

Disabling Bodies of/and Land: Reframing Disability Justice in Conversation with Indigenous Theory and Activism

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A central claim of this paper is that the destruction of Earth through practices of settler colonialism is inextricable from the disablement of Indigenous ontology, peoples, and communities. The disablement of land/body as a tactic of settler colonialism has persisted for centuries and takes multifarious forms. By highlighting Indigenous struggles to protect Mother Earth and her sacred resources, we suggest that Indigenous ontology, specifically relationships to land (Deloria, 1972), challenges Eurocentric/settler disability theory at the epistemological level by rejecting the taken-for-granted dualism between the environment and (disabled) humans within (settler) disability studies. Indigenous ontology, and Indigenous peoples' experiences of settler colonialism, belie a clear bifurcation of humans and the environment, or bodies and space. Land appropriation, resource extraction, linguistic genocide, forced removal, erasure, and devastation by settlers invariably wreaks havoc on the land, spirit, livestock, and bodies of Indigenous peoples. Rejecting logics of elimination and imagining alternative futures- in opposition to the capitalist state's projection of futures devoid of disability and Indigeneity- is essential for realizing *national* and *bodily* self-determination for non-Indigenous disabled and Indigenous peoples in the present and into the future.

Keywords: Indigeneity; Disability; Settler Colonialism; Capitalism; Disablement; Decolonization

Introduction

Recent disability studies scholarship, sometimes referred to as 'critical' or 'global' disability studies, responds to critiques of the field by addressing omissions in the discipline's canonical texts around the enmeshment of disability oppression with white supremacy, imperialism, and settler colonialism. As others have pointed out, though, genealogies or narratives of the field that continue to center the canonical early disciplinary texts and 'add in' later analyses of white supremacy and settler colonialism, preserve the very structures they aim to challenge through the historical erasure of work- within and beyond academic contexts- not recognized by the field as 'disability studies' (Chen et al., 2017). How does Indigenous feminist praxis theorize disablement¹ and challenge disability oppression, without

being named such or recognized as such by non-Indigenous scholars of disability studies? How might Indigenous peoples' critiques of liberal humanist ontology and conceptions of interdependency and mind/body/space, inform disability studies scholarship, particularly in grappling with settler coloniality? What insights might Indigenous epistemologies offer regarding the tension between valuing disability (e.g. as a social identity and meaningful epistemic location) and rejecting interwoven systems of power (e.g. settler colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy) that produce mass disablement? And how can the reification of settler coloniality through the dearth of Indigenous theory (recognized) within the field be rejected without, at the same time, co-opting or appropriating Indigenous knowledges or claiming easy/comfortable coalition or commonality?

With these guiding questions in mind, this paper argues that the disablement of the Earth, defined as settler colonial practices of land theft and degradation largely ignored within canonized disability studies scholarship, is inextricable from the disablement of Indigenous' ontology, bodies, and communities. The disablement of land/body as a tactic of settler colonialism has persisted for centuries and takes various forms. By highlighting Indigenous struggles to protect Mother Earth and her sacred resources, we suggest that Indigenous ontology, specifically relationships to land (Deloria, 1972), challenges disability theory at the epistemological level by rejecting the taken-for-granted dualism between the environment/space and (disabled) humans/bodies within (settler) disability studies. Indigenous ontology and Indigenous peoples' experiences of settler colonialism belie a clear bifurcation of humans and the environment, or bodies and space. Land appropriation, resource extraction, forced removal, erasure, and devastation by settlers are all forms of land disablement that invariably wreak havoc on the land, spirit, livestock, and bodies of Indigenous people². Indigenous resistance significantly centers not just on people, but on land, relationality, prayer, love, protection and reverence for the environment, suggesting that decolonial disability justice necessitates accounting for the disablement of land consequent of practices and logics of settler colonialism.

While disability theory has compellingly pointed to the ways in which the construction and production of (inaccessible) space renders disabled bodies abnormal or aberrant, Indigenous peoples informed by Indigenous epistemology, have consistently intimated that the disablement of space via settler colonial practices of land appropriation and destruction in pursuit of profit, concomitantly yields the disablement of Indigenous bodies and worldviews that are intricately woven together with space. These issues strike us as particularly urgent given that much of what is recognized as disability studies scholarship is produced by non-Indigenous people within settler-colonial states (e.g. the United States, Canada, Israel, and Australia) (Cushing and Smith, 2009). As Puar (2017) has pointed out, the social model asserts, in its broadest sense, that it is the social and economic structure and not individual bodily differences that disables. Settler-colonialism is the foundational structure in nation-states where the discipline of disability studies is most prominent. Practices of land theft and

destruction that are central to this structure are a vital part of the disabling social context with which disability theory is concerned.

The project of alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is one to be approached with vigilance and care. Discussing merging Indigenous studies and settler colonial studies, Snelgrove et al. (2014:30) advise that solidarities between ‘Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples must be grounded in actual practices and place-based relationships, and be approached as incommensurable but not incompatible’. We aim to follow the precedent of scholars who write by not simply adding in Indigenous perspectives, but centering Indigenous resistance, self-determination, and nationhood as the basis from which to build.

We begin with a discussion of settler colonial studies that draws on the work of Indigenous scholars. From there, we summarize recent disability studies scholarship that addresses settler colonialism. In the subsequent section- and without collapsing non-Indigenous disabled and Indigenous peoples’ distinct histories of oppression and resistance- we focus on three areas of potential convergence or likeness between disability and Indigenous theories: 1. a *logic of elimination* or erasure, driven by capitalism’s need for continuous expansion and extraction of value, is central to both disability oppression and settler colonialism (Harvey, 2003); 2. the mobilization of *sovereignty* as a framework or rallying call for pursuing self-determination and justice, and 3. theorizations of *futurity* and an insistence on imagining alternative futures, which are born from the past and shape the present. Our analysis focuses on Indigenous ontologies in the U.S. settler colonial context. While there are commonalities across histories and practices of settler colonialism and Indigenous survival, we do not assume our analysis translates neatly across settler colonial contexts, nor do we suggest easy solidarity or coalitions. We allow for incommensurabilities while insisting that disability and Indigenous liberation are in fact mutually contingent (Snelgrove et al., 2014). Challenging environmental racism and the disablement of land- intrinsic features of settler coloniality- (Tuck and Yang, 2012; Veracini, 2011)- is part and parcel of disability justice.

Locating the Conversation

Canonized disability studies scholarship has largely neglected to address the disabling effects of settler colonialism on Indigenous peoples and lands (Soldatic, 2013; Soldatic, 2015; Meekosha, 2011). Aiming to contribute to the ongoing development of decolonial disability theory, we offer three points of theoretical and practical convergence through which to consider a recent and widely known manifestation of Native resistance to settler colonialism- the Standing Rock resistance against the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline, which we read as a struggle for disability justice. We also look to the historical resistance of Diné and other Indigenous Nations to structural disablement produced by the settler colonial state.

Neither settler colonial disablement nor Indigenous resistance to settler-coloniality, are new or unique to this historical moment. The denial of Indigenous sovereignty and disablement of Native people/land for the sake of capitalist profit accumulation is foundational to the structure of the U.S. state. The history of uranium mining on the sovereign territory of Indigenous peoples- which has resulted in Native peoples in the northern great plains having the highest cancer rates in the U.S.- attests to the long history of settler colonial land/body disablement (Kline, 2013).³

Indigenous interventions

In this section, we contextualize the conversation by considering, first, Indigenous interventions in settler colonial studies and, subsequently, recent disability studies scholarship on settler colonialism. Although Indigenous interventions in academic scholarship are relatively recent, Indigenous nations and peoples were intervening, resisting, and decolonizing long before this work was recognized in academic contexts (in what is variously called global, Indigenous, decolonial, or settler colonial studies), and continue to do so largely outside of academic spaces.

Indigenous scholars' initial interventions focus on worldview. Vine Deloria Jr. (1997:40), a foundational scholar, writes that 'the major difference between American Indian views of the physical world and Western science lies in the premise accepted by Indians and rejected by scientists: the world in which we live is alive.' Linda T. Smith (2012) echoes this sentiment with a text devoted to untangling colonial narratives and asserting that Indigenous and Western epistemologies are different in worldview, knowledge systems, values, and norms. Although there are countless Indigenous Nations with differing worldviews, practices, and cultures, Indigenous peoples find solidarity by naming several points at which they resist Western ontologies. Some of these agreed upon distinctions include: a connection to land (mentally, physically, and spiritually); shared political agendas which advocate for sovereignty and recognition as independent nations; and the recognition of first peoples on lands prior to colonization and settler contact.

Alongside shared political projects, Indigenous interventions in academic scholarship, challenge some of the widely-accepted divisions and binaries in Western/settler philosophy, including but not limited to: sacred/secular; human/animal (Hubbard, 2014; Tinker, 1996); land/knowledge (Simpson, 2014; Tuck et al., 2014) and mind/matter (Smith, 2012). Not only do Indigenous ontologies question the inherent separation of such concepts, but they also challenge scholars to think differently about binaries at large, meaning Indigenous scholars do not refute them fully, but view them through a different ontology. These differences in knowledge, epistemology, and research, manifest in distinct ways of living, being, and interacting, with/in the material world.

Disability Studies

Disability studies challenges a Western medical approach to disability, which frames disability as a deficiency located in individual bodies that should be ‘fixed’ through medical intervention. A narrow medical model shapes dominant conceptions of disability in the U.S. and other global Northern/settler states and depoliticizes disability by obscuring disabled people’s shared experience of oppression under a system of able-bodied supremacy.⁴ The social model of disability, alternatively, locates the problem not in individual bodies, but in a society that renders particular bodies disabled. Social and political approaches highlight how disability is not inevitably fixed to certain embodiments, but is instead socially constituted within geographical and historical contexts. While the social model signifies an important paradigm shift, social approaches to disability have too often neglected the material production of disabled bodies (Erevelles, 2011; Grech, 2015; Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009; Bell, 2006; Connor et al., 2016). Disability activists and scholars are right to condemn references to disability as solely a tragic *symbol* or *consequence* of oppression and exploitation (Sherry, 2007), yet the tendency of disability studies scholars in settler-colonial states to uphold disability as the largest and most ‘universal’ group of oppressed people in the world, while failing to condemn colonial and imperial practices that disable millions in oppressed and occupied nations, fundamentally undermines the liberation of *all* oppressed and exploited peoples of the world. Silence around the material and corporeal realities of racialized settler-colonial capitalism, leaves these systems in place and futilely attempts to build a liberatory disability movement on the oppression of others. Recognizing and condemning these forces need and must not- for disability liberation to be realized- imply the inherent undesirability of disability, or replicate a eugenic logic which suggests that eliminating disability by undoing systems of power is an index of progress. Writing in the context of Australia, Soldatic (2015:56) has compellingly critiqued ‘the colonizing effects of disability theorizing that relies upon the collapsing of categories within white-settler societies’.

Russell and Malhotra (2002:216) note that ‘the definition of disability is not static but fundamentally linked to the needs of capital accumulation.’ A liberal, rights-based approach demands that disabled people be included within the framework of rational, autonomous subjects and, on this basis, allotted equal rights within the settler colonial nation-state. Legislation such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) that is confined to this Eurocentric framework, offers no recourse for the production of disability consequent of imperialism, colonialism, and the material conditions of globalized capitalism (Soldatic, 2013). Disability justice, a framework developed by queer, disabled women of color, transcends a narrowly individualized disability rights model, and emphasizes that disability liberation is tied to the liberation of all peoples, necessitating anti-capitalist movements led by those at the furthest margins of society (Lamm, 2015; Mingus, 2011; Berne, 2015).

Calling for the decolonization of disability studies, Meekosha (2011) criticizes universalizing tendencies that render invisible disabled people in colonized or post-colonial states and the production of disabled bodies through colonial practices. She writes that ‘in this context the process of disabling has to be seen as a total dehumanizing process and must include the destruction of physical, the emotional, psychic, economic and cultural life’ (p. 672). We want to build on this insight and think about the ways in which the destruction of land through colonial occupation is central to the production of disablement among Indigenous peoples. We are not simply reiterating the reality that oppression of Indigenous peoples has yielded higher rates of disability in Indigenous communities, but foregrounding that the ongoing theft and destruction of land for profit- or the disablement of land that is foundational to settler colonialism and requisite for capitalism- is a central facet of disability injustice experienced by Indigenous peoples.

Soldatic (2015) suggests that the structure of settler colonialism, fundamentally transforms the social meaning of disability for Indigenous peoples, stating that ‘indigenous knowledges map the body and mind differently from those western disability epistemologies and, therefore, what stands as disability for the settler is not positioned in this way for indigenous people’ (p. 57). Like Massad’s (2002) critique of the universalization of ‘gay rights’, and as Puar (2017) has emphasized, disability is not an identity that easily or unproblematically traverses national boundaries, and for settler states to promote it as such among peoples of colonized and occupied nations, perpetuates a colonial savior logic invoked to justify forced removal, dispossession, and disavowal of Indigenous nationhood. In this article, we highlight Indigenous scholars’ writings on Indigenous peoples’ connections to land. Foregrounding the original ontological connection to ancestral lands illuminates the unique perspective that Indigenous peoples bring to resisting disability injustice inherent to settler colonialism. Our intent is to center Indigenous communities- largely unrecognized within disability studies- that are *already* having these conversations. We particularly point to the way in which Indigenous peoples have foregrounded disability justice within struggles for national sovereignty to highlight the inextricability of disability justice and settler decolonization.

Because this paper draws from multiple theoretical lenses, we want to make explicit our understanding of Indigeneity as a political identity that is shared across tribal groups and first peoples of the land. This term was developed by first peoples seeking greater recognition within the United Nations. Although worldviews across Indigenous groups differ, Indigenous peoples stress a connection to ancestral lands and a non-Western ontology which frames their kinship, languages, and social organization. ‘Native American’ and ‘Native’ refer specifically to Indigenous groups in the United States settler context. We use Nation names (i.e. Diné or Standing Rock Sioux) when speaking about specific Indigenous nations.

The subsequent sections highlight three potential areas of convergence between Indigenous and disability theory. We approach this project with a broader interest in building meaningful political alliances, the urgency of which is driven home by settler states' mobilization of 'disability nationalism' to make disabled settlers 'productive' in perpetuating settler-colonialism (McRuer, 2010; Mitchell and Snyder, 2010)⁵.

Three points of (potential) convergence

Logics of elimination and erasure

Whose (continuous) disappearance does the settler capitalist state require to reproduce itself? A logic of elimination drives both disabled and Indigenous peoples' oppression. Non-Indigenous disabled and Indigenous peoples pose challenges to the settler capitalist state that it seeks to overcome through elimination. This logic involves the erasure of 'unfit' peoples and their unfit land, livestock, and ways of life. These logics play out in different communities, in different contexts, and with different tools. Indigenous and disabled people are not monolithic, and race, class, gender, and sexuality together yield different material circumstances such that more privileged disabled people are more easily recognized and incorporated into the settler state. Yet the continuity of this logic provides ideological infrastructure that travels, enabling ableist and settler colonial ideologies to more easily take hold. The U.S. mobilizes logics of elimination to justify the oppression of both non-Indigenous disabled people (through curative violence and eugenic imaginings of a future without disability) (Kim, 2017; Kafer, 2013) and Indigenous peoples, the latter exemplified, among many examples, through boarding schools that sought to 'kill the Indian and save the man' (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). We highlight logics of elimination to expose ideologies that oppress (and connect) different groups through overlapping but distinct systems. For Indigenous peoples, we situate the erasure and disablement of people as bound up with settlers' *disablement of land*.

Settler colonialism is distinct from colonialism in both goals and structure. Veracini (2013:3) explains this distinction, writing that settler colonialism:

...is characterized by a persistent drive to ultimately supersede the conditions of its operation. The successful settler colonies 'tame' a variety of wildernesses, end up establishing independent nations, effectively repress, co-opt, and extinguish Indigenous alterities, and productively manage ethnic diversity.

Each of these projects attempts to erase the relationships and presence of Indigenous peoples, lands, languages, and nationhoods. Ultimately, the system aims to erase itself and the memory of the process of erasure.

Wolfe (2006:402) defines settler colonialism as an ongoing, ‘inclusive land-centered project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies from the metropolitan center to the frontier encampment, with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies.’ Settler colonialism is not a point in history, nor is it a unilateral, anthropocentric structure. Instead, it integrates multiple institutions and oppressions with implications in the material world. Discussing settler colonialism, then, means discussing the relationship between Indigenous nations, institutions of oppression and marginalization (i.e. patriarchy, racism, ableism), and materiality (i.e. bodies, land, livestock, crops, space). Working at the nexus of settler colonial and disability theory, we center Indigenous nationhood as a practice of ongoing Indigenous survivance in the face of settler colonial destruction of Indigenous lands, livestock, and peoples (Hubbard, 2014; Voyles, 2015). Survivance is an active resistance that goes beyond simply ‘surviving’ settler state violence, to actively thriving within a system that works to continuously eliminate and restrict Indigenous survival. The erasure and elimination of Indigenous peoples is tied to a logic of elimination imposed on the land and livestock of Indigenous peoples, such that land and resources may be appropriated and extracted for profit by settler societies.

Since contact, Indigenous peoples have struggled against settler-colonial attempts to erase their physical presence on and connection to ancestral lands. To illustrate this concept, we pull from several Diné and non-Diné scholars who write about the 1863 forced removal (called the Long Walk) of Diné from Diné Bikeyah to Fort Defiance at the hands of Kit Carson and his men. Diné historian Jennifer Denetdale, (2014:72) writes that the U.S. ‘claimed the southwest as its territories.’ Following this declaration, an enforced network of settler colonialism worked to remove, displace, and erase the Diné. First attempts to defeat the Diné proved unsuccessful, so the military adopted a strategy which ‘scorched Diné Bikeyah and starved and humiliated Diné peoples’ (Denetdale, 2014:74). The forced removal of the Diné along with countless other Indigenous nations came through the demolition of crops, lands, and livestock alongside the violence against people. Hubbard (2014:239) explains how lands and livestock are implicated in removal processes, ‘by removing the means of survival, the perpetrators of genocide succeed in removing Indigenous peoples’⁶. Voyles (2015:ix) calls this practice of settler colonialism *wastelanding*, or:

...the way[s] in which resources come to enact, enable, and sometimes embody colonial relationships between the U.S. settler colonial state and Native nations, focusing on the ways in which discourses about lands and the peoples who inhabit them shape how colonial violence occurs.

The assault on lands extends to livestock, water, and crops. In other words, *wastelanding* is the process through which settler relationships to Indigenous lands mirror settler relationships

to Indigenous peoples of the lands, or in simple terms— settlers do to the land what they do to the peoples of the land.

Voyles (2014:xii) explains the logic of *wastelanding* as it extends to the Treaty of 1868, where Diné returned to Diné Bikeyah. Through the completion of the treaty, it was believed that Diné Bikeyah was, ‘as one historian put it, ‘waterless worthless waste’. Just as was the case when they were forcibly removed, when the Diné returned to their land, the settlers’ characterization of the land mirrored their characterization of Diné as a people. Characterizations of land can also fortify settler subjectivity as able-bodied and heteropatriarchal through narratives of land cultivation that emphasize settlers’ strength, capability, and productivity, as in the Zionist settler colonial project in Occupied Palestine (Puar, 2017). The intertwined characterization of unfit lands and peoples accentuates that an assault on one (land or people) is an assault on both. Solidarity with Indigenous peoples must recognize this connected relationship of Indigenous peoples to land and foreground Indigenous sovereignty as *sine qua non* in imagining futures toward which to struggle.

Proposing a feminist theory of disability, Rosemarie Garland-Thompson (2002:28; italics added) writes that ‘a vague notion of suffering and its potential deterrence drives much of the *logic of elimination* that rationalizes selective abortion.’ A eugenic logic of elimination- which functions to legitimize disability oppression and genocidal practices against disabled people- has likenesses to the logic of elimination of settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006; Clare, 2017; Meekosha, 2011). Underlying both settler-colonialism and ableism is a logic that is often for Indigenous peoples less about exploiting labor and more about eliminating the original inhabitants of land to justify theft for capital accumulation, while for disabled people, it is about eliminating ‘unfit workers.

Logics of elimination that target both Indigenous peoples and (non-Indigenous) disabled people are fundamentally rooted in the political-economy and derive from the material needs of capitalist production. While Indigenous peoples’ existence threatens the legitimacy of settlers’ land claims, foundational for settler capitalism, disabled people are reduced to ‘unfit’ workers or ‘useless eaters’ under the social relations of capital. As Russell (2001:87) argues, ‘disabled is used to classify persons deemed less exploitable or not exploitable by the owning class who control the means of production in a capitalist economy.’ Paternalistic classifications of ‘unfitness’, savagery, incompetence, subhumanity, and dependence are ascribed to both Indigenous peoples and people with disabilities, based on the (non-)utility of their bodies for the expansion of capital. Likewise, settler colonialism seeks to eliminate Native peoples to justify land dispossession necessary for capital accumulation. In line with this, Indigenous peoples have been characterized as ‘poor stewards of land’ as a means to legitimize settlers’ theft of land and resources (Weisiger, 2011).⁷ This is perhaps, in part too, because Indigenous epistemology and conceptualizations of relations to land- which reject the reduction of land to a resource, or to exchange value-, fundamentally contradict the social

and spatial relations of capital, thereby undermining capitalism's dominance and supposed 'naturalness,' timelessness, or inevitability.

As Erevelles and Minear (2010:133) explain how in discussing the entanglement of race and disability in intersectional theories,

...colonial ideologies conceiving of the colonized races as intrinsically degenerate sought to bring these 'bodies' under control via segregation and/or destruction. [...]. The association of degeneracy and disease with racial difference also translates into an attribution of diminished cognitive and rational capacities to non-white populations.

Ableist logics have long been invoked to justify the displacement, confinement, and genocide of Indigenous peoples on which the U.S. state rests.⁸ Eugenic ideology gave rise to practices of reproductive control which have particularly impacted disabled, Black, and Indigenous women, for, as Soldatic (2015:61) notes, 'indigenous and disabled women's fecundity was posed as a threat to the production and reproduction of the white able-bodied masculine settler nation.' A logic of elimination functions to justify parallel practices of elimination like forced sterilization, confinement, and institutionalization (e.g. in mental asylums, prisons, and boarding schools; Ben-Moshe, 2011; Chapman et al., 2014).

Sovereignty and self-determination

National sovereignty has served as a rallying concept in struggles for self-determination. While Indigenous communities invoke sovereignty to resist settler colonialism in the U.S., bodily sovereignty and self-determination have also been central demands of disabled people. *National self-determination*, little acknowledged as essential for genuine disability liberation for *all* peoples, is central to the struggles of Indigenous peoples, and is particularly paramount for Indigenous peoples to protect the earth on which they/we live, which as we have argued, is intimately tied to issues of disability and health for Indigenous peoples.

Legal scholar S.L. Pevar (2012:82) defines sovereign nations as those which 'exercise inherent authority over their members and territories.' Barker (2005:18) writes that the discourse of 'sovereignty' was taken up by Indigenous peoples to distinguish Native peoples from the umbrella of multiculturalism:

Instead, sovereignty defined indigenous peoples with concrete rights to self-government, territorial integrity, and cultural autonomy under international customary law. By doing so, it served to link indigenous peoples across the territorial borders of

nation-states, refuting their position under the domains of domestic policy and reclaiming their status under the conventions and relations of international law.

In other words, Indigenous peoples adopted the language of the settler to reaffirm their position as independent nations prior to colonization and to refuse the claims of non-Indigenous peoples to their lands.

More recently, critical Indigenous scholars like Alfred (2009) write that sovereignty is wrapped up with Indigenous nationhood and resurgence, meaning sovereignty pertains to more than simply authority over territory and members, but also the survivance of connections between lands and members. This includes a reformation of ontologies of land, language, kinship systems, and worldview. Beyond just the internal work of sovereignty, it relates to how Native peoples connect with other peoples. Grande (2000:171) writes that sovereignty is ‘both a project organized to defend and sustain the basic right of Indigenous peoples to exist in wholeness and to thrive in their relations with other peoples.’

For the Diné, discourses of sovereignty were used to secure autonomy over a large portion of ancestral homelands (Diné Bikeyah) by their negotiations in the Treaty of 1868. This negotiation was the only treaty in which Indigenous peoples used the framework of the treaty to regain access to nearly all their ancestral land, and is one of the earliest examples of Indigenous nations adopting the discourses imposed on them as a means of survival.

We raise this discussion not to purport a solution to the complex and multifaceted history of sovereignty among numerous Native nations, but to show how the use of borders can prove a liberatory option within the particular context of U.S. settler coloniality. While heeding Audre Lorde’s oft-quoted caution that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’, sometimes the master’s tools are strategically mobilized to survive along the road to dismantling the master’s house. As Barker (2005:26) writes:

Sovereignty is historically contingent. What it has meant and what it currently means belong to the political subjects who have deployed and are deploying it to do the work of defining their relationships with one another, their political agendas, and their strategies for decolonization and social justice.

National sovereignty has proven an essential political framework through which Indigenous peoples have secured a degree of self-determination under settler colonialism. As Bernice Johnson Reagon (1983:358) argues, ‘at a certain stage nationalism is crucial to a people if you are going to ever impact as a group in your own interest. Nationalism at another point becomes reactionary because it is totally inadequate for surviving in the world with many peoples.’ In the current moment, survival of Indigenous peoples and lands depends upon, at times, working within settler frameworks, while at the same time weaponizing them to

produce liberatory spaces in the present and subverting the settler state's future.⁹ While sovereignty claims have been an essential tool for Indigenous nations resisting ongoing settler violence, we recognize the limits of using settler frameworks (i.e. sovereignty, borders, nationalism) and know that an Indigenous discourse will never translate into a settler framework.

Disabled activists' calls for individual self-determination within the (settler) state have largely neglected questions of *national* self-determination. This raises a significant critique of notions of access and inclusion that have been central to the disability rights movement. Indigenous peoples' calls for sovereignty over land- and the disablement of Indigenous land/bodies consequent of disregard for Native sovereignty- suggest that within settler colonial contexts, disability justice requires that settlers *not* be included in all spaces. Indigenous struggles for national sovereignty challenge the uncritically assumed desirability of access/inclusion and suggest that decolonial disability justice necessitates that Indigenous peoples' land *ought to be inaccessible to or non-inclusive of* (disabled and nondisabled) settlers. It is a particularly white and imperial logic which suggests spaces should be open to everyone insofar as this ignores the reality of geopolitical power dynamics. National power imbalances enable imperial and colonial powers to justify interventions and occupations that disregard national sovereignty through the paternalistic rhetoric of 'humanitarianism' (Gill and Schlund-Vials, 2014). The Dakota Access Pipeline, which renders Native land accessible to settlers via the blatant disregard for tribal sovereignty, epitomizes the challenge Indigenous liberation poses to liberal conceptions of disability rights that uncritically celebrate access and inclusion on stolen land.

Seelman (2016:262) asserts that 'self-determination, human rights and justice are fundamental values for the Disability Rights Movement.' While it is undoubtedly the case, as Mirza et al. (2016:162) contend, that 'values such as decisional autonomy, self-determination, and individualism are derivatives of Western thinking and culture,' self-determination has been a powerful political tool for disabled people in the U.S. context demanding control over their bodies and lives. A materialist critique of the settler-colonial and ableist capitalist state, challenges postmodern theorizations of porous (bodily and national) borders, which can undermine the limited sovereignty achieved by disabled and Indigenous peoples demanding self-determination. Theorizations of porous borders can be deployed to legitimize the architecture of settler colonialism.¹⁰ In a similar vein, insisting on disabled people's sovereignty over their bodies and lives is an important means of challenging organizations (e.g. Autism Speaks) or people who profess to speak on behalf of disabled people. The case of Ashley X, whose parents surgically altered her body to prevent her from aging, professedly acting 'in her best interests', highlights the importance of preserving individual bodily sovereignty and self-determination as important political tools against ableism and heteropatriarchy (Kafer, 2013).

While recognizing the complexity of individual and national sovereignty, both insofar as ableist ideology falsely frames non-disabled people as fully autonomous/independent/determining and disabled people as exceptionally or uniquely dependent, and given the colonial roots of the nation-state, we also cannot ignore the political potency of self-determination as a rallying framework in liberation struggles.¹¹ Just as sovereignty over one's body is essential for disability justice, sovereignty over land is indispensable for decolonial and disability justice for Native communities and people, whose epistemologies transcend a clean bifurcation of body/land.

Futurity: imagining solidarity while (re)imagining the future

The present is shaped by historical conditions and processes, and the present and past, in turn, shape collective imaginings of the future. At the same time, our collective imagined futures inform the present, providing a blueprint that guides how we think, act, and desire in our everyday lives. In working toward more just alternatives to present conditions and social relations, we don't simply aspire to a romanticized past, but toward a particular vision of the future. How we imagine that future, has significant implications for the efficacy of present day struggles toward decolonial disability justice.

Indigenous scholars have intervened in philosophical conversations where linear temporal narratives dominate. Vine Deloria (2003) writes that linear and progressive timelines represent Western allegiances to progress and Christianity and are at odds with Indigenous ontologies. Further, Deloria identifies one of the greatest schisms between Christianity and Indigenous worldviews- the fissure between a temporal ontology and a spatial ontology. Trained as a theologian, Deloria writes immensely on the threads of Christian theology that weave through Western epistemologies and political economies. While Western ontologies are concerned with temporal movements toward a progressive future that is better (or settled, tamed, and exploited), many Indigenous peoples might describe time as cyclical or simply non-linear. Indigenous scholarship considers not only the temporal realities of past, present, and future, but also their significance for space, raising an important question: *What does the futurity of space look like?*

Arvin et al. (2013:24) describe the project of reimagining a future for Indigenous peoples and the construction of solidarity. Drawing on Andrea Smith's (2008) work, they write that 'one of the most radical and necessary moves toward decolonization requires imagining and enacting a future for Indigenous peoples— a future based on terms of their own making.' This project of Indigenous futurity is described by scholars as more than just a linear move forward in time, but also an attention to pasts, presents, and futures (ibid, 2013).

Imagined futures, center self-determination and contest settler logics. The ongoing project and future that Indigenous scholars strive for is a bit of the past, a bit of the future, and a lot of the present, including ongoing survival tactics. In the face of erasure, genocide, and dispossession, Indigenous peoples' futurity remains ever contingent upon the survival of Indigenous peoples in the past and present.

Writing on able-bodied supremacy, Alison Kafer (2013) analyzes how projections of 'the future', reinforce compulsory able-bodiedness in the present. Disability is portrayed as contaminating the gene pool, draining public funds, burdening the nuclear family, and weakening the (settler) nation. Consequently, Kafer (2013:27) observes that 'disability too often serves as the agreed-upon limit of our projected futures.' Disabled people are depicted as threats to the futurity of the settler state, and their elimination (through cure or prevention) used as an index of 'progress' in projected futures. Rejecting the ableist assumption that disability is undesirable and its ultimate elimination the end goal, Kafer (2013:28) suggests that 'imagining different futures and temporalities might help us see, and do, the present differently.' Imagining futures wherein disability is legible as radical possibility or desirable difference must be simultaneous with confronting the corporeal violence of exploitation that produces disabled bodies and renders spaces inaccessible, physically and spiritually (Erevelles, 2011; Kafer, 2013). The project of undoing dominant logics deployed by the U.S. state to dispossess and erase peoples deemed 'unfit' or 'undesirable', is pivotal for realizing liberatory futures for disabled and Indigenous peoples.

Projections of the future that cannot think beyond the settler colonial state, or in which Indigenous or disabled people no longer exist, invariably have consequences for present-day decisions, policies, and practices that affect non-Indigenous disabled and Indigenous peoples. Imagining futures in which disability is desirable, as Kafer (2013) suggests, and in which Indigenous peoples are self-determining, as Indigenous feminists proffer, is foundational to resisting, struggling, creating, and building in ways that don't replicate existing forms of oppression and exploitation. The mass disablement of Indigenous peoples/lands in the past and present as a tactic of settler colonialism, poses a challenge to, but does not undermine, the necessary project of imagining futures in which disability is desirable. This does not mean that disability is (in the present) or can only be (in the future) a *symptom* or *symbol* of oppression, but points to the urgency of simultaneous and coalitional struggle toward a future in which disabled and Indigenous peoples can exercise self-determination within or independent of a state that recognizes, respects, and supports their sovereignty.

Indigenous resistance to land-body disablement at Standing Rock

We turn here to Standing Rock as a current and concrete example of the theoretical ties outlined above. Leading up to its construction, and continuing today through a diversity of

tactics, the Standing Rock Sioux tribe fought the US\$3.8 billion crude-oil Dakota Access pipeline, a project of the private company Energy Transfer Partners. Though the water protectors' resistance struck much of the American public as an isolated event over a land claim, neither the U.S. violation of tribal sovereignty, nor Native resistance at Standing Rock are aberrant. Standing Rock is a recent and highly visible struggle in the ongoing resistance of Indigenous peoples to settler colonial practices of appropriation, displacement, and destruction. Often overlooked in media representations, further, the Standing Rock resistance was deeply embedded in Indigenous spirituality and worldview. Horses, prayer, and ceremony were central to the struggle. We emphasize this because the form that resistance takes, matters. Practices of resistance are born from different worldviews, and doing activism in distinctly Indigenous ways, is itself central to Indigenous peoples' survival and refusal of settler-coloniality.¹² Indigenous resistance centers not just on people, but on love/protection and reverence for the environment. In this sense, Indigenous ontology challenges the liberal humanist conception of bounded, autonomous subjectivity also critiqued by disability scholars. At the same time, Indigenous peoples center relationships between land, body, and community in ways often overlooked by non-Indigenous disability theorists, who are too often remiss about settler colonial practices of land appropriation and disablement (with important exceptions e.g. Clare, 2017; Ben-Moshe, 2016).

The settler tactic of disabling earth has been a conversation in Indigenous communities since contact, and Indigenous resistance to land-body disablement is not new. This continuity of land-body disablement is exemplified in a statement made by Amanda Lickers, part of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN), as reported in *Truthout*:

We are talking about how we experience climate change and environmental destruction as a direct result of colonization. [...] The root problem is not climate change per se, the root problem is the occupation of our territories and these anti-Indigenous world views that see the natural world as separate from human existence (Dhillon, 2016).

Calling attention to the threat the 1,172 feet long crude-oil Dakota Access pipeline poses to the health of the Earth and Indigenous peoples, an educational pamphlet created by the Sacred Stone Camp, a site of Indigenous resistance at Standing Rock, states:

The Dakota Access threatens everything from farming and drinking water to entire ecosystems, wildlife and food sources surrounding the Missouri. The nesting of bald eagles and piping plovers as well as the quality of wild rice and *medicinal plants like sweet grass* are just a few of the species at stake here. We ask that everyone stands with us against this *threat to our health, our culture, and our sovereignty* (NYC Stands, 2016:409, emphasis added).

In this case, the disablement of bodies is framed as concomitant with the destruction of culture and violation of Indigenous national sovereignty. An excerpt from a 2015 Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Resolution, included in the pamphlet, similarly frames the colonial appropriation and destruction of land and disablement of Indigenous peoples as inextricable:

WHEREAS, the Dakota Access Pipeline threatens *public health* and welfare on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation; and WHEREAS, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe relies on *the waters of the life-giving Missouri River* for our continued existence, and the Dakota Access Pipeline poses a serious risk to [Mni Sose and to] the very survival of our Tribe' (p. 411, emphasis added).

LaDonna Brave Bull Allard (2016), member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and founder of the Sacred Stone Camp, historicizes the struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline in an article recalling the Whitestone Massacre of 1863, in which an estimated 300-400 Sioux were killed by the U.S. Army in North Dakota. She emphasizes that the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline is not an exceptional or isolated incident, but a most recent manifestation of the foundational structure of U.S. settler colonialism. She describes how:

Where the Cannonball River joins the Missouri River, at the site of our camp today to stop the Dakota Access pipeline, there used to be a whirlpool that created large, spherical sandstone formations. The river's true name is Inyan Wakangapi Wakpa, River that Makes the Sacred Stones,' which is how the Sacred Stone Camp got its name (para. 5).

She explains that the stones are no longer created, and have not been 'since the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredged the mouth of the Cannonball River and flooded the area in the late 1950s as they finished the Oahe dam' (para. 6). In so doing, the U.S. state killed a section of the Sioux's sacred river, which is no longer safe to drink, and also destroyed burial sites. Allard goes on to write: 'Our people are in that water. This river holds the story of my entire life' (para. 7). Her words belie a fixed human/nature binary that imagines bodies as bounded and independent from an external and fixed space. The words echoed by water protectors- 'water is life'- similarly capture this notion of land as body, and body as land. The question of what this negation of a land/body dichotomy means for disability liberation is one to be grappled with in future disability studies scholarship. In closing, Allard (2016) writes:

The U.S. government is wiping out our most important cultural and spiritual areas. And as it erases our footprint from the world, it erases us as a people. These sites must be protected, or our world will end, it is that simple. Our young people have a right to know who they are. They have a right to language, to culture, to tradition. The way they learn these things is through connection to our lands and our history. If we allow

an oil company to dig through and destroy our histories, our ancestors, our hearts and souls as a people, is that not genocide?’ (para. 13).

Allard’s words attest to the urgency of rethinking disability liberation to account for the destruction and disablement of land as the disablement and genocide of peoples. Despite its concern with restructuring ableist spaces, a colonial conception of land (taken for granted as fixed space) goes largely unquestioned within disability studies. Allard highlights that, for Indigenous peoples, land is not merely fixed space upon which people live, but enmeshed with Indigenous histories, languages, and ontologies. The appropriation of Indigenous lands is not merely about denying Indigenous peoples physical space on which to exist, but speaks to efforts to disappear peoples for the sake of capitalist profit accumulation through territorial expansion, through the destruction of language, culture, and history that are learned through and inextricable from land (Wolfe, 2006). Indigenous peoples’ resistance at Standing Rock suggests an understanding of disabling land *as* disabling people/s that has received scant attention in disability studies. The framing of settler coloniality as ‘disabling land’ is intended to foreground that the settler colonial structure is inherently counter to disability justice; disablement of peoples goes hand in hand with settler land theft and degradation. Justice for (disabled) Indigenous peoples thus demands Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

Closing thoughts on (uneasy) solidarity

This paper sought to lay theoretical groundwork for viewing Standing Rock (and Indigenous resistance to settler coloniality more broadly) as a striving for both disability and Indigenous liberation. Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, transcend a limiting land/body dichotomy taken for granted within settler conceptions of disability, and which troublingly assumes that decolonization is outside the scope of disability studies (Soldatic and Grech, 2014). While recognizing differences in the struggles of Indigenous and non-Indigenous disabled communities, we’ve also suggested points of convergence in the theoretical lenses developed out of different histories. We’ve suggested three areas of potential connection or likeness in these political projects: 1. A eugenic logic of elimination is used to justify genocidal practices against both non-Indigenous disabled and (disabled) Indigenous peoples. This ideology is not inevitable or ahistorical, but derives from material life- or the mode of production- to justify land dispossession and appropriation, attempted genocides of disabled and Indigenous peoples, and institutionalization or hyper-exploitation of ‘non-productive’ bodies to maximize profit. We foreground the political economy of elimination because the framing of oppression has implications for theories of change. Changing ideology without altering the economic structure of settler capitalism which gives rise to an ideology of elimination will invariably prove inadequate; 2. Self-determination and sovereignty offer potent political frameworks that both peoples have effectively mobilized in struggle, and; 3. Imagining alternative futures- ones which refuse the ableist-settler state’s projected futures

devoid of disability and Indigeneity- is critical for realizing national and bodily self-determination in the present and into the future.

In outlining potential points of connection, we do not profess to speak for disabled or Indigenous communities, but suggest grounds for alliance in current movements against ableism and settler colonialism and for self-determination and sovereignty. This does not presume that solidarity is uncomplicated. As Mohanty (2003:7) reminds us, ‘solidarity is always an achievement, the result of active struggle.’ As the disablement of Indigenous peoples/land as a tactic and product of settler colonialism renders clear, there is no disability justice without decolonization. The persistence of ableism, further, undermines the possibility of Indigenous sovereignty, evident in how eugenic ideology normalizes ongoing efforts to eliminate Indigenous peoples and a dearth of public healthcare that particularly affects Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities (Minich, 2016). In conceptualizing the dialectic of oppression and resistance that continuously (re)shapes the material world, it is also significant that forms of environmental racism that disable Indigenous communities at the same time, give way to resistant movements such as the movement at Standing Rock. This point is central because it challenges conceptions of disability as solely lack, loss, or social death within the ableist imaginary, attesting that disability also gives rise to new ways of knowing, thinking, being, and doing that inform struggles toward a more just future.

In discussing futurity, we refuse moves to idealize the future or past in place of dealing with the material conditions of the present. This is not to ignore memories of the past or concede radically alternative futures, but to locate them in a productive place for current struggle. This means refusing to imagine the ‘future’ through the settler colonial lens of progress, erasure, and/or taming of ‘wildernesses’. Rejecting eugenic and colonial projected futures of ‘progress’ and tamed wild(er)ness devoid of minds/bodies that deviate from ableist and colonial standards, and imagining alternatives are critical for enacting desirable crip and decolonial futures (Kafer, 2013).

Notes

¹ We use disablement to emphasize that disability, like all social identities, is a ‘materialist [category] constituted by the exploitative conditions of labor in transnational capitalism’ (Erevelles, 2017: 111). Our aim in distinguishing disablement in this way is to avoid reinscribing *disability* or *disabled people* as inherently deficient/undesirable. Heeding the words of feminist disability scholars who critique simplistic and ableist arguments which suggest that women ‘are disabled by compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy,’ disability is not solely a *symbol* of the violence of settler coloniality (Hall, 2011:3). While disability is often produced through systems of oppression, disability is also a valuable epistemic location from which to wage resistance to these intersecting systems.

² Sherry (2007:15) rightly critiques the use of disability as metaphor in postcolonial writing, specifically contesting the use of disability as a symbol of colonialism's devastation. This logic implies that if we 'get rid of colonialism, [...] we will avoid many disability experiences, and that is unquestionably assumed to be a good thing.' Again, this is not the argument we are making. While we reject the invocation of disability as *solely* a symbol of the destruction of settler colonialism- with its ableist implication that disability is inherently undesirable- we are pointing to the very real material effects of settler colonialism on Indigenous land/bodies.

³ Highlighting the interrelation of debilitating settler and 'external' forms of colonialism, depleted uranium is, in turn, used by the U.S. to disable millions in imperialist interventions that continue the circulation of capital through an endless war economy (Chew, 2008).

⁴ We use the term able-bodied supremacy for simplicity, and as a rejection of a strict mind/body dualism. In using it, we refer as well to the dominance of able-mindedness (e.g. being neurotypical, or intellectually, psychiatrically, or developmentally nondisabled) within the social and economic structure.

⁵ The Israeli Defense Force's (IDF) recent celebration of having sworn in the first 11 soldiers with developmental disabilities epitomizes disability (settler) nationalism as manifest in the settler colonial Israeli state (Eisenbud, 2017).

⁶ Israeli settlers have, similarly, deployed the mass destruction of Palestinian olive trees- a key aspect of Palestinian identity, culture, and livelihood- as a tactic of settler colonialism.

⁷ In the context of Palestine, Israel has similarly advanced the myth that Palestinians occupied a barren desert and that Zionist settlers 'made the desert bloom' (George, 1979).

⁸ In her account of a colonial Canadian government inquiry which framed the death of Indigenous person Frank Paul while in police custody as a product of homelessness and alcoholism as opposed to settler coloniality, Razack (2015) reveals how colonial and ableist logics mutually constitute and reinforce one another. She notes that Frank Paul's death was rendered unexceptional and ungrievable through rhetorics that emphasized his lack of dominant or 'normal' abilities. During the inquiry he was described as 'a man on the brink of death anyway' (65), 'a man without mind' (80), 'likely incontinent' (63), and a man who could 'only crawl', had 'gnarled hands', and an 'inability to fully function' (63). Paul's dehumanization through such descriptions is contingent upon the unquestioned sub-humanity of disabled people.

⁹ In a similar vein, disabled activists have pointed to the intrinsic limitations of seeking disability justice within the class structure of the capitalist state, which views human value in terms of labor power and thus inherently renders many bodies disabled and-- within the logic of capital-- undesirable (Russell and Malhotra, 2001; Russell, 2002).

¹⁰ Eyal Weizman (2006) explains how the Israeli 'Defence' Force (IDF) weaponizes postmodern and poststructuralist theories through its 'Operational Theory Research Institute' in order to conceptualize Palestinian spaces as porous, borderless, and always penetrable by Israeli military forces.

¹¹ Black self-determination is also one of the key demands of the Movement for Black Lives policy platform, continuing a long history of the Black liberation movement foregrounding self-determination in the fight against white supremacy.

¹² Similarly, disabled activists have noted that the ways nondisabled people generally conceptualize activism- and the language used by many activists (e.g. marching, standing up, speaking out)- fail to account for many bodies. Disabled activists have waged creative forms of struggle born of distinct knowledges and which account for diverse embodiments (e.g. Hedva, 2015; Wheelchair protesters, 2016).

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