

**NATURAL RESOURCE EXPLOITATION IN INDIGENOUS
COMMUNITIES: AN EXPLORATION OF VIOLENCE
AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN**

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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of the connectedness of violence against American Indigenous women and natural resource extraction using corporate colonialism as a framework. In this investigation the implications of corporate colonialism on violence against Indigenous women are illustrated in the United States. The case study that will be used in this thesis will be Dakota Access Pipeline protests at Standing Rock, North Dakota.

It is important to bring awareness of the relationship between fossil fuel extraction and gender-based violence, using colonization as a framework. This brings awareness that fossil fuel extraction is not just an environmental issue, but that it is a social justice issue as well. Moreover, imperative to inform readers that this is not just happening in other countries, that this is happening in the United States as well. Another purpose of this study is to inform readers that the impacts of colonialism are ongoing and that it is not just a thing of the past.

Qualitative methods of research were used to analyze impacts of gender-based violence and intergenerational trauma. Scholarly articles as secondary sources are used for this thesis. Quantitative methods of research or interviews were not conducted as this may lead to further exploitation of Indigenous women and their individual experiences.

This topic is an important issue to research because “Indigenous women experience violence at higher rates than non-Indigenous women and that police and the state have failed to provide adequate standards of protection to Indigenous women,” (Walker). Moreover, “Indigenous communities worldwide are disproportionately affected by resource extraction in their territories,” (Walker). Another reason this topic was significant was because in the case of the Dakota Access Pipeline on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, “indigenous women and girls experience higher rates of sexualized violence from the frontline workers and security

forces hired by national and transnational corporations seeking to exploit the natural resources in Indigenous lands,” (Walker).

Violence against women, especially violence against women of color, is a catastrophic issue in the United States and every region of the world. This subject is innovative because it highlights the interconnectedness between environmental justice and social justice.

Table of Contents

Abstract ii-iii

Introduction..... 1-2

Literature Review: A Need for Research..... 2-3

Conceptual Frameworks: Corporate Colonialism and
 Intergenerational Trauma 4-5

Standing Rock Case Study: Connecting Corporate Colonialism
 to Violence against Indigenous Women 5-7

Social Work Theory Applications and Assessment..... 7-9

Recommendations: Social Workers and Divesting Banks 9-10

Conclusion 10-11

References..... 12-13

Natural Resource Exploitation in Indigenous Communities: An Exploration of Violence against Indigenous Women

Natural resource extraction by corporations are a catalyst of corporate colonialism as an entity. Corporate colonialism negatively impacts Indigenous communities around the world as it damages Indigenous health and well-being both spiritually, economically, physically, emotionally and socially. The experience of corporate colonialism on Indigenous communities agitates intergenerational trauma experienced by the American Indigenous community. Historically, colonialism has been sexually violent against Indigenous women. Natural resource extraction done through the entity of corporate colonialism has been violent against Indigenous women. Natural resource extraction in Indigenous communities is corporate colonialism due to its exploitative and violent behavior towards Indigenous Individuals. Natural resource extraction is not just an environmental issue, but an issue of social justice as well. Natural resource Exploitation actively threatens the culture, identity, and survival of Indigenous people.

This paper investigates natural resource extraction in Indigenous communities in the United States as natural resource exploitation. This paper will highlight the impact natural resource exploitation has on violence against Indigenous women as a social problem, not just environmental. This paper calls out natural resource extraction as corporate colonialism through its exploitative and abusive impact on Indigenous communities. In order to do so, this paper uses conceptual frameworks like corporate colonialism and neocolonialism as well as feminist theories such as postcolonial and transnational feminism and eco-critical theories.

The Dakota Access Pipeline incident in North Dakota will be used as a case study in this investigation, as it is the most well-known incident in the United States today. This paper will also examine another case in the world, illustrating the global relevance of this social problem.

The goal of this paper is to educate the audience on the social implications of natural resource exploitation in Indigenous communities. This social problem can be resolved through the divestment of banks and through social workers. Divestment of banks is a form of resistance against environmental injustice. This is because numerous banks in the United States fund and invest in pipelines across the country.

Literature Review: A Need for Research

Hilary Weaver wrote *The Colonial Context of Violence: Reflections on Violence in the Lives of Native American Women*. This work of literature articulates the perpetuation in the colonial context against Indigenous women in North America. The prevalence and nature of violence against Native American women is discussed. Mind-sets of society that have developed through colonization have led to violence against Indigenous women. Stereotypes that dangerously dehumanizes this population must be eradicated. This article offers discussion on activism and advocacy as well as the future of this issue.

Kyle Whyte wrote an excerpt from “Why the Native American Pipeline Resistance in North Dakota is about Climate Justice,” called *The Dakota Access Pipeline, Environmental Injustice, and U.S Colonialism*. This article highlights the case of the Dakota Access Pipeline and the interconnectedness between environmental injustice and colonialism. It conveys the relevancy of the concept of colonialism to current events happening in the United States. There is discussion on the history of illegal entrance by settlers despite 1851 and 1868 treaties. There is a lack of Indigenous consent in these land violations. Land use by settlers is an important topic in this paper as it has been something that Indigenous communities have fought against. There is a settler colonialist mentality through usage of policies or treaties that alter ecological functions

and change their perceptions of places. This aids in the lack of care for ecosystems and reduces those ecosystems to open lands and waters that belong to them. Settler Colonialist begin to view the pipeline as just if it is safe and if they do not violate settler laws, ignoring the dishonor to Indigenous cultural integrity, self-determination, and economic development.

James V. Fenelon wrote “From Peripheral Domination to Internal Colonialism: Sociopolitical Change of the Lakota on Standing Rock.” This article describes the Lakota identity and the power of the United States. The struggles over sovereignty and treaty rights between Indigenous tribes and the U.S government is discussed. This article offers several 19th century U.S policies with direct influence on Lakota identity. This article also discusses Sioux identity. A key piece in this work of literature is the relationship between Native Nations and contemporary corporate influence where corporations dominate Indian reservations in the U.S. The Journal of World-Systems Research provided a chart on the history of Lakota Resistance against oppressive policies.

Russ Diabo wrote *Pipelines, Climate, and “Indigenous Consent.”* This article discusses the environmental concerns that come with the pipeline and the violence that stems from the oil industry. Also, the work of literature articulates the profitability of the pipeline and the threat to the water and land on reservation. The company that builds the pipeline is funded by 38 banks. If the banks were to divest, then there would be no funding for the pipeline. The Department of Justice, Department of Army, and the Department of the Interior put a halt to construction. However, the state governor replaced state police with armed National Guardsmen.

Conceptual Frameworks: Corporate Colonialism and Intergenerational Trauma

How is violence against Indigenous women connected to natural resource extraction?

Exploring the access pipeline at Standing Rock in North Dakota is one case of this connection.

To know this connection closely one needs to explore the concept of colonialism.

What is Corporate Colonialism?

One can make an inference that when we think of Colonialism we think about the past and European perpetrators. The new entity of the colonialist or perpetrator today takes a form of a corporation. And corporate colonialism is not just happening in countries foreign to the United States, but it exists in this very nation. It is ongoing.

Neocolonialism can be defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “the economic and political policies by which a great power indirectly maintains or extends its influence over other areas or people.” That great power in this context are corporations and government.

An International Case Study: Coca-Cola Company in India

A case study of corporate colonialism outside of the United States involves the Coca-Cola company in India. According to an article written by Nick Mathiason in *The Guardian*, in the southern Indian state of Kerala, “a Coke Plant was forced to close in 2004 after it was alleged to have contaminated local water,” (Mathiason, 2006).

Coca-Cola established a bottling plant in the village of Lakadera in Rajasthan at the end of 1999. Farmers rely on access groundwater for the cultivation of their crops. Since Coca-Cola’s arrival, they have been confronted with a serious decline in water levels. Locals are increasingly unable to irrigate their lands and sustain their crops, putting whole families at risk of losing their

livelihoods. Water Levels then dropped by almost 10 meters over the following five years. Locals fear Kaladera could become a ‘dark zone,’ the term used to describe areas that are abandoned due to depleted water resources.

India is not the only country victimized by corporate colonialism in the exploitation of water resources. Countries in Latin America have been too. And Coca-Cola is not the only corporation either although it is one of the largest beverage companies in the world.

Standing Rock Case Study: Connecting Corporate Colonialism to Violence against Indigenous Women

Intergenerational trauma has plagued American Indigenous communities for hundreds of years after their land was grossly invaded by their perpetrators otherwise known as European settlers across academia. Intergenerational trauma “is the transmission of historical oppression and its negative consequences across generations,” (Evans-Campbell, 2008). This type of trauma “has been seen in the descendants of survivors who may not have experienced the trauma of abuse themselves,” (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Intergenerational trauma can be defined as “a collective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation- ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation. It is the legacy of numerous traumatic events in a community experiences over generations and encompasses the psychological and social responses to such events,” (Evans-Campbell, 2008 p. 320).

Tricia Bent-Goodley wrote *Health Disparities and Violence Against Women: Why and How Cultural and Societal Influences Matter*. This article discusses health disparities and barriers of women of color in relation to violence. Cultural and societal influences and barriers to care is

discussed in this article. Lack of cultural competency, language barriers, discriminatory treatment, and poverty are issues that women of color in this context experience.

Georgia Walker wrote *Big Oil and Broken Treaties: Settler Colonialism at Standing Rock*.

This article discusses the fossil fuel industry and treaties in relation to the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock. It was originally planned to be built in a predominantly white town of Bismarck but residents voiced their concerns over the safety of their drinking water therefore, the company moved over to the Lakota reservation. It is clear that there is an imbalance of power that can connect to settler colonialism. There were numerous cases of police brutality against Native people. There is an intersectionality between Indigenous rights and environmental protection. This article discusses the threat the oil industry has on the culture, identity, and survival of Indigenous people.

This work of literature describes settler colonialism as gendered in its violence. It describes that settler governments require “the death and elimination of Indigenous women in order to maintain their power,” (Walker). Amnesty International found that “Indigenous women experience violence at higher rates than non-Indigenous women and that police and the state have failed to provide adequate standards of protection to Indigenous women,” (Walker). Moreover, “Indigenous communities worldwide are disproportionately affected by resource extraction in their territories,” (Walker). Furthermore, the article highlights that “Indigenous women and girls experience higher rates of sexualized violence from the frontline workers and security forces hired by national and transnational corporations seeking to exploit the natural resources in Indigenous lands,” (Walker). The camps where the Dakota Access Pipeline is being built are housing sits for oil industry workers. There were huge spikes in sexual assault of native women that were mostly undocumented and unprosecuted. Indigenous women from the region

continuously reported the increases in gang rape and human trafficking. According to the article, “the federal government awarded \$3 million in grants to go towards services for victims,” (Walker) but that the camps still remain there. North Dakota has “become the 8th highest ranking state in reported incidents of rape,” (Walker) even with most of the cases in the region discussed to have been undocumented. The violence onto the land perceived by sovereignty, seems to be targeting Native women. Native women at Standing rock are on the frontlines of non-violent action against the pipeline and serve as the biggest threat to settler colonialism.

Social Work Theory Applications and Assessment

Postcolonial and transnational feminism focuses on “how nationhood, race, gender, sexuality, and economic oppression interact in the context of globalization and capitalism,” (Morgaine, Copous-Desyllas, 2015). This feminist theory is only one of many feminist theories that are used to bring some clarity in understanding gender inequality in society.

This investigation utilizes postcolonial and transnational feminism because it “inquires into the social, political, and economic conditions that compose imperialism and the connections of these conditions to colonialism and nationalism,” (Morgaine, Copous-Desyllas, 2015). Connecting natural resource extraction in Indigenous communities to violence against Indigenous women displays connectedness between a social condition of gender-based violence by the invader to the act of corporate colonialism.

According to this feminist theory, social workers should use this theory in practice by “organizing resistance to hegemonies of capitalism and imperialism as nations and nation-states evolve,” (Morgaine, Copous-Desyllas, 2015).

Eco-critical theories focus on environmental justice, sustainability and inclusiveness (Morgaine, Copous-Desyllas, 2015). Furthermore,

“social workers who adopt an eco-critical approach focus on the problems, challenges, and resources affecting the relationship between participants’ living environment and welfare. These social workers see participants as potential leaders and encourage their agencies to undertake broad, sustainable community work and to build a sense of belonging,” (Morgaine, Copous-Desyllas, 2015).

Corporate colonialism has impacted the wellness of Indigenous communities through natural resource exploitation. In the case of Standing Rock, a secondary impact of the natural resource exploitation is violence against Indigenous women. The wellness of Indigenous women has been negatively impacted by natural resource extraction. Social workers call for Indigenous peoples, especially Indigenous women to take leadership in community work in their environment. It is apparent that there is an important relationship between the environment and welfare. The trauma of having sacred grounds dug up and exploited and then the trauma of being sexually assaulted due to the colonialist nature of natural resource extraction impacts Indigenous welfare.

Understanding the concept of power is important when discussing issues of oppression and colonialism. Power can be defined as “the capacity, held individually or collectively, to influence either groups or individuals, (Morgaine, Copous-Desyllas, 2015). One mode of power is called personal power which can be explained as “individual characteristics of people that might play a role in such situations as intimate partner violence,” (Morgaine, Copous-Desyllas, 2015). A second mode of power is positional power which is considered a “social position (for example, power in the workplace or within organizations),” (Morgaine, Copous-Desyllas, 2015). In cases of corporate colonialism, both of these two modes of power play a huge role in power dynamics and oppression against Indigenous peoples, especially Indigenous women. For

instance, the entity of the corporation extracting resources and the construction workers are mostly male, and specifically non-Indigenous men. Individual characteristics and the position of power as a colonialist entity plays crucial roles in power.

Recommendations: Social Workers and Divesting Banks

The divestment of banks that fund construction zones on Indigenous lands can stop Violence against Indigenous Women by Corporate Colonialism. As aforementioned, approximately 38 banks funded the pipeline at Standing Rock. Social workers are social change agents and make excellent policy practitioners because they collect and connect the dots. Social workers must lead and facilitate change in communities by organizing efforts to motivate all levels of governments to divest banks that fund construction sites as an incentive to revoke funding efforts which will stop or slow down construction. Social workers can advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), “while many social workers are engaged in communities, working in settings directly with clients, many of the changes that are needed are systemic, and our efforts as change agents need to include influencing policy.”

NASW also states that “the values and ethics and systems perspectives of social workers can make them well-positioned to connect real world stories with data and advocacy. Social Workers also understand that racism and inequities are systemic and that only systemic approaches will address these issues.” This suggests that social workers have the knowledge and values to work closely in activism and public policy. Moreover, NASW states that “while people with public policy degrees are often hired in advocacy organizations and think tanks, the value base that a

social worker brings, their understanding of systems and their person-in-environment perspective can be extremely beneficial to policy work.” Social workers have the ability to have a holistic perspective that conveys individuals as highly influenced or impacted in their environment.

Taking social action towards divestment of banks and promoting policies that safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all people are recommendations for protecting Indigenous women from violence by corporate colonialism.

Conclusion

It is important to apply concepts like neocolonialism and corporate colonialism to cases like the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota, United States to acknowledge the severity and injustice of it. When societies examine cases in such a way, it calls out for social action and the need for change.

Social workers must apply theories in social justice action. This is called anti-oppressive social work practice. Anti-oppressive social work practice aims in:

“Understanding of how people’s intersecting identities are socially located within oppressive systems; challenging the belief that people can only be biologically and culturally defined; giving direct assistance to individuals affected by oppression; changing the oppressive structure and procedures of service delivery systems through organizational changes; laws, and policies; and identifying, naming, and challenging current oppressive systems,” (Morgaine, Copous-Desyllas, 2015).

Therefore, social workers must use their skills and values in the quest for activism.

Using corporate colonialism as a framework in understanding natural resource extraction in Indigenous communities and its connectedness to violence against Indigenous women aids in the realization of the injustices. Concepts such as intergenerational trauma and power are utilized to discuss the root of what triggers Indigenous communities by the actions of corporations that exploit Indigenous lands. Theories in social work practice such as postcolonial and transnational

feminism and eco-critical theories contribute to the understanding and responding to the oppression of Indigenous women in society. All of these ideas are essential in provoking social justice efforts in Indigenous communities.

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