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Challenging the Relationship Between Settler Colonial Ideology and Higher Education Spaces

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Abstract

In this article, I analyze, evaluate, and problematize the structure of settler colonialism and demonstrate how it is a process that remains entrenched in the U.S. educational system. I build on previous work done on settler colonial ideology by linking structural forms of settler colonial power to the lived experiences of Indigenous students, using their voices to describe how pervasive and harmful settler colonial ideology is in practice. From their descriptions of the replication of colonial ideology within policies and practices in higher education, the participants create a compelling image of the ongoing dominant influence of settler colonial power in their lives. Challenging settler colonial ideology is not just about providing a more accurate historical record of what occurred in the U.S. Rather, challenging settler colonial ideology reaffirms the value and importance of Indigenous people in the U.S.

Keywords: settler colonialism, Indigenous education

To understand the experiences of Indigenous peoples in the U.S., one must also understand how prevalent settler colonialism is within societal structures. Settler colonialism is a structural process meant to replace the local population with the settler population (Wolfe, 2006). After its inception, the U.S. quickly became a multi-racial settler colonial state. White settlers used settler colonial ideology to justify the exclusive control over the dispossession and exploitation of Indigenous lands, which continued as societal structures aimed to institutionalize the replacement of Indigenous peoples and communities (Glenn, 2015; Patel, 2016). Education is one such structure that maintains, reinforces, and replicates colonial ideology through curriculum, policies, and practices, both historically and in the present day (Leonardo & Singh, 2017). One example is the curricula used in research methods courses, which often includes only western-centered ideas and perspectives, excluding Indigenous views and research practices. This article acknowledges the role of settler colonialism in educational structures by presenting data from a qualitative study on the experiences of Indigenous students in postsecondary education. I analyze participants' reflections on the relationship between settler colonial ideology and the education system. I bring to this work a strong connection to my

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participants as an Indigenous scholar and someone who experiences ongoing settler colonization in the educational system.

The outcomes of this study engage the ongoing battle against the effects of settler colonialism for Indigenous people, particularly as work advancing postcolonial theories rarely acknowledges the ways in which settler colonialism permeates present-day societal structures. As Smith (2012) argued, "A constant reworking of our understandings of the impact of imperialism and colonialism is an important aspect" of Indigenous politics, culture, and critique (p. 25). Therefore, the goal of this study is to "not only question the assumed nature of western ideals and the practices they generate," but to also "tell an alternative story: the history of western research through the eyes of the colonized" (p. 2). In this article, I demonstrate how academic systems are often entrenched in settler colonial ideologies that privilege western knowledge as legitimate and marginalize Indigenous knowledge (Rizvi, Lingard, & Lavia, 2006).

This research is significant for several reasons. First, my study builds on previous studies of Indigenous students' educational experiences by looking specifically at settler coloniality (Brayboy, Solymon, & Castagno, 2015; Fryberg & Townsend, 2008; Shotton, 2017; Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013), which "has not been a valued concept when studying race and schools" (Leonardo & Singh, 2017, p. 95). This is particularly important because raising awareness of the permeation of settler colonialism in educational spaces can change the experience of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and educators, mostly by naming the structural practice that marginalizes Indigenous peoples (Patel, 2016). Second, I analyze, evaluate, and problematize the dominant structure of settler colonialism and demonstrate how settler colonialism is a process that remains entrenched in the U.S. educational system.

Initially, I discuss the role of settler colonial ideology in education—how educational structures and practices often diminish or erase Indigenous peoples by design. To do this, I focus specifically on postsecondary educational practices and policies. Then, I provide the methodological overview, in which I focus on the study design and introduce the two frameworks for the study: Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) and Dimensions of Settler Colonial Power. TribalCrit provides guidance for the study design and implementation, including the generation of interview and journal prompts. Dimensions of Settler Colonial Power offers an analytic frame through which to understand the students' responses. Third, I organize students' perspectives and reflections on settler colonial ideology into three categories: knowledge of settler colonial power, the link from settler colonialism to academic practices, and the tension between living in two worlds. I conclude by offering strategies that people in positions of power in higher education can use to challenge the role of settler colonialism in the academy.

Settler Colonialism in Education

Although settler colonialism is a concept discussed by scholars across academic disciplines, my work focuses specifically on the application of settler colonialism in education. By using Indigenous student experiences as my lens, I demonstrate the pervasiveness of settler colonial ideology. Settler colonialism's historical role in education has served three prominent functions: to reduce the power of Indigenous nations (Brayboy, 2005), to force assimilation and adoption of western-dominated thinking (Steinman, 2015), and to perpetuate narratives of erasure at multiple points of

analysis (Patel, 2016). Looking at this intersection of colonialism and education is important because

> Education was and in many ways continues to be (1) a battle for the hearts and minds of Indigenous nations; (2) a colonial call for assimilation; and (3) a responsibility of the federal government arising from a series of agreements between Indian nations and the U.S. meant to open up land bases to a burgeoning immigrant population. (Brayboy, Faircloth, Lee, Maaka, & Richardson, 2015, p. 1)

As Battiste (2013) wrote, "Education, like the institutions and societies it derives from, is neither culturally neutral nor fair. Education has its roots in a patriarchal, Eurocentric society, complicit with multiple forms of oppression of women, sometimes men, children, minorities, and Indigenous peoples" (p. 159). Educational institutions within the settler society, then, represent a prime site for negotiating between colonial rule and Indigenous sovereignty.

An ongoing concern for Indigenous communities is the relationship between power and settler colonial control. Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001), in their foundational work on anti-colonial frameworks, argued

> "Colonial" includes all forms of dominating and oppressive relationships that emerge from structures of power and privilege inherent and embedded in our contemporary social relations . . . colonial is not defined simply as foreign or alien, but more importantly, as dominating and opposing. (p. 308)

Relatedly, Glenn (2015) argued that while some forms of colonialism aim to take resources for the advantage of the colonizing country, the objective of settler colonialism is to acquire land to settle permanently. It is this settling that is most destructive to Indigenous communities. Although forms of colonialism include the exploitation of natural and human resources, settler colonialism has a more specific goal: to acquire, control, and define these resources and the territory as a whole. This process can be accomplished through genocide, forced removal, and assimilation, all of which occurred in the U.S.

Although early settler colonial societies replaced Indigenous communities through physical assault and violence, another vehicle was needed because settler colonialism is also "an institutionalized or normalized (and therefore mostly invisible) ideology of national identity" (Lovell, 2007, p. 3). Moreover, because the goals and outcomes of settler colonialism are inextricably linked to U.S. nationalism, the structural nature of education—both church-based and governmental—made it the perfect vehicle for replicating and reinforcing settler colonial ideology (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2016; Glenn, 2015). One such example is off-reservation boarding schools, in which settlers forcibly removed Indigenous students from their homes, placed them in "schools," and attempted to remove all traces of their Indigenous identity. Indigenous students were beaten for speaking their language, forced to work in horrible conditions for no payment, and prevented from communicating with their families (Adams, 1995). In many ways, education remains the perfect vehicle. Twenty years ago, Willinsky (1998) argued that the educational project of colonialism in western countries was only the beginning, and, given its enormity, was to live on as an unconscious aspect of education. Therefore, it is

essential to make conscious how entrenched and ongoing the process of settler colonialism is within the context of education (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013).

A key element of making conscious the role of settler colonialism in education is recognizing how everyone is implicated in settler colonial practices, even if they are unaware of it because of how normalized settler colonial ideologies are in educational spaces (Tuck & Yang, 2012). This normalizing occurs in postsecondary education through faculty's pedagogical and research practices. In the following section, I discuss the postsecondary education context to illustrate the type of educational environments the participants in my study experienced, and how this contributed to their understanding of settler colonialism.

Postsecondary Education: Settler Colonial Practices in Teaching and Research

Within this section, I discuss three different markers of settler colonial practices in postsecondary education. The first marker is the dominant belief in the value of western epistemologies at the expense of other forms of knowledge (e.g., Indigenous). The second marker is how research methods erase Indigenous perspectives. The third marker is how colleges and universities "erase to replace" (Patel, 2016, p. 38) non-western culture and knowledge through research training. Although the markers closely connect to teaching and research, each represents a different focus. The first marker focuses on the value of western knowledge over Indigenous knowledge. The second marker outlines how researchers value western-centered research practices when conducting research. The third marker illustrates how students are trained through western-centered research curricula, even if they want to perform Indigenous-based research.

One of the most significant markers of settler colonialism in postsecondary education is the dominant belief in the value of western epistemologies (Smith, 2012). Students often enter higher education with very little understanding of how western knowledge systems are constructed to serve particular agendas, such as the settler colonial agenda (Apple, 2014; Ruck-Simmons, 2006). Western knowledge is often "presented as objective and universal, obscuring its own interestedness" (Howard, 2006, p. 50). Therefore, there is no acknowledgement that the settler colonial state determines the epistemic values in education. Because academia treats western knowledges as superior, the legitimacy of western knowledges is "internalized, both by the colonizer and the colonized. Indigenous knowledge, on the contrary has been classified as a folklore of rituals, beliefs, or myths, which according to western epistemology, is a non-knowledge" (Thésée, 2006, p. 34). The contrast between the value of western knowledges and Indigenous knowledges is important for several reasons: not only do the participants of this study identify as Indigenous, but—within the U.S.—the project of settler colonialism was based on erasing and replacing Indigenous communities (Patel, 2016; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). My participants' presence in postsecondary education demonstrates that this erasure did not occur. However, Indigenous peoples still fight for the legitimacy of their knowledges within postsecondary institutions.

The second marker of settler colonialism in postsecondary education is the different set of research practices found within colleges and universities, which serve to replace Indigenous perspectives (Deloria, 2004; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). For example, the research process is often colonial in nature and is exacerbated "when the researcher conducts research among groups less powerful economically, politically, and socially than the researcher" (Hales, 2006, p. 244). The relationship between the

researcher and researched can often resemble that of the oppressor and oppressed (Fine, 1994), or the colonizer and colonized (Memmi, 2003). Researchers often get to decide and/or define the landscapes in which they conduct research (e.g., science-based work on Indigenous lands that does not engage with Indigenous peoples or epistemologies), often with the assumed authority to produce knowledge that they determine is legitimate (Bhattacharya, 2015). Colleges and universities also serve as gatekeepers to particular types of knowledge, privileging certain work over others. Bhattacharya (2015) wrote, "Privileging work that is filtered through academic structures can re-inscribe colonization, especially when raw knowledge, street knowledge, and knowledge from other non-traditional sources are dismissed as 'unscholarly' in academia" (p. 317). All of this occurs under the guise that western knowledges are neutral and universal.

The third marker of settler colonialism in postsecondary education is how colleges and universities "erase to replace" (Patel, 2016, p. 38) non-western culture and knowledge through research training. As Patel wrote, "the training of doctoral candidates is one of the sharpest junctures through which this logic of erasing to replace is expressed through higher education in the social sciences" (p. 38). A key element of this training occurs when students engage with different research epistemologies, which often involve positivistic and post-positivistic methods. These methods reflect western knowledge values of rationality and objectivity (Ruck-Simmons, 2006). Even critical approaches in research—often lauded as the most apt to address issues of structural power—cannot always address the pervasiveness of settler colonial ideologies in education. Often, these epistemologies—positivism, post-positivism, and critical approaches—are "racially biased ways of knowing" because they arise out of the social history of dominant white western culture and "are used and legitimated in educational research to the exclusion of the epistemologies of other racial and cultural groups" (Hales, 2006, p. 249). There is no escaping the effects of settler colonialism, no matter how critical the research. The entire research process is "inextricably bound up with the ongoing project of coloniality as well as the potential to interrupt it and other ways of knowing and learning" (Patel, 2016, p. 14). Bhattacharya (2015) stated, "colonizing and decolonizing discourses are always relational and interactional, for although they are oppositional, one cannot exist without the other" (p. 311). Even when educators and researchers attempt to disrupt the settler colonial project in education, they do so under the canopy of settler colonial ideology.

Methodological Overview

I conducted a yearlong qualitative study with twelve Indigenous graduate students, focused on their experiences in academia. In addition to interviews and observations, participants completed a series of journal reflections focused on different topics, such as their experiences with identity in classrooms, their interactions with peers, their reflections on classroom discussions, and their thoughts on settler colonialism. For the purpose of this article, I looked specifically at the data on their perception of colonialism within higher education and their understanding of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Participants received bi-weekly journal prompts, responses to which were discussed during our scheduled interviews.

Embedded in this study lies a form of resistance that attempts to disable the grand narratives of superiority and inferiority constructed by colonialism. One way to disable grand narratives is to study how individuals understand them in relation to their own educational experience. Therefore, the two theoretical frameworks I employ center on the

experiences of Indigenous peoples, allowing me to make sense of the data from the perspective of the colonized, not the colonizer. These frameworks are TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) and Dimensions of Settler Colonial Power (Steinman, 2015), which I elaborate on below.

TribalCrit emerged from Critical Race Theory as a means to recognize the positionality of Indigenous people in the U.S. as both racialized and colonized. Brayboy (2005) articulated nine tenets that address the relationship between colonization and the experiences of Indigenous people in the U.S. Although each tenet informs my analytical meaning making, the two I draw most heavily from are: (a) colonialism is endemic to society, and (b) stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data. One of the ways in which colonialism remains endemic to society is through the reproduction of settler colonial ideology in curriculum. Therefore, identifying these instances of reproduction is important to disrupt the grand narratives still being told about settler colonialism. The second tenet of TribalCrit disrupts the grand narrative in this research because stories are my primary source of data and are the foundation for the study. I used both journal reflections and interviews, which enabled me to listen to the participants' words and thoughts, and to draw out their reflections and perspectives on colonialism. This choice offers a different empirical approach than previous studies on settler colonial ideology, and I contribute this methodology to the field.

I also use Settler Colonial Dimensions of Power (Steinman, 2015) to analyze my participants' experiences. Steinman (2015) outlined six dimensions of settler colonial power: "Indigenous articulations of continuing colonial domination and of the limits of tribal sovereignty as a liberatory framework respectively alerted me to the potential salience of settler colonialism and its varied forms of settler colonial power" (p. 222). The six forms of settler colonial power he identified are (a) the denial of the existence of settler colonialism, (b) foundational settler colonial violence and its concealments, (c) ideological justifications for indigenous dispossession and naturalizing settler authority, (d) settler control of the population economy, (e) cultural appropriation, and (f) the denial/elimination of possible alternatives to settler colonialism. Although I identified all six within my participants' experiences, the most salient dimensions remain (a) settler control of the population economy and (b) the denial/elimination of possible alternatives.

Data Collection Process

I collected data during the 2016–2017 academic school year. The research questions guiding the study were: (a) How do Indigenous graduate students make meaning of colonization within higher education? and (b) How do colonial practices in higher education influence Indigenous student experiences? Each participant completed two individual interviews, with each interview lasting 60–90 minutes, for a total of approximately 30 hours of interview data. Each participant completed eight journal entries—each of which consisted of four questions—resulting in 32 entries total. Each journal entry ranged from three to five pages long. The total number of journal entries analyzed was 384.

Participants

My primary participants included twelve Indigenous graduate students with tribal affiliations across the U.S. who were all graduate students at the same Midwestern doctorate-granting university. I recruited participants through a STEM-focused cohort program on campus and through the Native American student center on campus. The 12 participants discussed in this article chose pseudonyms to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality. Below is a brief introduction to each participant:

- **Brian** identifies as Native Hawaiian. He was homeschooled until high school and then attended a private Hawaiian school. He is a doctoral student in Nutrition Science.
- **Charles** is a member of an Eastern Woodlands tribe, located in the eastern region of the U.S. He attended a minority-serving institution as an undergraduate. He is a master's student in Graphic Design.
- **Dawn** is a member of a Plains tribe, located in the central region of the U.S. She is very active in her community and attended a minority-serving institution as an undergraduate. She is a master's student in Education.
- **Hal** is a member of a Plains tribe, located in the central region of the U.S. He is a doctoral student in Forestry and Natural Resources.
- **Jeffrey** is a member of a Pueblo tribe located in the southwestern region of the U.S. He grew up on his nation's reservation. He is a doctoral student in Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences.
- **Ken** identifies as Native Hawaiian. He lived in Hawaii most of his life. He is a doctoral student in Computer Science.
- **Lance** identifies as Indigenous and does not claim a particular tribal affiliation. He attended schools on Indigenous lands. He is a master's student in the arts.
- **Mary** identifies as Native Hawaiian, although she grew up near a Native American reservation in the Southeast. She is a doctoral student in Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences.
- **Paula** is a member of a Southwestern tribe located in the southwest region of the U.S. She attended a predominately white university as an undergraduate. She is a doctoral student in Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences.
- **Robert** is a member of a Southwestern tribe, located in the southwest region of the U.S. He attended a university in the Pacific Northwest. He is a doctoral student in Chemistry.
- **Roger** is a member of a Plains tribe, located in the southcentral region of the U.S. He did not grow up on his nation's reservation, but stayed connected during summers. He is a doctoral student in Ecology.
- **Seth** is Native Hawaiian. He attended Hawaiian schools until he went to graduate school at a predominately white institution. He is a doctoral student in Mathematics.

I also bring my own background as an Indigenous scholar to the study. My experiences in both K–12 and postsecondary education were marked with a consistent narrative of the value and importance of settler colonialism, despite the large-scale cost to Indigenous peoples. In my own educational experience, my teachers' failure to address this cost

motivated me to think about the role of settler colonialism in educational spaces and how the ongoing replication of settler colonial ideology continues to harm Indigenous students.

Findings

After analyzing the journal reflections and interview transcripts, I identified three themes that illustrate how Indigenous students contextualized settler colonialism in their lives. The first theme is *knowledge of the settler colonial project.* In this theme, I discuss how the participants recognized and identified settler colonialism in their experiences. The second theme is *linking settler colonialism to academic practices*. Here, participants took their knowledge of settler colonialism and acknowledged how settler colonialism affected their academic lives. The final theme is *the tension of living between two worlds.* Participants acknowledged throughout the study that settler colonialism required them to display western values and perspectives in academia, despite their desire to include their Indigenous identities in their educational spaces.

Knowledge of the Settler Colonial Project

In both the interviews and journal responses, participants easily pointed out the system of colonization as something people experience whether they want to or not. Hal wrote, "To be successful within a colonialist society as a Native, you must work within that system even if you are disadvantaged to begin with." Participants also noted that even if colonized people receive some benefit from colonialism, the colonizer will always benefit more. Jeffrey wrote:

> No matter what type of compensation, whether money, land, food, clothes, or even acceptance. There will always be a price to pay. It may be from the land we are on, to the children being taken from their homes, to the complete loss and destruction of our ways of life. The goal is to always improve the situation of the colonists, not the Natives.

Hal challenged the narrative of the benevolent colonizer and wrote, "Colonialism carried with it religious, cultural, and health consequences, but its roots were about money and control of natural resources. Anything that appeared to be benevolent from the colonizers to the colonized was not." It could be argued that this quote echoes the savior narrative present in social studies curriculum. Roger wrote:

> This sounds to me like colonialism views themselves as "saviors of the old world." Essentially people who "save" indigenous people with religion, technology, government, social constructs, etc. Then from this viewpoint, they feel it is right to take from the natives such as land, resources and more. Disrupting the ecosystem of our people and culture in return for the "things" they gave us. Colonialism also spread many diseases and death, so yes, they gave us this and took away much more.

Lastly, Seth observed that there was an enduring nature in the colonizer/colonized relationship. As Seth stated, "I think this phrase means with every so-called progression

from colonialism there is also a new form being implemented." This would indicate that colonization is not a historical event, but an ongoing structure.

Linking Settler Colonialism to Academic Practices

Several participants remarked that prior to their involvement in the study they saw no link between the university and colonial ideology. However, the examples provided by participants of how university policies and practices reflected colonial ideology highlighted two things: Universities are designed to reflect western worldviews, and this reflection prevents universities from properly acknowledging the contribution of Indigenous perspectives. When asked to discuss the role of colonialism in higher education, Lance shared, "It is molded to fit western views. Science, for example. If it's not tangible or measurable, it doesn't exist. There is a lack of diversity. There is no room for adding cultural elements to benefit communities." Mary echoed the lack of diversity as a product of colonial ideology in universities, especially as it relates to professors. She shared:

> The majority of my professors have been white males. The dominance of viewpoints from people with similar cultures limits the number of viewpoints that are available for students to learn and consider. The lack of Native American professors in my academic career has limited my access to the viewpoints and perspectives of people that share my cultural background.

Both examples demonstrate how whiteness represents the benchmark of success in colleges and universities, and how educational experiences lack Indigenous viewpoints. As Roger argued, institutions remain quiet on issues regarding Indigenous students, but will still "promote and claim these individuals with the view of increasing their diversity. For example, cultural centers are often relegated to the outskirts of campus, specifically cultures that were victimized by colonization."

Seth, studying in the mathematics department, commented on the particular practice of requiring doctoral students to speak a second language. Seth wrote:

> Perhaps the most glaring instance of colonialism within my department is the requirement that a PhD student pass a written examination in either French, German, or Russian. The reasoning behind the requirement is that "most academic journals are printed in one of those languages." I speak out against this policy often amongst my peers and I get the impression that they think I'm making a big deal over a small policy. What bothers me is the logic behind this policy was the same that made it hard to maintain Indigenous languages: most business is conducted in English, so the students must learn English.

This particular university practice privileges a certain type of language at the expense of other languages because students can only choose amongst three European languages.

The Tension of Living in Two Worlds

Participants also viewed settler colonialism as the cause of tension that participants experience between their identity as Indigenous peoples and their membership in the academic community. This tension manifests itself in several ways. First, participants'

cultural identity is detached from their academic identity. As Brian said, colonialism in higher education takes the form of faculty who "disregard traditional knowledge for academic knowledge, including practices and stories." Paula shared a similar sentiment stating, "being 'cultural' is seen as a separate facet of one's life that isn't part of their academic career." Both participants felt that their Indigenous identity was not valued in the classroom, despite their ability to share information about Indigenous knowledges.

This tension was also present in the classroom. Charles discovered this when trying to correct a classmate regarding the influence of Manifest Destiny on land and agricultural knowledge. Charles wrote, "You cannot go against the preferred narrative in class, or acknowledge how costly U.S. expansion was for Indigenous communities." Ken found this to be true when trying to highlight how certain values in Indigenous communities influence how someone might solve a community issue. He wrote,

> My voice is silenced in the classroom. We are trained as [western] scientists to avoid certain (emotional? cultural?) topics. My culture values understanding how a situation affects everyone in the community because that is how you decide what is the best course of action to take. Yet, we are often presented with "cold, stark" numbers which inherently reduces what could be an inherently complex cultural issue.

This tension also made it hard for students to feel they belonged. As Dawn pointed out, "I have to deal with dominant discourse everyday [*sic*] telling me that my way of thinking is foreign, my education is not good enough, and that working with Indigenous peoples on natural resource related issues is hard/nearly impossible." Although participants might not have initially attributed these experiences to the inclusion of colonial ideology in higher education, the tension between their cultural and academic identity suggests otherwise.

The Entrenchment of Settler Colonial Ideology in Education

To explain how my participants' perspectives on their educational experiences reflect this entrenchment, I use the Dimensions of Settler Colonial Power framework (Steinman, 2015). This framework articulates settler colonialism's relationship with Indigenous people, assists in analyzing the patterns of resistance against these forms of domination, and addresses the salience of settler colonialism and its different forms of power (Steinman, 2015). Steinman uses these dimensions of power, "in conjunction with area scholarship, to identify and categorize well-established patterns of their empirical manifestations" (p. 4). I build on Steinman's work by linking structural forms of settler colonial power to the lived experiences of Indigenous students and using their voices to describe how pervasive and harmful settler colonial ideology is in practice. From their descriptions of the replication of colonial ideology within policies and practices in higher education, the participants create a compelling image of the ongoing influence of settler colonial power in their lives.

A dimension of settler colonial power is its acknowledgment of how settler colonialism controls the population economy. This involves the use of different mechanisms to eliminate or "transfer" Indigenous nations and populations out of existence to create and sustain the settler colonial population. Although these mechanisms take multiple forms, one of the most pervasive forms is in the emphasis on

assimilation-based education. This dimension of settler colonial power manifests itself in the academic experiences of Indigenous students in colleges and universities. As Alfred (2004) wrote,

> Our experiences in universities reflect the tensions and dynamics of our relationships as Indigenous peoples interacting with people and institutions in society as a whole: an existence of constant and pervasive struggle to resist assimilation to the values and culture of a larger society. (p. 88)

As the participants noted, they felt a forced detachment between their academic and Indigenous identities. Participants felt that university practices discounted their Indigenous identities in several ways. For several participants, degree requirements often reflected the assumed importance of settler colonial ideology. The largest example was the language requirement for the doctoral degree. If you require students to learn one of three languages, that indicates you find those languages more important than other languages. Moreover, although not noted by the participants, other requirements such as the preliminary exam process can reflect settler colonial ideology if they are based on western scholars. For many doctoral programs, passing preliminary or qualifying exams is required for moving on to writing your dissertation. However, if your preliminary exam questions only focus on western scholars, schools of thought, and perspectives, the message is that only these perspectives have value. Another way Indigenous students felt discounted was in classroom discussion. Their knowledge and cultural beliefs were not welcomed or treated as valid by peers or faculty.

In addition to the forced detachment between their academic and Indigenous identities, the participants identified other assimilation-based educational practices, one of which involved university hiring. Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) wrote:

> When white settler scholars are hired as expert or to fulfill roles relates to the challenges of multicultural—now refracted as diversity—they become the expert . . . who has gained expertise from 'diverse,' 'indigenous,' 'decolonizing,' or 'brown' others, now further replaced by the new 'native,' no longer accountable to those who have been historically underrepresented in the academy. (p. 79)

Participants noted that when the faculty is predominately white, there is less diversity in ideas, and it is more likely that settler colonial ideology will remain unchecked in the curriculum.

Participants also noted the assimilatory aspects of their experiences within the research curriculum—both in class and in labs. Several participants indicated that graduate students are encouraged to remain objective and neutral, which often dissuades Indigenous graduate students from using their Indigenous knowledge to solve their research problems. These types of practices often reinforce the value of western-based (i.e., settler colonial) scholarship at the expense of other types of cultural knowledge (Alfred, 2004; Patel, 2016).

Another dimension of settler colonial power is the denial and elimination of possible alternatives to the settler colonial narrative. One of the most damning factors of settler colonialism is that it essentially prevented the establishment of any other narratives. Although the counter-stories of others have emerged, the dominance of settler colonialism makes it hard to undo the long-standing damage done by settler colonial

ideology. Within the educational system, this damage occurs in two primary ways. First, colleges and universities reflect settler colonial worldviews of science and research, and position western practices as the norm and other practices as substandard (Patel, 2016). Second, there is no room for Indigenous knowledge in the academy. Indigenous students are expected to separate their Indigenous identity from their academic identity and not bring their Indigenous knowledge to the classroom (Brayboy, 2005). By denying the opportunity for alternatives to exist, there will never be any challenge to the structural nature of settler colonial ideology.

Disrupting Settler Colonial Ideology in Education

Disrupting settler colonial ideology in education is a monumental task. To do so requires a complete dismantling of the current educational structure—a structure that by design replicates and reinforces settler colonial ideology. While different forms of interventions exist (e.g., multiculturalism, critical race theory, browning), one of the primary reasons those interventions fail to disrupt settler colonialism is that "each has tried to make powerful shifts without alienating white settlers" (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 85). The reflections provided by the participants reveal how pervasive settler colonialism is within educational spaces, and how settler colonial ideology carries over into their daily lives as students in higher education. Although the insidiousness of settler colonialism is well documented (e.g., Alfred, 2004; Grande, 2008; Leonardo & Singh, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006), this study centers the perspectives of Indigenous students and their meaning making about the relationship between settler colonial ideology and their lives. Blackhawk (2008) wrote, "As many Indian people know all too well, reconciling the traumas found within our community and family pasts with the celebratory narratives of America remains an everyday and overwhelming challenge" (p. 287). Let this work serve as a display of this challenge.

In 2015, Bhattacharya offered an invitation for scholars to "identify ways in which de/colonizing discourses inform/invade their spaces in academia, and to imagine how they might enact de/colonizing discourses through their understanding of resistance to the continual onslaught of microaggressions" (p. 318). This article has documented the way settler colonial ideology invades academia; I conclude by offering suggestions on how one can disrupt settler colonialism in their own space. Building on the work of Thésée (2004), I present three strategies for challenging settler colonial ideology: (a) redefining knowledge, (b) questioning the aims and applications of settler colonial ideology in schools, and (c) refusing to support discourse that normalizes settler colonial ideology and thought.

A key strategy in disrupting settler colonialism is emphasizing the importance of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in comparison to western-based knowledge systems. In settler colonial ideology, defining what knowledge is helps justify settler colonial permanence. Therefore, finding ways to introduce Indigenous knowledges into academic spaces allows individuals to question the role knowledge plays in maintaining settler colonial ideology. In higher education, faculty should engage with Indigenous research methodologies and encourage students to use methods aligned with Indigenous perspectives. Relatedly, students—Indigenous students in particular—should be allowed to use Indigenous knowledges in their coursework and research. The positioning of Indigenous knowledges as equal to western-based knowledges provides a more holistic

understanding of what is and is not knowledge (Andreotti, Ahenakew, & Cooper, 2011; Grosfoguel 2011).

A second strategy is to question the aims and applications of settler colonial ideology in academic environments. Questioning the application of settler colonial ideology requires naming what settler colonial ideology is trying to maintain: white supremacy. Situating the settler colonial narrative within a system of oppression allows students to problematize the history they learn in schools. In higher education, questioning the aims and applications of settler colonialism involves analyzing the practices and policies at work in colleges and universities, and asking: Whom do these policies serve? Whom do these practices harm? Colleges and universities frequently mention aims that involve increasing diversity in its student population; yet, without a deep analysis of how their structures maintain settler colonial ideology, any interventions that are implemented will fall short.

The final strategy is refusing to engage and/or support discourse that normalizes settler colonial ideology and thought. In higher education, faculty can support students who want to use Indigenous methodologies in their research (Andreotti et al., 2011). Faculty can also integrate different forms of knowledge in their classes. For example, in the research methods courses I teach, Indigenous methods are positioned as equal to western-based methods. It is not presented as an alternative approach. Changing how one engages in settler colonial discourse is vital for disrupting its presence in educational spaces.

Throughout this article, I have demonstrated how academic systems are often entrenched in settler colonial ideologies that privilege certain narratives and forms of knowledge over others. The pervasiveness of settler colonial ideology also marginalizes Indigenous peoples and communities. Challenging settler colonial ideology is not just about providing a more accurate historical record of what occurred in the U.S. Challenging settler colonial ideology also reaffirms the value and importance of Indigenous people in the U.S. and gives space to recognize the contributions of Indigenous peoples. For those interested in creating educational spaces that affirm and value all people, disrupting settler colonialism is a required act.

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