

Conclusion: Continuing the Decolonization Agenda

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Columbus was a wétiko. He was mentally ill or insane, the carrier of a terribly contagious psychological disease, the wétiko psychosis. The Native people he described were sane people with a healthy state of mind. Sanity or healthy normality among humans and other living creatures involves a respect for other forms of life and other individuals. I believe that is the way people have lived (and should live). The wétiko psychosis, and the problems it creates, have inspired many resistance movements and efforts at reform or revolution. Unfortunately, most of these efforts have failed because they have never diagnosed the wétiko as an insane person whose disease is extremely contagious. (Forbes, 2008: 22)

In this book, we have attempted to address the role of social work in colonization and, more importantly, the process of decolonization: in theory, practice, education and research. While we have drawn attention primarily to Indigenous Peoples, the physical and mental aspects of decolonization apply equally to Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. We need to recognize that there are other radically different ways to live in this world, learn how to break through our identification with the colonizer, and recognize the detrimental impacts of colonization in our own lives and communities (see for example the Unsettling Minnesota Collective, 2009; Wilson and Yellow Bird, 2005; Zig-Zag, 2006). This process of decolonization requires 'truth telling' – both personal and public. It requires that we acknowledge the history and genocide of colonization (see Stannard, 1992 of Indigenous Peoples). It requires that we recognize the numerous manifestations of colonialism that continue to exploit people and their environments. Finally, it requires a willingness to stand up for the rights of Indigenous Peoples. There are many opportunities for social workers of all backgrounds, not only to work in solidarity and as allies with Indigenous people, but also to engage in active decolonization in their thinking and in their own communities.

Decolonizing the 99 per cent

Recently, some very important and critical events have happened across the world, such as the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement in the United States and the 'Facebook revolution' in the Middle East. In many respects, these represent

major decolonizing events for non-Indigenous Peoples as the occupy movement has brought the oppression of the majority by the economic and political elite into public discourse. Perhaps this is especially the case for white middle-class Americans, who due to economic marginalization, social rejection and political isolation by capitalist elites and economic structures, have, in a sense, become the 'new natives' and the 'other'. The term 'occupy', however, is problematic in the sense that the USA and Wall Street are situated on Indigenous Peoples' lands, as some Indigenous activists have pointedly protested (see for example Harris, 2012). Thus we suggest that the term 'Decolonize Wall Street' is a far more appropriate term. Instead of the slogan 'we are the 99 per cent' (see The 99 per cent Declaration Working Group, 2011), which addresses the growing income inequality between the wealthiest 1 per cent in the USA and the rest of the population, perhaps a far more apposite shibboleth would be 'decolonize the 99 per cent' (see *Unsettling America*, 2011). In an open letter to Occupy Wall Street activists, John Paul Montano (2011) writes:

I am not one of the 99 percent that you refer to. And, that saddens me. Please don't misunderstand me. I would like to be one of the 99 percent ... but you've chosen to exclude me. Perhaps it was unintentional, but, I've been excluded by you. In fact, there are millions of us indigenous people who have been excluded from the Occupy Wall Street protest. Please know that I suspect that it was an unintentional exclusion on your part. That is why I'm writing to you. I believe that you can make this right ...

It seems that ever since we indigenous people have discovered Europeans and invited them to visit with us here on our land, we've had to endure countless '-isms' and religions and programs and social engineering that would 'fix' us. Protestantism, Socialism, Communism, American Democracy, Christianity, Boarding Schools, Residential Schools ... well, you get the idea. And, it seems that these so-called enlightened strategies were nearly always enacted and implemented and pushed upon us without our consent. And, I'll assume that you're aware of how it turned out for us. Yes. Terribly.

Which brings me back to your mostly-inspiring Occupy Wall Street activities. On 22 September, with great excitement, I eagerly read your 'One Demand' statement. Hoping and believing that you enlightened folks fighting for justice and equality and an end to imperialism, etc., etc., would make mention of the fact that the very land upon which you are protesting does not belong to you – that you are guests upon that stolen indigenous land. I had hoped mention would be made of the indigenous nation whose land that is. I had hoped that you would address the centuries-long history that we indigenous peoples of this continent have endured being subject to the countless '-isms' of do-gooders claiming to be building a 'more just society,' a 'better world,' a 'land of freedom' on top of our indigenous societies, on our indigenous lands, while destroying and/or ignoring

our ways of life. I had hoped that you would acknowledge that, since you are settlers on indigenous land, you need and want our indigenous consent to your building *anything* on our land – never mind an entire society. See where I'm going with this? ... We're still friends, so don't sweat it. I believe your hearts are in the right place. I know that this whole genocide and colonization thing causes all of us lots of confusion sometimes. It just seems to me that you're *unknowingly* doing the same thing to us that all the colonizers before you have done: you want to do stuff on our land without asking our permission.

But, fear not my friends. We indigenous people have a sense of humor. So, I thought I might make a few friendly suggestions which may help to 'fix' the pro-colonialism position in which you now (hopefully, unintentionally) find yourselves ...

By the way, I'm just one indigenous person. I represent no one except myself. I'm acting alone in writing this letter. Perhaps none of my own Nishnaabe people will support me in having written this. Perhaps some will. I respect their opinions either way. I love my Nishnaabe people *always*. I am simply trying to do something good ...

So, here goes ...

1. Acknowledge that the United States of America is a colonial country, a country of settlers, built upon the land of indigenous nations; and/or ...
2. Demand immediate freedom for indigenous political prisoner Leonard Peltier; and/or ...
3. Demand that the colonial government of the United States of America honor all treaties signed with all indigenous nations whose lands are now collectively referred to as the 'United States of America'; and/or ...
4. Make some kind of mention that you are indeed aware that you are settlers and that you are not intending to repeat the mistakes of all of the settler do-gooders that have come before you. In other words, that you are willing to obtain the consent of indigenous people before you do *anything* on indigenous land.

Indeed, Indigenous Peoples may be more accurately portrayed as the 'other 1 per cent'. They have no connection to the elite upper 1 per cent, except that this group gained much of its wealth from the exploitation and illegal taking of Indigenous Peoples' lands and resources. And, as Montano (2011) states, they are not aligned with the 98 per cent that continue to occupy their territories with little regard for, or knowledge of, the rights of Indigenous Peoples – instead focusing their protests against income inequality and wealth distribution.

In examining the occupations of Wall Street in New York City and in many other cities of the world, we see that middle-class folk are raging in organized,

non-violent ways against their economic system due to its greed, and its negative effects on people who are poor and middle class, and the environment. It is highly important to point out that decolonization must also include occupying the colonial educational system that has prevaricated on critical aspects of history; the judicial system that has disproportionately and unjustly sentenced and incarcerated the colonized and, the neoconservative political system that has served the interests of the colonial elite and corporations. Occupy Wall Street has spread and is now a global phenomenon (Occupy Wall Street, 2012). One might say that global decolonization is 'picking up steam'. In other words, this is a beginning for decolonization or, as Frantz Fanon (1965) might say, 'a dying colonialism'. However, without consideration and honouring of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, this global decolonization movement may be just another colonial sheep in wolf's clothing.

The Social Work Profession and Decolonizing the 98 per cent

Obviously there are differences of opinions about the best way to seek change; however, there can be little doubt that many social workers across the world share the concerns of the Occupy Wall Street protesters about the impact of the economy on marginalized individuals and families, the prospect for any constructive change in the near future, and the complete lack of political as well as financial liability for the crisis (see Schachter, 2011). For social workers, worsening economic conditions, including the impact of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, have only added to the significant challenges faced by the communities they serve, while the need for services increases. Whether explicitly articulated by Occupy Wall Street or not, what is clearly needed is decolonization. We must openly recognize that colonization continues today under several guises including globalization, corporate greed and capitalist expansion. We need to make connections between the histories and trajectories of inter alia capitalism, globalization, imperialism, genocide and ecocide (Gray, Coates and Yellow Bird, 2008; Smith, 1999; Wilson and Yellow Bird, 2005).

The crux of the matter for social workers is that the real needs of people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are not being addressed in this age of service and tax cuts, punitive social policies and corporate dominance. Decolonization can be seen as an extension of the critical tradition in social work (such as structural, feminist, and anti-oppressive perspectives, and environmental social work) that draws attention to the oppressive and exploitative elements inherent in societies. In addition, the reality is much more complex than what has been mentioned thus far. For instance, examples of ongoing colonization are seen in unabated reliance on fossil fuels, which advances corporate profit while harming the environment and long-term health of people everywhere; Western governments being elected by increasingly fewer voters as voter futility and alienation is bolstered by corporate political spending; and the refusal of governments to work with First Nations

people in Canada and the USA to ensure that proper housing, sanitation and drinking water are available in their communities. Protest plays a critical role when political institutions are not up to the task of promoting social justice, or actively working against it, as evidenced by the reaction of governments to the G8 protests in Quebec and Seattle, and what has been called the 'Arab Spring' spreading across the Middle East (see for example Dalacoura, 2012; Zhuo, Wellman and Yu, 2011). If Occupy Wall Street is to have lasting impact, perhaps it can be an impetus for the social work profession to engage proactively in working towards a decolonized future to remove the many ways that colonization is perpetuated.

Decolonizing Language

The first step in the decolonization process, as we have seen in the chapters of this book, is awareness and a big part of this awareness involves cognizance of the language we use. The language of colonialism is deeply embedded in Western culture and awareness involves understanding the history attached to important symbols linked to our national identity. Hence, in order to decolonize, we must understand as much as we can about colonialism. In the United States, for example, colonialism has and continues to take many forms. One of the most prevalent is the names of colonialism. While we have paid attention to how colonialism operates in Western social work approaches, we have also taken note of how it has appeared by way of words, images, symbols, policies, ideas and names. In this volume, the name 'Columbia' appeared in one of the chapters, which to most would not appear to be an issue. However, many Indigenous Peoples in the Western hemisphere consider it to be a name of colonialism.

Columbia is considered to be an historical name for the United States and the female counterpart to Christopher Columbus. She was invented by US Americans to denote their patriotism and is associated with their idea of being a world power. After WWII she was replaced by 'Lady Liberty', a goddess-like female personification of the US. Perhaps the most famous image of Columbia was created by US American painter John Gast. You can find his painting of Columbia on the Internet, along with a description of what she represented in terms of US American progress. Many people have, and continue to, associate her with US American 'Manifest Destiny' (again, some refer to it as US American progress from the period 1820 to 1860) which was the idea, believed by many, that US Americans were divinely inspired (by God) to settle the entire United States from east to west. Manifest destiny meant that US Americans must bring their ideas of commerce, education, religion, democracy and civilization to all areas unsettled by white people. This of course meant dispossessing Indigenous Peoples of their lands, resources and rights (often using war, murder, deliberately spreading diseases, such as smallpox, or hunting out all of the game so Indigenous Peoples would starve, or making and breaking treaties with Indigenous Peoples to get the job done). To the land and resource hungry Americans, Indigenous Peoples were

not civilized. They were savages who knew nothing of God, had no laws, morality or industry. Their communal ways of sharing the land, loyalty to the community and respect for nature were considered to be primitive, backward and barely, if at all, human attributes. Of course, the US Americans – and colonizers everywhere, considered themselves God's chosen people, endowed with the responsibility to civilize Indigenous Peoples. Some scholars believe that manifest destiny is still a major objective of the United States. For instance, Gronquist (2005) writes:

Although the shameful concept of Manifest Destiny should be confined to history books, it has reared its ugly head, as reflected in our government's 21st century mission to reshape the Middle East. Of course, the psychology of Manifest Destiny – the projection of Anglo-Saxon supremacy – never really went away, it has always been used to justify America's expansionist adventures. Losing the Vietnam War drove it toward covert action, i.e., U.S. attempts in the 1980's to undo the Nicaraguan revolution and support for death squads in El Salvador and Guatemala. But U.S. foreign policy has consistently been based on an arrogant and racist view that 'America knows best'. (para.4)

The name Columbia did not come about by accident. She is the female counterpart of the same Christopher Columbus that ushered in the colonization of the Western Hemisphere by European nations and later on the United States of America. Columbus and his men were personally responsible for numerous, brutal acts of murder, rape, pillaging, slave trading, spreading disease and the annihilation and genocide of many Indigenous Peoples (De Las Casas, 1992). Catholic priest Bartolome De Las Casas (1992: 15), who accompanied Columbus on one of his voyages, wrote, as an eyewitness to the invasion of the Christian Europeans and what they did to the Indigenous Peoples of Hispaniola:

They forced their way into native settlements, slaughtering everyone they found there, including small children, old men, pregnant women, and even women who had just given birth. They hacked them to pieces, slicing open their bellies with their swords as though they were so many sheep herded into a pen. They even laid wagers on whether they could manage to slice a man in two at a stroke, or cut an individual's head from his body, or disembowel him with a single blow of their axes. They grabbed suckling infants by the feet and, ripping them from their mother's breasts, dashed them headlong against the rocks.

Many Americans, and often a good part of the world's population, overlooks, ignores and trivializes the impact that Columbus had on Indigenous Peoples and continue to celebrate Columbus' 'discovery' as a hallmark of human progress and civilization. However, numerous Indigenous Peoples in the Western hemisphere continue to oppose and protest the celebration of 'Columbus Day'. Change is slowly coming about and now some cities, towns, institutions and groups do not

celebrate Columbus and instead have begun to regard 12 October as Indigenous Peoples' Day.

In our efforts to decolonize, we urge vigilance about the many forms that colonialism takes. That said decolonizing social work requires that we either discard colonial names or point out them out for what they are. Challenging the names of colonialism is not an attempt at political correctness. It is an act of intellectual liberation that corrects a distorting narrative of imperialist notions of 'discovery' and 'progress' in the Western hemisphere that has been maintained far too long by Europeans and European Americans (Yellow Bird, 1999).

In another chapter, the sixteenth US American president Abraham Lincoln was cited for his democratic ideas and the inclusion of the voices of all the people in the American republic. In the United States, Lincoln is regarded as the great emancipator of black slaves and is pictured on the US five-dollar bill. US President Barack Obama has often quoted Lincoln and been compared to him by some political observers. However, Lincoln's image as a great humanitarian and unifier of a great nation has been challenged by many others, including Indigenous Peoples. For instance, Michael Gaddy (2003: para. 2) observes:

The false sainthood and adulation afforded Lincoln has its basis in the incorrect assumption he fought the war to free an enslaved people. To believe this propaganda one must ignore most everything Lincoln said about the Black race and his continued efforts at colonization.

Lincoln's treatment of, and lack of regard for, Indigenous Peoples in the United States has generally been ignored or covered up by American politicians and educators. Henry Clay was a political idol of Abraham Lincoln and, when he was elected president, Lincoln implemented Clay's political ideas (Gaddy, 2003). As Secretary of State, Clay declared, 'The Indians' disappearance from the human family will be no great loss to the world. I do not think them, as a race, worth preserving' (Gaddy, 2003, para. 4).

Among many Indigenous Peoples in the United States, Abraham Lincoln is nothing more than a representative of American invasion and colonialism. He is more infamously associated with giving orders to hang 38 Dakotas (Indigenous Peoples) following the so-called Dakota Uprising in Minnesota, which Brookeman (1984) described as the greatest mass execution in US history. According to the *Guinness Book of Records*, lynching these Dakotas made 'Old Honest Abe' the record holder for the largest hanging of people from one gallows (*Guinness Book of Records*, 1991). Brown (1991: 40) notes:

During Lincoln's presidency, the Dakota were mistreated, cheated, and abused by white settlers, Indian agents, and traders who had pushed them off their lands, leaving them only one-tenth of their original territory. They were starving because the wild game was gone from their hunting grounds, which were claimed by white settlers. They were also deceived in the treaties that they made with

the United States and did not get annuities and food promised to them. When Dakota chief Little Crow requested food from Indian agent Thomas Galbraith for his starving people, he was condescendingly told by trader Andrew Myrick that they should 'eat grass or their own dung.'

Gaddy (2003: para. 7) writes that Lincoln assigned General John Pope to put down the uprising and the General announced at the beginning of his campaign: 'It is my purpose to utterly exterminate the Sioux. They are to be treated as maniacs or wild beasts, and by no means as people with whom treaties or compromise can be made'. At no point did Lincoln challenge this statement.

Moving towards a Decolonized World

A truly decolonized world is very difficult to envisage, given that even the physical landscape of Earth is so very different now than it was prior to colonization. We need to first openly recognize colonization as the informal and formal methods that have maintained the subjugation of Indigenous Peoples lands and resources (see Wilson and Yellow Bird, 2005). This includes the legacies of internal and intergenerational layers of psychological colonization (Zig-Zag, 2006, see Chapter 16). Secondly, we must free ourselves from complacency (Unsettling Minnesota, 2009). This requires an awakening of how harmful colonization has been to us and to all populations. Open dialogue and collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is vital for this process to occur (McKenzie and Morrisette, 2002; Verniest, 2006; Watson, 1988). Decolonizing requires re-imagining a liberated future and then taking the necessary steps to realize this in practice: 'We have been forced into dependence on the very capitalist system that is killing us and the planet, and [our better future] ... is the escape from and destruction of this conundrum' (Healing the Earth, 2007, [Audio podcast]). The process of decolonization can help us move forward in continuing the story of Indigenous Peoples' survival and working towards 'decolonizing the 98 per cent'.

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