Moving through Colonial Wreckage and Pedagogies of Survivance

Response to Kneller Lecture

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In the 2020 Kneller Lecture,[1] Leigh Patel outlined how colonial epistemologies and ideologies have shaped Western narratives of the history of North America/Turtle Island and the specific role that land, culture, identity are conceptualized within them.[2] Specifically, Patel illustrated how settler colonial and white supremacist ways of knowing manifested in particular images and structures of indigenous disposability (physical bodies as well as bodies of knowledge) as well as the appropriation of environmental and economic resources. Patel's presentation posed visual and textual analysis of "Pittsburgh" as a specific place in terms of historical time and space. Moreover, Patel provided insightful critique of how our conceptions of "the local" reflect settler colonial ways of knowing and their effects on educational theorizing, research and classroom practice.[3]

Then, as Patel notes in her written account, IT happened. In March 2020, The United States took measures to acknowledge and adapt to what is now classified as the global pandemic of COVID-19. For some people, the coronavirus made visible and personal the catastrophic realities of a public health crisis as well as the fear, anxiety and trauma that accompanies it. My aim here is not to diminish the very emotional and material effects of COVID-19 (including shock, sadness and human loss) that many folks in the United States have experienced related to COVID-19.[4] Quite the contrary, I am moved by Arundhati Roy's call to think of the "Pandemic as Portal" to leave behind (or at least interrogate) ways of thinking *and living* that reinforce global capitalism, racial inequities, and the fungibility of Black, indigenous and refugee persons. Roy writes:

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION 2020 | Heather Greenhalgh-Spencer, editor

> Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.
>
> We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.[5]

Roy invites us to "break with the past and imagine [their] world anew." With the metaphor of portal as gateway, Roy suggests we "walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world." Both Roy and Patel encourage us to adopt collectivist ways of thinking and acting that honor and *fight for* the interdependent web of relations between forms of life. However, I detect a slight difference in their arguments. Whereas it appears Patel argues for a type of return to "traditional" [read pure] indigenous (including Black and Brown) ways of thinking that may be free from colonialism, I think Roy implies a type of embodied reckoning with how we are all complicit in (colonial) thinking: thus the call to walk lightly. Patel emphasizes the weight of the past – as both problem and solution. In contrast, Roy implores us to look towards the future with a desire and openness for the not yet. Like Roy, I wonder if we might look towards the future by walking lightly, and with little luggage. In order to walk lightly with little luggage, we must sift through the emotional, material, and conceptual wreckage including our attachments to philosophical concepts embedded in contemporary educational theorizing, such as ontology and epistemology.

To that extent, I'd like to draw on the scholarship of Troy Richardson (Saponi/Tuscarora) that interrogates the entanglements of western/continental philosophy with indigenous cosmologies and ways of living. A philosopher of education and a scholar of Critical Indigenous Theory, Richardson is particularly adept at parsing out points of theoretical connection and distinction within the cacophonous dialogue on the coloniality of Being. Richardson alerts us to

DOI: 10.47925/76.4.010

the dangers of applying constructs such as epistemology and ontology in the struggle to embrace a decolonial attitude due to their necessarily exclusionary and damaging dimensions. He writes:

> …ontology is not a neutral term or unproblematic transcendental concept with which philosophers of education can develop de-colonial relations to counter social hierarchies. The very dehumanization of racialized peoples stems from the interrogation of being posed by modern western philosophy as a response to the assumed lack of being of colonized, racialized peoples (or at the very least the question of their being).[6]

Here, Richardson deploys the framework of a de-colonial attitude that centers the experiences of minoritized and racialized peoples and that "makes space for the enunciation of non-Western cosmologies and for the expression of different cultural, political and social memories."[7]

Drawing from Richardson's provocative work on decoloniality, I suggest we pivot our attention away from epistemology towards a less person-centered approach to imagining the possibilities of life, learning, pedagogy, sociality and ethical relations. While philosophers of education have shifted the "dominant" conversation from "Being" towards that of "Becoming" and an emphasis on relationality, our theorizing still **centers** ways of knowing (epistemology) and the human and human-ness as the primary (if not only) actor – and for purposes of this talk – actor in motion.

In an effort to move toward decolonial ontologies in philosophy of education, I suggest we decenter epistemology and contemplate how place and space might serve as pedagogical sites that orient ways of being/moving in which humans cannot nor should not claim authority over forms of intelligence and rights/rites of passage.[8] As indigenous philosophers have noted, humans should not claim authority over the intelligence and rights of all forms of life – including land, animals, sky, spirit, water, etc. This form of androcentrism is part of the coloniality of power. Moreover, humans cannot claim authority over land, despite rampant colonial capitalist attempts at territorialism, extraction

and accumulation. There is no place that is pure or free from the entanglements of colonial power. But these entanglements or web of relations rooted in place(s) can certainly be educative. What we might consider, then, is to engage in corporeal pedagogies that allow us to inter-act with the historical traffic of particular places and spaces.

My thinking here draws from what Nigerian/Irish theorist Jayne Ifekewenigwe terms the "entanglements of belonging" and what Anishnaabeg writer Leanne Simpson terms as "land as pedagogy."[9] For both Ifekewenigwe and Simpson, place is not just a matter of geographical location – or the 'where' of identity and knowledge production. Instead, 'place' is a dynamic force that animates pedagogies of (bio)diversity, interdependence and survivance.[10] To be clear, land and place are always already imbued in colonial relations of power, and in turn, the embodied effects of these relations are inscribed in/on the flesh, bones and psyches of particular persons and communities. Land as pedagogy, then, acknowledges how place involves elements of "the natural," but also that "nature" is never untouched by histories of trauma, destruction, displacement and death. As Deborah Miranda notes, "we walk alongside power, or through it, carrying our illnesses, fearing all giving has gone to grave."[11] Yet, as survivance implies, a decolonial option imagines place as a site of both struggle and resistance; haunting and healing.

Although Ifekwunigwe writes from the position of the transnational and Simpson writes from the position of indigeneity, both theorize understandings of **locality and place** that take into account mobility and change across time and space. Simpson characterizes this type of place-based intelligence through the metaphor of "land as pedagogy" whereas Ifekwunigwe describes this as a "framework of roots/routes/detours." Both theorists are interested in tracking the ways in which colonialisms have polluted the natural, socio-cultural and landscapes of particular places. Yet, they also recognize how living beings have adapted and resisted the ongoing structures of colonization through "rebellious transformation" and "the dance of diasporic double consciousness."[12] What particularly interests me here is the connection between land/place, movement and embodied resurgence.

DOI: 10.47925/76.4.010

The long history of indigenous and First Nations pedagogies of resurgence is well documented.[13] Part of what characterizes resurgence is the complex solidarities among nations, tribes, and clans, across time and space. Indigenous resilience, resistance and resurgence occurs through embodied practices of naming and interrupting historical and ongoing structures and relations of colonial power. Political, social and community leaders regularly put their bodies on the line to protest the intergenerational trauma caused by residential schooling, violence against indigenous women and girls and the ongoing violation and desecration of sacred lands. From poetry to powwows, indigenous communities disrupt colonial ways of thinking and being through speaking, drumming and dancing. And, I would argue, that all of these forms of resurgence reflect a decolonial way of being that remembers and honors the interdependence of land/place/humans and all forms of life.

Let me give a brief example of a type of corporeal pedagogy of resurgence that makes explicit connections between embodied and cultural knowledges as well as re-membering, re-marking and re-mapping land through what Karen Recollet terms "a radical pedagogy of decolonial love within the context of the everyday in order to assure a *freedom of motion*…"[14] Combining community-based practices of memory work, creative scholarship, and artistic production, Walking with Our Sisters serves as a site of pedagogy that is both "local yet traveling."

Walking with Our Sisters, (2012-2019), was an art installation created by an intergenerational group of First Nations and Metis women that commemorates the 1800 missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.[15] Coordinated by Metis visual artist and author Christi Belcourt, the art installation consists of over eighteen hundred vamps (the top part of a traditional moccasin) beaded by hand by more than thirteen hundred artists from across North America. The vamps, however, are not merely on "display" – like an object of spectacle that reproduces a colonial gaze. Rather, each of the vamps are placed on a large red fabric arranged in a (circular) path formation, where participants remove their shoes and walk along the path amidst the vamps. Participants are "walking with our sisters" both figuratively and literally – making meaning in/through inter-

connected relations between land, place and peoples and the multiple stories that belong to them. The installation also includes trees, branches and other natural elements. Taken together, the installation forms a ceremonial lodge where participants can work through the "rupture" between trauma, grief, healing and resistance, or what Recollet calls "decolonial spatial glyphing."[16] Recollet writes:

> Glyphing practices share a history of producing geographies of resistance, achieved through making visible an active Indigenous presence and futurity in otherwise contested Indigenous territories. I utilize the concept of urban glyphing to accentuate the doing, and the intrinsic Indigenous motion entailed in producing symbols and narratives as forms of cultural production that are inherently political.

Central to Recollet's concept of decolonial spatial glyphing is the recognition that Indigeneity is a site of radical critique as well as creativity that is expressed through practices that are embodied, visual, sonic, and in constant motion.

As an installation, Walking with Our Sisters serves as both a pedagogical and political site of "presencing,"[17] in that it provides a visceral space for collective mourning and healing as well as promotes awareness of the violence against Indigenous women and the alarming silence among politicians, policymakers, and the media. Each of the vamps represents a particular woman or girl and reflects the symbology of specific indigenous communities and cultures. In this way, the individual vamps reflect local stories of persons and places that, woven together, create a powerful counter-narrative against colonial violence. While the artifacts within the installation trace the targeted yet expansive reach of colonial sexual terrorism, the performative and ceremonial aspects of the installation enact a form of decolonial pedagogy that connects land, embodiment, movement and community.

Many of the vamps are beaded together in community. As a culturally specific form of decolonial pedagogy, Walking with Our Sisters integrates two aims: learning traditional arts and serving as a critical intervention in the mate-

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rial, political symbolic disappearance of Indigenous women and girls. Vamps are created in intergenerational circles of First Nations, Metis, and Indigenous women and men, and, in doing so, learn about the lives of the individuals to bead their stories into the vamps. Then, Natives and non-natives work together to prepare, transport, and install the exhibit to ensure it retains a spiritual and culturally appropriate form of display. As of 2019, the installation has traveled to over thirty-two locations across Canada.

CONCLUSION

I conclude my remarks with the invitation for philosophers of education to "walk lightly, with little baggage" as we work towards disrupting the coloniality of being and coloniality of power that continues to wreak havoc in schools and society through the dehumanization of Black, Indigenous and other minoritized bodies. I offer this discussion of Walking with Our Sisters as an opportunity to think about the ways in which indigenous practices of presencing or spatial glyphing as pedagogies of resurgence and survivance demonstrate decolonial living, learning and loving in ways that honor multiple forms of life and intelligence across borders. The point here is not to appropriate or attempt to replicate installations such as Walking with our Sisters. Rather, I join Patel in the belief that ways of thinking and talking about land and place are always already conditioned by settler colonialism. I would like to humbly offer that we consider embodied inter-action with, and movement across, specific places and locations as a way of imagining decolonial ethical relations that include but do not privilege person-centered cosmologies.

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1 I'd like to thank Cris Mayo and Heather Greenhalgh-Spencer for the gracious invitation to provide a response to Leigh Patel's Kneller Address.

2 See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Oxford: Zed Publishing, 1999) for a good discussion of the definitions and distinctions between various forms of colonialism.

3 Leigh Patel, *Decolonizing Educational Research: From Ownership to Answerability* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

4 As several Black and Brown scholars and activists have noted, anti-Black racism and genocide against indigenous peoples that make up the "coloniality of power" as a historical and continuous structure means that many communities are always already subject to a public health pandemic. See Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America," *Nepantla* 1, no. 3, (2000): 533-580. See Walter D. Mignolo, "Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-colonial Thinking," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3, 2007 for an overview of the framework of de-coloniality.

5 Arundhati Roy, "The Pandemic is a Portal," *Financial Times,* April 3, 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca.

6 Troy Richardson, "Disrupting the Coloniality of Being: Toward De-colonial \Ontologies in Philosophy of Education," *Studies in Philosophy of Education* 31, (2012): 539–551 and "Between Native American and Continental Philosophy: A comparative approach to narrative and the emergence of responsible selves," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44, no. 6 (2012): 663-674.

7 Richardson, "Disrupting the Coloniality of Being," 548-549.

8 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson refers to this as Nishnaabeg intelligence – a kind of wisdom produced by humans and non-humans as part of the logic of interconnected sustainable knowing/being/moving involving human and non-human life in particular places and spaces. See L. B. Simpson, *Dancing on Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Recreation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring, 2012).

9 Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, "Entangled Belongings: Reimagining Transnational Biographies of Black and Global African Diasporic Kinship" in *Contested Belonging: Spaces, Practices, Biographies.* Published online:[website?] 17 May 2018; 19-41; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society,* 3, no. 3, (2014): 1-25.

10 Gerald Vizenor, (Ed.,) *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 2008).

11 As quoted in Quo-Li Driskill, "Pedagogy" https://shetrieshertongue.wordpress.com/category/driskill-qwo-li/.

DOI: 10.47925/76.4.010

12 Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy,"1; Ifekwenigwe, "Entangled Belongings," 21.

13 See Gerald Vizenor, *Survivance*. See also Glen Couthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, (Location: University of Minnesota, 2014); Nick Estes, *Our History is Our Future: Standing Rock v. the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (Brooklyn NY: Verso, 2019); and Jaskiran Dhillon, *Prairie Rising: Indigenous Youth, Decolonization and the Politics of Intervention* (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto, 2017) to name a few.

14 See Jeong-eun Rhee, Stephanie Daza, and Sharon Subreenduth, "Un/learning Habituation of Body-Mind Binary Through the Teaching/Learning Body/Mind," *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning* 23, (2018): 118-137; Karen Recollet, "Glyphing Decolonial Love though Urban Flash Mobbing and Walking with Our Sisters," *Curriculum Inquiry*, (2015,129-145): 141.

15 Walking with our sisters. A commemorative art installation for the missing and murdered
Indigenous women of Canada and the United States (2013-2019). Retrieved from http://www.walkingwi
thoursisters.ca

16 Recollet, "Glyphing Decolonial Love," 141.

17 Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy."