

Conceptualizing collaboration between Indigenous racialized immigrants and Aboriginal peoples

DANGERS OF EXCLUSION AND APPROPRIATION

Indigenous peoples are distinguished from others for being “Indigenous to the land they inhabit” (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 598) for having ways of life attached to this initial connection with the land and having to defy contemporary forms of colonization. Worldwide, Indigenous people are forming alliances, suggesting that sharing an Indigenous identity and experiences of colonialism can contribute to decolonizing collaboration among Indigenous populations (Aylwin, 2008; Smith, 2012). This article explores how similar decolonizing collaborations can take place between Aboriginal peoples and Indigenous immigrants. It has been argued that racialized immigrants, including Indigenous immigrants, do not accept their involvement in colonialism as settlers while experiencing systemic racism themselves (Byrd, 2011; Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This has resulted in anti-racist discourses that exclude Aboriginal people and their experiences (Lawrence & Dua, 2008). Although this problem needs to be addressed by non-Aboriginal people, it has often been ignored (Regan, 2010; Thobani, 2007). With this article, I hope to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action, which enlist non-Aboriginal people in Canada to embrace the responsibility of building partnerships with Aboriginal peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012). In the process, I analyze the dangers of appropriation in my position relative to Aboriginal worldviews.

There is some existing literature on the relationships between racialized immigrants and Aboriginal peoples (Bohacker & Iacovetta, 2009; Ghorayshi,

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2010). However, there is no information about Indigenous immigrants living in Canada and their relations with Aboriginal peoples. The Indigenous populations involved in this research are Quechua and Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Quechua peoples are Indigenous groups consisting of the Incas, Chancas, Huancas, and Cañaris, who live mainly in the Andes of South America (Waddington, 2016), whereas First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) constitute the Aboriginal peoples living in Canada (National Household Survey, 2011). My engagement with Indigenous people in this research is deeply influenced by my positionality, which involves being Peruvian born and Mestiza (having Quechua and European, mainly Spanish, roots). I chose to discuss collaboration of Quechua immigrants with Aboriginal peoples because I have not observed discussions on this topic within my own ethnic community, even though that is the expectation. As well, it is of personal benefit for me to collaborate on the well-being of Aboriginal peoples as I have two daughters who are Aboriginal.

THE KNOWER

My worldviews are shaped by my experiences of colonization in my homelands and my immigration to a colonized country; my presence helps prop up the

colonization of FNMI peoples (Lawrence & Dua, 2008). As I engage with Quechua and Aboriginal worldviews and epistemologies, my positionality is unsettling. I have lived in Canada for many years and have lost aspects of my Mestiza roots. Therefore, I consider myself an insider/outsider researcher within Quechua communities. On issues concerning Aboriginal communities, I clearly have an outsider’s perspective. Similarly, depending on who “the knower” is, the knowledge shared will vary (Mignolo, 2009). Within Indigenous worldviews, “the knowers” include all the cosmos, whereas in mainstream research practices, there is a power imbalance embedded in who is allowed to be the knower (Hardings, 1987). This comparison illustrates the need to move away from Eurocentric frameworks such as ethnography, which rely on ways of knowing that are fairly different from Indigenous ways of knowing.

The proposed forms of collaboration between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples are founded on the principle that non-Aboriginal peoples “experience settler privileges on Turtle Island” (Koleszar-Green, 2016). Awareness of their settler position and what this entails is important in making non-Aboriginal peoples assume responsibility in the restoration of Aboriginal communities (Keefer, 2010). Collaboration with Aboriginal peoples would involve transformation of the current structures in place (Swamp, 2010). To partake in this collaboration, allies would need to engage in the inner work as described above, as well as reflect on how one’s positionality influences collaboration with Aboriginal peoples (Swamp, 2010; Davis, 2010).

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THE FOCUS OF COLLABORATION

Collaboration of racialized immigrants with Aboriginal peoples could be partly hindered by their different focus. Whereas anti-racist concepts of collaboration focus on equality among groups that have excluded Aboriginal populations, Aboriginal activists focus on sovereignty of Aboriginal peoples and repatriation of Indigenous lands and life (Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Gkisedtanamoogk, 2010; Tuck and Yang, 2012; Koleszar-Green, 2016). In response, Tuck and Yang's (2012) model of *contingent collaboration* claims that collaborating with Aboriginal peoples means accepting their views on decolonization. The collaborative relationships will remain as long as they are effective, and they could stop at any time when they no longer work.

Koleszar-Green's (2016) interpretation of the Two-Row Wampum Belt offers guiding principles for the relationships between Aboriginal peoples and settlers. According to Koleszar-Green, "the belt is made up of three rows of white beads separated by two rows of purple beads. The purple beads represent two vessels (one canoe and the other a ship) that travel the same river without interfering with each other" (Koleszar-Green, 2016, p. 31, from her personal communication with elders Sakoieta and Tewantahawitha, September 22, 2013). White beads symbolize peace, friendship, and mutual respect, and they are the values supporting collaborative relationships (Koleszar-Green, 2016). The Two-Row Wampum Belt represents the responsibilities of both the "guest" (settler) and the "host" (Indigenous person) for making the relationship itself more collaborative.

A prophetic view on collaboration is offered through prophecies such as "The Eagle and the Condor," told by various Indigenous groups such as the Incas. According to the prophecy, a transformation would happen around this time when the Condor unites with the Eagle: "this will give birth to a new spirit. This new spirit will unite once


again the red nations of North, Central and South parts of the hemisphere" (Eagle and the Condor Coordinating Council). This prophetic joining of forces among Indigenous nations in America is already taking place among Indigenous people in America.

The application of these collaborative approaches to Quechua immigrants involves having Quechua immigrant recognize that they are contributing to the colonization of Aboriginal peoples. This is the case, regardless of the conditions that brought them to these lands (Dhamoon, 2015). At the same time, to engage in collaboration, Quechua immigrants may also need to engage in healing. For instance, the hardships of holding marginalized identities as Indigenous in their homelands and Indigenous immigrants in Canada would need to be addressed. This cannot be the responsibility of Aboriginal peoples, yet it is a crucial step toward reaching collaboration. As I move forward with this research, I hope to learn more about the awareness that racialized immigrants, particularly Quechua immigrants, have on their identities as settlers and the responsibilities that this entails. Addressing such questions is a step toward finding a connection among Indigenous immigrants and Aboriginal peoples in Canada that so far has been dismissed. 🍁

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Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew when she states that “the creative process has restorative powers” (2009, p. 68). In order “to heal the wounds of oppression, and to reconcile our communities” (Episkenew, 2009, p. 194), writing must not dance around the issue of trauma in any of its forms—psychological, physical, linguistic—and must instead strive to write “‘liberating’ madness” through texts (Felman, 2003, p. 15). Ongoing trauma is an unavoidable fact of post-colonial realities, as made obvious in Marlene’s resounding “Yes” in response to Brand’s question of “did we, did you go crazy after?” (2001, p. 169). Writing the “crazy” thus becomes a political and emancipatory act, in denying the forgetting of violation and madness in all its forms. 

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