

COLONIZED CLASSROOMS: RACISM, TRAUMA AND RESISTANCE IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

by Sheila Cote-Meek. Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2014. \$24.94 Canada, paper, ISBN: 9781552666531. Pages: 1-198.

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In *Colonized Classrooms: Racism, Trauma and Resistance in Post-Secondary Education*, Sheila Cote-Meek raises a fundamental question: How do/can Aboriginal students and professors contend with ongoing colonization taking place in Canadian university classrooms? To answer the question, the author first examines challenges and dilemmas that Aboriginal groups who are constructed as 'inferior and unintelligent' racialized subjects face in Canadian university classrooms. Not only does the author reflect on some of the dilemmas and challenges faced by racialized subjects, but she also pays attention to the struggles and resistances including thought-out personal strategies in response to racism and violence in university classrooms. The author goes further in her analysis by providing practical advice for teaching and learning about colonization as 'difficult knowledge' in mixed classrooms.

Difficult knowledge in university classrooms includes not only the history of colonial violence against Aboriginal people and social trauma, but also individual encounters with such violence and trauma in their lives. To convey difficult knowledge without re-traumatizing the colonizer/colonized relationship, the author suggests transformative pedagogies such as 'communities of memory' as a space where remembrance is valued with community support, 'a holistic model of education' that pays attention to the mind, body, emotion and spirit of a person who experiences violence, and 'red pedagogy' which focuses on the quest for sovereignty, and indigenous knowledge and praxis.

One of the significant contributions of Cote-Meek's book is that she constructs a non-linear understanding of history by placing the post-secondary classroom as a space where past, present and future are concurrently alive. In other words, the author emphasizes that history is not a fossilized form of knowledge; rather, it still affects the ways in which the lives of Aboriginal groups are understood and taught in university classrooms. The author emphasizes that colonial violence is not a past product, rather it is still imposed on Aboriginal students' lives in the

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classroom as a form of discrimination, silencing and denial. What is taught and learned in classrooms are thus struggles for history and memory in order to rectify both a colonial past and present colonialism. For Aboriginal groups, education is an element of the ongoing violent colonial regime, which undermines Aboriginal peoples' self-determination and ways of knowing (163).

Cote-Meek suggests traditional Aboriginal cultural practices should be negotiated outside of the classroom, rather than simply creating a setting in the classroom where culture is consumed by non-Aboriginal students (145). The author describes in detail the classroom dilemma in which both Aboriginal educators and students are expected to practice Aboriginal culture. While both Aboriginal students and professors have challenged the racialized constructions of themselves as cultural/spiritual beings, these students and professors have at the same time put significant efforts into revitalizing Aboriginal cultural strategies and recovering forgotten histories. The author warns that emphasizing Aboriginal culture as a source of empowerment may contribute to perpetuating existing constructions of Aboriginal people as the 'cultural Native,' in contrast to what these cultural practices intend to contribute.

In Chapters 3 and 4, Cote-Meek provides detailed narratives of dilemmas, limitations, frustrations and constraints that Aboriginal professors and students have experienced in the classroom such as the denial of racism, being silenced, degradation of Native Studies, and demeaning the intelligence of Native students (100-112). The author interprets these narratives as negotiating practices. However, the author does not clearly define what these negotiations actually mean and these interpretations aim to achieve. Also, she does not explain how these negotiating practices specifically differentiate from other aspects of individual practices such as opinionating, adapting, complying, and resisting.

Not only would this book benefit Aboriginal students and professors, but also non-Aboriginal students and professors who participate in native studies. In particular, this book does provide insight into non-Aboriginal professors who either advertently or inadvertently, fall into a trap of reproducing colonized practices. Cote-Meek criticizes these professors with examples such as asking an Aboriginal student to provide a cultural ritual for the class that was predominantly non-Aboriginal (143). She emphasizes the responsibilities of professors to provide anti-racist and anti-oppressive pedagogies in four main ways. First, that professors acknowledge that Aboriginal students come to the classroom carrying a huge burden of racialized construction and ongoing colonial violence.

Second, that professors engage in holistic pedagogical approaches which focus both on the emotive aspects of students and critical understanding of colonialism. Third, a proactive prevention of racism by engaging with any forms of racism and violence. And fourth, the necessity of creating safe and supportive spaces solely for Aboriginal students.

Throughout her book, Cote-Meek borrows many ideas from anti-racist and feminist scholars such as bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Minh-ha Trinh, who have provided critical insights of other racialized groups and, in particular, struggles of women of color in North America. Cote-Meek's research focus on Aboriginal groups is meaningful given the lack of academic attention the topic has received. However, where Cote-Meek does not succeed is in presenting how experiences of Aboriginal groups are different from those of other racialized groups. Many racialized experiences and their resisting strategies overlapped and are interchangeable with the experiences of many other racialized groups. While she does briefly mention the connection (130), she does not develop this point further. Touching upon the complicated relationships of other marginalized and racialized groups in the classroom beyond the binary construction of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal would have taken her analysis a step forward.