“She Must be Civilized, She Paints her Toenails”

Sharon Venne

An Ongoing War: The Colonial Project of Indigenous Disappearance

- The arrival of Christopher Columbus on the shores of Indigenous America inaugurated a war of survival for the Indigenous Peoples.
- Indigenous Peoples have been subjected to genocide, slavery, diseases, population transfers, and other depopulating actions by the colonizers.
- The war against Indigenous Peoples is ongoing. It has simply shifted **from unabashed destruction to more insidious attempts** to diminish Indigenous nations into manageable units.
- Indigenous Peoples **continue to survive** the occupation of colonizing foreigners by knowing themselves and their role in relation to the Creator.

Some of these insidious attempts named by Venne include:

- Assimilationist policies disguised as multiculturalism (e.g., melting pot (US); cultural mosaic (Canada))
- Racial criteria based on blood quantum
- Colonizers “freezing” Indigenous Peoples in time
- The imposition of individualistic values
- Attempts to reduce Indigenous Peoples to a ‘minority’ people
- Removal from lands and territories
- Dehumanization and disenfranchisement
- Scientific colonialism
- The colonizers’ false history

Why do the colonizers want to erase Indigenous presence on Great Turtle Island (North America) ?

→ To feel safe in their illegal occupation of Indigenous America.

Indigenous Identity

- Being ‘Indigenous’ is a **political identification**, not a racial indicator.
- Indigenous Peoples identify with their lands and territories.
- Being Indigenous comes from the heart and the mind.

Attempts to Subject Indigenous Nations to Criteria Based on Race

- Despite this, colonizer states (like Canada and the US) have used racial criteria based on blood quantum to decide and register Indigenous Peoples.
- Designed to rob Indigenous Peoples of their inherent right to decide their citizenship.

Why classify Indigenous Nations by racial identity ?

‘Legal’ Disappearance

Over time, Indigenous Peoples would ‘legally’ disappear as intermarriage between the nations would result in no one group having the necessary blood quantum to meet the colonizer’s quota.

Terra Nullius

If there are no ‘legal’ Indigenous Peoples, the lands become ‘terra nullius’ (belonging to no one). The lands can then be open for the colonizer to occupy and use without obstruction.

Dispels the Collective Guilt of Colonization

Because it would not have been the colonizers who eliminated Indigenous Peoples, but rather the natural laws of reproduction.

Superficial & Decorative: ‘Acceptable’ Manifestations of Indigenous Identity Within the Colonizers’ Model of Indigenous America

Indigenous Peoples continue to assert their rights to their lands and territories. → In doing so, settler occupation remains suspect. → Indigenous Peoples remain a **mental and psychological threat** to the colonizers.

Within a colonizer’s model:

- Indigeneity should be **superficial and decorative**.
- Indigenous Peoples are to be a caricature wearing feathers, beads and buckskins.
- Indigenous Peoples’ political and legal rights are things of the past and best forgotten.

“Frozen in Time”

- In Indigenous Peoples’ struggle for political identity, the **perception of being frozen in time** is a major hurdle to overcome.
- In the mindset of the colonizer, Indigenous Peoples would have to remain in the same condition as when colonization began to claim rights to their lands and resources.

Why would the colonizers seek to “freeze” Indigenous Peoples into a specific time period ?

- Denies the existence of Indigenous Peoples.
- **Produces no threat** to the colonizers.
- Allows for the colonizers to use signs of “civilization” (e.g., painted toenails) to disavow Indigenous Peoples’ political and legal rights.

Venne’s Interventions:

- There is no need to wear beads and feathers to know that one is Indigenous.
- Such things as wearing Western clothes, riding on airplanes, and using a phone are not signs of a relinquishment of Indigenous identity and do not bar an Indigenous person from advocating for their rights.
- While the colonizers see powwows as non-threatening, in reality, Indigenous Peoples dancing and singing their songs to the Creator is a **survival of the Peoples**, **a political act**, and **an act of identity** that cannot be diminished by the colonizers.

Collective Responsibilties & Rights vs Individualism

Collective Responsibilties

- For Indigenous Peoples, there is a responsibility to protect the collective for future generations.
- The collective responsibility of the group is to the lands and territories that the colonizers want to destroy.

Individualistic Values Destroy the Collective

- Indigenous Peoples cannot survive as individuals outside the collective.
- The colonizers’ attempt to impose individualistic values on Indigenous Peoples via educational, political, social and cultural systems has led to alienation of Indigenous Peoples from their own peoples and lands.
- When this has occurred, Indigenous Peoples have been **lost to their culture, their history, and their land**, which is the **ultimate goal of the colonizer**.

Collective Rights

- Indigenous Peoples’ rights are based on principles of collective rights; the right to land, government, laws and self-determination.
- These rights function contrary to the Eurocentric notion of individual rights.

International Law: Rights of Peoples vs Minorities

- To defeat the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples, they must become a ‘minority’ people within their own territories.
- Indigenous Peoples are **NOT minorities**.
- The difficulty for Indigenous Peoples has been to obtain these rights of Peoples; to add ‘Indigenous’ to ‘Peoples.’

Peoples	Minorities
✓ Rights to their lands and territories	✗ Rights to lands and territories
✓ Rights to their laws, government and self-determination	✗ Political rights; right to self-determination
	✓ Rights to speak their languages, wear their traditional costumes, and practice their religion

Lands and Territories

- For Indigenous Peoples, land is a primary responsibility, part of the original instructions given by the Creator.
- The land as mother; from the land, Indigenous children learn their place in creation.
- **Myth:** Indigenous Peoples can survive without their lands and territories.
- **Reality:** Removal from territories leads to loss of identity.
- Part of the colonization process is to remove the identity with the lands, thereby destroying the link to the ancestors.

The Kari-Oca Declaration: An Indigenous Prayer for All Creation

- After being excluded from the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development in 1992, Indigenous Peoples from around the world held their own forum and drafted their own declaration.
- The Declaration points out that all the environment must be protected for the future. Indigenous Peoples do not view the earth as a short-term goal.
- It reminds the colonizers of their own failures to care for the earth.
- The Declaration is called 'radical' in an attempt to reduce its impact. In doing so, non-Indigenous peoples point out their own shortcomings.

- **The Kari-Oca Declaration** (also known as the Indigenous Peoples' Earth Charter) **was significant for several reasons:**
  1. Indigenous Peoples did not give up when excluded from the UN meeting.
  2. Indigenous Peoples did not threaten disruption of the main UN forum.
  3. Officials in charge of the UNCED formally requested that Indigenous Peoples present their finding to the plenary.
  4. Indigenous Peoples from around the world could decide their own agenda; no need to request the colonizer States' permission.

Colonialism, Capitalism, and Environmental Degradation

- Settler states and the colonizer mentality, of instant pudding solutions for instant gratification, lead to environmental destruction.
- A colonizer society built on consumption and greed cannot understand the rights of Indigenous Peoples to protect their territories and lands.
- Canadian Ministry of Environment and Climate Change reported that two earths would be needed if every person were to live a typical Canadian way of life.
- Now, for settlers, hunting and fishing for sport has become a multimillion-dollar business. While, in many cases, Indigenous Peoples cannot hunt, fish, trap, and gather on their own lands and territories because they are currently controlled by the colonizers.

Laws of the Creator

- Venne is not prepared to put on a buckskin dress and feathers to appease an audience:
  1. It gives into the stereotype.
  2. A buckskin dress requires the hides of animals.
- The number of animals are greatly diminished due to the effects of colonization. Trying to keep the animals alive is the priority.
- Hunting laws given by the Creator to respect creation; an animal can only be killed for food. Anything that is killed must be used.
- An offering must be left for the spirit of the dead animal; otherwise, that spirit returns to the Creator and never returns to earth again. This is how the Elders explain the disappearance of the animals, fish and other relatives.
- Man is the last of creation ⇨ all of creation is the older and wiser ⇨ humans must respect their elders.

Scientific Colonialism & The Human Genome Diversity Project

The Human Genome Diversity Project → Project developed by the 'scientific' colonizers.

→ **Stated goal:** to link Indigenous Peoples to Asia.

Science's political agenda: trying to deny that the existence of Indigenous Peoples begins and ends on Great Turtle Island.

⇦ **Why?** ⇦ To **deny Indigenous Peoples' rights to lands and territory** by positing that everyone on Great Turtle Island is an immigrant, some just happened to arrive later.

- **Indigenous Peoples' knowledge:** the Creator placed Indigenous Peoples on Great Turtle Island.
- The project has looked to patent Indigenous Peoples' genes. Colonizers continue to use Indigenous Peoples' territories and resources without their consent; now colonizers have moved on to harvest body parts, including genes.
- Genetic codes are given by the Creator, not to be examined by the scientific world.
- Indigenous Peoples who protest against the project are painted as being against 'development'.

Teaching Human Rights

- To illustrate the difficulty facing Indigenous Peoples in terms of correcting 500 years of colonial history and myths, Venne shares a story of her experience teaching human rights in 1992 at the International Institute of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France.

Key takeaways:

- If the history of the colonization of Indigenous America is unknown, how can students understand the reasons for Indigenous Peoples needing to seek redress **outside** of the State?
- Students from Canda and the US protested Venne's lectures. They wanted to learn about oppression elsewhere rather than be reminded that they lived in colonizer states that oppress Indigenous Peoples.
- A request was made to exchange the lectures for discussions on education, health, and social issues (rights that flow to minorities). It is not possible to discuss minority rights when the rights of Peoples are at stake.
- Racism against Indigenous Peoples is pervasive.
- The colonizer's history has been very effective; historical records need to be corrected.

Knowledge as Power and the Value of Stories

- Indigenous Peoples are reluctant to tell outsiders about the internal workings of their communities.
- Knowledge is power and the Creator gave Indigenous Peoples that knowledge to survive for the future generations.
- Telling stories is an important aspect of the educational process through which the history, culture, traditions, laws and values are taught.

Key Takeaways

- Indigenous Peoples from Indigenous America have been colonized and continue to be colonized.
- While anti-Indigenous racism may be less overt, looking at the consequences of the policies and actions of the colonizers exposes that the goal remains one of Indigenous disappearance.
- Indigenous Peoples' struggle for political identity is a struggle against the prejudices of the colonizers' false history
- To correct the historical record written from the colonizer's point of view, the colonized must tell both their history and the effects of colonization on Indigenous Peoples.
- Indigenous Peoples continue to resist colonization by maintaining their rights as nations, questioning their oppressor, developing strategies to save the earth for future generations, pushing back against stereotypes, protecting their knowledges and sharing their stories.

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