “How did we find ourselves here?” (p. 16) as a quest to recover what has been lost or wrongly mapped. We recognize the power of grounded cultural practices like the “bomba” dance from Puerto Rico – originally created by African people facing the daily burdens of slavery – as another instance of rerouting through movement that enables collective political expression while connecting with ancestry and land through drums. Our walking and talking practice involves all of our senses in enriching ways, beyond the mind, while we actively question and deconstruct the history of the present. Feeling the flow of energy through our body’s movement and being open to serendipity, the presence of non-humans, and de/colonial markers in our surroundings, we share self-reflexively, affirming each other’s embodied experiences, open to conversational directions awakened in movement.

Knowing that we are not alone in these conundrums, we invite you to join us on a walk that is both literal and metaphorical, recognizing that mobility is an unevenly felt way of moving (thinking of global mobilities and literal mobility in terms of walking). When Anita broke her ankle, our walking was suspended for a time, which permitted critical reflection on how walking can sometimes frame ableist capacities. But with disability scholar-activist Sunaura Taylor, we affirm expansive framings of walking, including those facilitated through assistive technologies emphasizing interdependence as a shared (more-than-) human condition (Taylor & Butler, 2008). We also know that our pandemic practice of walking was not possible to many throughout the globe who were locked down in small quarters. In these contexts, we do not take walking and talking for granted or romanticize these acts. In our practice, we sometimes paused to take photos in key moments in which serendipity provoked specific turns in our conversations, or where more-than-human

surroundings seemed to affirm our words or generatively interrupt us. We were witness to both breathtaking beauty and destruction on these lands. We present some of these photos and vignettes here to animate this essay, noting how the multiplicity of stories and conversations behind each cannot be fully expressed. In this way, the reader may feel with us the emergent quality of our nascent learning.

Walking and Talking Methodology

For almost three years, we engaged in weekly walking and talking about our work, lives, and communities beyond our institutions. Within the context of our universities, which have made important institutional commitments to anti-racist and anti-oppressive approaches to education, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015), we have found ourselves in high demand to lead work towards decolonization, and equity, diversity and inclusion – work often foreshortened and corporatized through acronyms (EDI, DEI, JEDI, EDID, etc.). Although some initiatives permit small strategic shifts on overlapping issues, we also witnessed how the conflation of decolonization and equity can reproduce tensions inherent in such terms. The walking and talking practice thus started with what became a repetitive cycle of offloading what felt uneasy about our experiences with this work. It involved expressing ourselves openly and witnessing each other as we tried to make sense of the experience. This cycle of offloading, expressing, witnessing, and making sense became a necessary part of clearing our minds and hearts from deeply embodied experiences as we sought to create space for creative acts and transformative ideas; notably, many ideas seemed new but were actually longstanding practices in wider communities, even in scholar-activist communities that have been straddling worlds (Lugones, 1987; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2021). Some of our meanderings led us to the work of seeking out, remembering, and affirming that which has been marginalized, while simultaneously caring for each other and our communities.

As people who are taken to represent diversity, institutional work for us is personal and emotional, taking its toll on bodies, spirits, and minds. For example, one of us was asked to lead the work on decolonization in her unit, without using words deemed negative and antagonistic, such as “whiteness,” “racialized,” and “anti-racist.” While the discussion that led to this topic was intended to be part of an open and frank conversation amongst colleagues, it marked a moment of clarity that the work ahead would be difficult if the language inherent to decolonization, equity, diversity, and inclusion was so uncomfortable as to be inadmissible. As non-tenured faculty members who know that discomfort is a part of learning, we often find ourselves in politically sensitive positions that feel risky.

To move through and against this structure, our creative weekly process throughout the pandemic entailed clearing through the messiness of engaging

in transformative practices in the academy (Ahmed, 2012), while recognizing and giving weight to larger events and structures embedded in our worlds and families.



Figure 2. (photo credit: Glorisel Pérez Piñán)

The cycle of clearing, metaphorically represented by this image of a washing machine (Figure 2), allowed us to retrieve the fabric of our work in a new light. In using this photo as a metaphor for this work, we acknowledge the gendered aspect of the work implied. This is relevant in the context of our institutions that echo wider societal norms of gendered work of cleaning and care. Gendered labour burdens, especially of service, are everywhere present in higher education (Jang et al., 2021; Rodriguez, 2023; Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group, 2017). We also note, as Boricua and Jamaican/Afro-descended people, the racialized economies heaped upon gender to structure divisions of labour, such as “mammy,” “nanny,” and “house-cleaner,” which become the tropes of our embodied experiences in universities (Thompson, 2019). For example, Anita often bears the burden of

taking on mammy work in relation to Black history month and remediating anti-Black racism in institutions with few commitments to presencing Black communities and knowledge (Girvan, 2021). These calls to absorb the messiness of anti-Black racism in universities demonstrate the ways that our bodies are often expected to be sites of laundering toward a more virtuous institution. The work of reckoning and repairing is highly asymmetrical and disproportionately assigned to those whom such repair is meant to support but ends up burdening (Dhamoon, 2020). We have thus paradoxically engaged in multiple levels of clearing: (a) in attempts to diplomatically engage with the university while watching our tongues and filtering to make feedback palatable; and (b) in clearing through honestly with each other while moving to release tension during our walking and talking.

Ecologies of (De)colonization: Entanglements

We deeply feel physical and socio-political ecologies of colonization within and outside of university spaces, noting that we are paradoxically complicit with these ecologies even as we attempt to resist them. For example, as we walk in our neighbourhoods, we recognize that we are complicit with Euro-Western colonial logics of “property” through co-ownership (with banks) of a home in these lands. Given this complicity, as one small step we participate in emerging initiatives like Reciprocity Trusts, which offers homeowners the possibility of voluntarily contributing funds to 10 nations in Southern Vancouver Island. This contribution is one small step that we do not take as a dispensation with guilt but rather as a messy initiative that gestures toward accounting for material wealth based on dispossession that continues to flow disproportionately toward settlers and colonial structures.

We recognize that colonization and decolonization are overused words and, thus, often underwhelm in terms of their transformational potential. We take seriously Tuck and Yang’s (2012) insistence that decolonization is not a metaphor; yet, we also see metaphor as an important and material world-making practice (Aikau, 2023; Girvan, 2018). The knowledges and practices embedded in metaphor are important sites to affirm land-based reclamations. We witness the move initiated in communities and adopted in some universities to restore first languages to signs. This move generatively unsettles those for whom land has felt an entitlement. Where we walk in *ləkʷəŋən* territories, the “The Signs of *Ləkʷəŋən*” names a project of reclamation of culturally significant places by master carver Butch Dick and his son Clarence Dick Jr.¹ Similarly, the longstanding practice of recognizing the Taino name Borikén with (and sometimes in place of) Puerto Rico dismantles convenient colonial stories of extinction.

¹ “The Signs of *Ləkʷəŋən*” may be found at <https://www.songheesnation.ca/community/l-k-ng-n-traditional-territory>

We see ecologies as sets of relations and processes at multiple scales across human and non-human bodies and beings. We mark the entanglements through the word *de/colonization* since both colonizing and decolonizing are ongoing since contact. We take up the task of noticing these entanglements and trying to loosen the grip of colonial ecologies within ourselves, in the English ivy-choked *KEKEILĀ* (*SENĆOFEN* Word List, n.d.) arbutus tree here (Figure 3) and there.



Figure 3.

Although we have participated in pulls of invasive species like English ivy, we also note with Hōkūlani Aikau (2023) that the metaphor of “invasive species” is problematically based upon two faulty premises: first, that all “non-native plants and animals are invasive by their nature and must be removed. This idea relies upon notions of purity and authenticity that serve white supremacy and the eliminatory logics of settler colonialism” (p. 56); second, that decolonization insists “all things non-native must be removed before restoration can take place. Both assumptions rely upon binary racial and gendered discourses about natives and settlers, tradition and modernity that undermine Indigenous resurgence” (p. 56). We see in Aikau’s (2023) literal and metaphorical engagement with conservation practices around invasive species an invitation to think and act within complexities and entanglements that can never be completely purified, but that nonetheless compel a loosening of the grip of colonial agents, which Aikau (2023) has suggested makes space so that “natives” can grow.

The photo above demonstrates the tight grip of the ivy on the tree; yet, there is a way to loosen this grip. After English ivy is pulled, it inevitably returns along with the need to continually pull. Cheryl Bryce (2020) has invited all people in *lākʷəŋən* spaces to pull ivy, scotch broom, gorse, and invasive

blackberries. These colonizing plants (and humans) have strong roots but, as Bryce (2020) has demonstrated with the land at *Meegan* (“a place to warm your belly”) in which *kwetlal* food systems are tended, so too do Indigenous plants and communities have strong roots that extend deeper in time. The grounding memory among kin relations exerts a strong pull toward resurgent energies and against capitalist extraction (Coulthard, 2014; Watts, 2013).

While the above photo (Figure 3) suggests a tight and negative colonial grip, we also wish, with John Borrows (2017), to mark the complexities of entanglements as potentially enriching:

To be alive is to be entangled – with a past and in the present ... In common parlance, entanglement sounds like a bad thing – as if we are caught, bound, constrained, tied up, and in need of liberation. Yet, in the real world, entanglement with other human beings can enhance our lives. Thus, I do not want to suggest that entanglement is always and entirely problematic. Most of what we enjoy in life flows from other people’s labour, received through our entanglement with people long dead or living people whom we will never meet ... Our received conditions can augment our growth and broaden our horizons through mutual aid and participatory structures. (pp. viii-ix)

One example of mutual aid and participatory structures affirming sovereignty has recently occurred here in W̱SÁNEĆ land (W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council, 2021). While recently Halibut Island was a private settler-owned place, a joint agreement between The Land Conservancy and the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council has returned SISØENEM – an island of cultural and ecological importance – to the W̱SÁNEĆ people. Chief Don Tom of the Tsartlip First Nation has asserted, “The phrase ‘Land Back’ is no longer a euphemism. It’s finally a reality” (W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council, 2021, p 2).

As we walk and talk, we also think about highly complex de/colonial entanglements that continue in the Caribbean archipelago. As Astrid is from Borikén and has family and community there, her family have been engaging with the ongoing effects of Hurricane Maria upon the island. As a former Spanish colony and current unevenly constituted colony of the U.S. Commonwealth, Borikén has its own entangled ecologies of de/colonization. Defying colonial narratives of being too small to be independent and self-sufficient, Puerto Rican communities took into their own hands the task of cleaning up the hurricane’s devastation and taking care of themselves and their land in deep solidarity with one another, while nurturing networks of care at a time when the absence of the state was so notable. Resistance and resurgence have long been present in Borikén; this presence was amplified in the wake of hurricane Maria, inspiring community-based projects that continue to flourish today.

Meanwhile, in Jamaica and other parts of the Commonwealth, ongoing inequities that have intensified since the pandemic and the crowning of King Charles reveal the continuing impacts of imperial plantation ecologies and what Saidiya Hartman (2007) has called “the afterlife of slavery” (p. 6).

Movements toward ending the “lock” of the British monarchy in the Caribbean began in the late 20th century and continue today (Hauteville, 2023). These demonstrate the unfinished business of emancipation and liberation seeded through the processes of resistance and resurgence. Without reclaiming a pre-colonial state of purity, acts of refusal towards Empire constitute a loosening of the grip of colonization.

To think about Borikén and Jamaica as singular islands diminishes existing archipelagic connections (Martínez-San Miguel & Stephens, 2020), the entanglements of colonization, enslavement, and racial capitalism (Gilmore, 2023; Olusoga, 2018), and, importantly, resistance and resurgence that extends across this archipelago and beyond (Alexander, 2005; Lowe, 2015).

Finding Paths to Connect: Here-There

As we walk and talk about our responsibilities of being settlers of Caribbean roots here (Canada) with relations there (our shared roots in the Caribbean and beyond), we take seriously the wisdom of Elder Victor Underwood (Tsawout Nation), who has emphasized the possibility of simultaneous respect for our traditions and those of local Indigenous people (personal communication, November 12, 2019). We also take guidance from Dian Million (Tanana Athabascan), who reminds us that our ancestors have not abandoned us and that we should “listen to the land” (personal communication, March 17, 2017).

Our practice and methodology regularly return us to these lessons. The clearing work and ecologies of entanglement help us to articulate the simultaneity of “worlds here and there” that call upon a way of simultaneous being. The pull to travel between worlds leads us to Maria Lugones (1987), who has proposed that one can “have the distinct experience of being different in different ‘worlds’ and having the capacity to remember other ‘worlds’ and ourselves in them,” adding that “the shift from being one person [in one world] to being a different person” in another world is what she calls “travel” (p. 11). Shifting from one world to another, world travelling, is not new to many women of colour especially “foreign-born” women navigating academia. In their study, Loya et al. (2024) found that these women “continually performed multiple, and at times conflicting, identities as they traveled in and out of academic and non-academic worlds” (p. 1156). Yet, world-travelling in Lugones’ (1987) work should not be conflated with the extractive expectations of a globally mobile class in which the here and there are implicated in entitlements to creature comforts, where one can play anywhere in the world and feel equally at home everywhere. Indeed, the difficulty and possibility that Lugones (1987) identifies arise in the suspension from such comfort. World-travelling for Lugones (1987) entails a particular conception of *a* world rather than *the* world as a universalizing experience:

A “world” may be incomplete in that things in it may not be altogether constructed or some things may be constructed negatively (they are not what “they” are in some other “world.”) Or the “world” may be incomplete because it may have references to things that do not quite exist in it. (p. 10)

In our worlds here, a negative construction or “othering” often takes place against the backdrop of a white settler nation-state and its gaze upon many of us who do not fit into white settlerhood. Lugones (1987) names the ways that race, gender, class, and language are mobilized to assert hegemonic normalcy so that non-white others are reduced to a minoritized status, regardless of the variegations within and amongst categories like Latine, Black, etc.:

In a “world” some of the inhabitants may not understand or hold the particular construction of them that constructs them in that “world.” So, there may be “worlds” that construct me in ways that I do not even understand. Or it may be that I understand the construction, but do not hold it of myself. I may not accept it as an account of myself, a construction of myself. And yet, I may be *animating* such a construction. (p. 10; emphasis in original)

This notion of animating a construction is highly complex and often entails a lack of agency in enacting one’s authentic and multifaceted self within sets of community relations. Lugones (1987) has noted the specificities of the role of language and culture and the ways that travelling to other worlds constrains the self that is more playful in certain worlds. In our contexts, and also globally, English exerts a dominating force over lands. As we walk and talk (in mostly English because of varied colonial trajectories) on lands with rich pre-contact and enduring language traditions, Astrid shares that she misses the kind of person she can be when she is in her land: keen to be humorous, open, and expansive in expression – qualities that do not seem permissible in the Anglo-North-American academy without translation into universalizing stereotypes that devalue “the Latina woman.” While the Spanish Astrid speaks entails a colonial imposition, it also represents entangled ecologies of de/colonization in its Taino and African influences and land and water-based inflections. For example, the name of the city in which Astrid grew up, Mayagüez, is derived from the Taino word Yagüez for the clear water of the Yagüez River. In erasing such important relations, the tiring narrative of Puerto Rican Spanish as improper or unclean Spanish echoes normative judgements of creolized language throughout the Caribbean and elsewhere. Such attempts to purify the languages of Indigenous and Black enrichment (read as contamination) reflect the colonial logics of purity found in anti-miscegenation policies, the “1-drop-rule,” extinction narratives of Indigenous peoples, and the Great Replacement” theory, which asserts the nativized primacy of whiteness in places built upon Indigenous dispossession and criminalization (Stark, 2016), Black fungibility (Hartman, 1997), and other forms of racialized capital (Gilmore, 2023).

Eroding Concrete Manifestations of Colonial Capitalism

During our walks, we engaged in conversation and set intentions to listen to and connect with the Indigenous lands and ecologies surrounding us. Despite this intention, we were consistently reminded of colonization as we encountered concrete markers of property on our paths. Our walking and talking methodology thus became a political tool to notice and co-disrupt colonial norms and spaces.



Figure 4.

We noticed the presence of a plaque on a small bridge and on a bench honouring a white settler, attributed as the person who “recognized the uniqueness of the forests” and whose “visionary plan” made the preservation of the ecosystem possible (Figures 4 and 5). We wondered, why is there no mention of W̱SÁNEĆ peoples?



Figure 5.

Without diminishing the importance of memorialized lives and loving relations enshrined on modest bench plaques, we noted the ecologies of de/colonization in which such structures are entangled. The concrete and metal-embossed markers here and elsewhere, enshrined in statues and memorials throughout Turtle Island and beyond, have the effect of inscribing permanence to the presence of settlers, reminding passersby of the structures and ongoing processes of colonization. Concrete, “the highest consumed product on earth besides water” and an extreme emissions producer (Ramsden, 2020, para. 1) is a part of the infrastructure of capitalism, possessing both material and metaphorical power. As Dian Million (2023) has articulated, the “infrastructure of capitalism makes us believe in its dominance and enclosure through its seeming permanence. And more so even, through seemingly unbreakable patterns that appear to capture spirit, which is affective matter” (p. 50). We walked in many spaces where such structures were present, coinciding with pre-contact and enduring W̱SÁNEĆ and Ləḵʷəŋən presences that settler

culture is trained to un-see through processes of “settler-colonial socialization” (Nath & Allen, 2022).

On days in which we felt like connecting with water, we took the way of the coast. Moving from forested areas to the Salish Sea involved a different flow of movement and energy. Yet again, concrete markers abounded. In one place, we encountered a municipal playground located at a documented burial site for people inhabiting the ancient village called TEL ȨĆE (in SENĆOŦEN) or Ȩłíłć (in Ȩłkʷíjínəŋ). We came to hear the story of this ancient burial site while walking there with Brian Thom, an anthropologist who has been gifted knowledge collaborating with Ȩłkʷəŋəŋ and WŚÁNEĆ communities. Astonishingly, no obvious markers honoured this site, and the whole area has been impacted by a sewage pump station with public washrooms built at the interface of the land and beach in this small municipal park (Figure 6).



Figure 6.

This photo is another reminder of what settler colonialism has done to waterways, right there by a sacred site. The water plant is necessary to clean “la mierda” that humans flush into waters on a daily basis as our way of life. But how do such structures contribute to the processing and processes of ongoing colonial erasure by attempting to purge the “City of Gardens” (as Victoria is known) from the messy entanglements of de/colonization?

The topographical erasure of community and colonial overlay find echoes throughout Turtle Island. On a walk to renew relations with his territory at the site of the “Viking Ribstones” pilgrimage (Alberta), Dwayne Donald (2021) (nêhiyaw Cree) has suggested “while standing on the crest of that hill and surveying the landscape, I noticed that the *relational psychosis* that troubles Indigenous-Canadian relations was on display all around me” (p. 56; emphasis added). To reach this sacred ground to honour the “generosity of the buffalo,” Donald had to trespass on private property: “When newcomers arrived, the story of ancient kinship relationality was gradually replaced by the emerging story of a Canadian nation and nationality” (2021, p. 56).

Although the contexts and specific histories are different, the erasure of Indigenous communities in the colonial misapprehension of the “extinction” of Taino people in Borikén and Jamaica also represents a relational psychosis. While this story of extinction is conveniently neo-colonial, reckoning, repairing, and reworlding with attention to the continuing presence of the Taino community is happening and has long been a part of Caribbean relationalities (see Castanha, 2011; Feliciano-Santos, 2021; Williams, 2014).

As we walk and talk about entangled university contexts, we think about the relational psychoses that trouble the work of EDI, decolonization, and Indigenization. We, and others, are called upon to do this work within the colonial framework of neoliberalism. Neoliberal academia, with its foundational colonial logics, racialized and gendered hierarchies, and ways of mobilizing international students as racialized capital to subsidize the system, is incongruent with and antithetical to the flourishing we seek. In these contexts, we metabolize through movement and talk about how we can gradually “chip away” (Ahmed, 2017) at concrete institutional structures to build community with others.

Otherwise Connections Through Spirit, Routes, and Roots

Returning to Million’s (2023) understanding of spirit, affective matter as that which is captured in concrete structures of colonial capitalism, we are also reminded that the matter and spirit of Ləkʷiŋínəŋ and W̱SÁNEĆ life are ever-present. In the process of walking and talking, such presences in these lands stop us in our tracks to demonstrate sovereign and long-enduring relations in place and, crucially, learning and knowledges outside of universities.

In the midst of walking and talking in May, we rounded a corner to witness the stunning beauty of *kwetlal* (camas) pictured in Figure 7. Cheryl Bryce (2020) (ləkʷiŋínəŋ) has asserted the importance of *kwetlal* food systems nested within families of Garry Oak ecosystems that her family – especially women – have tended over generations. Bryce named the role of this complex carbohydrate that was traded along the coast before the arrival of the Hudson Bay Company and subsequent urbanization that destroyed 95% of cultivated *kwetlal*. She described how this root is stored (like a potato), harvested, and

used in pit cooks in the Fall (2020). Bryce also noted the role of the toxic “death camas” planted explicitly within the harvest area to prevent raiders (and current colonial extractors) from pillaging.



Figure 7.

This long-cultivated root vegetable reminds us of edible roots that connect us to the archipelago of the Caribbean. Key taste memories and ancestral spirits come from our distinct but shared experience of another root.



Figure 8.

The root we are touching in Figure 8 – called yuca, cassava, or manioc – has been a staple of the Taino people in the Caribbean and other Indigenous people in Latin America for millennia (Donop, 2014). As a drought-resistant perennial crop that matures in six to seven months and can be stored for up to two years, this root is intimately entrenched in food traditions. In Astrid’s context of Borikén, the yuca is made into multiple dishes including “pasteles” (see Figure 9), a Christmas favourite typically prepared collaboratively within family. Those of us in distant lands who have learned to make pasteles alone cherish this food as a soulful reconnection to memories of home, celebrations, comfort, and for nurturing what we playfully refer to as our “Boricuan spirit.” When Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico in 2017, unlike other crops, yuca remained available to those who cultivated it since it remained safely underground. Indeed, yuca allows Astrid to stay connected to her culture and to the goals of food sovereignty in Puerto Rico, rejecting the myth of the extinction of Taíno ancestors, especially in the context of intensified colonization post-Maria. Furthermore, it connects Astrid to transregional food sovereignty efforts in a collective project in which she is involved (Vibert et al., 2022). This project affirms the deeply interconnected food sovereignty work of Indigenous peoples, including Palestinians displaced as refugees in Jordan, Wayuu communities in Colombia, South African farmers in Limpopo, and the T’Souke Nation in Canada.



Figure 9.

In Anita's context of a childhood visit with her grandma in Jamaica, the cassava creates intergenerational connections through "bammy" – cassava cakes that her grandma made to accompany steamed or fried fish in her modest outdoor eatery. Recently, in a labour of love and remembrance, she peeled, grated, and strained cassava in cheesecloth for hours (to remove naturally occurring cyanide toxins). She then made bammy with the grated cassava on a shallow cast-iron pan (Figure 10).



Figure 10.

In following complex travels through local-global colonial traffics, we note that cassava was introduced to Africa in the 16th century by Portuguese colonizers and has become the “second most important food in the African diet” after maize, and that currently half of all globally produced cassava comes from Africa (Nweke et al., 2002, p. xvii). While it was once relegated to a food for rural people and held in reserve for famine times, cassava has become a part of daily food rituals for those in urban Ghana and Nigeria in the form of *gari*, a coarse flour made into staples like *fufu* (a starchy accompaniment for soup) (p. 3). Small family farmers in West Africa have cultivated the varietal TMS, which produces 40% higher yields without the use of fertilizer (p. xviii). As a drought-resistant crop that does not rely on rain, cassava nourishes and economically sustains people on a continent that bears the brunt of, without being responsible for, the harshest impacts of climate change. Since it has travelled the same violent transatlantic routes that brought African people to the Caribbean and Latin America, we wonder what entangled conversations yuca/cassava/manioc is having in its multiple earthly and oceanic ecologies of de/colonization.

When we interact with yuca/cassava, we are reminded that when we make and find nourishment within the food from these communities, we are engaging with a spirit and affect that animates *otherwise* relationalities. Indeed, we reflect upon the fact that as we left the research centre that brought us together, we made Caribbean food specific to each of our family and island's ecologies in celebration and in gratitude for being hosted there to finish our doctoral work. Following Lugones (1987), we know paradoxically that this demonstration partly constructed us through a world of a "multicultural" Canada that animates our presence in an exoticized and curious way (re-enter the mammy/cook trope); but, for us, this act was a strong assertion of something that grew from our practices and grounded us differently in complex local-global traffics of de/colonization and resurgent energy.

Circuitous Paths, Contingent Closures, Continuing Learning, and Acting

To return on our circuitous journey to the site of potential in relation to the lightning-struck tree, we remember that it was on the borderlands of the university that we found each other. In this process of walking and talking, we have also been searching, finding paths that others have taken within and across institutions, and we have found others who are walking with "one foot in" and "one foot out" in similar ways (Bhandar, 2017; García-Peña, 2022; hooks, 1991; Santos-Febres, 2019). Our relational practice demonstrates possibilities within and against ecologies of decolonization. This process has been crucial not only for our "sur-thrival" in sometimes hostile environments but is also refigurative of the worlds we wish to manifest in coalition with larger-than-human communities (Gumbs, 2020; Santos-Febres, 2019).

In recognizing the sovereign land-relations here, we are again inspired by Cheryl Bryce (2020) (lək^wəŋən) to "remember the land you're walking on has a deep history that goes beyond what you're seeing now" (21:59). We are continuing our learning and acting with community partners, colleagues, and friends as we work with our students to unlearn settler socialization. We plan to learn more words of languages spoken here as we continue to nurture our curiosity, understanding, and sense of responsibility towards the people and relations of these lands.

In walking with humility here – indeed even tripping on roots and breaking an ankle – in ways that destabilize sure-footedness, we are also inspired by Cherríe Moraga on the 40th anniversary of that important coalitional work, *This Bridge Called My Back*:

There are whole worlds of knowledge that we are not privy to, here and elsewhere. We are blessed if and when they still exist; for these are the teachers our grandchildren have been waiting for (perhaps unbeknownst to them) to reconstruct a liveable planet. (2021 p. xviii)

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