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# From Settler Colonialism to Self-Determination: An Indigenous Perspective on **Decolonizing** Social Work

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# HEY, I'M AUTUMN!

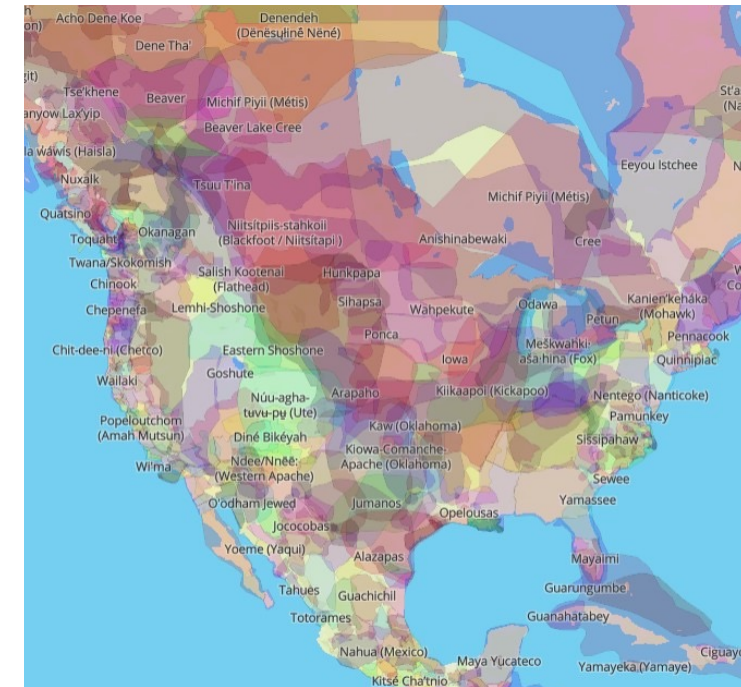
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# BEYOND A LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT –

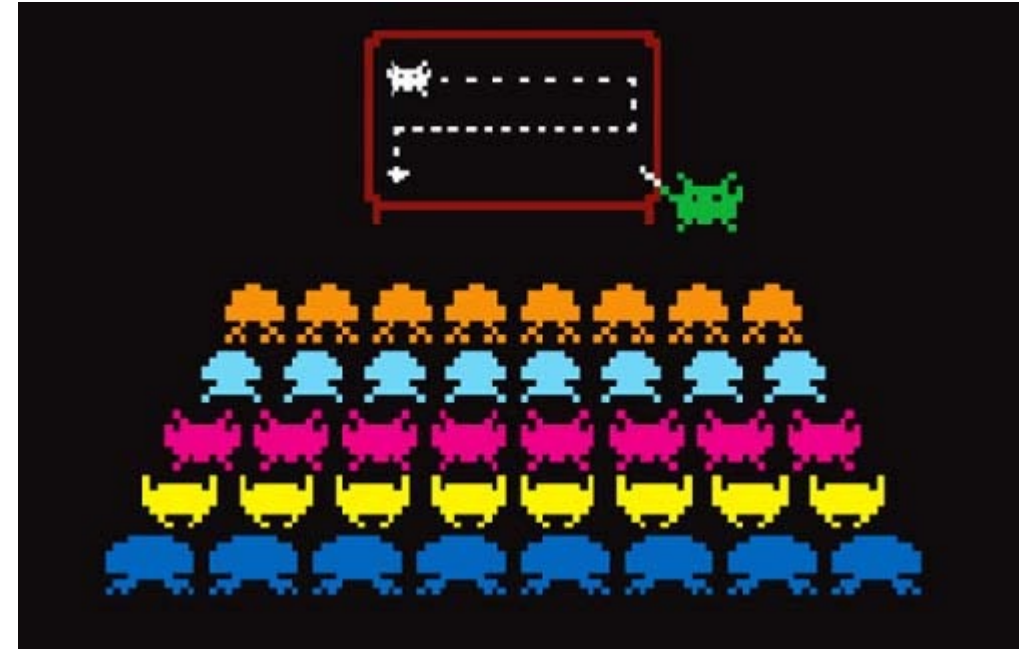
- Support Native folx in your community!
  - Whose land are you on? [www.Native-land.ca](http://www.Native-land.ca)
  - Sponsor the [WUSTL powwow](#)
  - Learn more at [Native Governance center](#)
    - [Self-Assessment](#)
    - [Voluntary Land Taxes](#)



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# PLAN OF ATTACK

- Background
- Social Work + Native Nations
- Present-day Problems
  - Research
  - Teaching
  - Practice
- Future directions
- Reflectors / Q+A





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BACKGROUND

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# SETTLER COLONIALISM

- **Settler colonialism** is an ongoing system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression of Indigenous peoples and cultures.
- Colonization began with the exploitation of Native lands and resources for settlers to gain wealth and power while subsequently making Natives dependent upon state resources
- Attempts to “**solve the Indian problem**”
  - outlawed tribal institutions, beliefs systems and practices, and traditional ways of life
  - imprisoning Natives for attending powwows, praying, and even holding traditional ceremonies
  - in schools, Native children were not permitted to speak in their Native languages

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# WHAT IS DECOLONIZATION?

- The **undoing of colonization** whereby a nation reestablishes itself
  - Returning to traditional ways of being, such as traditional practices and languages
  - Addressing one's own internalized oppression and colonization
- Logical endpoint: dismantling structures
- **NOT** a buzzword
  - Does a disservice to the truly decolonial work that targets power structures
  - Not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools

## **Decolonization is not a metaphor**

**Eve Tuck**

*State University of New York at New Paltz*

**K. Wayne Yang**

*University of California, San Diego*

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# WHAT IS DECOLONIZATION?

Short term work that's not **decolonization** but helpful:

- Diversify syllabus and curriculum
  - Digress from the cannon
  - Decenter knowledge + knowledge production
  - Devalue hierarchies
  - Disinvest from citational power structures
  - Diminish some voices and opinions in meetings while magnifying others
- Social justice
    - Reformist
    - Diversification + Inclusion
    - Recognition
  - Decolonial work
    - Anti-capitalist
    - Anti-colonialist
    - Sovereignty
    - Abolition



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# TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY + SELF-DETERMINATION

- **Tribal sovereignty** refers to the right of American Indians and Alaska Natives to govern themselves. The U.S. Constitution recognizes Indian tribes as distinct governments and they have, with a few exceptions, the same powers as federal and state governments to regulate their internal affairs.
- **Self-determination** refers to the social movements, legislation, and beliefs by which American Indian and Alaska Native tribes exercise self-governance and decision making on issues that affect their own people.

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# SOCIAL WORK + NATIVE NATIONS

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# TIMELINE COMPARISON

## Social Work with Native Populations

- 1887: National Conference of Charities and Corrections
  - 1892 first committee and report on Indian policy
- 1893 – 1927: Time of little interest
- 1927 – 1935: Social welfare again takes notice
  - 1927: first conference-level report informing national membership of direct practice with Natives.
  - 1930s: conference recognizes limited progress the profession has made with Indigenous peoples.
- 1930 – 1960s: little attention to Natives (WWII and beyond)
- 1960 – 1980s: Indigenous social workers demand their own voice
- 1980s – present: Indigenous peoples define SWK practice that is more than culturally competent, but a product of the culture it assists

## Federal Indian Policy Timeline

- 1770s-1820s: Sovereign to sovereign (nation to nation)
- 1830s-1850s: Relocation and Removal
- 1850s-1890s: Reservation -- Reservation treaties
- 1870s-1930s: Assimilation and Allotment -- End of treaty making
- 1930s-1950s: Reorganization (renewed trust relationship; quasi-sovereign)
- 1950s-1960s: Termination
- 1960s-present?: Self-Determination + Self-Governance

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# WHY SOCIAL WORK SHOULD CARE

- “It is essential that social workers understand the source of what can appear as dysfunctional behavior of Indigenous peoples and families. The loss of family, communities, and cultures has left a legacy of death, pain, and devastation that affects the Indigenous peoples today in the form of multi-generational trauma”
- Social workers need to be aware of the effects of colonization and work to create less oppressive ways of delivering social service

Tamburro, 2013

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# PRESENT DAY PROBLEMS



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# RESEARCH

## Evidence-Based Practice

- Government funding agencies push for evidence-based practices in order to relocate professional practice from one's clinical experience into scientific evidence
- Majority of EBPs are built on assumptions of a western medical model which emphasize **distress** and **dysfunction**

**“You cannot be the doctor if you are the disease”**

(Daes, 2000, p. 4)

## Decolonizing Research Methodologies

- Evidence mapping
- Recommendations
  - Co-construction of methodology
  - Community driven
  - Rejecting the RCT gold standard
    - Context matters
  - Dissemination – not just reporting back
  - Rejecting interventionism: clinical colonization

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# TEACHING

## Native Social Work Education

- Legacy of boarding schools
  - Education historically a tool for assimilation
- Lack of inclusion in social work curriculum
  - Less than half have a dedicated course with at least half of the focus on American Indian populations
  - Lack of courses on Native topics, including textbooks with Native content
- Address gaps in social work education
  - Understand alternate worldviews, incorporate Native perspectives and content

## Indigenous Knowledge + Epistemologies

- Indigenous teaching methodologies
  - Talking circles
  - Learning with the heart and mind
  - Land-based education, planting the seed
- SWK curriculum should include Indigenous knowledge, skills, and values in all aspects of the curriculum
  - policy, practice, values and ethics, diversity, human behavior in the social environment, and research.

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# PRACTICE

## Native Mental Health

- Overrepresentation in the DSM
  - Inconsistent treatment of culture
- Field lacks even the most basic information about relative mental health burdens of Native populations
- Barriers to treatment
  - Lack culturally appropriate treatment
  - Stereotyping, discrimination, stigma

## Indigenous Concepts of Wellness

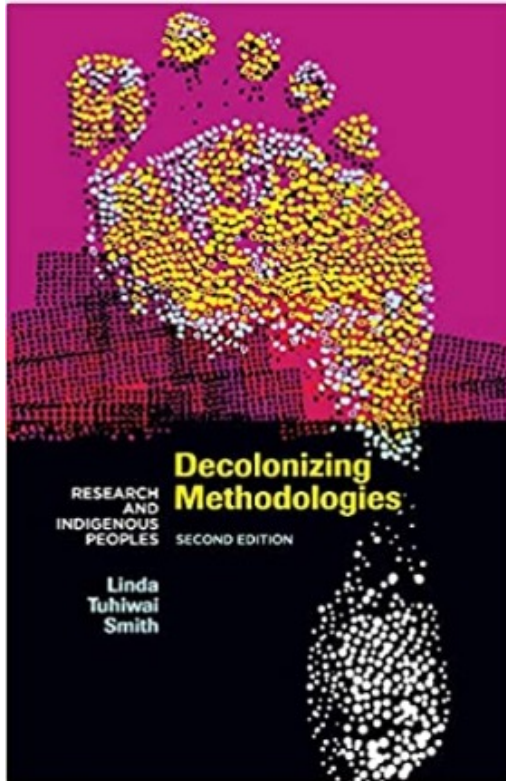
- Community-defined treatments
- Decrease and address pathologization that occurs with Indigenous clients.
- Indigenous conceptualizations of wellness
  - Traditional healers and healing
  - Role of ceremony
  - Relational worldview (ex: medicine wheel + four directions)

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# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? - RESEARCH



- Questions to ask:
  - Whose research is it?
  - Who owns it?
  - Whose interests does it serve?
  - Who will benefit from it?
  - Who has designed its questions and framed its scope?
  - Who will carry it out?
  - Who will write it up?
  - How will its results be disseminated?



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# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? - TEACHING

Recommendations to increase resources for Native students and faculty + improve curriculum

- Increase integration of Native content in social work curriculum
- Offer relevant field placements for Native students
- Encourage the development of American Indian Studies Programs or collaborate with existing programs
- Support the development of student resources in social work programs
- Support the development of alternative curriculum delivery models to educate Native students (online modalities for distance learning)

Status of Native Americans in Social Work Higher Education (CSWE)

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# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? - PRACTICE

## Systemic Change

- Learn about and incorporate Indigenous conceptions of wellness into your practice
- Understand effectiveness of community-defined treatments
- Increase comfort in referring to community resources
- Increase Native representation in providers
- Advocate for increased resources for Natives in your community

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# TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY + SELF-DETERMINATION

Dr. Weaver's best practices for Indigenous People and the Social Work profession

- **Knowledge:** aware of the history of Native life – treaties, sovereignty, federal Indian policy, oppression, colonialism, and racism
- **Skills:** active listening, tolerating silence, decentering one's own world view.
- **Values:** helper wellness (helping professional must be strongly grounded in their own community and value system), respect, open-mindedness, general willingness to decenter one's self.

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# TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY + SELF-DETERMINATION

Final thoughts

- Culture as the ultimate intervention
  - How can social work empower Native communities to reconnect and honor that process of reconnection to culture?
- Nothing about us without us
  - Following up on decentering one's self.. Kindly get out of the way.
- Active efforts
  - We can't will colonization and white supremacy away. It takes concerted and consistent action.

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# Nea'ese!

Thanks so much for having me!

Feel free to reach out or send any questions to [autumn.asher@wustl.edu](mailto:autumn.asher@wustl.edu)

Find out more about my work at [www.autumnasherblackdeer.com](http://www.autumnasherblackdeer.com)

Follow me on Twitter!

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# REFLECTORS / Q + A TIME