

Master's Capstone Project

entitled

The Table of Power:

A Liberatory Praxis Through Indigenous Knowledges

by

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Author's Positionality

Serina Payan Hazelwood {she/her}. I am a survivor of the historical and current impacts of colonialism. I am a queer, Indigenous-Chicana. I am a daughter, mother, sister, wife, prima, friend, scholar, student, and educator. I am a community member within the ancestral lands of the Hohokam (literal translation, those who have passed; Phoenix, Arizona) and Kumeyaay (Rosarito, Baja California, Mexico). My mother's ancestral roots extend to the sacred lands of the Pueblo Peoples (New Mexico); Chihuahua, Mexico; and Spain. My father and his ancestors are settler-colonists who emigrated from England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my daughter, Ashley Brooke, my heart.

Our grandmothers who were strong, resilient, and joyful call us back to our roots.

The medicine is yours.

I love you.

Acknowledgments

My work would not be possible without the love, guidance, and encouragement of many individuals. I pray to the ancestors who came before me in gratitude for their resilience and resistance. Thank you for waking me up through my dreams and guiding me with your whispers until the time comes when I will be at your side as an ancestor to our descendants.

Thank you to my sister, Sharla, for always being there and accepting me for who I am and what I choose no matter what. You provided me with a roof over my head and cared for the babies when I was in need and wasn't very good at asking for help. You are the only one who

will ever understand where I came from. We are survivors. We are resilient. The medicine is yours.

Ashley, my daughter, I am so very proud and honored to be your mom and witness your own journey of becoming a nurse. Studying with you by my side was a great joy and highlight. I know that our ancestors are proud of you and that it is no mistake that you have taken the path of a healer.

To my *Sweets*, Silvana, my wife. Thank you for walking by my side, hand-in-hand, as we decolonize and Indigenize the spaces we take up. You are my inspiration and hold the mirror up so that I can see my Chingonisma! Thank you for feeding my soul with conversation and meals that inspired me to press on even though sometimes it hurts.

My dear sweet, Piscean, Eternal Mentor, Lara Jacobs, I bow my head in gratitude for your guidance, friendship, and love. I truly could not have done this without you. You inspired me in ways you will never know. You are the only one who can lovingly provide a multitude of redlines, critiques, and edits and ensure that I am actually encouraged! I appreciate your wisdom, depth of knowledge, and kindness. You ARE the mentor you wish you would have had.

Thank you to my academic advisor, Kimberley Greeson, for guiding me through moments of feeling overwhelmed and lost on this academic journey. I so appreciate the sacred space of community you held for me every month and I didn't realize how lonely I was until the end of our hour.

I am in deep gratitude to Oscar Medina for introducing me to the Nahui Ollin and Chicana/o/x educational perspectives I had been craving all my life! Thank you.

I am in deep appreciation for the scholars and liberators who came before me to establish the foundation of this work despite the violence and sacrifices you endured. I am especially

grateful for Dr. Bianca Laureano, Dr. Zelaika S. Hepworth Clarke, Cindy Lee Alves, Dr. Roger Kuhn, and Dr. Susy Tonalmetl Zepeda. Each of you have contributed to my journey of self-reflection and Precious Knowledge in a way that has been loving, kind, and inspirational. Thank you for your Precious Knowledges, time, and support.

To all of the participants and learners who have attended the classes I have led or facilitated over the years, thank you. You have held a mirror to my face so that I could learn and transform into the person I am today.

Finally, thank you, Vienna, for telling me in 2016 that I didn't need a degree and that I was doing extraordinary work without it. Your words ignited a fire in my soul and I had a knowing that I owed it to my ancestors and I deserved to have the degrees.

Introduction

The impacts of colonization are complex and deeply personal to me. Due to the extraction and exploitation of land via genocide through white settler colonialism in the so-called United States, human and non-human beings such as lands, waters, plants, and other animals have endured immeasurable harm (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015; Jacobs et al., 2022). Liboiron (2002, 10:15) describes colonization as "non-Indigenous access to Indigenous land for non-Indigenous goals, needs, and desires." Marya (2018, 10:13) extends this definition further by underlining how colonization was an extractive economic system on Indigenous lands, "supported by systems of supremacy and domination which are a necessary part of keeping wealth and power accumulated in the hands of the colonizers and ultimately their financiers."

In the mid-fifteenth century, European monarchies created a religious, political, and legal proclamation called the Doctrine of Discovery. In 1493, the papal authority granted explorers the

rights to "discover", conquer, and dominate land, waterways, and people (enslavement) of non-Christians (e.g., Indigenous Peoples) global territories. Christians used the doctrine as permission directly from god to commit genocide worldwide, which created an ideology (Manifest Destiny) that strengthened over time and ultimately was brought with the European settlers fleeing persecution (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). Settler colonialism is a particular power where settlers come in with the intention of making a new home which includes removing the people and creating a political system that ensures the settler's power (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Jacobs, 2023; Veracini, 2010).

By the 1800s, the ideologies of Manifest Destiny, American Exceptionalism, and Romantic Nationalism were in full motion as white settlers expanded the United States territory, which ushered in the insidious education system to strengthen nation-building and wealth (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015; Jacobs et al., 2022; Hemphill & Blakely, 2015). This time period intersected with the Indian removal era in which Indigenous Peoples were forcibly relocated from their ancestral territories and ongoing assimilation policies by the federal government filtered into their communities (Jacobs et al., 2024). In 1860, the United States War Department established the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to carry out epistemicide (defined as the "killing, silencing, annihilation, or devaluing of a knowledge system") by creating the first of many boarding schools where Indigenous children were stolen from their parents' homes and forced to endure the tortures of cultural genocide (Patin, 2021, 02:51). Hundreds of thousands of Indigenous children were killed and terrorized in boarding schools for over one hundred years (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). Federal Indian boarding schools attempted to address the "Indian problem" with an assimilation technique that Captain Richard H. Pratt described as to "kill the Indian, and save the man" (Pratt, 1892. p. 46). As a tool of assimilation, killing the Indian meant

that the federal government would attempt to assimilate Indigenous children at a young age to Judeo-Christian norms and values so they could be transformed into exploitable nation-builders of democracy (Jacobs et al., 2024).

By the end of the 1800s, "Theodore Roosevelt considered the weakening of 'whites,' 'strong radical qualities,' and the declining population among white settlers amid rising immigration as a form of 'racial suicide'" (Kosek, 2006, p. 148). The United States then allocated resources to an assimilationist model of education that created outdoor camps to condition the weakening physique of descendants of white settler men and boys and new European immigrants (Grande, 2004; Grande, 2015; Deloria, 1999). At the turn of the twentieth century, the era of "free" lands vanished and brought social changes within education. John Dewey, the "grandfather of progressive education," wrote, "At the present time, the frontier is moral, not physical. The period of free lands that seemed boundless in extent has vanished. Unused resources are now human rather than material" (Mitchell, 2001, p. 53). Dewey theorized that democracy and nation-building could be expanded upon by the methods of education (Boydston, 1987). Nation-building also requires a falsity of democracy in which lands stolen from Indigenous Peoples are then built upon the backs of the stolen and colonized peoples (Truesdell et al., 2017; Grande, 2015). Unfortunately, Dewey's proximity to power as a white settler descendant reinforced the falsity of democracy and nation-building through the extraction, consumption, metabolization, and reproduction of knowledge.

The two central systems of white settler colonization are supremacy and capitalism, which create, support, and uphold the narrative of white settler nation-building (Figure 1.; Marya, 2018). In the United States, nation-building used systems of education (such as academia and public school systems) as one of many methods for epistemological genocide (Grande,

2015). Nation-building also contributes to the long settler history of knowledge production that occurs within the Academy and has created a legacy in which white settler descendants perpetuate the harms of their predecessors, making them shareholders in supremacy and capitalism.

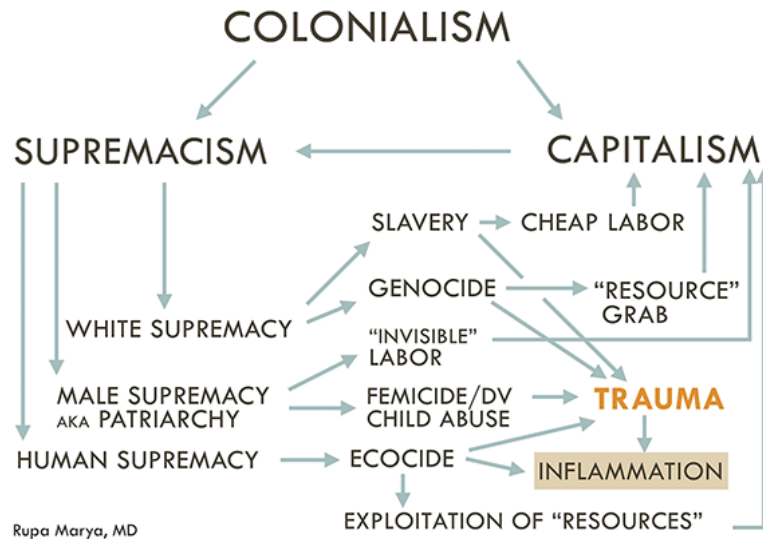


Figure 1. Colonialism, Supremacism, Capitalism chart.

Shareholders of Power

Within the metaphorical Ivory Tower of the Academy, experience has taught me that the shareholders of power (e.g., administrators, tenured professors) are often disconnected from the realities of the people they govern and are unconcerned with the realities of the people who serve. As a way to conceptualize how colonial power is used today by shareholders, especially in the Academy, I visualize a table of power in which shareholders are seated. The shareholders sit around this metaphorical table of power and uphold and maintain the infrastructure of colonialism by influencing the production and allocation of knowledges and creating policies,

laws, and additional spaces at the table for other shareholders deemed “worthy” of power and privilege.

The table of power extends outside of the Academy and into other colonial systems, such as city, county, state, and federal governance. As I write this manuscript, shareholders who benefit from the status quo of colonialism are actively introducing bills into legislation to double down on centuries of epistemological genocide and violence. Various movements for pedagogical reimaginings (e.g., Critical Race Theory (CRT), which emphasizes the incorporation of non-colonial historical perspectives into academic contexts) are met with violence and disregard from the shareholders in an attempt to maintain the infrastructure of colonial epistemologies. Since January 2021, eighty-eight percent of the states have introduced bills to eradicate, restrict, or limit CRT with consequences ranging from fines to termination of employment (Schwartz, 2023).

Gaining a seat at any of these tables of power is a difficult task and often requires assimilation to a prescribed set of colonial values, a phenomenon called the Value Assimilation Effect (VAE; Emmanuel-Aviña & Delaney, 2018). Therapy settings demonstrate the VAE because therapeutic clients often assimilate their values to match the values of their therapists (Schwehn & Schau, 1999). VAE has also been demonstrated in colonial academic contexts in which, over time, students' values (especially those relating to religion) assimilate to the values of their professors (Emmanuel-Aviña & Delaney, 2018; Schwehn & Schau, 1990). The power holders in these two scenarios are responsible for assimilation—a tool of colonial reform that has been used against Indigenous Peoples and other colonized peoples since settlers first stepped foot on these lands (Jacobs et al., 2024). Gaining a seat at the table of power then requires forms of

assimilation in which values and knowledge systems are colonized and used as hegemonic tools that maintain epistemic and ontological normativity (Jacobs et al., 2024).

Assimilation can occur when a well-intended member of a marginalized community gains a position of power by exhibiting competency with the Academy's missions and values. Often the power of an individual of a marginalized group is perceived as illegitimate and less effective by those they have power over, which causes the individual to assert their power more firmly to show they have the power to reward or punish within the constructs of the system's missions and values (Daniel, 2018). In addition, gaining power can elevate an individual's confidence and value of their egocentric ideologies and perceptions, which can lead them to make decisions that benefit themselves and their abilities to maintain power (Lucas & Baxter, 2011).

Though assimilation is one way that I conceptualize how seats of power are shared around the table of power, I also theorize another avenue through which new shareholders, mainly those from colonized communities, gain a seat at the table so that the Academy can be perceived as compliant with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) values; however, these instances typically occur only after an act so heinous has been committed that causes public outcry for accountability. It is after such acts that shareholders of the table of power offer a performative gesture: a seat at the table, given specifically to a "marginalized" person who can be the voice for (DEI) as "an interloper in their space" (Daniel, 2018. p. 21). The DEI representative is tasked with the insurmountable and impossible labor of "fixing" the systemic oppression that colonizers created and the structures of colonialism that maintain such oppressions.

For example, proceeding the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020, on-campus protests at Penn State prompted administrators to announce an investigation to address campus

racial discrimination and bias (Tobin, 2023). A report led by minoritized scholars and faculty members recommended that Penn State invest in creating a Center for Racial Justice on campus to address racial discrimination and bias. Sadly, two years later, and with social justice protests in the rearview mirror, the new president of Penn State announced the cancellation of the center plans, causing community outcry with no foreseeable resolution (Tobin, 2023).

Although individuals from minoritized communities can attain positions of power, their representation in academic settings remains minimal and perpetuates a system where they are consistently outnumbered, which maintains hegemonic colonial epistemologies and values. For example, positions of power in academia, such as full-time professors, account for only about **22%** of non-white folks (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). In 2020, The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published data (Figure 2) that shows the power differential of full-time professors at colleges and universities in the United States. The NCES findings show white males at 51% and white females at 28% for a combined majority of **79%**. The remaining 21% of space is shared by 8% male Asian/Pacific Islanders (API) and 4% API women for a combined total of 12%; 2% Black males and 2% Black females; 2% Hispanic males and 2% Hispanic females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The race category for American Indian/Alaska Native excludes sex breakouts because the combined total is less than 1%.

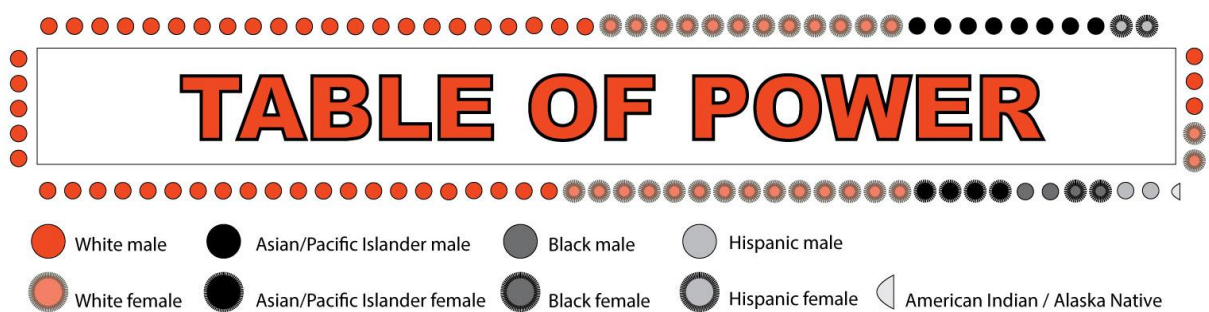


Figure 2. Table of Power created from NCES data

The colonial research method used in the NCES is yet another example of how the system of white supremacy attempts to erase and assimilate everyone into a hegemonic melting pot. Although the NCES data helps validate the isolation and minoritization of marginalized peoples, the reductive approach taken by the authors of the study in interpreting the data by only race and the biological sex binary does not provide an accurate depiction of the sociocultural identities that situate a person closer to the proximity to power such as ethnicity, assigned sex at birth, gender, sexuality, ability, personal association, political party, class, religion, and language (Cuahtin et al., 2019). In addition to the lack of sociocultural identities, colonial terms such as Asian/ Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native are problematic because they combine very distinct groups of people that are geographically and culturally inappropriate (thereby making distinct groups of people into a monolith) while simultaneously erasing the histories and experiences of multiple distinct peoples.

Going back to the idea of "fixing" the problems within the Academy, many scholars from marginalized backgrounds have considered different frameworks that would rectify some of the racial and ethnic disparities underlying the colonial issues. Black feminist scholars such as bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Nicole Truesdell, Beverly Jean Daniel, Bianca Laureano, and many more have led the conversations of anti-racist and anti-diversity emancipatory pedagogies. Indigenous communities have underlined the need for decolonial pedagogies where colonial knowledge systems should be replaced with Indigenous epistemologies (Fanon, 1963; Risam, 2018). However, the need for inclusion and additional participation of marginalized peoples in colonial systems come down to two truths 1) a decolonial seat at the table is a violent process (Fanon, 1963, 2) "...colonization of Indigenous lands, bodies, and minds will not be ended by 'further inclusion or more participation' (Byrd, 2011, p. xxvi).

Realizing this, many individuals continue to advocate for the dismantling of power systems and metaphoric tables of power. However, such calls for systemic colonial paradigm and structural shifts are often met with different forms of violence. The emotional, spiritual, and sometimes physical violence that liberators and activists endure while attempting to dismantle the power hierarchy within the Academy include harassment, fatigue, and sometimes involvement from law enforcement (Daniel, 2018). As a result of such violence, many faculty members leave their positions or are forced out of their seats at the table by other "infractions" Grande (2004, p. 3) writes, "Similar to black feminism (which forced white feminists and black male intellectuals to examine how they remained blind to the continued exploitation of black women) my hope is that American Indian critique-al studies will compel critical theorists and American Indian scholars to examine how their lack of interchange has hindered the struggle for spiritually vibrant, intellectually challenging, and politically operative schools for both Indian and non-Indian students."

This is especially important, given the assimilative nature of colonial academic classrooms, as previously mentioned. On a personal level, the systems of colonialism, with education being the most pervasive, ripped my people from our lands and forced them into systems of nation-building that eroded our family roots generation by generation. As with many other Indigenous minoritized scholars, I ignorantly allowed myself to be tokenized as the face of DEI in academic spaces in hopes that having a seat at the table of power would help me create change in a system that is bigger than the people who exist within it—a system that intends to maintain our minoritization while extracting our values and Knowledges. After years of this work, I now resist it. Today, I walk in solidarity with other Indigenous scholars like Sandy Grande, Lara A. Jacobs, Cherry YEW Yamane, Tara McAllister, Andrew Kalani Carlson,

Jonathan Fisk, Jessica Hernandez, Max Liboiron, Zoe Todd, and many more who refuse to allow the Academy to continue extracting, assimilating, commodifying, consuming, metabolizing and repackaging our values and Knowledges in ways that make them and ourselves more palatable to the white settlers seated at the table of power in the Ivory Towers (Jacobs et al., 2024). Together, we enact a politics of refusal through our resistance (Simpson, 2014).

Below, I present reflexive storytelling as an act of resistance and weave together my experiences in white settler spaces as a student and educator. The story becomes a metaphorical Indigenous Framework for liberatory praxis, "particularly in this moment of a metastasizing settler state..." in which "it is incumbent upon each and every one of us to refuse, reimagine, and rearticulate assimilative logics in all of their (low and high intensity) forms" (Grande, 2015. p. 7). My story work creates a more nuanced understanding of how the systems and mechanics of colonization (e.g., supremacy and capitalism) affect colonized peoples on a personal level while also drawing attention to the systemic oppression created by these systems. I begin with a story of the table of power and then replace hegemonic colonial systems of knowledge with the Nahuatl Ollin (an Indigenous Way of Knowing and Being) and theories of black feminism to tell a counter-narrative story that is an act of defiant Indigenizing (Indigenous theorizing).

In recent years, Indigenous scholars have implemented the Nahuatl Ollin as a framework to decolonize minds, bodies, and spirits and a method through which we can re-humanize ourselves and others who have experienced oppression and marginalization by the educational school system (Acosta, 2007). The Nahuatl Ollin comprises four Tezcatlipocas (Ways of Knowing) from the Aztec sun stone calendar. The four energies are associated with the directions and include Tezcatlipoca (north), meaning "the smoking mirror," representing self-reflection and memory; Quetzalcoatl (east), means "precious and beautiful knowledge; Huitzilopochtli (south), means

"will to act"; and Xipe Totec (west) represents transformation. As a human seeking liberation, I recognize how the Nahui Ollin energies have always been a part of my Ways of Knowing and Being and how they continually guide me through decolonizing my mind, body, and spirit (Acosta, 2007). At nearly fifty years of age and as a survivor of colonialism's historical and current impacts, I am journeying to decolonize myself and re-member what my ancestors hoped and imagined for me. My journey has no final destination but includes decolonial methods and story work that allow me to decolonize my educational experience by exploring the Nahui Ollin.

The apex of the project is the reflexive and metaphorical "Table of Power" story, where I reflect on my lived experiences through storytelling and invite readers to "draw their own conclusions and gain life lessons from a more personal perspective" (Wilson, 2008. p. 17). I encourage readers to remove the abstractions and rules that storytelling lends and "to see others' life experiences through your own eyes" (Wilson, 2008. p. 17). After the Table of Power story, I present an Indigenous counter-narrative—a futurities-based operationalization of a different imagining. I employ the Nahui Ollin's epistemologies and thereby create a storied framework for Indigenizing pedagogies on a path to liberatory praxis where readers may re-member and imagine Indigenous elsewheres that are "beyond the erasures of coloniality..." and beyond the structures of colonial powers (McCarty, 2018, p. 232). Finally, I conclude with my position on the Academy and futurities of Indigenous elsewheres.

Methods

This project uses multiple methods, including reflexivity, decolonizing methods, and storytelling through the operationalization of the Nahui Ollin's epistemologies. The first story provides a metaphorical framework for decolonizing a seat at the Table of Power at the Ivory

Tower's apex. Similar to Laura Harjo (2019), I dream in Indigenous futurities, as my ancestors have always done in an effort to create an Indigenous replacement for the table of power—a space created in collaboration by the colonized through the four energies (Tezcatlipocas) of the Nahui Ollin.

Reflexivity Method

Reflexivity guides my journey to understand further my Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being while centering my experiences and the futures of Indigenous Peoples and all of our relations (Jacobs, Avery, et al., 2022; Jacobs et al., 2021a). I use critical reflexivity methods to disrupt power and reveal oppressive colonial systems (e.g., supremacy and capitalism) that support the Academy and are present within the self (Arday, 2019; Castell et al., 2018). The revelations of how the structure of settler colonialism is embedded into the education system create a pathway to decolonize so that I may re-member and imagine a liberatory praxis of Indigenous elsewheres that are "beyond the erasures of coloniality..." (Wolfe, 2006; McCarty, 2018).

Decolonizing Method

Similar to colonialism, decolonization is not an event; it is a continuous, creative, violent process that replaces colonial systems, norms, ideas, and practices (Wolfe, 2006; Liboiron, 2022; Fanon, 1961; McClaren, 2003; Grande, 2004). There is no medal to be won at the end of the race because there is no end to decolonizing processes. Decolonial methods help to "acquire not only the knowledge of the oppressor but also the skills to dismantle and negotiate the implications of such knowledge (Grande, 2004, p. 56). Decolonial methods are not linear and are constantly evolving, so they are difficult to define. However, a common thread in decolonial work is the

objective to replace, rather than integrate or request to be included within the existing, hegemonic colonial systems within education (Grande, 2018; Jacobs et al., 2024).

To decolonize, the colonized must first gain knowledge about the colonial systems and their intentions to oppress, replace, commit genocide, and dispossess (Liboiron, 2021; Fanon, 1961; Grande, 2018). My knowledge has been gained through my lived experiences in the Academy as both a student and as an educator. As a research method, decolonization has been used to challenge democracy, capitalism, research practices, educational paradigms (e.g., pedagogy, curricula design), etc. (Grande, 2018; Liboiron, 2021; Smith, 2012; Ropers-Huilman, 1998; Jacobs et al., 2024). Decolonization has also been used to critique the production of Knowledge and integrate Indigenous Knowledges into multiple frameworks that replace colonial systems and epistemologies (Fúnez-Flores, 2022; Jacobs et al., 2021; 2022a; 2022b; 2024).

For this project, I use decolonization methods to investigate colonial power structures that cause harm and are embedded in the Academy and then find ways to dismantle them into non-hierarchical, circular, and shared power structures that include concepts of seeking common ground alongside a spectrum in identities, beliefs, and learning styles, while fostering a collaborative environment and negotiating knowledge (Ropers-Huilman, 1998). Finally, decolonizing methods allow readers to expand on how they can reconnect to the Earth's body through Indigenous Knowledges, ancestral ontologies, cosmologies, and axiologies, which I encourage readers to do as they navigate the two stories below.

Indigenous Storytelling

"Story is a basic foundation of all human learning and teaching" (Cajete, 1994; Iseke, 2013. p. 559). Since time immemorial, Indigenous Peoples have used storytelling to pass down

teachings and epistemologies, cosmologies, axiologies, and ontologies (Fernández-Llamazares & Cabeza, 2017; Iseke, 2013; Jacobs et al., 2022; Jacobs et al., 2024). Wilson (2008, p. 17) writes,

Stories and metaphor are often used in Indigenous societies...as a teaching tool. Stories allow listeners to draw their own conclusions and to gain life lessons from a more personal perspective. By escaping abstractions and rules, stories allow us to see others' life experiences through our own eyes. This information can be internalized in a way that is difficult for abstract discussions to achieve.

Indigenous storytelling methods are a decolonial approach to Indigenizing Knowledges with counter-narratives that disrupt hegemonic colonial epistemologies. Story work is the reciprocal way in which I receive and give the nourishment of Knowledge. The metaphor of Knowledge as nourishment came to me in a vision from an ancestor in 2018. In my vision, an ancestor was simmering red medicine when she looked up and walked over to me with a bouquet of plant medicine. She spoke to me, not from her mouth, but from her heart, and said, "We have been waiting for you. It is time. Will you accept this?" I extended my arms, and she laid the bouquet across them, bringing me back to my body. At that moment, I knew that I must honor my ancestors. My story work in the below sections privileges my cultural responsibility. The "Table of Power" story is just a snippet of the multitude of metaphors from conversations I have had with collaborators and colleagues who remain disheartened by a system that needs hospice (de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015; Grande, 2018). I hope that readers of this manuscript will expand on the story's metaphors and find their elsewheres that are "beyond the erasures of coloniality..." (McCarty, 2018)

The Story of the Table of Power

In a place far away stands a massive Ivory Tower that looms on the periphery of the people who once inhabited the land the tower now occupies. The colonizers who stole the land claimed it was their destiny by god to spread democracy, liberty, and justice for all and called themselves shareholders. At the apex of the Ivory Tower, there is a Table of Power where shareholders of political, economic, legal, educational, and healthcare systems produce knowledge for the consumption of nation-builders. The knowledge produced from the table of power creates systemic laws and policies that uphold the democracy of the lands and the infrastructure needed for colonization.

Many generations of colonized peoples were denied access to the Ivory Tower based on the shareholders' beliefs in their merciless savagery and epistemic failings. To pacify the revolutionaries, the shareholders of democracy gave selective seats to the colonized, who demonstrated fluency via assimilation into the systems of the colonizers' democracy along with specific social privileges and higher education. As time went on, the communities of the colonized began to demand additional seats at the table for a more egalitarian democracy that included the voices of all people, not just the shareholders.

After many years of achieving the tiers of prerequisites to apply for a seat at the Table of Power, I finally received my invitation that read,

Dear Shareholder Candidate,

You are cordially invited to attend our yearly Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Academia Day. This is a great honor and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for minorities such as yourself to compete for the opportunity to one day sit at the Table of Power. DEI Day is an opportunity for the shareholders of the Ivory tower to consume and enjoy your exotic, ancestral

recipes of Knowledges. Shareholders' consumption of your Ancestral Knowledges represents unity in the movement toward democracy. If your Knowledges exceed our expectations, you may be able to advance to the next level of consideration. We expect you to focus solely on this opportunity and decline all other offers to demonstrate your allegiance to the Ivory Tower. We recommend that you arrive early and dress professionally. Please note that your resources are considered a donation to the cause. We do not validate parking; bring cash.

Sincerely,

The Academy's DEI Committee

I was excited and put off by the invitation's wording; it sounded competitive and outside my cultural values, but I was grateful for the opportunity. If I had a seat at the Table of Power, I could help make a change. I spent months on my knees at the altar of my ancestors, asking for wisdom, guidance, strength, and humility. I was so excited to share my Ancestral Knowledges so that others would finally see the beauty and value of who we are! The night before the big day, I selected my recipes and braided my hair with prayers.

The following day, I made my way to the Ivory Tower. Looking out my windows, I watched the abuelas watering their urban gardens and children in uniforms walking to school. ****BUMP**** I was startled out of my window-watching when my tire dropped into a giant pothole in the street. My mom had been calling the Ivory Tower's road services department for years to have the streets repaired for safety, but she never received a call back. Maybe I would meet a shareholder who would connect my mom to a person in power who would allocate resources for our community roads.

I finally made my way to the highway toll booth that led to the Ivory Tower. Wow! The highway was lush and pristine, and there was not a pothole to be seen. A couple of luxury

vehicles with shareholder license plates honked as they passed me because my little *trokita* could not keep up. I exited the highway and entered the neighborhood leading to the Ivory Tower. There were mansions with substantial front lawns and backyards with pools and paths leading to golf courses. Laborers were busily manicuring the shrubs into nearly perfect squares and rectangles. The automatic sprinklers that kept the grass green leaked water into the street and down into a storm drain. Au pairs walked children to school while moms sipped their lattes after a busy morning of yoga and Pilates. The grocery stores were called markets, and their signage boasted organic food sources with free delivery.

As I finally reached the gates of the Ivory Tower, the road leading to it was even more impressive; plants and trees I had never previously seen lined both sides of the road. I leaned closer to my wheel to see the full view of the Ivory Tower; it was massive! The Ivory Tower was constructed of solid, white marble and had windows with iron bars at the tower's peak. In the center of the roundabout was an enormous statue of the "Founding Father". I followed the sign that said, "DEI guest parking in the rear." Even though I could not afford the parking fee, I also could not afford to not be there, so I paid the exorbitant parking fee and gathered my Ancestral Knowledges for a day of sharing.

With my Ancestral Knowledges in hand, I knocked on the door that read, "DEI Guest," and a woman who appeared familial answered the door. She was wearing a huipil under a black suit jacket, and her hair was pulled back into a bun and adorned with tiny flowers. Her smile was warm, but her eyes were tired. She said, "Come on in; we have been expecting you. Did you bring your Ancestral Knowledges? The shareholders are starving!" I nervously nodded and asked, "What can I do to help?". She pointed toward the lively kitchen and said, "Go ask the

Elders; they are leading the way." The kitchen was full of nervous and joyful energy. Folks chatting and feeding each other their Ancestral Knowledges.

A loud buzzer rang, and a shareholder stood up on a ladder with a microphone and said, "Today, I am your leader. If you are hoping to win, you better hope your Knowledges are not too spicy or exotic. The elevator is unavailable to non-shareholders, so grab your Ancestral Knowledges and climb the ladder to the Table of Power!" I whispered to the woman wearing the huipil, "How many times have you done this?" She responded, "This is my seventh attempt." The shareholder's blue eyes were piercing as she blew her whistle like a soldier, and we began our journey up the ladder with our Ancestral Knowledges close to our hearts. Our breaths and footsteps echoed through the cold, fluorescent-lit cylinder that led to the apex of the Ivory Tower. The ascent was arduous, and many had to abandon their trek because it was not accessible to them for one reason or another.

When we finally reached the door of opportunity, nobody complained about how tired they were, only that we were happy to have finally made it. The heavy double doors swung open, and the light from the windows nearly blinded me. When my eyes finally adjusted to the light in the room, I observed several mirrors hanging on the whitewashed walls. The walls were decorated with photos and paintings of invasions, conquests, and conquests of the founding fathers of democracy. I searched for my reflection in the mirror but only saw that of another face whose reflection had been burned into it.

My attention refocused on the long rectangular wood table. The seats that the shareholders sat upon were all different. Some seats had tall, sturdy backs of the finest wood and leather; others were plastic and short, so some shareholders barely reached the table's base. "How odd," I thought. With all the resources that went into the Ivory Tower, surely they could afford to

provide everyone with the same regal chairs. I counted 100 seats at the Table of Power; 79 white settlers occupied the majority. At each end of the Table of Power sat older shareholders: white men who wore regalia made with the finest textiles and detailed with precious metals and stones. The room's silence was broken by the eldest shareholder wearing the most ornate regalia, seated in the chair with the tallest back, at the head of the table.

"Greetings! I am President MAGA. On behalf of Academia's (DEI) Day Committee, I would like to thank you for volunteering to be here today. We hope to gain knowledge and insight from your people so that we may better represent your wants and needs within the Academy. Today, we will consume your Ancestors' Knowledges and present feedback on how your Knowledges can be merged with ours as one large melting pot of Knowledge that we can all enjoy. After all, we are here to celebrate how democracy makes America great. You may now serve us."

With joy, we each presented our Ancestral Knowledges to be shared family style in the center of the Table of Power. Eight non-white women shareholders who were sitting in plastic seats instinctually began to serve everyone else seated at the table, not to embarrass the white settler shareholders unfamiliar with the family style of sharing Knowledges. One said, "Thank you for being here; I almost forgot my Ancestor's Knowledges. Thank you for helping me remember". Mr. MAGA glared at her from the end of the table. He said, "I would like one of you to spoon-feed me your Knowledges to get the full experience." Several others pushed the Knowledge away with faces of disgust. I overheard a female shareholder whisper to another, "Aren't you glad you have a seat at the table, so you do not have to eat like this anymore?" The other woman glared at her and gave her an obligatory "ha-ha." I overheard comments like,

"Mmmm, this is so delicious, I need this recipe!", "This is too spicy for my palette," "This needs mayo," and "This is weird."

The flood of comments and feedback from the shareholders were overwhelming, and I started to feel angry, so I turned my attention to the iron bars outside the windows I first saw when I drove in. I thought it was so strange that iron bars were necessary since the apex of the Ivory Tower was so high above everything else that surrounded it. As I looked past the iron bars, I saw laborers harvesting rows of vegetables in the fields and others hurriedly fueling a machine with natural resources to keep the Ivory Tower in service. My attention was brought back to the table by the voice of President MAGA. He said, "We expected a lot more Knowledges from you people. Nonetheless, here is my feedback for each of you to rectify. I expect that our suggestions will be implemented if you would like to be considered for the next step of the competition for a seat at the Table of Power." He then leaned in and directed his subsequent comments to the twenty-one non-white shareholders and said, "A little white bird told me about your plans of a revolution. Disloyalty will not be tolerated at this sacred Table of Power! Soon, your seat will be given to one of these people. Maybe they will appreciate what we have given to them. You know who you are and we know who you are."

The silence in the room was ominous. A black woman shareholder stood up from her seat and said, "I am so tired of the threats and mistreatment at this Table of Power. You invited ME! I was led to believe that this seat could be part of making a difference in my community. Instead, I am overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated. Most of my Knowledges are rejected, only to be repackaged and presented by white-settler men who get celebrated for my labors and the Knowledges from my peoples. I no longer wish to be a part of an institution that continues to cause me and my community harm...I quit!" President MAGA shook his head in disgust and

said, "You people never appreciate anything we try to do to help you. If anyone else shares her sentiment, now is the time to leave!"

With her chin high, the woman began to walk away from the Table of Power. Inspired by her truth, a few more shareholders stood up from their seats to join her. They were shoved aside as eager bodies from my cohort rushed past them to take their seats at the Table of Power. My eyes met with theirs, and I understood the assignment; I turned to open the window latch, and in solidarity, we flew out the window, carried by the whispers of wind from our ancestors. I looked back to see bars on the windows were just a façade created to believe we were captives in the Ivory Tower.

We flew deep into the landscape until our view was protected from the ivory tower. Although this space was new, we re-membered what the ancestors had hoped for us. When our feet touched the Earth, I felt a jolt of energy and heard the voices of the past as I was embraced home.

A Counter Narrative to the Table of Power: Operationalizing the Nahui Ollin

In this section of the project, I operationalize the epistemologies of the Nahui Ollin to create a counter-narrative story in community. As a human on the path toward liberation, the Nahui Ollin energies guide me toward realizing their "humanity through self, familial, and community critical reflections" (Romero et al., 2009. p. 221).

The Nahui Ollin is situated in the sun's Aztec calendar. The journey begins toward the north with Tezkatlipoka (Tezcatl translates to mirror and Popoca translates to smoking for a combined translation of smoking mirror). The Tezkatlipoka represents the journey of inner self-reflection through life (Acosta, 2007). Quetzalcoatl (Quetzal translates to precious or beautiful; Coatl means precious serpent) is the process of building upon the inner self to learn

about our ancestors' histories, struggles, and joys "to become a more fully realized human" (Acosta, 2007. pp. 37-38). Quetzalcoatl represents the stability of a human that comes from "precious and beautiful Knowledge" (Medina, 2022). Huitzilopochtli (Huitzilin means hummingbird and Pochtli translates to left hand) represents a "hummingbird's tenacity of work rate to fly and the strength of its will" to act with the precious and beautiful Knowledges we possess (Acosta, 2007. pp. 37-38; Medina, 2022). Finally, Xipe Totke (Xipe translates to the shedding of our skin; To means our; and Tekutli means guide) is "identified as our source of strength that allows us to transform anew... through trusting ourselves" (Acosta, 2007. pp. 37-38; Medina, 2022).

Here, I share a piece of my heart with my readers and hope it will inspire you to create your own version of a counter-narrative story with your Indigenous Knowledges and Ways of Being. The story work below is my process of cycling through the Nahui Ollin many times over the years. Some symbols and metaphors will be evident to the reader; others will be known to just me and my family.

The Pallan Hazelwood Counter-Narrative Story

The newly liberated humans came together in a circle. We agreed that we would seek what the ancestors had hoped for us and meet back in the circle in four seasons for the Gathering of Knowledges. My ancestors' whispers guided my heart to a house in the red clay desert where the mountains were high, tunas were magenta, the maize tall, and the calabazas ripe. The smell of the roasting chilis brought a tear to my eye, and the sweet songs of the coyote were carried by the wind and my feet were moved to dance. Inside the house made of red clay, a smoking mirror (Tezcatlipoca) hung. I tried to wipe the mirror with my skirt, but it would not clean. In the

middle of the room was a fire simmering red medicine. I sat beside the pot, grabbed the ladle next to it, and sipped.

I sat silently and received a vision from my ancestors, who were near and far from before and after. I was gifted with Ancestral Knowledges and acceptance of my inner self in the vision. The ancestors told me it was time to receive the medicine so I could give it. They shared origin stories and told me their histories. We rejoiced in our shared love and laughter of life. We cried for the suffering they endured (Quetzalcoatl). My grandmother told me, "It is time for you to return. Know that we are always with you". She opened my hand, placed a maize kernel in the center of my palm, and said, "This is your precious and beautiful Knowledge, plant it and nourish your family and community with this Knowledge." We smiled in the Pallan way. I kissed her cheek and awoke in front of the mirror, free of the smoke hiding my reflection. Next to my mirror were four more, and I heard my name being called from outside before I could ask who they were for.

I opened the door, and the sun shone in my eyes. I saw four silhouettes walking toward me. When the figures got closer, I saw that it was my father, mother, sister, and daughter. "Welcome, my family! Come inside; the ancestors made you a drink". They sat around the fire, and I handed them their mirror. They sipped from the ladle and left their bodies. Moments later, they awoke, and each had returned with precious, beautiful Knowledge in their hand. We loved each other like we never could before. We danced through the night to the moon's light, and when the sun rose, we embodied the will to act (Huitzilopochtli).

My father said that his ancestors called him home to the land across the ocean. He said he had much to re-member, but we would reunite at the Gathering of Knowledges. Hand-in-hand, we women walked toward the Rio Grande to gather our Knowledges, because we had much to

practice in preparation for the gathering. We gathered, prepared, and fed each other our ancestor's Knowledges for four seasons. Sometimes, coyote would stop by with his medicine, and we would feed him ours. On the last day before our journey to the gathering, we felt our heart's wounds had healed from the past (Xipe Totek).

At the Gathering of Knowledges, the people (human and non-human) came together for one complete cycle of the moon. The sun guided our talking circles and warmed our bodies. The moon guided our silence and celebrations. I was delighted to see my father once again. His countenance was like I had never seen before. He said, "We were scattered from faraway places, but I finally met my ancestors. We had many tears and much to re-member because we were lost for so long". From behind him, there they stood, filled with love and precious, beautiful Knowledges. I embraced them all. And our people were in balance again.

Conclusion

The Academy is a colonial tool used to perpetuate epistemological genocide, control knowledge production, and maintain shareholder stock in supremacy and capitalism for nation-building. The colonized peoples of the United States desperately need an exclusive space (a sanctuary) to re-member, imagine, and dream in futurities of liberation; rather than spending precious energy on dismantling a deeply rooted system of oppression (Jacobs, 2024; Grande, 2018; Harjo, 2019).

Since the beginning of time, Indigenous Peoples have used storytelling to pass down teachings, epistemologies, cosmologies, axiologies, and ontologies (Fernández-Llamazares & Cabeza, 2017; Iseke, 2013; Jacobs, Avery, et al., 2022). The Nahui Ollin is an epistemology that guides people toward realizing their "humanity through self, familial, and community critical

reflections." (Romero et al., 2009. p. 221). Every day, Indigenous scholars work tirelessly to empower their children and communities to re-member who they are by creating a pedagogical curriculum that uplifts their stories of resilience and relationships to all Earth's beings. Black feminists and Indigenous theorists have led the conversations of discourse and the need for change within the Academy. However, Grande (2004. p. 29) asks, "Can democracy be built upon the bloody soils of genocide?"

My answer is no. Once upon a time, not so very long ago, I was striving for a seat at the table. I erroneously thought that my gift of liminal identities, where others perceived me as "exotic" yet appearing "white" enough to them, could be my Trojan horse that disarmed and changed the minds and hearts of the shareholders. As my relationship with my culture, ancestors, and the Nahui Ollin deepened, I no longer wanted anything to do with the table, tower, or shareholders. Instead, my purpose and responsibility are to embody what my ancestors had hoped for me and our descendants: trusting myself with the precious and beautiful Knowledges that provides me the stability to thrive in this life.

My hope is that this storywork can be used as a praxis toward liberation. Educators can create a curriculum by using the stories as the framework for developing lesson plans and activities that guide participants through the critiquing process of colonial systems of power and dismantle and replace them with an Indigenous Knowledge system (hopefully, one that is close to their heart). Activities may include talking circles, movement exercises, music, art, theater, writing, reading, guided meditation, activism, and so much more. We have power in coming together with our stories that can inspire the storyteller and the listener. I acknowledge that the process of decolonizing is complex (and violent). Often (not always), I feel hopeless as I toss and turn in the entanglement of the oppressor's tentacles. I am rejuvenated by collaborating with my

community in sanctuaries, where we engage in reciprocal conversations and share our joys, work, heart, and tribulations far away from the white gaze. I am encouraged by descendants of settlers who "do the work" and don't ask me to do it for them. I am honored when learners want to collaborate rather than consume. Perhaps not in my lifetime, perhaps not even in my daughter's, but I believe that the whispers of all our ancestors will be too great to ignore and there will be liberation for the earth and all who are connected to it, especially in the context of liberation from the table of power and all of its shareholders.

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