

How We Came to Inhabit These Spaces: Reflections on the Role of Place in Our Individual and Collective Journeys as Emerging Sustainability Scholars

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Abstract

This paper provides a descriptive analysis of the experience of four doctoral students engaged in a collective project of place exploration at a midsize Canadian university. Under the methodological tradition of self-study, we contextualize concepts of place attachment and decolonization in order to investigate what it means to be interdisciplinary scholars of

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sustainability. We use storytelling and mobile discussion methods, alongside visual and mapping methods to disentangle our experiences and analyses of place, mobility, land, and scholarship. This reflective piece demonstrates that collaborative forms of scholarship such as this require deliberate moves toward community creation and place attachment within institutions of higher education. Through a process of collaborative investigation and writing, we have created spaces of caring academic scholarship rather than engaging in competitive and hierarchical university culture.

Keywords: *Sense of place, Decolonization, Sustainability, Sustainability education, Environmental education, Collaborative scholarship, Reflexivity, Higher education*

How we came to inhabit these spaces: Reflections on the role of place in our individual and collective journeys as emerging sustainability scholars

The view from above:

We each arrived in this place by plane, some of us traveling from different countries, others from different continents. We left behind big cities or small communities, forests and oceans or sidewalks and skyscrapers. Upon arrival, however, we discovered a shared, near-identical bird's-eye view of a small Canadian city, bisected by a river, with a striking abundance of trees, and surrounded by flat prairies and canola fields.

We have each traveled to this place, a midsize university on Treaty 6 territory in the Canadian prairies, to become scholars of sustainability. Our relationship to this place is shaped by the place attachments we have carried with us, as well as the journeys we have traced in order to arrive here. The idea of this collaborative writing emerged from a weekly writing group. Once a week on Tuesdays, we meet at the Sustainability Education Research Institute (SERI) lab, a collaborative working space fitted with a living wall with different plants. It is here that we started conversations about our scholarship, asking ourselves why we study sustainability and what this means to our respective larger communities. We are a writing collective of doctoral students who study environment from diverse and interdisciplinary perspectives- sustainability science, environmental economics, and education- and who decided to embark on co-exploration of place, mobility, and decolonization.

In unravelling our own place attachments, and re-sorting these experiences together in place, through the lens of critical place-based pedagogy, we hope to better understand how these relationships to place inform our work as sustainability scholars (Objective 1). Furthermore, we are interested in the implications of such place analysis for Indigenous land recognition, decolonization, and sustainability scholarship (Objective 2). We were also motivated by the need to explore multi-scholar collaborative interdisciplinary research methodologies that are often promoted as integral components of interdisciplinary graduate studies (Objective 3).

We begin this paper by outlining the key theoretical approaches and scholars that inform our exploration of place, mobility, and decolonization. In the Methods section, we locate our methodological approach within the tradition of self-study and describe the methods used for our collective place exploration. We then move on to findings, with a central focus on the four anchor stories of our group members before providing an analysis of group stories, discussions, and photos. We conclude with the major implications of our work, including our belief that such collaborative forms of scholarship are a deliberate move toward community and place attachment within institutions of higher education, and a move against competitive and hierarchical university systems.

Understandings of Place and Mobility

Place has been understood to represent the particular, inexchangeable, and phenomenological, eluding replication and quantification. Place is not merely a “thing”, or description of such; rather, it is a way of understanding the world (Cresswell, 2004). Agnew (1987) proposes three dimensions of place: place as the *location* of an object or event; place as the *locale* or setting for human activity; and *sense of place*, which refers to identification with

and belonging to a particular place. While this paper engages with all three dimensions of place described by Agnew, it is particularly the sense of place that motivates our investigation.

Cultivating a sense of place, or place attachment, has been advocated as a response to perceived human detachment from the natural world, described by one charismatic advocate as “Nature Deficit Disorder” (Louv, 2005). Numerous scholars and educators promote place attachment as a means to develop ecologically conscious citizens possessing the ability to connect global and local issues (Smith & Sobel, 2010; Smith & Gruenewald, 2007). Place attachment represents more than a simplistic “if you love a place, you won’t harm it” rhetoric; rather, it acknowledges that people who have lived in intimate connection and interdependency with a particular place for years, centuries, or even millennia, will have both the knowledge and capacity to best protect it (Cajete, 1999; Battiste, Bell, Findlay, Findlay, & Henderson, 2005).

Doreen Massey has made important contributions to this body of work, writing of place as relational, global, and open to flows of people and ideas. Massey proposes a “global sense of place” that is “progressive; not self-enclosing and defensive, but outward-looking” (1994, p.147). Massey’s sense of place embraces modern time-space compression and its resultant stretching out of social relations across space. This celebration of flows is not to suggest equality of openness; Massey also writes of the power-geometries that result in differentiated mobility and placement of ideas, individuals and social groups (Massey, 1994; 2005).

Institutions of higher education could be considered exemplars of the kind of relational, outward-looking, and fluid places that Massey describes. In our experiences, universities self-describe as serving to gather together scholars from around the world, united by shared values of seeking basic and applied knowledge, and better served by the diversity and circulation of ideas and people.

Understandings of Decolonization

Relational conceptualizations of place, such as we are drawing on for the framing of this work, have not escaped critique. Perhaps the most salient criticisms have come out of postcolonial and Indigenous decolonization studies (e.g. Smith, 1999/2012). Indeed, place theorizing that ignores the implication of settler place-making in the displacement and genocide of Indigenous peoples is unethical, at best. Massey (and others) writes of the sleight of hand that converts geography to ontology (development) and represents those in other places as at an earlier point in development compared to the more industrialized. Witness how “underdeveloped” has replaced “Third World” in polite conversations. This sort of spatio-temporal fix has also been implicated in the subjugation of Indigenous peoples, a move that “assigns conquered populations to a different Time” (Fabian, 2014, p.30). This has been accompanied by very material spatial fixes: the displacement of Indigenous peoples, and, in Canada and the U.S., removal to reserve land. Through reserves and reservations, geography helped perform the ultimate spatial fix by hiding the evidence that the land of the New World was not unoccupied, unused, or pristine wilderness (Johnson, 2003).

If the multiculturalism implied by a relational view of space is to be achieved, then there must first be substantive decolonization. Otherwise, these global places, including sites of higher education, will collapse “into neoliberal models of multiculturalism meant to absorb difference into the state without creating any real difference in the structures that dominate” (Goeman, 2013, p. 132). The decolonization of the socio-spatial has important implications for places of higher education. If public education is considered to be an important site of social reproduction (Anyon, 1980), then pockets of resistance and redefinition of socio-spatial relations must be uncovered within these lived experiences of place.

Critical Pedagogy of Place

In alignment with both place attachment and decolonizing approaches, Greenwood proposes a critical pedagogy of place (Greenwood, 2013; see also Gruenewald, 2003). For Greenwood, a critical pedagogy of place requires the twin processes of decolonization and reinhabitation, the latter referring to the “need to re-imagine and recover an ecologically conscious relationship between people and place” (2013, p.96). He proposes three questions to guide place-conscious learning (directly from Greenwood, 2013, p.97): What happened here? (historical); What is happening here now and in what direction is this place headed? (socioecological); What should happen here? (ethical). We have drawn on the above questions in our own place-based exploration, which we describe in more detail in the following section.



Figure 1. Reflections of the interrelations between the university and the city that envelops it.

Methods

The methodology for this paper is informed by self-study approaches and guided by our commitment to reflexivity and exploration/disruption of the taken-for-granted, including what places and ideas are in the background of our work as emerging sustainability scholars. We follow self-study approaches rooted within the field of education, which recognize the importance of practitioner self-reflection in knowledge creation (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Bullough and Pinnegar (2001, p.15) describe “quality” self-study research as “requir[ing] that the researcher negotiate a particularly sensitive balance between biography and history...[S]uch study does not focus on the self per se but on the space between self and the practice engaged in.”

We used several different methods to guide our place exploration, including storytelling and both guided and free-form group discussion. This work took place at the university campus at which we are all students. To open our discussion, we shared stories of our “home” places, or places of origin. We refer to these stories in the discussion as “anchor stories.” We also carried out walking discussions in group, which involved moving across the campus and stopping in significant places, their significance either predetermined by the group, or emerging as important during the journey. We refer to these meandering discussions as our “campus place-exploration.”

The questions that guided our discussions during this place exploration are adapted from Greenwood's critical place-conscious approach (2013). We asked:

- *What is happening here?* What do we notice about this place? How do we (each of us) relate to this place? What others (people, animals, plants) are in this place?
- *What has happened here?* What is the history of this place? If this is originally Indigenous territory, how did the university come to own the lands and what happened to the people who lived here?
- *What could /should happen here?* What could we imagine as a hopeful future for this university, as well as the academy in general?

We complemented these discussions with visual methods, including photo-taking and map-making. The photos accompanied our campus place-exploration, while the map-making was used to trace our journeys of how we came to be in the Canadian prairies.

Findings: Place-based Reflections and Analysis

Origin Stories: Romania to Ghana to Kenya to Canada

The following map and four anchor stories (one for each author) trace our places of origin and the paths we have traveled to the university campus on the Canadian prairies. Our anchor stories are accompanied by brief reflections on the journeys that each of us traced to arrive here. These stories are intended to be read alongside Figure 2, a map tracing our journeys of scholarship. Each of the anchor stories below is a different origin point on the map and the journeys traced by each of us are represented by different colors.

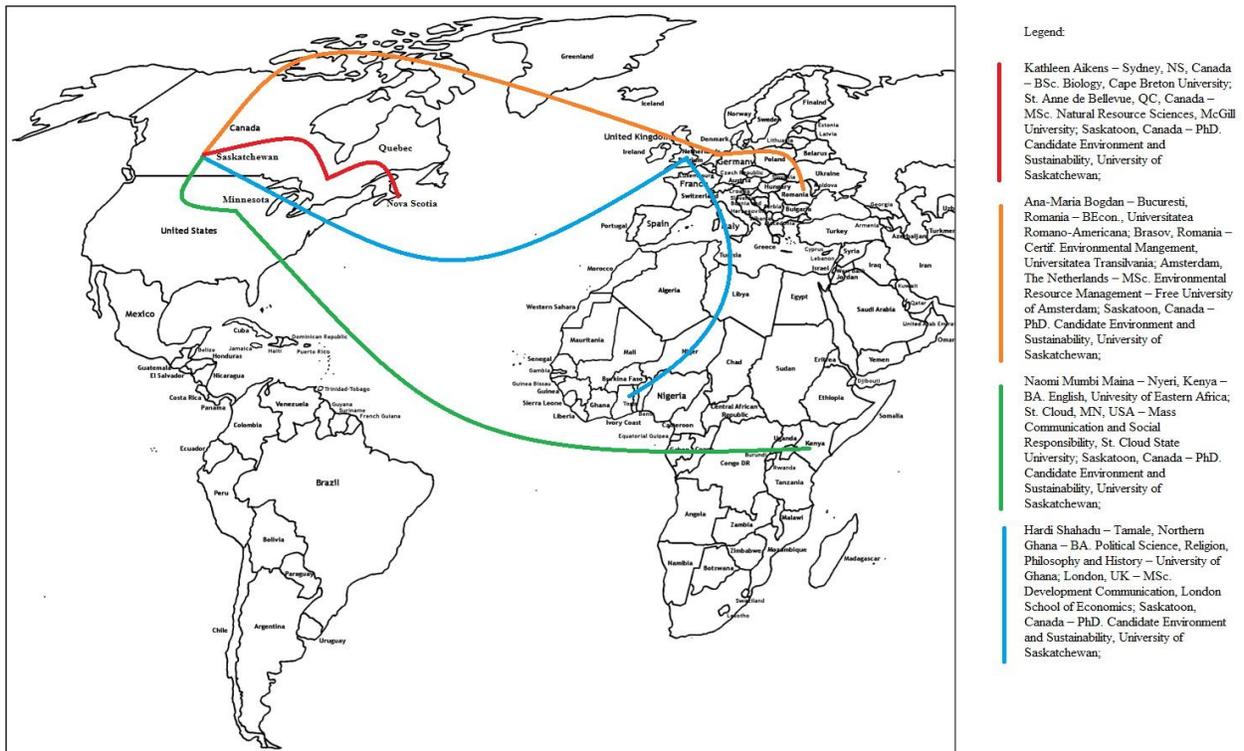


Figure 2. Section of World Map illustrating our group's scholarship journeys.

Anchor Story 1: Romania: Derailed westbound dream and a revisit of eastern roots. *At times I catch myself walking the streets of Brasov – the place where I grew up, while I am almost*

8,000 km away. This nostalgic journey is a collage of images, smells, sounds, and feelings. As I start walking, the crisp mountain air touches my cheeks, the laughter of my friend breaks the silence, and the scent of my mother's garden of roses fills the air. Myriad of architectural styles displayed on the facades of historical buildings remind me of the rich cultural diversity. Romanians, Saxons, Hungarians, and Jews have co-inhabited – mostly peacefully and uniquely shaped this place. Walking further I see the wounds of the 1989 revolution. The buildings are still scarred by the holes of artillery; the sudden smell of burnt pages stings my nostrils. The chaos and the blood are not evident anymore on the lively and thriving streets of the city. My mind rushes me away from this into a cove, off of Michael Weiss street. Here I find the vibrant, smoky, and dull-lighted bistro where my friends are around the table as we passionately dream together, at times of the West. We lament for hours about our damaged political and educational systems and other things, which we think we understand so well. In all this I feel I have arrived. I feel compassion for this place; I want to contribute to its sustenance, to create its resilience from within.

Reflection: My foundations are rooted in the places and within the people I grew up with. It was this place in particular that inspired my desire to acquire more knowledge. I was enrolled in the formal educational system in 1987 – the last years of Ceausescu's dictatorship. As expected, post-communist Romania could not revamp its educational system immediately after the fall of the regime. The system remained rigid, disempowering, and discriminatory. While reverend behavior towards authority was expected, critical perspectives were out of place. However even within this educational system, plenty of exceptions existed and the system incrementally changed throughout the years.

I grew up eulogizing the Western culture. The societal rhetoric that the Western World had better people, places and a superior educational systems was constructed both from within and outside the country. It took a distancing from the place and ironically the Western World education to realize how I/we have started believing in our own (even their) illusion that we were not as good. As eager as I was to be part of the Western educational system, the experience was distressing. I suddenly found out that this world had very different rules – I still remembered cringing in my seat when a Dutch student started arguing his point with a professor in a full auditorium. This place seemed alien, frightening and with new rules which I was discovering day after day, while thinking in Romanian and writing/talking in English. After few years in different educational settings in The Netherlands and Canada, I came to realize that imperfections exist in these educational systems as well, and that this constant admiration exercise of the West was overshadowing my own roots but also my place in it.

Meandering got me interested in issues of sustainability. Moving across borders, physically but also mentally, allowed me to understand the arbitrariness of these artificial delimitations and made me think outside the borders of Romania and the importance for caring for the whole of nature. During my Bachelor of Economics, I got interested in Marketing. The human behavior in relation to decision-making in the market became the topic of interest. A book on green marketing changed everything for me. Soon after that I found the topic of my dissertation: eco-labeling in Romania. From then on I passionately attempted to better understand the intricate

human-nature relation. With that came a deconstruction of ideologies and a reinterpretation of realities. My passion is to research ways of advancing alternative forms of human organizations, novel practices and ideas that could allow us to disrupt current regimes in a way that we empower people to care for the very nature we owe our existence.

Anchor Story 2: Travel and See: A desire nurtured in rural North of Ghana. *Growing up in rural Ghana gave me an opportunity to experience place and nature in ways that are significantly different than the experiences I have had over the past 20 years. I grew up in a rural farming community in which we lived on and with nature. Our care for and understanding of human-nature relations were profound and deep. We had traditional norms and customs known as taboos, which restricted our use of certain plant or animal species. These species I can now refer to, with hindsight, as endangered in circular terms. The reasons for the protection of such species (as I knew them) had nothing to do with danger of extinction but that these animal or plant species represented the “souls” of certain clans or tribes. Therefore one couldn’t harm your own or the soul of another.*

My journey to the discovery of different values about the environment, nature and place began with my introduction to formal education. One of the first writings that I learnt to read outside of the classroom was an inscription on an articulator truck with the phrase “travel and see”. I was fascinated with this phrase and sought every opportunity to travel out of my hometown even as a child. I knew there were new things out there to discover and learn about and different people to get to know. My desire to travel was to discover the world out there but it was after I had visited parts of Europe and North America that I discovered another important side of the travel and see phrase. I have learnt that one never really knows who you are until you step out of your place of origin. Learning of the unwanted consequences of the current trajectory of individualism and consumer oriented societies in the developed world makes me reflect more of the values that we take for granted in parts of Africa; values on deep connections with nature that are fast eroding.

Reflection: Whilst dominant ideas of progress in the western world are leading humanity towards unsustainable pathways, traditional societies in Africa are fast losing their social values in pursuit of the so-called progressive western values. My career as an emerging sustainability scholar leads toward reconciling the notions of progress and modernity with the need to create a balance between human needs and capacity of the planetary life support system to sustainably support those needs. I seek a critical review of the disappearance of the differences between needs and manufactured wants in modern societies. This review will lead to important questions about what constitute sustainable values and trajectories for humanity and how we can effectively transition towards those sustainable pathways.

Anchor Story 3: Kenya- Losing Myself to Locate my Roots. *As the mythology of the origin of our Kikuyu tribe goes, Mumbi and Gikuyu were our first parents. Together they had nine daughters, and resided on the foothills of Mt. Kenya. They lived off the land and worshipped Ngai the creator and sustainer of life, who was believed to dwell in Mt. Kenya. Therefore they prayed to Ngai while facing Mt. Kenya. Among the trees in this community, the Mugumo (fig) tree was considered sacred, and people were forbidden from cutting it down or collecting firewood from around it. It is at this same tree that Ngai provided nine young men to marry the nine daughters when they became of age. Although as a child I lived in different places among different tribes, I always knew the story of my origin. Because of our constant move as a family,*

*my conceptions of place are shaped by diverse cultural experiences. One thing that was common was the people's reliance on land for their livelihoods. As I came to learn later, people's relationship with land had changed because of colonialism. The violent invasion by the British colonialists had displaced people from their ancestral land, forcing them to live as squatters in their own land. What followed was mass migration of men to the cities in search for jobs, leaving the women to take care of the children and the little land they had left. But because of the unsustainable practices instigated by the colonial rule such as deforestation and change in agricultural practices to cash crop based farming, the land was no longer able to support the needs of the families. As Professor Wangari Maathai articulates in her book *Unbowed*, the rivers were drying up and women had to walk for long distances to look for firewood for fuel. The returns from the cash crops were not enough to support families, a situation that resulted to increased poverty and high cases of malnutrition. The issues are different now, as more people have moved to the cities and only visit their villages during holiday season.*

Reflection: It was not until I left Kenya, that I was able to look back and begin to understand who I truly was. Leaving Kenya to pursue further studies in the United States, I imagined that I would be coming into a large cosmopolitan city, more sophisticated and full of opportunities (at least that is how the media portrayed it). However, upon arrival I quickly learned that this was not a land flowing with milk and honey where everybody sang kumbaya as I had anticipated. The Community Anti-Racism Education Initiative within which I worked and the Social Responsibility Master's program that I was enrolled in became important venues that helped me make the connections between colonialism in Africa, displacement and violence against Native Americans, and the founding of the United States on slave labor. I developed a critical lens that helped me to explore how the dominant Western ideologies operate to discredit Indigenous knowledge systems as backward and needing Western thinking to legitimize them. Such Western ideologies have alienated people from the land, to the extent that people are oblivious of where a basic commodity such as food comes from. These understandings have led me to further pursue sustainability studies at the University of Saskatchewan. Here the complexities of place are also evident and rooted in the history of Indigenous land and sovereignty, and my concern is how these issues inform our conceptualizations of sustainability. Having experienced life in two different continents, I find myself drawing on the different ideas of place evident in the two worlds, and constantly grappling with the idea of how these ideas can be connected to form holistic and relational conceptions of sustainability.

Anchored to the Forest in Maritime Canada. *Wandering down the slope of the hill behind my parents' home, I enter the woods. I first pass the apple trees, then the decayed spruce, riddled with woodpecker holes. The trail is firm under my feet as I skirt the field of stones. (Who assembled those dozens of rocks? Human or past-river?) The path becomes swampy and sided by alders and springy moss, and I leap first from one side then the other to avoid soaking my feet because I'm not wearing boots. (I'm never wearing boots.) The vegetation stands to my shoulders as I push past the spring well from which my parents draw their water to the creek from which my grandmother drew water for her eight children. This is where the leopard frogs live, and this is where the beavers grapple for dominance with my father and uncle. (My family is motivated by the desire to avoid Giardia in their water supply.) The precarity of navigating the stream*

depends on the beavers' recent activity, but I always begin with a step to the central, flat rock, then a flying leap to the felled branches on the opposite side. A few more steps and the scent of the land changes to that of forest soil, and the understory opens. And I find what I'm looking for: the mid-summer blooming Pyrola, with its base of ever-green round leaves and nodding, white, cup-like flowers. I crouch, I gently run my fingers along the leaves and touch the petals. This is the first of my visits with more-than-human world; today I will also sit with the violets, and listen to the ovenbirds and black-throated green warbler (and get alternately scolded and teased by a common yellowthroat warbler.) These places and beings feel as much home and kin as do visits with extended family.

Reflection: One of my most significant learnings in relation to place and decolonization has been the recognition of the implicit colonialism associated with my home community and culture. Decolonization literally ‘unsettles’ the colonial mentality of unproblematic place-attachment of non-Indigenous North Americans (Tuck & Yang, 2012). My own sense of home runs particularly deep for a settler-Canadian: my Gaelic Scottish-Irish culture transplanted itself along the East Coast of Canada more than six generations ago. Along with traditional music and dance, Gaelic culture perpetuates itself through storytelling. This New World rootedness, with all its sentimentality and sense of belonging, has erased from its settlement stories of the dislocation, through violence and starvation, relocation and re-education, of the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, and Beothuk peoples (Joe, 1989; Parnaby, 2008). One of the songs of my home (Cape Breton Island), is a colonialist anthem, yet is still sung in celebration (and, ironically, in defiance of outsider capitalism). How do I decolonize my attachment to home? And how do I possibly reinhabit this place, after recognizing the destruction and disappearance of the people *who came to be*, rather than came to inhabit, this place? Decolonization is not a metaphor (Tuck and Yang, 2012); it must have cognitive, affective AND material consequences - i.e. renegotiation and return of land.

Thematic Analysis of Anchor Stories, Discussions, and Place-Exploration

Throughout our storytelling, discussions, and campus place-exploration, several themes persistently presented: Place Attachment/Mobility; Colonization/Decolonization; Extraction/Sustainability. In each of these thematic areas, we see opposed ideas or perhaps two sides of the same coin. We had identified these themes as important prior to embarking on our place explorations, but still attentive to the ways in which these ideas emerged on unexpected occasions.

Place Attachment/Mobility:

Themes of rootedness and uprootedness emerged in both anchor stories and campus place-explorations. In sharing our stories, we experienced nostalgia for community and relationship to land, in the context of “home.” The importance of affective and sensory attachment to significant places threaded through our stories: “crisp mountain air” and “the sudden smell of burnt pages” in Romania; intimate visits with a wildflower in maritime Canada. Feelings of belonging and of love for place that transcended generations were also repeated currents in the stories shared. Yet, we also recognized that places are not static - as we move and change, so do they, as well as the human and non-human inhabitants that remain there.



Figure 3. Photos from a university community garden in which all four authors took part.

Mobility, through force and through choice, was a theme that emerged repeatedly in our work. Not only did we discuss mobility in the sense of the journeys that led us to our current shared institution, but we also spoke of mobility through stories of wandering, stories of departure for higher education pursuits, and stories of forced mobility through loss of ancestral land. Three of us articulated how, by leaving our home countries, we gained a deeper understanding into the challenges and the strengths of our communities: “I had to leave to be able to understand.” The affordances of perspective gained through travel were somewhat mitigated by the challenges of straddling multiple worldviews and responding to others’ conceptions of African nations as existing at an earlier state of development. Nevertheless, as articulated by one group member, it is perhaps “harder to speak back to colonialism when you are rooted in that particular [colonized] place.”

The challenge of returning to home places also emerged as a theme. Attaining high levels of formalized education often confers respect; yet extended periods of separation from countries of origin pose challenges for re-connection. In becoming “scholar,” one becomes both expert and outsider, gaining status but simultaneously losing local credibility. Our discussions lead us to question, how does one maintain trust across distance, while also disrupting the idea (and practices) of scholar as expert.

Our research is informed by movement between disciplines in our academic journeys. As interdisciplinary scholars, our placement within academia is rather fluid. Most of us have an area in which we have more disciplinary depth, but in our research we create bridges between areas and disciplines, in order to develop an improved understanding of reality, and to explore alternative ideas and pathways of development. As scholars of sustainability we are at the fringe of disciplines and at times that is an unsettling position.

Colonization/Decolonization

“So much of this land is colonized!”

As we neared the end of our storytelling and campus place-exploration, one of our members made the above exclamation. A lady-beetle had just landed in the midst of our circle and one of our members identified it as a Seven-spotted ladybug (*Coccinella septempunctata*), originating from Europe but spreading to North America and India in the last few decades. We had previously remarked on the colonial appearance of the architecture, the parking lots that covered much of the campus, the non-native plants that adorned the grounds, and of ourselves, all relative newcomers to this place. The architecture of the university campus gives a sense of inclusion

and exclusion. As we journeyed through our campus place-exploration, we marvelled at how the British architecture still dominated many buildings, especially the administration office located adjacent to the greenest space known as the “Bowl.” Even though this university campus is un-gated and apparently open to all, there remain unwritten rules of who belongs here and who does not.



Figure 4. Photos of colonization by lady beetle (left) and architecture/plants (right).

In his opening remarks to the university community in July 2015, the newly minted president of our institution announced his intention to Indigenize this university. "We cannot do our role in fostering a civil society with success unless we become demonstratively ... the best place we can possibly be for the aboriginal people of this province and of this country" (Stoicheff, quoted by French, July 10, 2015). Our discussions yielded some ambivalent feelings about the imperative to Indigenize the university. In many ways, this mission could be understood to align with Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste's call for "not just reducing the distance between Eurocentric thinking and Aboriginal ways of knowing but engaging decolonized hearts and minds" (2002, p.22). However, we also draw on the work of Tuck and Yang, 2012, who state that "decolonization is not a metaphor;" rather, it must involve repatriation of land to Indigenous communities. Our institution is located on Treaty 6 territory; the original signatories with the Crown were from Cree, Saulteaux, Nakota, and Dene nations. Though the treaties were negotiated, encroaching settlement, disease, violence, and destruction of land and buffalo left Indigenous nations in a highly compromised negotiating position (Daschuk, 2013). Our discussions led us to ask further questions about the meaning of Indigenization, and about the responsibility of universities in relation to Indigenous land repatriation, and (potentially) treaty renegotiation.



Figure 5. Photo of the Indigenous student center.

One of the spaces of hope that we encountered during our place-exploration was the semi-finished construction of the Indigenous student center photographed above. Designed by an Aboriginal architect and located at the center of campus, this place gives the impression of literally creating Indigenous space at the university. This is important because as we noted earlier, the openness of the university is not necessarily a reflection of how inviting it is to Indigenous peoples and ideas. In connection to our current president's articulated commitment to Indigenization, we wondered what kind of engagements would happen at this new center. Would it create an open space for genuine expressions of the needs of Indigenous students, or would it be a place where Indigenous students are burdened with the task of educating the entire community regarding Indigenous issues? We hope that this space helps the university to move beyond the mundane portrayals of Indigeneity as revolving around dress, dance and food, and begin to authentically address issues of Indigenous students' access to both the campus and resources.

Extraction/Sustainability

As scholars of sustainability, we are confronted with a dilemma of reconciling the role of our institutional research priorities in relation to environmental and community sustainability. The university's relationship to extractive industries is an ongoing concern; one of the six "signature areas of research" for our institution is Energy and Mineral Resources. This is articulated as follows:

Demand for energy and natural resources is starting to outpace supply. Clean energy solutions, sustainable resource development and sound policy development are vital to meet future demand while conserving ecosystems and sharing the benefits with all.
(University of Saskatchewan, Office of the Vice President Research).

We were troubled by the supposed unproblematic juxtaposition of sustainability and clean energy alongside extraction of mineral resources. Fifteen percent of the world's uranium supplied is mined several hundred kilometers north of here (Natural Resources Canada), and the

implications of our institution in nuclear energy are multi-faceted. In the northern regions of this province, communities have been fighting the deposition of exhausted nuclear material in their backyard (Hande, 2014). Meanwhile, companies linked to these same extractive industries are prominent sponsors of university infrastructure and research.

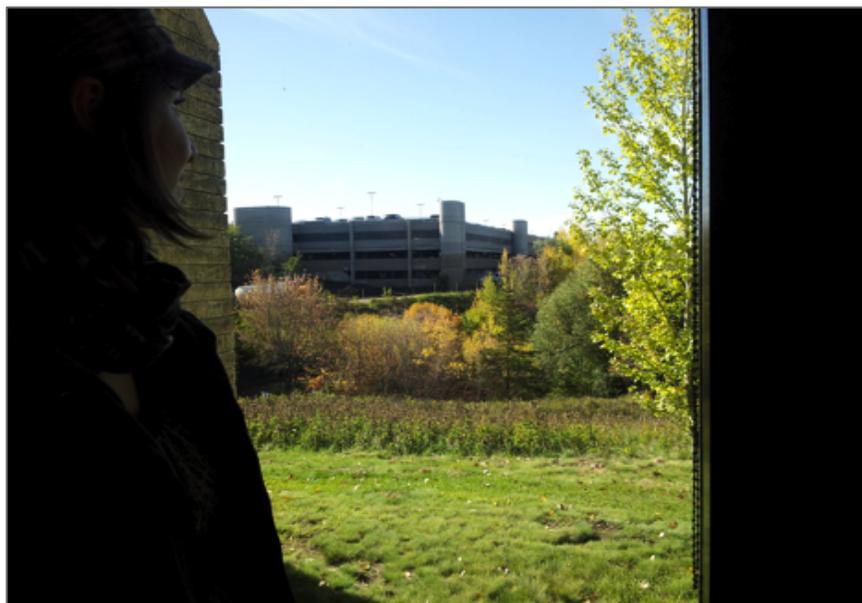


Figure 6. Reflecting on the relationship between institutional commitments to sustainability and extraction.

We recognize that universities and scholars are increasingly in competition for limited government and private funding, and that uneasy partnerships may be struck. We have heard from tenured academics that choose to limit their criticism of unsustainable practices, not because it will end their employment, but because it may impede their ability to gain crucial funding. Our discussion pointed toward the ways in which students occupy liminal positions in relation to these conflicts: at this career stage, students may be able to question with less retribution, but perhaps also with less effect. We acknowledge, however, that social media create digital footprints that may follow students from graduate study through to employment and tenure applications.

Themes of extraction also extend metaphorically to the methods in which sustainability scholarship is (sometimes) conducted. Historically, scholarly research has been associated with the removal of knowledge, resources, and even biological material from Indigenous and other marginalized communities (Smith 1999/2012). While community-based and participatory action research methods are increasingly valued across disciplines, the knowledge that is extracted from the process often remains valuable only as judged by peer-review evaluation. As Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández point out: “Not everything, or even most things uncovered in a community-based inquiry process need to be reported in academic journals or settings. There are some stories that the academy has not proved itself to be worthy of knowing” (2013, p.85).

Conclusions and Implications:

We embarked on a journey to explore our different experiences of place through a collaborative interdisciplinary research process. We intended to examine the taken-for-granted understandings of place and sustainability within institutions of higher learning. Our conclusions

seek to highlight key points of learning that the exercise of collective writing has brought us as emerging scholars of sustainability, including in relation to decolonization. Through post-exercise debriefings and reflections, we have come to appreciate the value of these kinds of collective work as moves against the competitive educational system and how these will facilitate slow scholarship with articulated benefits (Hartman & Darab, 2012).



Figure 7. The writing collective at SERI with the living wall in the background.

Instead of attempting to out-smart, out-write, and out-publish our colleagues, we have made a deliberate move toward thinking and writing together. This undoubtedly slowed the progress of our work but the learning through the process has compensated for the slow progress. But as we learnt through the process of writing this paper, collaborative interdisciplinarity is much more complex than the manner in which it is represented in the literature (Nielsen-Pincus, Morse, Force & Wulfhorst, 2007; Roy et al., 2013). Setting the topic and focus of this paper among scholars working on sustainability with different lenses proved to be challenging. How could this be if we were bridging disciplinary boundaries? The good news however is that the difficulty and complexity of interdisciplinary studies has not and should not be a barrier to committed scholars seeking to positively influence societies pathways to sustainability and to shape ideas of our collective wellbeing.

Despite divergent professional and personal backgrounds, we have worked to create a space of caring, support, and appreciation. We have decided to place value on the act of collaboration and to support slower, reflective, and generous scholarship. We contend that academics both established and emerging have a responsibility to create spaces of caring within the university system. This place-exploration has also been a process of questioning the spaces and systems within which we, as sustainability scholars, are embedded. It has opened up new questions, and new pathways and we hope that such collaborations will become common among scholars of sustainability, beginning from graduate education. Through this collaborative process of writing, we recognize the need for more sustained conversations around the role of universities in relation to Indigenization, decolonization, and land repatriation. We value the

excellent work of Indigenous academics in the area of decolonization and education (e.g. Battiste, 2000; Smith, 1999/2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012, Wilson, 2008). Interdisciplinary scholarship involves stretching beyond the boundaries of disciplinary comforts; we contend that such adaptation can also serve to integrate decolonizing theory and practice into systems of higher education.

At our own institution, the recently constructed Indigenous student center is a space that is open to the entire university and the local community. In thinking about sustainability, we see this place as an opportunity to connect sustainability scholarship with Indigenous knowledge, working with Indigenous faculty, students, and community members to intentionally bridge these two areas. Indigenous ways of life have been for many years the most sustainable ways of living (Battiste et al., 2005), and it would be a missed opportunity for sustainability scholars not to work collaboratively with the Indigenous center. This work, however, should not merely involve the absorption of a certain amount of Indigenous content into curriculum and research; it needs to authentically engage with Indigenous teachers and researchers. There must also be acknowledgement and discussion of the role of environmental/sustainability movements and writings in the erasure of Indigenous knowledges. In our observation, these erasures have manifested as exclusion of Indigenous knowledge, relegation of Indigenous voices to the past, and citation preferences for non-Indigenous voices, even when explicitly discussing Indigenous ideas.

By examining the history of the colonization of Indigenous peoples, we see similarities with what happened in some of our places of origin. We are conscious that as ‘scholars’ who are currently dwelling in this place, we could be in a position of further colonization and oppression of Indigenous peoples. It is critical for us to be aware and consider how we can contribute towards the decolonization process of this place that has become our new home. We challenge all sustainability scholars to ask the question: what does decolonizing sustainability scholarship look like, and what does it do, in your particular place? In our North American context, decolonization cannot be addressed without implicating settler colonialism (Veracini, 2011). Sustainability scholars must be diligent to identify the rhetorical and material moves that displace, absorb, and replace the knowledge of Indigenous and other marginalized scholars (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). We consider citation practice as a possible avenue for de-centering whiteness, particularly when care is taken to avoid tokenism (Ahmed, 2013). Our scholarship ought to support the needs identified by Indigenous peoples and those of other marginalized groups, with the aim of working with and for the people, and not advancing the colonial and neoliberal agenda that often forms the basis of higher education.

Our challenge moving forward, is how do we continue to undertake collaborative research projects that support sustainable, decolonizing, and place-conscious community-building? This is a challenge that we intend to carry throughout our academic endeavours, as both a daily practice and a longer-term project. We propose that collaborative, decolonizing, and place-conscious scholarship should be at the core of sustainability education, as this will contribute to guiding individuals and communities toward more sustainable pathways.

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How We Came to Inhabit These Spaces: Emerging Sustainability Scholars

