

## Decolonization and Qualitative Epistemology: Toward Reconciliation in the Academy

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### Abstract

The subject of (de)colonization in the academy has witnessed an upsurge in attention over the past two decades across the social sciences and the Global North-South divide. This article critically examines central themes that have guided the conceptualization of decolonization thus far and foregrounds the convergences that decolonization shares with the epistemology of qualitative research methodology and pedagogy. In so doing, this article articulates the objective of reconciliation and demonstrates the ways in which reconciliation has been and can be enacted in the academy, limning the themes of (a) attention to physical context; (b) inclusion of Indigenous voices; (c) and decolonization of Indigenous and non-Indigenous minds. This article argues for better aligning the epistemology and conduct of qualitative research with Indigenous values – and concludes by calling for attention to Indigenous intersectionality and calling against a growing trend of decontextualizing decolonization.

**Keywords:** race, decolonization, Indigenous, epistemology, institutions, qualitative research

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## Introduction

Beginning from a loosely bound literature on colonization with diffuse roots in psychoanalysis, sociology, social work, education, and philosophy, the subject of (de)colonization has witnessed an upsurge in attention over the past two decades. The place of Indigenous peoples in research and teaching and the conceptualization of these practices themselves as they are institutionalized in the academy have figured into the hearts of many influential agendas across the social sciences and humanities (Chilisa, 2011; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012[1999], p.xii; Tuck, 2009a,b; Wolfe, 1997).

North American universities have adopted the idea by creating new panels for (de)colonization and kickstarting a flurry of new conversations, forums, dialogues problematizing the social bases of academic colonization, and through it all, references to a project of decolonization (Keele University, 2019; OCAD University, 2016; Wildcat et al, 2014). Scholars across the Global North and South alike increasingly recognize the academy as a site where Indigenous colonization operates on multiple levels to orchestrate their material deprivation and symbolic detriment (Henry et al, 2017; Wolfe, 1997; Young, 2015). The consensus holds that we have not moved past colonialism in how we structure our academic institutions, think about our research, and dispense knowledge through pedagogy today (Wilson, 2001, 2008).

Within this scope, this article interrogates the rich linkages between Indigenous decolonization (DC) and qualitative research methodology and pedagogy (QRP). Their connection is empowered by the latter's commitment to interpretivist epistemologies that challenge relations of power in existing knowledge production, lend ear to marginalized experiences, and transform their students into critical thinkers with an eye for these issues

(DeVault, 1999, 2004; Hood, 2006; Rogalin and Pfeiffer, 2012). This theoretical commitment and ability to see what is not immediately visible, the unspoken webs of influence that systemically repress minorities (Collins, 1990, p.18; Denzin, 2002, 2010; Scott, 1991), makes QRP fertile ground to nurture labors of DC.

This article uses this coupling as a vista to examine more closely the central themes guiding the conceptualization of DC thus far. This article scopes the literature on (de)colonization to inductively address two interrelated lines of inquiry: what are the interconnections between DC and QRP? What are the themes in the scholarly and political ways in which DC has been and can be operationalized within the academy?

In what follows, this article first discusses the conceptual and historical origins of DC. This article then articulates the objective of reconciliation and interrogates the convergences it shares with QRP. This article shows the ways DC has been and can be enacted in the academy to accomplish reconciliation through (i) attending to physical context, (ii) including Indigenous voices, and (iii) decolonizing the mind. Throughout, this article highlights DC's emancipatory potential for Indigenous peoples and for advancing QRP in view of their shared commitment to social justice and equity. Finally, this article concludes by articulating gaps for future scholarship and praxis, focusing on the subject of Indigenous intersectionality and arguing against a growing trend of decontextualizing DC.

### **Decolonizing Indigenous Knowledge and Advancing Qualitative Research and Pedagogy: Toward Reconciliation**

The forms that colonization has assumed in the academy parallel the historical gatekeeping against and suppression of the voices of women, racial, and ethnic minorities in the academy to preserve the status of white men in power (Collins, 1990, p.25; DeVault, 2004).

Colonization traditionally aggravates the physical exploitation of appropriating Indigenous land and the symbolic delegitimization of the empirical validity of Indigenous methods, voice, and traditions (Henry et al, 2017; Tuck and Yang, 2012).

Like how women speak in ways limited and shaped by men's superior position (DeVault and Gross, 2012), Indigenous knowledge has been subsumed into a binary of colonizer/colonized wherein histories and identities are distorted (Smith, 2012[1999], p.172), Indigenous peoples are Othered as agentless listeners to their own stories, and their persons systematically excluded from academic institutions (Corntassel, 2012; Kovach, 2010, p.159; Wolfe, 1997). Historically, Western research (within a colonial framework) has collected, represented, and categorized all (social, cultural, linguistic, and natural) systems of indigenous communities to objectify and exploit Indigenous persons by Western researchers (ibid, p.41; see Baber, 2016; Battiste, 2008; Connell, 2007, Ch.1). Indigenous history and ways of knowing have thus been hegemonized into a legacy of subjugation, dehumanization, and pain that recursively exploits Indigenous persons by propounding a "damage-centered" (Simpson, 2016, 2018; Tuck, 2009a) collective memory shift that evokes trauma and casts them as passive victims, stripping Indigenous voices and methods of their interpretivism and legitimacy (Chilisa, 2011, p.87; Hammersley, 2004; Hillebrand, 2000).

In response to the delegitimizing and exploitative influences of colonization, DC is broadly conceptualized as a category of efforts to expunge these influences from the relations and methods of knowledge production (Fanon, 1963; Freire, 1970; Manuel and Posluns, 2019; Memmi, 1991[1957]; Said, 1978). Drawing on an emancipatory impulse to challenge colonial domination and questioning certainties of culture, race, and nation, the conceptualization of DC efforts hitherto falls into several themes interrelated processually: mobilization, healing, and

social transformation. Below, this article briefly reviews their individual conceptualizations. This article then illuminates their contribution to the objective of reconciliation that builds upon and empowers QRP, while advancing their shared commitment to social justice, particularly for Indigenous peoples.

*Mobilization.*—Indigenous *mobilization/activism* began with localized frustrations which sweltered into unified activism across various localized communities, tribal nations, and reserves in North America (Coulthard, 2007; Smith, 2012, p.214). Embodied in this shift was a parallel transition in the Indigenous agenda from survival to revitalization, tapping into the politics and problems of self-determination as it bled into the domains of education, justice, land titles, sovereignty, system development, among others (Corrigall-Brown and Wilkes, 2012; Wilkes et al, 2010).

*Healing.*—Correspondingly, *healing* hearkens to what Fanon calls a “decolonization of the mind” (Fanon, 1963; Simpson, 2001, 2018), where Indigenous peoples *reclaim* their identities to the effect of self-empowerment as resistance (Adese, 2015, 2016), paralleling how Black women in the twentieth century reclaimed their ideas in a unifying epistemology grounded in common experiences that inculcated a unique (feminist) consciousness conducive to progressive, emancipatory activism (Collins, 1990, pp.3, 98). A growing literature on Indigenous studies, as with the creation of new specialty journals like *Critical Ethnic Studies* in 2016 and *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* in 2012, reflects a serious effort in this regard of opposing colonial ways of thinking and acting, moving toward reclaiming Indigenous peoples’ identities within a “global Indigenous movement that strengthens and supports local moments for decolonization” (Sium et al, 2012, p.i).

*Social transformation.*—Mobilization and healing, projected over the long-term, culminate in *social transformation*, or system-wide liberation. Resonating with the basic instinct of QRP as a tradition of critical inquiry and social scientific and humanistic disciplines committed to reversing inequality and effecting social change, such as sociology, social work, education, among others (Borochowitz, 2005; Grauerholz and Copenhaver, 1994; Kaomea, 2016; Navarro, 2005), social transformation as the goal of Indigenous DC represents the dissolution of persistent hierarchies within the academy that delegitimize their ways of knowing, exclude their persons, and deprioritize their material wellbeing (Alasuutari, 2004; Coulthard, 2010; Simpson, 2001; Wilson, 2018).

Despite their individual importance, each process feeds into a continuous roadmap for change that usefully informs the tenets of *reconciliation* inextricable from the labor of decolonizing the academy, crucially foregrounding an emphasis on *practicality* indispensable to such an objective (Acker et al, 1983; Becker, 2000). Implicated is a call for discursive change and performative action as core values in the objective of reconciliation in order to truly reverse the inequality that Indigenous people experience.

I show that Indigenous methodologies and QRP can be mutually empowering. The two converge in challenging the construction of rigid categories that mortgage relationality and context for imagined objectivity blind to the systemic disenfranchisement inflicted on (racially, ethnically, gender-wise) marginalized researcher and researched identities (Wilson, 2001, 2008), emphasizing co-construction of knowledge between researchers and researched (Del Vecchio et al, 2017; Hesse-Biber et al, 2004; Luker, 2008, Ch.8; Snow et al, 2003), and recognizing how relations of knowledge production are mired in hierarchical power relations designed to enrich white, Anglo-Americans shielded by institutions at the expense and exclusion of Indigenous

voices (Chilisa, 2011, p.87; Choo and Ferree, 2010; Choo, 2016; Tuck, 2009a; Wacquant, 2002). Visualizing rich lines of potential dialogue between the two traditions, these convergences show their potential for enhancing their shared commitment to social justice and equity (Borochowitz, 2005; Keen, 1996; Lincoln, 1998).

I write with the positionality of a working-class racial and ethnic minority. As DC scholars have previously pointed out, the labor of countering social hierarchies for marginalized identities like Indigenous peoples calls upon solidarity with racialized communities both philosophically and pragmatically (Margonis, 2011; Richardson, 2012). The same colonial “founding violence” and its enervating legacy of classism and racism expel both Indigenous and racialized bodies from the walls of the academy, bends them to inferior positions bereft of equitable access to resources, and strips their identities of the right and dignity of self-determination (Greensmith & Giwa, 2013).

Bringing the objective of reconciliation in DC into the context of QRP, this article defines reconciliation as the restoration of Indigenous heritage, culture, and lives within the academy, drawing inspiration from Paulette Regan, a liaison to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, who writes that

“settler violence against Indigenous peoples is woven into the fabric of... history in an unbroken thread from past to present that we must now unravel, unsettling our comfortable assumptions about the past... we must work as Indigenous allies to ‘restory’ the dominant culture version of history; that is, we must make decolonizing space for Indigenous history—counter-narratives of diplomacy, law, and peacemaking practices—as told by Indigenous peoples themselves” (2010, p.6)

Though there are myriad Indigenous tribes each with their own heritage and each deserving of attention, their nuances have largely been totalized by a Eurocentric “storying” of Indigenous identities into stereotypes of savagery and invisibility outright (Erdrich & Dorris, 1994, p.xii). In recognition of this history, this article focuses on the common ground shared by Indigenous peoples. To the end of “restorying” Indigeneity within the academy, this article argues that proper reconciliation is underwritten by a commitment to (i) greater attention to *physical context* (APC); (ii) greater *inclusion* of marginalized Indigenous voices (IIV), values, and methods in research and teaching; (iii) as a result of APC and IIV, igniting a Fanonian “decolonization of the mind” (DM) (Smith, 2012[1999], p.30; Fanon, 1963), a collective shift in thinking that expunges the conceptualization of Indigenous histories as damaged and their people as victims.

#### **(i) Attending to Physical Context (APC)**

Proper reconciliation demands attention to *physical context*. An important thrust of QRP is to attend to context by propounding the significance of sociocultural dynamics ongoing within a *space* and how the researcher navigates or fails to navigate their adherent local relations, fruitfully stimulating (discussions on) practices like manipulating researcher participation roles (Bessett and Gualteri, 2002; Goodwin and Horowitz, 2002; Zinn, 2001) and actively writing autobiographies (Contreras, 2013; Von Unger, 2016). Hsiung (2016) advances the argument by calling attention to the added significance of context in the geopolitical South and Aboriginal territories because of the binary, hierarchical relationships immanent to the issues of knowledge production and teaching within them (Wildcat et al, 2014). Indeed, conceived as the material manifestation of their ancestry, Indigenous people enjoy a spiritual connection with the land – an added, unique dimension that urges attention to the cultural appreciation for Indigeneity and space (Chilisa, 2011, p.107; Coulthard and Simpson, 2016; Iseke-Barnes, 2003; Wilson, 2018).



QRP, a locus of discussion in sociology, social work, education, and other social scientific and humanistic fields that enter the orbit of DC, works to theorize about social spaces (and social structures) that loom large in physical ones. Through fieldwork, it usefully studies the myriad complexities of navigating the boundaries and dynamics of a given space, especially those occupied by marginalized identities, as a *field site* (Contreras, 2013, p.10; Goodman, 2008; Hoang, 2015). Using qualitative field interviews in Toronto's gay village, for instance, Greensmith and Giwa (2013) unearth the myriad denials of Indigenous (and racial) minorities in the Toronto Pride event. Tapping into the entanglement of Indigenous lived experiences within this physical and social space, QRP sensitized their inquiry to the colonial homonationalism that totalized Indigenous identities even within a domain of marginalization (sexual minorities), where it was only white subjectivities (white Queer identities, but not Indigenous or racial minority Queer identities) that were reproduced.

However, the objective of reconciliation, keeping in mind the value of land itself to Indigenous peoples, redeems the significance of the very *physical* dimension of space often auxiliary to social spaces and disregarded once the theory it is used to generate about inhabitants is complete (Anderson, 1999).

Indigenous methodologies situated within an objective of reconciliation thus importantly illustrate how Indigenous peoples are *additionally* disadvantaged because they are marginalized upon lands that were appropriated from them; they unearth the need to attend the cultural attachments held to land by Indigenous peoples. This signifies that respect for physical context should not only be identified but *performatively* enacted to truly benefit marginalized Indigenous peoples. Fulfilling reconciliation, then, should compel our attention toward a new category of

efforts to *account for* and *readministerate or redistribute physical space* in ways that honor the significance of land attached to Indigenous culture.

How might this work with research and teaching, both of which have perpetuated the disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples? Hitherto, Connell (2014) laments, research has not only failed, but worked *against* the objective of reconciliation as a “ploy or tactic to coerce Indigenous communities into sacrificing their cultural values” (Smith, 2012[1999], p.226); see also Lozano 2017). Teaching, as the generational transmission of knowledge and of the *legitimacy* to gatekeep and define what constitutes knowledge (Park, 1993, p.3), also perpetuates these power relations by legitimizing white, Anglo-American colonizer knowledge at the exclusion of others (Hsiung, 2016). To move beyond these encumberments, this article argues for better aligning the epistemology and conduct of QRP with Indigenous values.

Accounting for how Indigenous peoples assign value differently to alternate media of expression, like oral traditions (Navarro, 2005), unveils new types of methods and adherent units of analysis to guide research and incorporate into course content for teaching, such as stories and conversations with elders (Kaomei, 2001, 2016; Kovach, 2010, Ch.7). Scholars of education and psychology similarly draw attention to the boons for equity in the research process, community-building, and Indigenous enfranchisement when professional practitioners (e.g. community social workers) encourage the incorporation of traditional Indigenous spiritual practices (e.g. sun dances, pipe ceremonies) into practice (Gone, 2017; Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019). Indeed, Bennett (2015) vividly shows the costs of failing to account for Indigenous forms of knowing, when social workers who do so face skepticism, rejection, and conflict from Indigenous peoples.

This gains credence from Barnes’ (1996) emphasis that cultures embed powerful meanings in conversational interactions and DeVault’s (2004; DeVault and Gross, 2012)

assertion that marginalized identities have different structured experiences of conversations. Recent innovations in conversation analysis, like Menchik's and Tian's (2016) study of emails, further showcase the richness of nuances in meaning-making available in conversations that foster successful communication and social relations (Duneier, 1999, Appendix) and which refract social scripts indicative of values in a broader context (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974). Resonating with Navarro's (2005) and Smith's (2012[1999], p.34) valorization of oral traditions in Indigenous culture, this typology of Indigenous methods focused on conversations and stories excavates new dynamics hitherto overlooked in physical space and their implications for social relations within them (Coulthard, 2007; LaDuke, 2005). Conversations and stories also share rich linkages with recent innovations in QRP that evoke everyday interactions in marginalized cultural contexts. Examples include Tan and Ko's (2004) use of films to teach the observation of patterned social interactions in varying cultural contexts or Kaomea's (2016) use of alternative educational resources (Native Hawaiian knowledge) that encourages students to assemble their *own* interpretive analytical toolkits to apply to their biographies.

Bolivar and Domingo (2006) and Kim and Cho (2005) also offer general support for the positive fruits that Indigenous methods can yield as guides for (participatory action-based) QRP and (communal) *education*, showing how projects designed according to local cultural values outside the Global North are more telling of social action and better poised to resolve the intricacies of local social problems. Incorporating this thrust into QRP also begins to position knowledge-making *outside* Anglo-American systems (Barnhardt and Kawagley, 2005), creating local repertoires of expertise that enact reconciliation, which eventually generates practical change for locals. In this manner, Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies not only resonate with, but also advance goals of QRP traditions such as feminist methods, critical

discourse analysis, and participatory action research: rather than reframing the context into a contribution to more abstract advances in theory, Indigenous methodologies reclaim context to introduce a final recursive process in knowledge production, when our findings are taken back to shape the place that we analyzed (Hesse-Biber et al, 2004; Park, 1993; Van Dijk, 1993, 2008; Wilson, 2001).

This epistemological shift<sup>1</sup> lays the foundation for reconciliatory action by way of *(re)administering physical space*. As an important thrust in participatory action research shows, social transformation for minorities by way of self-determination only occurs by placing the means of knowledge production in the hands of the victimized (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003; Maguire, 1987, Ch.7; Park, 1993; Tuck, 2017). Within this scope, as this section elucidates, DC efforts to answer the call for reconciliation can focus (and have focused) on *conscientization* by substantively incorporating respect for physical context and its attendant Indigenous cultural attachments into the content of pedagogy and research (Kaomea, 2016; Smith, 2004). But while this transgressive practice does depart from the relations of domination that marginalize Indigenous knowledge, an objective of reconciliation further demands the physical *(re)administration of land as material change*. This may be difficult for individual course instructors and researchers to directly shape the governance of institutional property ownership, but very little work has been done in restoring land to Indigenous peoples (Battiste, 2008). Without belittling these difficulties, this section concludes by asserting that such material change can be effected through *political solidarity and assistance* of Indigenous peoples in their activist struggles – mobilizations that *can* potentially shape institutional property ownership (Corntassel, 2012) – and the *creation of shared spaces* in the academy, like the classroom, further discussed in the next section.

## **(ii) Inclusion of Indigenous Voices (IIV)**

Proper reconciliation demands greater *inclusion* of marginalized Indigenous voices, values, and methods in research and teaching. Segueing with APC, many universities and colleges have begun to recognize in course syllabi, official reports/documents, and webpages that the land on which their courses are taught and institutions are founded are traditional territories belonging to specific Indigenous tribes (Wilkes et al, 2017). While an important step forward in advancing the conversation, this conjures the risk of DC becoming a “metaphor” (Daigle, 2019; de Leeuw et al, 2013; Tuck and Yang, 2012), for wherever discourse (commitment to Indigenous well-being and reconciliation) is decoupled from commensurate levels/modes of action ((re)administering land), DC is reduced to a mere tool to placate colonizer guilt while ultimately maintaining the status quo (Coulthard, 2014).

Reconciliation demands material change or risks becoming empty lip-service that continues to devalue the meaning of Indigenous struggles by denying them claims to reparative social justice. As Daigle (2019) recently demonstrates of reconciliation even in Canadian universities, the truth and reconciliation processes initiated “naturalize and fetishize Indigenous suffering and trauma while cultivating settler colonial spectacles whereby white settler[s]... engage in hollow performances of recognition and remorse” (p.703). Indeed, empty lip-service in “settler colonial spectacles” endangers Indigenous identities by erasing their lived experiences of *ongoing* colonial dispossession – and resistance to this dispossession (Baloy, 2016; Grande, 2018). What results is the perpetuation of settler images of Indigenous peoples through spectacular images, rather than attention to actual relationships and experiences indispensable to reconciliation (Simpson, 2016). We witness this already with government apologies and truth commissions in Australia, Canada, Guatemala, and Peru, where symbolic recognitions are

entirely removed from or even seen to replace the need to reverse material inequality (Corntassel and Holder, 2008; de Leeuw, 2017). It therefore becomes essential to move beyond symbolic recognition to effect *physical inclusion* that is socially empowering.

The onus on Indigenous reconciliation as material change gains from Becker's (2000) emphasis, in a parallel argument on QRP on racism, on how the social rewards of taking measurable action against inequality are a larger behavioral shift when others are similarly inspired to reject inequality. Building on yet advancing the discussion in APC on how Indigenous traditions valorize unrecorded stories and conversations, particularly from *elders* (Kovach, 2010, Ch.7), this article argues that proper reconciliation in academia demands that scholars and practitioners account for this focus on positionality in deciding *who* does research and teaching.

Indigenous actors should be responsible for organizing research projects and teaching coursework on Indigenous peoples and (de)colonization. Even in courses where Indigenous affairs comprise a certain section, Indigenous actors should be given the position to teach and to tell their own tales. Only thus can hitherto unseen Indigenous identities reclaim their ideas and narratives to overturn the controlling stereotypical images that suppress them (Battiste, 2008; Dua and Lawrence, 2000). Furthermore, to scope out and inspire dialogue between potentially different epistemologies within Indigenous knowledge, we should invite as many types of Indigenous agents of knowledge as possible. Like how Collins (1990, pp.70-72, 123-125) distinguishes and propounds conversation between Black scholars and Black *women*, it is important to foster dialogue among different actors in the Indigenous community to articulate an Indigenous position without descending to either fragmentation when different camps are polemicized or domination when one camp gains voice over others. Alain Touraine (2000) adds

to this epistemological theorization by suggesting that *intervention* toward the production of discourse more sensitive to minority experiences cannot occur in isolation from their voices themselves (see also Hammersley, 2004).

On these accounts, material Indigenous reconciliation carries some instrumental risks, such as polemicizing students in courses or even antagonizing course administrators in a department (May and Aikman, 2003; McCarty and Lee, 2014; Smith, 2005). However, there are epistemological and practical precedents from QRP's inclusion of minority subjects to insure, guide, and legitimize this form of physical inclusion.

Epistemologically, the traditions of critical discourse and participatory action research lend credence to physical inclusion. Given its inherent ties with communities and with social inequality, Indigenous knowledge is a matter of interactive *and* critical knowledge (Park, 1993). In other words, given the influence academia wields over public discourse and policymaking (Becker, 2000), how Indigenous knowledge is structured and shared in academic institutions matters for how Indigenous communities at large function and their constituents' well-being. This is particularly true given Lozano's (2017) critical examination of public sociology, articulating the understated need for more decolonial praxis for sociology and a more collaborative model that prioritizes knowledge co-construction above knowledge dissemination. Within this fold, discourse as the organization of language is an important way through which dominance and inequality are perpetuated (Van Dijk, 1993), sensitizing us to how Indigenous self-determination in academia, such as putting the research and teaching capabilities and content within their own hands, is a potential gateway to broader forms of self-determination (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003; Simpson, 2018; Wilson, 2018).

Practically, we can obtain inspiration from Duneier's (1999) *Sidewalk* project. After his ethnographic project on sidewalk storeowners and peddlers concluded, he invited the same subjects he worked with on the streets during fieldwork to take up paid guest lecture positions to assist in teaching coursework on the subject matter (urban ethnography and poverty) at his university. Rogalin and Pfeiffer (2012) advance the argument by inviting people from across disciplines, which inadvertently helps keep students engaged. This provides a model for inviting Indigenous people to teach and conduct research at universities, while activating manifold modes of Indigenous performative reconciliation by providing material rewards, empowering marginalized identities to reclaim their own narratives in the academy, and providing a sustained way to share physical space (land).

### **(iii) Decolonization of the Mind (DM)**

Freedom, colonization scholars argue, is a reality that is emotionally felt (Lorde, 1984, p.37; Wilson, 2001). Emotions are important as the gateway through which actors enter and analyse their social relations (DeVault, 2004; Doucet, 2008) at a micro-level and which comprise an ethics of accountability at a meso-level (Collins, 1990, p.50). What this means is that the prevailing images of Indigenous peoples – victims, savages, primitive, dirty, even terrorist (LaDuke, 1994; Wolfe, 1999, 2006) – that relegate them to a lower role incapable of comprehending their own position and narratives are deeply embedded in our mental structures across multiple levels and highly consequential for how Indigenous peoples are treated.

In response, Indigenous scholars reclaim Indigenous self-determination by creating their own canons to cite, shape knowledge, and ultimately use to engage with existing academic canons (Kaomea, 2016; Tuck, 2018). Naming and becoming visible, as colonization scholars assert in a tradition shaped by Fanon (1963, p.45) and Freire (1970, Ch.3; 1987), afford



ideological power to the name-giver and subjugation to the named (Agrawal, 2002; LaDuke, 2005). This power originates in the capacity to shape mental structures that order how we think about Indigenous peoples at large and, therefore, how their communities become structured in reality.

This is true of scholarship and pedagogy as much as it is for professional practice that has historically imposed Western-centric standards of wellbeing on Indigenous communities in disregard of their religious sensibilities (Gone, 2007, 2010). To erase Indigenous names and practices (e.g. sun dances) is to sterilize research, teaching, and professional spaces of Indigenous presence, and therefore, visibility. Even when compelled to admonish against the medical merits of Indigenous practices such as skull medicine, Gone (2016, 2017) alludes, it is paramount to account for Indigenous sensibilities as a matter of (ethical) reparations for the erasure of history and bodies that academicians were responsible for in the past.

Thus, allowing Indigenous peoples to build their own bodies of knowledge simultaneously encourages deeper incorporation of Indigenous methods into the academy that helps DM for Indigenous peoples, but also for *non-Indigenous* people (Carlson et al, 2014). Taking up this focus, DM describes the consequences of APC and IIV for the process of decolonizing non-Indigenous minds on multiple levels in terms of reflexivity.

In practical terms, engagement with Indigenous issues and peoples in the capacity of administrative roles inform a reflexivity for non-Indigenous actors in designing research projects, taught coursework, and professional practice. Defined as a “process that challenges the researcher to explicitly examine how [their] research agenda and assumptions, subject locations, personal beliefs, and emotions enter into their research” (Hsiung, 2008, p.212), reflexivity’s significance is heightened for those who *teach* the standards for knowledge production. Hence,

engaging with Indigenous issues in institutional settings becomes a unique type of reflexivity combining Hammersley's (2004) "bricolage" model of qualitative inquiry, wherein reflexivity is the fundamentally negative task of challenging all we perceive, and Hesse-Biber et al's (2004) "strong reflexivity," attention to personal values and conceptual schemas that shape how we organize our experiences of the field (in this case, the academy). This combination into what might be called Indigenous reflexivity commands the heart of Indigenous methodology to relate the self to elders, ceremony, and academic life (Barnhardt and Kawagley, 2005) and also stimulates greater consciousness toward the politics of knowledge production and its pedagogy among non-Indigenous actors by evoking a *set* of interwoven reflexivities between self and past (exposing our values/worldviews), self and respondents (exposing convergences/divergences between our values/worldviews and theirs), and self and audience (exposing how our work engages with different worldviews that view it) that Doucet (2008) calls "gossamer walls."

In this way, Indigenous reflexivity is embodied among researchers, teachers, and practitioners which can be further prompted with strategies like autobiographies by teachers conducted throughout the project or course (Grauerholz and Copenhaver, 1994; Wilson, 2011). The fulfilment of reconciliation also requires that this Indigenous reflexivity be *taught*, made possible by its integration into existing teaching strategies for QRP. In addition to alternative, Indigenous teaching resources outlined in APC, Indigenous reflexivity can be taught across generations by engaging students in the production of knowledge/writing text through exposure to histories of marginalized peoples (Hsiung, 2016), fostering dialogue on issues of social justice and discrimination pertinent to Indigenous peoples (Lincoln, 1998), having students conduct research projects on marginalized Indigenous experiences (Kaomea, 2016), or including

workshops and discussions that challenge the credibility of and philosophies embodied in prevailing themes in QRP texts (Hood, 2006).

Richardson (2012) theorizes that reflexivity is a powerful antidote for coloniality in education, such as to embody the “sentiment of existence” by placing students into contact with the “experiential and existential situation of particular individuals,” most notably “the everyday experiences of racism, patriarchy, and classism... particularly minoritized and racialized [peoples]” (p.543; see also Margonis, 2011). Reflexivity is salient for educators as well, whose “broader socio-cultural milieu” may well perpetuate “the continuing regulating force of coloniality in contemporary educational relationships which dehumanize African American and other minoritized [students]” (Richardson, 2012, p.540; Ruwhiu, 2019; Quijano, 2000).

This set of teaching strategies helps institute Indigenous reflexivity while overcoming a perennial challenge of QRP education: reducing “conceptual baggage” (preconceived notions about identities and QRP altogether) that students (and educators) carry and struggle to dispose of (Clark and Lang, 2002; Hsiung, 2008; Tan and Ko, 2004). QRP scholars warn that the dangers of students’ conceptual baggage lie in their adopting cultural biases that blind their observation beyond *what* behaviors are present to interrogate *why* or *how* categories of behaviors are socially constructed (Baker et al, 2016). What this means for Indigenous issues is that cultural images of Indigenous peoples prefigure students’ worldviews in ways that draw from and potentially reinforce the present relations of domination that already subordinate Indigenous peoples (Kovach, 2010, Ch.9). Richardson (2012) goes further to elaborate how the stigmatization of Indigenous identities is a direct barrier to education for Indigenous students, whose presence in the academy has itself been an object of unwanted scrutiny (see also Grosfoguel, 2008). The

thrust of reform, he notes, is thus the reconstruction of prevailing norms of ideating Indigenous identities themselves.

To re-story Indigenous identities, therefore, constitutes a pedagogical opportunity for methodological education by way of challenging and calling upon students (and instructors) to challenge their own cultural biases with experiential learning (i.e. fieldwork and observation assignments) and discussion with one another (Grauerholz and Copenhaver, 1994; Navarro, 2005). Just as important, re-storying Indigenous identities vindicates the *political significance* of doing so for the DC of non-Indigenous minds toward effecting reconciliation as social transformation.

## **Discussion**

Colonialism continues to live large in the power dynamics that govern the enterprise of knowledge production through standards for research and education. It may be argued that the academy itself as an institution ought not to be relied on for Indigenous empowerment, especially given its Christian roots and historical role in erasing Indigenous culture; that Indigenous peoples would benefit more from building their own collectives with which to give new life to their legacies, heritages, traditions, and repertoires of knowledge. This article does not discredit this alternative, but rather asserts that the very historical proximity that the academy has to colonization makes it a worthwhile site for decolonization as an exercise of moral accountability and a matter of practicality. Anglo-American universities and colleges continue to occupy resources that have historically belonged to Indigenous peoples, such as land, that ought to be redistributed to them in some form.

Decolonizing inquiry is a noble effort aligned with the historical emphases on equity and social justice native to many social sciences and humanistic disciplines interested in DC and

QRP, a growing conversation of which this article is a part. Within this scope, three areas of action underwrite the objective of reconciliation and should guide this effort across how we approach QRP: (i) attention to physical context (APC), (ii) inclusion of Indigenous voices (IIV), and (iii) decolonizing the mind (DM).

Yet, diffuse across all three is a dormant tension within DC, torn between one characterization as yet another empty promise that upholds the status quo by depriving Indigenous of agentic representation to benefit colonizers (Tuck and Yang, 2012) and another as a genuine way of progressing toward social transformation for Indigenous people in the academy (Smith, 2012[1999], pp.5, 9). The scale tips toward either depending on how it is *enacted*. Keeping this in mind, this article preserves the potential for DC as a tool for social transformation by laying out epistemological and practical strategies that, by way of APC, IIV, and DM, enact DC in terms of: substantively accounting for cultural attachments to and (re)administrating physical space, physically incorporating different Indigenous agents of knowledge into research, teaching, and practice, as well as instituting and teaching forms of reflexivity that precipitate from the preceding strategies to decolonize the minds of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike.

The three key principles outlined in this article are tools to improve the ongoing effort of DC as well as barometers to assess its success, applicable to post-secondary institutions engaged in research, academic teaching, and/or professional training at the postgraduate and undergraduate levels alike. The focus on materiality pervading all three principles is intended to empower local Indigenous communities in practical ways: by placing material resources into the hands of Indigenous peoples, they hope to lessen extant gaps in poverty and wellbeing; and by having canons of knowledge built by and whose access is governed by Indigenous peoples, they

hope to increase Indigenous representation in the academy and reduce institutional discrimination.

However, reflecting on the insights developed from the above sections, this article outlines two shortcomings and areas for further deliberation in the labor of DC to be addressed in advancing reconciliation:

(1) As asserted throughout this article, the systemic experiences of deprivation faced by Indigenous peoples resonate with those of marginalized racial (i.e. Black), gender-based (i.e. women), and geopolitical identities (i.e. the Global South). Differences among separate identities may inform interlocking inequalities in what Collins (1990, p.18) calls a matrix of domination, whereby axes of oppression intersect to generate new, unique types of inequality, like Indigenous feminist epistemology (Smith, 2012[1999], p.76). It may prove fruitful to temper the epistemology of Indigenous identity with analysis of varying and overlapping identities to identify new breeds of intersectionality that covertly order hitherto ignored forms of deprivation in other contexts, such as ownership and labor relations in workplace settings (Choo and Ferree, 2010) or the contentious politics that Indigenous women experience in mobilization (Hernandez Castillo, 2010). The potential for such intersections further gains credence from Hsiung's (2016) observation that QRP subjects in the periphery typically face a shared marginality (structured sets of marginalization experiences) because of their common geopolitical position.

(2) As DC gains momentum in the academy, it becomes a lamentable panacea of a framework to treat all exclusions of academia. Solidarity among Indigenous peoples and racial minorities is an important means of mobilizing to push for reconciliation, but some institutions have received the message wrongly, blurring the nuances in these identities in their attempts to devise solutions without consulting minorities themselves. Renewed efforts to decolonize

universities from within, for instance, conflate Indigenous with *racial* equity and discrimination under a broad banner of DC (Diagle, 2019; Keele University, 2019; Ontario College of Art and Design University, 2016). Similarly, even the most vocal commitments to reform within the public-facing camps of social scientific and humanistic disciplines perpetuate a unidirectional diffusion of “expert knowledge,” failing to recognize more collaborative forms of knowledge production needed to truly become effect DC (Lozano, 2017). DC’s meaning – and therefore its power – as a genuine mechanism for social transformation thus risks being diluted by a deluge of scholarship and institutional reform uncritically applying it without respect for Indigenous land, issues, or identities. This dilution deprives DC of its ability to build localized, Indigenous bodies of expertise needed for intellectual independence from white, settler Anglo-America and risks marginalizing Indigenous struggles by diverting its focus to unrelated issues that, although important, are ultimately separate from Indigenous affairs (Adese, 2016). This dilution also endangers DC by transforming it into cerebral exercise by elite academics in isolation from concrete efforts to enact reconciliation, motivate material change, mobilize for social transformation, and advance the Indigenous struggle for better visibility, legitimacy, and well-being<sup>2</sup>.

There is a particular spark of potential in this point about collaboration. Recent scholarship shows that Indigenous and colonized peoples are not “passive victims,” but active and eager architects of their own empowerment. We glimpse this energy in growing demand for cross-cultural inclusivity from Indigenous peoples in professional and academic fieldwork. Bennett (2015), for instance, details how Indigenous peoples are positioning themselves as agentic defenders of a culture that deserves accounting for in social work practice, such “speaking with elders and other community members to discuss what they need and to identify

broader issues” (p.29). Sullivan (2018) describes how Indigenous agency in determining their own sex and sexuality is an act of reclamation that disrupts legacies of colonial worldviews instituted in government policies. Thus, attention to Indigenous agency now gains traction in the domains of professional practice (social work), scholarship, and even governance (Tomaselli, 2017), from which arises a political will ready for collaboration toward reconciliation and social transformation. In a similar vein, though the credibility of the academy itself as a producer of knowledge may be questioned given its resignation to neoliberalism over the years, the processes by which reconciliation comes to fruition (APC, IIV, and DM) outlined in this article are forces that will resist neoliberalism at the same time they effect reconciliation. Reconciliation, ideated in the present article as the restoration and “restorying” of Indigenous heritage, culture, and lives within the academy, presents a disruption to the epistemology and personnel that order the modern university, which, in the contemporary political climate extremizing toward populist racism, sexism, and classism, is becoming all the more important.



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<sup>1</sup> Hsiung (2016) calls strategies within this kind of epistemological shift “transgressive practices.”

<sup>2</sup> Although I argue for the intersection for varying identities in (1), I note that this is meant to identify and disaggregate hitherto unidentified struggles for *Indigenous* peoples, “whose bodies, territories, beliefs and values have been travelled through” (Smith, 2012[1999], p.81), *not* to cede uniquely Indigenous intellectual grounds to other racial and ethnic identities that already have their own epistemologies (see Acker et al, 1983; Collins, 1990, pp.x, 30).