

Beyond Erasure:

Indigenous Genocide Denial and Settler Colonialism

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Abstract: I argue that Indigenous genocide denial allows for the continuation and emergence of settler colonial ideology, processes, and practices. Decolonial and sovereignty efforts that emphasize Indigenous cultural resurgence are essential to challenge the internalization and naturalization of settler colonial ideals.

While *external* modes of colonialism include the removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands and the recasting of Native bodies and land as resources to be exploited, *internal* modes include biopolitical and geopolitical methods of control, such as schooling, criminalization, segregation, and minoritizing (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Additionally, I argue that heteropatriarchal ideals have been internalized and naturalized within Indigenous communities. The presence of homophobia, transphobia, and sexism within Indigenous communities demonstrate the pervasiveness of settler colonialism. Finally, I argue that cultural resurgent decolonial and sovereignty efforts challenge the internalization of settler colonial ideals by revitalizing Indigenous cultural traditions that accept gender and sexuality diversity and emphasize the power and authority of women.

The designation of “genocide” to describe the crimes that settlers inflicted upon Indigenous Peoples in the Americas remains controversial within the United States. In the U.S. imaginary, Indigenous genocide is largely denied, erased, or framed as inevitable. Education scholars argue that history curriculum in K-12 schools maintains this widespread Indigenous genocide denial. Essentially, K-12 history curriculum implies the “extinction” of Native Americans, while justifying settler actions toward Indigenous populations (Shear, Knowles, Soden, & Castro, 2015). This whitewashing of history is a form of continued colonization that marginalizes and erases modern Indigenous perspectives (Shear et al., 2015). Research has overwhelmingly focused on how genocide denial in K-12 schools erases Indigenous Peoples from U.S. history, yet erasure is not the only consequence of genocide denial. Erasure-only discourse ignores the ways that genocide denial allows for the continuation and emergence of settler colonial ideology, processes, and practices. Patrick Wolfe (2006) describes the processes of settler colonialism as a “structure not an event,” arguing that settler colonialism cannot be situated in the past as a singular nor series of historical events. Indigenous genocide denial functions as a method of settler colonialism. Situating genocide denial within a settler colonial framework allows for an analysis of how genocide denial functions differently within the U.S. settler colonial state.

I build upon Indigenous research to argue that Indigenous genocide denial not only erases and marginalizes Indigenous Peoples, but also allows for the continuation and emergence of settler colonial processes and practices. Additionally, I argue that simply acknowledging Indigenous genocide within and outside K-12 history curriculum is insufficient to challenge settler colonialism. The internalization and naturalization of settler colonial ideals within non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities renders genocide acknowledgment as insufficient to

challenge settler colonialism. Further, I argue that acknowledgment that only addresses genocide and not settler colonialism further perpetuates settler colonialism. Additionally, the invisibility or erasure discourse that dominates Indigenous genocide denial research fails to acknowledge the hypervisibility of Indigenous Peoples. I argue that genocide denial and settler colonialism simultaneously render Indigenous Peoples as both invisible and hypervisible. Finally, I argue that decolonization, Indigenization, cultural resurgence, and sovereignty are necessary to challenge settler colonialism and Indigenous genocide denial.

Wolfe (2006) describes settler colonialism as a “logic of elimination” meaning that it is “inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal.” Essentially, he argues that settler colonialism is a larger category than genocide, in the sense that it includes assimilatory and other practices common in settler states. Further, Tuck (Unangax) and Yang argue that settler colonialism simultaneously operates through both internal and external colonial modes. External modes of colonialism are extractive and include the removal of Indigenous Peoples from their lands and the recasting of Native bodies and land as resources to be exploited (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Internal modes refer to the biopolitical and geopolitical management of Indigenous populations, land, flora, and fauna (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Internal modes of colonialism include the criminalization of Indigenous practices, imprisonment, minoritizing, schooling, policing, segregation, and surveillance (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Settler colonialism is the “total appropriation of Indigenous life and land” rather than the selective extraction of profit-producing resources (Tuck & Yang, 2012). This distinction is necessary to acknowledge the ways that settler colonialism functions differently from other forms of colonialism. Settler colonialism requires the removal of Indigenous Peoples to settle the land and to establish settler sovereignty

(Tuck & Yang, 2012). Further, settler sovereignty and the violence of removal is “reasserted each day of occupation” (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

The denial of Indigenous genocide functions as a form of settler colonialism through both external and internal methods of colonialism. In the U.S., genocide denial within K-12 and collegiate educational systems functions as an internal mode of settler colonialism. Further, Wolfe (2006) states that “settler colonialism is premised on the securing- the obtaining and the maintaining- of territory, but not in a particular way.” Genocide denial is a method of maintaining territory for the settler state by denying that settlers committed atrocities to eliminate Indigenous Peoples to take their land. In the U.S. imaginary, settlers are characterized as immigrants who were fleeing persecution and sought a new home to build their lives. These settlers collaborated with the “savage” Indians until they were attacked and forced to defend themselves. This re-telling of settler and Indigenous interactions is one that is used to legitimate and justify settler claims to land by emphasizing the “natural” death of Indigenous Peoples from diseases, collaboration with Indigenous tribes, wars and battles instead of massacres, and the signing of “valid” and “fair” treaties. While many of these “histories” are taught in K-12 curriculum, they are reaffirmed through collegiate education and popular culture references.

Despite the importance of acknowledging Indigenous genocide within the U.S., acknowledgment is insufficient to challenge settler colonialism. Settler colonial ideology is internalized and naturalized among non-Native and Indigenous communities through internal modes of colonialism. Settler colonialism moves beyond a re-telling of history to establish policies and procedures that uphold the settler state and ensure settler futurity. Due to the pervasiveness of settler colonialism, settlers do not have a framework for “another” way within the U.S. Settler colonial ideals and values including, private property, individualism,

Christianity, patriarchal systems, lineage, and governance, medicalized healing, and capitalism are embedded within U.S. policies, structures, families, schools, churches, and every space within the settler state.

Further, the pervasiveness of settler colonial ideology is most clearly demonstrated by the presence of these ideals within Indigenous communities. Within Indigenous tribal nations, settler colonial ideals have infiltrated traditions and have become naturalized as the “way it’s always been.” For instance, heteropatriarchal ideals have supplanted Indigenous traditions of gender and sexuality diversity within many Indigenous communities. The same-sex marriage bans within the Cherokee and Navajo Nations demonstrates the pervasiveness of heteropatriarchal settler colonial ideals (Nenetdale, 2017, Justice, 2010). Additionally, the discrimination against Indigenous Two-Spirits within their own communities/nations demonstrates the infiltration of heteropatriarchal settler colonial ideals (Gilley, 2006). These examples of heteropatriarchal ideals within Indigenous tribal nations represents the internalization of settler colonial ideals. However, Indigenous Peoples have and continue to be pressured to conform to settler colonial culture in order to gain legitimacy and to be perceived as “civilized.”

The internalization and naturalization of settler colonial ideals is not the only issue associated with simply acknowledging Indigenous genocide. Many Indigenous scholars argue that “genocide” is inadequate to acknowledge the continuation of colonial processes within the U.S. and Canada. Essentially, Indigenous scholars argue that genocide framework often positions harm in the past, ignoring the ongoing settler colonial structures and processes (Simpson, 2014). The U.S. and Canada already position harms to Indigenous Peoples as situated in the past as evidenced by Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper’s apology in 2008 and the U.S. apology written in 2009. Both apologies refer only to past events, ignoring the ongoing settler colonial

processes and structures. While neither Canada nor the U.S. formally acknowledge Indigenous genocide, the naming of Indigenous genocide would not change the ways these settler states navigate their relationships with Indigenous Peoples. Specifically, the designation of genocide would likely prompt more apologies for past actions, after all, the Canadian apology only referred to the harms associated with the residential school system and not any other settler colonial actions. These apologies fail to address the ongoing settler colonial policies and structures that continue to harm Indigenous Peoples. Further, they continue to position Indigenous Peoples in the past when referring to their relationships with land, traditions, and sovereignty. Any acknowledgment of Indigenous genocide must address settler colonialism, or it will further perpetuate settler colonialism. Simply, settler colonialism will not disappear just from the inclusion of Indigenous genocide in the U.S. and Canadian narratives.

Indigenous genocide denial discourse is often focused on the erasure and invisibility of Indigenous Peoples. While genocide denial does erase Indigenous history, this chapter moves beyond the typical “invisibility rhetoric” by emphasizing how genocide denial perpetuates settler colonialism. Research indicates that K-12 history curriculum contributes tremendously to the widespread genocide denial in the U.S. Studies reveal that history curriculum overwhelmingly portrays Native Americans as outsiders, “existing in the distant past” who had a “cooperation-to-conflict” relationship with settlers and whose “removal” was an “inevitable outcome of westward expansion” (Shear et al., 2015). In a comprehensive study, researchers found that most textbooks only mention Natives prior to the 1900s and then they disappear from textbooks (Shear et al., 2015). The disappearance of Natives in textbooks, implies that Indigenous Peoples went extinct, but not from genocidal and settler colonial acts. The textbooks overwhelmingly state that Indigenous Peoples died from diseases or were the cause of their own demise by initiating

attacks or wars (Shear et al., 2015). Further, in the textbooks, Natives are overwhelmingly portrayed as bloodthirsty savages, alcoholics, lazy, and thieves (Shear et al., 2015). These stereotypes persist today and have formed a deficit narrative that dominates with popular culture references. The erasure of Indigenous Peoples and genocide eliminates the need to address settler colonialism in the curriculum. In this way, genocide denial in K-12 history curriculum perpetuates settler colonialism by erasing modern Indigenous perspectives and ongoing settler colonial structures. Additionally, K-12 history textbooks often minimize Indigenous Peoples cultures and histories (Shear et al., 2015). The curriculum overgeneralizes Indigenous Peoples by not providing information about the unique perspectives and experiences of various Indigenous Peoples. K-12 history curriculum contributes to widespread genocide denial and settler colonialism.

Settler colonialism and genocide denial are also perpetuated within universities. la paperson (2017) states that the “university is settler colonial”, meaning that the university’s environment, policies, and procedures are settler colonial. Universities often lack Native faculty and staff, large populations of Native students, resources for Indigenous students, and Indigenous studies courses (Waterman, Lowe, & Shotton, 2018). Additionally, universities often focus on how Native students can and should adapt rather than how college programs and environment can be more welcoming to Native students (Waterman et al., 2018). Further, Native students, their issues, and perspectives are marginalized due to the relatively small numbers of Indigenous students (Waterman et al., 2018). The lack of university resources for Indigenous students produces an expectation that Native students should be “experts” on Indigeneity, not just for their own tribes or nations, but for all Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous students are often burdened with teaching classmates and instructors about tribal nations (Waterman et al., 2018).

Due to the settler colonial environment, Indigenous students often engage in surveillance, which is the act of decreasing visibility to navigate college campuses without being called out for being “different”. This is a self-induced invisibility to protect oneself from the settler colonial environment in colleges.

Today, Indigenous Peoples are often referred to as “invisible” populations within academia and popular culture. Despite the fact that over 5.2 million Native Americans live in the United States, 40 percent of Americans think Native Americans no longer exist; while 62 percent of Americans living outside of Indian Country have never met a Native American (Campisteguy, Heilbronner, Nakamura-Rybak, 2018). These findings demonstrate the invisibility of Indigenous Peoples through historical accounts, but also, how Indigenous people are identified in daily life. In reality, many of the Americans “who have never met a Native American” have probably met an Indigenous person but did not acknowledge the individual as Native. Indigenous recognition often lies outside of the Indigenous individuals’ control. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in the U.S. overwhelmingly refer to the invisibility of Indigenous Peoples. Research, diversity-focused studies and reports have maintained this “invisibility” discourse regarding Indigenous populations. The invisibility discourse has consequences for Indigenous populations. Issues that disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples are often ignored because we are perceived as too small of a population to attract researchers, media coverage, or money and resources to address problems. Specifically, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) demonstrates the way the invisibility discourse harms Indigenous Peoples. According to a report funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, 4 out of 5 Native women experience violence, and murder is the third-leading cause of death among Native women (Bachman, Zaykowski, Kallmyer, Poteyeva, & Lanier, 2008). Further, there were 5,712 cases of

MMIWG in 2016, but only 116 of the cases were logged in the DOJ database. Despite the extremely high numbers of MMIWG in the U.S., police forces have overwhelmingly failed to track MMIWG and legislation to standardize tracking has yet to be passed (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018). The MMIWG represents the ongoing settler colonial processes that cast Indigenous women's bodies as resources to be extracted (Simpson, 2014). The refusal to appropriately address the MMIWG demonstrates settler colonial ideology that renders Indigenous Peoples invisible.

Settler colonial processes and genocide denial attempt to erase Indigenous Peoples from history and present-day society. However, in many ways, these mechanisms also render Indigenous Peoples hypervisible. The settler state attempts to make Indigenous traditions and cultures invisible so settlers can appropriate Indigenous cultures and control Native narratives. Adrienne Keene, Cherokee Nation, (2015) writes that "Native peoples are only ever represented as a stock set of stereotypes, including: savage warriors, subservient squ*ws, or mystical shamans, and always set in the historic past, in contrast to contemporary modernity." In popular culture, Indigenous people are underrepresented and misrepresented in TV shows, movies, books, photography, and the media. When *National Geographic* hires non-Native photographers and writers to publish photos and articles, they typically portray the tired trope of the "stoic Indian" who lives on an impoverished reservation where alcoholism and drug addiction are common. Indigenous photographers rarely receive the same attention as non-Native photographers and writers (Wilbur & Keene, 2019). In TV shows and films, Indigenous Peoples are overwhelmingly represented as criminals or savages from the past who terrorized white settlers. Media portrayals build upon what Americans learn in K-12 history curriculum to

solidify settler colonial ideology that justifies the U.S. settler state. Further, these representations ignore the fact that 78 percent of Indigenous people live outside of reservations (OMH, 2018).

Additionally, the use of Native imagery and names for sports team mascots, businesses, and military weapons and operations function to make Indigenous Peoples invisible and hypervisible. Some of the most well-known sports teams' mascots, such as the Washington Redskins and Chief Wahoo from the Cleveland Indians have become points of contention within popular culture. Many sports teams at schools throughout the U.S. use Native imagery, names, or pseudo-Indian rituals. What is absent from many debates regarding sports team mascots, is the way that they posit a certain type of Native imagery that is far removed from real lived Indigenous experiences. Most media portrayals fail to acknowledge Indigenous resilience and resistance despite genocidal efforts and ongoing settler colonialism. These portrayals are harmful because they dictate how Indigenous Peoples are perceived within the U.S. imaginary. The *Reclaiming Native Truth* report found that most Americans learn about Natives from popular culture and media (Campisteguy et al., 2018). Americans are not learning about Indigenous Peoples in schools nor from actual Natives, but instead, rely on media and popular culture to teach them about Indigenous Peoples. When popular culture and media portrayals rely on deficit narratives to portray Indigenous Peoples, they are (mis)educating the public.

The hypervisibility of Indigenous Peoples is also perpetuated through cultural appropriation. In the simplest terms, cultural appropriation is the “taking, from a culture that is not one’s own, intellectual property, cultural expressions and artifacts, history and ways of knowledge” (Tobias, L.K. in Keene, 2016). Cultural appropriation demonstrates the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples and represents the power imbalance between settlers and Indigenous Peoples. In the U.S. some of the most commonly appropriated items include, spiritual

practices, such as prayer bundles and smudging; the use of war bonnets and headdresses; dreamcatchers; and Halloween costumes. The hypervisibility of Indigenous Peoples through cultural appropriation, media portrayals, and Native mascots represents a form of settler colonialism that is influenced by genocide denial. The erasure of Indigenous genocide allows for the settler state to appropriate and re-write Indigenous narratives for their own benefit. Non-Indigenous settlers make money off Indigenous cultural items and imagery. Despite the fact that until the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, Indigenous traditions were criminalized. The erasure of this genocidal settler colonial history allows for the continuation of settler colonial practices that appropriate and control Indigenous narratives and traditions.

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, genocide denial is inextricably linked to settler colonialism. Indigenous genocide denial functions as a method of settler colonialism that simultaneously renders Indigenous Peoples invisible and hypervisible. By situating genocide denial within settler colonialism, it becomes necessary to acknowledge and challenge settler colonialism within Indigenous genocide discourse. In order to appropriately challenge settler colonialism and genocide denial, scholars must be committed to decolonization and Indigenization efforts that center cultural resurgence and Indigenous sovereignty. While many scholars and communities call for decolonization, Indigenization is necessary to challenge settler colonialism. Stephen Gilchrist (Yamatki People) states that “decolonizing is undoing, Indigenizing is doing” (Waterman et al., 2018). Essentially, decolonization disrupts colonial processes while Indigenization establishes a new or different way to function. Indigenization refers to the “process of naturalizing Indigenous knowledge systems and making them evident to transform spaces, places, and hearts” (Antoine, Mason, Mason, Palahicky, & Rodriguez de France, n.d.). Further, Indigenization efforts should always emphasize cultural resurgence.

Cultural resurgent practices “draw critically on the past with an eye to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present” (Coulthard, 2014). Cultural resurgence acknowledges the role of Indigenous traditions to challenge settler colonialism. Specifically, Indigenization that emphasizes cultural resurgence focuses on developing culturally appropriate practices and policies for the tribal nation(s) being served. Indigenization and decolonization efforts include Indigenous genocide and settler colonialism education in K-12 and higher education curriculum. Additionally, Indigenization challenges the popular culture references and cultural appropriative practices. By naturalizing Indigenous knowledge, Native traditions, names, and imagery retain their intended meaning and importance in the settler state imaginary. Indigenization emphasizes the centering of Indigenous perspectives, requiring the inclusion and acceptance of Indigenous actors, actresses, photographers, writers, and other roles to regain control of Indigenous narratives.

Additionally, Indigenization and decolonization efforts must support Indigenous sovereignty movements. Sovereignty refers to the political and cultural campaigns to gain self-determination and self-governance. According to the *Reclaiming Native Truth* report (2018), most Americans do not support sovereignty, partly because they don’t understand what it is and its importance for Natives (Campisteguy et al., 2018). Genocide and settler colonial discourses must acknowledge Indigenous tribal nations as sovereign in the U.S. Importantly, the U.S. maintains settler colonialism by refusing to fully engage with Indigenous nations and tribes as sovereign entities. Often, Indigenous nations and tribes are characterized as existing within settler sovereignty rather than as a nation that existed and continues to exist as a separate nation (Simpson, 2014). Specifically, more attention needs to be focused on settler state recognition practices which deny federal recognition to many Indigenous tribal nations.

Since widespread genocide denial functions as a method of settler colonialism, it is necessary for both genocide and Indigenous studies scholars to engage in decolonization and Indigenization efforts that emphasize cultural resurgence and sovereignty. Simply acknowledging Indigenous genocide is insufficient to disrupt settler colonialism. Instead, decolonization and Indigenization efforts in K-12 education, higher education, and in popular culture challenge both the widespread genocide denial and settler colonialism. Specifically, these efforts combat the invisibility and hypervisibility of Indigenous Peoples by centering Indigenous perspectives and emphasizing the importance of sovereignty. The U.S. settler state continues to operate in a way that requires that “Indigenous peoples must be erased, must be made into ghosts” (Tuck and Ree, forthcoming, as cited in Tuck & Yang, 2012). The combination of decolonization, Indigenization, cultural resurgence, and Indigenous sovereignty allows us to challenge the settler state. Without these efforts, genocide discourses will fail to move beyond acknowledgment and erasure rhetoric to challenge settler colonialism.

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