

5



There is no future without Native and Black faculty in higher education

No hay futuro sin profesorado nativo y negro en la educación superior

Amanda R. Tachine*;
Meseret F. Hailu**

DOI: 10.5944/reec.43.2023.36648

Recibido: 18 de enero de 2023
Aceptado: 4 de junio de 2023

*AMANDA R. TACHINE: Dr. Amanda R. Tachine is Navajo from Ganado, Arizona. She is Náneesht'ézhí Táchii'nii (Zuni Red Running into Water) born for T'íizí lání (Many Goats). She is an Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership & Innovation at Arizona State University. Amanda's research explores the relationship between systemic and structural histories of settler colonialism and the ongoing erasure of Indigenous presence and belonging in college settings using qualitative Indigenous methodologies.. **Datos de contacto:** E-mail: Amanda.Tachine@asu.edu.

MESERET F. HAILU: Dr. Meseret F. Hailu is an assistant professor of higher and postsecondary education at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. Her research focuses on how institutions of higher education retain minoritized women in STEM pathways. Dr. Hailu is exploring two lines of research concerning the experiences of undergraduate Black women in different geographic settings: East Africa and the United States. Her primary research agenda investigates how articulations of identity shape educational retention and reflect institutional culture. **Datos de contacto: E-mail: meseret.hailu@asu.edu.

Abstract

Using a letter-based methodology, we assert that higher education in the United States needs faculty members from Native and Black communities in order to be viable for present and future. We recognize that decolonization in higher education requires epistemological shifts that must be achieved by the people. Without people well-attuned to these epistemologies, such as critical Native and Black professors, this decolonization cannot happen. We also draw from extant literature and data from the National Center for Education Statistics to show how demographic disparities among faculty have been persistent over the past four decades. Throughout, we create a dialogue between decolonial and postcolonial literature. In doing so, we draw connections between these theories and education policies, practices, and pedagogies that advance more equitable and sustainable relationships in the relational flow of life where everyone and everything –both human and non-human–are deeply interconnected.

Keywords: decolonization; Indigenous; Black; faculty; higher education.

Resumen

A través de la aplicación de un enfoque basado en cartas (letter-based), sostenemos que la educación superior en los Estados Unidos necesita académicos que provengan de comunidades indígenas y negras para continuar siendo viable en el presente y el futuro. Reconocemos que la decolonización de la educación superior requiere cambios epistemológicos que deben ser logrados por las personas. Sin individuos bien sintonizados con estas epistemologías, como los profesores indígenas y negros con mirada crítica, esta decolonización es inviable. Además, a partir de la literatura existente y los datos del Center for Education Statistics de EE. UU. mostramos como las disparidades demográficas entre los profesores universitarios han persistido durante las últimas cuatro décadas. Este artículo ofrece un diálogo entre la literatura decolonial y poscolonial. Al hacerlo, establecemos conexiones entre estas teorías y las políticas, prácticas y pedagogías educativas que promueven relaciones más equitativas y sostenibles en el flujo relacional de vida donde todos y todo, tanto humanos como no humanos, están profundamente interconectados.

Palabras clave: Sintoísmo; crisis ecológica; educación moral; enseñanza del idioma nacional; política educativa; decolonial

Dear Meseret,

I am in the air, flying over home(land)s of many Indigenous peoples and those who have arrived to these lands through force, migration, and mobility. I want to thank you for your patience with me in sending this letter to you. It's been a heavy season of travel, something that I am not quite sure how to make sense of, other than I am in motion with a suitcase in tow, visiting communities of people who in many ways are learning about engaging in Native presence. There is a sense of uneasiness still while on these travels as Covid-19 continues to move through the globe, still getting people sick, and still taking peoples' lives away. I am aware that while sitting on the plane, there are very few people wearing masks and I wonder too when I will stop wearing my mask. It still feels too soon.

I want to thank you for allowing a space for us to commune with each other over letter writing to connect and share in time and place our understandings on Native and Black thought and lifeways in academe, our survival in these White spaces. This practice of connection is in a way our efforts toward building "intellectual solidarity" (Hailu & Tachine, 2021) as our good friend Keon McGuire so beautifully named that describes and shapes our time together. In another way, it is to build worlds of Black and Native presences *together* for that to me is incredibly critical. I finished reading Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasanosake Simpson's (2022) book, *Rehearsals for Living*. In the sky, I read through their last letters which opened up portals of possibilities of building new worlds which inspired the format of our letter writing. Robin D. G. Kelly wrote in their afterwor(l)d, "They [Maynard and Simpson] understand that the work of building the new world, is no luxury – and that our survival depends on turning dreams of decolonization and abolition into action" (Maynard, Simpson, 2002, p. 273). I agree with Kelly in the need to emphasize that this is not luxurious work, rather its rigorous work that confronts and attempts to contend with tensions, fears, confusion, silence, and deep thinking of our shared lives and differences. This is not luxurious because we are against systemic monsters (Tachine, 2022) that threaten our presences, ways of knowing, histories and futures in society and in academe. Maynard notes on monsters and differences by stating, "We are already, living and organizing on entirely different terms than those laid out by the monsters, however imperfectly, and these terms have long-standing historical traditions" (Maynard & Simpson, 2002, p. 25) We know too well that these places within higher education were not built for us, but were built from the killing, lying, stealing, cheating, and manipulative actions that destroyed our relatives' spirits, silenced our songs that ripped our relationship to each other, the lands and waters. And if we pay close attention, those actions are still happening right now.

I've had the time to read your work, to sit alongside you over coffee and perhaps tea, to giggle with you as we traverse together in academe, and to listen and learn from the knowledge you offer me and so many others of your family's journey from Africa to what we now call the United States. Ahé'hee' for the rigorous work that you offer us in higher education, the knowledge of migration and the diaspora in rich and meaningful ways is a gift to our field, your people, and to me and my people. In reading your article that you co-authored with Molla and Johnson (2022) of African refugee youth titled, "Researching experiences of African refugee youth in high-income countries: Reflections on conceptual challenges and possibilities," I learned about the ways that young people, women in particular from Africa are creating and forming places of possibility in this nation. I learned that they are affirmed by their cultural practice of transnationalism for survival. And they are then using that knowledge to bridge worlds, from their homelands

to their new homeplace. They are creating borders in ways to survive! They remind me of the remarkable ways knowledge systems are abundant and transformative, creating connections across waters to cultivate and support kinships in new and old ways. The power of this work is directly connected to you! Because your life growing up in Ethiopia and acquiring the knowledge from your family, the cultural attunement from Africa land, stories, songs has enriched you with the language and perspectives to SEE and KNOW the value of refugee youth and their stories of survivance and transnational aptitude in kinship making. It matters that you as a Black African values these knowledges for Black futures, blackness, and the world-making of Black lives in academe spaces. And it also matters to me, as a Diné person from these lands to deeply listen and learn about the beauty and struggle of Black life. For me, Black life is imperative to Indigenous life. We are related in multiple ways, in shared struggle with systemic monsters, in tangled ways with the history and present-day conditions, in love making and generations of new babies, and in the erasure of our intelligence and theorizing in academe. We are connected and therefore I have a desire to see and breathe alongside you in worlds to come.

I can count the number of Native and Black faculty in our academic space in two hands. That is a travesty, down-right harmful with long-term implications. I think of the many Black and Native students who left academe too soon. I think of the many Black and Native students who had to (and continue to) confront hideous racism, heteropatriarchal sexism, and assimilation. I am pained with the invisibility of our presences in academic spaces across these lands. And the frustrating irony of the way institutions benefit (and continue to do so) by stolen land and lives from Black and Native peoples. That is why I believe that there are no futures without you, without Black and Native knowledge systems that are attentive to differences but also passionate over shared understandings and are working to equip ourselves for the long run in the sky of world building. We are writing our presences. Seneca scholar Lyons (2000) states that this is a form of “rhetorical sovereignty,” where I consider it an act of writing on the walls the need for more of us, for survival and thrivance. I am writing to you for your presences.

With love,

Amanda

Dear Amanda,

I am so thankful to be engaging in this work with you, especially using this methodology that frees up so many possibilities. A while ago, I came across an article titled, “Love is calling”: Academic friendship and international research collaboration amid a global pandemic” written by Amy Scott Metcalfe and Gerardo L. Blanco (2021). In this piece, the authors write about how their friendship is situated within “...an academic relationship that is mutually constituted, supportive, and self-referential” (p. 1). In addition to Maynar & Simpson’s (2022) *Rehearsals for Living*, I have seen the beauty of a letter-based methodology in the work of Wright-Mair & Castillo-Montoya (2022). When I think about our work together on our own piece, it feels like an example of the refreshing relationships that other minoritized scholars before us have cultivated.

Whenever you mention the impact of Covid-19, in our work in higher education, my mind always races back to some of the first few months of the pandemic, when there

seemed to be tragic news every few days. I remember you telling me about the many lives lost in the Navajo nation, and in particular, in your hometown of Ganado. While I cannot remember the exact phrasing you used, I do recall how at a certain point, you said that you were driving up to Ganado every few weekends for another funeral. I remember hearing the pain in your voice, and feeling so helpless. I wanted to say or do something to alleviate your pain, but felt like everything I said was an inadequate balm. Perhaps the current impulse we have, as a higher education community more broadly, to go back to “normal” is based on a desire to distance ourselves from the emotional paralysis and overwhelming pain of that time.

Thank you so much for the kind engagement you have had with my work about African refugees. I hope you know how much your own scholarship and thinking, your very *presence* makes a difference to me. In all of my years in academe, you are the first Native faculty member I have known personally. You have stretched my thinking about sovereignty, and in particular, how lands are fundamentally part of sovereignty for Indigenous peoples everywhere. A formative conversation for me took place during our flight to Portland for the ASHE conference in 2019. We sat next to each other on the flight, and I remember telling you about my experiences as a first-generation immigrant to the United States. Because my family left Ethiopia when I was a child, my search for connection and a sense of belonging to this place has always been elusive. Whenever I have traveled there as an adult, however, I notice a distinct and potent connection to the land, especially in rural areas. Somehow, knowing that my ancestry can be traced back to people from that specific land has such a profound emotional resonance for me. I have told that to friends before, but you are the first person who heard it and deeply understood. I think that is when I first realized that our friendship was special.

Since then, you and I have had a chance to support one another in countless ways in academia. You have guest lectured in one of my seminar courses, where you shared insights about your piece titled, “Story Rug: Weaving Stories into Research,” published in the book, *Reclaiming Indigenous Research in Higher Education (2018)*. In this chapter, you offer your conceptualization of a story rug, which is an Indigenous metaphorical framework. You explained how writing your dissertation was like weaving a rug, drawing parallels between: “...traditional forms of dissertation chapters (e.g., introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, and conclusions) and the rug weaving process (e.g., building the loom, warping the loom, gathering of story rug tools, weaving stories, and caring for the story rug), which provides a story rug framework for research” (p. 68).” You use this metaphor because stories are an important part of Indigenous life and because you are thoughtful about applying oral stories and histories in your own work. Listening to you speak that day, I noted how my students were thrilled to read your work and talk with you directly. I observed then (and many times since), the twin blessing and burden you have of being only one of two Native faculty members in our college.

We have also had many discussions about how to wrestle with theory in our work and in our professional lives. Whenever we have sent each other books and articles to read, it is clear that you are partial to decolonial theory, while I lean more toward postcolonial thought. Each conversation with you is always so generative. I always walk away feeling challenged and encouraged in my ability to “think with theory” after spending time with you. In that tradition, I would like to share an excerpt written by a Black scholar that I return to often. It comes from Fanon’s foundational work in *Wretched of the Earth*. As you know, this is a book that has motivated the leaders of revolutionary movements for

decades, from the Black Panthers, to the movement led by Steve Biko and others in the Black consciousness movement in South Africa; to the efforts of the Irish Republican Army, and the Shiite revival in Iran. When discussing the reparations owed to formerly colonized nations, Fanon argues:

"We must refuse outright the situation to which the West wants to condemn us. Colonialism and imperialism have not settled their debt to us once they have withdrawn their flag and their police force from our territories. For centuries the capitalists have behaved like real war criminals in the underdeveloped world. Deportation, massacres, forced labor, and slavery were the primary methods used by capitalism to increase its gold and diamond reserves, and establish its wealth and power. Not so long ago, Nazism transformed the whole of Europe into a genuine colony. The governments of various European nations demanded reparations and the restitution in money and kind for their stolen treasures. As a result, cultural artifacts, paintings, sculptures, and stained-glass windows were returned to their owners. In the aftermath of the war the Europeans were adamant about one thing: 'Germany will pay' " (p. 57).

This quote always gives me chills because Fanon is unflinching in his demands. I also feel like what he is demanding is largely impossible, at least on a large scale. I suppose that the British Council's Commonwealth Scholarships (n.d.) are an example of one way colonial debts are settled. So is the piecemeal return of treasures to African nations, such as the return of sculptures to Nigeria and Benin (Smith, 2021). But that does not seem like enough. I wonder if it is possible to ever really settle the debts of colonialism and imperialism.

I am curious, when you read this excerpt, how do you feel? What do you think?

Lots of love,

Meseret

Dearest Meseret,

I am in the air again, flying to the eastern lands to much colder weather than what we are accustomed to these days in the desert lands of the Akimel O'odham and Pee Posh. And yes, I am still wearing a mask. Since my last letter to you, Covid-19 finally caught me or I caught it. Even with the care I attempted to put in place, with a mask and incessantly frequent cleaning of my hands, I still got sick and sadly brought the virus home to my babies. For nearly a month, our home was stricken with horrendous coughs, body chills and fevers, weariness, and quarantined frustrations. And during those weeks, my mind wandered to the months that haunted our family and tribal communities when the first wave of Covid-19 swept through our homelands. A brief depression set in me as I laid in bed thinking and remembering as you mentioned in your letter, the devastating loss that we felt and encountered in 2020 and 2021. I recall our regular check-ins and how in many ways, you and Keon were pillars of support for me. Thank you for carrying me through those months of despair and grief. I recalled rereading bell hooks' *All About Love* while we were locked down in our homes for protection. I read her book three

times and each time, I felt near to her and her words. A quote that struck and healed me was, “Contemplating death has always been a subject that leads me back to love. Significantly, I began to think more about the meaning of love as I witnessed the deaths of many friends, comrades, and acquaintances, many of them dying young and unexpectedly” (2000: xxii).” And that carrying over of love is something that I hope to hold on to, with and for you.

While on the plane tonight, I finished reading yet another book. This time, I completed the book that you first recommended to me, *Decolonising the Mind: The politics of language in African literature* by Ngūgī Wa Thiong’o (1981). Remember how we exchanged books? I shared Linda Tuhivai Smith’s, *Decolonizing Research Methodology* with you while you gifted me *Decolonising the Mind*. Thank you for introducing his work to me, as there were many parallels between Indigenous peoples and African people in our fight against colonialism and imperialism, the maintenance and survival of non-English languages, and the struggle over “cultural bombs.” Ngūgī Wa Thiong’o stated that, “The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. ... The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish” (p.3). To lose the capacities of self is the ongoing effects of systemic monsters and their hauntings in our lives. Indigenous peoples, my people know this too well as settler colonialism as a structure is the ongoing machinery that works to erase Indigenous life and love for the advancement and control over the beautiful lands and waterways that provides for us all. As I read *Decolonising the Mind*, I was captivated and understood more clearly our shared and yet different histories and presents that intertwine and are tangled up. Ngūgī Wa Thiong’o wrote passionately on the refusal of non-English languages and the assertion of Gĩkũyũ, the spoken language of his people and lands. He described the ways that colonial systems of education were vehicles for language shifts and cultural bombs, “Thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds” (Ngūgī Wa Thiong’o, p. 12). I thought about the history of Diné people and the ways that English was also forced upon us in school systems which has resulted in shifts toward English over the Navajo language. I am not a fluent Diné speaker and that pains me. Recently, I have had goals of learning to speak my language, to practice every day, to begin with prayer because I was told once that if I want to learn to speak in Navajo that I should start by learning prayers in Diné. Maybe you can help me dear friend by reminding me of these aspirations? I would welcome that dear friend.

Ngūgī Wa Thiong’o is reminding me of what many Indigenous peoples also tell us that our ways of knowing, our ways of speaking, our ways of dreaming are not lost but that in academe we have to fight to cultivate their presences. You see that is why your presence alongside my presence is so critical. The English language is just but one example of the ways that colonialism and imperialism is everywhere and operating steadily. We need each other. But I am unsure if we should expend our energies to change the academy. Some may use the language of “Indigenize the academy” or “decolonize higher education.” There were years when I bought into that fight, but now I am unsure if that is where my heart and energies lie because how is that possible when the very foundations of academe were built on the theft, killing, and enslavement of our peoples and their deep relationships to land? Now I am not against those who are taking up that work, in all honesty, much respect is given to them. I, on the other hand, want to try hard to invest

my time toward building new worlds with you and others, a world where we belong and invested in each other and in the care of the precious earth.

In your letter you asked me about reparations. Thank you for your generous question. If I may add, I believe that there should be acts and engagement of rematriations which is more closely related to Indigenous value systems of reciprocity and relationality. I have written about how reparations are based on colonial, patriarchal concepts that too often view payback as profits and property. Rematriation is not payback necessarily, but it's rooted in caring for and protecting the land and our present and future generations. Rematriation then cultivates lasting and respectful relationships. I want to believe that rematriation is possible. And in a small way, my relationship with you is part of rematriation, in building a world toward a lasting relationship.

With love,
Amanda

Dearest Amanda,

As always, your letter made me reflect and imagine, and I am so grateful for how you push me to engage more deeply with ideas through your writing. Thank you for challenging me to think about rematriation versus repatriation, and how the former might be what is needed for a more fulfilling and respectful future between people. I see how our letter writing approach, which builds on "...an honored radical Black feminist methodology of scaffolding the intimate and personal within the global," (Maynard and Simpson, 2022, p. 33), has already shaped my thinking.

I am so glad you finished reading the book written by Wa Thiong'o! This was the first text I ever read in the social sciences that made me cry. In 2015, I was a Ph.D. student at the University of Denver, taking a course titled, "Education and Development" taught by Dr. Devin Joshi. In that class, we compared the P-20 systems of education in various areas of the world, and when we came to the focus on African education, this is one of the texts Dr. Joshi assigned. After reading Wa Thiong'o, I remember being saddened by how much of Western epistemology I had allowed to displace my own African ways of knowing. When my family first moved to the United States in 1997, I tried quickly to lose my accent and adapt as quickly as possible to the idioms, inflections, and language of American schooling. Looking back, I realize how much knowledge is sacrificed when people try to assimilate to a dominant culture at the expense of their own heritage. Now, 25 years after I tried to shed all traces of my native language as a newcomer to this country, I am interested in taking Amharic courses offered through Howard University's (n.d.) Program in African Languages in an attempt to recover some of what was lost back then. And yes, of course, I will check in and encourage you to keep up your practice of strengthening your fluency in Diné! We can support each other in "...a recovery of our language and epistemological foundations" (Smith, 2013, p. 40). Like many things, we have this aspiration in common.

Recently, I shared with one of our colleagues here at Arizona State University a book that you recommended: *A Third University is Possible* by La Paperson. As you know, in chapter 3, La Paperson offers 10 axioms about what he has dubbed as the "Third University." Some of these axioms are that the Third University is: "It is timely, and yet

its usefulness constantly expires,” “It is problematic. In all likelihood, it charges fees and grants degrees,” and “It is anti-utopian. Its pedagogical practices may be disciplining and disciplinary. A third world university is less interested in decolonizing the university and more in operating as a decolonizing university” (p. 36). In your last letter, when you refer to your gradual divestment from phrases such as “Indigenize the academy” or “decolonize higher education,” I am reminded that the terminologies and ideas we use in academia (as La Paperson suggests) constantly expire. I think what is compelling to me about your work is that you constantly urge your audience to dream about what else is possible. Through this dreaming, we can move closer to an alternative to current anti-Indigenous and anti-Black realities. Similar to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “I cherish the belief and practice that it is never enough to just critique the system and name our oppression. We also have to create the alternative, on the ground and in real time” (p. 36). Your writing helps me in that process.

As you mentioned in your last letter, you encouraged me to revisit the foundational work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith via *Decolonizing Research Methodology*. In this book, Smith offers the reader conceptual tools for research, as well as a discussion of how imperialism is articulated ideologically, discursively, economically, and physically. One of the most striking lines in this work for me is “...we are still being colonized (and we know it), and that we are still searching for justice” (Smith, 2013, p. 36). For me, this is a liberating idea because it helps alleviate the pressure of seeing decolonization happen in its entirety. Rather, this line from Smith helps me consider how decolonization is something that one can strive for and continue working toward, even if a person is not able to experience it fully in one lifetime. This idea from *Decolonizing Research Methodology* also echoes the experience of some of my students in a seminar I taught last year.

Over the span of a 15-week course in Spring 2021, I noticed that my students—who were primarily students of color—were growing more and more hopeless as the semester progressed. The more we discussed the writing of authors such as Stuart Hall, Leon Tikly, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, the more dejected they became. This was the opposite of my intent as their teacher! I wanted them to walk away feeling powerful and energized to do good work in this world. Eventually, I paused class one day and told them that they did not cause the structural inequities in education today, so they are not solely responsible for fixing all of the inequities either. I reminded them that their charge was to do their part, and advance decolonial work in their own spheres of influence for as long as they can and to the extent they can. That pause was an important reminder for me as well.

So, in keeping with the rhythm of this conversation, I am curious: when you imagine a higher education system that is an alternative to anti-Indigenous and anti-Black realities, what are some of the things that come to mind? And if you do not mind, I would also love to hear some of the reflections from your students when you taught the class “Love and Healing in Higher Education” course in summer 2020.

Hugs,

Meseret

Dearest Meseret,

Good morning. Ah, it's a Monday December morning in the desert lands. I am home and my body and mind are happy and at ease for not being on travel and for feeling the closeness to my babes. I woke up to your beautiful letter, as I so appreciate this generous methodological approach that we are engaging in through letter writings, for sharing and thinking deeply about our Indigenous and Black presences in academe.

This is my last letter to you, for now. I hope you are opening it with ease and a smile. :) Thank you for sharing insights about your class. Your students' experiences are so real! Students are lucky to have you as a professor. I am sure the wise words that you imparted to them is what they needed to hear. Also, good work for teaching critically as I do not take for granted that the instruction and readings that you provide your students are too often not provided in academe. It takes courage for us to teach about the struggles that our communities and families face and the ways those issues are ongoing. Thank you for your thoughtful and generative question regarding imagining a higher education system that uplift Indigenous and Black lives. Your question reminded me of working closely with my dear friend Eve L. Ewing in organizing and leading a 2-day virtual convening where over 2,000 people gathered for the Cultivating Black and Native Futures in Education. We were overjoyed and amazed at the positive reception of this gathering where scholars, activists, artists, organizers, educators, youth, and practitioners all came together to uplift Indigenous and Black lives. Our goals were to make educational learning spaces as places of exploring and experiencing community, resurgence, answerability, rematriation, and the forwarding of Black and Indigenous futures. Theory, conversations, music, movement, research, stories, lessons and more were generated in those two days. When thinking about it now, I am awed. I am reminded that this work is possible and occurring. We are in the mix! And we must not stop, we must keep going.

One of the reflections that stuck to me while teaching and learning from the students in the Love and Healing in Higher Education course was the deep appreciation toward valuing love in our work. As you know, that course was developed in response to the trauma we were all feeling through Covid-19. We deeply engaged in bell hooks, *All About Love* book and discussed our conceptions of love, and the ways that love can and should be infused in all that we do in academe and in our lives. We cried and held space with one another during those summer months. I learned more profoundly the value of teaching for our futures in the course. Thank you dear friend for your questions. They evoke energies of remembrance that I find are important for us to engage in regularly.

Our presences, as Black and Native women, in academe is critical. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), in 2020, there were 1.5 million faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions. Considering full-time faculty only, nearly 75% of them were White, and among Black female faculty 5% were assistant professors, 3% were associate professors, and 2% were full professors. The percentages for American Indian/Alaska Native male and female comprised less than 1 percent of assistant professors and professors! Friend, we represent the mighty *minoritized* faculty conglomerate in academe. I appreciated Harper's (2012) consideration of the term *minoritized* to denote the socially constructed nature of underrepresentation in place of using "minority." By shifting the framing from an individualized trait of being a minority, minoritized places the emphasis that the contexts/place/institution creates the conditions to maintain positions for certain peoples to have historically privileged social roles and identities. Did you

notice that I added the term mighty in front of minoritized faculty? I had to do that to indicate that we may be few in number, but we are mighty in our fight for our presences and knowledge systems. We have to. With irony, we have to.

While you were reading and engaging in La Paperson and Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, I was reading and learning from Ghandi, Prasad, and Said who were all beautiful recommendations from you after engaging in Vanessa Andreotti's (2011) work on *Contextualizing postcolonialism and postcolonial theories*. I learned how the concept of postcolonial was used in Commonwealth literature to refer to the cultural interactions within colonial and imperial societies, and that postcolonialism (like decolonization) differ in how it is defined and approaches. Materiality and knowledge production are intertwined in the relationship between those in power and those oppressed. Thus, I can see why your earlier question on reparations forwarded by Fanon is critical and should be taken up. Thank you. I had to read, pause, and then write to you about these views, ideas, and histories because I did not have the privilege to read those readings while I was a student. I am in my forties now and I am just learning and engaging in this work. What does that say about schooling and higher education? What does that say about me? What I do know for sure is that I needed you as a professor. I needed you to help me think expansively and globally of the ways that imperialism, colonialism, and settler colonialism are operating across lands and waters in similar ways to my homelands of Diné Bikeyah. Systemic monsters are much larger and expansive than what I know. Thank you. I also better understand why your standpoint may be closer to postcolonialism than to decolonization. I have another question and I apologize for my ignorance in this manner. Regarding postcolonialism, I am wondering where is the language of land, is it missing? Please forgive me if I have not deepened my knowledge at this time. Decolonization centers land, place, and presences. And I know you know that is where I lean toward. Yet, I am eager to learn and listen more, to continue our conversations together of knowledge production over tea and coffee, to giggle and anguish as we share stories of our families and histories, and to breathe in the air that is shared when we are together.

I am reminded of our plane ride together, as you opened your life journey with me. Oh what a precious moment that was for me and us. I felt your regard for questioning belonging to your homelands of Ethiopia and to your home in this nation state. You helped me to rethink conceptions of belonging and the ways that belonging is taken up in college environments. Thank you. We may have different histories and views on belonging, but what I do know is that we both have felt a sense of un-belonging to academe, whether that was when we were students or now as professors. What is powerful is that we try to create belonging for ourselves, which may include the act of writing these letters to each other. In our own ways, we also push back against the popular "best practices" of acquiring tenure that is often imposed on us. I am blessed to be able to talk with you about ways to rearticulate language and practices that more aligns with my value systems than the neoliberal higher education system. You see our presences are more than just knowledge production, it encompasses the fullness of all of our senses. Together we not only transform pedagogy and courses, our very presences are linked to the relationships that we form with colleagues, students, our communities, and the land/places that we have come from. That knowing is powerful and beautiful. It's an honor, dear friend, to not only be your colleague but to be able to call you a friend. And to imagine worlds together, for generations to come.

Ayóó'ánííníshní,

Amanda

To my lovely friend Amanda,

You have concluded your correspondence to me in such a powerful way! You are very kind to say that you would have benefited from having a professor like me when you were a student. That is quite a generous statement, and I receive with it gratitude.

The question you brought up about land in the context of postcolonial theory is such an important one. In short, yes, I do see postcolonial theory as a framework concerned with land. However, I understand this framework to be *equally* concerned with cultural and ideological hegemony as well. If I were to summarize my understanding of the main components of postcolonial thought, I would say there are four major ideas as explained by Bressler (1999) and Grosfoguel (2013):

1. European nation states (England, France, Italy, Germany) and the United States have colonized and “modernized” much of the contemporary world.
2. The British empire played the most significant role in this project of colonization and modernization.
3. Dominance was exerted by controlling not just the land, but also the epistemology of non-European peoples.
4. The impacts of colonization are evident in nearly every dimension of contemporary economic, political, and social systems across the globe.

Andreotti, a scholar who uses postcolonial theory extensively in education, argues that postcolonial theory helps us explore the question: “What aspects of Western/Enlightenment humanism (or other discourses) could stop or prevent a noncoercive relationship or dialogue among different ways of being in the world?” (p. 1). Andreotti also argues that the goal of postcolonial thought is plurality. Those who take up postcolonial thinking do not aim to “... delegitimize or discard Western/Enlightenment humanism, but to engage its limitations in an attempt to transform and pluralize it from within” (p. 3). Tuck and Yang have also drawn distinctions between decolonial and anti/postcolonial critique: “...anti-to-post-colonial project doesn’t strive to undo colonialism but rather to remake it and subvert it” (p. 19) In many ways, postcolonial theory gives me lots of theoretical room to imagine alternatives to current conditions of inequality, which is why I am partial to using it as a guiding framework for different academic projects.

Since I met you, however, I have grown a much stronger awareness of land and I am compelled to place it chronologically ahead of other dimensions of anti-colonial work. In the years that I have worked alongside you, I have started to ask myself, “What theoretical possibilities emerge when we *start* with land?” This question is particularly pertinent for me as a researcher focused on STEM higher education, in which notions of rationality are oftentimes steeped in colonial logics. For example, in your OpEd about the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) atop Mauna Kea, you explained that despite protests from Native Hawaiians, the TMT is under construction and expected to be operational in 2027. You note how this project fails to “...create an environment respectful of Mauna Kea’s cultural landscape, including not adequately protecting Native Hawaiian traditional and customary rights and practices” (Tachine, 2019, para. 7). In this piece, you also quote law professor Williamson B.C. Chang, who shared at a University of Hawaii Board of Regents meeting, that the connection between Mauna Kea and the indigenous

communities who are on the same land “...is a relationship, a deep visceral relationship: beyond reason, beyond law, beyond rationality” (2019, para. 8). As Chang pointed out, the priorities of Indigenous peoples are viewed as irrational, while the priorities of universities and states are presented as rational. For me, thinking about the issue of the TMT as fundamentally an issue of land is conceptually clear. I am grateful for the work of Indigenous scholars such as Christine A. Nelson, you, and Jameson D. Lopez (2021) and Adrienne Keene (2020) to start with land in my work about STEM.

Relatedly, Simpson—while discussing her politics of sharing and land—offers a definition of consent that can be applied to both human and non-human life. She states that “consent in this context is about whether you trust someone to uphold the responsibilities to the reciprocal relationships within which life is enmeshed” (Maynard & Simpson, 2022, p. 145). Thank you for teaching me so much about how to cultivate and deepen reciprocal relationships. We both know that “White supremacy has a vested interest in keeping Black and Indigenous movements apart and competing. Colonialism benefits from these two genocides” (Maynard & Simpson, p. 99). Using both decolonial and postcolonial lenses, I look forward to many more years of life and building with you, dear friend.

I love you.

Meseret

References

- Andreotti, V. (2011). *Actionable postcolonial theory in education*. Springer.
- Bressler, C. E. (1999). *An introduction to theory and practice*. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- British Council. (n.d.) Commonwealth Scholarships. <https://study-uk.britishcouncil.org/scholarships-funding/commonwealth-scholarships>
- Chang, W.B. (2019, July 26). Hawai‘i law professor provides insight on Mauna Kea to University of Hawai‘i Board of Regents. *Indian Country Today*. <https://indiancountrytoday.com/opinion/hawaii-law-professor-provides-insight-on-mauna-kea-to-university-of-hawaii-board-of-regents>
- Grosfoguel, R. (2013). The structure of knowledge in westernised universities: Epistemic racism/sexism and the four genocides/epistemicides. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 1, 73-90.
- Hailu, M. F., Molla, T., & Johnson, A. T. (2022). Researching experiences of African refugee youth in high-income countries: Reflections on conceptual challenges and possibilities. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 90, 168-176.
- Hailu, M F. & Tachine, A. R. (2021). Black and Indigenous theoretical considerations for higher education sustainability. *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education*, 13(3), 20-42.

- Harper, S.R. (2012). Race without racism: How higher education researchers minimize racist institutional norms. *Review of Higher Education*, 36, 9-29.
- Howard University. (n.d.). Languages Offered at Howard. <https://wlc.howard.edu/academics/languages-offered-howard>
- Keene, A. (2020). # NoDAPL as pedagogy: Bringing the movement into the university classroom. In *Education in Movement Spaces* (pp. 99-110). Routledge.
- La Paperson. (2017). *A third university is possible*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Lyons, S. R. (2000). Rhetorical sovereignty: What do American Indians want from writing? *College Composition and Communication*, 51(3), 447-468.
- Maynard, R., & Simpson, L. B. (2022). *Rehearsals for Living*. Haymarket Books.
- Metcalfe, A. S., & Blanco, G. L. (2021). "Love is calling": Academic friendship and international research collaboration amid a global pandemic. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 38, 100763.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). Characteristics of postsecondary faculty. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved May 31, 2022, from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/csc>.
- Smith, L. T. (2013). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Zed Books Ltd.
- Smith, S. (2021, October 29). Europe hands back looted African artifacts as it reckons with colonial legacy. *NBC News*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/>
- Tachine, A. R. (2018). Story rug: Weaving stories into research. In *Reclaiming indigenous research in higher education* (pp. 64-75). Rutgers University Press.
- Tachine, A.R. (2019, August 02). Stifling the seedling's growth. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2019/08/02/thirty-meter-telescope-project-mauna-kea-raises-questions-about-academic-research>
- Tachine, A. R. (2022). *Native presence and sovereignty in college: Sustaining Indigenous weapons to defeat systemic monsters*. Teachers College Press.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1-40.
- Wa Thiong'o, N. (1992). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. East African Publishers.
- Wright-Mair, R., & Castillo-Montoya, M. (2022). Sisterhood Birthed through Colonialism: Using Love Letters to Connect, Heal, and Transform. *Meridians*, 21(1), 265-292.