

Colonialism Undone: Pedagogies of Entanglement

Response 2

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Colonialism in North America continues to be undone. It is unfinished and ongoing, yet is also subject to interruption, contestation, and disassembly by Indigenous peoples. As Sandy Grande so eloquently insists, the insurgent process of disruption and undoing entails “political/pedagogical strategies that go beyond simply resisting settler relations of power” and demands working “to redefine the epistemological underpinnings through which the colonial world order is maintained.”¹

The first chapter of *Red Pedagogy*, “Mapping the Terrain of Struggle,” thus begins with the violence and didacticism of colonial ordering, as well as the dynamic persistence of Indigenous ways of knowing and living otherwise. While colonial cartographies seek to naturalize the ideologies of conquest, to control and confine Indigenous peoples, to enframe territory and enforce the boundaries of property, they nevertheless remain shaped in response to those people they aim to pacify and the places they claim to occupy.

Always a consequence of these constitutive antagonisms, colonial reason and its modes of governance are symptomatic of that which they disavow. In contrast to the unconditional and peremptory conventions of colonial spatial delineation, Mishuana Goeman argues that Native mapping often describes relations to place that are polyvocal and contingent, living in stories told and retold.² Despite its professed inevitability, settler colonialism in North America is a project of perpetual failure and immanent crisis. *Red Pedagogy* specifies what it means for Indigenous peoples to contend with the brutal

perseverance and entanglements of this failure, as well as its still virulent economies of dispossession.

Grande's opening chapter generatively sketches colonial predicaments that invite ongoing consideration. What are the material conditions under which Indigenous peoples enact and assert self-determination during the present moment? Under these conditions, why do anti-colonial pedagogies necessitate "a method of analysis and social inquiry [that] troubles the capitalist, imperialist aims of unfettered competition, accumulation, and exploitation" (p. 26)? How are circumstances of Native peoples living under U.S. occupation shaped in relation to what Lisa Marie Cacho describes as the "differential devaluation of racialized groups"³ and discrepant colonial formations throughout the world? This chapter is intended to build upon the foundation provided in Grande's chapter, expanding upon some of the principal concepts and ideas and their enduring significance since *Red Pedagogy's* original publication.

The current historical conjuncture is not simply the most recent moment in the continuous procession of Indigenous dispossession by U.S. empire and settler colonialism. Just as neoliberalism is not simply an extension of classical liberalism but is instead a reactive formation that aims to dismantle the conciliatory regulatory mechanisms of mid-twentieth century liberal capitalism in pursuit of the upward redistribution of wealth in the "Global North," Indigenous dispossession assumes specific tactical forms in response to present-day practices of and possibilities for indigenous self-determination. The intensified redeployment of colonial predation and necropolitical inclusion takes many forms, some of which manifestly accentuate the constitutive contradictions of neoliberal multiculturalism.

As a way of marking this continuance and its impact on Indigenous youth, one need only to consider the recent 2013 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Adoptive Couple v Baby Girl*. The highly controversial case effectively undermined key provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 and used a reactionary post-civil rights era discourse of racial preference and alleged "special rights" of tribal nations to undermine protective gains made by the 1978 law. Indeed, much like the recent U.S. legislation that discarded core aspects of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by claiming that the racist practices that necessitated the law were now resolved, commentary in support of the 2013 Supreme Court ruling suggested that Indian Child Welfare Act was outdated, emphasizing that the legislation was "more than thirty years old." In the context of the ruling, efforts by organizations such as the National Indian Child Welfare Association and the Lakota People's Law Project to stop the ongoing theft and abuse of Indigenous children have shifted to address the particularities of contemporary U.S. colonial governmentality, specifically, "post-racial" assertions of white entitlement and retooled ideol-

ogies of anti-tribalism that aim to justify further erosion of Indigenous sovereignty.

In the neoliberal offensive of the past forty years, the uneasy historical entwining of Indigenous education, a particular version of self-determination, and the reduction of life to the calculus of market relations appear in at least two modes of containment and hegemonic realignment. On the one hand, neoliberal multiculturalism extends the simultaneous promise of autonomy and inclusion. On the other hand, an insistence on accountability for the conditions of colonial and racialized dispossession has been diverted to support standardized testing and assessment that accelerates inequities and devaluations under the aegis of settler normativity.

For instance, the anti-colonial movement for control of schooling by and for Native peoples—from the Navajo Nation's Rough Rock Demonstration School established in 1966 to the Red Power community survival schools to the Coalition of Indian Controlled School Boards to Deganawidah-Quezal-coatl University—helped compel the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975. Yet, although the 1975 legislation established significant changes in federal Indian policy, its mandate for Indigenous self-governance devolved administrative authority to tribes in ways that did not fundamentally challenge the ultimate plenary power of congress.

Likewise, the U.S. settler state responded to grassroots pressure for more adequate investment in education for both impoverished communities of color and Indigenous peoples with the rhetoric of accountability set out in the means-tested disciplinary regime of No Child Left Behind—a regime that has only intensified since the original publication of *Red Pedagogy*.⁴ As intimated by Grande, both trajectories partially build from and work to dismember preceding strategies for Indigenous liberation and sovereignty. Nevertheless, the colonial norms of recognition that seek, as Audra Simpson argues, to instantiate an Indigenous autonomy that "is exercisable only because recognition is conferred" are always also symptomatic of the pernicious "ambivalences of exigencies of settlement itself" and "the needs and desires of states that are new, that are in process, that are complicated, and struggling always not to fissure."⁵

Similarly, in response to the student movements of the 1970s and 1980s for ethnic studies and Native American self-determination, the U.S. educational system responded with inclusive pedagogies for minoritization and neoliberal multiculturalism. Indeed, the notion of "minority" here is precisely a consequence of the colonial attrition that has in fact minoritized peoples through circuits of conquest, displacement, and slavery. Roderick Ferguson points out that during this moment state and capital began to adopt a simultaneously affirmative and preemptory discourse of anti-racist diversity "through the regulated incorporation of minorities and minoritized intellectual and cultural production" so as "to forestall the redistribution of resources

to economically and racially disfranchised communities.”⁶ Although such forms of minoritization operate primarily through a logic of race that concertedly disavows colonial difference and Indigenous sovereignty, it is imperative nonetheless to attend to the tensions, entanglements, and disjunctures—what Jodi Byrd describes as “cacophony”—between subalternized racialized groups and Indigenous peoples that remain more complex than the normative lens of the U.S. state, educational system, and neoliberal multiculturalism allows.⁷

Since the 1970s, U.S. Indian policy affirming recognition of Indian self-determination has operated in tandem with new forms of economic disposability, social abandonment, and environmental plunder. As Grande observes, “Indian education was never simply about the desire to ‘civilize’ or even deculturalize a people, but rather, from its very inception, it was a project designed to colonize Indian minds as a means of gaining access to Indian labor, land, and resources” (p. 19). She makes clear that both contesting the possessive and extractive logics of colonization and creating the possibilities for a “new Red pedagogy” demand grappling with how Indigenous ways of being and knowing cannot be reduced to these conditions of material expropriation. At the same time, neither Euro-American forms of knowledge nor Indigenous forms of knowledge are thoroughly discrete⁸; instead, each are heterogeneous and—to various degrees—unevenly entwined, even if the arrogance of Euro-American knowledge production continues to disclaim its debts and culpability for the death worlds of logocentricism.

As *settler colonialism* and *decolonization* are increasingly invoked by non-Indigenous scholars and activists, it becomes especially important to engage the specificity, social etymology, and complex genealogies of each term. Decolonization is not an analogy for struggles against domination in general.⁹ Decolonization is least helpful when used to suggest a binary relation to colonialism or the retrieval of a more authentic prior to colonial rule. Yet, as much as international law has codified decolonization as a series of mandates and protocols susceptible to the ongoing maintenance of neocolonial and imperial formations, it nevertheless serves to evoke other possible relations and refusals. As Grande contends, “‘decolonization’ (like democracy) is neither achievable nor definable, rendering it ephemeral as a goal, but perpetual as a process” (p. 166). Decolonization is thus a shifting configuration of strategies and actions, not an event, even as it is nonetheless eventful. Decolonization is a means without end. It is a creative response that necessarily exceeds legibility and reconciliation from the perspective of the conditions from which it arises.

The terrain of struggle mapped by *Red Pedagogy* a decade ago continues to exceed the political boundaries, militarized borders, and knowledge regimes of imperial nation-states. Scholars and activists have grounded their

work in ways that both confront the imposed limitations and elisions of the state form and build anti-colonial alliances born of shared conditions of colonial possibility.¹⁰ The practice of “red pedagogy” so forcefully charted by Grande entails the sustained and difficult labor of discerning and enacting these multiple forms of struggle in relation to one another without losing sight of their mutual frictions, tensions, and incommensurabilities.¹¹

In this sense, the ethics of being accountable to one another as living radical relationality is itself the possibility of contesting and further disrupting the colonial conditions that continue to be undone. A declaration of radical hope and potentiality, *Red Pedagogy* theorizes with the insurgent forms of knowledge that arise from and sustain decolonization as a collective overcoming and becoming in perpetuity by Indigenous peoples. The urgency of this declaration only intensified in the ten years since *Red Pedagogy* was first published.

NOTES

1. Sandy Grande, “Accumulation of the Primitive: The Limits of Liberalism and the Politics of Occupy Wall Street,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 3.3–4 (2013): 376.
2. Mishuana Goeman, *Mawk'ny Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
3. Lisa Marie Coakto, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: NYU Press, 2012): 13–18.
4. Teresa L. McCarthy, “The Impact of High-Stakes Accountability Policies on Native American Learners: Evidence from Research,” *Teaching Education* 20.1 (2009): 7–29.
5. Audra Simpson, “Under the Sign of Sovereignty: Certainty, Ambivalence and Law in Native North America and Indigenous Australia,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 25.2 (Fall 2010): 108. For further discussion, see Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
6. Roderick Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012): 190, 191.
7. Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
8. This was a point incisively made by Chris Andersen at the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association meeting, Austin, Texas, May 2014.
9. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1.1 (2012): 1–40.
10. M. Bianet Castellanos, Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, and Arturo J. Aldama, (eds.), *Comparative Indigenities of the Americas: Toward a Hemispheric Approach* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012); Noelani Goodyear-Ka'opua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Brenda J. Child and Brian Klopotek (eds.), *Indian Subjects: Hemispheric Perspectives on the History of Indigenous Education* (Santa Fe, NM: SAR Press, 2014); The Kino-nda-nimni Collective (ed.), *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement* (Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2014).
11. Harsha Walia, *Unhooking Border Imperialism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2013); Tiffany Jeanette King, “In the Clearing: Black Female Bodies, Space, and Settler Colonial Landscapes,” PhD dissertation (College Park: University of Maryland, 2013); Luan Kidane and Jarrett Martineau, “Building Connections across Decolonization Struggles,” *ROAR Magazine*, October 29, 2013. <http://roarmag.org/2013/10/african-indigenous-struggle-decolonization/>.