feral feminisms
Hacking the Anthropocene:
Do-It-Together (DIT)
issue 10 · fall 2021

Imagining Possible Futures for Black and Indigenous Relations and Wellbeing

Ciann L. Wilson and LLana James

This paper is a reflective piece, written from the perspectives of two African diasporic women who hail from the Caribbean and Canada, and who have engaged in work in various capacities with both African diasporic and Indigenous communities on Turtle Island. Together their work concerns Black and Indigenous life, health, and wellbeing and their analysis throughout this piece intends to interrogate the history and contemporary relationships between Black African diasporic people, and people Indigenous to Turtle Island.

A Road Map

In this paper, we begin by outlining the long and brutal history of European colonization, which displaces peoples, flora, and fauna from other parts of the world to the Western hemisphere, jumpstarting environmental degradation and the Anthropocene—all for European empire building projects. We outline how this process of displacement of Indigenous African peoples to the Americas creates the current social relationships we have in the West, where the Black experience is simultaneously erased and re-imagined as part of a homogenizing and ahistorical "settler of colour" category. Through this lense, we make direct connections to our work on the health and wellbeing of Black and Indigenous communities, where we identify that colonization and its modern manifestation—the Anthropocene—continues to be a devastating pandemic in our communities, much like COVID-19 is in the twenty-first century. We discuss the challenges around Indigenous and Black erasure as being materially different depending on whether one is in the Canadian nation-state or the American nation-state, and how this erasure challenges the work of Indigenous and Black mobilizing. Lastly, we unpack some of our ongoing work with Black and Indigenous communities, noting the importance of that pivotal work in combating the impact of the colonial devastation wreaked on our communities.

Don't Get it Twisted: European Colonization is Synonymous with the Anthropocene

There has been a dangerous re-historicizing of the Canadian nation-state as a place of welcome habitation for Black and Indigenous peoples and communities that runs the risk of erasing the real and ongoing violence on our persons, whether we be designated status or non-status 'Indians,' citizens or non-citizens, immigrants, or refugees within the hierarchy of the empire. We begin this paper by first locating ourselves outside of, and in opposition to, the white Western academic tradition of centering the Eurocentric "I" by opting to write collaboratively and tell of the interconnections of our storied histories and realities as two Black women. We both hail from Turtle Island (which is a term used by some Indigenous communities to define the landmass that spans from present-day Canada to Mexico, including the Caribbean

archipelago), one born in the Caribbean and the other in Canada, both raised in Ontario with a deep respect for the histories of the land, water, and peoples. In locating and positioning ourselves in our work, we are also marking the importance of how place and geography influence our perspectives and inform our worldviews (Wilson et al. 2016).

We come to this work of thinking about the importance of Black and Indigenous organizing for the health[1] and wellbeing of our communities as two African diasporic women on Turtle Island.[2] Our ancestry and family histories are connected to African and Indigenous communities stretching from North and South America through the Caribbean and the continent of Africa. Much like the nation-state of Canada, the economic, historical, and ethno-racial composition of the Caribbean is the byproduct of centuries of barbaric colonial violence instigated by Europeans. Similar stories taint these territories: namely, the massacre and disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples in the Americas; the displacement of Indigenous peoples from the African continent, and their importation into the Americas via the Trans-Atlantic enslavement trade. The children, youth, adults, and elders who survived the horrors of the Middle Passage were worked to death, and forced to produce children who were themselves also worked until death as enslaved labourers throughout Turtle Island (i.e. present-day Canada, the Caribbean archipelago, US, and Mexico). Many of these concentration camps across Turtle Island were small homesteads, many were larger settler enterprises, but all were a part of a systemic plantocracy. The sole purpose was to violently extract any and everything for empire building projects of Europe (Cooper 2006; Nelson 2016). White settlers could not undertake the project of colonization—the genocide, disenfranchisement, and routing of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island from their land—without the displacement and enslavement of Indigenous peoples from the continent of Africa. Put another way, the transatlantic enslavement trade infrastructure and profits, gained by enslaving the Indigenous people of Africa and transporting them throughout the Americas, was essential to the colonization of the Americas, including the portion now known as Canada.

The logics informing the plantation colonies of the Caribbean were rolled out on the mainland (present-day Canada and the United States), and proved to be very lucrative for the British and French Empires. The wealth generated by the British colonies in the Caribbean provided the means for Britain to dominate and pursue war, trade, and wealth from the people they unlawfully captured and transplanted, who in turn were forced to perform slave labour, raising cash crops of sugar, tobacco, molasses, etcetera. Notably, in their desperate attempt to recreate in the Caribbean, the "Spice Islands" of Indonesia and the rest of the "Orient" in their corporate empire building project, colonists were invested in the business of transplanting both Indigenous flora (i.e. plants) and fauna (i.e. people through chattel slavery, and animals) from other parts of the globe. Meanwhile, they extracted minerals such as gold from the Americas for wealth-building in Europe. The "Doctrine of Discovery" began as early as the 1100s via various papal bulls and decrees. However, the 1455 Romanus Pointfex by Pope Nicholas V (targeting Africa), and the 1493 papal bull Inter Caetera issued by Pope Alexander VI (targeting the Americas) (Miller 2019) were key documents that codified white supremacy—the fallacious and harmful belief Europeans held about themselves as supreme, and having divine dominion over all other people, land, water, air, and life forms to do with as they please, without consent or authority (Assembly of First Nations 2018). The Doctrine of Discovery was used to establish processes of genocide across Turtle Island and the globe, instigating the horrors of chattel slavery/enslavement, exporting Europe's violent culture of racial capitalism, and introducing

destructive agricultural, fishing, and mining practices that have produced environmental catastrophe. Driven by European desire and greed, these havocs wrought by colonialism are deeply interconnected with the devastation we now call the Anthropocene. Thus, the Anthropocene was sparked by, and the result of, white European colonial extraction and exploitation.

One of the more recent injustices is the attempts by European descendants who reside in present-day Europe, North America, and Australia, and who continue to benefit from ongoing colonization, to reframe catastrophic climate change and environmental devastation—which sustain the Anthropocene—as the result of all human action, including that of Indigenous people worldwide, and descendants of the transatlantic enslavement trade. It is a libelous fiction that the people on whom colonial violence was sustained were equal participants and willing accomplices in the destructive cult of European colonization, white supremacy, and the white settler societies, institutions, and economies they founded across the world. Thereby concealing the colossal scale and scope of European colonization and its most recent mutation, globalization.

The resulting environmental disasters, from excessive and irresponsible extraction via logging, inappropriate farming, rapacious hunting and fishing practices, along with the by-products of destructive mining, technology usage, and dumping practices that poison the earth, water, and air, are not distributed evenly (CBC 2010; Hamir 2019; Porter n.d). Instead, Indigenous and Black communities are targeted and disproportionately harmed (Galvez 2020). Colonization by Europeans and their Euro-Canadian descendants and these experiences of environmental racism in Canada—that result in a host of health issues, chronic conditions, and fatalities from cancers induced by the poisons being brought, poured and leached into the ground, water, and air, directly affecting and diminishing the quality of life of infants, children, adults, and elders—go hand in hand (Waldron 2018). Environmental racism is an inherent by-product and expression of the deceptive practice of white settler-colonization and the white supremacy that underpins it. The transatlantic enslavement trade rested upon the violent, inhumane extraction and human trafficking of millions of kidnapped Indigenous children and adults of Africa forced into sexual slavery and concentration camps where enslaved Africans and their descendants were worked until death, as were their children and children's children, until the later half of the nineteenth century; forced to destroy the environment laying waste to vast fertile ecosystems. This clearing and working of the land by enslaved people indigenous to Africa and the incomprehensible wealth their labour generated for white settlers, was used to secure the wealth they have today (Lockhart 2019) and domination over others into the present moment (Skelton 2019). It also helped to advance colonization of Indigenous peoples' lands and lives across Turtle Island, Africa and around the globe, with consequences that persist and cumulatively contribute to the conditions of the Anthropocene (McKie 2018; Lewis and Maslin 2018).

Colonial Violence Begets Narrow Understandings of Blackness and Indigeneity

The consequences of colonization are often erased or substantively minimized in order to produce a sanitized national narrative of the Canadian nation-state that highlights the 30-year period of the Underground railroads' terminus (Brown 2018ab; Trudel 2013). This narrow understanding of the presence of people of African descent on Turtle Island is ahistorical at best,

and aligns with Eurocentric worldviews at worst. In this, it is important for us to be mindful of the over-simplistic way in which we use labels such as "Indigenous" to exclude displaced African peoples and to intentionally "separate Black skinned people from Red skinned people". These distinct racial categorizations were invented by white settlers to deny any kind of variation of Indigeneity. Throughout the Americas, including within what we now call Canada, indigeneity was not always "fair complexioned," and did not fit the white man's conception of the imaginary Indian (Francis 1992). European colonization is used to distort and reconfigure human relations and history by denying the many waves of travel and trade between Indigenous African peoples and Indigenous peoples of the Americas from time immemorial. This narrow understanding works to situate the history of Black people on Turtle Island as beginning with and through European conquest and enslavement, and as something separate and apart from Indigenous history.

Partaking in the erasure of several generations of Indigenous peoples from the African continent in this place and space is a form of violence. This forced and willful amnesia lays the foundation for the ongoing violence evoked against Black lives—what Saidiya Hartman refers to as "the afterlife of slavery" (2007, p.6). This violence takes many forms in the contemporary moment: from excessive surveillance through racial profiling by police—referred to as "carding" in Canada—resulting in curtailed mobility and freedom; to state sanctioned extrajudicial killings and enslavement through incarceration; and the concealment of Black embodiment when it comes to the realities of mixed Black and Indigenous people on Turtle Island, whose identities are often fractured, ignored, and silenced (Maynard 2017; Wilson et al. 2016). Importantly, outside of Turtle Island, Blackness and Indigeneity are not always mutually exclusive, Australia and Papua New Guinea for example.

In the current configuration, in the white man's imagined "New World," colonial violence is what brings African diasporic people into relationship formation with Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, and this is the only relationship white settlerism affords us. It thus appears that a symptom of colonial violence is amnesia as Canada is simultaneously imagined to be the epicenter of harmonious multicultural acceptance and diversity. Canada is imagined to be a post-colonial utopia to which other countries should aspire, that accepts refugees from places in crisis such as Syria and skilled immigrants from all over the world who are unable to get a job in their trade once they get settled in the country. We have been conditioned to believe that this reimagined configuration of our relationships as White, Indigenous, and Black people in Canada is somehow natural and altruistic, as if we come to these relations by choice, chance or happenstance, rather than through violent processes of disenfranchisement, displacement, and genocide. Multiculturalism, much like creolization across the Americas, is the result of violence which commenced on the Caribbean islands and was expanded and scaled-up on the mainland (Walcott 2016).

We Never Get to Forget We Are Not From Here – Stolen People on Stolen Land

The binary "Settler-Native" relationship that has been at the crux of discourse between white and Indigenous people in Canada is, and always has been, insufficient in accounting for the presence and humanity of African diasporic peoples within the boundaries of the Canadian nation-state. This is a discourse in which Black people have historically been rendered silent, stripped of speaking authoritatively about how and where we enter the history of the nation-

state. Furthermore, in more recent discourse, Black people have been recast as "settlers of colour." The extension of white settler colonial violence to include Black-embodied peoples cast into exile by way of the transatlantic enslavement trade is problematic for several reasons we will discuss further. In order to do so, we review how people of the Black diaspora are once again forcibly reconstructed but this time as "visible minorities" and lumped into the "people of colour" category in Canada.

Black people in Canada have been conveniently reconstructed as visible minorities in order to forward a mythology of Canada as a settler society that opened its borders to the settlement of people of colour, while being publicly silent about settlement practices as a vehicle of genocidal occupation of Indigenous territories, enslavement and its modern equivalent, and indentured servitude of Black-embodied people. Further, African diasporic peoples have a history on Turtle Island that predates European colonization. This is a history that has been intentionally suppressed by white anthropologists invested in ideologies of terra nullius, white supremacist notions of "discovery," and the doctrine of domination (Assembly of First Nations 2018). White settlers often used terra nullius and the doctrine of domination to further an erroneous ahistorical account that features Europeans as the first and only people to have contact with the people of Turtle Island. In so doing, they invented a binary history between people Indigenous to Turtle Island and European colonizers. This, among other acts of intentional erasure mentioned earlier, have led to the notion that people Indigenous to Africa and people Indigenous to Turtle Island only knew one another by way of white European colonialisms (Chengu 2014; Van Sertima 1976; Von Wuthenau 1975; Wiener 1920). This is a fabrication that strips people Indigenous to Turtle Island and Africa of a pre-colonial history that includes trade and cultural exchange, agency, and humanism.

Extending white settlerism to include Black African diasporic peoples who are descendants of the transatlantic enslavement trade is to pretend as if white settlerism and whiteness is not a social space that intentionally always excludes Black peoples, in as much as it is used to exclude Indigenous peoples. There is an intention to transpose white guilt (Sharma and Wright 2005) onto Black people when we uncritically take-up terms such as "settler of colour" without question or critique (Sharma and Wright 2005). Herein, we must do some unpacking and careful thinking about what this means specifically for Black people of the diaspora to be regarded as settlers, who survived over three centuries of transatlantic enslavement and ongoing suppression exerted by white supremacy expressed in every social and economic institution. What, for instance, is the relationship of stolen people to stolen land (Amadahy and Lawrence 2009)? We are told that decolonization involves the repatriation of land (Tuck and Yang 2012). However, the fact remains that enslaved African people came to this place and the Americas (as well as other places across the globe) as property, not recognized as human beings, a legacy still faced by their descendants until this very day. Enslaved Black people were stripped of their own agency and self-determination and, as such, were incapable by rule of law of owning land (Holness and Sutherland 2000). Through the economic systems of the West, this still remains true for many African diasporic peoples. Black-embodied people were—and in many ways still are, through the carceral system—thought of as commodities to be bought, sold, and bred like animals. Ironically, while Black people could not own resources like land and wealth, and were in fact exploited and commodified like land, it is through their very lives and labour that economic wealth is built for the empire. The questions remain: how then do we, or should we as Black-embodied people, the descendants of enslaved

Indigenous Africans forced into exile and diaspora for eternity, approach the topic of land and ownership at the center of white settler and Indigenous discourse? What do these conversations mean in the Canadian context, where roughly 90% of Canada's territory is designated "crown land," implying it is still owned by the British Royal Family, even though the territories are largely unceded (McIntosh 2020). Further, this idea of decolonization requiring repatriation of land (Tuck and Yang 2012) is also problematic for many First Nations peoples such as Inuit and Métis communities due to the fact that many Indigenous peoples remain unrecognized by their communities and the Canadian government and therefore, have tenuous claims to their territories. Black people are always presumed to be foreigners that do not quite belong. Always from somewhere else, we are not the intended beneficiaries of white settler appropriated wealth. White settlers are able to supplant the histories, worldviews, and socio-political structures of the Indigenous communities they make contact with and the territories they occupy (Tuck and Yang 2012). Such authority is not part of the Black experience in the Americas. As Tiffany King states, "white settlers and Black people are not ontological/structural equivalents in this hemisphere" and to make such an intellectual leap, is sloppy (2015).

Health, Wellbeing, and Survival in the Face of Colonial Violence

As two Black women born within Turtle Island, we are both descendants of survivors of the transatlantic enslavement trade and we recognize the importance of all of our relations, including our relationship to land. Of utmost importance to our worldviews is our relationship to our ancestors. In showing respect for the land and our ancestors, on whose territories we are no longer based, we extend our respect to the Indigenous stewards of the territories we now reside—that of the Neutral, Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee. As such, integral to our approach is the acknowledgement that the work we aim to do in the health sector, and the violence we aim to combat within our communities, must also take into consideration and aim to address the violence inflicted on the Indigenous peoples of North America (King 2015).

One important area of our work is in the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) movement. HIV is a harbinger of structural violence and inequity, and emerges as a pandemic because of the condition produced by European colonization (Pepin 2021). HIV has gone on to disproportionately affect Black and Indigenous communities on Turtle Island—be they straight, queer, or transgender. First contact and its reverberations include the arrival of, and ongoing presence of HIV in Black and Indigenous communities as an outcome of biological warfare inherent to European colonization (James 2017; Pepin 2021). The Anthropocene more generally then, much like COVID-19 in a specific sense, is just the latest in a long history of pandemics linked to white settler colonial violence that has devastated Black and Indigenous communities. In fact, without pandemics such as smallpox and COVID-19, you could not have an Anthropocene. Illness, disease, and death were integral to weakening any opposition Indigenous North Americans and Indigenous Africans had to colonial violence. Pandemic was and still is used as a weapon of war for clearing the land of title and people, genocide, enslavement, and, ultimately, for financial gain. Pandemics allow for the decimation of the working class of society, much like it decimated the warrior class of our Indigenous ancestors.

Colonization, and its neoliberal sibling globalization, are by design disruptive of the stable ecological and immunological continuity integral for Indigenous life to thrive. For instance, we often conceptualize biological warfare to include things like smallpox blankets and

anthrax, however, it also includes the protracted stressors resulting from removal of Indigenous ways of gathering, preparing and partaking of food and maintenance of the land. Forced removal of peoples from their homelands, the silencing of protest in protection of the land (Noakes 2020), systemic poisoning of our food system and living environments (e.g. toxic tailing ponds, overfishing, mining-ecological devastation, mercury-pulp and paper mills, etc.) are all examples of ongoing devastation wrought by European settlers and their descendants. These forms of environmental destruction and industrial pollution are deployed to aid and abet our genocide as groups of peoples, and the destruction of our overall wellbeing. It is no surprise then that Black and Indigenous communities across Turtle Island are subject to disproportionate rates of chronic illnesses such as HIV, diabetes, heart disease and stroke, immunological diseases such as Lupus, and are some of the hardest-hit communities by pandemics such as the COVID-19 crisis.

While our work centers the connections (historical and contemporary) of the health and wellbeing of Black and Indigenous communities, creating Black-led and Black-focused spaces is also very important. It is for these reasons that movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM) existed prior to and will exist long after the emergence of BLM chapters global, local, or otherwise. The movement is greater than any group of individuals who seek to identify Black liberation and resistance as a brand. The movement centers the realities of anti-black violence and the queer Black experience, which are so important for the self-determination, and wellbeing of our communities. Notably, the BLM movement has centered the Black experience, where Indigenous and Black issues are interconnected. The BLM movement has exemplified and encouraged our careful thinking about the ways in which the fight for Black liberation is deeply connected to Indigenous sovereignty in North America, because we cannot expect to attain rights within a nation-state that does not even abide by the rule of the treaties that rightfully govern these territories.

Building Bridges, not Borders

Across the borders of the nation-states that wound and divide Turtle Island it is important to note that the relationships between, and within, Black and Indigenous communities have developed differently in important and nuanced ways. For instance, haunted by the legacy of slavery so romanticized in American history, in the United States a dominant discourse has developed solely between White and Black people. The civil rights struggle in the 1950-1960s, is a protracted struggle that continues today. In American media, Black people continue to be viewed as the central point of reference when it comes to "diverse racial" representation. Meanwhile, the histories and realities of Indigenous or "Native American" peoples are often erased in the context of the United States. Instead, Native American peoples are imagined as extinct relics of the past.

Relatedly, there has been an interesting criminalization of Indigenous peoples migrating from present-day Mexico (also part of Turtle Island), who are viewed as foreigners trying to "invade" the imagined border of the American nation-state. Completely erased is the fact that prior to the arbitrary Mexico-United States border and colonization by Europeans, Indigenous peoples frequently travelled across the Americas. In highlighting the arbitrariness of the border and the Indigeneity of South American people on Turtle Island, a perplexing issue is raised by proponents for controlling and surveilling the borders of the North American

nation-states. The Indigeneity of South American peoples also highlights the importance of Indigenous movements in North America that bridge connections with those in South America, and elsewhere across Turtle Island and in the Global South.

In stark contrast to the United States, the nation-state of Canada has facilitated a dominant discourse between White and Indigenous peoples. White settler society in Canada has intentionally divorced itself from its involvement in, benefit from, and promulgation of the transatlantic enslavement of Black-embodied people. Instead, the Canadian nation-state has reimagined itself as the altruistic savior of the same enslaved African peoples who sought refuge via the Underground Railroad and immigrated post-emancipation from the United States into Canada only to find anti-black racism, threats of lynching and segregation (Yarhi 2016). It is in this retelling of its own history that Canada begins branding itself as a utopia for Black people, and all those seeking refuge from oppression and persecution in countries abroad. Erased is the fact that Canada, being part of the British-North American Empire, was also a site of the enslavement of African and Indigenous peoples (i.e. members of the Pawnee Indian Tribe or, as they were colloquially called, the Panis) for two centuries, starting in 1628 (Cooper 2006; The Historica-Dominion Institute 2008). Canada has selectively erased two hundred years of zealous slave ownership that was fully supported by the Crown and white settlers, instead preferring to valorize the 30-year period of the Underground railroad that had Canada as its terminus. In fact many thousands of enslaved African peoples seeking refuge through the Underground Railroad faced peril, violence, and bondage in Canada and returned south, across the then transient border to the United States (Brown 2018; Holness and Sutherland 2000). The idea that passage through the Underground Railroad was unidirectional is yet another aspect of a re-imagined Canada (Cooper 2006).

Notably, when Jesuit priests saw the humanity of Indigenous peoples in the Americas, they intervened, designating them “noble savages” and went before the Crown to stop their inhumane enslavement, opting instead to focus on their genocide through assimilation. This concept of the noble savage was never extended to include Indigenous African peoples. Canada did not end slavery until it was outlawed across the British Empire in 1862. The emancipation from slavery for Black people was not a singular event instituted upon announcement. Put another way, Black people did not walk off plantations and into sunset, go to sleep and rise the next morning as wage earners. Emancipation in most jurisdictions, such as the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, and in South America (i.e. Brazil) emancipation was not protected, as such non-payment for work performed was common. In many instances room and board were the only “payment offered” (typically in barns and slave quarters). Further to this, emancipation was “phased” in, meaning the only options legally available for ex-slaves were unpaid “apprenticeships.” In some jurisdictions freedom was only available to people of a particular age (i.e. in Brazil only those over the age of 60, or in Cuba only children born post-proclamation). In other jurisdictions such as the United States and Canada non-payment and restrictive laws post slavery were the norm. Segregation, surveillance, and policing were used to restrict, regulate and end Black lives prematurely (Blanchard 2002; Conrad 1972; Drescher 1999; Holt 1992; Scott 2000).

The histories of the United States and Canada directly inform the racial formations that have developed in these respective countries, and the differing relationships African Diasporic and Indigenous peoples have to each other and to these respective nation-states. As such, the conversations held between Black and Indigenous peoples in the United States cannot

be transposed in their entirety to the Canadian context. In fact, it is anti-Black and an affront to Indigenous peoples to think that the histories and relationships that have developed between African American and Native American peoples in the United States can be transposed and readily applied to unpack the nuanced and complicated relationships that have developed between African diasporic peoples and Indigenous peoples in Canada. These attempts at transposition by some scholars have functioned to misrecognize and erase the contemporary experiences, histories, realities, and resistance strategies of the Black diaspora in Canada (James 2017). These acts of misrecognition and erasure by scholars also function to obscure their own entanglements with white supremacist logics and global capitalism. This fuels the Anthropocene, making disposable land, water, air, and the African diasporic and Indigenous peoples from South America and the Caribbean that all too often labour under the inhumane conditions of temporary worker programs, seasonal agricultural and domestic work developed by the Canadian government to import labour to sustain unsustainable agricultural and other land use practices.

For Indigenous peoples, racial formations have functioned to make invisible continued colonization through the geographic, social, economic, and political silencing of Indigenous communities on reserves and the cultural erasure of Indigenous peoples in urban centers. Importantly, not all racism is created equal. Put another way, equivocating anti-black and anti-Indigenous racism relies on flawed logic. Firstly, because some Indigenous people of Turtle Island are both Indigenous to Turtle Island and descendants of the Black African Diaspora, experiencing intersectional discrimination, such as the intergenerational and contemporary effects, may occur. Secondly, because these respective forms of discrimination are informed by the different, and yet related, histories of these peoples.

As Ciann L. Wilson has argued elsewhere (Wilson et al. 2016), there is a powerful metaphoric relationship between colonialism and HIV, as the virus literally colonizes the human body. There are also very clear socio-historical developments that connect the spread of HIV in Indigenous communities in the African continent, as well as here on Turtle Island, to ongoing colonial processes. This has important implications for reframing narratives around the purported "victors" of the HIV movement, namely white gay men; challenging hierarchies and problematic relationships that have developed within the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) Industrial complex (Wilson et al. 2016); and imagining the empowerment and emancipatory potential encompassed in Black and Indigenous organizing for our own health and wellbeing in a way that decenters narratives about our peoples as "risky," "diseased" bodies (Patton 1990). Towards this end, decolonial processes for engagement between Black and Indigenous communities must be understood as an ongoing, challenging, but rewarding process, not some final destination.

In this work, we must resist romanticizing relationships between Black and Indigenous folks. There is rampant anti-black racism within Indigenous communities, much like in the rest of society, as Black-embodied people remain at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Similarly, there exists nuanced forms of Indigenous erasure within Black communities, which need to be unpacked, understood, and challenged. While people have a keen understanding of their own oppression; often there is a struggle to empathize with that of others. Further, it is only natural that there would be tensions and challenges that exist between any groups of peoples forced together under violent conditions not of their own making. This is to say that this work around Black and Indigenous mobilizing is not easy, nor should we expect it to be.

What is it to Embark on This Work?

As Black-Canadian scholars, we are not invested in superimposing discourses between Black and Indigenous communities from the United States or the Caribbean to the Canadian context. Instead, we are interested in understanding and continuing to facilitate processes that reflect the nuanced ways in which these cross-community relationships have developed and continue to evolve in the Canadian context. While there are important connections from nation-state to nation-state across Turtle Island, as we have highlighted above, there is something fundamentally problematic, apolitical, and ahistorical when we believe that discourses from one context readily apply to communities in another. As such, much of our work has and continues to be in conversation with Indigenous scholars and communities who have a situated understanding of the nation-state of Canada. Our work with Indigenous communities has and continues to be practical in as much as it is intellectual. This has included collaborating with Indigenous partners on projects, papers, workshops, and conferences, amongst other knowledge exchange opportunities (Wilson et al. 2016).

Drawing on the Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) principles as an inspiration (First Nations Centre 2005; First Nations Information Governance Centre 2014), LLana James's work has raised concerns about Black people's lives, minds, and experiences being harvested and repackaged for scientific commercialization and market consumption at the expense of Black populations. Like earlier extraction schemes, harvesting data from people, places and things requires raw minerals—often conflict minerals—and produces emissions, hazardous waste, and environmental damage that is adding to the burden of climate change and advancing the Anthropocene at an alarming rate (Dhar 2020). This has many obvious and implicit parallels to earlier colonization of the land and her peoples via enslavement and the inherent ecological destruction that occurs.

James's astuteness in 2005 raised the alarm about the expansion of the biomedical research industry's growth into data production/mining sectors, and the resulting lack of protection for Black communities that have had their data harvested. Combined with Black people increasingly being ushered into research that in their own opinion, often offered little if any meaningful value, inspired and guided James in the development and implementation of the first research summit to shift the paradigm in June 2006. This included scientific tracks historically hived off from Black communities and the first Research Think Tank 2009 designed to situate Black people and communities in the driver's seat of priority setting. Both events were specifically for Black communities and for the first-time centered Black people and communities' self-determination (James 2009). This led her to be one of the first people in the Black community in Toronto to identify the importance of advocating for ethical practices in research that facilitate protection and the self-determination of Black communities in Canada (James 2009). James led early conversations within Black communities about research ethics that value Black life and protect the ecologies that sustain our collective well-being (James 2009). These conversations encouraged our communities to think critically about research and other forms of data harvesting, given the history of these practices as a vehicle for racism and colonization. James's earlier efforts led to her more recent work with Wilson in spearheading *The Black Diaspora Research, Data Collection, and Evaluation Protocol—The Canadian Edition* for ethical practices with and among Black communities.

Our work also speaks back to and raises important questions of ongoing political processes that impact our communities. For instance, in this time of national conversation about Truth and Reconciliation for Canada's Indigenous peoples, Wilson's work on the Proclaiming Our Roots project (POR) brings awareness to the realities of mixed Black-Indigenous communities across Canada. People of mixed Black and Indigenous ancestry have existed on Turtle Island for over 400 years. Through personal videos and testimony, the POR project affords Black-Indigenous peoples an opportunity to artistically write, tell, and visually narrativize their experiences into being. In addition to sparking discussions about belonging, mental health and fractured identities, this work also incites important conversations about anti-black racism, as well as questions about whose truth and which Indigenous voices Canada aims to reconcile with at this historic juncture.

The practical, hands-on work of collaborating has been as important as the intellectual work for us. This begs the question, is it enough to merely intellectualize about working across Indigenous and Black communities without embarking on building those relationships on a political, personable, or population level? Further, if cross-community partnerships are about "having each other's backs" (Walcott 2017), then can intellectual exercise ever be sufficient for the politicized realities in which we (as Black and Indigenous peoples) live?

Lastly, our work would not be possible without acknowledging that we inherit from our ancestors many traditions of resistance, revolution, peacemaking, and world building. The Sister Vision Press (Awe n.d) and Between the Lines press, which published the works of Black women and women of colour are part of the tradition, as are the Combahee Collective, a collective of Black feminists who took leadership around the genesis of contemporary Black feminist thought as guiding principles and processes for political organizing within Black communities and across difference (Taylor 2017).

Concluding Remarks

Our collective bodies of work shed light on the fact that in order to make any kinds of gains around health and wellbeing for Black and Indigenous peoples, we must understand our issues as both distinct and connected. Colonization is a central driver of physical and social disease and illness in our communities as a result of the reverberation of the impact of "first contact" with Europeans. The impact of first contact is ongoing and lives in the present moment in very specific ways for Indigenous peoples (e.g. assimilation, the remnants of the impact of residential schools, ecological destruction, etc.) and people of the Black diaspora (e.g. anti-black violence, the physical embodiment of labour, and underemployment) (Hartman 2007; Sharpe 2016). Therefore, as we think through environmental sustainability and sustainable health solutions, separately and together, we must think carefully about how we can reclaim and restore the material conditions for good health that go beyond the biomedical industrial complex, which were often lost in our communities through the processes of colonial violence. Integral to the sustainability of this work is love for Black and Indigenous life and humanity (Simpson 2014). Were it not for our deep love for the communities we work and identify with, and were it not for our visions of the limitless possible futures, we could not care for one another, the land, water, air, and the ecosystems of life, and much of this work would not be possible.

Notes

1. We define health broadly as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

2. Turtle Island is an Indigenous term used to refer to North America and the Caribbean (Adelson and Olding 2013; Amadahy and Lawrence 2009).

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LLANA JAMES (llana.james@queensu.ca.). LLana James' research illuminates the ways in which technology can undermine or bolster human rights in the context of clinical care, rehabilitation science and public health. Her transdisciplinary and applied approach is designed to critically appraise current applications of technology, while developing and implementing interventions that seed new, ethical futures. To accomplish this, LLana brings together academic and community scholars across disciplines and sectors to work at the intersections of medicine/clinical care, public health, data, AI, law, and race-ethnicity across multiple axes, e.g., gender, class, able-bodiedness. LLana is wrapping up her PhD in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto. As a result of her ground-breaking work, she is the inaugural AI, Medicine and Data Justice Post-Doctoral Fellow at Queen's University.

CIANN L. WILSON is an Associate Professor at Wilfrid Laurier University. Dr. Wilson has extensive experience in consulting, advocacy and community development related to Black and Indigenous health promotion and brings considerable expertise in developing intersectional, anti-racist evaluation frameworks. Dr. Wilson's interdisciplinary research program addresses the multi-faceted and complex drivers that impact the overall health of racialized and Indigenous communities. Her program consists of community-based research (CBR) projects that utilize evidence-based, art and media-based approaches to elucidate community perspectives on their own health, and engage communities in evidence-based interventions that have local specificity and relevance. Her CBR approach addresses the pressing health and well-being needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities by harnessing the talents, knowledge, and skills of communities, encouraging them to be empowered agents of change and co-producers of knowledge and research that centres their voices, and which is of benefit to their lives. In addition to leading the Access & Equity Research Interest Group and Co-Directing the Centre for Community Research, Learning and Action, Dr. Wilson has consulted with Peel District School Board, and departments within the Government of Canada. Wilson is also a sitting member on the Anti-racism Advisory Working Group of Waterloo Region.