Painting a Picture of Alberta's History

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Abstract:
Painted by Henry G. Glyde in 1951, the *Alberta History* mural has been a fixture in the University of Alberta's Rutherford South Library Reading room for more than 70 years. In the last decade, it has come under scrutiny for its problematic representation of the province's past, sparking public dialogue and a process of consultation to determine its future. This paper examines how the mural, as public art, contributes to a lived curriculum of settler colonialism at a time when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) asks that institutions "support, promote, and facilitate truth . . . [and demonstrate] a profound commitment to establishing new relationships embedded in mutual recognition and respect that will forge a brighter future" (p. 339). Drawing on understandings of public pedagogy, theories of settler geographical ignorance, ethical relationality and difficult knowledge, this paper questions the production of a settler colonial consciousness and its role in normalizing the settler experience while marginalizing, misrepresenting or making invisible the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous Peoples. By challenging dominant narratives of Canadian history that are part of the lived curriculum of place and public art, and by re-imagining them through the lens of ethical relationality, this paper aims to confront and disrupt colonial harm and settler colonial consciousness.

Keywords: Truth and Reconciliation; Alberta History mural; lived curriculum of place

Esquisse de l'histoire de l'Alberta

Résumé :
Peint par Henry G. Glyde en 1951, la murale *Histoire de l'Alberta* est un élément emblématique de la salle de lecture de la bibliothèque Rutherford South de l'Université de l'Alberta depuis plus de 70 ans. Au cours de la dernière décennie, elle a suscité des critiques en raison de sa représentation problématique du passé de la province, menant à un dialogue public et un processus de consultation visant à déterminer son avenir. Cet article examine comment la peinture murale, en tant qu'art public, contribue à un curriculum vécu du colonialisme d'occupation à un moment où la Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada (2015) demande aux institutions de « soutenir, promouvoir et faciliter la vérité . . . [et démontrer] un engagement profond à établir de nouvelles relations fondées sur la reconnaissance et le respect mutuels qui forgeront un avenir meilleur » (p. 339). En s'inspirant sur les conceptions de la pédagogie publique, des théories de l'ignorance géographique des colons, de la relationnalité éthique et de la connaissance difficile, cet article interroge la production d'une conscience coloniale et son rôle dans la normalisation de l'expérience des colons tout en marginalisant, déformant ou rendant invisibles les perspectives et les expériences des peuples autochtones. Cet article examine également la nécessité de reconnaître l'ignorance des colons comme un facteur dans leur refus, ainsi que celui des institutions coloniales, de voir comment l'art public, tel que la murale Histoire de l'Alberta, perpétue des préjudices coloniaux et empêche un engagement approfondi avec les vérités historiques, dont certaines qui peuvent constituer des connaissances difficiles. En remettant en question les récits dominants de l'histoire canadienne qui font partie du curriculum vécu du lieu et de l'art public, et en les réimaginant à travers la lentille de la relationnalité éthique, cet article vise à confronter et à perturber les préjudices coloniaux et la conscience du colonialisme d'occupation.

Mots clés : vérité et réconciliation; murale de l'Histoire de l'Alberta; curriculum vécu du lieu

Post-secondary institutions play a significant role in how knowledge is curated and disseminated to both students and members of the public who access those spaces, resources and events. At a time when universities have expressed their commitment to truth and reconciliation, it is critical that they also consider how they are implicated in the ongoing project of colonialism. Drawing on understandings of public pedagogy, theories of settler geographical ignorance, ethical relationality and difficult knowledge, this paper investigates the production of settler colonial consciousness and its role in normalizing the settler experience while marginalizing, misrepresenting or making invisible the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous Peoples. The paper considers the importance of recognizing settler ignorance and the refusal to engage with difficult knowledge as obstacles to addressing colonial harms advanced through public art.

As a White settler scholar, educator and member of the University of Alberta community, I am interested in how public art on our campus operates as a hidden curriculum, specifically, in how it reproduces and/or challenges ideas of settler colonialism. In my consideration of public art, and in my use of the term *settler*, I seek to draw attention to systems and structures within Canada that are inherently colonial and that have been used to dispose, erase and harm Indigenous Peoples. Like Battell Lowman and Barker (2015), I use the word "settler" as a tool to name, confront and disrupt ongoing injustices rather than as a term that Veracini (2011) suggests evokes a sense of permanence in settler colonial states such as Canada. He also theorizes that the term "Indigenous" evokes a sense of fragility that has been normalized in settler colonial consciousness to legitimize violence and erasure. Acknowledging this, I take up the term *settler colonialism* instead of the term, settler which has "mask[ed] the violence of colonial encounters that produced and perpetrated consistently discriminatory and genocidal regimes against Indigenous peoples" (Coombes, 2006, p. 2).

My choice of language results from a commitment to anti-colonialism and a respect for the generosity of Indigenous students, colleagues and community members who have been my teachers and my guides over the last 20+ years. Both reasons have helped me to recognize that the privileges I am afforded by virtue of being a White settler are directly connected to the settler colonial project that aims to displace and erase Indigenous Peoples (Tupper, 2014a, 2014b, 2019). In turn, this has shaped my scholarly and educative considerations including how I experience and interpret the curation of art in public spaces as a hidden curriculum of settler colonialism at my institution.

The *Alberta History* mural, painted in 1951 by Henry G. Glyde (1906-1998), resides in the Reading Room of the Rutherford South Library on the main campus of the University of Alberta. As a student at this university in the late 1980s and early 2000s, and now as an employee, I have encountered this public artwork many times over the years. The mural was a gift to the institution by the artist, who was originally from England and who studied art in Europe as part of his own education. According to Ainslie (1987), Henry George Glyde was an influential and authoritative figure in the Alberta art scene and was the founder of the University of Alberta Art Department. Ainslie (1987) notes the *Alberta History* mural took eleven months to research and design, and another four months to paint. It is twenty feet long, eight feet high and is located above the interior

entrance to the Reading Room. According to Iqbal (2010), an article written about the mural's unveiling in 1951 describes it as depicting the "civilizing influences in the early life of the province" (p. 9).

In the last decade, the mural has become the focus of public scrutiny and dialogue given that the visual story it depicts is a version of the province's past that Cree scholar Dwayne Donald (2009) has described as the logics that normalize divisions between Indigenous and settler peoples. In the mural, Father Lacombe who was an Oblate priest and missionary, is pictured in the foreground, standing over a group of Indigenous men in loincloths who are seated on the ground with their backs to the viewer. Father Lacombe holds a crucifix upwards, as if pointing toward the heavens, while nearby a North West Mounted Police Officer stands beside Reverend John McDougall, a Methodist missionary who appears to be preaching to a group of Indigenous People. Both Father Lacombe and the Reverend John McDougall are considered important historical figures in the establishment of Alberta for their foundational contributions to the success of the settler colonial project thus Glyde's inclusion of them in the mural reflects this. Several religious buildings and a fort are visible in the background and a cluster of teepees can be seen just outside the fort walls. This depiction reinforces a "pedagogy of the fort" where the fort symbolizes and naturalizes a civilizational divide between Indigenous nations and settler Canadians (Donald, 2009, p. 1). Settlers are also included in the mural. They are coming down a hill towards the gathering of missionaries and Indigenous Peoples and there is a Red River cart, a large, two-wheeled wooden cart used by the Métis to carry goods, with a visible male occupant. Prominent Métis artist and academic, David Garneau (2012), has speculated that this occupant is Métis. Seen as a whole, the imagery advances a theme of "progress" through trade, religion and nation building by way of the "civilizing" influence of settlers.

Although the mural is intended to present a neutral version of history, I assert that it does not. Instead, it functions as a settler colonial narrative that reinforces a dominant and oppressive settler colonial consciousness, upheld through public pedagogy. Since public pedagogy shapes cultural knowledge and attitudes beyond formal education, critically questioning the mural's narrative is essential. A closer examination reveals the presence of a settler colonial curriculum of knowing.

Theoretical Engagements

My analysis is informed by key theoretical engagements that help to contextualize the mural within broader structures of power and meaning-making. One such engagement examines how settler colonialism is sustained and reproduced, particularly through dominant narratives that obscure Indigenous presence and resistance. Another focuses on the role of art as public pedagogy, recognizing how visual culture operates as a site of learning that shapes collective understandings of history, identity and belonging. By bringing these theoretical engagement frameworks into the conversation, I examine how the mural functions as both an artifact of settler colonial dominance and a pedagogical tool that reinforces, rather than disrupts, these power dynamics.

Sustaining Settler Colonialism and Dominance

Forcione et al.'s (2023) notion of settler colonial geographical ignorance and Britzman's (1998; 2000) notion of "difficult knowledge", together with Donald's (2012) notion of ethical relationality help to make sense of the mural as a settler colonial curriculum of knowing. Settler dominance embedded in a settler colonial curriculum of knowing is endemic in Canadian society, and has been advanced through the nation building project that Smith (2017) describes as a "settler geographic project of spatial dominion" (p. 25). Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) describe the settler colonial nation building project as a project of replacement that renders Indigenous peoples invisible with the aim of securing the futurity of the settler state. Such a nation building process requires the active construction of settler memory, which Bruyneel (2021) describes is the "productive capacity of settler colonialism" to disavow Indigeneity while "shield[ing] attention away from the standing, interests, and expressions of white settlerness" (p. 9). Indigenous scholar Patrick Wolfe (2006) speaks to the genocidal outcomes of this settler colonial nation-building endeavour for Indigenous Peoples. Thus, settler dominance through spatial dominion are important considerations in the ongoing contestations around public commemorations of the colonial nation state. With respect to the images in the mural and its location in the University Reading Room, the colonial sensibility underlying the story of Alberta's past, painted by Glyde, reveals that colonialism is not just the elephant in the room, it is the room itself (Ahenakew, 2023).

Considering the location of the Glyde painting, Stein's (2020) concerns about institutions of higher education staying rooted in colonial logics, economies and relationships—despite efforts to Indigenize them and make the perspectives and histories of Indigenous Peoples more present—need immediate attention. As Stein (2020) sees it, universities are deeply implicated in what I have described elsewhere as settler historical consciousness and what I describe here as settler colonial consciousness. Settler colonial consciousness is a way of knowing that normalizes and celebrates the settler experience while making colonial violence and the experiences of Indigenous Peoples invisible and distinctly separate from what is worth knowing (Tupper, 2019). The relationship between settler colonial consciousness and the way past, present and possible futures are narrated in public spaces is apparent in the Glyde mural. It is apparent, not only in the figurations of settlers and Indigenous Peoples depicted in the painting, but also in the story it tells and in how the painting's substantive material presence dominates the Reading Room. Setting aside the details of the mural for a moment to understand its curricular effects, one must delve deeper into what settler consciousness means. Furniss' (2006) work enables this deeper understanding. For Furniss (2006), settler consciousness includes the *frontier complex* which she describes as a "diverse yet interrelated set of values, beliefs, attitudes, identities and understandings about society, history, and Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relations that appear repeatedly in multiple domains of everyday Canadian society" (p. 182). Furniss (2006) connects the frontier complex to historical consciousness, saying that it is through the manifestation of historical narratives of conquest, such as seen in the mural, that settlers come to believe in the willing submission of Indigenous Peoples to benevolent forces, like missionaries. In turn, these beliefs about Indigenous submission contribute to broader, deeply embedded narratives that support a national identity of settler benevolence. They in/form a settler colonial curriculum of

knowing that is on offer in the University of Alberta through formal and informal curriculum and pedagogies of place. Given the historical narrative it depicts, the mural represents a settler colonial consciousness and the project of settler socialization described by Stein (2020).

As part of the larger colonial project, the construct of benevolent settler socialization ensures that a settler colonial consciousness continues to be generated in the present and projected into the future. Like Furniss (2006), Seixas (2004) maintains that "a common past, preserved through institutions, traditions, and symbols, is a crucial investment—perhaps *the* crucial instrument—in the construction of collective identities in the present" (p. 5; emphasis in the original). Smith (2017) highlights that hegemonic versions of history require the "perpetual re-centring of European exploits as the essential measure of 'progress'" (p. 25). This re-centering is evident in the ways Indigenous-settler relations are depicted in the mural. In a frontier complex shaped by racism and colonialism, settler colonial consciousness enables individuals operating within education systems to actively ignore connections between present structures of colonial oppression experienced by Indigenous Peoples and a colonial past that continues to define the boundaries between settlers and Indigenous Peoples (Seixas, 2006). In this way, a settler colonial consciousness flows from and through temporal and spatial curricular relationships underpinning what Marker (2011) suggests is a colonizing way of thinking about the nation state in relation to its people and the land. Such colonizing thinking is very much on display in the mural's images and the overarching story of colonial progress and settler dominance it tells.

Art as Public Pedagogy

The ideas conveyed by public art are a form of public pedagogy (Qadri, 2016; Schuermanns et al., 2012). Public art is implicated in the reproduction of settler colonial consciousness, especially in how the past and the present are understood and how possible futures are imagined. Art is thus a discourse, and the mural is "an utterance within that discourse" (Phillips, 2006, p. 134). In schools and institutions of higher learning, the presence of art contributes to how we make sense of experience and how we engage in these places. Thus, public art as a form of public pedagogy is a site of teaching (Pinar, 2010). It composes a curriculum of knowing that Post and Rhodes II (2022) articulate as "the performativity of memory on the landscape" (p. 542). Broadly speaking, public pedagogies have been theorized to function in the "spaces, sites, and languages of education and learning that exist outside of the walls of the institution of schools," including sites of public learning such as museums, parks, memorials and zoos (Sandlin et al., 2010, pp. 1-3). Sandlin et al. (2010) assert that these sites need to be recognized as sites of public pedagogy to decentre common understandings of what it means to teach and learn, and draw attention to the complexity of how, where and when we learn. With regard to dominant and oppressive public pedagogies, they suggest vigilance because the "type of pedagogy occurring in public space . . . might still elude our vision" (Sandlin et al., 2010, p. xxi). By virtue of its geographical location and accessibility, the mural as public pedagogy contributes to a collective settler memory that transmits historical knowledge across generations of public viewers.

Public Art as a Hidden Settler Colonial Curriculum of Knowing

Explicit and implicit forms of curriculum that encompass formal and informal learning experiences invite us to make sense of the world and our experiences of it in specific ways (Egan, 1978). As public art, the *Alberta History* mural is implicated in a settler colonial curriculum of knowing at the University of Alberta. It reflects what Stanley (2009) has described as the "banality of colonialism" (p. 143). Smith (2017) has discussed this banality in terms of the "pervasive reach of settler historical commemoration across space" (p. 24). My experience of the mural is an unsettling one. The story that the mural tells reminds me of the ease with which dominant narratives of nation-building are expressed through public art and how they contribute to a hidden curriculum that normalizes settler dominance and Indigenous subjugation. The mural epitomizes and perpetuates Bruyneel's (2021) notion of settler memory through its historical depiction of nation-building, civilizational divides and the subversion of Indigenous Peoples.

The mural looms large in the Reading Room space with a presence that is visible from everywhere in the room. Iqbal (2010) points out that the mural's location is significant, noting that "it does not stand alone: the University supports it, literally and figuratively" (p. 18). He suggests that the Reading Room, which he refers to as the study hall, "graced with this artefact of colonialism shapes the learning possible within its walls [because] it narrates a certain version of history" (Iqbal, 2010, p. 19). He goes on to say that "in this study hall, the mural also has a function in the education of historical memory" (Iqbal, 2010, p. 19). Though not named as such, Iqbal (2010) offers an account of a settler colonial curriculum of knowing deeply embedded in the spatial, temporal and even psychic structures of the University. Of the psychic structures, he says the University of Alberta organizes the ways individuals engage with and make sense of university systems by way of formal, informal and hidden curriculums. Furthermore, a psychic structure embedded in a lived curriculum of place can deeply influence an individual's identity, memories, emotional responses, and how an individual perceives and interacts with their environment and community. Having spent considerable time in the Reading Room while thinking about and writing this paper, I experienced the mural as an omnipresent colonial commemoration and as an unsettling and disturbing power and presence. In reflecting an Indigenous fragility within a settler state, it also constructs Indigenous identities as less than (Verancini, 2011).

Indigenous scholar Susan Dion (2009) reminds us how the violence of settler colonialism has prevented Indigenous Peoples from controlling the ways in which they were/are reproduced by the dominant settler society and thus how they are perceived. The Glyde mural is no exception in this respect. It offers up what Griffith (2015) refers to as "thick layers of colonial education" (p. 172). Mackey (2002) describes it as the projection of ideas "about Western 'civilization' and progress in relation to 'uncivilized' and savage others" (p. 59).

Garneau (2012) also provides a robust analysis of the mural. While he is especially critical of the mural's portrayal of Métis people overall, he criticizes the symbolism, mixed messages, historical inaccuracies and settler colonial narrative on display. That said, Garneau (2012) is enthusiastic about what he sees as the rise of the Métis in the mural. However, settlers frequently cite this de-

contextualized enthusiasm in public consultations I have attended, as a justification for the mural's continued presence and as a way to dismiss concerns about historical consequences.

Settler Geographical Ignorance

Colonial landscapes, manifested through such things as public art and commemorations become place-making practices that invite particular understandings or ways of knowing the past and present, without necessarily attending to the complexities of remembering and imagining that scholars like Basso (1996) call us to notice. Such landscapes often impose Eurocentric designs, memorials and works of art that solidify colonial authority, normalize dispossession and frame public spaces as extensions of settler identity and governance. Basso's (1996) assertion that "place-making involves multiple acts of remembering and imagining which inform each other in complex ways" (p. 5) can be connected to the creation and maintenance of settler consciousness by highlighting how these acts shape spatial narratives that privilege settler histories, identities and claims to land. Settler place-making reconfigures landscapes through selective remembering—elevating colonial achievements while erasing or marginalizing Indigenous presence—while simultaneously imagining a future where settler occupation is naturalized and unquestioned. This recursive process sustains settler consciousness by embedding colonial logics into physical spaces, reinforcing a sense of permanence and entitlement to stolen land.

The history of Alberta advanced in and through the pedagogical offering of the Glyde mural serve up ideas of settler colonial dominance. It also invites the viewer to gaze with geographical ignorance because it encourages them to see and read Indigenous-settler relations in ways that reinforce and justify Indigenous subjugation and erasure as part of the frontier complex. Donald (2004) illustrates this kind of geographical ignorance in his re-reading of the history of Edmonton, noting that,

> The history of Aboriginal people before and after contact with Europeans has been painted over by mainstream interpretations of official history. In that sense, we can say that an attempt was made to displace or replace Aboriginal history and memory (as the history of Canada) with a new painting of a new civilization. (p. 23)

The Glyde mural is literally an example of such a painting over. It feeds, sustains and nourishes geographical ignorance by normalizing "ways of thinking that reject, obscure and refuse the dynamic multiplicity of Indigenous presence, and therefore, Indigenous place-based politics of relationality" (Forcione et al., 2023, p. 16). As such, place-making and public pedagogy are integrally connected in the spatial geographies of settler ignorance; they ignore the deep cultural, spiritual and ecological connections Indigenous Peoples have with their territories. In part, the move to recognize and redress the colonial harms of/in public art is a response to the efforts of Indigenous communities to challenge settler colonial ignorance which is "at the heart of the problematic and dysfunctional relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada today" (Forcione et al, 2023, p. 1).

Forcione et al. (2023) also suggests that ignorance and settler imaginaries reinforce futurities of settler design and get in the way of possible ethical relations. This aspect of place-making in the

colonial context of Canada, implicates art in reproducing a partial, inaccurate or even an imaginary history of a place that has been the focus of national conversations for more than two decades. For example, in 2007, following a process of public consultation, the members of the legislative assembly of British Columbia voted to remove four murals in the Legislature Building because of how Indigenous Peoples were represented in the art. Similarly, and more recently, following extensive stakeholder discussions, the City of Edmonton approved the removal of a public work of art at a downtown Light Rail Transit (LRT) station because it glorified Bishop Grandin, one of the architects of the Residential School system in Canada. In both provincial instances, public consultations were emotionally charged. Settler knowledge was contested by Indigenous representatives and others. This was not surprising given the "focus on difficult histories that challenge commonly accepted versions of the past and feature oppositional forms of historical consciousness" (Gibson, 2021, p. 439). Related to these public consultations and the emotional discussions that ensued, Stanley (2020) observed that the

> structuring of settler colonialism is not just something from a now distant past; rather, it continues today as it is woven into the material, symbolic, and embodied spaces of [Canadian cities] and, indeed, of virtually every other space that makes up the Canadian nation-state. While the structure of settler colonialism is all too real for Indigenous peoples, for most settlers it is largely invisible until such time as monuments get taken away or dominant systems of representation get challenged. (p. 90)

In these moments, examining colonial place-making through memory work, shows the racial dynamics of settler colonialism as an organizing grammar (Whitlock, 2006). The frontier complex and its corresponding narratives and grammars cannot justify the continued presence of problematic works of art, statues or monuments that determine how the material space is experienced and organized. Considering the Glyde mural, its presence not only shapes the cultural and symbolic landscape of the Reading Room, its imposing settler-centric narrative and symbols also shape the physical environment. This reminds us that the mural, in many ways, contributes to a settler geographical ignorance since Indigenous interventions into standard narratives of Canadian history are absent in the space (Phillips, 2006).

Difficult Knowledge

Dion (2009) urges settlers to engage with Indigenous stories that disrupt settler subject positions and create dissonance in settler consciousness. However, settlers often resist these disruptions through what Tuck and Yang (2012) describe as *settler moves to innocence*—strategies that minimize accountability for colonial harms while maintaining a sense of moral legitimacy. This resistance is evident in the refusal to acknowledge or address the colonial violence embedded in public monuments, statues, art and institutional names, a form of denial that Forcione et al. (2023) characterize as willful ignorance.

Britzman (1998; 2000; 2013) theorizes that willful ignorance distances individuals from *difficult knowledge*, which refers to encounters with unsettling truths that challenge one's understanding of self and society. Difficult knowledge is both intellectual and emotional, provoking discomfort—such

as reactions to terms like *settler* or *White settler*—by disrupting dominant narratives. In educational contexts, it requires both educators and learners to engage with discomfort and uncertainty, critically examining the social and political forces that shape what knowledge is deemed difficult. Lehrer and Milton (2011) highlight that disruption occurs when knowledge previously silenced or marginalized is suddenly brought into the public domain, particularly when exposing social or historical traumas. In settler societies, *geographical ignorance* serves to suppress difficult knowledge that might otherwise challenge colonial narratives, reinforce settler innocence and perpetuate the ongoing erasure of Indigenous histories and perspectives.

The Glyde mural and the ongoing conversations over the last decade about its future in the Reading Room reveal the dissonance that emerges through engagements with difficult knowledge and efforts to challenge dominant forms of public pedagogy. Indigenous members of the university community have spoken out about the violence they experience through their real and symbolic encounters with the mural. For example, in 2016, Kelsey Chief, an Indigenous student at the University of Alberta, wrote "A Call for the Permanent Removal of the Glyde Mural" in which she described the mural as an act of violence against Indigenous Peoples. She described it as a piece of art that "depicts the roots of violent colonization that nearly killed us all", and that represents "the white supremacist colonialist belief of my peoples' inferiority" (p. 2). Chief (2016) urged the university community not to practice settler moves to innocence by excusing the colonial violence of the mural because of norms of the 1950s when it was created. In my experience, not much has changed since Chief's urging in 2016. Then, as now, many at the University and in the broader community assert that the mural reflects the views of its time. As Starblanket and Hunt (2020) suggest, this justification for the mural's presence perpetuates settler colonialism by "narrat[ing] itself into being" (p. 16). In their work, they describe various ways that settler colonialism shapes memories and imaginaries through active refusals to hear and learn from the histories, stories and experiences of Indigenous Peoples. Such refusals, they say, are in part manifestations of encounters with difficult knowledge that take the form of settler justifications, rationalizations and outright dismissal. When the Glyde mural is described as violent by Indigenous Peoples, their perspective should not be dismissed, rather, settlers should seek to consider and understand why Indigenous Peoples would describe the mural in such a way.

Gibson (2021) asserts that "in Canada, commemoration controversies have been particularly contentious because they focus on difficult histories that challenge commonly accepted versions of the past and feature oppositional forms of historical consciousness" (p. 439). This may explain why the 2016 consultation process to determine the future of the mural did not result in any concrete decisions or associated actions by the university. In the many consultations that have since taken place, including those in 2023 and 2024, settlers have asked to see the mural identified as a valuable piece of art that should not be judged by the artist's intent. They also suggest that removing it constitutes an erasure of the history of the province. Both these settler responses signal an effort to resist difficult knowledge through settler ignorance (Tupper, 2011). In my view, hanging the painting *Sky Talk,* by Indigenous artist Alex Janvier (2009), in the same room directly across from *Alberta History* does not constitute an argument for keeping *Alberta History* hanging there too. While *Sky*

Talk is a beautiful piece of art, it does not on its own (nor should it have to) counter the colonial violence and settler colonial representation of the past perpetrated by the Glyde mural. In fact, the University of Alberta has explicitly said that *Sky Talk* "was not painted or installed as a response to *Alberta History*" (University of Alberta, 2022, np). Considering the power of colonialism to reproduce itself through the refusal of difficult knowledge, using the Janvier (2009) painting as a rationalization for the continued existence of the Glyde mural makes no sense. Such rationalizations simply deflect attention from critiques of the mural by focussing on the beauty and balance of *Sky Talk* or what Pitt and Britzman (2003) might describe as a lovely knowledge that affirms existing identities and understandings of the world. While the embrace of difficult knowledge requires a willingness to engage in self-examination, "lovely" knowledge does not. Coming to know and understand that *Sky Talk* does not, nor should it have to, undo the harm of *Alberta History* requires the settlers involved in the consultation process to engage with difficult knowledge.

I am also troubled by the ways in which White settler voices inhabit and dominate the consultative process. In the public consultations I have attended, I have observed White settlers speaking first, at length, and then speaking again even when other voices have yet to be heard, partly because "white settlers have the privilege of being given the benefit of the doubt when it comes to their credibility, neutrality, responsibility, and reasonableness" (Starblanket & Hunt, 2020, p. 101). In this process, Indigenous Peoples, their concerns and experiences have become the problem for the university and the perception "is rationalised by pointing to 'proof' of the institution's commitment to Indigenisation" (Stein, 2020, p. 162). In her work, Ahmed (2012) examines the effects of raising awareness of institutional problems because those that raise the concerns are seen as troublesome for "getting in the way" (p. 147) of institutional happiness. Ahmed's (2012) research is helpful in understanding the organizing grammar of settler colonialism in/forming discussions about the mural's future.

In some respects, the consultation process can be seen as a performative gesture that not only fails to challenge settler colonialism but also serves to sustain and legitimize it. The same may be said of settler assertions that the presence of the *Sky Talk* painting legitimates the continued presence of the mural because it provides an Indigenous perspective (Stein, 2020). Suggestions that the mural remain as a teaching tool may appear to have merit on the surface, but these suggestions can also be understood as a strategy to protect a settler colonial curriculum of knowing, especially in light of the mural's large physical size, its location and its accessibility. Further, careful consideration must be given to curation of a teaching tool that causes harm and violence towards Indigenous students rather than replacing it with one that doesn't. In the considerable time I have spent in the Reading Room over the last several months, I have not observed any active efforts at curricular intervention, such as instructors using the mural to disrupt dominant stories of Canada's colonial past and present. Thus, the mural persists in its omni-colonial-presence, wrapping those in the space in harmful colonial narratives of the imagined history of the province.

Ethical Relationality

Cree scholar Willie Ermine (2007) has conceptualized an ethical space for engagement between settlers and Indigenous Peoples. He suggests that forms of superficial acknowledgement often occur in encounters between these two groups, but that "there is a clear lack of substance or depth to the encounter" because deeper thoughts, ways of knowing, interests and assumptions remain hidden. These encounters do not influence and animate the kind of relationship possible between the two (Ermine, 2007, p. 195). Donald (2009) builds on Ermine's (2007) notion of ethical space by inviting consideration for

> curricular and pedagogical engagements that traverse the divides of the past and present. Such work must contest this denial of historic, social, and curricular relationality by asserting that the perceived civilizational frontiers are actually permeable and that perspectives on history, memory, and experience are connected. (p. 5)

In this respect, Donald's (2009) ethical space is a site of possibility, a meeting space in which we "step out of our allegiances, to detach from the circumscriptive limits of colonial frontier logics, and enact a theory of human relationality that does not require assimilation or deny Indigenous subjectivity" (p. 45). For Donald (2012), to engage in ethical relationality is to not only acknowledge difference, but to embrace an epistemological stance in which the aim is to more deeply understand how

> different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. This form of relationality is ethical because it does not overlook or render invisible the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a standpoint arises. Rather, it puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across frontiers of difference. (p. 45)

Ethical relationality requires a willingness to come together with open hearts and minds to hear different stories, even if and especially when those stories are unsettling to settler colonial consciousness.

Clearly, the mural is a form of public pedagogy, a lived curriculum of place, a geographical imaginary that affirms and is productive of settler colonial consciousness. It tacitly invites all those who sit in its presence to view the past through a colonial framework. In considering the narrative advanced through the mural, a specific, partial and mis-educative depiction of Indigenous-settler relations is advanced. The way Indigenous Peoples are represented in the mural is in direct contrast to the White settlers, especially those with religious authority, who stand over and above Indigenous Peoples. This juxtaposition ignores the complexities and realities of Indigenous-settler engagements and enables a single perspective, thus a single story.

The benevolent dominance of settlers and the subjugation of Indigenous Peoples loom large in the mural, in an effort to justify and validate the settler story of progress and colonization, while perpetuating narrow and troubling engagements with the past, present and possible futures. What then might it mean to adopt and embrace ethical relationality as an orientation, a lens through which to (re)read the Glyde mural and contribute to the conversations about its future? Such an orientation would necessitate a willingness to acknowledge the function of settler colonialism and settler colonial consciousness in temporal, spatial and psychic ways as well as in settler-colonial

geographical imaginaries that "undermine understandings of co-presence, relation-ality and responsibility" (Forcione et al., 2023, p. 5).

Settler colonial consciousness and the history of the province narrated through the mural are mutually constitutive (Tupper, 2019). Thus, an ethically relational engagement demands that settlers broaden and reflect on their own knowledge and understanding of the past and present, while also acknowledging Indigenous knowledges, wisdom traditions and philosophies. It means really listening to the voices and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples who share their experiences of the Glyde mural even if, and especially when, what they are saying creates dissonance and disrupts the "lovely knowledge" that many individuals may hold dear. It means acknowledging how "Indigenous voices are [often] heard as irrational and as a sign of individual pathology" (Cook, 2018, p. 19). It requires what Patel (2021) has described as a willingness amongst settlers to "let go of what we are sure of" (p. 169), which is manifest through our deep attachments to the colonial values, entitlements and habits of being into which we have been socialised. Had these considerations oriented settler engagements with the mural during discussions about its problematic representation of Alberta's history, then the process of determining its future might have been resolved years ago. Such considerations, I believe, would have centred the perspectives and knowledges of Indigenous peoples in a way not so easily ignored. That discussions about the mural's future have been ongoing for over a decade with no resolution to date, speaks to the power of settler colonialism and the frontier complex. My view is that until there is settler acknowledgement of the "full extent to which colonial violence has shaped Canadian higher education" (Stein, 2020, p. 157) there will be little hope for substantive, let alone transformative, change.

Conclusions

It has been many years now since Kelsey Chief (2016) authored her manifesto for the removal of *Alberta History*. Chief's (2006) call for action by the university to remove the mural and thereby acknowledge and respond to the colonial violence perpetrated in and through it remains unanswered at the time of writing this paper. The university's claims about succumbing to the pressures of political correctness and thus erasing history continue to be expressed throughout the consultation process. The reasons for these claims appear to be as Stanley (2020) suggests, "settler colonizers see their own meanings reflected back at them. They consequently have great difficulty engaging with the meanings of Indigenous people, even when these are clearly presented to them" (p. 106). For me, these claims only exemplify the power of the frontier complex and colonial logics, and create barriers to possibilities for transformational change.

Million (2013) describes how felt scholarship—in this context, the embodied knowledge of how colonialism is felt by Indigenous peoples—has been disregarded and discredited as a legitimate form of knowledge by those wanting to keep the mural hanging in the Reading Room. This rejection not only silences Indigenous experiences but also reinforces the authority of settler epistemologies, which prioritize visual and textual representations over lived, affective knowledge. Thus, settler expressions of resistance are less about preserving a work of art and more about preserving the ideology of colonial dominance and settler colonial consciousness. As such, the continued presence

of the mural in a space where students come to study and learn is a lived curriculum, contributing to both the socialization of settler citizens and settler colonial consciousness.

Similarly, the process for discerning the mural's future has fallen short in fostering an ethically relational approach in the ways Donald (2012) calls for. As the university community continues to grapple with overt and tacit manifestations of colonialism, it must find ways to reconcile its role in "the colonial project of assimilation and genocide against Indigenous peoples" (Pidgeon, 2022, p. 16). When one considers the narrative of nation building reflected in the mural through the images and juxtaposition of White settlers and Indigenous Peoples, it can only be understood as advancing a colonial curriculum. The reality is that the settlers that appear as saviours in the mural, are not; the Indigenous Peoples and their cultures that appear fragile in the mural, are not; the depiction of progress as desirable, often isn't; nor are civilizational divides inevitable. That a similar colonial curriculum has been enacted throughout the consultative process is also unfortunate and harmful. Consultations have born witness to forums in which settlers dominate and direct the discussions. As many supporters of the mural's removal know, this is how colonial geographical ignorance and the refusal of difficult knowledge function to preserve colonialism and the settler futurity that Tuck and Yang (2012) describe.

This said, Ermine's (2007) and Donald's (2009) ethical considerations offer a number of epistemological and ontological, what if possibilities. I find myself asking, what might it mean if consultations about the mural's future began with Indigenous ceremony, the spiritual and cultural practices that uphold reciprocal relationships with the land, ancestors and community, often involving protocols, storytelling, song, dance and ritual to honor Indigenous knowledge and ways of being? What might have been different if those participating in consultations sat together in circle with settlers sitting alongside their Indigenous relatives? What if settler representatives chose to listen with open hearts and open minds to the voices and experiences of Indigenous members of the university community? How might conditions be created and sustained in ways that enable ethical participation by all, but with a care for Indigenous experiences and perspectives? I wonder what the process might look like if it were designed by Indigenous Peoples, or what would happen if the consultations unfolded outside the colonial walls of the University of Alberta? What might make it possible for participants to truly hear and acknowledge the expressions of felt colonial violence and harm that the mural enacts as a form of public pedagogy? And what new possibilities might emerge if, as Stein (2020) suggests, "settlers could arrive at a space of uncertainty and humility in which they recognize the impossibility of ever repaying their colonial debt, yet feel a deep sense of responsibility to try nonetheless" (p. 156)? Sadly, the "collective remembering in Canada . . . has failed to come to terms with the centrality of genocide, of racism, and of their ongoing effects in the process of making people and things Canadian" (Stanley, 2020, p. 112). What might make it possible for participants to truly hear and acknowledge the expressions of felt colonial violence and harm that the mural enacts as a form of public pedagogy? And what new possibilities might emerge if, as Stein (2020) suggests, "settlers could arrive at a space of uncertainty and humility in which they recognize the impossibility of ever repaying their colonial debt, yet feel a deep sense of responsibility to try nonetheless" (p. 156)?

Using the mural as a focus, I have endeavored to discuss my deep concerns with the colonial project and its effect on Indigenous Peoples in Canada. I have shown how the physical presence of the mural enacts a settler colonial curriculum of knowing as public pedagogy through public art. I have shown how the mural depicts and represents a settler colonial 'imagined' history of Indigenous-settler encounters as part of an internalized settler frontier complex. I have also shown how settler colonial consciousness, settler geographical ignorance and the power of settler memory manifested themselves in the consultation process surrounding the debate to remove the mural. In challenging dominant narratives of Canadian history advanced through a lived curriculum of place, I have offered alternative versions of that history as suggested by Donald (2016) and others that include ethical relationality and the possibilities they afford for Indigenous-settler relationship repair.

This paper not only outlines the reasons why the mural should be removed, it is also a plea for "unsettling structural apparatuses, systemic mechanisms and every day (yet power-laden) routines that reassert colonial relations" (Pidgeon, 2022, p. 21). It is my attempt to intensify a conversation with settler colonial histories, challenge settler colonialism and honour Indigenous wisdom traditions and philosophies so that a different future might be possible.

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