

# UNEVEN EXCHANGES: Borderlands Violence and the Search for Peace at Sand Creek

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**Abstract:** *Woven into the social fabric of everyday life, borderlands violence is a perilous accumulation of fault-finding and Othering that, in the US, has rendered Indigenous women, children, and elders the most vulnerable subjects of state-sanctioned allowable violence. When the Northwestern University and Denver University committees released their reports on John Evans's culpability in the 1864 massacre of an entire peace-seeking community of Cheyenne and Arapaho families, perhaps many of us were hoping for a shred of a confession. Instead what we are left with is the story of an overwhelmed businessman, a self-aggrandizing military killer, a frigid Colorado winter, and scores of reopened wounds as we realize we lack the epistemic capacity to contain all of the stories of those who died there, those who killed there, those who survived, and those who profited from this massacre in distinctive and inexplicable ways. As Indigenous feminists, one of our weapons in the war against forgetting is the practice of subversive lucidity, in which we restore epistemic justice by sifting through the record of violence and resiliency to find the threads to weave a healthier future for our women and children.*

**Key Words:** *borderlands; genocide; history of the West; Indigenous feminism; Indigenous knowledge; Native North American history; violence against women*

In 2012, students and faculty at the University of Denver and Northwestern University requested investigation into allegations that in 1864, John Evans, physician, frontier businessmen, founder of Evanston, territorial governor of Colorado, and founder of Northwestern University and the University of Denver, ordered the massacre of hundreds of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians—including women, children, and elders—at Sand Creek, in the Colorado Territory. If the historical record demonstrated the facts of Evans's culpability, what were the universities' responsibilities in addressing the injustice?

Like many tribal people, I grew up learning that the federal government was untrustworthy when it came to dealing with Indians. I read about Sand Creek and experienced nausea, anger, and profound sorrow at the thought of a Cheyenne mother slitting her children's throats so they would die in her arms rather than at the hands of marauding US soldiers. That story, to me, is familiar. As a child, my aunts would remind me how, during an 1898 massacre, Yaqui mothers jumped with their children off a cliff rather than allowing the bullets of Mexican soldiers to enter their children's bodies. While some scholars see massacres as anomalies in the process of national expansion, I see the intrinsic violence of colonial expansion, and how it consists of cycles of subjugation of Indigenous women and their words, intentions, and ways of being.

As Indigenous feminists, we can understand each other's experiences and shape how we think about past violent acts and their present reverberations. We exercise *subversive lucidity*: the combination of humility, diligence, and open-mindedness that helps us discern layers of injustice around genocidal acts, and then weave a healthier social fabric for our peoples (Medina 2013).

In this essay, I regard the university reports of Evans's culpability as evidence of epistemic injustice toward Indigenous women. I explain how epistemic injustice is integral to colonization, and how it produces borderlands violence. I highlight how communities are acknowledging and making peace with the Sand Creek Massacre. We are reaching for peace with an irreparably violent past. Our process must be relational, understanding, and built on ethics of humility, diligence, and open-mindedness.

### **John Evans's Culpability for the Sand Creek Massacre**

Colonel Chivington was a moral man, believed he was made in the image of God, and he carried out the orders of his nation's law; Kit Carson didn't mind stealing and killing either (Ortiz 1981, 52).

In 1864 the Civil War was not yet won. American politicians and businessmen sought an end to both the fighting south of the burgeoning nation's capital and the complex negotiations with tribal peoples west of the Missouri River. Congress passed the Pacific Railroad Act in April of that year, granting land and federal funds to American entrepreneurs with the acumen and bravado to nail miles of steel track across Indian territory. John Evans, superintendent of Indian Affairs and supervising governor of the Territory of Colorado, was seeking to stabilize competing land claims for the rights to build the railroad through Colorado. The historical record shows that in mid-November 1864, Evans brashly gave over any talk of peace-keeping with the Cheyenne and Arapaho—many of whom were already forced from the prairie to the plains—to the US military. He left the territory to pursue political and business goals in the east.

Meanwhile, General Ned Wynkoop offered a safe camp at Fort Lyon to peace-seeking Cheyenne and Arapaho under the leadership of Black Kettle, among others. On the morning of November 29th, Black Kettle's encampment rested near the shores of Sand Creek, marching distance from Fort Lyon. There would have been tension in the air. In June, Evans encouraged whites in the Colorado territory to “kill and destroy, as enemies of the country' any hostile Indians,” and to “hold to their own private use and benefit' any Native property they had seized” (Blackhawk et al 2014, 67). In August, Evans paid volunteers to undergo 100 days of battle training against so-called hostile Indians, and titled them the Third Regiment, also

known as the Hundred Dayers. That cold November morning, Black Kettle, White Antelope, Left Hand, War Bonnet, and many others did not know that Wynkoop's superiors had recently ousted him for perceived friendliness to the Indians and disregard for the chain-of-command. Instead, Major Scott Anthony filled his position and marched alongside General John Chivington, Colonel Silas Soule, and the Hundred Dayers toward Sand Creek. Chivington intended to attack.

Officers loyal to Wynkoop notified Soule that the Cheyenne and Arapaho encampment was peaceful. Some of the tribal leaders rose to greet the oncoming officers. Black Kettle approached the soldiers carrying a US flag and a white truce flag. Chivington had at his command two loaded Howitzers. The soldiers opened fire, and mowed down the tribes' first and perhaps only line of defense, a row of rapidly assembling able-bodied Cheyenne and Arapaho. Soule ordered his soldiers to hold their fire and not to participate in the atrocities. They observed Chivington's soldiers shoot into lodges, killing children, women, and elders, and mutilating the bodies, removing the genitals of the women and elder men, and scalping the children. Soule reported the soldiers' mob-like behavior, noting how they scavenged for body parts and the belongings of the dead after the survivors fled upriver, destroying what was left behind (Blackhawk et al 2014; Kelman 2013). The few survivors hid, burying themselves along the creek bed.

Chivington returned to Denver and proclaimed victory through the local newspapers and to his commanding officers. Soule also contacted his commanding officers, detailing the atrocity and reporting that Chivington and Anthony knew the Cheyenne and Arapaho people there were peaceful toward whites. George Bent, the son of trader William Bent, who married into Owl Woman's (Cheyenne) family, recorded his own take on the horrific

events. Witnesses provided testimony of soldiers cutting open a pregnant woman and mutilating the infant, a woman holding her children while they were shot at close-range, a woman holding her knees as she hung herself from poles in her lodge, and a woman mercifully cutting the throats of her own children.

As these reports made their way east into the hands of congressmen, different people began calling for an inquiry into what was called the Battle of Sand Creek. Evans and Chivington, among others, were called to testify. Accounts revealed that Chivington intentionally marched his soldiers beyond their assigned jurisdiction to reach Sand Creek. Evans deferred on many points, claiming to have washed his hands of the matter when he handed authority over the Indians of the Colorado Territory to the occupying military authority. At stake for him were both political status and the goal of establishing a passage for whites to build the railroad across Indian land.

Of course, neither Evans nor Chivington admitted culpability. Their jobs were to open up the West for white American development, and even their most vociferous White House critics did not doubt the righteousness of the frontier mission to occupy, settle, and colonize tribal lands. After a year and a half of congressional testimony, Evans resigned from his government post in Colorado, focusing instead on railroad entrepreneurship and the settlement of Denver. Chivington retired from military leadership and continued his work as a Methodist preacher, the unrepentant “Fighting Parson.”

For tribal peoples in the US, the Sand Creek Massacre commenced a series of wars against the invading and untrustworthy whites—battles, skirmishes, raids, and massacres—that would last all the way through the Wounded Knee Massacre in the winter of 1890, and which, to this day, marks the

incommensurability of Native and white approaches to justice around the matter of white settlers' theft of tribal lands.

When the Northwestern University and the University of Denver committees released their reports on Evans's culpability in the 1864 massacre, perhaps many of us were hoping for that shred of historical errata in which Evans confessed either "On this day I commissioned the execution of over a hundred and sixty women, children, elders, and peace chiefs," or "On this day I did all I could to save their lives." Maybe we thought such acknowledgement would put the ghosts of the nightmare of Manifest Destiny to rest. Instead we are left with the story of Evans as an overwhelmed businessman who once hid in a well because he thought hostile Indians were going to attack Denver at any moment. We detect General Chivington as a self-aggrandizing military killer who even proud colonial generals distanced themselves from, and who led a crowd of inebriated, brutally ignorant soldiers. Wounds reopened as we realized we lacked the epistemic capacity to contain the stories of those who died, killed, survived, and profited from the massacre. There are so many perspectives around Sand Creek—Cheyenne, Arapaho, traders, settlers, patriotic Americans, frontier women, colonels and other military men, past and present—that we must appreciate historian Patricia Nelson Limerick's capitulation that writing about the frontier means writing about an "unsubtle concept in a subtle world" (Limerick 1987, 25).

According to contemporary legal definitions of culpability, the Northwestern Evans Committee found Evans not culpable, on the basis of his handing over his authority to the military, his not being aware of Chivington's intent to march on the peaceful encampment at that time, and his absence at the time of the attack (Blackhawk et al, 2014). Applying a socially relational definition of culpability, the University of Denver Evans Committee found Evans deeply

culpable, on the basis of his creating the conditions for the violent subjugation of all Indians of the region, his implementation of irrevocable violent policies, and his failure to uphold a peace-keeping role as superintendent of Indian Affairs and supervising governor for the Territory of Colorado (Clemmer-Smith et al, 2014).

The committees' distinct definitions of culpability reveal layers in the epistemic landscape shaping scholarly approaches to violent Indian-white encounters, frontier violence, and violence against Native women. There is no doubt that men killed Cheyenne and Arapaho women that day, but when we ask scholars who was to blame, we are still more likely to receive a list of norms, practices, and social policies than names. Thus we learn how it is allowable for a social policy to kill a Native woman. This suggests that as humans we are somehow not responsible for the violent conditions we create through everyday silences, refusals, denials, and "just-following-orders." No one wants to claim that US soldiers killing and mutilating more than a hundred and sixty Cheyenne and Arapaho, including women and children, was integral to establishing two great US cities and educational institutions. Many, however, will agree that the Sand Creek Massacre was a nightmare in the American dream. What does one do with nightmares but strive to forget them?

### **Borderlands Violence: Layers of Epistemic Injustice**

Scholasticism and intellectualism have been barriers to emotion.

No wonder there is such fear of women, children, blood and anger: control them (Ortiz 1981, 58).

It is precisely in the debate between what is real and what is not, who is culpable and who is not, what is nightmare and what is fact that Indigenous

women find their histories, experiences, and futures diminished, ravaged, de-legitimated, and forgotten. As Indigenous women, we live in legal/political, social, and epistemic borderlands, zones where Euro-American pragmatic modes of justice fall to pieces, where violence against our bodies, lands, and minds is both allowable and presumed necessary for our education and salvation, largely for the benefit of the settler societies blooming in self-righteous ignorance like “mutant generations” (Ortiz 1981, 87). Epistemic injustice is integral to colonization. It produces borderlands violence, a regenerative violence that stabilizes institutions at the center of nation-state power by repeatedly subjugating individuals residing in contested terrain (Slotkin, 2000).

Borderlands violence occurs in places where settlers claim total ownership of terrain and seek total command of political boundaries and border enforcement, worldviews, languages, economic systems, and rules of citizenship. In these places, Indigenous women are treated as collateral in the work of settlement and market expansion (Bowden 2010; Fregoso and Bejarano 2010; Gaspar de Alba 2010; Mignolo 2000; Peña 1997; Smith 2005). Consider the body counts and assault records around Ciudad Juarez and British Columbia’s Highway 16, renamed the Highway of Tears, in addition to the domestic violence around reservations. The record of violence against Indigenous women at the geographic and social peripheries of national centers of power is paradoxically well documented by the same state-funded agencies that purport to improve conditions for Indigenous families (Million 2013). Colonial mechanisms are formidable. The educational and health-care institutions that depend on the neoliberal circulation of affordable goods, labor, and information across borders also depend on the subjugation of Indigenous languages and philosophies, histories, economies, bodies, and the creative energy of the women, the young, queer, wise, clever, elders,



and Others who see the dehumanizing arrangement (Smith 2005). These individuals as a rule cannot conform to the upper echelons of the white supremacist class-based hierarchy of a powerful North American capitalist market economy.

A symptom of borderlands violence is the degree to which past violent acts shape present border enforcement. The shadow of the Sand Creek Massacre and subsequent battles, massacres, and unjust policies reverberate in tribal communities in the form of domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness, hypervigilance, apathy, and other disorders of intergenerational trauma and despair (Duran 1998; Waldram 2015; Weaver and Yellowhorse Brave Heart 1999). An array of programs, services, and policies are designed to contain these disorders, many of which result in pathologizing Native peoples. Those with no regard for colonial legacies cannot overturn colonial violence.

When educational institutions like the University of Colorado-Boulder, the University of Denver, Northwestern University and federally funded institutions like the National Parks Service frame tribunals and memorials as part of the path toward healing, the irony is not lost on the descendants of Sand Creek survivors and their relatives. Indeed, Eugene Little Coyote, former Northern Cheyenne tribal president, reminded audience members at the 2007 opening of the National Parks Service memorial, “Northern Cheyennes could not treat sickness with memorials, could not feed their children on apologies, and could not find shelter within multicultural bromides” (Kelman 2013, 32). US university educators and administrators do not necessarily see their contributions to a greater colonial project that renders Indigenous women ignorable, forgettable, untrustworthy, over-emotional, angry, confused survivors of a dying race, anti-modern, anti-intellectual, unteachable, non-rational, and dangerously hyper-sexual, superstitious, and radical.

In 1864, women at Sand Creek dug trenches in the creek bed, hiding themselves and their children. “Being in the trenches” is not a disembodied metaphor for Indigenous feminists who, through their scholarship, change academic and state institutions. The marginalization of the Indigenous woman’s claims to body, mind, soul, memory, potential, and community belonging by all means possible is key to colonization (Anderson 2001). Her ways of being, thinking, speaking, and reacting become zones of border enforcement and territorial contestation. Thus the turning away from the painful emotions and record of physical and psychological abuse of Indigenous women becomes the precursor, the figurative condition, perpetuating allowable violence.

### **Habits of an Unjust Colonial Mind**

Repression works like a shadow, clouding memory and sometimes even to blind, and when it is on a national scale, it is just not good (Ortiz 1981).

What habits of mind does it take to see the social ills among Indigenous women and families, and not connect this to colonial legacies and present colonial arrangements? Medina (2013) identifies three habits of mind that contribute to an individual’s epistemic ability to disregard apparent oppression: arrogance, laziness, and closed-mindedness (Medina 2013, 27-55).

Evans expressed epistemic arrogance on several occasions. First, he accepted the title of superintendent of Indian Affairs while lacking knowledge of plains tribal customs, languages, governance, histories and philosophies, and demonstrated no intent to learn these. Second, he deputized settlers to pursue, capture, and kill Native peoples and to take their belongings, a demonstration

of criminal arrogance bolstered by his own fear of the unknown. Third, he disregarded the terms of the Treaty of Little Arkansas. Fourth, he refused to negotiate with Black Kettle and associated leaders. Fifth, he abetted theft of tribal lands.

Evans expressed epistemic laziness by choosing an incriminating militant response to the peace-making effort with tribes. He chose not to exercise diligence in negotiations.

Evans's closed-mindedness was typical of the narrow-mindedness of settlers at the time, unable to respect tribal peoples as functional societies living in right relation to the land, and unable to imagine themselves as subservient to that modality. Amplified by the federal government's illicit granting of land titles to white settlers, and classification of black, brown, Asian, and Native bodies—especially women's bodies—as, at best, labor, and at worst, vermin, bearing limited or no rights, settlers of all classes constructed educational, economic, and legislative institutions that perpetuated an American patriarchal colonial authority. Educators and spiritual leaders subjugated Indigenous values, languages, histories, philosophies, and pedagogies as the path to damnation within a Euro-American Judeo-Christian teleology. Settlers built economic and legislative institutions to promote banking, accounting, crediting, and rules of adjudication and law enforcement that effaced Indigenous modalities of trading, potlatch, peace-keeping, and territorial passage. It paid, quite literally, to adopt an American colonial mindset, from spouting the most benign anti-Indian Protestant salvos to the most vicious wearing of Indian scalps. Evans and Chivington were rational in their colonial proto-capitalist logic, but they exercised a vicious morality, and were unjust in their attitudes and actions toward Native peoples and women especially.

Meanwhile, the 2014 University of Denver and Northwestern University reports of Evans's culpability reveal the following legacies of nineteenth-century epistemic injustice.

In terms of epistemic arrogance, we find no unit for American Indian Studies at Northwestern University, in spite of Chicago's significant Native and Indigenous population. To complete the requested inquiry, Northwestern administrators recruited American Indian Studies faculty from other institutions. Both universities lacked access to Cheyenne and Arapaho scholars. The University of Denver committee reached out to tribal communities. In academia, however, we well know that the battleground of ideas happens among those with a tenure-track PhD and access to administration. Thus toward this inquiry both faculty bodies bore an epistemic blind spot. While gaps in knowledge are correctable, they become dangerous when there is no systematic effort to do so, and more so when groups of powerful citizens foment ignorance. Polarizing the research question around Evans's culpability—was he legally culpable, or was he not—centers colonial (in)justice, in which Indigenous peoples are rendered incapable of asserting their own histories and modes of justice in American institutions.

The University of Denver committee recognized how collective bodies of ignorance shape social crimes. They compared Evans's actions with those of neighboring territorial governors, and found Evans deeply culpable for the Sand Creek Massacre.

In both cases, the research questions should not have been, "was Evans culpable or not?" but rather, "What was the nature of the social fabric that compelled Evans to treat the Native peoples within his jurisdiction as he did," and, "What are the legacies of Evans's interactions for Native peoples?"

To be more specific, researchers may ask, “What was the nature of the social fabric that compelled Evans to treat Cheyenne and Arapaho women as he did?” and “What are the legacies of Evans’s treatments of women for contemporary Cheyenne and Arapaho women?” Collecting the data to answer questions that center the relational nature of violence rather than the long-dead alleged perpetrator yields ideas for ways faculty and students can create understanding. It allows Cheyenne and Arapaho testimony.

Chivington and Evans faced a US tribunal in 1865, a year after the massacre. A hundred and twenty years later, Oyate students at the University of Colorado-Boulder demanded the name of the Nichols dorm be changed, as John Nichols led the Hundred Dayers. The University of Colorado-Boulder complied. In the 1990s, the Methodist Church initiated a tribunal and memorialization. In the mid-2000s, the National Parks Service began a memorialization in partnership with descendants of the massacre. It has taken the universities too long to address this issue. The committees were given limited time and scope, impeding tribal consultation and participation. The investigations were channeled as institutional inclusion projects, rather than as reciprocal partnerships with tribes about addressing whose land is the cornerstone of their elite private and land-grant institutions.

Epistemic laziness manifests in fast-paced institutions through emphasis on deadlines rather than space for substantive thought, on financial settlements rather than on negotiation and trust-building, and through an unwillingness to make structural changes that lead to a vibrant teaching, research, and service environment for Native and Indigenous students, staff, and scholars. Thus we must acknowledge the diligent faculty on both of these committees, who brought significant knowledge and goodwill to bear and who are making the findings actionable in spite of these constraints.

The reports reveal collective bodies of ignorance we have inherited. We discern a gap in knowledge about Indigenous and relational modes of justice, and about foregrounding colonialism. Many do not know the social significance of place-names like Evanston and Mount Evans. Some erroneously frame the deaths that day as unfortunate but essential sacrifices for the benefit of Denver and Colorado. Few state and municipal policy-makers know about the Treaty of Little Arkansas or their responsibility to it. Those who insist time has passed and Indians should “get over it” offer a particularly closed-minded, defensive, and self-interested stance. The unwillingness to acknowledge one’s own ignorance, and even celebrate a stubborn certainty of one’s superior stance, is more than a symptom of a colonial mindset. It is a symptom of a deeper brutality, the unwillingness to regard one’s position and responsibility within a greater social fabric. Swept up into the mechanisms of imperial and national expansion, the rhetoric of close-mindedness becomes one technique among many designed to colonize, subjugate, and destroy alternative modes of self-governance. It is a way for elites to accumulate and sustain social power, by dismissing and disregarding the possibilities put forward by Others.

### **Finding a Pathway Through The Record of Violence**

Pain and death did not have to be propagated as darkness and wrong and coldness; they could have listened and listened and learned to sing in Arapaho (Ortiz 1981, 34).

Cheyenne and Arapaho people and the descendants of Sand Creek survivors walk with the truth of this violence in their hearts, bodies, and minds every day. An individual’s life is filled with myriad choices in how to respond to external stimuli. A tribal person’s life is filled with

external stimuli that, forged out of generations of “darkness and wrong and coldness,” demean rather than encourage dignity (Ortiz, 1981, 34). Narrating the massacre as anomalous, and Evans’s and Chivington’s actions as deviant instead of allowed, displaces the trauma from its manifestations. The Sand Creek Massacre was an effort by Colorado denizens and military, spiritual, and political leaders to erase a people—past, present, and future—and destroy their dignity. By acknowledging that motivation, we can identify how the chains of actions shaping the massacre’s eventuality continue to emerge.

We identify chains of actions, causal events, conditions, and patterns by telling the stories of what happened in many ways to many people over time. Each time the history is shared and emotions are expressed, opportunities emerge for tribal people to learn their histories and acknowledge the range of responses. Settlers who were trained to be insensitive and ignorant of the gaps and obfuscations in their own American immigrant mindset may observe tribal people’s retelling, and open up to how these histories interlace with their own acceptable narratives. Acknowledging how past acts shape the flow of present injustice is key for communities haunted by borderlands violence.

Not everyone responds to the retelling in the same way. Some respond with the arrogance, laziness, and closed-mindedness that allows them to coincide and profit by the violence. Others respond with empathy. It reminds them of an oppression they have endured. It reminds them of another community or family secret. Features of the history may undeniably fill gaps in a story they long thought required substantiation. Individual realizations precede the possibility for just social action in what Subcomandante Marcos refers to as the war against forgetting (Marcos 2006).

As Indigenous women, one of our primary weapons in the war against forgetting is subversive lucidity. Medina (2013) finds three qualities integral to this way of responding to injustice: humility, diligence and curiosity, and open-mindedness.

Humility comprises understanding different peoples' histories, experiences, and epistemologies in complementary fashion, with individuals and groups limited in their understanding of various perspectives within this complexity. Individuals or groups who do not practice epistemic humility consistently assert the supremacy of their views, narratives, discourses, and logics. They express overriding fragility when their logics are challenged or fit into a complementary dynamic (DiAngelo 2011). Profound humility develops the capacity of the lucid individual to listen to the confrontational and limiting rhetoric of the epistemic aggressor and remain serene. A majority of Chicago denizens may have no clue about the Treaty of Chicago, the Treaty of Fort Laramie, the Treaty of Fort Wise, the Sand Creek Massacre, the subsequent Treaty of Little Arkansas, or the federal government's plan for reparations to the aggrieved Cheyenne and Arapaho descendants. Many see nothing wrong with a logo of a smiling Indian on the Chicago Blackhawks jersey, or with the lack of American Indian and Indigenous studies units in Chicago colleges and universities, and some insist on sporting the R\*\*s\*\*\*s mascot and Chief Illiniwek t-shirts. These expressions of ignorance and arrogance are legacies of the original social conditions that shaped the Sand Creek Massacre. They are part of the contemporary conditions that allow Native and Indigenous women to suffer from far higher rates of physical, verbal, and emotional abuse than almost any other population. Rather than shift into wrath—an overwhelmingly arrogant expression of anger—many Native women live with the weight of Sand Creek and everyday violence against Native women, while maintaining a serene and courageous gaze toward these injustices.



Diligent and compassionate learning about colonialism and violence against Native peoples and Indigenous women specifically has become a way of transforming anger and sadness from unresolved pain into a creative intellectual project. We walk through the record of violence, feeling what we feel, thinking what we think, speaking when we can to who will listen, writing when we can about atrocity, and with diligence, as smoothly as waking up each day, brushing teeth, washing faces, feeding children, watering plants, and asking for Creator's pity, for those of us who are prayerful. Decolonization is at its core an epistemic knowledge project with very tangible structural requirements, and with spiritual, psychological, and political repercussions. We can give voice to the Sand Creek Massacre a million times over, and still an elite minority will think it sufficient for a society "not to allow such atrocious acts to occur again." We are not reaching for a society that agrees not to let atrocity into "their backyard"; rather, we are reaching for a society that inherently engages the creativity of Indigenous women as integral to social well-being.

In response to the diligence of the descendants of the Sand Creek Massacre, and in partnerships with area tribes and historians, in 2009 the National Parks Service opened an historic site. In 2014, shortly after the release of the university reports on Evans's culpability, the local PBS station in Denver broadcast a documentary about Sand Creek, including commentary by members of the Cometsevah and Ridgely families, as well as many descendants. Each November, the descendants host an annual run, meeting in the cold early morning at Sand Creek and running to the Denver capitol steps. In December 2014, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emmanuel issued an apology on behalf of the City of Chicago to the descendants of the massacre. Denver art galleries have hosted Native artists depicting Sand Creek in vivid color. In the mid-1980s, the University of Colorado-Boulder changed

the name of Nichols dormitory to Cheyenne-Arapaho dormitory. In 1981 Simon Ortiz released his book-length poem *From Sand Creek*. In 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church issued the Sand Creek Apology, asking forgiveness for the deaths of over two hundred Cheyenne and Arapaho women and children. In 2015, Northwestern University administrators announced a plan to hire a cohort of Indigenous faculty and committed substantial funding to the effort. Also, in 2015, Muscookee Creek poet Joy Harjo released *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*, a series of poems inspired by tragedies against women in Indian Country, including the Sand Creek massacre. The prepositional figuration of mind necessary to embracing relational modes of justice must begin through acknowledgment, poetry and storywork. If massacres of Native people are the nightmares of Manifest Destiny, than Native women must be living with her ghosts. When we shine light on the shadows of violent histories we can eradicate the recurring fear (del Pilar Blanco 2012). In response to the university investigations, John Evans's great-granddaughter began contemplating her own family responses, and shared a poem in a local Colorado newspaper about her great-grandfather's palpable silence.

The practice of making conversations about injustice unspeakable is part of the effort to subjugate one worldview for another. It takes diligence to bring submerged narratives back into focus, and to disseminate them with the intention of making a better way for Native peoples. Sharing what happened at Sand Creek across media through various voices is one way of addressing the complexity of perspectives, narratives, and epistemologies mentioned above. Rather than attempting to build or waiting for the emergence of the ideal discursive moments when all listeners are prepared to listen with open hearts and selflessly open minds, we rely on what Lugones (2006) refers to as complex communication, in which multiple liminal voices reach through,

across, and around the very structures of power that have prevented trust-building, transparent discourse, and patient understanding. We *expect* for meanings to be lost in the communication, translation, and dissemination of experience, and instead rely on fellow advocates of a just and peaceful vision for Indigenous women to contribute to the *coalitional expression* of what we can learn about Sand Creek moving into the future.

Maintaining an open mind toward these various expressions—observing their energy, motion, meaning, underlying systems of belief, and direction—is also integral to the practice of subversive lucidity. It allows us to be able to identify individuals or groups of individuals who are positioned to make positive changes in their networks of friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers. This is a relational understanding of social change: individuals in different positions of power make intentional changes in their networks over time. It accounts for the unevenness of communicative exchanges. Different individuals in different positions of power hear and respond to the living history of Sand Creek in different ways. To bring about a decolonial vision for Native and Indigenous women, we have to help people in positions of power understand that being open-minded to Native knowledge and histories while accepting the limitations of one's academic or legal expertise precedes true learning and understanding.

Investigating the Sand Creek Massacre reveals the social costs of closed-mindedness, ignorance like a fog pervading generations. It is for this reason, that Margonis (2007) asserts that the “most potent weapon against the epistemology of ignorance is the development of personal and institutional commitments to diversify the intellectual community so the perspectives of individuals ranging from all groups and all cultural traditions have a place in shaping the nature of the discussion and the insights brought to the table” (Margonis 2007, 192). In this case, with respect for Cheyenne and Arapaho

ways of learning, teaching, and guiding, we are interested in ivory tower conversations *and* in transformative discussions through, across, and around the structures of power shaping the ways we know Native histories and experiences in Colorado and Illinois.

### **Standing with Cheyenne and Arapaho Women, Children, Elders**

Women and men may be broken and scattered, but they remember and think about the reasons why. They answer their own questions and always the truth and love will make them decide (Ortiz 1981, 56).

Being aware of the paradigmatic difference between Native modes of peace and justice and US legal definitions highlights the difficulty of seeking peaceful resolutions to colonial horrors. In the neoliberal paradigm, where the universities sit, nearly everything is for sale, and nearly all concepts, whether expansive or reductive, are somehow applicable toward industry and global trade. There are no human nations among mouse nations, wolf nations, rock nations, or plant nations in the neoliberal paradigm. There is only the human race, including various human subjects, and all the rest is some version of not-living or not-interactive: unable to represent oneself, vote, earn, save, spend, sell, or communicate in ways that are legible within the world-market. Then there is the Indigenous paradigm woven out of many distinct peoples and ontologies within a cosmic dynamic of which human beings comprise a pitiful part. Justice may emerge swiftly by decree of tribal leaders, or slowly through cumulative intergenerational acts. Justice emerges through human hands and words, or through the actions of four-legged, two-legged, winged, stone, plant, spirit, eight-legged, serpentine, underground, and underwater beings. In the white world, what system of

belief can perceive, make sense of, account for, or regulate, emergent and relational styles of justice? Legal authorities often ignore the testimonies of Native peoples, or find such evidence inadmissible due to the nature of the medium and mode of transmission. How and where does one locate justice across ontological and paradigmatic incommensurability?

In the neoliberal paradigm, matters are settled through programs supporting Native and Indigenous peoples, and more specifically, Native elites who enhance academic productivity. Framing is key: what do we perpetuate when we pursue grant funding to further evidence of the ills of the impoverished, downtrodden, and oppressed, as opposed to the ills caused by the habits of the privileged, elite, the anti-Indian with the Settler mentality? What are we narrating when we change the names of buildings, streets, faculty chairs, and facilities tied to the Evans name to terms that acknowledge the Native peoples of Colorado and Illinois? What might happen if we redirect funds for advancing military technologies toward ecological restoration in Illinois and Denver?

What might happen if universities partnered with tribal colleges, granting tribal students unlimited and free access to library, archival, and museum collections, and creating bridge programs from the high schools to advanced degrees? Appropriate programs would mentor students in cohorts, so that students could share histories, stories, theoretical frameworks and ideas with open-minded, diligent, and humble Northwestern and the University of Denver students and faculty, while finding solace with other tribal students. What if faculty at Denver and Northwestern as a matter of course learned and taught about US colonialism and imperialism, and tribal sovereignty? The University of Winnipeg now requires undergraduate students to take a course in Indigenous rights, history, governance, and traditions. Why shouldn't Northwestern and the University of Denver follow suit?

When administrators accept their positionality with regard to borderlands violence, their manner of interpellating themselves and Others must change, and as it shifts, they will take heat from colleagues who hold fast to the blindness of privilege. Sitting with the source of discomfort becomes a way of deciphering the means to peace, and then, compassionate action. Administrators who jump for money will be uncomfortable with this process, and may fear for their lives and the lives of their inheritors as Evans did, jumping into a well and calling for military protection from marauding Indians when there were none. Similarly, intellectuals who want to work with tribal peoples but who cannot understand the close tie between politics, spirituality, land, and history in Indian Country will suffer great misunderstandings, their work with tribal communities veiled in ignorance.

But those who arrive at this understanding will experience the force of history in their everyday interactions and ethical approaches. Upholding Native and Indigenous women isn't about fame, prestige, institutional goals to reach every citizen, or presenting "all sides" of an agonistic American history. It's about seeking peace after irreparable loss. Creating the conditions for peace takes many acts done in the right way. Can a Northwestern university administrator apply the concept "with all my relations" when he signs off on a program to support Cheyenne and Arapaho youth? Let that be a milestone toward weaving a healthier social fabric for the people of Colorado and Illinois.

### **Conclusion**

The habits of mind that contribute to violence against Native and Indigenous women are rooted in prior injustices. In this essay, I showed how in 2014 two universities repeated an 1865 tribunal of the alleged crimes of Governor Evans in the case of the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre. Applying distinct definitions of culpability, the University of Denver found Evans culpable

while Northwestern University did not. By examining instances of arrogance, laziness, and close-mindedness in the acts and attitudes of Evans and in the ways the tribunals are framed, we can see how past atrocities are not forgotten or forgettable, but rather shape how we imagine present solutions. This essay shows that communicative acts matter, and moreover, that *ways of thinking about* complex social crimes like massacres, battles, and colonization matter as well. A respect for epistemic injustice, subversive lucidity, and complex communication guide us through a healthier way of thinking about finding peace at Sand Creek. For the families who organize the run every year, the pace of sweat, muscle, and breath exorcise emotional and intellectual miseries, creating the serenity that wins the fight before entering the battle. I ask that my fellow scholars consider how they express compassion with the women of Sand Creek as they inscribe their intellectual present onto the past.

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