

Reflections on Our Current Social, Economic and Political Realities as an Indigenous man

I have been a witness all my life. A witness of civil war and displacement in my home country of El Salvador and resettlement as a refugee in Canada. I have been impacted by witnessing this journey of mine and many others. I recognize the need to move away from a witness standpoint so that I can enter the realm of lived experiences. The question that guides this new perspective taking is “Who am I as an active participant in my own life story?”

This question has emerged due to my recent reading of the book titled *“Fresh Banana Leaves: Healing Indigenous Landscapes through Indigenous Science”* written by an Indigenous scientist Jessica Hernandez. I wish I could have written *this* book the way she has done so because it contains my lived experiences. Another book that has captured my imagination is *“Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis”* written by Amitav Ghosh. These books have provided me with a deeper understanding of the impact of colonization on Indigenous and racialized people across the globe at different historic time periods. Also, these books contain larger perspective on the impact of colonization on the land, ecosystems, and climate patterns across the globe.

In the Americas, colonial capitalist structure is built upon Indigenous lands using the slave labours of Africans and indentured slaves from other parts of the world (e.g., South Asia). The genocide of Indigenous peoples continues to be a part of this process. Displacement at spiritual, physical, and psychological levels are inevitable outcomes of colonization and capitalism. This “forced” displacement, which is part of my lived experience as well, can span rural to urban migration within a single country as well as across countries and continents. Anyone who is forced to migrate, including African slaves, are not settlers on Americas. African slaves were “forcefully taken from their ancestral homelands during slavery. This is the embodiment of how the United States was built. It was built on the stolen lands and built by stolen Indigenous peoples from the continent of Africa. To me, Black people are included in the Indigeneity discourse and the Indigenous scholarship I write about. Black people are Indigenous, their indigeneity was fractured over generations of the slavery, segregation, and discrimination they have endured when they are displaced from their ancestral homelands. Like Indigenous peoples, Black people have also been caretaking and stewarding our lands since slavery” (Hernandez, 2022, pg.3)

As stated by Ghosh (2021, pg. 54), *“colonization and conquest are as old as human history itself... What makes the European colonization of the Americas distinctive, however, is the sheer scale and the rapidity of the environmental transformations that accompanied it, radically altering more than quarter of the Earth’s land’s surface in a few hundred years.”* *The settler colonizers reengineered the land and waterways to support European ways of living. What choice did Indigenous and racialized people have in this mass destruction at multiple levels of our existence? Well, Indigenous and racialized peoples had to “adapt” or “fit in” or face “extinction”.* The process of “acculturation” and “adaptation” is engaged with a deep sense of vulnerabilities, anxiety, fears, restlessness, hypervigilance and self-oppression or self-silencing. The trauma of

people is experienced by the land and ecosystem as well. We are not fully aware of the trauma endured by the land itself.

During this discourse of vulnerabilities, we have begun to pay attention to resilience and resistance of Indigenous, Black, and racialized peoples. However, from my perspective, we tend to objectify people along the vulnerability and resilience continuum without raising consciousness about the larger social, economic, and political forces of colonization, capitalism and imperialism. Today, some Indigenous, Black, and racialized peoples are holding positions of “power” and “influence” within the “dominant Eurocentric White world”. We applaud their success and look up to them as role models. Somewhere we forget that they have paid the price and incurred many losses silently to be part of the mainstream structures and to ascend the power hierarchy within these structures. The reality is that a small percentage of white people continue to accrue disproportionately larger benefits from the insight, wisdom, and efforts of the Indigenous, Black, and racialized leaders who work within their systems. Thus, Indigenous, Black, and racialized people are not always the real beneficiaries of their “success” in the Eurocentric world. The trade off (gains versus losses) is huge for non-White people in the dominant systems. And their apparent “success” still supports the needs and ways of living of European settler colonizers.

Also, when the wisdom and voices of Indigenous, Black, and racialized people do not suit the interests of Eurocentric systems and lifestyle, they face retaliation, threats and hatred. The question arises as to what equity and inclusion means to people who want to be in a meaningful relationship with human life, land and all living beings. This is the question I grapple with the most as I look at my history and the history of my Indigenous ancestors and set a vision and intention for my relationship with the next seven generations. I do not want to be concerned about leaving a legacy, which means I do not want to build my little kingdom of power and influence. I want to experience inner freedom from such constraints, while building meaningful relationships with my own creative space and the creative force of our Creator.

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References

Hernandez, J. (2022). *Fresh Banana Leaves: Healing Indigenous Landscapes through Indigenous Science*. California, USA: North Atlantic Books.

Ghosh, A. (2021). *The Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*. Chicago, USA: The University of Chicago Press.