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Word Count: 1308

Indigenous Feminisms Midterm #2

Based on Tuck's piece, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," I think of damage-based research as the reduction of Indigenous peoples and cultures to something suspended within time, a time in which they were structurally murdered and outlawed. It negates the rich histories, presents and futures of these tribes and ignores their agency. Tuck encourages us to look at Indigenous peoples through a desire-based lens, in which "understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (416) is the goal. She also notes that understanding Indigenous peoples when informed only by damage leaves room for us to pathologize them as people to be *damaged* (416) and this is a form of neocolonialism in and of itself. Decolonization is often seen as a concerted and directed focus of Indigenous peoples, but in reality, existing and maintaining their traditions while also taking advantage of modernization are forms of decolonization. Unlearning Western ideals with a preference for tradition is decolonization. Desire-based research allows us to view hope, survivance, and futures (417) and how that damage fits into this narrative, instead of the other way around. I think that Indigenous feminists should consider this so as to recognize where tribes are already practicing desire, and how desire-based practice is a form of decolonization. This may allow for more success in the reduction of gender violence and patriarchy within tribes; a desire-based approach would better inform a tribal jurisprudence of rape and crime, as discussed by Deer.

Cutcha Risling Baldy's book, *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming of Age Ceremonies* takes a more holistic, desire-based approach to understanding Native women's ceremonies. One aspect of this is Risling Baldy's denunciation of salvage ethnography, and the ways that anthropology has taken over the autonomy of Native people in their own tellings of histories and cultures (5). A desire-based approach to anthropology as a whole would frame an Indigenous way of knowing by foregrounding an Indigenous presence—allowing Native people control over how their stories are told and shared. An anthropologist "studying" Native cultures, even through conversations with Native people or through participant observation, will always be biased by and understood through a Western epistemology. Ethnographic refusal, in which Native peoples refuse to be part of anthropologist's ethnographic work (80), is a form of resistance that connects survivance and sovereignty—a desire-based understanding of this offers that Native peoples deserve autonomy over their bodies in research, and should not even be a subject of study in the first place. Museums and the exploitation of the bodies of Native people for consumption mimic the forms of settler colonialism that were most violent; the exploitation of Native peoples for land and Native women for power.

Risling Baldy's ideas about (re)writing, (re)righting, and (re)riting are a unique way to frame a desire-based approach. The goal of this framework is to use a Native feminist analysis to combat Western ideas of Native peoples and their traditions as static, dated, or uncivilized (29-31). She notes that "internalized patriarchal expressions of ceremonial practices are not traditional and illustrates how the revitalization of women's coming-of-age ceremonies center and reclaim Native feminisms" (31). Later, she discusses how it is important to understand the violence committed against Native peoples in order to understand the relevance of (re)writing,

Commented [1]: Although the article I'm analyzing gave us a long and detailed explanation of damage and desire in Indigenous research, I felt really good about the way I synthesized all of that information into something I can operate with.

Commented [2]: I decided to include this discussion of decolonization because even though it is not necessarily the focus of the idea that I am analyzing in this paper (damage vs desire), decolonization is at the heart of an relationship between Indigenous feminisms and the outside world.

Commented [3]: Making this comment felt really good because as an Anthropology minor, we are always critical of our own field and our many failures. It's nice to jab at it and gives me hope for the future of the field.

(re)righting, and (re)riting (52). In this way, Risling Baldy connects desire-based research's focus not only on how colonialism impacted those traditions, but on how Native feminisms can decolonize tradition through the centering of desires. In her discussion of the reclamation of Hupa coming-of-age ceremonies, Risling Baldy expertly denies the use of a heteropatriarchal, "taboo" lens, and instead champions a "queer hermeneutic" based in traditional ways of knowing (107). The reclamation of these ceremonies cannot be a true decolonizing effort without first understanding and reconnecting to Indigenous ways of knowing and desires.

Deer's book, *The Beginning and End of Rape*, details the history of colonization and rape as a tool of conquest, and discusses the history and future of tribal rape law. I would argue that Deer takes on a more damage-based approach to these issues; while she makes concessions about the hopes of Indigenous women and for the future of tribal jurisprudence, the book is largely informed by the impact of colonialism—how it has changed views on violence against Native women, created the erasure of Native women, and how it influences tribal legality in rape. Her first chapters center the colonial history of rape, and in her chapter titled "At the Mercy of the State" (which feels like a damage-centered title) she discusses the pathologization of tribes as unable to adequately handle severe matters and crimes such as rape, but she also recognizes this as a myth constructed by settler colonists (40). When reading her book, much of it feels as though it is centered around the harms of colonization. I find it difficult, however, to understand these topics beyond those harms—they were committed, and they have long lasting effects on tribal sovereignty and internalized heteropatriarchy. It is possible, however, to consider how recognizing these influences can better inform decolonization efforts and reclamation of practices; positioning non-Native people in the present day impacts of colonialism and neocolonialism will also help reposition Native people as dynamic, living actors.

Her chapter "What She Say It Be Law" discusses the theories of rape present before colonialism; she recognizes that while rape has always existed, women and men were far more equitable, and women far more powerful, than they were post-colonialism (18). However, this does necessarily employ a desire-based approach, as she writes about it in terms of what happened to those tribal traditions as a result of colonialism. Her chapters discussing the tribal jurisprudence of rape comes closer to desire-based research, in which she says that constructing theories of rape, both as a "moral wrong" as well as in the judicial system, must take place from a Native tribes' perspective, featuring culturally relevant solutions (as opposed to simply reconstructing existing American systems) (109). Acknowledging the harmful influences of colonialism that exist in tribal rape law does not excuse tribes from tackling rape, and doing so effectively within a tribe requires a decolonizing praxis. An interesting concession that Deer makes in regard to peacemaking is cautioning against automatically rejecting American practices in favor of seemingly more "tribal" practices, because those practices may still not be suited to healing rape victims (124). I think of this as attempt at including desire-based frameworks for rape; centering the healing of victims that is not solely a reaction to colonization will ultimately result in a more effective Indigenous jurisprudence of rape.

A desire-based approach to understanding Indigeneity is incredibly valuable. Viewing Native tribes, and especially Native women, as those have been erased inevitably allows them to continue to be erased by Westernism and colonization. Just as colonization is not something that happened, but something that continues to happen, so are Indigenous peoples and their cultures. They have changed over time and been hugely impacted by colonialism, surely—but more importantly, they are living, breathing, and maintaining their traditions today in new ways. Risling Baldy's focus on salvage ethnography and (re)writing, (re)righting, and (re)riting

Commented [4]: It felt strange to criticize Deer's book this way, because it was the first real exposure and learning I had on Indigenous feminisms. Through continued learning, I later decided that the way she discusses these subjects were not the way I believed they should be learned.

Commented [5]: I chose to highlight some examples in Deer's text that are actually in line with some desire-based rhetoric; I wanted to bring in an element of surprise (that denouncing all non-tribal practices may not be effective).

Indigenous ways of knowing are the epitome of Tuck's hope for desire-based understandings. While Deer takes a look more closely at the crimes and erasures of Native peoples by colonizers, she understands the importance of reconstructing rape theory in a way that is best suited to the needs and cultural understandings of each tribe. While it is not possible to undo colonization (i.e., never stealing the land in the first place; even to return all of the land back would never absolve the United States) or the harms of it, it is possible to recenter the needs and wants of Native tribes today so as to stop erasing their presence.

Commented [6]: I wanted to use this concluding sentence as a place to state in clear terms the nature of colonization, but to also provide a semblance of hope and possibility, which is the ultimate goal of desire-based research.