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Slavery is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor"

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Abstract: This essay offers a critical analysis of the metaphysical and methodological presuppositions of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor". While Tuck and Yang position settler colonial spatiality as structured by a settler-native-slave triad, we argue that their critique of metaphor entails the collapse of the triad into a settler-native dyad, the reduction of slavery to forced labour, and a division between the material and the symbolic that forecloses not only an analysis of slavery, but also the constitution of settler colonialism itself. Through an immanent critique of "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" we identify what animates their critique of metaphor, and drawing on scholarship in Black studies, we offer an alternative theorisation of slavery and settler colonialism.

Keywords: anti-Blackness, slavery, settler colonialism, decolonization, Afro-pessimism, metaphor

> What the Settler and the "Savage" share is a capacity for time and space coherence. At every scale—the soul, the body, the group, the land, and the universe—they can both practice cartography, and although at every scale their maps are radically incompatible, their respective "mapness" is never in question. This capacity for cartographic coherence is the thing itself, that which secures subjectivity for both the Settler and the "Savage" and articulates them to one another in a network of connections, transfers, and displacements. (Wilderson 2010:181)

> Geography's discursive attachment to stasis and physicality, the idea that space "just is", and that space and place are merely containers for human complexities and social relations is terribly seductive … (McKittrick 2006:xi)

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" (2012) has significantly influenced a growing body of literature on settler colonialism, intervening especially in decolonial geographies, methodologies, and pedagogies (e.g.

Antoine 2017; Patel 2014; Zaragocin 2019). The essay has been widely circulated in activist spaces, finding its way onto the #standingrocksyllabus, the reading lists of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) chapters, and classrooms and workshops across the continent. The political reception of the essay reflects its broader socio-historical context, as it has become a resource for Indigenous activists and their allies seeking reorientation following the failures of Occupy Wall Street, and it has provided nourishment for resurging Indigenous movements, such as Idle No More and NoDAPL. In and beyond the immediate context, Tuck and Yang participate in contemporary iterations of decolonial struggle that seek to redress the *longue durée* of modernity, its expression as settler colonialism, and the endlessly expanding pile of wreckage that it produces.

But the essay not only reflects a socio-historical context—it articulates a metaphysical orientation towards text *and* context. Most obviously, Tuck and Yang's titular imperative rehearses a well-known take on the structure of metaphor. When metaphor "invades decolonization" (Tuck and Yang 2012:3) the very possibility of decolonization is destroyed, as it is stolen from its literal referent and transported to the realm of semantic superabundance. Recovering and reviving what metaphor has stolen is meant to reorient the proper scope and scale of decolonial struggle. In this essay we identify how the Möbius strip between Tuck and Yang's critique of metaphor and their directive for decolonization is made real through purported similitude to another field of struggle: abolition. Their charge does not just rebuff poststructuralist misdirection, it also operationalises a synecdoche that engulfs slavery by having decolonization stand in for the totality of struggle. Across their collaborative publications, their work simultaneously invokes and subsumes Black studies scholars such as Saidiya Hartman, Hortense Spillers, Sylvia Wynter, Audre Lorde, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, Fred Moten, Frank B. Wilderson III, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Katherine McKittrick, Thomas Shapiro, and the Black/Land Project (see Morrill et al. 2016; Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández 2013; Tuck et al. 2014a, 2014c; Tuck and Yang 2014, 2016). Through epigraphs and secondary asides that mobilise this work on anti-Blackness, Tuck and Yang gesture towards what elsewhere is referred to as a "tangled" (Tuck et al. 2014a:6) relationship between slavery and their paradigmatic analysis of settler colonialism. This relationship is most often expressed by way of a "settler-native-slave" triad, a model whose reliance on difference-in-unity nonetheless collapses difference under a presumptive totality. On the one hand, anti-Blackness is employed as a structure *alongside* settler colonialism, each identified through distinct logics. Each vertex of the triad appears to have equal influence. The dynamic shifts, however, when attempting to broach the *relationality* between vertices.[1] By citing Black scholarship with little and often no elaboration, Tuck and Yang exemplify how anti-Blackness is theoretically engulfed by the settler colonial paradigm. Seen as derivative, rather than essential to the constitution of the triad, the figure of the slave is transubstantiated into either a colonised or proto-settler position. That is, under the weight of the settler-colonial structure, the equality of the triad transmutes into the hierarchy of a binary.

Tuck and Yang's political manoeuvres serve as a cautionary example of what Frank B. Wilderson calls "the ruse of analogy" (2010:35–53) as they fold slavery

into settler colonialism in order to mediate the dis/similarity between the slave and native. The problem with such moves lay in the way that they position slaves within the world, imbuing them with positive substance, so as to vivify the ethical-political dilemmas of decolonization.This essay examines Tuck and Yang's text as exemplifying a theoretical tension between sovereignty and the figure of the slave that subtends settler colonial studies, which is also to say that Tuck and Yang's work is under consideration insofar as it is a symptom of a general problematic within the aforementioned field. Our analysis proceeds in three parts. First, we identify the object Tuck and Yang want to recover from the metaphor. Next, we elaborate how this object is both sustained and undermined by metaphysical commitments that divide the material from the symbolic, space from its symbols. Lastly, we articulate how this object-orientation pulls slavery into its orbit, only to disavow and subsume it. Contrary to positions that would want to protect the essence of Blackness from appropriation by other discourses, we argue that anti-Blackness is animated by the gratuitous substitution that marks metaphoricity. We contend, in metaphysical and methodological contradistinction to Tuck and Yang, that *slavery is (nothing but) metaphor.*

Land

What is the object Tuck and Yang want to recover from metaphor? The answer is deceptively simple: Land. "Decolonization is not a metaphor" because decolonization, understood by Tuck and Yang, requires the return of land and the reconstitution of Indigenous geographies. This requirement is textured by their reading of Patrick Wolfe, whose popular elaboration of settler colonialism as a "project of elimination" (instead of the more recognised project of exploitation and accumulation) led him to identify its "primary motive" as being driven not by "race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilisation, etc.) but access to territory" (Wolfe 2006:338; see also Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández 2013:73; Veracini 2017:5). Like Wolfe, Tuck and Yang's now just-as-cited version of settler colonialism is distinct from internal and external colonialism, even when it operates through both. *External* colonialism entails the expropriation of parts of Indigenous worlds and resources, for the purpose of exporting them to the metropole; *internal* colonialism is the governance of the colonised within the borders of the colonising nation. Unlike external and internal colonialism, settler colonialism is predicated upon settlers claiming all land for their new home (Tuck and Yang 2012:4–5). Tuck and Yang find that settlers establish a claim to permanent ownership of land through its conversion into property. Their analysis reiterates, in this respect, the Lockean matrix by which the settler obtains the right to property in land upon mixing land with their labour, and the appropriation and cultivation of land enables its commodification. Capitalism and the state are thus read as "technologies of colonialism, developed over time to further colonial projects" (Tuck and Yang 2012:4n2). By reversing (without substantively complicating) the relation between capitalism and colonialism, Tuck and Yang forward an inverted Marxist analysis that extends the critique of liberal-capital land acquisition.[2] Given the absence of spatial separation between coloniser and colonised and the total

expropriation of Indigenous life, land (as opposed to labour) is centralised as that which is "most valuable, contested, [and] required" (Tuck and Yang 2012:5). Land, then, is the "principal momentum" (Harris 2004:179) that grounds capitalism in colonialism (see Wolfe 2006:394).

Labour does not disappear as a problem when land is the unifying principle; instead, it is reinvested in other moments of primitive accumulation, namely slavery. The purpose of slavery is to work the land that settlers have claimed as property, while race, as "an invention of colonialism" (Tuck and Yang 2012:4n2), is condensed into a technology of separability to enable this extraction. Racial slavery is subordinated to settler colonialism because land is the material basis of the slave's productive labour. In short, slavery is conceived as "the forced labor of stolen peoples on stolen land" (Tuck et al. 2014b:7). We will return to this reduction of slavery to forced labour, which we call the "labour theory of slavery".

The drive toward the permanent and total ownership of land (be it "land/water/air/subterranean earth") is, of course, about more than just land—it concerns what is *in* land ("as diverse, specific, and un-generalizable … a teacher and conduit of memory") *more than* land (as property) (Tuck et al. 2014b:8–9).[3] While Tuck and Yang's central text does not broach what Indigenous relations to land are, Tuck has devoted analysis with other interlocutors towards an exposition of what land might be otherwise. In "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor", the status of Indigenous relations to land proceeds through its negating force, rather than positive assessment: settler property disrupts Indigenous spatial sensibilities by reducing land to the potential of its commodification.[4] The settler colonial fantasy of *terra nullius* attempts to clear land of all non-empirical impediments to its aim, be they alternative modes of sovereignty, personhood, memory, or relationality. The continuation of Indigenous life, therefore, stands between the settler and the land. Thus, "everything within a settler colonial society strains to destroy or assimilate the Native in order to disappear them from the land" (Tuck and Yang 2012:9). Tuck and Yang's conception of violence requires positing extra-material layers to violence precisely because colonisation-as-clearing devours everything in its way.

Attention to such "profound epistemic, ontological, [and] cosmological violence" (Tuck and Yang 2012:5) isn't especially new to settler colonial, decolonial, or postcolonial critique (e.g. Blaney and Inayatullah 2010; Deloria 1998; Smith 2006). Despite this attention, it is clear that Tuck and Yang's analysis *via negativa* (through the implied absence of what is lost) remains committed to an empiricist conception of land *prior* to its conversion into property. The full political-epistemological force of settler colonialism can only be ascertained through an unflinching focus on land as the prerequisite for maintaining and recovering Indigenous life. This is also to say, paradoxically, that land is the common ground that unites colonial projects of control and decolonial projects of reclamation: *the fact of* land (beyond or before ways of *relating to* land) is assumed, against both colonial (proprietary) and decolonial (relational) epistemologies. Land grounds *both* settler futurity and decolonial futures.[5] It functions as what Wilderson in the epigraph refers to as "the thing itself, that which secures subjectivity for both the Settler and the 'Savage' and articulates them to one another in a network of connections, transfers, and displacements".

If land is the condition of possibility for social life, it should be centralised in method and praxis. Its displacement in the humanities and social sciences would demonstrate a failure to stay with what is essential. In collaboration with Marcia McKenzie, Tuck diagnoses this continued displacement in the wake of "the proliferation of postmodern and postpositivist theories of the late 20th century" (Tuck and McKenzie 2015b:3). The misguided focus on the role of language in mediating social relations means that "postmodern" approaches struggle with "loss of knowledge of the real" (Tuck and McKenzie 2015b:3). Taking the materiality of place into consideration would mean reckoning with the conditions of occupation: the history of genocide and the ongoing displacement and dispossession of people from the land. "Postpositivist" social theories would fail to confront the fact of colonial occupation because they institute a division between mind and body (and by extension mind from land), and uphold the former over the latter. Tuck and McKenzie charge that it is easier to ignore "fuel extractions, agricultural practices, pollution and toxic dumping, hyper-development, and water use" (2015b:3) when everything is symbolic.

Without the *literal* return of land, the metaphoricity of settler colonialism is supposed to succumb to the imperatives of a politically bankrupt multicultural present while being reified *as if* it were a timeless phenomenon. In this reading, the decolonial metaphor mystifies how occupation and appropriation are ongoing, and neglects the continued existence of people who might lay claim to land—what Morrill et al. refer to as the making of "future ghosts" (2016:7).[6] With Indigenous-centred perspectives obscured, efforts to decolonize the syllabus, for example, are endlessly susceptible to re-appropriation, domestication, the "public cathexis of white guilt", and, ultimately, the re-inscription of settler colonialism that Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández call "the *curriculum project of replacement*" (2013:80–81). It is important to note that this critique explicitly singles out Black demands during and after the Civil Rights movement as being too ready for inclusion, exemplified in the diluted and self-cannibalising practice of "multicultural education" (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández 2013:81).[7] As proxies for multiculturalism, "liberal concerns with equity or access" have as their eventual goal the telos of "settler emplacement" and reproduction of "settler futurity" (Tuck 2011:35). To be unconcerned with land is to be against the inhabitants of that land. Land, in its implacable there-ness, is proof that the settler-colonial project continues, while "the presence of Indigenous peoples—who make *a priori* claims to land and ways of being—is a constant reminder that the settler colonial project is incomplete" (Tuck and Yang 2012:9). Indeed, "The easy adoption of decolonization as a metaphor (and nothing else) is a form of this anxiety, because it is a premature attempt at reconciliation" (Tuck and Yang 2012:9). Settler colonialism is only concerned with the being of Indigenous peoples to the extent that their continued existence might make profane the divine purpose of property.

Life

It should be obvious by now that land, for Tuck, Yang, and their various collaborators, is to be understood in positivist terms as space that can be demonstratively

identified and reclaimed but also as shorthand for the intrinsic relation between matter and our ways of relating to it: "land *and* life". That is, land is both an *a priori* counterpoint and inseparable from Indigenous life-worlds (hence the critique of mind-body and body-land dualisms). This absence of separation influences settler colonial tactics, for whom the theft of land is nonetheless considered the "primary motive". According to Wolfe, while the means by which land was stolen "certainly requires the elimination of the owners of that territory", the vicious path of elimination is not unidirectional nor does it insist on "any particular way" (2006:402).[8] Dispossession is malleable and promiscuous, and calls for "not only homicide, but also state-sanctioned miscegenation, the issuing of individual land titles, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, reprogramming (via missions or boarding schools), and myriad forms of assimilation" (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández 2013:77; see also Nunn 2018:1337–1338; Smallwood 2019:412; Veracini 2017:8; Wolfe 2006:387–388). This means that settler colonial critique from Wolfe to Tuck and Yang need not centre genocide as a primary motive. Instead, as Tiffany Lethabo King clarifies, genocide is one tactic among others—a "byproduct and subordinate clause" of a more encompassing land-based strategy of colonial control and capitalist expansion (King 2016; see also Wilderson 2010:149–161).

Such diverse tactics of power seem to demonstrate that those seeking to eliminate "owners of … territory" comprehend how severing the connection between Indigenous land and life (whether through genocide or assimilation) is a necessary means to secure control of land. Land only becomes land *because of* its separation from life. But Tuck and Yang are ambivalent about this productive destruction. They acknowledge that any demand for the "repatriation of land" requires "the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted" (Tuck and Yang 2012:7). Against the convergence of repatriation and recognition, their polemic simultaneously subordinates the symbolic gesture of "recognition" to its referent "repatriation" (see Coulthard 2014:13). Insofar as the recognition of native land-relations can function as a diversion from the literal return of land, land is actually in excess to the symbolic, as base is to superstructure, which is to say that repatriation exceeds liberal recognition: the demand is to return "*all* of the land, and not just symbolically" (Tuck and Yang 2012:7). The thrust of Tuck and Yang's critique of metaphor should be evaluated in light of how symbolic strategies to secure assimilation are situated as just one tool in the settler arsenal.

In a later essay, Tuck and Yang analyse the discourse of "justice" in terms comparable to their critique of decolonization. In this rendering, justice is limited because it is ensconced in "a colonial temporality" that only permits "limited actions within a colonial moment against colonial structures" (2016:5–6). Justice in the hands of the colonial nation-state is yet another instrument in the domination of land and elimination of Indigenous peoples; it is effectively a non-starter for Indigenous people, whose blinkered political subjectivity "falls under the exceptional legal order of war rather than under the State" (Tuck and Yang 2016:8). Tuck and Yang call to focus attention instead upon those "outside elsewheres" that *exceed* the paradigm of justice, to formulate and pursue projects

("rematriation, reparations, regeneration, sovereignty, self-determination, decolonization, resurgence, the good life, futurisms") that "refuse the abstraction of justice", in the interest of "specific material concerns" (2016:9). These excesses are grounded in the principle that "indigenous resurgence is about forms of life that do not take oppression as their defining referent" (Tuck and Yang 2016:9), which means Indigenous relations to land—and practices of refusal—are ontologically prior to the settler state's regime of property. Instead of seeing Indigenous peoples as lost to history, this approach requires searching for and maintaining their real *material* presence, in a metaphysical commitment to materiality whose first, if not final, form is land.

With land as the crux of settler colonialism, Tuck and Yang lean into the *via negativa* determination of what (with assistance from their reading of Césaire) "decolonization is not":

> It is not converting Indigenous politics to a Western doctrine of liberation; it is not a philanthropic process of "helping" the at-risk and alleviating suffering; it is not a generic term for struggle against oppressive conditions and outcomes. The broad umbrella of social justice may have room underneath for all of these efforts. By contrast, decolonization specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. Decolonization is not a metonym for social justice. (Tuck and Yang 2012:21)

Disentangling decolonization from the impulse to make it a species of a larger struggle, Tuck and Yang differentiate between an "indigenous politics" (which would integrate land with life) and a "western doctrine of liberation" (instrumentalising land for life).[9] The prioritisation of land, however, problematises the efficacy of the distinction for, as Jared Sexton (2014) addresses, regardless of the approach to land (Indigenous or otherwise), the issue for critics of settler colonialism remains primarily a "problem of the terms of occupation": "This frames the question of land as a question of sovereignty, wherein native sovereignty is a precondition for or element of the maintenance or renaissance of native ways of relating to the land" (Sexton 2014:5). The danger is that, while admitting "denial of sovereignty imperils native ways of relating", the configuration of sovereignty as a positive claim to land "does not thereby guarantee this way will be followed" (Sexton 2014:5). Tuck and Yang's argument subordinates this risk to a problem they see to be much more fundamental and abiding: that recognising life (which becomes a stand-in for symbolisation) may not materialise (and usually actively impedes) the repatriation of land.

To return to the problem of *via negativa*, Tuck and Yang *cannot* positively address what Indigenous approaches to land are, without complicating how land is the ground upon which decolonization hinges.[10] In this way, they succumb to the seduction described by Katherine McKittrick in the epigraph—"the idea that space 'just is'" (2006:xi). Their critique of metaphor serves as a counterfactual to what they see to be the central problem of (and solution to) settler colonialism—land—even as this single focus undercuts what might differentiate settler sovereignty from native sovereignty. By making metaphor "bad", Tuck and Yang illustrate a re-investment in sovereignty as an empty vessel, whose substantial difference from property orientations becomes indiscernible, except in the fleeting

accelerationist fantasy later posed by Tuck and McKenzie that "decolonization may be something the land does on its own behalf, even if humans are too deluded or delayed to make their own needed changes" (2015a:xv).

Now, we might side with Tuck and Yang to argue that the focus on land (and land-based articulations of sovereignty, property, and possession that accompany it) is but a strategic response to the violence of settler colonialism itself, that it would open up to considerations of "land and life". Robert Nichols takes such a tack: while Indigenous scholars who mobilise the language of dispossession for decolonial ends might seem to invest in a prior mode of possession (insofar as dispossession is the retraction of possession), the rhetorical use of "theft of land" is a necessarily recursive attempt to access the peculiar way the settler-colonial project functions to fulfill "not (only) … the *transfer of* property, but the *transformation into* property" (Nichols 2018:14; see also Brown 2013; Coulthard 2016:96). Colonial dispossession is, in other words, the emergent expression of the property-logic that comes to mark colonial capitalism. Nichols might charge our argument, as he does Sexton's, with a "dubious line of reasoning": that of attempting to "catch Indigenous peoples and their allies up on the horns of a familiar dilemma" (Nichols 2018:11). Instead, scholarship should be attuned to how "the supposed circularity of the critique is, in fact, reflective of the recursive logic of dispossession itself, that is, as a mode of *property-generating theft*" (Nichols 2018:22). As "a unique species of theft for which we do not always have adequate language" (Nichols 2018:14), land-based theft actualises the proprietary system of right to begin with. Colonialism, then, "is not an *example* to which the concept [of dis/possession] applies, but a *context* out of which it arose" (Nichols 2018:21; see also Radcliffe 2017). Nichols's argument echoes Tuck's, which decidedly persists in using "repatriation" (as opposed to "rematriation") *because* the imperfect term reflects "the inadequacy of the English language to describe and facilitate decolonization" (Tuck 2011:35). Inadequate concepts might generate friction, but the resulting "blisters can be drained and the work can still be completed" (Tuck 2011:35). Despite decrying the decolonization metaphor as a dangerously non-material mode of symbolisation, this logic contends that there are nonetheless effective symbolic strategies whose use can draw attention to the limits of the symbolic.

But Tuck and Yang are not interested in critiquing the decolonization metaphor as symptom or strategy. They draw strength from a more metaphysical claim: the positivism professed in the capacity to identify anything at all. This faith, which functions as a sort of love, comes to the fore in Tuck's recurrent reference to a quote by Fred Moten: "everything I love survives dispossession, and is therefore before dispossession" (quoted in Tuck and Yang 2012:10).[11] Tuck and Yang's libidinal investment in the precedent of land actually indexes the *non-recursivity* of dispossession. As indicated by the affirmation of "outside elsewheres" and decolonial forms of life, the object of dispossession (land) is ontologically prior to the agent of dispossession (settlers). Land-based sovereignty thereby ensures that Indigenous people's positive (even if unstated) claims to land remain undetermined by the settler-colonial regime of property. This is the position from which Tuck and Yang's political appeal unfolds.

Slavery

The positivist affirmation of land is not methodologically innocent. Its implications can best be understood in how it indents the political ontology of slavery and the methods of Black studies. As we have noted, by framing the "settler-native-slave" triad through the presumptive totality of settler colonialism, Tuck and Yang bring the slave into the fold only to disavow its premises.[12] Slavery can be a *component* of settler colonialism, but when consigned to the "labor theory of slavery", the constituent elements of the slave position (and the possibility that slavery might be in excess to the demand for labour) can never be broached. Further, the Indigenous quilting point—land—enables a chain of meaningful struggle and recovery unavailable to the enslaved. Indigenous peoples have protection against the threat of their struggle being "turned into an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation" (Tuck and Yang 2012:7) through access to the physical object of land which, even if understood relationally and through remembrance, can only be returned in its total physical presence. Tuck and Yang's analysis and citational practices demonstrate that while land rescues Indigenous peoples from the condition of interminable metaphoricity (the driving thesis of their essay), Black people are in the singular position of beginning and ending their "track towards Liberation" as empty signifiers. Land is the signifier that secures the impossibility of Indigenous fungibility.

Take the telling seventh footnote, in which Tuck and Yang clarify the structural logics of their triad—a footnote worth quoting in full because, if brought into the body of the text, it would wreak havoc on its premises:

> … although the setter-native-slave triad structures settler colonialism, this does not mean that settler, native, and slave are analogs that can be used to describe corresponding identities, structural locations, worldviews, and behaviors. Nor do they mutually constitute one another. For example, Indigenous is an identity independent of the triad, and also an ascribed structural location within the triad. Chattel slave is an ascribed structural position, but not an identity. Settler describes a set of behaviors, as well as a structural location, but is eschewed as an identity. (Tuck and Yang 2012:7n7)[13]

Whereas the native, we are told, can claim both "an identity independent of the triad" and "an ascribed structural location within the triad", the slave is positioned through "an ascribed structural position, but not an identity". It is the native's independent identity, always stabilised by the relationship with land, that can stop what would otherwise be a runaway chain of signification. It is clear that by this differentiation Tuck and Yang want to preempt falling prey to Wilderson's (2010) "ruse of analogy".[14] As we will see, Tuck and Yang (2012:17) mobilise a similar refrain, "colonial equivocation", to guard against coalitional appropriations of colonialism. What their metaphysical commitment to positivism misses, however, is the doubled valence of the ruse. Slavery is resistant to the project of recovery—there is no hidden material, neither land nor identity, to be recovered. The slave's lack of identity, as postulated by Tuck and Yang, also doubles to expose a lack in their theorisation of slavery because of the problem at the constitutive core of slavery: not the presence of land, appropriated identity, or alienated

labour, but, as we will argue, the lack of anything to lack. Their method cannot accede this aporetic possibility.

"Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" instead intensifies the difference formulated by Wolfe between (1) Blackness as "expansive", "inherited" through the one-drop rule "by an expanding number of 'black' descendants"; and (2) Indigenous peoples "racialized" as "subtractive": "Native Americans are constructed to become fewer in number and less Native, but never exactly white, over time" (Tuck and Yang 2012:12; see also Wolfe 2006:387).[15] This subtractive logic is propelled, not surprisingly, by the priority of land: "Native American is a racialisation that portrays contemporary Indigenous generations to be less authentic, less Indigenous than every prior generation in order to ultimately phase out Indigenous claims to land and usher in settler claims to property" (Tuck and Yang 2012:12). What might animate the anti-Black logics of the one-drop rule dissolves except in a synthetic analysis that would collapse both "the racializations of Indigenous people and Black people in the US settler colonial nation-state" as "geared to ensure the ascendancy of white settlers as the true and rightful owners and occupiers of the land" (Tuck and Yang 2012:12), which is to say both Indigenous and Black peoples are structured by a common settler-colonial project, even as Black people (insofar as "the US government promised 40 acres of Indian land as reparations for plantation slavery" [Tuck and Yang 2012:29]) are also figured as proto-settlers.[16] The grounding "settler" concept frays further when considering that (1) the "Indian Removal Act" also rendered native peoples unwilling settlers by relocating them to already Indigenous populated territories (Smithers 2015:117–128); (2) Indigenous peoples remain Indigenous when they move or are forcibly moved, because indigeneity expresses relationality, not possession (Blackwell et al. 2017:127; Radcliffe 2017); (3) in Latin America, creolisation has, complexly, been referred to as an "indigenizing process" (Castellanos 2017:777; Jackson 2012:42–44); and (4) African indigeneity meant a unique intensification of structures of slavery on the African continent *through* settler colonialism (Kelley 2017).[17] The last two points also serve to underscore the Anglo-centrism of Tuck and Yang's argument, as Canada and the United States remain their point of departure for understanding of the relation between Blackness and Indigeneity, rather than the Western hemisphere as a whole.

Consider too how the asymmetry between native and slave operates within Tuck and Yang's discussion of "playing Indian" (Tuck and Yang 2012:8–9), which in Tuck et al. (2014b:16) means not only tribal garb but also those "alternative" settler cultures of "communalism and counterculturalism, such as in rural communes, permaculture, squatting, hoboing, foraging, and neo-pagan, earth-based, and New Age spirituality … formed by occupying and traversing stolen Indigenous land and often by practicing cultural and spiritual appropriation".[18] "Playing Indian" involves putting on the accoutrements of Indianness in much the same way that Blackness is performatively appropriated—the difference is that the decolonization metaphor is never theorised as central to the struggle over land. In "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor", the impulse to "go native" is instead non-essential to the subject-formation of the native. It is a late, superstructural practice meant to relieve settler anxiety, to provide "some mercy or relief in face of the

relentlessness of settler guilt and haunting" (Tuck and Yang 2012:9), but whose embrace of a kumbaya sensibility, while advocating a "reinhabitation" of the environment on ethical grounds, actually tends towards the replacement of Indigeneity.[19] "[J]ust as relentless as the desire to disappear the Native", playing Indian ("the desire to *become without becoming* [Indian]" [Tuck and Yang 2012:14]) "is a desire to not have to deal with this (Indian) problem anymore" (Tuck and Yang 2012:9). As the performative expression of the metaphorical conceit, playing Indian is a secondary (not constitutive) strategy en route to extermination.[20] It drives towards "moves to innocence", from the invention of long-lost ancestors (Elizabeth Warren comes to mind)[21] to settler adoption fantasies (*Dances with Wolves* and *The Last of the Mohicans* [Tuck and Yang 2012:13–17]) to the "colonial equivocation" of coalitions that proclaim "We are all colonized" (behind which is the implication "None of us are settlers" [Tuck and Yang 2012:17]).

Unlike the late origins of the decolonization metaphor, we argue that the slave metaphor is central to the structuring logics of slavery, not an after-effect. While Tuck and Yang see "colonial equivocation" as an erasure of what is distinct about settler colonialism (land), Wilderson's "ruse of analogy" registers the distinction of racial slavery as the absence of anything to claim. This means that, as "a crucial and fungible conceptual possession of civil society" (Wilderson 2010:21), slavery is only ever available as semantic displacement. Slavery-as-metaphor is the being-of-slavery, what Wilderson (2010) calls its "political ontology". Tuck and Yang's mis-reading of this ruse is replicated in J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's (2017) critique of Afro-pessimism. For Kauanui, the political-ontological approach, which would make Blackness-as-slaveness immanent and essential to a violent political determination of being (rather than exogenous and contingent), is a symptom of what it means to critique: "to assert blackness as ontological is to recapitulate colonising thought, to take colonial ideology as truth" (2017:258).[22] In order to extract Blackness from its colonial-ontological confines, Kauanui proposes a turn to the historical and concrete. By identifying the contingency of racial slavery as "rooted in historicizing race" (2017:259), Kauanui searches for a non-ontological Blackness. She finds it in a twist to the (by now much disputed) origin story ascribed to late 17th century Virginia and Bacon's Rebellion, arguing that slaves and indentured servants were not only equally (and economically) oppressed but also united in "efforts to commit genocide against indigenous peoples" (Kauanui 2017:261).[23] This reading renders race an "additional pliant" (Kauanui 2017:260) to the conquest of native lands, which is to say that slavery is internal to settler colonialism.

We offer an alternative structural history, one that neither cedes to the pressures of empiricism as grounds for critique nor falls prey to the obfuscation of metaphor that Tuck and Yang charge non-land-based struggle with. By centralising political ontology precisely as the problem of the relationship between history and contingency, materiality and the symbolic, we attempt to account for the genesis and structure of modernity, and propose slavery as the code that functions as "the *a priori* or ground of the history to which it gives rise" (Scott and Wynter 2000:197; see also Warren 2018). For Tuck and Yang, the "current colonial era goes back to 1492, when colonial imaginary goes global" (2012:4n2).

For Sylvia Wynter (1995, 2003), by contrast, the basis of the triadic political ontology of the post-1492 Americas was well established prior to the Columbian expedition (see also King 2019:15–21).[24] Black slaves—as they crossed from the "old world" sugar-complex to the new world—would play a central role in the formulation of what we recognise as the modern world. If slavery is essential to the grounding logics of capitalism, it also needs to be situated in the political-economic geography of the Mediterranean within which the conquest of the New World was conceived. The Columbian expedition would not have been possible without the inauguration of slavery earlier in the 15th century, as "the Portuguese landing on the shores of today's Senegal and their drawing of areas of West Africa into a mercantile network and trading system" (Wynter 1995:10) challenged the geographical and technological orthodoxy of late medieval scholasticism, and solidified the political-economic relations that would blossom into global civil society. The position of the slave was both materially and *symbolically* significant, for the reification of Africans as the only "legitimately enslaveable population" enabled the emerging discourses of republicanism and civic humanism, and thereby sutured the "moral and philosophical foundations of post-1492 polities" (Wynter 1995:35; see also Wynter 2003:309). Likewise, McKittrick argues that the "'naturalization' of difference" was "bolstered by the ideological weight of transparent space, the idea that space 'just is'" (McKittrick 2006:xv). The political-symbolic structures of slavery are essential to the production of space and its meanings. By condensing this lattice into "forced labor" *in extremis*, Tuck and Yang miss how the conceptual density of slavery might always already condition the positivism of land. Slavery cannot be added as an afterthought without diminishing the historical-geographical scope of modernity and leaving the constitution of the material and symbolic conditions of conquest unthought.

With the "labor theory of slavery", slavery has been drawn into the whirlpool of Marxist critique (e.g. Beckert and Rockman 2016; Tomich 2004). And while Marxism certainly has methodological and political purchase, we argue that the now perennial and unsolved problem of how race connects to class (and slavery to capitalism) points to the need to call upon and develop new frameworks of approach (Bledsoe and Wright 2019; Sorentino 2019; Wilderson 2010). Drawing from a tradition of theorising interested in the non-economic utility of the slave (Sexton 2010, 2014; Spillers 2003a; Wilderson 2010; Wynter 1995, 2003), we are interested in what becomes available for critique when identifying the constitution of slavery through its "metaphorical aptitude", the way the slave operates as "the imaginative surface upon which the master and the nation came to understand themselves" (Hartman 1997:7). Focus on formlessness or, as Hartman calls it, the "figurative capacities of blackness" (1997:7) complicates critiques of colonial sovereignty, property, and land acquisition. The metaphoricity of the slave is a feature of the global fungibility of the slave—its interchangeability and replaceability. Fungibility renders the slave a vessel through which the settler-master regenerates their position: "The dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master's body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion" (Hartman 1997:21). Hartman's reading of fungibility provides a possible reading of the constitution of settler's

capacity to undertake the settler-colonial project in ways that don't simply take for granted Lockean conceptions of history and property. King does precisely that, identifying how the slave's role in signifying "expansion and spatial possibility became a feature of the spatial imagination of the conquistador-settler" (2019:120). Taken further, as "an open sign that can be arranged and rearranged for infinite kinds of use" (King 2019:104), the slave enables the very possibility for the settler to accumulate land and wealth. Blackness is rendered "a-spatial" (Bledsoe and Wright 2019:12–13) and "unsovereign" (Sexton 2014:11) such that slavery provides the "enabling postulates" for the "social and discursive practices" of the post-1492 world (Spillers 2003a:18; Walcott 2014).

The implications are considerable, exposing a different entry into geography and materialism than either Marxism or the Marxist-inflected settler colonial studies scholarship exemplified by "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor". The "immateriality" and "a-spatiality" of the slave, its abstractness and metaphoricity, *is its materiality and geography*. This is one under-utilised but central methodological intervention of the Black feminist project of Hortense Spillers, encapsulated in her revision of the schoolyard chant "sticks and stones *might* break our bones, but words will most certainly *kill* us" (2003c:209). Throughout her work, we find not only a complication of reductive materialism, but also an intensive meditation on the way that "the materiality of discourse is as solid an aspect of political economy as the Gross Domestic Product, and its far-flung subtleties and evasions, its coded displacements and well-choreographed insinuations, decidedly more pernicious as the missile that hides its hand" (Spillers 2003a:7; see also McKittrick 2006).[25] If slavery—as metaphor—is both historically and ontologically essential to settler colonial spatiality, if metaphor makes geography, it stands to reason that settler colonialism cannot be adequately theorised *without* metaphor: *the excision of metaphor from settler colonialism is necessarily the excision of slavery.* The collapse of slavery into a non-discursive event is why, in Spillers' words, "we search vainly for a point of absolute and indisputable origin, for a moment of plenitude that would restore us to the real rich thing itself before discourse touched it" (2003b:179). Within the conceptual apparatus of "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor", slaves are stuck in a treadmill of political indecipherability—both victims and antagonists, essential to the clearing of land and inessential to its return—that exemplifies the violence of slavery itself. And so, while Tuck and Yang argue that to be non-land (as in forgetting or displacing) is to be anti-Indigenous, we argue that to be anti-metaphor is to be anti-Black.

Conclusion: Abolition

Our reading of Tuck and Yang exposes a four-step manoeuvre that persists across scholarship on slavery and settler colonialism: (1) anti-exceptionalism: the refusal of "an Indigenous/settler binary constituted in relation to land or a black/non-black binary founded on racial slavery" (Day 2015:102) in favour of a "two-way process" (Amadahy and Lawrence 2009:123)[26] or dialectical resolution; (2) equivalence: the account of slavery and settler colonialism as expressions of "mutually constitutive origins" (Leroy 2016) or "common cause" (Amadahy and Lawrence

2009:127), for which capitalism is usually "the ultimate expression of the two" (Horne 2018:20)[27]; (3) historicism: the appeal to history (and a truncated historical materialism in particular) (Day 2015:103; Kauanui 2016) as the appropriate method for adjudicating the relation between slavery and settler colonialism; and (4) replacement: the relapse of these writers into repeating the very problem they argue against—the collapse of one orientation into the other. Namely, when historical tools are assumed capable of providing an exhaustive account of the joint origins of slavery and colonialism, the "labor theory of slavery" reappears as slavery's founding dictate, ultimately making slavery dependent upon settler structures, as when Justin Leroy argues that "any theory that holds the two apart or attempts to establish primacy between them cannot account for the interlocked histories that inform *colonialism* and its resistance" (2016, emphasis added), when for Iyko Day "the unitary end" of control of "land and an enslaved labor force" is "increasing *white settler property*" (2015:113, emphasis added; see also Byrd 2011), or when Stephanie Smallwood frames "territorial conquest and chattel slavery as twin tools of *settler colonial dominion* across the hemispheric Americas" (2019:413, emphasis added). By conceptually retreating into the settler colonial frame despite appeals to equivalence, Leroy, Day, and Smallwood reproduce the metaphysical caesurae between the material and symbolic that flattens the constitution of modernity (*including* modernity's relationship to settler colonialism) into an empirical decipherability whose vehicle, as Tuck and Yang (2012) reveal, is land. These formulations, we might add, are indebted to a reading of the modern world that refuses to reckon with slavery's role in rendering the emerging conceptions of God, globality, humanity, politics, history, and economy coherent for the purposes of capitalism and conquest. We note that recent work in native and Indigenous studies is more ready to see resonance between native cosmographies and the political-ontological interventions emanating from Black studies (see Jackson 2012; King 2019; Rifkin 2019). Our aim is to help facilitate a move away from the positivist investments in land that have overdetermined scholarship extending from Wolfe to Tuck and Yang.

In marking this pattern in settler colonial studies, we hope to move beyond appeals to re-establish conversation en route to a synthetic resolution of positions. Instead we are interested in understanding the animating conditions of the recurrent *failure* of settler colonial studies and its satellites to reckon with the metaphoricity of slavery. By arguing that this metaphoricity provides the generative conditions for the geographies of conquest, we might exemplify the modes of exceptionalism, non-equivalence, and ahistoricism that self-styled synthetic scholars warn against. These elements, however, could be considered constitutive features of the problem of relationality in the wake of world-rending shifts, not liabilities that can be wished away with more history, sharper analysis, or better allyship. Leroy might hope that historical archives "offer a body of evidence that we can marshal against ways of unknowing that are actively and aggressively produced" (2016) and Tuck and Yang might strive to "help to reduce the frustration of attempts at solidarity" (2012:4). What slavery-as-metaphor offers is an opening to tarry with unknowing, to *increase* frustration, insofar as slavery calls for "the abolition of hierarchal spatial categories" (Wright 2018:14) and toggles the very

conditions of thought as such. This tarrying means identifying aporias and inhabiting them, apprehending "a solidarity that seems to persist, in principle and in practice, despite problems of asymmetry or even antagonism; a solidarity that does not simply join the struggle, but exceeds it from within" (Sexton 2015).

If slavery is a metaphor, what does that make abolition but a challenge to the very structures that frame our constitution of reality? "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" presumes access to the truth of colonisation and its relationship to metaphoricity. It can only imagine abolition as the "inclusion of emancipated slaves and prisoners into the settler nation-state" (Tuck and Yang 2012:29). "Slavery is a metaphor", by beginning with the instituting act, rather than with solutions to it, throws this relationship into a productive crisis that may, one day, open space for the only resolution that might effectively address the problem: "the end of the world". Metaphor, that is, is geography-making, and it is at the precipice of the instituting metaphor that the end might begin.

Endnotes

[1] This distinction is informed by Sexton's call to "denature the comparative instinct altogether in favor of a *relational* analysis more adequate to the task" (2010:47). One of the more sensitive texts to address Black-Indigenous relations rejects a "unified political imaginary" (Rifkin 2019:14), but in doing so abdicates the possibility of a paradigmatic analysis.

[2] Which is why Marxist analysis can include the capacity for a critique of the colonial subject (see Blaney and Inayatullah 2010:145–179; Brown 2013; Coulthard 2014; Dunbar-Ortiz 2016).

[3] The refrain of "land, air, water" repeats in Tuck and Yang (2012:5).

[4] See Coulthard's (2014:6–15) attempt to recuperate "primitive accumulation" from its developmentalism to describe ongoing dispossession.

[5] This against their claim that "decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity" (Tuck and Yang 2012:35).

[6] Brown (2013) makes these lines explicit in connecting the loss of land and life through the relationship between the "vanishing Indian" and the "vanishing glacier".

[7] See Amadahy and Lawrence's argument that "the struggle for an equitable distribution of resources within or among nation-states that form a part of antiracist and diasporic struggles of Black peoples can be critiqued from Indigenist points of view for internalizing colonial concepts of how peoples relate to land, resources, and wealth" (2009:127). See, by contrast, Walcott's inverse proposition that "to achieve the kinds of justice Aboriginal communities required if their forms of life were to be fully acknowledged would mean to create a significant opposition to capitalism in all its present forms, and therefore also needed to align indigenous claims with radical Black demands" (2014:101).

[8] For expansions of Wolfe's (2006) "logic of elimination", see Nunn's (2018) reading of toxicity exposure as elimination, Rodríguez's (2015) analysis of a "logic of evisceration", and Zaragocin's (2019) reappraisal of "gendered embodied elimination".

[9] Or, to consider the Indigenous relationship to land as exogenous to proprietorship and instrumentalisation. Tuck writes that "Indigenous scholars have long challenged Western frameworks that relegate *land* to *property,* legally and philosophically, because the concept of property is predicated on ownership. Conceptualizations of place that rely on latent notions of property are tangled in the ideologies of settler colonialism, dependent upon constructions of land as extractable capital, the denial of indigenous sovereignty, the myth of discovery, and the naturalization of the nation-state" (2011:36).

[10] This might be at the root of the tendency noted by Byrd (2016) and Kauanui (2016) for settler colonial studies to replace Indigenous studies. Veracini counters that "[s]ettler colonial studies cannot replace indigenous studies because it is predicated on it" (2017:7).
[11] This quote also features as the epigraph to Morrill et al. (2016). See Veracini's rescuing of settler colonial studies through humanism by "culling" the settler and saving the "man": "My humanity is to come; it will follow genuine decolonization" (2017:2).
[12] See a similar failing in Smith (2006).
[13] Tuck et al. (2014a:4) later admits the error of provincialising this footnote.
[14] See an awareness of this critique in Tuck et al. (2014a:6n2).
[15] Day repeats this "mirror" opposition between black "increase" and Indigenous "elimination" (2015:113). Kelley (2017) clarifies Wolfe's analytic limits through an engagement with Cedric Robinson (2015: 272–273). See also King (2016).
[16] See Wolfe: "The fact that enslaved people immigrated against their will … does not alter the structural fact that their presence, however involuntary, was part of the process of Native dispossession" (2013:263) and Amadahy and Lawrence: "The reality … is that Black peoples have not been quintessential 'settlers' in the White supremacist usage of the word; nevertheless, they have, as free people, been involved in some form of settlement process" (2009:107).
[17] See King's (2019:xi–xii) corrective that, given the recurrent slippages concerning who is a settler, "conquistador-settler" more adequately captures the target of critique. See also Byrd (2011:xix) who, following Kamau Brathwaite, designates African slaves in the Americas as "arrivants", as well as Jackson (2012:3).
[18] For a compelling alternative in black feminist agrarian geographies, see McCutcheon (2019).
[19] On problems with "reinhabitation", see Tuck et al. (2014b:17). For an incisive reading of how "the nostalgic environmentalist-as-homesteader image … unifies the liberal environmentalist, mainstream, and rural conservative strains of settler identity", see Anson (2019:54).
[20] This is different than Deloria's identification of a "noble savage" ideology since Montaigne, whose tension between "an urge to idealize and desire Indians and a need to despise and dispossess them", he identifies as forming "the *precondition* for the formation of American identities" (1998:4, emphasis added).
[21] Deloria Jr. refers to this as the "Indian-grandmother complex" (1988:2–4). Tuck and Yang contend that "Indigenous identity and tribal membership are questions that Indigenous communities alone have the right to struggle over and define, not DNA tests, heritage websites, and certainly not the settler state" (2012:13).
[22] See, for more productive attempts to reckon with political ontology in Indigenous studies, Blaser (2012), Jackson (2012), Lugones (2010), and Radcliffe (2017).
[23] For a critical overview, see Vaughan (1989).
[24] The collapse of Wynter into a theorist of white supremacy and settler colonialism (not of slavery and anti-blackness) is seen in Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013:74). Although King has Wilderson and Wynter depart on the status of the human-slave antagonism, we follow King in arguing their shared identification of the human as "anti-black" subverts "the prosaic colonial dyad of settler and Native that structures most colonial discourses, including settler colonial studies" (2019:17–18).
[25] It is important to note that while we posit a common thread in the methodologies of scholars in Black studies, their methodologies are not the same. For both Spillers and McKittrick, metaphoricity is *essential* for understanding the materiality of slavery. McKittrick argues for the equivalence of the material and the symbolic, whereas Spillers emphasises the generative capacities of the latter.
[26] Amadahy and Lawrence, for example, attempt to take Toni Morrison to task for assuming that American literature is "fundamentally about White and Black people" and that "all others are irrelevant to the dynamic" (2009:122). From here, they criticise African Americans for the "hegemonic role" of their "theoretical work" (2009:123).
[27] See Rifkin's (2019:4, 29–32) attempt to manoeuvre otherwise by writing of Black and Indigenous struggles "less as incommensurable than as simply nonidentical".

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