ABSTRACT: Decolonizing and Indigenizing work needs to be done in museums and our day-to-day lives. On Turtle Island or so-called North America, the current settler colonial states add urgency to this work. Many settlers live on stolen land and benefit from colonial structures in ways that Indigenous friends, colleagues, and hosts do not. This article presents a self-reflective account of two museum studies courses I have been part of developing and delivering that incorporate decolonizing and Indigenizing principles. From my white settler perspective, I discuss the need for settlers to educate (or reeducate) ourselves as museum practitioners by putting decolonizing and Indigenizing words into conversation with our accountabilities in daily life.

KEYWORDS: decolonizing museums, museum studies, professional development, settler colonialism

During my PhD research, I assembled a nonexhaustive list of what (to me) are foundational decolonizing principles to apply to my work, research, methodologies, and, above all, my daily life. These include: understanding myself in relation to the land I am on; visibilizing colonial structures that surround us; understanding whiteness as an affliction alongside ways that we (“we” for me means white people of European ancestry) normalize white supremacy; building and maintaining relationships with all Nations (people, plants, insects, animals, etc.); centring settler needs and desires; understanding limits of my authority; expressing gratitude and love freely and regularly; prioritizing languages, place names, plant names, animal names, ontologies, and epistemologies that are Indigenous to the land I am on, instead of imposed European systems of my ancestors; and, attempting to work and live in nonextractive, reciprocal ways.

As demonstrated by Cuban American settler artist Coco Fusco (1997) and Mexican/Chicano/American settler artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s 1992 performance piece Two Undiscovered
Amerindians Visit and more recently by a 2020 survey in the UK that found 82 percent of people said they trusted curators to tell “the truth” (Adams 2020), museums have authority in society and must use this to enact change, starting with visibilizing the ongoing colonialism around us (see Chung and Fusco 2021; Fusco 2021). I restate that I am not intending to speak for everyone as if we benefit from colonialism in the same way—I am a white settler, of European ancestry. My benefits, privileges, and ancestral tracings are entirely different from other ethnicities who are now settled on Indigenous lands.

When I call myself a “settler,” I attempt to show I understand I am not Indigenous to this place. Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson (2020: 38) defines “settler” as:

a statement of positionality that seeks to make visible the ways by which non-Indigenous people have benefitted from colonial policy such as the Indian Act in Canada and the genocidal policies of Indian Residential Schools . . . The term “settler” has been adopted as a form of self-identification by those who were not, historically, the first settlers of the already occupied Indigenous lands now known as Canada, but nevertheless understand their complicity in and benefit from ongoing colonial policies that continue to constrain Indigenous rights and resurgence.

As settlers, we are active beneficiaries of ongoing structures of colonialism, though the ways we benefit vary greatly (see Wolfe 1999, 2006.). Naming this means we can start to visibilize the tentacles of colonialism grasping everything around us and understand how we are held in the tenacious grip of invisible, invasive vines we have become one with.

Any discussion around decolonizing, unless it is about giving land back, is guilty of, in the words of Unangaxscholar Eve Tuck and settler scholar K. Wayne Yang (2012), “metaphorizing decolonization.” For museums, then, nonmetaphorical decolonizing work entails researching whose stolen land the institution is situated on and doing whatever is necessary within restrictive capitalist, colonial frameworks to return the land, and second, returning collections (belongings, archives, etc.) extracted from Indigenous Nations—not keeping a copy, not giving a copy, but giving everything back freely and without conditions—and perhaps adding financial compensation for years of unconsented use museums have benefited from exhibits, displays, promotional materials, and so on. Actions of redress are important, but without reformulating museology and museums, we continue to be contained and constrained within the Enlightenment-era foundations of these institutions.

I want to be clear from the beginning that while this article does metaphorize decolonizing work, the purpose is to help educate/reeducate the current and future museum workforce, especially settlers of European ancestry like myself who may not recognize the extent to which colonialism continues to shape contemporary societies. Institutions are shaped and constructed by the people within them—people are policy writers, action takers, and interpreters. People are responsible for everything that happens within and outside museums, so calls for decolonizing these spaces must start with the people ourselves. We need to apply decolonizing principles to all aspects of training undertaken in museum studies courses. Second, we need to (re)educate the existing museum workforce, many of whom (in Canada) are settlers whose schooling did not include truth-telling curricula introduced in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC 2015) Calls to Action, and who may unwittingly be promoting white supremacist and/or colonial-centered views.

Revisioning museums to normalize decolonizing principles, for the end goal of living in societies where we (settlers) understand how and what we need to give up and, more importantly, give back, will create the preconditions required for unmetaphorized “decolonization,” as in, “land back.” Hand in hand with decolonizing efforts comes the essential requirement to
Indigenize these spaces. By this I mean, to make and hold space for Indigenous people to live, work, create, and be—in their own way, not expected to conform, perform, explain, or curtain their Indigeneity for the institution (Ng and AyAyQwaYakSheelth 2018).

The approaches to teaching discussed here will hopefully be of interest to students, educators, and practitioners working and living in all places with colonial histories and present by providing resources that help understand contemporary challenges facing museums and countries that have benefited from (and likely continue to benefit from) colonialism. These benefits range from the physicality of extracted Ancestors, Beings, or Belongings and financially through resource extraction for colonial profits, or ongoing colonial influence and imposed external cultural ideologies.

A Graduate Museum Studies Course

When developing a postgraduate museum studies course on “Curatorial Practice,” I wanted to incorporate decolonizing and Indigenizing principles alongside content related to curatorial tasks in both the course structure and delivery, without naming them as such. To me, this is how curatorial practice should be done. This course (MSL 2000) was an elective offered in Fall 2021 as part of the University of Toronto’s Master of Museum Studies program and had an enrollment of 35 students, aged mid-twenties to early thirties, from a wide range of ancestries and positionalities. The overall course theme was meant to activate ways of moving museums, galleries, and other curated spaces from “temple” to “forum,” as described by Cheyenne and Arapaho scholar Richard W. West (2019), and understanding the complexities that a decolonizing “forum” presents.

I’ll discuss my introductory decolonizing principles in relation to different aspects of the course, from the syllabus to our guest speakers and assignments. Vocalizing our relationship to the land we are on was expressed at multiple points in the course. I included a land acknowledgment at the start of my syllabus, acknowledging the land where I developed the course, as well as the land in Tkaronto (Toronto) where the university was imposed in 1827. Ever conscious of the need to move beyond performativity (George 2022; Robinson et al. 2019) in land acknowledgments, students were required to present their own unique land acknowledgment in small groups at the start of each class, after reflecting on Robinson et al. (2019) and Kulin Nation scholar Nerida Blair (2019). Each week, three or four students would share a personal acknowledgment, which often included referencing the path taken by their ancestors to arrive in what is now Canada, as well as their own ancestral homelands. The acknowledgments often included highlighting Indigenous artists, organizations, and community programming. The students were invited to reflect on the process by which they developed their contributions, followed by a general discussion of what was shared. Some land acknowledgments include wording like being present on “the traditional lands of . . .,” which we problematized following Anishinaabe Hayden King (CBC Radio 2019). Encouraging students to think with precision about what words really say, or imply, shows the specificity of language we need for decolonizing work, as we think through how our words erase or foreclose on other possibilities of being and knowing (Davis and Krupa 2022; O’Brien 2010; Raibmon 2018). Referring to how we arrived in this place, for those of us who are not Indigenous to this land, is an essential part of acknowledging that we are benefactors of settler colonial structures (Wolfe 2006). The ongoing treaties between colonial powers and Indigenous Nations are the mechanisms that “allowed” us to be here in the first place (Mackey 2016).
Alongside modules focused on elements of curatorial practice, readings for the course were selected to represent diverse experiences, to normalize rather than “add on” inclusivity, equity, and diversity (Acesso Cultura 2022). I invited five guest speakers to have short, informal “conversations” with us to support learning goals. I intended to give over authority to these colleagues, many of whose publications we read in preparation for their time with us.

Our first conversation was with settler artist Hadley Howes as part of our field trip to Corktown Common, Toronto, to view their work *The Garden of Future Follies*. This sculpture is an assemblage of pieces cast from figurative public sculptures that were erected within the last 150 years—typically depicting “great white men,” many of whose presence in our public spheres are now being challenged. The students read an interview with Howes and their collaborator Maxwell (Fasche 2016), and a publication by Howes (2021) that presents the background to this work, alongside imagined realities. On-site, Howes gave an overview of their career trajectory (which to me is an essential component for students to hear from all speakers), problematized the exclusivity of public art selection committees and processes, and explained their current preference for working with grassroots organizations. Students had the option of reporting on this field trip for their first assignment, Curating Social Media. These quotes drawn from the anonymous weekly post-class feedback form (1 October 2021) demonstrate the impact of this activity:

![Figure 1. Classroom curation for MSL 2000: Letting Our Belongings Speak for Us. Photo courtesy of the author.](image-url)
I really enjoyed when we explicitly discussed how recontextualizing monuments, rather than removing them, is just displaying change rather than inciting meaningful change. There needs to be a level of discomfort and action that simply honoring the “forgotten” or “marginalized” narratives in history cannot bring about. I really like the notion of productive discomfort, and I wonder how we can invite people into those feelings rather than having them feel angered and disengaging from the conversations that need to happen.

We have discussed the removal of statues in quite a few classes and I have always come down on the idea of adding context to them, thinking that it was a happy middle ground. I didn't understand why other people didn't agree. This is the first time that someone was able to make me understand that just adding context isn't a great option.

Other guest speakers joined us by Zoom, as COVID-19 restrictions prevented guests from coming to campus. For “Curatorial and Artist Interventions,” we read publications by and about the work of Tahltan artist Peter Morin, followed by a conversation between him and me. For “Curators and Communities: Building Relationships and Partnerships,” Latinx scholar/curator Armando Perla and Euro-Canadian/Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) scholar/curator Heather George discussed their many years of working with, and for, their own diverse communities. Through this conversation, students learned that working with and for communities requires long-term commitments and carries enormous accountabilities and personal responsibilities.
that come with you throughout your life, regardless of where you are employed at any given time. By sharing their career and life trajectories, Perla and George relayed how relationships and accountabilities move well beyond a checkbox on an exhibition development plan but are embedded within them as curators and community members. This conversation built on readings that included “First Nations Community Consultation Report 2019,” an unpublished report by Director, First Nations, Laura McBride (Wailwan and Kooma) and First Nations Assistant Curator Mariko Smith (Yuin) (2020) at the Australian Museum (2020) that details the years of consultation that went into the 2021 Unsettled exhibition at the Australian Museum; excerpts from the Unsettled exhibition catalog (McBride and Smith 2021) that demonstrate how the consultation results were put into curatorial practice; the Unsettled exhibition website (Australian Museum 2021); and a blog post from Nathan Sentance (2017a) (Wiradjuri Nation) that questions when “collaboration” becomes “exploitation.” Our final guest speaker was Julie Crooks, Curator of Arts of Global Africa and the Diaspora at the Art Gallery of Ontario, for our “Curators & Collections Development” class. Students read two articles (Lee 2017; Valentine 2019) in which Crooks spoke about the 2019 acquisition of a large collection of historic photographs from the Caribbean, and the acquisition and deaccession policies of the Art Gallery of Ontario. Crooks gave an overview of her career trajectory and emphasized how she curated wherever and however she could, transforming unusual and unused spaces into curatorial opportunities. This conversation demonstrated curatorial practice is something that students can do anywhere to express their passions, without institutional permission or acknowledgment.

The last example I will share is the “5 Things” assignment. Students shared photographs of any five personal items, on any theme. I assigned each set of photographs to another student, anonymously. Each “set” of two students started with the “imagined” narrative for the collection of “Other,” followed by the “Self” narrative of the same collection of “5 Things.” The purpose of this assignment was to demonstrate the differences between lived experience and knowledge in interpreting belongings, knowing limits of authority for curatorial work, questioning authenticity, and experiencing investment in multiple narratives. The outcomes of this assignment surprised all of us: the presentations were fantastic: engaging and emotional. Some were overcome with emotion during their presentation—especially when belongings evoked memories of passed relatives or were connected to difficult times in their life. “Self” presentations typically included personal stories and anecdotes—information that no one aside from themselves and perhaps their families could have known. “Other” presentations typically included less personal content based on internet research, with some students saying they went down a rabbit hole trying to find out details of obscure personal items—an obsessive tendency to which I am sure many curatorial practitioners can relate. When we debriefed this activity, students shared their surprise at how uncomfortable it was to see personal belongings “presented back to them.” In this activity, students explored many elements of curatorial practice, from research to imposing narratives on disparate objects, and it reinforced decolonizing principles like limits of authority; reminded them of the need to turn over authority and to build meaningful, nonextractive relationships with others; demonstrated ways that belongings tell stories of how we came to be on this land; and showed us that visibilizing “arrival stories” makes space for, and respects, the longevity of ongoing Indigenous presence.

This section has shared my attempts to embed decolonizing principles into the teaching of curatorial practices so the next generation of curators and museum professionals approach their work and lives in decolonizing and Indigenizing ways. I wanted to enable students to challenge colonial structures presented within museums and beyond, and to inspire them to make the future of curated spaces a “forum” for society rather than a “temple” for an authorized few. The next section discusses the development and delivery of a course for museum professionals
that aims to challenge existing ways of working and introduce decolonizing and Indigenizing principles to daily realities.

**Professional Development for Museum Workers**

This section focuses on the content, format, and purpose of a “decolonizing museums in practice” (DMIP) course, and the reception of the course by participants. From Fall 2020 to Spring 2022 the course has been offered five times on a part-time, remote basis, to around 70 participants of varying career positions (researchers, managers, collections managers, curators, education, programming), longevities (emerging professionals, mid- to late career), and specialties (for simplicity I will refer to these as within the fields of arts, humanities, and natural sciences), working at a wide range of museum and memory institutions based in Canada, Australia, and the United States. The widespread interest in the course has been exciting, but the time zones represented have presented some logistical challenges in that the course timing for our synchronous portions has tended to fall in the later afternoon for US/Canada Eastern, mid-afternoon for Central/Western US/Canada, and very early in the morning for the Australian time zones.

DMIP was developed with two key intentions: for people working within museums to understand the limitations of what is currently on offer by recognizing the extent of the Enlightenment era inheritance that museology continues to be shaped by, and to share strategies on how to internalize decolonizing and Indigenizing principles within restructured and reconceptualized museum-like spaces and our daily lives.

**Decolonizing Museums in Practice: Course Outcomes, Delivery, Format, Structure**

DMIP was initially born out of my frustration in not finding adequately critical (to me) reflections on contemporary museum practices when there is a wealth of decolonizing and Indigenizing resources in other critical disciplines that can be applied to museology. Nathan Sentance, author of the *Archival Decolonist* blog, member of the Wiradjuri Nation, and Head of Collections First Nations at the Powerhouse, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney, agreed to join as a co-instructor for the first session in September 2020. Heather George joined us as co-instructor in the November 2020 session.

The course initially spanned four weeks, with meetings twice weekly. The most recent course was nine weeks, with one synchronous meeting per week led by Heather or me. Assignments are completed biweekly (four in total), alternating with required answers to discussion questions posted on the web platform (to which participants can respond or reply to each other, as well as share additional thoughts and reflections). Initially, the default web platform was set up for each assignment and discussion post to receive a numerical mark out of one hundred. In the Spring 2022 course, we changed this to pass/fail for the course in its entirety, though we continue to comment and review all submissions. The amount of personal reflection and diversity of life experiences made it impossible (and we realized, continued colonial mentalities) to reduce what was shared to a number out of one hundred. The shifting nature of the course demonstrates the nature of decolonizing approaches in that we respond to, and rethink, what does not feel right or in keeping with our methodologies, as each matter arises.

The course delivery is modeled on Indigenous talking circles with an emphasis on deep listening and respectful participation as discussed by Métis/Cree scholar Jean Fyre Graveline (1998).
Each person is invited to share reactions to the readings in this nonhierarchical method of communication that encourages deep listening and gratitude for the brief time we have together. For Nathan, Heather, and me, the experience of the course is as important as the content, mixing more formal response circles, Indigenous guest speakers, and less formal reflection times during beading lessons from Heather.

Figure 3. Beading kits we gift to participants of the course “Decolonizing Museums in Practice.” The invitation was designed by Heather George and is included here with permission.
The specific outcomes the course aspires to include understanding the importance of positioning statements (understanding yourself in relation to your work/research); appropriate terminologies; critiquing written and unwritten narratives through decolonizing approaches; creating exhibit content, texts, and labels using decolonial and Indigenizing ways of thinking; developing strategies for building relationships and long-term partnerships; critiquing authenticity and authority in a museum setting; naming challenges we need to grapple with in our museum inheritance; and developing strategies for decolonizing and Indigenizing work in our museums. In the course preamble, we make it clear that the course is not “about” decolonizing museums but rather is looking at ways we can actively decolonize ourselves and our work by bringing new ways of thinking, including ways to promote Indigenizing, into our lives.
Decolonizing Museum in Practice: Course Themes

The course DMIP is divided into four core themes: Understanding Your Place on this Land; Critiquing Written and Unwritten Narratives; Museums, Authority, and Authenticity; and Imagining New Futures for Museums. The course textbook, Stó:lō scholar Jo-ann Q’um Q’um Xiie Archibald and colleagues’ (2019a) Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology, does not speak specifically about museums but is an embodied example of what the course is about, and acts as a background through-thread that activates decolonizing and Indigenizing principles. The readings give opportunities for us to learn directly from Indigenous voices, to think through, and think together, about how we can apply these teachings within our work, and how these voices challenge the assumptions we make in our work and daily lives.

Few if any of the theoretical readings mention museums specifically, but they demonstrate the wealth of scholarship written outside of “museum studies” that can be put into conversation with challenges that need to be overcome in decolonizing and Indigenizing museums. The practical readings have specific examples, analyses, and case studies about museums. We read chapters from Ho-Chunk Nation scholar Amy Lonetree’s (2012) Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native American in National and Tribal Museums, alongside works by other Indigenous scholars, curators, and artists that invite reflections on decolonizing work and Indigenous “ways of being” in museum contexts. Space restrictions prevent lengthy discussion of each theme, so I will discuss the first theme in more detail, followed by summaries of three other themes.

Theme 1: Understanding Your Place on This Land

“Understanding Your Place on This Land” looks at how we position ourselves in relation to this land. Part of this is understanding whose territory/ies we live and work on. We use positioning statements to discuss ourselves, look at what our family ancestry exposes or conceals about our privileges, and demonstrate how speaking from our own positions makes space for other ways of being. Sharing our positionality statements initiates an understanding of how we think within our current (as yet potentially undefined) worldviews, and enacts understandings of “self-in-relation-to-research,” extending to our daily lives: where we are, and how we came to be here.

Theoretical Material

In Decolonizing Research Indigenous scholars discuss how they have taken up Archibald’s story work framework, a structure that centers on seven principles: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy, through lived experiences, Land-based knowledges, and center the strength of unique world views formed through relationships with the land (Archibald et al. 2019b: 1, 11). DMIP participants easily apply and absorb this content into decolonizing and critical self-awareness skills throughout the course, and how narratives presented by their museums and memory institutions are forms of “story work.”

Settler scholar Laura Murray models ways for settlers to think through and analyze, in a personal way, our own privilege. Murray presents her history and ancestry—showing how decolonizing processes work on a personal level of self-interrogation and private reflection, and how she applies this in teaching. Her main themes are essential for DMIP participants to keep in mind, especially “Look Around You, Look to your Ancestors, Don’t Finish” (2018: 262). Participants often cite this article as their favorite reading in Week 1 because it helps them understand how to approach decolonizing work, how to think it through personally, and how to sit in discomfort with our personal accountabilities (251).
Kwagu’l scholar Sarah Hunt and settler scholar Cindy Holmes’s article is included for the content as well as a model of positionalities that leave us grounded in their relationships to their words, each other, their research, the land they are on, their lived experiences, their ancestors, their worldviews, and methods for visibilizing different ways of being (2015: 154–155). They introduce terminology from gender studies that can be applied to new ways of being for museums and discuss how decolonizing actions can be applied in our daily lives:

We view “decolonization” and “queering” as active, interconnected, critical, and everyday practices that take place within and across diverse spaces and times. While queer is often used as an identity category or umbrella term for non—normative sexual and gender identities, it emerged as a critique of essentialist constructs and identity politics. As a verb, queer is a deconstructive practice focused on challenging normative knowledges, identities, behaviours, and spaces thereby unsettling power relations and taken—for—granted assumptions. Queerness is then less about a way of “being,” and more about “doing,” and offers the potential for radical social critique. (156)

Tuck and Yang’s “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor” presents foundational concepts for decolonizing work, naming actions that are “moves to innocence,” and insists on defining decolonization as giving land back rather than metaphorical applications (2012: 3, 10). We think through the ways the word decolonize is applied to movements that want to challenge “normative” society and social narratives, demonstrating the attention we need to give to language, and what happens when we appropriate words for other contexts. Participants have commented that this article, when read alongside Murray (2018), gives them a fuller picture of what we can do to start to understand personal accountabilities in decolonizing processes.

After our first session, Nathan added settler scholar Emily Bautista’s (2019) article to the Week 1 readings. Bautista puts core decolonizing works from the twentieth century in conversation with her experiences in the American education system (which can equally be applied elsewhere), visibilizing colonial structures that are usually obscured and unnamed (see Fanon 1963; Freire 1970; Smith [1992] 2012; Tuck and Yang 2012). Bautista explains that “scientific knowledge” tends to only describe knowledge traditions formed during the European Enlightenment era, how individualism and capitalism are embedded in colonial norms, and how Christianity has contributed to patriarchal authority imposed on Indigenous people and places through colonial powers (2019: 56–57, 66). Bautista draws attention to colonial structures around us and shows how the process of naming and identifying this inheritance and world view makes space for other ways of seeing and being—one of the fundamental principles presented in DMIP (67). Understanding the ways museums present “Western/Enlightenment” knowledge as the only way of naming and ordering the world is essential, and we return to this many times throughout the course.

To introduce critiques of whiteness, we read a chapter from Quandamooka Nation and Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s (2015) book The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty that talks about the commodification of land through constructs of “the beach.” Moreton-Robinson articulates assumptions Europeans brought with them/us in how they/we viewed land as a resource, something that could be owned, rather than “lived in relation to and with,” holistically and reciprocally, and confronts subtleties of white supremacy (see Jennings and Jones-Rizzi 2017).
Practical Material

The practical material for “Understanding Your Place on this Land” brings the weighty (and likely uncomfortable) content introduced in the theoretical readings into conversation with relatable applications in museum contexts (Lonetree 2012; Raibmon 2018; Sentance 2017b; Vowel 2016). We look at different perspectives of land acknowledgments: a comedy sketch from the Baroness von Sketch Show (2019) that presents a land acknowledgment being done at the start of a theatrical performance, with a confused audience member asking follow up questions about what actions we should do to support the words, to comedic effect, showing the performative emptiness of the words, as well as reflections from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars (Blight and King 2019; CBC Radio 2019; George 2022; Isador 2019; Robinson et al. 2019). These readings introduce the imperative that land acknowledgments be active, and we must think carefully about what we expect words to do instead of taking action ourselves.

Theme 2: Critiquing Written and Unwritten Narratives

The second theme critiques written and unwritten narratives. The rationale is the need to change the “national” narratives of colonial states like Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, and to sharpen focus on settler colonialism as the violent agency that continues to shape our societies. This work requires an understanding, or at least an introduction to, the idea that dominant or hegemonic narratives in lands continuing to live within structures of settler colonialism are not based on, and do not include, the original ideas or worldviews born in these places, nor do they reflect relational and reciprocal ways of being Indigenous peoples have with these lands. Dominant narratives in these places have been imposed from Europe, and mostly reflect Enlightenment-era ways of thinking (Archibald 2019; Christian 2019; Doxtator 2001; Martin and Williams 2019; Watts 2013). Museum staff need to be able to identify how the work of museums erases Indigenous history, present/presence, and contributes to ongoing dominance of settler narratives. This is especially important because of our mutual obligations under the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous People (UN 2007), and in Canada, Calls to Action are directed at museums and memory institutions in the Report of the TRC (2015).

These readings show alternatives to Eurocentric ways of thinking, selected to demonstrate how Indigenous knowledge challenges Euro/Enlightenment norms and expectations. For example, in Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants, Citizen Potawatomi Nation scholar Robin Kimmerer (2013: 49) demonstrates the deep resonance of Bodewadmimwin knowledge and how the land and language live in relationship through Bodewadmimwin words for concepts not even conceived of in English. She contrasts this to European language “thought labels”:

My first taste of the missing language was the word Puhpowee on my tongue. I stumbled up on it in a book by the Anishinaabe ethnobotanist Keewaydinoquay, in a treatise on the traditional uses of fungi by our people. Puhpowee, she explained, translates as “the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight.” As a biologist, I was stunned that such a word existed. In all its technical vocabulary, Western science has no such term, no words to hold this mystery. You'd think that biologists, of all people, would have words for life. But in scientific language our terminology is used to define the boundaries of our knowing. What lies beyond our grasp remains unnamed.

As Kimmerer explains, animacies or life forces expressed in Bodewadmimwin bring the world alive, challenge gender binaries present in English and other European languages, and demon-
strate deficiencies in European languages for expressing the Potawatomi worldview (49, 53, 55). Kimmerer explains it is simply impossible for invasive plant species to become “Indigenous,” yet they can become “naturalised.” This has invited reflections in our sharing circles around analogies to settlement: the potential for settlers to become “naturalised,” learning to live holistically and in relation with what is around them (us) (211, 213, 215). The Henceforward podcast introduces further complexities in settler presence through Eve Tuck and settler scholar Rinaldo Walcott’s (2016) discussion of the phrase “Everyone is Indigenous from Somewhere.” This conversation considers concepts of settlement, the “frontier,” “pioneers,” “firstings,” becoming “Indigenous” to place, and the renamings of the world around us during settlement. Walcott presents the impossibility of “return” from his position as a Black scholar, descended from enslaved ancestors, and reminds us of complexities around relationships to place and homelands when the disconnect from your Indigenous lands is through violent extraction.

The assignment for this section is to look at the “official” story of where participants live—the “sanctioned” history of their municipality found online, from local history groups, or local museums. The participants analyze the content—what does it say or not say about the original peoples who were/are displaced by colonialism?—and then revise the text to reflect what has been left out of the story.

**Theme 3: Museums, Authority, and Authenticity**

The third theme looks at authority and authenticity. Building on the discussion of different worldviews, we look at examples of Indigenous-led research projects in Decolonizing Research that focus on language and interpretations of place through stories, naming, centering self-determination, what it looks like to really turn over authority, and how to make and hold space for Indigenous peoples to do the work of interpreting and curating in their own ways, according to their own priorities and their own timelines (Cavino 2019; Jones 2019; Lee-Morgan 2019; Seed-Pihama 2019).

The other readings focus on how structures of museums inflict epistemic violence and attempt epistemicide by treating knowledge as “information,” and by treating Ancestors, Beings, and Belongings as items, artifacts, or objects, terms that do not recognize their animacies or life forces. Reducing animate beings to “objects” and managing their embedded knowledge as “related information” to be “objective” or clinical perpetuates Western/European Enlightenment ways of thinking as the only way (Frank 2000; Lonetree 2012; Morin 2014; Pickering 2020; Wilson 2016).

**Theme 4: Imagining New Futures for Museums / Memory Institutions**

By now our knowledge base enables us to assert that Enlightenment structures museums are built upon inflicting colonial violence and authority. Participants understand the ways we are complicit with this violence in our work and daily lives. Noticing this, and naming this, helps us imagine new futures, and new ways of being, which is the final theme. The theoretical readings demonstrate ways in which work in museums can be reframed and restructured using decolonizing and Indigenizing principles and perspectives, and museum forms of story work can be transformed to reflect new futurities (De Santolo 2019a, 2019b; Blair 2019; Steffenson 2019). This applies to all exhibitions, including those that do not talk specifically about colonialism, and beyond exhibitions of Indigenous belongings, to reconsider the entire function and organizing principles of museums. The practical readings introduce hopeful ways to carry the course content into the future and remind participants that how we conduct ourselves in our daily lives matters as much as what we do in our places of work (Garneau 2016; Lonetree 2012; Sentance
2017c, 2017d; Simpson 2008; Wakeham 2008). If some of our colleagues are truly only interested in Eurocentric, Enlightenment-based knowledge, this needs to be specified and qualified in ways that state only this type of knowledge is shared. Adding qualifiers to name ways of thinking and knowing opens up spaces for additional ways of thinking and knowing. These might not be known, available, or comprehended by settlers. Robinson (2020) refers to this Eurocentric assumption that everything can be known as insatiable “hunger,” while Métis scholar David Garneau (2016) refers to this as “scopophilia,” as defined below.

Three powerful concepts that frame future potential for museums come from Garneau. First, his definition of scopophilia names the actual practice that museums are founded on (and continue to enact daily):

The colonial attitude is characterized not only by scopophilia, a drive to look, but also an urge to penetrate, to traverse, to know, to translate, to own and exploit. The attitude assumes that everything should be accessible to those with the means and will to access them; everything is ultimately comprehensible, a potential commodity, resource, or salvage. The academic branch of the enterprise collects and analyses the experiences and things of others; it transforms story into text and objects-in-relation into artifacts to be catalogued and stored or displayed. (2016: 23)

Second, Garneau reconceptualizes the federally (colonial) mandated “Reconciliation” era in what is now known as Canada as one of “perpetual conciliation.” He points out the impossibility of a “return” to a time that simply did not exist in the history of this land, and presents an alternative that settlers can use to re-envision our ways of being:

Rather than accept the idea that there was a prior period of conciliation, we recognize the fact that the need for conciliation is perpetual. Conciliation is an ongoing process, a seeking rather than the restoration of an imagined agreement. The imaginary produced without Reconciliation emphasizes post-contact narratives: the moment of conciliation settled as if it were a thing rather than a continuous relationship. (31, emphasis added)

Finally, Garneau provides inspiring guidance for settlers undertaking the hard work of unsettling ourselves:

Settlers who become unsettled—who are aware of their inheritance and implication in the colonial matrix, who comprehend their unearned privileges and seek ways past racism—are settlers no longer . . . they have become respectful guests, which in turn allows Indigenous peoples to be graceful hosts. (28–29, emphasis added)

Class participants have felt inspired and hopeful after reading these words, as demonstrated by these two closing comments (Week 8, “Decolonizing Museums in Practice”)

Working toward being a “respectful guest,” the overwhelmed feeling is replaced with a “let’s get to work” feeling.

I love that idea as well . . . “respectful guest.” When I think of these words, it really puts me in a place of openness, and appreciation of Indigenous values, knowledge, language, and culture. I too feel encouraged, hopeful, and excited with the journey ahead.
Conclusion

Giving things up for decolonizing and Indigenized futures is and will be hard work for settlers. I hope that my fellow settlers understand this as an essential precondition to becoming something different from what we are now—whether we envision ourselves as “guests” (Garneau 2016) or as “naturalised” (Kimmerer 2013). These aspirations can be enacted in all museum spaces, not only those caring for collections of Indigenous Ancestors, Beings, and Belongings.

My discussion of the Curatorial Practice course was meant to demonstrate how decolonizing and Indigenizing approaches can be integrated and embedded into a course without including these concepts in the course title. As noted by a reviewer of an earlier version of this article, an additional challenge is that decolonizing and Indigenizing courses tend to be offered as electives, instead of mandatory or core curricula embedded in all educational programs (including museum studies). Separating decolonizing and Indigenizing work into focused courses in university settings continues to remove these ways of thinking from essential revisioning, rethinking, and restructuring of Enlightenment-based knowledge systems to meet the needs of contemporary society.

Co-teaching the DMIP course, learning with, and from, the participants and my co-instructors has made me feel that I am part of a bigger movement internationally. However, our participants have so far been limited to countries with Indigenous populations who continue to be displaced by settler colonial immigrants. Time zone challenges aside, we have not had any participants from European museums. This has been somewhat of a surprise, given that these museums contain the bulk of extracted Ancestors, Beings, and Belongings from contemporary Indigenous Nations. In my opinion, European museums are only beginning to understand the realities of what responsible and ethical approaches to decolonizing and Indigenization work looks like, for example, activating the demand "Nothing About Us, Without Us"; repatriation/rematrication without demands or expectations, and what it does not [look like], for example, partnerships that result in continued extraction of knowledge; publications with only European authors (or, of European ancestry) on any Indigenous topic; exhibitions that do not include colonial motivations, do not fund full collaborations with Indigenous partners or that do not bring Indigenous presence into the present. It is the responsibility of museums and practitioners to understand and present the truth of what has shaped their present, presence, and collections. I hope this article has broad international relevance for all readers united in our passion for museum spaces, even if we cannot yet imagine what their futures may be.

This article has been a way to share my decolonizing journey through reflection on the development and delivery of a graduate-level museum studies course and a career development course aimed at museum professionals. My main goal in my teaching is for participants to recognize their own potential for enacting change in whatever space they happen to inhabit. For me, this journey is shaped by inspirational teachings shared by many Indigenous and critical settler scholars, through thoughtful discussions and reflections with many people, and my imperfect attempts to live in relation to all Beings and this land.
Acknowledgments

Certain disciplines of academia condition us to accept and aspire to single/lone authorship. While I have written (typed) this text, this is not only my work. All experiences described reflect conversations and engagements with colleagues, peers, supervisors, and scholars in my daily life. I’m particularly grateful for my collaborations with Nathan Sentance and Heather George as described in the section about the course we co-teach, and they reviewed multiple versions of this article. I challenge all of us to problematize the current practices of authorship, citation, and bibliographic referencing to find new ways to decenter ourselves.

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Notes

1. Without specifying ancestries in public biographies, it is often impossible to identify settler origins, yet identifying everyone who is not Indigenous to this land as settlers implies we have shared the same settler experience which is reductive and wholly inaccurate.
2. What Is Curation? What Is a Curator?; Texts & Labels; Curating in / of Public Spaces; Curators and Artistic Interventions; Inclusive Curation; Curating Social Media; Curators & Communities: Building Relationships & Partnerships; Curators & Collections Development; Curators & Research: Different Forums & Formats; Curatorial Self-Representation; Curating “Difficult” Subjects; Curators, Authenticity & Authority; Curating OUR Futures.
3. All speakers were gifted with mittens or a tuque I purchased from the Facebook page Ut’lloo-un, One Who Weaves.
4. The course has been offered through Museum Study (2022), a private company based in the US that hosts a wide range of professional development courses primarily aimed at staff working in museums and galleries. As of 2022 we are developing an expanded course for the continuing education department at the Ontario College of Art & Design that includes considerations for archives, libraries, and heritage spaces.
5. By “Enlightenment era,” I refer to the eighteenth-century European philosophical movement whereby “reason” or human intellect was centered as the only way of knowing and understanding the world. This necessitated the acquisition and accumulation of all forms of life, beings, and forms of existence, which were then organized in a variety of structural methods. British scholars Subhandra Das and Miranda Lowe (2018) cite the Enlightenment as the start of scientific racism and name museums as a location where scientific racism became firmly entrenched.
6. Nathan and Heather have both given me permission to include their names in the discussion of our course. From the start of the course until February 2022, Nathan held the position of Digital Program Manager at the Australian Museum in Sydney.
7. For more on the racism and white supremacy of place names in the US, see McGill et al. (2022). Bonnie McGill was a participant in the first cohort of DMIP.
REFERENCES


