

# Building Historical Consciousness

*Indigenous thinking on infrastructure and architecture as sites for historical consciousness and contemporary creative Practice in North America.*

October 14, 2020

4:30-5:30 PM EST

Guests: Chris Cornelius, Elsa Hoover, and Nick Estes, *The Red Nation* web/podcast

To our guests:

The focus of this discussion will be “Building Historical Consciousness.” We will discuss your experiences with architecture and infrastructure, as well as creative approaches to their making and their historicity, and how these two things meet. We would like you to reflect on Indigenous thinking about space, place, infrastructure, and architecture, and will prompt you (through your own work) to launch the dialogue from starting points beyond narratives of structure and resistance. Our readings in this course so far have centered on the construction of knowledge, and the partitions of land and the self. We will ask you how you construct knowledge, and how you use the built environment, institutions, practices of making, and other spatial consciousness practices to achieve knowledges of the past. We will talk about what those knowledges of the past may be used for, how they may partition, and how they may restore. We may also reflect on the larger arc of the dialogue series, “Racial Justice in the Built Environment,” through our preoccupations with Minneapolis, New York, and Nairobi, threaded through many of the talks in the series. Our goal is not merely to consume information but to build solidarities. In that spirit, we hope that this may be the beginning of a discussion and collaborations between the three of you.

**Chris Cornelius** is a citizen of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, and focuses his research and practice on the architectural translation of American Indian culture. He is the founding principal of studio:indigenous, a design and consulting practice serving American Indian clients and an Associate Professor in the School of Architecture & Urban Planning at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He served as a cultural consultant and design collaborator with Antoine Predock on the Indian Community School of Milwaukee, which won the AIA Design Excellence award from the Committee on Architecture for Education, and was among a group of indigenous architects who represented Canada in the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including an Artist in Residence Fellowship from the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution. He teaches at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Cornelius holds a Master of Architecture degree from the University of Virginia and a Bachelor of Science in Architectural Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

**Elsa Matossian Hoover** is an architectural designer and writer of mixed Anishinaabe and Finnish descent whose research focuses on borders, environments, and Indigenous futures.

Her recent work includes cartographic illustration and an immersive theater installation in Minneapolis. Her work has been featured in *The Avery Review*, *The Funambulist*, and will be published this fall in *Interior Provocations: History, Theory, and Practice of Autonomous Interiors*. Elsa is an Editor at Large with *The Avery Review* and a founding member of the Harvard Indigenous Design Collective. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Architecture from Columbia University and studies architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

**Nick Estes** is a citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe. He is an Assistant Professor in the American Studies Department at the University of New Mexico. In 2014, he co-founded The Red Nation, an Indigenous resistance organization. His research engages colonialism and global Indigenous histories, with a focus on decolonization, oral history, U.S. imperialism, environmental justice, anti-capitalism, and the Oceti Sakowin. Estes is a member of the Oak Lake Writers Society, a network of Indigenous writers committed to defend and advance Oceti Sakowin (Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota) sovereignty, cultures, and histories. His most recent book is *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (Verso, 2019), which places into historical context the Indigenous-led movement to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline.

This program is supported by the course “Colonial Practices” taught by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi.

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## Guiding Questions

1. When is it helpful to appeal to a shared Indigenous identity, and when does that shared identity not make sense, in your own practices (historical, architectural, activist...)?
2. As academics, how do you negotiate your position as producers of Indigenous knowledge within a structure (the university) that has historically been and is presently entangled with various forms of violence?
3. Is there a way to extract materials or knowledge from the land in a way that is not destructive? In what ways can *architecture* steward *land*?

## Bibliography

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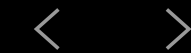
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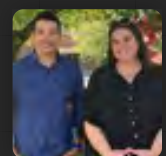
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# Indigenous Ways of Knowing

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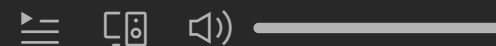
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Indigenous Ways of Knowing  
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The first pictograph of the 1880 Battiste Good (Brown Hat) winter count documents the arrival of Pte Ska Win, the White Buffalo Calf Woman, the most significant historical figure of the Oceti Sakowin who formalized the first treaty with the human and other-than-human worlds. Manuscript 2372: Box 12: F6, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Museum Support Center, Suitland, Maryland.

## Origins

There are no two sides to the history of the United States and its relationship to people who have lived here for thousands of years. There are no two sides to that story. You have no right to displace people, to steal their resources, and steal their lives . . . What America has done is criminal. And they're still doing it.

—Elizabeth Cook-Lynn<sup>1</sup>

There is one essential reason why Indigenous peoples resist, refuse, and contest US rule: land. In fact, US history is all about land and the transformation of space, fundamentally driven by territorial expansion, the elimination of Indigenous peoples, and white settlement. From its original 1784 boundaries of the first thirteen colonies, the US rapidly expanded westward from the Atlantic Seaboard to the Pacific coast, annexing nearly 2 billion acres of Indigenous territory in less than a century. Most was west of the Mississippi River.

This includes the Missouri basin, a massive circulatory system of streams, rivers, creeks, and tributaries that empties into its main artery, Mni Sose (the Missouri River). In Oceti Sakowin cosmology, Mni Sose begins everywhere the water falls from the sky to touch the earth and trickle into one of these waterways. The river is 2,466 miles long, with a drainage basin encompassing a massive 529,000 square miles, a landmass one-sixth the size of the continental United States. The Oceti Sakowin and the Indigenous nations with which it has shared territory, and has sometimes fought, are as much defined by Mni Sose as they are by their own political, cultural, and social relationship to its life-giving waters.

In this world, water is life, and so too is the buffalo nation, the Pte Oyate. Vast buffalo herds once migrated according to the river's seasonal ebbs and flows, followed by the hunting nations of the Northern Plains. At the center of this world is He Sapa, the Black Hills, *the heart of everything that is*. If He Sapa is the heart of the earth, then Mni Sose is its aorta. It is from this country that the Oceti Sakowin emerged as a nation, a people, and gained its humanity.

Much has been written about the history of the Missouri River. Yet, few histories have focused on the river's role in the colonial project. Book titles such as *Unruly River*, *River of Promise*, *River of Peril*, and *The Dark Missouri*, as well as the settler nickname for the Missouri—"Old Misery," for its frequent flooding and the property damage that ensued—depict the river as a deadly, treacherous, and inhospitable landscape.<sup>2</sup> Early settlers often described the Missouri basin as an irrational and violent country, plagued by endless inter-Indigenous warfare; settlers saw Indigenous peoples as equally irrational and violent. "This is a delightful country," wrote British trader Alexander Henry about the Northern Plains in 1800, "and were it not for perpetual wars, the natives might be the happiest people on earth."<sup>3</sup>

European and US explorers, traders, and settlers dubbed the many nations here "the Sioux," mythologizing them as the most hated, the most feared, and the most violent North American Indigenous people. Viewed as a noble warrior society, they have come to symbolize the violent hypermasculinity of the frontier and are the basis of the standard image of Indigenous culture as equestrians who lived in tipis, wore headdresses, and aimlessly wandered the land like the wild game they called kin. The University of North Dakota's racist "Fighting Sioux" mascot (retired in 2012), a disembodied head of a Native male warrior, represented such views. (Among the tribes in the state, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe stood alone in opposing it).<sup>4</sup> The "Sioux warrior" myth is portrayed in the award-winning film

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*Dances with Wolves* (1990). Such stereotypes, however, are not confined to the realm of popular culture. Prominent US historians such as Richard White portray the Sioux as a pillaging band of expansionists who violently expelled their Indigenous neighbors, and who never crossed west of the Missouri River—with no small irony—until the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776.<sup>5</sup> In fact, these attempts to classify the Sioux as imperialist newcomers—a label that more accurately describes the United States—marked the Sioux as nomadic, rootless, unsettled, and malicious, which made their removal, genocide, and colonization more palatable.<sup>6</sup> Oral histories and careful Indigenous record keeping, including Dakota and Lakota winter counts, show otherwise. Winter counts marked each year or winter by recording a significant event with a pictograph on hide (or sometimes on paper), accompanied by an oral recounting of the event, and constitute a meticulous record of family, individual, and larger national histories.<sup>7</sup> US historians, however, have misinterpreted winter counts to support their claims that the Lakotas crossed the Missouri River and subsequently “discovered” the Black Hills sometime around 1776.<sup>8</sup>

The Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota nations never called themselves “Sioux”—that term derives from an abbreviation of “Nadouessioux,” a French adoption of the Ojibwe word for “little snakes,” denoting the Ojibwe’s enemies to its west. Instead, they simply called themselves the “Oyate,” the “Nation,” or the “People,” and sometimes the “Oyate Luta” (the Red Nation); as a political confederacy, they called themselves the “Oceti Sakowin Oyate” (the Nation of the Seven Council Fires). Their geographical span was vast. The oldest Dakota-speaking nations were located mostly in the western Great Lakes forests, glacial lakes, and rivers. They are the Mdewakantonwan (the Sacred Nation that Lives by the Later); the Sissintonwan (the Medicine Nation that Lives by the water); the Wahpetonwan (the Nation that Lives in the Forest); and the Wahpekute (the Nation that Shoots Among



the Leaves).<sup>9</sup> The Nakota-speaking nations are the caretakers of the middle territory that began on the eastern banks of the Missouri River. Their names came from their location in the camp horn: Ihanktonwan (the Nation that Camps at the End) and Ihanktonwanna (the Little Nation that Camps at the End). And the youngest and largest, the Lakota-speaking nations, covered the vast expanse of the Northern Plains west of the Missouri River, called Tintonwan (the Nation of the Plains). Among the Tintonwans, there are also seven divisions: the Oglala (the Nation that Scatters Their Own); the Sicangu (the Nation of the Burnt Thighs, also known as the Brulé); the Hunkpapa (the Nation at the Head of the Circle); the Mniconjou (the Nation that Plants by the Water); Itazipco (the Nation without Bows, or the Sans Arc); the Sihasapa (the Blackfeet Nation); and the Oohenupa (the Nation of Two Kettles).<sup>10</sup>

Like most human societies, the origin stories of the Oceti Sakowin are as diverse as its people and the lands they continue to live with and protect. To name but a few examples, their origin histories include emergence from the earth—from the Wase (red clay); emergence from He Sapa; emergence from Bde Wakan (Spirit Lake or Mille Lacs); descent from the Wicahpi Oyate (the Star Nation); descent from the Pte Oyate (the buffalo nation); and westward and southern migrations from the Atlantic Seaboard or Central America. None of these origin stories are more or less true than others. What they have in common, however, is their collective significance in defining both a historical experience within a specific geography, and the moral universe of how one relates to others and the land. The origin stories contradict settler narratives that describe the Oceti Sakowin as “late arrivals” west of the Missouri River, at best; or as expansionists, at worst—driven, like their US counterpart, by purely economic motives to control river trade by violently displacing other Indigenous nations.

In the absence of written law, according to Lakota author Luther Standing Bear, “a great tribal consciousness” reigned at

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the individual level in Oceti Sakowin societies. No human institution employed force or violence to compel behavior. Social conduct was based on mutual solidarity and kinship, in what Standing Bear calls Woucage, “our way of doing things.” The ultimate punishment for breaking group solidarity was exile, which “meant to lose identity or die.” An individual’s responsibility was first and foremost to ensure the survival of the collective. Decisions—concerning anything from hunting to travel to warfare—were made at the community level in the open council, a decentralized political authority that frequently rotated leadership, affording equal say, that is, to separate societies of men and of women and, in some cases, places of honor to Wintke societies, those who did not conform to the binary gender roles. An Oyate Okizu, or the assembly of the entire Oceti Sakowin, was called only for matters of great importance such as sun dances, or, in the late nineteenth century, the negotiation of treaties and repulsion of US invasion. In contrast to their own customary laws, Lakotas created the word Woope Wasicu to describe the white man’s law. Woope Wasicu described “the cruel equipment” of law—from armed soldiers and cops, to guns, cannons, balls and chains, and prisons. According to Luther Standing Bear, this kind of law “designated not order but force and disorder.”<sup>11</sup> Next to the maintenance of good relations within the nation, an individual’s second duty was the protection of communal territory. In the east, the vast wild rice patties and seasonal farms that grew corn, beans, and squash demarcated Dakota territory. In the west, Lakota territory extended as far as the buffalo herds that traveled in the fertile Powder River country. For Dakotas, Lakotas, and Nakotas, territory was defined as any place where they cultivated relations with plant and animal life; this often overlaid, and was sometimes in conflict, with other Indigenous nations.

For example, the Lakotas were by no means the only Indigenous nation with connections to the Black Hills. When different peoples combined through alliance (whether through

the formation of kinship relations, or purely for survival), they often incorporated aspects of one another's histories. Among the more than fifty Indigenous nations who possessed similar, often overlapping, relationships and claims to the Black Hills were the Arikara, Osage, Shoshone, Assiniboine, Gros Ventre, Pawnee, Mandan, Hidatsa, Kiowa, Ponca, Crow, Omaha, Winnebago, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, and Blackfeet.<sup>12</sup>

Like the countries that constitute the United Nations, the political authority of the Oceti Sakowin didn't prevent them from sometimes warring with other Indigenous nations. Luther Standing Bear, commenting on Lakota warfare in 1931, admits as much. He notes how the United States criminalized the assertion of Indigenous political authority to make war and defend territory. "We kept our lands to ourselves," he writes, "by making all other tribes stay away from us." When whites began to fear the Oceti Sakowin's political power, Standing Bear observed, "they called us Sioux."<sup>13</sup> In settler vernacular, "Sioux" became equivalent to "criminal" and was used to justify invasion and endless war. But, as Indigenous scholars and intellectuals have contended for the last two centuries, war, diplomacy, and sovereignty are just a few of the Oceti Sakowin's many characteristics. Nonetheless, "Sioux" warfare, diplomacy, and sovereignty dominate settler histories of nineteenth-century Indigenous life on the Missouri River and in the Northern Plains. This is not because Indigenous nations are inherently militaristic, but because they had come to know the United States—which the Lakotas called "Milahanskan" (the nation of the long knives)—best through its army.

The first Indigenous-US interactions on the Missouri River were military encounters. In 1803 President Thomas Jefferson finalized the Louisiana Purchase from the French Republic: an annexation of 827 million acres. Louisiana Territory encompassed the entire Missouri River basin and more than doubled the territory of the fledgling United States. Shortly thereafter, Jefferson sent Meriwether Lewis and William Clark

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to lead a military expedition up the Missouri River, bearing arms, flags, and “gifts,” to claim the “new” land and its people. Their goal was to proclaim US sovereignty over the region and its nations, and to bring the indigenous people into trade relations with the United States. And of all the Indigenous nations, Jefferson mentioned only “the Sioux” by name. “On that nation,” Jefferson ordered Lewis, “we wish most particularly to make a friendly impression, because of their immense power, and because we learn they are very desirous of being on the most friendly terms with us.”<sup>14</sup>

The Corps of Discovery (a unit of the US Army) met several divisions of the Ojibwa as they traveled upriver. After navigating the Big Bend of the Missouri (present-day Crow Creek and Lower Brule Reservations) in late September of 1804, the expedition was intercepted by a camp of Sicangu, a political subdivision of the Lakotas.<sup>15</sup> As per custom, the Lakotas hailed the corps with a plume of smoke that rose in the northwest, signaling the expedition had been spotted. The Lakotas sought council and some form of payment to pass through their territory, but Lewis and Clark rebuffed the Lakotas’ assertion to determine who shall pass and at what cost—clearly disobeying Jefferson’s instructions “to make a friendly impression.”

After eight days of failing to negotiate their passage without paying a toll, Lewis and Clark resorted to violence. According to John Ordway, an expedition volunteer, Clark informed the intransigent Lakota headman, Black Buffalo, that they were sent by Thomas Jefferson, who could “have them all destroyed [*sic*].”<sup>16</sup> But, obviously surrounded and overwhelmed, Lewis and Clark’s threats were worthless. Because he led the negotiations between the Corps of Discovery and the Sicangu and he refused to let the expedition pass, Lewis and Clark took Buffalo Medicine (and possibly other leaders like him) hostage and to secure their passage north. (Buffalo Medicine was later released once the expedition was free from Lakota country.) Taking

Indigenous hostages was common practice; Jefferson had earlier advised Lewis that “taking influential chiefs” or their children “would give some security to your party.”<sup>17</sup> Reflecting on the encounter, Clark later wrote that the Lakotas were “the vilest miscreants of the savage race, and must ever remain the pirates of the Missouri.” “Unless these people are reduced to order, by coercive measures, I am ready to pronounce that the citizens of the United States can never enjoy but partially the advantages which the Missouri presents,” he continued. “[The Sioux] view with contempt the merchants of the Missouri, whom they never fail to plunder, when in their power.”<sup>18</sup>

Historians have uncritically taken Lewis and Clark’s testimony of that first encounter at face value: they were waylaid by a band of river pirates straight from the pages of a Robinson Crusoe fantasy novel. This was most recently retold in popular accounts like US historian Stephen Ambrose’s 1997 bestselling book *Undaunted Courage* and documentarian Ken Burns’s 2001 PBS film *Lewis and Clark*.<sup>19</sup> But in their estimation, the Lakotas didn’t make much of the encounter. Lewis and Clark came and left, and the Lakotas continued living as before. This was a fairly routine engagement: merely a different flavor of whites traveling through their territory bearing flags and guns. According to Clark, even the downriver and more “peaceful” Ihanktonwan “invariably arrested the progress” of all traders traversing the river by exacting tolls and demanding more accommodating trade prices.<sup>20</sup> However, for the United States this first interaction held great significance, and it profoundly shaped their feelings toward a nation they viewed as criminal “pirates of the Missouri.” As Oglala historian Craig Howe observes, this exchange “gave rise to storm clouds of deceit that have in some sense darkened two centuries” of Lakota-US relations.<sup>21</sup>

But for the historian Jeffrey Ostler, the foundation for genocide in US Indian policy had in fact been laid decades earlier, in the 1787 Northwest Ordinance.<sup>22</sup> The ordinance opened up

the area north of the Ohio River and in the Great Lakes region for settlement, creating territories that became the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Additionally, Article 3 stated (of the “Indians”) that “in their property, rights, and liberty, *they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress.*” While, as Ostler observes, this “did not call for genocide in the first instance,” it legalized genocidal war in the event that land cessions could not be achieved through “peaceful” means and Indigenous people were unwilling to submit to US authority.”<sup>23</sup>

The 1823 Supreme Court decision *Johnson v. M’Intosh*, in which Chief Justice John Marshall spelled out the rights of the United States to Indigenous lands, also drew upon a centuries-old doctrine. Indigenous peoples, he ruled, only possessed “occupancy” rights, meaning their lands could be taken by powers that “discovered” them: the “Doctrine of Discovery.” The origin of this notion was a fifteenth-century papal bull known as the “Doctrine of Christian Discovery” that distinguished Christian from non-Christian nations. The latter were regarded as little more than “savage” peoples awaiting the gift of European civilization, and according to Lenape scholar Steven Newcomb, the United States interpreted the doctrine as describing Indigenous peoples as “politically non-existent, partially or entirely.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Indigenous title to the land could not be extinguished where it did not exist. Commenting on the *Johnson* decision, Onondaga international jurist Tonya Gonnella Frichner observes, “The newly formed United States needed to manufacture an American Indian political identity and concept of Indian land that would open the way for the United States in its westward colonial expansion.”<sup>25</sup> This founding myth eventually became known as “Manifest Destiny.”

In 1807, following the expedition, Jefferson appointed Clark brigadier general and Indian agent for Louisiana Territory, and he served as an Indian Affairs agent under the War Department until his death in 1838. The expedition and

the annexation of land west of the Mississippi was a part of a rapid push westward, and the Louisiana Purchase was a landmark achievement. For one, it provided the means by which southern plantation capitalists could expand their “cotton kingdom” to new markets—hence the importance of imposing trade relations with the Indigenous nations. Without expansion, the plantation system was doomed to fail.<sup>26</sup> Jefferson envisioned an “Empire of Liberty” for the lands west of the Mississippi; one that required the expansion of Black slavery and the transformation of Indigenous land into private property for advancing a yeoman farming empire. In this way, the expansion of the plantation system coincided with Indigenous dispossession and removal.

Jefferson saw the foundation of the Louisiana Territory as a partial solution to the “Indian problem”—the problem being that the “Indian tribes” still resided on lands coveted by the United States. His primary targets were the so-called “Five Civilized Tribes”—the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Muscogee, and Seminole—and his intention was to break up and ultimately dissolve these eastern nations. Because these nations had become slaveowners with farms and plantations, like their white neighbors, their system of land tenure resembled a claim to permanence. Thus, they had to be departed. And new lands in the West offered a new opportunity for eastern Indigenous removal. For example, Section 15 of the 1804 Louisiana Territorial Act afforded that “the President of the United States is hereby authorized to stipulate with any Indian tribes owning lands on the east side of the Mississippi, and residing thereon, for an exchange of lands, the property of the United States, on the west side of the Mississippi, in case the said tribes shall remove and settle thereon.” Jefferson wanted to further concentrate eastern Indigenous nations into ever-diminishing territories. By making their wild game, land, and resources scarce, he could force them to either “incorporate” or “remove beyond the Mississippi.”<sup>27</sup>

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Dakotas, Nakotas, and Lakotas had been trading with the French and British for decades by the time the Lewis and Clark expedition arrived. By the early 1800s, the fur trade had enveloped Northern Plains life (the Europeans also brought the Bible, the gun, and disease), and the Lakotas had a vested interest in maintaining a foothold in the river trade; they certainly didn't consent to the US claim over the land and waterway.<sup>28</sup> But the Lakotas never saw themselves as owning the river; on the contrary, it was to the river that they belonged. The many centuries they spent living in relationship to the land and water reinforced this understanding. And by 1804 they also belonged to the river trade, both economically and politically, making the river a different source of their livelihood and survival.

Early settlers and traders heavily relied on Indigenous labor and patronage for trapping and hunting, while Indigenous societies in turn relied on trade goods such as cloth, guns, ammunition, knives, iron cooking utensils, and food items.<sup>29</sup> From the early colonial times through the end of nineteenth century, the fur trade was dominated by rival trading firms (and rival European colonizers), who encouraged sporadic inter-Indigenous trade wars. From 1806 to 1835, US Indian policy introduced a factory system of trade houses to curb the criminal behavior of these white traders, but the policy had little effect, because the US government and traders themselves participated in the same criminal enterprise of trespass and theft.<sup>30</sup> All of these companies were in the business of trading beaver pelts, to be sold on the European and US markets; however, by the 1830s beaver populations had been all but exterminated.

Historians and archeologists largely view Indigenous peoples as responsible for the decline of fur-bearing animals in the Northern Plains, and the adoption of horse culture increased the ability of Indigenous peoples to hunt buffalo.<sup>31</sup> But their capabilities never compared to the killing efficiency of white trappers and hunters. For example, the killing



efficiency of the “Rocky Mountain system” of trapping, dominant in the early nineteenth century, rapidly depleted fur-bearing animals. Made up of heavily armed company employees, these units knowingly trespassed into Lakota and Arikara territories, fortifying their positions and trade routes as they advanced.<sup>32</sup> According to Indigenous custom, no one was barred from hunting for subsistence and survival. But they did place restrictions on whites who hunted for profit; thus, these highly romanticized frontiersmen were in fact little more than poachers. As beaver populations declined and demand for their pelts decreased, buffalo robes were quick to fill their place. Yet when US companies began to bypass Indigenous peoples and dominate the trade, buffalo herds, like the beaver, were all but exterminated, from the 1870s to the 1880s. This expropriation went hand in hand with military-sponsored extermination campaigns, which began in 1865.<sup>33</sup> Taking only the hides, white hunters not only left buffalo carcasses to rot on the plains, but also poisoned them with strychnine to kill off coyotes, wolves, and other scavengers—and sometimes starving Native people.<sup>34</sup> Estimates place the precontact North American buffalo population at 25 to 30 million. It took settlers nearly a century to exterminate the herds in the east, forcing the survivors of the holocaust much like their human kin, west of the Mississippi River. Annihilating the remaining 10 to 15 million in the Great Plains took just two decades.<sup>35</sup>

These were acts of genocide. For genocide encompasses much more than merely acts committed during war, as most US historians believe. The 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines the intent of genocide as “to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” Examples include, but are not limited to, murder, torture, *or* the deliberate deprivation of resources needed for physical survival, like clean water, food (i.e., buffalo), clothing, shelter or medical services. This definition also includes actions targeting women

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specifically, like involuntary sterilization, forced abortion, prohibition of marriage, and long-term separation of men and women, all of which threaten the ability to produce future generations. (Another tactic is the forcible transfer of children). United States policy has subjected Indigenous peoples to all of these genocidal acts. Some of which are historical, others are ongoing. “Settler colonialism is inherently genocidal in terms of the genocide convention,” writes historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz.<sup>36</sup> Although the genocide convention is not retroactive (it only became applicable in the United States in 1988, the year the US Senate ratified it), it is a useful lens for studying Indigenous history.

The fur trading forts were rampant with sexual violence. White traders, low-level laborers, and soldiers often stopped by for a drunken “frolic,” which involved demanding the sexual services of Indigenous women’s bodies—with or without their consent. Access to whiskey, treaty annuities, and trade goods sometimes came with the expectation that Indigenous men should forfeit their daughters’, sisters’, and wives’ bodies to white men (as if Indigenous women’s bodies were theirs to give), and soldiers also frequently raped Indigenous women whom they had taken prisoner. “To celebrate victory, troopers often rounded up the prettiest girls to be passed around among the officers, leaving the enlisted men with the less attractive, older women,” wrote Sicangu scholar Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve in her account, based on family oral histories of the well-known abuses against Lakota women at Fort Platte (in operation from 1840 to 1846).<sup>37</sup> Many Indigenous activists today have identified “man camps,” the transient all-men communities of oil and gas workers, as hubs for the exploitation of Indigenous women through trafficking and sex work.<sup>38</sup> In some ways, trading forts were the first man camps—the vanguards of capital that extracted wealth not only from the land, but also through the conquest of Indigenous women’s bodies. Later, these trade forts also became border

towns, the white-dominated settlements that today ring Indigenous reservations.

The fur trade also violently transformed gender relations. As Driving Hawk Sneve recounts, Lakota society didn't adhere to monogamous sexual values, possessed nothing on par with the puritanical Christian views of sexual conduct or marriage, and considered property in the home to be owned by the women.<sup>39</sup> But Lakota women who married white traders were placed under the protection and control of a patriarch (a practice known as "coverture"). Descending from a society where women owned all the property in the home, losing control of their property, their bodies, and their children, and being placed under the dominion of a white patriarch was a harrowing, alien experience.<sup>40</sup> Maybe this should come as no surprise. In white society women and children held little or no political authority and were little more than domestic servants. Diplomacy, trade, and war—the public sphere—were the sole privilege of men. This included the sale and trade of hides at European or US forts along the Missouri River, unlike the Indigenous systems they had replaced, in which trade, exchange, and the sharing of material wealth was intended to strengthen kinship relations, rather than a market economy and private ownership. During the fur trade, Indigenous women labored to prepare the buffalo hides, but they didn't "own" the hides sold to whites because the hunting and sale of those hides was a male-dominated business. And white traders often owned or "married" multiple Indigenous women to increase their access to the women's relatives—and their trade markets—or to sell her off to others. In this sense, the subordination of Indigenous women was lucrative for a trader and increased his social standing.<sup>41</sup>

One of these men was the French Canadian trader Toussaint Charbonneau, who is famous for joining Lewis and Clark in November 1804, when the expedition camped among the Mandans at Fort Mandan. He offered up his services and those

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of his “wife,” a Shoshone woman by the name of Sacagawea, as interlocutors and interpreters for Indigenous peoples they would encounter upriver. Although Sacagawea has surpassed Charbonneau in fame for her aid to the expedition, little is known about her other than her services to white men. Captured by Hidatsas at the age of thirteen, Sacagawea was one of many women Charbonneau purchased throughout his life.<sup>42</sup> Although she bore him children, Sacagawea was little more than chattel to Charbonneau—a piece of property he sometimes resented, and at others physically abused.<sup>43</sup> And it wasn’t only Sacagawea whom he subjected to violence. In May 1795, while working for the Montreal-based North West Company, Charbonneau was sent to pick up supplies at a trading post near Lake Manitou. According to the journal of John Macdonell, a North West Company clerk, an elder Ojibwe woman caught Charbonneau “in the act of committing Rape upon her Daughter.” Furious, the woman stabbed Charbonneau with a canoe awl, “a fate he highly deserved for his brutality.”<sup>44</sup>

Like Charbonneau, white traders, explorers, soldiers, and settlers believed they possessed the right to trespass freely across Indigenous territory, and they also believed they possessed unrestricted access to Indigenous women’s bodies and their children. Muscogee jurist Sarah Deer argues that rape “can be employed as a metaphor for the entire concept of colonialism” because it is not only experienced individually but is also part of an ongoing structure of domination—one with a beginning, but no end.<sup>45</sup> More so than Indigenous men, the subordination of Indigenous women was about realizing profits in the fur trade. Violence against Native women undermined their customary political authority and used their bodies to create profit. As noted above, unlike their white counterparts, whose bodies were used for sexual reproduction, Indigenous women’s bodies increased white traders’ access to new markets through their kin—and by extension, land, capital, and political and economic influence. Thus, while Indigenous women did bear

children for white men, their main use was for securing the future of white settlement. As Athabascan scholar Dian Million puts it, “Gender violence marks . . . the evisceration of Indigenous nations.”<sup>46</sup> White traders and trappers appropriated Indigenous women’s bodies as much as they had appropriated the wealth of the land by harvesting and selling the skins of animals. The two practices went hand in hand.

But this was only one component of the settler society’s attack on Indigenous women’s political authority. With women already shut out of the fur trade, the treaties, which barred Indigenous women from participation in this specific realm of diplomacy, offered an externally imposed means to recognize Indigenous men’s political authority.<sup>47</sup> From 1805 to 1873, the United States made thirty-five treaties and agreements with various political divisions of the Oceti Sakowin—or, as they became known in treaty parlance, “the Sioux Nation of Indians.” Not one woman was allowed to “touch-the-pen,” place an “x-mark,” or formally consent to any land cessions, peace agreements, or political relationships with the United States.<sup>48</sup> By the time the Oceti Sakowin had been forcefully confined to reservations in the 1890s, Indigenous women had been completely confined to the domestic sphere, while Indigenous men occupied the primary roles in the reservation political economy, including as reservation police, political leaders, and traders.<sup>49</sup> Gender divisions were sometimes enforced by military rule, and the boarding school system, which was controlled by the military like the reservations, further entrenched these divisions, ripping children from their families and educating young girls and boys on their proper places in a “civilized Christian society”: homemaking for the girls, and wage labor for the boys.<sup>50</sup> Finally, in 1924—after Indigenous peoples had achieved a relative degree of “civilization”—the United States granted them citizenship, annexing both Indigenous lands and lives into the US nation-state. It was not only within the home

that Indigenous women's political authority been domesticated, but also in the settler nation as a whole.

This upheaval of gender relations significantly undermined the political traditions of the Oceti Sakowin. After all, it was a woman who formalized the first compact—or treaty—with the human and other-than-human world. Pte Ska Win, White Buffalo Calf Woman—the most significant historical figure in Oceti Sakowin history—established not only the basis of customary and ceremonial laws of humans, but also how humans would exist in correct relations to the Pte Oyate and the nonhuman world. In his earliest entry on his winter count, the Sicangu historian Brown Hat depicts White Buffalo Calf Woman as a white buffalo arriving in the center of a camp circle in the first decade of the tenth century. Above her are the Calf Pipe, a yucca plant, and a cornstalk. To the right, in English, Brown Hat lists the various animal nations the White Buffalo Calf Woman brought into formal relations with the Oceti Sakowin: elk, deer, antelope, buffalo, beaver, and wolves. Corn kernels fall from her udders into water, making the connection between humans, plants, animals, the earth, and water.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, no one had the right to cede these relations to the land, water, plants, and animals—because those relations were grounded in the first compact, the first treaty with Pte Ska Win. (This is why Arvol Looking Horse, the nineteenth-generation keeper of this Calf Pipe, led the prayer marches at #NoDAPL to honor those original instruction and the Oceti Sakowin's first commitments.)

To gain access to Indigenous lands, white men had used Indigenous men to break communal land practices and undermine Indigenous women's political authority. As a result, Indigenous women are largely absent from early historical narratives.<sup>52</sup> Yet their power posed an obstacle to US annexation of Indigenous lands.<sup>53</sup> It should come as no surprise that #NoDAPL was led primarily by Indigenous women, from youth leaders, such as Bobbi Jean Three Legs, Zaysha Grinnell, Tokata

Iron Eyes, and Jasilyn Charger; to women like LaDonna BraveBull Allard, Phyllis Young, and Faith Spotted Eagle.

Zaysha Grinnell, a fifteen-year-old citizen of the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation, the descendants of Sacagawea, successfully petitioned her tribal council in March 2016 to oppose DAPL. She described the scene faced by her nation during the oil boom as similar to the one confronted by her ancestors during the fur trade, two centuries ago:

When these oil companies come in, they bring in the men . . . These men bring with them the man camps, and with that comes violence and sex trafficking. Indigenous women and girls near the camps are really affected by this and we are not going to put up with it. Making more girls into leaders, because we witness it firsthand, is so important.<sup>54</sup>

As the first entry of capitalism in the Upper Missouri, the fur trade, spreading through existing Indigenous networks, brought with it apocalypse in the form of smallpox. By the time Lewis and Clark arrived, the European disease had already devastated the Missouri River Indigenous peoples several times, most likely being introduced by French and British traders. The advent of steamboats greatly increased the spread of smallpox. In 1824 Congress authorized the Army Corps of Engineers, a construction branch of the military, to regulate the navigation of rivers and harbors. By 1838 Congress had assigned the Army Corps to pull snags and clear the river for steamboat traffic coming from Saint Louis. The federal government assumed its authority over navigable waterways under the Constitution's commerce clause—the same clause that also regulated trade with Indigenous nations. Indian affairs, under the supervision of the War Department, was tasked with the creation and management of federally subsidized trading posts to undercut British, Spanish, and French trade and bolster US influence over Indigenous nations.<sup>55</sup> The increase in steamboat traffic

intensified the fur trade; and the fur trade in turn intensified commerce and, therefore, US authority over the river. As R. G. Robertson points out, the fur trade “was the primary means by which smallpox reached the Indians in the interior.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, the spread of smallpox and other diseases coincided with an intensification of colonial invasion.

Steamships transporting treaty annuities, ammunition, Indian agents, traders and soldiers to Missouri River forts and trading posts also brought disease and death. The consequences of their passage brought pure horror to Indigenous nations. In the summer of 1837, an American Fur Company steamboat, the *St. Peter's*, traveled from Saint Louis transporting trade goods and Indigenous treaty annuities; it was, in turn, to collect Indigenous-harvested buffalo hides. It also knowingly carried, in its human cargo, the smallpox virus.

At Fort Clark, where the Mandans lived, along the Missouri River, the deadly virus arrived on June 19, 1837, via the *St. Peter's*. As early as April, the crew had seen signs of the disease among themselves, but they nevertheless unloaded treaty annuities and loaded buffalo robes onto the ship that day—smallpox too, as the infected crew embarked on a drunken “frolic” with the Mandans. Within twenty-five days, the Mandans showed the first signs of infections. The only ones spared were elders who had built up an immunity, and who were already scarred from previous outbreaks. Children and adults writhed and stung from intense fevers. Putrid, hideous sores filled with pus, scarring them for life—if they survived. Francis A. Chardon, a fur trader at the fort, stopped counting the dead “as they die so fast it is impossible.” To end the suffering, parents killed their children; friends, relatives, and lovers killed each other; and some committed suicide. The smell of decaying corpses was discernable from miles away.<sup>57</sup>

Many have speculated that Indigenous peoples were incapable of understanding infection and the spread of disease. What is clear from Chardon’s journals is that Indigenous peoples knew



the source of their affliction—the fur trade and the trading forts—and sought retribution against the traders and the fur trade itself. “We are badly situated,” wrote Chardon, “as we are threatened to be Murdered by the Indians every instant.” Indigenous peoples knew traders and explorers sometimes carried smallpox or cowpox with them in vials for inoculations. George Catlin, a white painter and traveler of the American West, recounted a story he heard among the Pawnees that a trader threatened unleashing smallpox upon them if they didn’t submit to his will: “He would let the small-pox out of a bottle and destroy the whole of them.”<sup>58</sup> “The Sioux had it in contemplation . . . to murder us in the spring,” Lewis wrote while he and Clark wintered with the Mandans in 1805 and 1805, “but were prevented from making the attack, by our threatening to spread the *small pox*, with all its horrors among them.”<sup>59</sup>

Accurate Indigenous population data does not exist, but some studies suggest that Indigenous nations with closer contact to the whites had increased exposure to diseases. These nations, such as the Mandans at Fort Clark, had positioned themselves as brokers in the fur trade, often settling near trading forts or allowing trade posts in or near their villages. Diseases were quick to spread in these intimate river communities, making quarantine or flight nearly impossible. Some calculations estimate that from 1780 to 1877, Indigenous river nations lost around 80 percent of their populations, with the Mandan, Caddo, Wichita, and Pawnee experiencing almost 90 percent population loss. Buffalo-hunting nations on the Northern Plains from 1780 to 1877 experienced a 40 percent population decline overall; among them, this figure approached 80 percent for the Assiniboine, Atsina, and Comanche. While smallpox epidemics arrived again and again to the Plains nations—1778, 1781, 1801—the 1837 outbreak was the most devastating for those along the Missouri River, nearly wiping out the Mandans and forcing them to join together with the Hidatsas and Arikaras. (The Lakotas and Dakotas, however, largely escaped the

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outbreak because of prior inoculation and by avoiding trading posts after learning of the epidemic.)<sup>60</sup> In 1849 cholera killed about one-fourth of the Pawnees, along with many Lakotas. The last major smallpox epidemic in the region occurred in 1871, killing thousands of Assiniboines and Blackfeet.<sup>61</sup>

Turning the river into profit required little capital investment in Indigenous lives, as long as the trade goods and annuities continued to flow. But it did require the continual extraction of furs. The employment of Indigenous societies as trappers, hunters, and patrons was the first effort at turning the river into a source of wealth. But the Missouri River wasn't a "middle ground" scenario where all parties were equals, even when the British and French dominated trade. A popular convention in US history, the "middle ground" thesis posits that in some cases, such as the fur trade, Indigenous and white people found common ground in forms of trade where one group was not allowed to assert too much control or influence over the other.<sup>62</sup> Lost in these imaginary and ahistorical situations, however, is the simple fact that early European and US colonization, in all its forms, was fundamentally extractive and imperial. Lakotas and Dakotas *did* actively compete with other Indigenous nations for control over the river trade, but such conflict never approached the holocaust brought by disease and the calculated violence of the US military and traders.

The Oceti Sakowin had good reason to despise the imposition of white traders and US forts. As the fur trade peaked, the Oceti Sakowin east and west of the Missouri began to wage defensive wars to expel the invaders whom they rightfully blamed for the disappearing buffalo and other animal kin. Foremost among their grievances was the devastation inflicted by white traders, emigrants traversing the land, and the increasing US military presence. Each was a foreboding sign of white encroachment. Instead of justice, however, what they got instead was a "peace" through the permanence of war.

May 15, 2017

# “Standing Rock Lives”: On the Persistence of Indigenous Architecture



By Elsa Matossian Hoover - ᐱ·nū·kǎa·tsistai'ᐱiiyii

*Above: Two women cross the entrance to Oceti Sakowin camp along the Missouri River. Photo: Jaida Grey Eagle*

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This short piece is intended to open an Indigenous architectural dialog motivated by the power and increasing visibility of land defense action, led

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(re)produced a process of (re)claiming land as old as our first encounter with settlers while it created relationships that are unsettlingly new. Making and breaking camp—for hunting, for a powwow, for the summer—remain familiar skills in our communities. When camps form the frontline, they draw together traditional skills, diplomacy, claims to Indigenous sovereignty over the lands we defend, and the violent refutation of that sovereignty through extraction and policing. The frontline camp is indigenizing architecture already, posing a challenge to architects, spatial thinkers, and “indigenous architects?” like myself: how do we situate our building and ourselves when we recognize our presence in Indigenous homelands? I write this piece as an Anishinaabe architecture student and the youngest member of the NYC Stands with Standing Rock Collective.

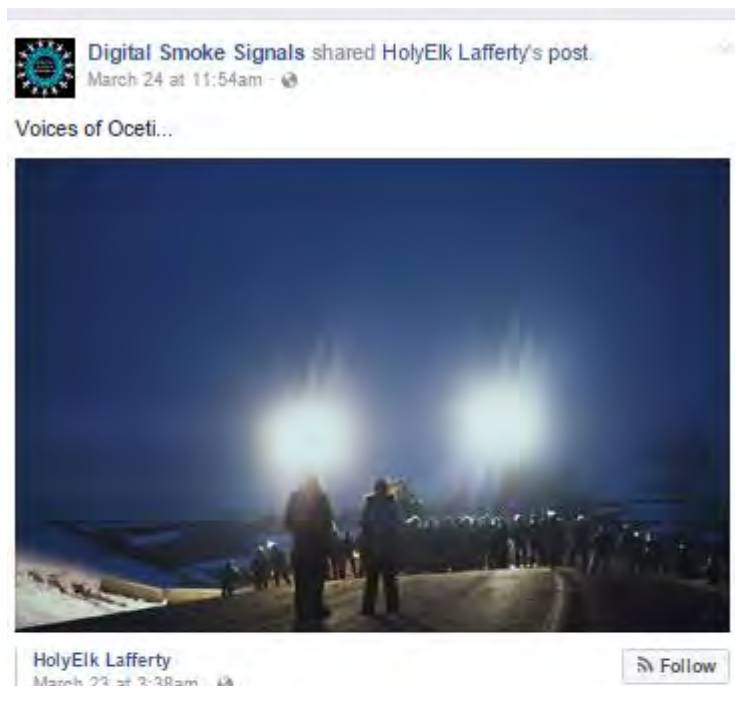
## I.

Here on the urban periphery, images of Standing Rock are blurry and pervasive. In pictures taken from drone and horseback, tipis, *tarpees*,<sup>[1]</sup> tents, camp kitchens, yurts, and outhouses are laced together with the footprints, hoofprints, and vehicle tracks left by the procession of thousands and thousands of peaceful bodies. In the last two weeks of February, these bodies were forced from the

protect them from the danger posed by spring flooding. Two camps remain at Wakpala and Eagle Butte, while thousands of Water Protectors have spread themselves across state and national borders, waiting to mobilize against the Keystone XL and any other project carved through Indigenous (home)lands. On March 29th, Digital Smoke Signals, an organization dedicated to innovating media and technology in Indigenous advocacy, flew their drones over the drill pads on the banks of the Missouri River, revealing a pipeline under construction with sections buried and others sticking out of the earth. The day before, March 28th, 2017, a report from within Dakota Access stated that “oil has been placed in the Dakota Access Pipeline underneath Lake Oahe,” betraying the company’s need, even after months of violent policing, successes in court, and evicting most of the camps, to mark and mar the territory they claim.

The scenes that reach us here in New York and across the entire world through visual media are <sup>1</sup>*chaotic*: old people sprayed with water cannons in the freezing North Dakota winter. They are <sup>2</sup>*remote*: drone footage of the placid river and acres of overturned ranchland, containing now-invisible graves that have been plowed apart. Most of all, they are <sup>3</sup>*enduring*: that the land defenders were

citizen journalism circulated from this space. This is not to minimize the fresh trauma caused by this action, but to highlight the fundamental spatial ignorance that it displays. These bureaucracies refuse to acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty by breaking the treaties that brought the United States and Canada into being.[3] Land defenders position their camps directly in the path of this bureaucratic refusal, making the Indigenous right to build in defense of land and water visible and legible to the defenders, the settler-offenders, and the entire world through media. Channeling resources from the urban periphery back to the homeland; and restoring all that was outlawed (our languages, our ceremonies, our gatherings) through graceful, bodily confrontation: this is the architecture of Indigenous resistance.

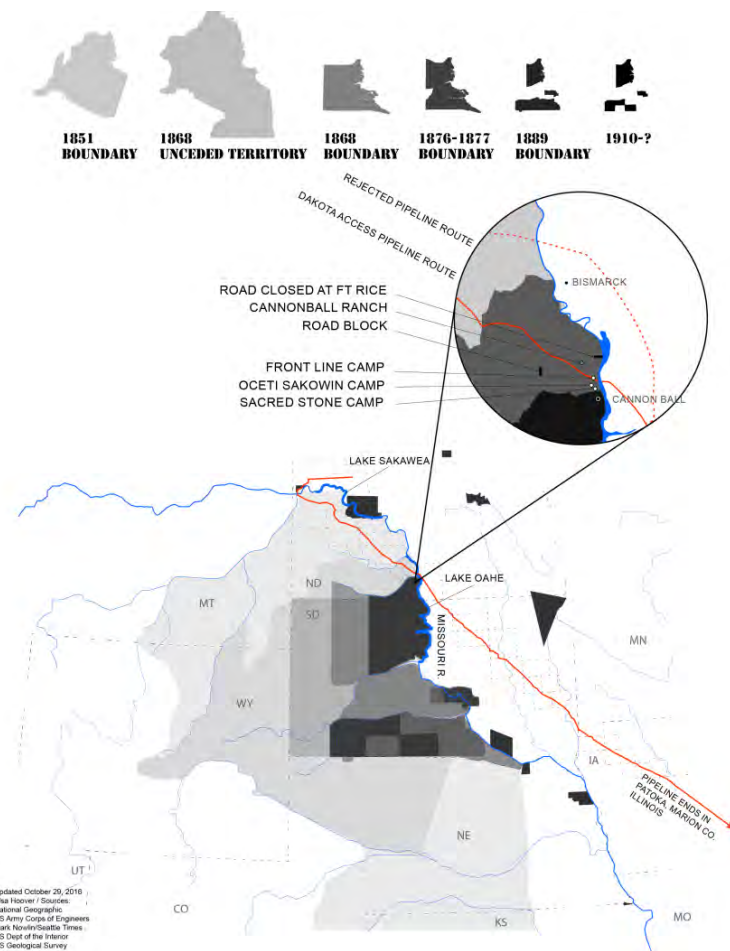


threatened by our existence that they would attempt to brutalize and arrest grandmothers and young women as they prayed. It hurt to know that THIS IS OUR REALITY. It's not a movie or happening in some other land where it's easier to ignore and turn the other cheek.

This happened one month ago... in 2017, on our own land which we have the right to stand, pray and live on through broken promises written on treaties that have never been honored. These men hid behind their riot gear masks as I stared them in the face and they had every intention of hurting us all. We believed them because they had proven it to us repeatedly. It was only through prayer that they didn't and we all walked home into camp that night.

\*Special gratitude to the courageous photographers that stayed until the end with us to capture our truth so we can speak it to the world.  
Photo credit: Jen Byers

I never lived or worked or prayed at Standing Rock because that was not my place. In New York, I am a student. For Indigenous students and academics here, as in many urban places, our presence is often about gathering knowledge to take back to Indian Country (in its many forms). While youth from the reservation set up tents gifted to them along Mnišošē,[4] we crowded into apartments to sort through what we had gathered—our degrees, skills, friends, and books—to send it back where it was, and is, needed. What I know is drawing (and a little history, and how to catch a rez dog), so I offered to make maps. For the hundreds of hours that my teachers and collaborators spent assembling the real matter of the project, what people tend to remember first about the #Standing Rock Syllabus is the map. Images carry power and collapse distance. In the city, we are responsible for using images and our newly generated visibility well.



II.

On Halloween. I missed the tide of Indian



unprepared to go to Standing Rock. These were camping club activists well-versed in the language of fossil fuel divestment and on-campus protests, ready to take their lingo and funds from a handmade t-shirt campaign on the 1,735-mile drive to Cannon Ball, ND. Here, in a circle of well-meaning undergrads, space opened up for me to act on the responsibilities we carry at the periphery of Indian Country: to choose what relationships are channeled home to the camp, the rez, the traditional territory. As much as they wanted me to, I could not decide for these students; instead I asked two questions:

*Have you ever been to a reservation? (“Yeah, in Minnesota. I can’t remember the name though.”) What is the closest reservation to campus? (\*silence\*)[5]*

Over the next hour, they became familiar with their own discomfort:

*(“You can’t walk to the grocery store?” “Will there be bail and representation for us? Do women have to wear skirts?”).*

The prospect of living away from the amenities of urban space, the promise of police violence, and the foreignness of Indigenous leadership and protocols caused them to reflect on their own positions.

Ultimately, they decided the money they had raised

Indigenous students headed for the front line.



III.

Let us return to relationships, and expand those between urban outsiders and the Indigenous leadership they encounter in and beyond the city. The land defense camp, from Unist'ot'en to Standing Rock, to Barriere Lake, to Oka Lawa, to Split Rock, is a permanent structure. Its transitory population and donated composition would suggest otherwise in conventional architectural

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burned in the face of raids—they have already gathered energy, teachings, and skills that do not dissipate. The purpose that circulates people, material, and building among these places of gathering demonstrates a need to indigenize architecture outside of brick and mortar and drawn conventions, so that we might write ourselves into theories and praxis prepared to serve Indigenous communities and their struggles. For now, the practice is largely comfortable defining the "rural" against the "urban" as a negative space that fuels the active city. Land defense camps, and perhaps Standing Rock most of all (so far), invert this relationship by foregrounding the Indigenous homeland and our responsibility to channel our resources—that which is extracted—back to the center. In cities, Indigenous people have long built community and solidarity by mutual care. For decades, this has meant finding each other through the little signs we show in public: a common code of quilled earrings and tournament jackets that, to outsiders, is blurred to the point of meaninglessness in the urban fabric. After Standing Rock, Indigenous people have suddenly come alive again to the non-Indigenous who surround us; this is as unsettling as it is vital to our success in reclaiming sovereignty.

For the land defense camp, allyship is meaningful

presence at the frontline. The absurdity of the outsized military deployment against Standing Rock's camps is that, despite the trauma it causes to people in these spaces of healing, it is powerless against the Indigenous mobilization it seeks to crush. Policing can only repeat patterns of settler violence and thereby stage images that echo their legacies into the wider world's consciousness. Land defenders travel the same highways that carry tanks to Oceti Sakowin; we turn Facebook into a platform for citizen journalism even as it is incompetently monitored by police and censored at their request; we attach our bodies to earth-moving equipment and to the glass doors of Manhattan banks. A land defense camp exists to reject violence against living things by bodily confrontation. When we shout "mni wiconi!"—across camp, across a bank lobby, across continents—it is a declaration of rights and responsibilities to Standing Rock and an affirmation of Lakota leadership in the defense thereof. A contract signed elsewhere, created by those whose investments in the world travel along abstract webs, can never have meaningful authority here in Indian Country. A need to mark territory (the inside of an unfinished pipe; the underside of a river; reservation land flooded but resilient) even after attacking and evicting its protectors, even during a judicial process, betrays the weakness of

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that we defend our steward relationships in the ways our ancestors did, and in new ways too. The governments and companies enacting violence against Indigenous people reject these structures of relationality, and therefore our architecture remains illegible to them.

Finally, the images we produce of the land defense camp matter. At worst, they conjure that toxically romantic species, the Western Vanishing Indian. At best, they call us home from many distant places, both physical and mental. Somewhere in between, they compel the guilt and curious goodwill of settler-descendants to show up, to learn, and often to take more than they give in the process. Though media attention is vital to the creation (through education) of new allies, its absence does not force us to disappear into the romanticized mist; we are rebuilding the homeland, and you are not necessarily invited.



[1] A *tarpee* is a sturdy plywood and tarp rendition of the traditional lodge.

[2] The Bureau of Indian Affairs  
(<https://www.bia.gov/>)

[3] For a run-down of North American treaty history, read sections “Indigenous History of North America” and “United States Indian Policy, Sovereignty and Treaty-Making” in the [#Standing Rock Syllabus](#).

[4] Lakota language: The Missouri River

[5] The nearest tribal headquarters to Upper Manhattan is the Ramapough Lenape Nation (25.5 miles), home to the nearest active land defense camp, [Split Rock Prayer Camp](#); followed by the Shinnecock Indian Nation’s reservation on Long Island (91 miles).





*f-architecture* (alt: *feminist architecture collaborative*) is a three-woman research enterprise aimed at disentangling the contemporary spatial politics and technological appearances of bodies, intimately and globally. Partners/caryatids/bffs Gabrielle Printz, Virginia Black and Rosana Elkhatib run their practice out of the GSAPP Incubator at NEW INC, an initiative of the New Museum.



PREVIOUS

Bad Taste Kill\$: Redecorating  
Heteropatriarchy with Queer Eye  
for the Straight Guy

NEXT

House-Work



# Decolonizing Methodologies

RESEARCH AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

*Linda Tuhiwai Smith*





# Decolonizing Methodologies

Research and Indigenous Peoples

LINDA TUHIWAI SMITH



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DUNEDIN

# Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory

*The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*

Audre Lorde<sup>1</sup>

Imperialism frames the indigenous experience. It is part of our story, our version of modernity. Writing about our experiences under imperialism and its more specific expression of colonialism has become a significant project of the indigenous world. In a literary sense this has been defined by writers like Salman Rushdie, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and many others whose literary origins are grounded in the landscapes, languages, cultures and imaginative worlds of peoples and nations whose own histories were interrupted and radically reformulated by European imperialism. While the project of creating this literature is important, what indigenous activists would argue is that imperialism cannot be struggled over only at the level of text and literature. Imperialism still hurts, still destroys and is reforming itself constantly. Indigenous peoples as an international group have had to challenge, understand and have a shared language for talking about the history, the sociology, the psychology and the politics of imperialism and colonialism as an epic story telling of huge devastation, painful struggle and persistent survival. We have become quite good at talking that kind of talk, most often amongst ourselves, for ourselves and to ourselves. 'The talk' about the colonial past is embedded in our political discourses, our humour, poetry, music, story telling and other common sense ways of passing on both a narrative of history and an attitude about history. The lived experiences of imperialism and colonialism contribute another dimension to the ways in which terms like 'imperialism' can be understood. This is a dimension that indigenous peoples know and understand well.

In this chapter the intention is to discuss and contextualise four concepts which are often present (though not necessarily clearly visible) in the ways in which the ideas of indigenous peoples are articulated;

imperialism, history, writing, and theory. These terms may seem to make up a strange selection, particularly as there are more obvious concepts such as self-determination or sovereignty which are used commonly in indigenous discourses. I have selected these words because from an indigenous perspective they are problematic. They are words which tend to provoke a whole array of feelings, attitudes and values. They are words of emotion which draw attention to the thousands of ways in which indigenous languages, knowledges and cultures have been silenced or misrepresented, ridiculed or condemned in academic and popular discourses. They are also words which are used in particular sorts of ways or avoided altogether. In thinking about knowledge and research, however, these are important terms which underpin the practices and styles of research with indigenous peoples. Decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices.

### Imperialism

There is one particular figure whose name looms large, and whose spectre lingers, in indigenous discussions of encounters with the West: Christopher Columbus. It is not simply that Columbus is identified as the one who started it all, but rather that he has come to represent a huge legacy of suffering and destruction. Columbus 'names' that legacy more than any other individual.<sup>2</sup> He sets its modern time frame (500 years) and defines the outer limits of that legacy, that is, total destruction.<sup>3</sup> But there are other significant figures who symbolize and frame indigenous experiences in other places. In the imperial literature these are the 'heroes', the discoverers and adventurers, the 'fathers' of colonialism. In the indigenous literature these figures are not so admired; their deeds are definitely not the deeds of wonderful discoverers and conquering heroes. In the South Pacific, for example it is the British explorer James Cook, whose expeditions had a very clear scientific purpose and whose first encounters with indigenous peoples were fastidiously recorded. Hawaiian academic Haunani Kay Trask's list of what Cook brought to the Pacific includes: 'capitalism, Western political ideas (such as predatory individualism) and Christianity. Most destructive of all he brought diseases that ravaged my people until we were but a remnant of what we had been on contact with his pestilent crew.'<sup>4</sup> The French are remembered by Tasmanian Aborigine Greg Lehman, 'not [for] the intellectual hubbub of an emerging anthrologie or even with the swish of their travel-weary frocks. It is with an arrogant death that

they presaged their appearance....'<sup>5</sup> For many communities there were waves of different sorts of Europeans; Dutch, Portuguese, British, French, whoever had political ascendancy over a region. And, in each place, after figures such as Columbus and Cook had long departed, there came a vast array of military personnel, imperial administrators, priests, explorers, missionaries, colonial officials, artists, entrepreneurs and settlers, who cut a devastating swathe, and left a permanent wound, on the societies and communities who occupied the lands named and claimed under imperialism.

The concepts of imperialism and colonialism are crucial ones which are used across a range of disciplines, often with meanings which are taken for granted. The two terms are interconnected and what is generally agreed upon is that colonialism is but one expression of imperialism. Imperialism tends to be used in at least four different ways when describing the form of European imperialism which 'started' in the fifteenth century: (1) imperialism as economic expansion; (2) imperialism as the subjugation of 'others'; (3) imperialism as an idea or spirit with many forms of realization; and (4) imperialism as a discursive field of knowledge. These usages do not necessarily contradict each other; rather, they need to be seen as analyses which focus on different layers of imperialism. Initially the term was used by historians to explain a series of developments leading to the economic expansion of Europe. Imperialism in this sense could be tied to a chronology of events related to 'discovery', conquest, exploitation, distribution and appropriation.

Economic explanations of imperialism were first advanced by English historian J. A. Hobson in 1902 and by Lenin in 1917.<sup>6</sup> Hobson saw imperialism as being an integral part of Europe's economic expansion. He attributed the later stages of nineteenth-century imperialism to the inability of Europeans to purchase what was being produced and the need for Europe's industrialists to shift their capital to new markets which were secure. Imperialism was the system of control which secured the markets and capital investments. Colonialism facilitated this expansion by ensuring that there was European control, which necessarily meant securing and subjugating the indigenous populations. like Hobson, Lenin was concerned with the ways in which economic expansion was linked to imperialism, although he argued that the export of capital to new markets was an attempt to rescue capitalism because Europe's workers could not afford what was being produced.

A second use of the concept of imperialism focuses more upon the exploitation and subjugation of indigenous peoples. Although economic explanations might account for why people like Columbus were funded to explore and discover new sources of wealth, they do not account for the devastating impact on the indigenous peoples whose lands were

invaded. By the time contact was made in the South Pacific, Europeans, and more particularly the British, had learned from their previous encounters with indigenous peoples and had developed much more sophisticated 'rules of practice'.<sup>7</sup> While these practices ultimately lead to forms of subjugation, they also lead to subtle nuances which give an unevenness to the story of imperialism, even within the story of one indigenous society. While in New Zealand all Maori tribes, for example, lost the majority of their lands, not all tribes had their lands confiscated, were invaded militarily or were declared to be in rebellion. Similarly, while many indigenous nations signed treaties, other indigenous communities have no treaties. Furthermore, legislated identities which regulated who was an Indian and who was not, who was a *metis*, who had lost all status as an indigenous person, who had the correct fraction of blood quantum, who lived in the regulated spaces of reserves and communities, were all worked out arbitrarily (but systematically), to serve the interests of the colonizing society. The specificities of imperialism help to explain the different ways in which indigenous peoples have struggled to recover histories, lands, languages and basic human dignity. The way arguments are framed, the way dissent is controlled, the way settlements are made, while certainly drawing from international precedents, are also situated within a more localized discursive field.

A third major use of the term is much broader. It links imperialism to the spirit which characterized Europe's global activities. MacKenzie defines imperialism as being 'more than a set of economic, political and military phenomena. It is also a complex ideology which had widespread cultural, intellectual and technical expressions'.<sup>8</sup> This view of imperialism locates it within the Enlightenment spirit which signalled the transformation of economic, political and cultural life in Europe. In this wider Enlightenment context, imperialism becomes an integral part of the development of the modern state, of science, of ideas and of the 'modern' human person. In complex ways imperialism was also a mode through which the new states of Europe could expand their economies, through which new ideas and discoveries could be made and harnessed, and through which Europeans could develop their sense of European-ness. The imperial imagination enabled European nations to imagine the possibility that new worlds, new wealth and new possessions existed that could be discovered and controlled. This imagination was realized through the promotion of science, economic expansion and political practice.

These three interpretations of imperialism have reflected a view from the imperial centre of Europe. In contrast, a fourth use of the term has been generated by writers whose understandings of imperialism and

colonialism have been based either on their membership of and experience within colonized societies, or on their interest in understanding imperialism from the perspective of local contexts. Although these views of imperialism take into account the other forms of analysis, there are some important distinctions. There is, for example, a greater and more immediate need to understand the complex ways in which people were brought within the imperial system, because its impact is still being felt, despite the apparent independence gained by former colonial territories. The reach of imperialism into 'our heads' challenges those who belong to colonized communities to understand how this occurred, partly because we perceive a need to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity. This analysis of imperialism has been referred to more recently in terms such as 'post-colonial discourse', the 'empire writes back' and/or 'writing from the margins'. There is a more political body of writing, however, which extends to the revolutionary, anti-colonial work of various activists (only some of whom, such as Frantz Fanon, actually wrote their ideas down) that draws also upon the work of black and African American writers and other minority writers whose work may have emerged out of a concern for human and civil rights, the rights of women and other forms of oppression.

Colonialism became imperialism's outpost, the fort and the port of imperial outreach. Whilst colonies may have started as a means to secure ports, access to raw materials and efficient transfer of commodities from point of origin to the imperial centre, they also served other functions. It was not just indigenous populations who had to be subjugated. Europeans also needed to be kept under control, in service to the greater imperial enterprise. Colonial outposts were also cultural sites which preserved an image or represented an image of what the West or 'civilization' stood for. Colonies were not exact replicas of the imperial centre, culturally, economically or politically. Europeans resident in the colonies were not culturally homogeneous, so there were struggles within the colonizing community about its own identity. Wealth and class status created very powerful settler interests which came to dominate the politics of a colony. Colonialism was, in part, an image of imperialism, a particular realization of the imperial imagination. It was also, in part, an image of the future nation it would become. In this image lie images of the Other, stark contrasts and subtle nuances, of the ways in which the indigenous communities were perceived and dealt with, which make the stories of colonialism part of a grander narrative and yet part also of a very local, very specific experience.

A constant reworking of our understandings of the impact of imperialism and colonialism is an important aspect of indigenous cultural

politics and forms the basis of an indigenous language of critique. Within this critique there have been two major strands. One draws upon a notion of authenticity, of a time before colonization in which we were intact as indigenous peoples. We had absolute authority over our lives; we were born into and lived in a universe which was entirely of our making. We did not ask, need or want to be 'discovered' by Europe. The second strand of the language of critique demands that we have an analysis of how we were colonized, of what that has meant in terms of our immediate past and what it means for our present and future. The two strands intersect but what is particularly significant in indigenous discourses is that solutions are posed from a combination of the time before, *colonized time*, and the time before that, *pre-colonized time*. Decolonization encapsulates both sets of ideas.

There are, however, new challenges to the way indigenous peoples think and talk about imperialism. When the word globalization is substituted for the word imperialism, or when the prefix 'post' is attached to colonial, we are no longer talking simply about historical formations which are still lingering in our consciousness. Globalization and conceptions of a new world order represent different sorts of challenges for indigenous peoples. While being on the margins of the world has had dire consequences, being incorporated within the world's marketplace has different implications and in turn requires the mounting of new forms of resistance. Similarly, post-colonial discussions have also stirred some indigenous resistance, not so much to the literary reimagining of culture as being centred in what were once conceived of as the colonial margins, but to the idea that colonialism is over, finished business. This is best articulated by Aborigine activist Bobbi Sykes, who asked at an academic conference on post-colonialism, 'What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?' There is also, amongst indigenous academics, the sneaking suspicion that the fashion of post-colonialism has become a strategy for reinscribing or reauthorizing the privileges of non-indigenous academics because the field of 'post-colonial' discourse has been defined in ways which can still leave out indigenous peoples, our ways of knowing and our current concerns.

Research within late-modern and late-colonial conditions continues relentlessly and brings with it a new wave of exploration, discovery, exploitation and appropriation. Researchers enter communities armed with goodwill in their front pockets and patents in their back pockets, they bring medicine into villages and extract blood for genetic analysis. No matter how appalling their behaviours, how insensitive and offensive their personal actions may be, their acts and intentions are always justified as being for the 'good of mankind'. Research of this nature on indigenous peoples is still justified by the ends rather than the means,

particularly if the indigenous peoples concerned can still be positioned as ignorant and undeveloped (savages). Other researchers gather traditional herbal and medicinal remedies and remove them for analysis in laboratories around the world. Still others collect the intangibles: the belief systems and ideas about healing, about the universe, about relationships and ways of organizing, and the practices and rituals which go alongside such beliefs, such as sweat lodges, massage techniques, chanting, hanging crystals and wearing certain colours. The global hunt for new knowledges, new materials, new cures, supported by international agreements such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) brings new threats to indigenous communities. The ethics of research, the ways in which indigenous communities can protect themselves and their knowledges, the understandings required not just of state legislation but of international agreements – these are the topics now on the agenda of many indigenous meetings.

### On Being Human

*The faculty of imagination is not strongly developed among them, although they permitted it to run wild in believing absurd superstitions.*

(A. S. Thompson, 1859)<sup>9</sup>

One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the ‘arts’ of civilization. By lacking such virtues we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilization but from humanity itself. In other words we were not ‘fully human’; some of us were not even considered partially human. Ideas about what counted as human in association with the power to define people as human or not human were already encoded in imperial and colonial discourses prior to the period of imperialism covered here.<sup>10</sup> Imperialism provided the means through which concepts of what counts as human could be applied systematically as forms of classification, for example through hierarchies of race and typologies of different societies. In conjunction with imperial power and with ‘science’, these classification systems came to shape relations between imperial powers and indigenous societies.

Said has argued that the ‘oriental’ was partially a creation of the West, based on a combination of images formed through scholarly and imaginative works. Fanon argued earlier that the colonized were brought into existence by the settler and the two, settler and colonized, are



mutual constructions of colonialism. In Fanon's words 'we know each other well'.<sup>11</sup> The European powers had by the nineteenth century already established systems of rule and forms of social relations which governed interaction with the indigenous peoples being colonized. These relations were gendered, hierarchical and supported by rules, some explicit and others masked or hidden. The principle of 'humanity' was one way in which the implicit or hidden rules could be shaped. To consider indigenous peoples as not fully human, or not human at all, enabled distance to be maintained and justified various policies of either extermination or domestication. Some indigenous peoples ('not human'), were hunted and killed like vermin, others ('partially human'), were rounded up and put in reserves like creatures to be broken in, branded and put to work.

The struggle to assert and claim humanity has been a consistent thread of anti-colonial discourses on colonialism and oppression. This struggle for humanity has generally been framed within the wider discourse of humanism, the appeal to human 'rights', the notion of a universal human subject, and the connections between being human and being capable of creating history, knowledge and society. The focus on asserting humanity has to be seen within the anti-colonial analysis of imperialism and what were seen as imperialism's dehumanizing imperatives which were structured into language, the economy, social relations and the cultural life of colonial societies. From the nineteenth century onwards the processes of dehumanization were often hidden behind justifications for imperialism and colonialism which were clothed within an ideology of humanism and liberalism and the assertion of moral claims which related to a concept of civilized 'man'. The moral justifications did not necessarily stop the continued hunting of Aborigines in the early nineteenth century nor the continued ill-treatment of different indigenous peoples even today.

Problems have arisen, however, within efforts to struggle for humanity by overthrowing the ideologies relating to our supposed lack of humanity. The arguments of Fanon, and many writers since Fanon, have been criticized for essentializing our 'nature', for taking for granted the binary categories of Western thought, for accepting arguments supporting cultural relativity, for claiming an authenticity which is overly idealistic and romantic, and for simply engaging in an inversion of the colonizer/colonized relationship which does not address the complex problems of power relations. Colonized peoples have been compelled to define what it means to be human because there is a deep understanding of what it has meant to be considered not fully human, to be *savage*. The difficulties of such a process, however, have been bound inextricably to constructions of colonial relations around the binary of

colonizer and colonized. These two categories are not just a simple opposition but consist of several relations, some more clearly oppositional than others. Unlocking one set of relations most often requires unlocking and unsettling the different constituent parts of other relations. The binary of colonizer/colonized does not take into account, for example, the development of different layerings which have occurred within each group and across the two groups. Millions of indigenous peoples were ripped from their lands over several generations and shipped into slavery. The lands they went to as slaves were lands already taken from another group of indigenous peoples. Slavery was as much a system of imperialism as was the claiming of other peoples' territories. Other indigenous peoples were transported to various outposts in the same way as interesting plants and animals were reclinatized, in order to fulfil labour requirements. Hence there are large populations in some places of non-indigenous groups, also victims of colonialism, whose primary relationship and allegiance is often to the imperial power rather than to the colonized people of the place to which they themselves have been brought. To put it simply, indigenous peoples as commodities were transported to and fro across the empire. There were also sexual relations between colonizers and colonized which led to communities who were referred to as 'half-castes' or 'half-breeds', or stigmatized by some other specific term which often excluded them from belonging to either settler or indigenous societies. Sometimes children from 'mixed' sexual relationships were considered at least half-way civilized; at other times they were considered worse than civilized. Legislation was frequently used to regulate both the categories to which people were entitled to belong and the sorts of relations which one category of people could have with another.

Since the Second World War wars of independence and struggles for decolonization by former parts of European empires have shown us that attempts to break free can involve enormous violence: physical, social, economic, cultural and psychological. The struggle for freedom has been viewed by writers such as Fanon as a necessarily, inevitably violent process between two forces opposed to each other by their very nature.<sup>12</sup> Fanon argues further that 'Decolonization which sets out to change the order of the world is, obviously, a programme of complete disorder'.<sup>13</sup> This introduces another important principle embedded in imperialism, that of order. The principle of order provides the underlying connection between such things as: the nature of imperial social relations; the activities of Western science; the establishment of trade; the appropriation of sovereignty; the establishment of law. No great conspiracy had to occur for the simultaneous developments and activities which took place under imperialism because imperial activity

was driven by fundamentally similar underlying principles. Nandy refers to these principles as the 'code' or 'grammar' of imperialism.<sup>14</sup> The idea of code suggests that there is a deep structure which regulates and legitimates imperial practices.

The fact that indigenous societies had their own systems of order was dismissed through what Albert Memmi referred to as a series of negations: they were not fully human, they were not civilized enough to have systems, they were not literate, their languages and modes of thought were inadequate.<sup>15</sup> As Fanon and later writers such as Nandy have claimed, imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world. It was a process of systematic fragmentation which can still be seen in the disciplinary carve-up of the indigenous world: bones, mummies and skulls to the museums, art work to private collectors, languages to linguistics, 'customs' to anthropologists, beliefs and behaviours to psychologists. To discover how fragmented this process was one needs only to stand in a museum, a library, a bookshop, and ask where indigenous peoples are located. Fragmentation is not a phenomenon of postmodernism as many might claim. For indigenous peoples fragmentation has been the consequence of imperialism.

### Writing, History and Theory

A critical aspect of the struggle for self-determination has involved questions relating to our history as indigenous peoples and a critique of how we, as the Other, have been represented or excluded from various accounts. Every issue has been approached by indigenous peoples with a view to *rewriting* and *re-righting* our position in history. Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes. It is not simply about giving an oral account or a genealogical naming of the land and the events which raged over it, but a very powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying. The sense of history conveyed by these approaches is not the same thing as the discipline of history, and so our accounts collide, crash into each other.

Writing or literacy, in a very traditional sense of the word, has been used to determine the breaks between the past and the present, the beginning of history and the development of theory.<sup>16</sup> Writing has been viewed as the mark of a superior civilization and other societies have been judged, by this view, to be incapable of thinking critically and

objectively, or having distance from ideas and emotions. Writing is part of theorizing and writing is part of history. Writing, history and theory, then, are key sites in which Western research of the indigenous world have come together. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, however, from another perspective writing and especially writing theory are very intimidating ideas for many indigenous students. Having been immersed in the Western academy which claims theory as thoroughly Western, which has constructed all the rules by which the indigenous world has been theorized, indigenous voices have been overwhelmingly silenced. The act, let alone the art and science, of theorizing our own existence and realities is not something which many indigenous people assume is possible. Frantz Fanon's call for the indigenous intellectual and artist to create a new literature, to work in the cause of constructing a national culture after liberation still stands as a challenge. While this has been taken up by writers of fiction, many indigenous scholars who work in the social and other sciences struggle to write, theorize and research as indigenous scholars.

### **Is History Important for Indigenous Peoples?**

This may appear to be a trivial question as the answer most colonized people would give, I think, is that 'yes, history is important'. But I doubt if what they would be responding to is the notion of history which is understood by the Western academy. Poststructuralist critiques of history which draw heavily on French poststructural thought have focused on the characteristics and understandings of history as an Enlightenment or modernist project. Their critique is of both liberal and Marxist concepts of history. Feminists have argued similarly (but not necessarily from a poststructuralist position) that history is the story of a specific form of domination, namely of patriarchy, literally 'his-story'.

While acknowledging the critical approaches of poststructuralist theory and cultural studies the arguments which are debated at this level are not new to indigenous peoples. There are numerous oral stories which tell of what it means, what it feels like, to be present while your history is erased before your eyes, dismissed as irrelevant, ignored or rendered as the lunatic ravings of drunken old people. The negation of indigenous views of history was a critical part of asserting colonial ideology, partly because such views were regarded as clearly 'primitive' and 'incorrect' and mostly because they challenged and resisted the mission of colonization.

Indigenous peoples have also mounted a critique of the way history is told from the perspective of the colonizers. At the same time, however, indigenous groups have argued that history is important for

understanding the present and that reclaiming history is a critical and essential aspect of decolonization. The critique of Western history argues that history is a modernist project which has developed alongside imperial beliefs about the Other. History is assembled around a set of interconnected ideas which I will summarize briefly here. I have drawn on a wide range of discussions by indigenous people and by writers such as Robert Young, J. Abu-Lughod, Keith Jenkins, C. Steadman.<sup>17</sup>

*1. The idea that history is a totalizing discourse*

The concept of totality assumes the possibility and the desirability of being able to include absolutely all known knowledge into a coherent whole. In order for this to happen, classification systems, rules of practice and methods had to be developed to allow for knowledge to be selected and included in what counts as history.

*2. The idea that there is a universal history*

Although linked to the notion of totality, the concept of universal assumes that there are fundamental characteristics and values which all human subjects and societies share. It is the development of these universal characteristics which are of historical interest.

*3. The idea that history is one large chronology*

History is regarded as being about developments over time. It charts the progress of human endeavour through time. Chronology is important as a method because it allows events to be located at a point in time. The actual time events take place also makes them 'real' or factual. In order to begin the chronology a time of 'discovery' has to be established. Chronology is also important for attempting to go backwards and explain how and why things happened in the past.

*4. The idea that history is about development*

Implicit in the notion of development is the notion of progress. This assumes that societies move forward in stages of development much as ~~an infant grows into a fully developed a dult human being. The earliest phase of human development is regarded as primitive, simple and emotional. As societies develop they become less primitive, more~~ civilized, more rational, and their social structures become more complex and bureaucratic.

*5. The idea that history is about a self-actualizing human subject*

In this view humans have the potential to reach a stage in their development where they can be in total control of their faculties. There is an order of human development which moves, in stages, through the

fulfilment of basic needs, the development of emotions, the development of the intellect and the development of morality. Just as the individual moves through these stages, so do societies.

*6. The idea that the story of history can be told in one coherent narrative*

This idea suggests that we can assemble all the facts in an ordered way so that they tell us the truth or give us a very good idea of what really did happen in the past. In theory it means that historians can write a true history of the world.

*7. The idea that history as a discipline is innocent*

This idea says that 'facts' speak for themselves and that the historian simply researches the facts and puts them together. Once all the known facts are assembled they tell their own story, without any need of a theoretical explanation or interpretation by the historian. This idea also conveys the sense that history is pure as a discipline, that is, it is not implicated with other disciplines.

*8. The idea that history is constructed around binary categories*

This idea is linked to the historical method of chronology. In order for history to begin there has to be a period of beginning and some criteria for determining when something begins. In terms of history this was often attached to concepts of 'discovery', the development of literacy, or the development of a specific social formation. Everything before that time is designated as prehistorical, belonging to the realm of myths and traditions, 'outside' the domain.

*9. The idea that history is patriarchal*

This idea is linked to the notions of self-actualization and development, as women were regarded as being incapable of attaining the higher orders of development. Furthermore they were not significant in terms of the ways societies developed because they were not present in the bureaucracies or hierarchies where changes in social or political life were being determined.

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*Other key ideas*

Intersecting this set of ideas are some other important concepts. Literacy, as one example, was used as a criterion for assessing the development of a society and its progress to a stage where history can be said to begin. Even places such as India, China and Japan, however, which were very literate cultures prior to their 'discovery' by the West, were invoked through other categories which defined them as

uncivilized. Their literacy, in other words, did not count as a record of legitimate knowledge.

The German philosopher Hegel is usually regarded as the 'founding father' of history in the sense outlined here. This applies to both Liberal and Marxist views.<sup>18</sup> Hegel conceived of the fully human subject as someone capable of 'creating (his) own history'. However, Hegel did not simply invent the rules of history. As Robert Young argues, 'the entire Hegelian machinery simply lays down the operation of a system already in place, already operating in everyday life'.<sup>19</sup> It should also be self-evident that many of these ideas are predicated on a sense of Otherness. They are views which invite a comparison with 'something/someone else' which exists *on the outside*, such as the oriental, the 'Negro', the 'Jew', the 'Indian', the 'Aborigine'. Views about the Other had already existed for centuries in Europe, but during the Enlightenment these views became more formalized through science, philosophy and imperialism, into explicit systems of classification and 'regimes of truth'. The racialization of the human subject and the social order enabled comparisons to be made between the 'us' of the West and the 'them' of the Other. History was the story of people who were regarded as *fully human*. Others who were not regarded as human (that is, capable of self-actualization) were prehistoric. This notion is linked also to Hegel's master-slave construct which has been applied as a psychological category (by Freud) and as a system of social ordering.

A further set of important ideas embedded in the modernist view of history relates to the origins (causes) and nature of social change. The Enlightenment project involved new conceptions of society and of the individual based around the precepts of rationalism, individualism and capitalism. There was a general belief that not only could individuals remake themselves but so could societies. The modern industrial state became the point of contrast between the pre-modern and the modern. History in this view began with the emergence of the rational individual and the modern industrialized society. However, there is something more to this idea in terms of how history came to be conceptualized as a method. The connection to the industrial state is significant because it highlights what was regarded as being worthy of history. The people and groups who 'made' history were the people who developed the underpinnings of the state – the economists, scientists, bureaucrats and philosophers. That they were all men of a certain class and race was 'natural' because they were regarded (naturally) as fully rational, self-actualizing human beings capable, therefore, of creating social change, that is history. The day-to-day lives of 'ordinary' people, and of women, did not become a concern of history until much more recently.

### Contested Histories

For indigenous peoples, the critique of history is not unfamiliar, although it has now been claimed by postmodern theories. The idea of contested stories and multiple discourses about the past, by different communities, is closely linked to the politics of everyday contemporary indigenous life. It is very much a part of the fabric of communities that value oral ways of knowing. These contested accounts are stored within genealogies, within the landscape, within weavings and carvings, even within the personal names that many people carried. The means by which these histories were stored was through their systems of knowledge. Many of these systems have since been reclassified as oral *traditions* rather than histories.

Under colonialism indigenous peoples have struggled against a Western view of history and yet been complicit with that view. We have often allowed our 'histories' to be told and have then become outsiders as we heard them being retold. Schooling is directly implicated in this process. Through the curriculum and its underlying theory of knowledge, early schools redefined the world and where indigenous peoples were positioned within the world. From being direct descendants of sky and earth parents, Christianity positioned some of us as higher-order savages who deserved salvation in order that we could become children of God. Maps of the world reinforced our place on the periphery of the world, although we were still considered part of the Empire. This included having to learn new names for our own lands. Other symbols of our loyalty, such as the flag, were also an integral part of the imperial curriculum.<sup>20</sup> Our orientation to the world was already being redefined as we were being excluded systematically from the writing of the history of our own lands. This on its own may not have worked were it not for the actual material redefinition of our world which was occurring simultaneously through such things as the renaming and 'breaking in' of the land, the alienation and fragmentation of lands through legislation, the forced movement of people off their lands, and the social consequences which resulted in high sickness and mortality rates.

Indigenous attempts to reclaim land, language, knowledge and sovereignty have usually involved contested accounts of the past by colonizers and colonized. These have occurred in the courts, before various commissions, tribunals and official enquiries, in the media, in Parliament, in bars and on talkback radio. In these situations contested histories do not exist in the same cultural framework as they do when tribal or clan histories, for example, are being debated within the indigenous community itself. They are not simply struggles over 'facts' and 'truth'; the rules by which these struggles take place are never clear



(other than that we as the indigenous community know they are going to be stacked against us); and we are not the final arbiters of what really counts as the truth.

It is because of these issues that I ask the question, 'Is history in its modernist construction important or not important for indigenous peoples?' For many people who are presently engaged in research on indigenous land claims the answer would appear to be self-evident. We assume that when 'the truth comes out' it will prove that what happened was wrong or illegal and that therefore the system (tribunals, the courts, the government) will set things right. We believe that history is also about justice, that understanding history will enlighten our decisions about the future. *Wrong*. History is also about power. In fact history is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others. It is because of this relationship with power that we have been excluded, marginalized and 'Othered'. In this sense history is not important for indigenous peoples because a thousand accounts of the 'truth' will not alter the 'fact' that indigenous peoples are still marginal and do not possess the power to transform history into justice.

This leads then to several other questions. The one which is most relevant to this book is the one which asks, 'Why then has revisiting history been a significant part of decolonization?' The answer, I suggest, lies in the intersection of indigenous approaches to the past, of the modernist history project itself and of the resistance strategies which have been employed. Our colonial experience traps us in the project of modernity. There can be no 'postmodern' for us until we have settled some business of the modern. This does not mean that we do not understand or employ multiple discourses, or act in incredibly contradictory ways, or exercise power ourselves in multiple ways. It means that there is unfinished business, that we are still being colonized (and know it), and that we are still searching for justice.

*Coming to know the past* has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things. Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes. This in turn requires a theory or approach which helps us to engage with, understand and then act upon history. It is in this sense that the sites visited in this book begin with a critique of a Western view of history. Telling our stories from the past, reclaiming the past, giving testimony to the injustices of the past are all strategies

which are commonly employed by indigenous peoples struggling for justice. On the international scene it is extremely rare and unusual when indigenous accounts are accepted and acknowledged as valid interpretations of what has taken place. And yet, the need to tell our stories remains the powerful imperative of a powerful form of resistance.

### Is Writing Important for Indigenous Peoples?

As I am arguing, every aspect of the act of producing knowledge has influenced the ways in which indigenous ways of knowing have been represented. Reading, writing, talking, these are as fundamental to academic discourse as science, theories, methods, paradigms. To begin with reading, one might cite the talk in which Maori writer Patricia Grace undertook to show that 'Books Are Dangerous'.<sup>21</sup> She argues that there are four things that make many books dangerous to indigenous readers: (1) they do not reinforce our values, actions, customs, culture and identity; (2) when they tell us only about others they are saying that we do not exist; (3) they may be writing about us but are writing things which are untrue; and (4) they are writing about us but saying negative and insensitive things which tell us that we are not good. Although Grace is talking about school texts and journals, her comments apply also to academic writing. Much of what I have read has said that we do not exist, that if we do exist it is in terms which I cannot recognize, that we are no good and that what we think is not valid.

Leonie Pihama makes a similar point about film. In a review of *The Piano* she says: 'Maori people struggle to gain a voice, struggle to be heard from the margins, to have our stories heard, to have our descriptions of ourselves validated, to have access to the domain within which we can control and define those images which are held up as reflections of our realities.'<sup>22</sup> Representation is important as a concept because it gives the impression of 'the truth'. When I read texts, for example, I frequently have to orientate myself to a text world in which the centre of academic knowledge is either in Britain, the United States or Western Europe; in which words such as 'we', 'us', 'our', 'I' actually exclude me. It is a text world in which (if what I am interested in rates a mention) I have learned that I belong partly in the Third World, partly in the 'Women of Colour' world, partly in the black or African world. I read myself into these labels *partly* because I have also learned that, although there may be commonalities, they still do not entirely account for the experiences of indigenous peoples.

So, reading and interpretation present problems when we do not see ourselves in the text. There are problems, too, when we do see ourselves but can barely recognize ourselves through the representation. One

problem of being trained to read this way, or, more correctly, of learning to read this way over many years of academic study, is that we can adopt uncritically similar patterns of writing. We begin to write about ourselves as indigenous peoples as if we really were 'out there', the 'Other', with all the baggage that this entails. Another problem is that academic writing is a form of selecting, arranging and presenting knowledge. It privileges sets of texts, views about the history of an idea, what issues count as significant; and, by engaging in the same process uncritically, we too can render indigenous writers invisible or unimportant while reinforcing the validity of other writers. If we write without thinking critically about our writing, it can be dangerous. Writing can also be dangerous because we reinforce and maintain a style of discourse which is never innocent. Writing can be dangerous because sometimes we reveal ourselves in ways which get misappropriated and used against us. Writing can be dangerous because, by building on previous texts written about indigenous peoples, we continue to legitimate views about ourselves which are hostile to us. This is particularly true of academic writing, although journalistic and imaginative writing reinforce these 'myths'.

These attitudes inform what is sometimes referred to as either the 'Empire writes back' discourse or post-colonial literature. This kind of writing assumes that the centre does not necessarily have to be located at the imperial centre.<sup>23</sup> It is argued that the centre can be shifted ideologically through imagination and that this shifting can recreate history. Another perspective relates to the ability of 'native' writers to appropriate the language of the colonizer as the language of the colonized and to write so that it captures the ways in which the colonized actually use the language, their dialects and inflections, and in the way they make sense of their lives. Its other importance is that it speaks to an audience of people who have also been colonized. This is one of the ironies of many indigenous peoples' conferences where issues of indigenous language have to be debated in the language of the colonizers. Another variation of the debate relates to the use of literature to write about the terrible things which happened under colonialism or as a consequence of colonialism. These topics inevitably implicated the colonizers *and their literature* in the processes of cultural domination.

~~Yet another position, espoused in African literature by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, was to write in the languages of Africa. For Ngugi wa Thiong'o, to write in the language of the colonizers was to pay homage to them, while to write in the languages of Africa was to engage in an anti-imperialist struggle. He argued that language carries culture and the language of the colonizer became the means by which the 'mental universe of the colonized' was dominated.<sup>24</sup> This applied, in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's view, particularly to the language of writing. Whereas oral~~

languages were frequently still heard at home, the use of literature in association with schooling resulted in the alienation of a child from the child's history, geography, music and other aspects of culture.<sup>25</sup>

In discussing the politics of academic writing, in which research writing is a subset, Cherryl Smith argues that 'colonialism, racism and cultural imperialism do not occur only in society, outside of the gates of universities'.<sup>26</sup> Academic writing, she continues, is a way of "writing back" whilst at the same time writing to ourselves'.<sup>27</sup> The act of 'writing back' and simultaneously writing to ourselves is not simply an inversion of how we have learned to write academically.<sup>28</sup> The different audiences to whom we speak makes the task somewhat difficult. The scope of the literature which we use in our work contributes to a different framing of the issues. The oral arts and other forms of expression set our landscape in a different frame of reference. Our understandings of the academic disciplines within which we have been trained also frame our approaches. Even the use of pronouns such as 'I' and 'we' can cause difficulties when writing for several audiences, because while it may be acceptable now in academic writing, it is not always acceptable to indigenous audiences.<sup>29</sup>

Edward Said also asks the following questions: 'Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances? These it seems to me are the questions whose answers provide us with the ingredients making a politics of interpretation.'<sup>30</sup> These questions are important ones which are being asked in a variety of ways within our communities. They are asked, for example, about research, policy making and curriculum development. Said's comments, however, point to the problems of interpretation, in this case of academic writing. 'Who' is doing the writing is important in the politics of the Third World and African America, and indeed for indigenous peoples; it is even more important in the politics of how these worlds are being represented 'back to' the West. Although in the literary sense the imagination is crucial to writing, the use of language is not highly regarded in academic discourses which claim to be scientific. The concept of imagination, when employed as a sociological tool, is often reduced to a way of seeing and understanding the world, or a way of understanding how people either construct the world or are constructed by the world. As Toni Morrison argues, however, the imagination can be a way of sharing the world.<sup>31</sup> This means, according to Morrison, struggling to find the language to do this and then struggling to interpret and perform within that shared imagination.

### Writing Theory

Research is linked in all disciplines to theory. Research adds to, is generated from, creates or broadens our theoretical understandings.

Indigenous peoples have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory. Any consideration of the ways our origins have been examined, our histories recounted, our arts analysed, our cultures dissected, measured, torn apart and distorted back to us will suggest that theories have not looked sympathetically or ethically at us. Writing research is often considered marginally more important than writing theory, providing it results in tangible benefits for farmers, economists, industries and sick people. For indigenous peoples, most of the theorizing has been driven by anthropological approaches. These approaches have shown enormous concern for our origins as peoples and for aspects of our linguistic and material culture.

The development of theories by indigenous scholars which attempt to explain our existence in contemporary society (as opposed to the 'traditional' society constructed under modernism) has only just begun. Not all these theories claim to be derived from some 'pure' sense of what it means to be indigenous, nor do they claim to be theories which have been developed in a vacuum separated from any association with civil and human rights movements, other nationalist struggles or other theoretical approaches. What is claimed, however, is that new ways of theorizing by indigenous scholars are grounded in a real sense of, and sensitivity towards, what it means to be an indigenous person. As Kathie Irwin urges, 'We don't need anyone else developing the tools which will help us to come to terms with who we are. We can and will do this work. Real power lies with those who design the tools – it always has. This power is ours'.<sup>32</sup> Contained within this imperative is a sense of being able to determine priorities, to bring to the centre those issues of our own choosing, and to discuss them amongst ourselves.

I am arguing that theory at its most simple level is important for indigenous peoples. At the very least it helps make sense of reality. It enables us to make assumptions and predictions about the world in which we live. It contains within it a method or methods for selecting and arranging, for prioritising and legitimating what we see and do. Theory enables us to deal with contradictions and uncertainties. Perhaps more significantly, it gives us space to plan, to strategize, to take greater control over our resistances. The language of a theory can also be used as a way of organising and determining action. It helps us to interpret what is being told to us, and to predict the consequences of what is being promised. Theory can also protect us because it contains within it a way of putting reality into perspective. If it is a good theory it also allows for new ideas and ways of looking at things to be incorporated constantly without the need to search constantly for new theories.

A dilemma posed by such a thorough critical approach to history, writing and theory is that whilst we may reject or dismiss them, this does

not make them go away, nor does the critique necessarily offer the alternatives. We live simultaneously within such views while needing to pose, contest and struggle for the legitimacy of oppositional or alternative histories, theories and ways of writing. At some points there is, there has to be, dialogue across the boundaries of oppositions. This has to be because we constantly collide with dominant views while we are attempting to transform our lives on a larger scale than our own localized circumstances. This means struggling to make sense of our own world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful.

Part of the exercise is about recovering our own stories of the past. This is inextricably bound to a recovery of our language and epistemological foundations. It is also about reconciling and reprioritizing what is really important about the past with what is important about the present. These issues raise significant questions for indigenous communities who are not only beginning to fight back against the invasion of their communities by academic, corporate and populist researchers, but to think about, and carry out research, on their own concerns. One of the problems discussed in this first section of this book is that the methodologies and methods of research, the theories that inform them, the questions which they generate and the writing styles they employ, all become significant acts which need to be considered carefully and critically before being applied. In other words, they need to be 'decolonized'. Decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes.

As a site of struggle research has a significance for indigenous peoples that is embedded in our history under the gaze of Western imperialism and Western science. It is framed by our attempts to escape the penetration and surveillance of that gaze whilst simultaneously reordering and reconstituting ourselves as indigenous human beings in a state of ongoing crisis. Research has not been neutral in its objectification of the Other. Objectification is a process of dehumanization. In its clear links to Western knowledge research has generated a particular relationship to indigenous peoples which continues to be problematic. At the same time, however, new pressures which have resulted from our own politics of self-determination, of wanting greater participation in, or control over, what happens to us, and from changes in the global environment, have meant that there is a much more active and knowing engagement in the activity of research by indigenous peoples. Many indigenous groups, communities and organisations are thinking about, talking about,

and carrying out research activities of various kinds. In this chapter I have suggested that it is important to have a critical understanding of some of the tools of research – not just the obvious technical tools but the conceptual tools, the ones which make us feel uncomfortable, which we avoid, for which we have no easy response.

*I lack imagination you say  
No. I lack language.  
The language to clarify  
my resistance to the literate....*

Cherrie Moraga<sup>33</sup>

### Notes

- 1 Lorde, Audre (1979), 'The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House', comments at 'The personal and the Political' panel, Second Sex Conference, reproduced in Moraga, C. and G. Anzaldúa (1981), *This Bridge Called My Back*, Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, New York, pp. 98–101.
- 2 See Sale, K. (1990), *The Conquest of Paradise, Christopher and the Columbian Legacy*, Alfred Knopf, New York.
- 3 See Churchill, W. (1994), *Indians Are Us? Culture and Genocide in North America*, Common Courage Press, Maine.
- 4 Trask, H. K. (1993), *From a Native Daughter*, Common Courage Press, Maine, p. 7.
- 5 Lehman, G. (1996), 'Life's Quiet Companion', paper, Riawunna Centre for Aboriginal Studies, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia.
- 6 Giddens, A. (1989), *Sociology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 530–3.
- 7 The term 'rules of practice' comes from Foucault. See, for this encounter, Salmond, A. (1991), *Two Worlds, First Meetings Between Maori and Europeans 1642–1772*, Viking, Auckland.
- 8 Mackenzie, J. R. (1990), *Imperialism and the Natural World*, Manchester University Press, England.
- 9 Thompson, A. S. (1859), *The Story of New Zealand: Past and Present, Savage and Civilized*, John Murray, London, p. 82.
- 10 Goldberg, D. T. (1993), *Racist Culture, Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, Blackwell, Oxford. See also Sardar, Z., A. Nandy and W. Davies (1993), *Barbaric Others, A Manifesto of Western Racism*, Pluto Press, London.
- 11 Fanon, Frantz (1990), *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin, London.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 27–8.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 14 Nandy, A. (1989), *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- 15 Memmi, A. (1991), *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Beacon Press, Boston, p. 83.
- 16 For a critique of these views refer to Street, B. V. (1984), *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- 17 I have drawn on a wide range of discussions both by indigenous people and by various writers such as Robert Young, J. Abu-Lughod, Keith Jenkins and C. Steadman. See, for example, Young, R. (1990), *White Mythologies, Writing, History*

- and the West*, Routledge, London; Abu-Lughood, J. (1989), 'On the Remaking of History. How to Reinvent the Past', in *Remaking History*, Dia Art Foundation, Bay Press, Seattle, pp. 111–29; Steadman, C. (1992), 'Culture, Cultural Studies and the Historians', in *Cultural Studies*, eds G. Nelson, P. A. Treicher and L. Grossberg, Routledge, New York, pp. 613–20; Trask, *From a Native Daughter*.
- 18 Young, *White Mythologies*.
- 19 *Ibid.* p. 3.
- 20 Mangan, J. (1993), *The Imperial Curriculum – Racial Images and Education in the British Colonial Experience*, Routledge, London.
- 21 Grace, P. (1985), 'Books are Dangerous', paper presented at the Fourth Early Childhood Convention, Wellington, New Zealand.
- 22 Pihama, L. (1994), 'Are Films Dangerous? A Maori Woman's Perspective on *The Piano*', *Hecate*, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 241.
- 23 Ashcroft, B., G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin (1989), *The Empire Writes Back, Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, Routledge, London.
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- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Smith, C.W. (1994), 'Kimihia Te Matauranga: Colonization and Iwi Development', MA thesis, University of Auckland, New Zealand, p. 13.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 28 van Dijk, T. A. (1989), *Elite Discourses and Racism*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, California.
- 29 Smith, L. T. (1994), 'In Search of a Language and a Shareable Imaginative World: E Kore Taku Moe, E Riro i a Koe', *Hecate*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 162–74.
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- 31 Morrison, T. (1993), *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Vintage Books, New York.
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- 33 Moraga, Cherrie (1983), quoted by G. Anzaldúa, in 'Speaking Tongues: a Letter to 3rd World Women Writers', in *This Bridge Called My Back*, p. 166.