

COMPLICATING SPACE: EXPLORING LUGONES AS AN ODAWA NATIVE

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ABSTRACT

Growing up, I clearly understood my connection to indigeneity and being Odawa Native.

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Growing up, I clearly understood my connection to indigeneity and being Odawa Native. Although, as a family, we were not embedded in traditional cultural practices, my father (who was Odawa) and my mother (who was white) ensured from a young age that this was a central component of my identity. As part of the Anishinaabe people, the Odawa are one of the original caretakers of the Great Lakes area of the United States where I grew up. Knowing this from a young age, I have always had a sense of belonging to a community spatially situated. However, balancing two identities was never an easy topic to approach with others outside and sometimes inside my home. Like many Indigenous Americans who may not fall into a Western conception of indigeneity, I often receive confused looks when telling others that I am an Odawa Native. I was seen as too light-skinned or not Native-looking enough for others to believe I was indeed Odawa, which stood in contrast to my father and sister, who are darker than I am. As a form of colorism, this followed me across my life, personally, professionally, and into spaces I have traveled through.

I am intentional with how I present my identity to others. Preferring to use the Anishinaabe spelling Odawa versus its anglicized spelling Ottawa, I am not only subverting linguistic expectations but asserting an authentic self through language. I also choose to wear my hair in two braids to connect to my culture and those who came before me. In doing so, this becomes one of the few physical signifiers of my identity I can express, and push normative conceptions of how men present themselves.

I use this brief introduction as a point of departure to critically reflect on my identity in relation to space and place, shifting the focus of inquiry and positioning myself as the subject of discussion. As space and place are contested areas, identities that challenge normativity are an act of decoloniality, which as an ongoing process, decenters hegemonic power relations and knowledge. Decoloniality asks us to disrupt and critically reflect on what identity means in relation to those we engage with and the places we travel through. As an Odawa Native, I complicate space by intentionally inserting my identity and authentic self into place and space. By examining Lugones' idea of motion and stasis (1998), I consider the following questions: What implications of physical presence in a place are there when a place is unwelcoming to those outside the normative identity? By examining place, power, and mobility, how do we consider entering and engaging with place as an act of resistance? Place becomes a site contestation that is ripe for further exploration.

Maria Lugones states that, "One walks from place of identity to place of identity, one's own and others'. One builds stakes in each place and complicates and challenges each place and is challenged by it and its inhabitants" (1998, 51). Lugones is direct in offering a decolonial moment. In discussing movement in/through space and place, we situate ourselves in a way that disrupts and challenges. She states that this includes "the adoption of several new attitudes as well as a different way of living: moving in and out of communities without thinking that these are places just to pass through as tourists" (51). Lugones' ideas motion/stasis are useful in imagining how individuals and spaces are never the same after engaging with or passing through them. Motion offers us the ability to move through engagements as an overt act of resistance, by inserting oneself

into an environment for the sake of disruption or a subtle articulation of language that changes one's perception. The same can be said of stasis. We can enact an oppositional stance to a hegemonic space by standing still.

As an Odawa, engaging with people and spaces has interesting implications concerning what remains after leaving. Using Lugones, we as individuals embed a piece of ourselves in any given space or person. Nothing is ever genuinely singular in its entirety but an amalgam of everything and everyone that came before. We ultimately embody a piece of everything we encounter and leave behind a part of ourselves after we are gone. This becomes a living memory of people and places. As a decolonial move, this asks us to consider how our engagements with a space or person disrupt and ultimately break down any hegemonic barriers or ideologies. By entering a space as my authentic, Odawa self, I am challenging normativity and conceptions of how Indigenous Americans are perceived and how I am embedding a piece of my existing self in a space and through others. As Lugones' states, "motion is always for the sake of understanding and for the sake of connections with political movement" (52). As I move through space and with people, at the core of my traveling is always a willingness to work toward a decolonial understanding of identity.

Identity work is rarely easy and rarely clear cut. As an Odawa who has faced colorism and erasure of identity, my movement may not always be politically oriented. However, I would be remiss to say this type of engagement was not inherently political. Suppose we apply Lugones' ideas of motion/stasis toward a framework of decoloniality. In that case, we can, as she states, "have a movement that creates space for rearranging one's own identity, for making the complexity of one's own subjectivity explicitly, for articulating it, for making it public" (52). By articulating and making my Odawa identity explicit, I work in and through the margins toward a decolonial mindset. One that places normativity under examination and imagines a better future.

CONTRIBUTOR:

Eric J. Hunting is an Odawa native and doctoral student at Penn State University. He is seeking a degree in Lifelong Learning and Adult Education with graduate minors in Latina/o Studies and Comparative & International Education. His work examines learning and decoloniality in the context of Latina/o punk music. He aims to explore how the intersections of punk music and urban soundscapes challenge how we learn and where learning occurs.

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