COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL STRUCTURES OF POWER AND DOMINATION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
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Description:
This stream will consider the endemic forces of colonial power in contemporary global policymaking. We will investigate the relationships between inequalities of power, race, and wealth, with a focus on issues of human rights and gender inequities.

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Colonial and Postcolonial Structures of Power and Domination in Historical Perspective

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<td>La Paperson, &quot;Settler Colonialism is a Set of Technologies&quot;, in La Paperson, A Third University is Possible, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2018, pp. 1-24. <a href="http://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/a-third-university-is-possible">www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/a-third-university-is-possible</a></td>
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Settler Colonialism Is a Set of Technologies

I learned that our land was not quite our land; that our compound was part of property owned by an African landlord . . . that we were now ahoi, tenants at will. How did we come to be ahoi on our own land?

—Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Dreams in a Time of War*

In *Dreams in a Time of War*, the first book in a trilogy of memoirs, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o begins with land. The dispossession of Indigenous Kenyans from their land, his Gĩkũyũ family’s dispossession from their traditional lands in particular, was made legally possible through the legitimation of the printed English word over the millennia-old word of the Gĩkũyũ people. How land becomes property not only was but is still the great colonizing trick that paves the way for capitalist accumulation.

Indigenous land rights in Kenya were and are still largely guided by customary law, which evolved over millennia to describe clan and community rights to cultivation, freedom of use, and stewardship of land. **Under customary law, land often cannot be permanently alienated into property.** Nineteenth-century British colonial authorities found it convenient to respect customary law, as it seemed to preclude African land titles, and colonialists actually used customary law to justify the forced labor of Indigenous Africans as “cultivators.” However, Kenya’s “white highlands” of the Gĩkũyũ became one of the few hotbeds of white settlement outside of South Africa. There, lands of Indigenous Africans were declared terra nullius, making way for white land titles, and as the land was bought and sold under their homes and under their feet, the Gĩkũyũ became tenants on their own land. When needed to be removed, they became designated as “squatters.” In 1948, British colonialists extended the Indian
Act to Kenya, a legal claim to convert (Black) Indigenous land into British Crown lands and Black (Indigenous) peoples into Crown subjects.[1] In this example, we can see the separations of Black–Indigenous, people–land, and the simultaneous extension of white sovereignty over these now separate lands and peoples. Technologies of alienation, separation, conversion of land into property and of people into targets of subjection, continue to mutate. Black bodies become squatters, become subjects of the Crown, then of the colonial state, and now of the state of Kenya. Settlers become protected by rule of force; their violence against Black “squatters” becomes legitimate; state violence becomes normalized repertoire. Black bodies become exchangeable juridical objects to be recast as needed for settler property making. Settler colonialism is about the land. Yet, technologies to make land into property also remake Indigenous African bodies.

Land is the prime concern of settler colonialism, contexts in which the colonizer comes to a “new” place not only to seize and exploit but to stay, making that “new” place his permanent home. Settler colonialism thus complicates the center–periphery model that was classically used to describe colonialism, wherein an imperial center, the “metropole,” dominates distant colonies, the “periphery.” Typically, one thinks of European colonization of Africa, India, the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, in terms of external colonialism, also called exploitation colonialism, where land and human beings are recast as natural resources for primitive accumulation: coltan, petroleum, diamonds, water, salt, seeds, genetic material, chattel. Theories named as “settler colonial studies” had a resurgence beginning around 2006.[2] However, the analysis of settler colonialism is actually not new, only often ignored within Western critiques of empire.[3] The critical literatures of the colonized have long positioned the violence of settlement as a prime feature in colonial life as well as in global arrangements of power. We can see this in Franz Fanon’s foundational critiques of colonialism. Whereas Fanon’s work is often generalized for its diagnoses of anti/colonial violence and the racialized psychoses of colonization upon colonized and colonizer, Fanon is also talking about settlement as the particular feature of French colonization in Algeria. For Fanon, the violence of French colonization in Algeria arises from settlement as a spatial immediacy of empire: the geospatial collapse of metropole and colony into the same time and place. On the “selfsame land” are spatialized white immunity and racialized violation, non-Native desires for freedom, Black life, and Indigenous relations.[4]
Settler colonialism is too often thought of as “what happened” to Indigenous people. This kind of thinking confines the experiences of Indigenous people, their critiques of settler colonialism, their decolonial imaginations, to an unwarranted historicizing parochialism, as if settler colonialism were a past event that “happened to” Native peoples and not generalizable to non-Natives. Actually, settler colonialism is something that “happened for” settlers. Indeed, it is happening for them/us right now. Wa Thiong’o’s question of how instead of why directs us to think of land tenancy laws, debt, and the privatization of land as settler colonial technologies that enable the “eventful” history of plunder and disappearance. Property law is a settler colonial technology. The weapons that enforce it, the knowledge institutions that legitimize it, the financial institutions that operationalize it, are also technologies. Like all technologies, they evolve and spread.

Recasting land as property means severing Indigenous peoples from land. This separation, what Hortense Spillers describes as “the loss of Indigenous name/land” for Africans-turned-chattel, recasts Black Indigenous people as black bodies for biopolitical disposal: who will be moved where, who will be murdered how, who will be machinery for what, and who will be made property for whom.[5] In the alienation of land from life, alienable rights are produced: the right to own (property), the right to law (protection through legitimated violence), the right to govern (supremacist sovereignty), the right to have rights (humanity). In a word, what is produced is whiteness. Moreover, it is not just human beings who are refigured in the schism. Land and nonhumans become alienable properties, a move that first alienates land from its own sovereign life. Thus we can speak of the various technologies required to create and maintain these separations, these alienations: Black from Indigenous, human from nonhuman, land from life.[6]

“How?” is a question you ask if you are concerned with the mechanisms, not just the motives, of colonization. Instead of settler colonialism as an ideology, or as a history, you might consider settler colonialism as a set of technologies—a frame that could help you to forecast colonial next operations and to plot decolonial directions.

This chapter proceeds with the following insights. (1) The settler–native–slave triad does not describe identities. The triad—an analytic mainstay of settler colonial studies—digs a pitfall of identity that not only chills collaborations but also implies that the racial will be the solution. (2) Technologies are trafficked. Technologies generate patterns of social relations to land. Technologies mutate, and so do these
relationships. Colonial technologies travel. In tracing technologies’ past and future trajectories, we can connect how settler colonial and antiblack technologies circulate in transnational arenas. (3) Land—not just people—is the biopolitical target.[7] The examples are many: fracking, biopiracy, damming of rivers and flooding of valleys, the carcasses of pigs that die from the feed additive ractopamine and are allowable for harvest by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The subjugation of land and nonhuman life to deathlike states in order to support “human” life is a “biopolitics” well beyond the Foucauldian conception of biopolitical as governmentality or the neoliberal disciplining of modern, bourgeois, “human” subject. (4) (Y)our task is to theorize in the break, that is, to refuse the master narrative that technology is loyal to the master, that (y)our theory has a Eurocentric origin. Black studies, Indigenous studies, and Other-ed studies have already made their breaks with Foucault (over biopolitics), with Deleuze and Guatarri (over assemblages and machines), and with Marx (over life and primitive accumulation). (5) Even when they are dangerous, understanding technologies provides us some pathways for decolonizing work. We can identify projects of collaboration on decolonial technologies. Colonizing mechanisms are evolving into new forms, and they might be subverted toward decolonizing operations.

The Settler–Native–Slave Triad Does Not Describe Identities

One of the main interventions of settler colonial studies has been to insist that the patterning of social relations is shaped by colonialism’s thirst for land and thus is shaped to fit modes of empire. Because colonialism is a perverted affair, our relationships are also warped into complicitous arrangements of violation, trespass, and collusion with its mechanisms.

For Fanon, the psychosis of colonialism arises from the patterning of violence into the binary relationship between the immune humanity of the white settler and the impugned humanity of the native. For Fanon, the supremacist “right” to create settler space that is immune from violence, and the “right” to abuse the body of the Native to maintain white immunity, this is the spatial and fleshy immediacy of settler colonialism. Furthermore, the “humanity” of the settler is constructed upon his agency over the land and nature. As Maldonado-Torres explains, “I think, therefore I am” is actually an articulation of “I conquer, therefore I am,” a sense of identity posited upon the harnessing of nature and its “natural” people.[8] This creates a host of post-colonial problems that have come to define modernity. Because the humanity of
the settler is predicated on his ability to “write the world,” to make history upon and over the natural world, the colonized is instructed to make her claim to humanity by similarly acting on the world or, more precisely, acting in his. Indeed, for Fanon, it is the perverse ontology of settler becomings—becoming landowner or becoming property, becoming killable or becoming a killer—and the mutual implication of tortured and torturer that mark the psychosis of colonialism.

This problem of modernity and colonial psychosis is echoed in Jack Forbes’s writings:

Columbus was a wétiko. He was mentally ill or insane, the carrier of a terribly contagious psychological disease, the wétiko psychosis. . . .

The wétiko psychosis, and the problems it creates, have inspired many resistance movements and efforts at reform or revolution. Unfortunately, most of these efforts have failed because they have never diagnosed the wétiko.[9]

Under Western modernity, becoming “free” means becoming a colonizer, and because of this, “the central contradiction of modernity is freedom.”[10]

Critiques of settler colonialism, therefore, do not offer just another “type” of colonialism to add to the literature but a mode of analysis that has repercussions for any diagnosis of coloniality and for understanding the modern conditions of freedom. By modern conditions of freedom, I mean that Western freedom is a product of colonial modernity, and I mean that such freedom comes with conditions, with strings attached, most manifest as terms of unfreedom for nonhumans. As Cindi Mayweather says, “your freedom’s in a bind.”[11]

For grasping the twisted plotlines written by colonialism, the settler–native–slave triad is one of the most useful and most problematic heuristics in settler colonial studies. This triad is useful because it quickly describes the crooked relationships constructed by settler colonialism: the settler who accumulates rights, land, and property; the native whose presence on land must be extinguished; the chattel slave who must be kept landless. Although simple, it nonetheless quickly complicates the binaries in terms of which we are trained to think: oppressor–oppressed, black–white, settler–native. Even though white supremacy might be a prime architect in the triad, a triadic analysis decenters white supremacy as the absolute pole or umbrella of oppression. Instead, it shows our skewed participation in the colonization of other
peoples and places. We are all complicit, just some of us a lot more than others. We can think of the triad as a quick sketch of colonialism on a napkin. It is useful for drawing attention to a complicated problem and for disrupting other paradigms. That is about how useful it is.

However, the settler–native–slave triad has also forwarded many problems, in large part because it seems to describe racial identities: settlers, Indigenous peoples, and Black people. Thinking of this triad as identities creates major pitfalls—four of which are pointed out in what follows. The most obvious is the misconstrued question, are Black people settlers? This question is symptomatic of a pitfall of settler elision, where everyone non-Native is assumed to fit the category of settler: settlers = non-Natives = people of color = migrants of color = settlers of color = Black people. Such a question cannot reckon with how Black people are often confronted by the impossibility of settlement, because antiblackness positions Black people as “out of place” on land. More revealing questions would be more specific: when and where have Black communities been settlers? When and where do they cease to be settlers? The same might be asked of other communities, Black and not, indeed, Indigenous and not. Such questions are not directly engaged by the triad, because “the slave” is not shorthand for a generalizable anywhere, anytime Black community anyway.

We have another pitfall of turning the triad into an identity spectrum, where settler–native–slave are thought of as points on a graph and individuals or ethnic groups can be located partway between different categories. Settler–native–slave technologies operate everywhere on everybody in intersecting, sometimes contradictory ways, and always with a dynamic specificity that radically changes with context. Antiblack technologies operate on Mien people in Oakland, California, in 2016 differently from how antiblack/anti-Indigenous/pro-settler technologies might try to reconstruct Mien students into Asian students just a few miles away at UC Berkeley.

We have the pitfall of anthropocentricism. Anthropocentric analyses of colonialism prefer to talk about colonized peoples, not animals, earth, water, and air. This continual return to the racialized human subject—which is identity’s main referent—undermines the work that Indigenous studies has done to emphasize the geopolitical, the land, and the circle of relations that do not begin and end with the human.

Finally, we have another pitfall of untranslatability of North American identities to non-North settings, because settler–native–slave do not map neatly onto other racialized groups elsewhere.
If not identities, then what are the settler–native–slave in the triad? The triad is a figurative shorthand—settler–native–slave are figuraae to describe relations of power with respect to land. They sound like identities, but they are not identities per se. As figuraae, they represent sites of exception that reveal the underlying logic of settler colonial power. As a suitable analogy, sites of exception are like planets, supernovae, and black holes. None is quite comparable to the others; yet each can be analyzed for its particular gravitational effects, which in interaction come to define the field of gravity in the surrounding space. Sites of exception are not comparable, even though their effects can be felt as an interlocking lattice of power. The “settler” is a juridical space; the “native” is a world to be disavowed and dismembered; the “slave” is an ontological system. Space, world, and system are not of the same scale or form. They are not comparable units of analysis.

The “settler” is not an identity; it is the idealized juridical space of exceptional rights granted to normative settler citizens and the idealized exceptionalism by which the settler state exerts its sovereignty. The “settler” is a site of exception from which whiteness emerges. Whiteness is property; it is the right to have rights; it is the legal human; the anthropocentric normal is written in its image. Not all settlers at all times enjoy the full privileges available to the “settler”; rather, settler supremacy is constructed and maintained by a number of technologies: citizenship, private property, civil and criminal innocence, normative settler sexuality, and so on. Settler technologies may be to your advantage always, sometimes, or never, depending on who you are, where you are, and what time it is.[12]

The “native” is not an Indigenous identity; it is a world to be obliterated, exceptionalized as the necropolitical target, and also to be splintered into pieces that are constructed as “naturally” eligible for “primitive accumulation.”[13] The “native” is a site of exception for that which and those who are written as premodern, primitive, and thus “before” law and “before” rights. The “native” is thus exceptionalized from having any recognizable laws or rights that matter in modernity. Technologies of Indigenous erasure include military materiel and methodologies to carry out terror or genocide or containment; frontier law that legitimates murder, rape, torture, and abduction; racial science of disappearance (such as blood quantum); the partitioning of earth into “natural resources” that can be separated, owned, sold, and developed; land privation, privatization, fungibility, and development; boarding schools and institutions of cultural assimilation; resource
development and cultivation, and so on. Technologies of Indigenous erasure are applied to Indigenous people, but some are also applied to enemy Others in war, some are recommissioned to reinvent spaces of frontier and border, some are used to gentrify and redevelop ghettoized space. Anti-indigenous technologies are applied to nonhumans—sometimes specifically to eliminate Indigenous people, such as killing the buffalo as a means to starve Plains peoples; sometimes in the name of progress, such as the killing of Haitian Kreyòl pigs; sometimes as a reflex of desecration, such as the poisoning of nonwhite waters. Primitive accumulation involves not only the gathering of “natural” resources as assets but also the externalizing of the “cost” of the accumulation in the form of contaminated water, disease, and other traumas to the “natural,” nonpropertied, that is, “indigenous,” world. To be subject to anti-Indian technologies does not require you to be an Indigenous person.

The “slave” describes how blackness is transfigured into enslavability and murderability. The “slave” should not be analyzed as a category of labor that “reduces Blackness to a mere tool of settlement” but rather as an ontology of total fungibility and unending property constitutive of the very world order of settler colonialism. That is, the logic of racial capital creates an indefinite being of property to be exchanged, to be shipped or stored, to be parted out, to be disposed. The technologies of antiblackness create ontological illegality or criminal presence, landlessness, lethal geographies, carceral apparatuses, trafficking and abduction, nonpersonhood, and so on. Obviously, technologies of antiblackness circulate onto non-Black bodies. In a U.S.–Mexican borderland context, for example, we see the condensation of antiblack and anti-Indigenous technologies to dispose of brown bodies and to create frontier space—a militarized zone of policing and death. In North American ghetto contexts, we see the wide-scale application of antiblack technologies upon whole communities who can be of mixed ethnicities. However, one incomparable technology of antiblackness is the production of the Black body as in itself the preeminent site for antiblackness. Whereas settler technologies can focus on space, and technologies of Indigenous erasure can focus on land, technologies of antiblackness have a corporeal priority.

Technologies Are Trafficked

Thinking about technologies moves us a little bit out of the trap of thinking about specific identities as well-defined colonizers or as the fixed targets of necropolitics.
Instead, we can see the transit of empire as involving a commute of technologies and a translation of ideologies and logics[17]—a moving cross hair.

This is also why we can analyze the technologies of whiteness, antiblackness, and Indigenous erasure in contexts where there is no apparent white colonizer or phenotypically black person, or ostensibly where “everyone is indigenous” to a country. Technologies of land dispossession are in wide circulation today even in places where we do not see white settler emplacement. For example, the privatization of land in China employs settler colonial technologies, creating indebted dispossessed people by erasing any pre-state land rights. Indeed, Mao Zedong claimed that Indigenous peoples’ rights were irrelevant in China, because the revolution resolved all such dilemmas. In China as well as in Mexico, revolutionary nationalisms claim innocence from colonial processes by claiming a “new future starting now”—conveniently ignoring that its revolution is predicated upon nation-state technology. In Mexico, the concept of mestizaje was transfigured by Mexican neocolonial statecraft into a universal transcendental race, by such luminary statebuilders as José Vasconcelos.[18] In such cases, the settler nation appropriates indigeneity to manufacture a national “ethnicity” that serves dual ends of Indigenous appropriation domestically and a way of exporting a distinct, national “tradition” abroad. Stating that “all of us” Mexican nationals are Indigena en parte is another way of saying that your Indigeneity is not special, that none of you are truly Indigenous anymore. In South Korea, where ostensibly all Koreans are “indigenous” to the peninsula, we witness Indigenous displacement in the logic of neoliberal expansion: the people are increasingly removed from their ancestral homelands and plugged in to the growing South Korean transnational corporate machinery.

With “machinery,” I am drawing from Eve Tuck’s reading (and eventual refusal) of Foucault’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s theorizations of “desiring machines”: assemblages of machines that attach to, accumulate, and create other machines.[19] The settler desires to become the native. His machines turn the Native into chattel and/or subtracts her indigeneity to make her less and less native.[20] Machines of genocide, enslavement, land mining, and war run through the colonial apparatus and produce multiple colonialisms as adaptations to each particular place and time. This is why specific colonial apparatuses differ but similar technologies recirculate in them—pieces of desiring machines that assemble into new machines.
Thus a technological rather than identity–political analysis of the settler–native–slave triad allows us to see the “how” and the “who next” rather than just the “who” of settler colonialism. The triad is a structure of settler colonialism. The relationships it maps were never the ones we loved in the first place. It describes what power wants, not who you are.

Land Is the Biopolitical Target

Biopolitics is normally conceptualized in terms of how “life” for the modern human subject is increasingly controlled by liberal disciplinary apparatuses. Yet the exercises of supremacist sovereign power over life and death are most chillingly undisguised when we consider the ways the life worlds of land, air, water, plants and animals, and Indigenous peoples are reconfigured into natural resources, chattel, and waste: statuses whose capitalist “value” does not depend on whether they are living or dead but only on their fungibility and disposability. For example, in modern animal industrial processes, the carcass is valued just as much as, if not more than, the breathing animal. The business of chicken “farming” involves the separation of birds into parts with exchangeable value, extractable value, or disposable value: skinless, boneless white meat offers premium profit per ounce; parts not fitting an American appetite are frozen and dumped with undercutting prices in poorer countries; viscera go to rendering plants to become pet food or fertilizer; feathers return as animal feed or plastic fortifiers; beaks are routinely pared off of live birds to prevent damage before slaughter. Fungibility is exchangeability. Fungibility also means getting anatomized into exchangeable parts to be stored, shipped, sold, combined with other parts for a new product, or decomposed entirely for elimination. When parts are worth more than the whole, the living being ceases to exist as a meaningful unit. Fungibility means that “life” is reduced to just another state of matter, to plug and play into machines of re/production. Chickens grow like vines into cages; cattle are planted in boxes of mud where they are watered, fertilized, and fed growth serum. In modern animal industrial processes, the “livestock” are already in a state of living death.

In discussing the state of ambiguous life/death, I am directly drawing upon Black studies scholarship in the vein of Wynter and Weheliye, who describe how antiblackness situates the Black body outside of any meaningful speciation with the human.[21] Hortense Spillers describes how slave transactions were recorded with a meticulous disregard for gender and name—just like counting livestock: “nothing breaks the uniformity of this guise,” this “sameness of anonymous portrayal,” despite
the otherwise “detail and precision that characterize these accounts.”[22] In contrast to
the rubric of Marxist politics that focuses on the labor exploitation faced by human
slaughterhouse workers, Afropessimist scholar Frank Wilderson compares the
accumulation of Black bodies with the cows in the slaughterhouse. “But still we must
ask, what about the cows? The cows are not being exploited, they are being
accumulated and, if need be, killed.”[23] Writing on neoslavery and the modern
prison’s genealogy in the techniques of the transatlantic slave trade, Dennis Childs
describes the literal and figurative caging of Black ontology into a state of “living
death.”[24] Antiblack is not a subject position. It is a chattel position—like being a
sardine in a can—a Schrödinger’s box where life and death are only two different
states of a commodity.

Tiffany Lethabo King takes this analysis a step further by considering how the body
of the Black woman is treated much as land is treated under slavery and settler
colonialism. That is, the settler colonial machinery that marks up land for clearing, for
production, for settlement, for industry, for waste—for infinite malleability in the
service of settler futures—similarly marks the Black woman as infinitely malleable in
the service of a racial economy. “Black-femaleness becomes this open sign within the
symbolic economy of slavery. It can be turned into virtually anything”: productive
labor, reproductive labor, tissue for medical science, object of social policy, and
“anything else imaginable.” Anything, that is, except human. For King, Black
women’s bodies function as metaphors for and units of settler space:

It is within Black feminist scholarship that we see this robust theorization of
Black fungibility or the unending exchangeability. . . . To gender Blackness
as “female” is to make Blackness more malleable and flexible as opposed to
making it, as Sylvia Wynter says, “another genre of” the liberal stable human
(i.e., white womanhood). What this means, is that gender as a discourse when
applied to Black bodies is about making these bodies ever malleable. It is not
about imposing coherent humanizing gender upon Black Bodies.[25]

King’s analysis thus extends our understanding of Black fungibility beyond the
animal and into land, into the nonhuman beyond biological. In this way, King’s
insights have provocations for the very relationship between the fields of Indigenous
studies and Black studies. Whereas Blackness is obscured in ethnic studies as another
“race,” it has greater capaciousness when thought about as a piece of the more-than-
human world—the living world—as analyzed more deeply in Indigenous studies.
When foundational Native studies scholar Jack Forbes asks, “where do our bodies end?” he draws attention to life as being far more than the unit of the living organism:

I can lose my hands, and still live. I can lose my legs and still live. I can lose my eyes and still live. I can lose my hair, eyebrows, nose, arms, and many other things and still live. But if I lose the air I die. If I lose the sun I die. If I lose the earth I die. If I lose the water I die. If I lose the plants and animals I die. All of these things are more a part of me, more essential to my every breath, than is my so-called body. What is my real body?

We are not autonomous, self-sufficient beings as European mythology teaches. . . . We are rooted just like the trees. But our roots come out of our nose and mouth, like an umbilical cord, forever connected to the rest of the world. . . . Nothing that we do, do we do by ourselves. We do not see by ourselves. We do not hear by ourselves. . . . That which the tree exhales, I inhale. That which I exhale, the trees inhale. Together we form a circle.[26]

When we consider the transport of fracked oil via railways and pipelines, and the bulldozing of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe’s burial sites by the forces of Dakota Access Pipeline, we see the application of death to land itself. Destroying burial sites to lay pipeline is no different from the mass extermination of buffalo to lay rail. Both target the land (the nonhuman) to (1) eliminate Indigenous presence and (2) make the land alienable. Making death lands is an operation of making terra nullius. Death and extraction and fungibility ride together.

Alienating the life out of Black life is required to subject black bodies to industrial technologies of mass killing and caging. Alienating the Indigenous spirit life out of the land is required to subject land/animals/people to mass reapings. Removing land from people also means making war ontologically inherent on certain peoples. War-able peoples in turn lead to bombable lands, extinctionable animals, and genocide. The “human” is about all the idealizations above the flesh and above the land, what Sylvia Wynter describes as the elevation of an “ethnoclass” of the Western bourgeois conception of Man, “which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself.”[27] Blackness is about the flesh, and the flesh is land—both are biomatter. Thus, by seeing land as biopolitical, I am seeing how the nonhuman critique in Black studies aligns with the more-than-human critique in Indigenous studies.
Settler time has transfigured North American land into a simultaneity of Black violation and Indigenous disappearance, into a schism of property–people. Therefore, for King, the entanglements of settler colonialism and gendered/sexualized antiblackness must inform solidarity in Native and Black feminist organizing. Land must be decolonized into a simultaneity of Black life as being, which requires Black places to be, and to be joyful, without the eminent threat of violation and of Indigenous life as being-and-place, which requires places/peoples to be regenerated. This is a decolonizing land biopolitics, so to speak.

Theorize in the Break

For the reader who is concerned with the genealogy of theory, especially for you who will shape this theory into your own, know that by deploying the “biopolitical” and “technologies,” you do not have to allow yourself to be claimed into a Eurocentric lineage. Rather, the genealogy of (y)our theory lies in the breaks as theorized by Black and Indigenous intellectuals.

The object—which is not a human subject, which is the state of Black being that is already outside of the “human” ethnoclass of Man—resists, according to Fred Moten. The object resists Eurocentric theory “by way of open analytic failure” of that theory; in other words, it resists by dwelling in the “breakdown of the breakdown.” To theorize in the break is to theorize in an elsewhere that is already beyond the dispossession of that oppressive theory, “by way of a kind of recapitulative improvisation (a lingering in the iconic break of this double breakdown).”[28] Put plainly, to theorize in the break is to improvise theory in the rupture from the genealogy of the (often European) founding fathers. It is to think, sing, write, and embody theory in the elsewhere, in the sovereign, in the Black.

By theorizing machinery, you do not have to embrace Gilles Deleuze, despite the totalizing sweep of his and Félix Guattari’s thinking. In “Breaking up with Deleuze,” Eve Tuck parses out differences between her understandings of knowledge, change, and regeneration and those pieces of Deleuzian theory of desire that seem to echo Indigenous understanding. Unlike the unconscious directions of Deleuzian desiring machines, Tuck “insists that desire accrues wisdom in assemblage, and does so over generations.”[29] Eve Tuck broke up with Deleuze so that you may avoid his seductions.
Likewise, theorizing land as biopolitical target is better understood through Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics than through Michel Foucault’s biopolitics. Mbembe breaks from Foucault’s interest in the disciplining of liberal life by examining the “subjugation of life to the power of death.”[30] One can see how necropower has long been in effect in settler colonial invasions of Indigenous lands—and has evolved its killing, capturing, and living-dead zombie technologies.[31]

Black studies has already made multiple breaks with the Western project of uplifting and theorizing “humanity.” In theorizing the human, or the genealogy of prisons, or capitalism, or gender, or justice, Black studies scholarship continues to denude how antiblackness is the normalized exception upon which Western politics, theories, and institutions are erected.[32] For example, Alexander Weheliye deconstructs the analytic failures of Eurocentric biopolitical theory—the breakdown of the breakdown—particularly how Giorgio Agamben’s bare life and Foucault’s biopolitical racism assume pained flesh to be an exercise of exceptional power. Following Saidiya Hartman, Weheliye demonstrates the regularity of the brutalization of (black) flesh under colonialism and slavery.[33]

Finally, land as biopolitical also draws upon global studies of biopiracy and of neoliberalism. Kalindi Vora breaks with Marx to insightfully describe how Global South human organs, time, intelligence, social life, and biological life functions are tapped to support cosmopolitan “life” in the Global North. “Vital energies” are drained and redirected to perform liberal “life support.”[34] This moves away from the anthropocentric sense of “biopolitical” as principally referring to the control of life/death for human populations, when the very methods of life/death involve the bleeding of Indigenous worlds to pump life into a “First World.”

In each of these breaks, there is always a defender of European intellectual hegemony who wishes to claim blackness back in service of that which wishes itself white: Reviewers of Mbembe’s work who say necropolitics is no different from biopolitics; reviewers of Vora’s work who says life support is the same as capitalist labor exploitation; the Marxists who would claim, once again, that Marx predicted it all.

Here, in the breaks, are possible dovetails among Black, Indigenous, and Other-ed studies that make the foundation for a technologies framework. Technologies are the master’s tools, and yet they will never be just that, any more than you are the master’s tool. Your theory is just like that.
Even When They Are Dangerous

Everywhere land resists and refuses—whales that destroy ships, bees that refuse to work, bombed islands that reconstitute themselves. The land also resists in the form of people; Indigenous peoples’ resistance is the land’s resistance. Indigenous people continue to subvert legal and capitalist technologies as part of that resistance. And technologies and technological beings resist too.

Patent law is patently designed to favor corporations, a legal technology whose colonizing functions are particularly evident when considering how Monsanto and other GMO producing giants are patenting seeds and genes they “find” throughout the world. Yet Indigenous communities are fighting this biopiracy by refusing the systems that permit corporations to patent life and that document knowledge for expropriation in the first place, by creating digital libraries of traditional knowledges, and sometimes by subverting patent law to claim rights to their own life worlds and knowledges.[35]

Treaties are technologies of colonial coercion and yet also of Indigenous survivance. As Scott Lyon says, an x-mark that signs the treaty “is a sign of consent in a context of coercion. . . . And yet there is always the possibility of slippage, indeterminacy, unforeseen consequences, or unintended results; it is always possible, that is, that an x-mark could result in something good. Why else, we must ask, would someone bother to make it?”[36] Since 1948, the Oneida Indian Nation has pursued restoration of sovereignty over historical reservation lands via a complex set of avenues involving treaty law, U.S. courts, casinos, and excise taxes, resulting in a landmark 13,004 acres of land taken into trust by the Department of the Interior in 2014.[37]

Sometimes settlers return land to Indigenous tribes and nations. Hopefully, they/we might do so without conditions. As I write, the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians are getting back 688 acres of coastal lands in California.[38] I am not saying wealthy settlers who return land are decolonizing. I am saying that some colonizing technology has been hotwired; something scyborg is happening.

The truth is that any return of land is not just due to the good graces and benevolence of wealthy settlers; it is a scyborg possibility foretold by an x-mark. About Hollywood star Johnny Depp’s purported promise to buy land for Comanche, Sonny Skyhawk, a Sicangu Lakota actor and founder of American Indians
in Film and Television, said, “If it’s from the heart, we accept it. If it’s not from the heart, we’ll accept it anyways.”[39]

Developed as weapons of surveillance and assassination, drones are hard to imagine as decolonizing instruments; yet these machines we hate may serve a function before we discard them. Originally a wind-powered device similar to the childhood wind toys of its Afghani creator Massoud Hassani, the Mine Kafon drone “can autonomously map, detect, and detonate land mines” and could contribute to demilitarizing mine-filled lands within a generation.[40] Dynamite, which left Alfred Nobel rich and many dead, and which abetted in U.S. westward imperial expansion, blew up the Elwha and Glines Canyon dams and restored the Elwha River.[41] A giant, autonomous artificial coastline could assist the ocean to clean herself of the great Pacific Garbage Patch.[42] Oysters made “plantable” by farming technologies detoxify the Hudson and so become too poisonous to eat, but because of them, the frogs will return.[43] Wind-powered strandbeests—originally devised to restore Dutch beaches—now roam almost autonomous, almost free.[44] Toxic and explosive and wind-willed machine animals, you, scyborg, might read about and feel some odd sense of recognition.

Figure out how technologies operate. Use a wrench. Technologies can be disrupted and reorganized—at least for a machine cycle. Rather than thinking of ourselves as just subjects of those technologies, think about how we are the drones, the explosives, the toxified, the operative parts of those technologies—and ideally, how we might operate on ourselves and other technologies and turn these gears into decolonizing operations.

If this sounds easy and obvious, then my writing has failed you. Listen: you will need to remember this when you are accused of destruction. Attach a pacemaker to the heart of those machines you hate; make it pump for your decolonizing enterprise; let it tick its own countdown. Ask how, and how otherwise, of the colonizing machines. Even when they are dangerous.

NOTES


2. This resurgence in academic circles can be marked by the luminary work of Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409, and Lorenzo Verancini, *Israel and Settler Society* (London: Pluto Books, 2006), and with the founding of the journal *Settler Colonial Studies* in 2011. While acknowledging the importance of the resurgence, I do not want to narrate critical theorizations of settler colonialism as somehow originating from this moment.


6. In this book, *Black* refers to Black life, people, epistemologies, and the Black radical tradition, whereas *black* refers to the distortion of blackness into the role of referent for a racial order under white supremacist logics; *black* is a category of antiblackness, whereas Black was always beyond whiteness and antiblackness—as Fred Moten puts it, “beyond dispossession.”

7. *Land* is shorthand for land, waters, air, plant and animal life, and Indigenous peoples—in other words, Indigenous worlds in their specific contexts. *Landlife* is shorthand I use to emphasize that land/life are in relation within Indigenous cosmologies but are actively being separated by colonizing operations.


12. This sentence is not meant to make settlers feel better—to flatten “oppression” into a relativism. Even if it isn’t always to their advantage, individual settlers tend to uphold settler supremacy because of its relative advantage (over immigrants yet-to-become settlers) and its promise of unending advantage over Black people, Indigenous people.

13. Imperial accumulation under Marxist rubric is usually considered “primitive accumulation,” or “previous accumulation,” which is an antecedent to capitalist accumulation. Yet, for colonized
lands and peoples, there is nothing “previous” or somehow over about imperial accumulation—it is modern, continuing, evolving.


20. In this book, I capitalize Native and Indigenous to refer to identities, cultures, and epistemologies of Indigenous nations, communities, and tribal groups. I use lowercase native and indigenous when explicitly referring to settler and Western concepts of native and indigenous.


31. I use *biopolitics* instead of *necropolitics* in this writing because *bio-* hails a living and dying world beyond the human, whereas *necro-* is usually reserved for human death. But there is no difference between biopolitics and necropolitics made in this book (I know they are different).


