

History, Guilt and Reconciliation:
Using the dialectic as a tool to create a global community

Alexis Bernstein

Dominic Smith
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I.

I entered the conversation of privilege, social justice, and community as a cis-gender, straight, white, middle-class female. I went to the Dakota Access Pipeline protest (DAPL) in North Dakota with the hopes of using my privilege to help the Standing Rock Tribe, a Native American minority population, stop the creation of the Dakota Access Pipeline through the Standing Rock Reservation and give a voice to people having difficulty being heard. The pipeline would threaten the region's water source as it travelled under the Missouri River directly on the Standing Rock Reservation. The DAPL protest lasted from April 2016- February 2017 and was an intersection between environmental and indigenous rights activism that was joined by thousands of people from across the world.

When my other white, female, friend, Maggie, and I arrived, we were welcomed but with touch of caution for the first couple days. Even though we came with the best intentions, we could feel that we were not fully trusted, and as we noted some of the other people there, we understood why. People in charge of the camp made the situation explicitly clear that DAPL was not a festival or a chance to be a "white savior." We were told of frustration over "The Weekend Warriors," people who come for a weekend, post about it on social media, and then return home to not do anything more because they weren't acting as allies. These weekend protestors were considered selfish because they seemed to be using the protest to make themselves appear better on social media rather than allowing DAPL to stand as a desperately needed platform for underrepresented people.

Maggie and I found a place to work in one of the many kitchens, cutting vegetables and serving food to the hundreds of volunteers present. The kitchen gave me an opportunity to talk to members of Native American tribes from across the country, activists, and documentarians, all sitting under the same tent sharing the same goal. There was one conversation I specifically remember between Maggie, a documentarian called Josue Rivas, and myself. Josue is native Otomi and asked permission to talk to us about why we were there while he snapped photos of weary eyed people eating and laughing around us. Maggie and I spoke of the discomfort in our own skin and the guilty feeling of which we couldn't rid ourselves. As white people, we knew that only through actions could we help reverse the post-colonial structure but felt a need to ask permission to even exist in a setting where we were the minority. His response shook me to my core; he said, "It's moments like this that are the most important, us talking right now. Look at all these brown and white peoples coming together, so willing to have difficult conversations about the past, the present, and the future. These conversations are what matters." Looking around the tent, I understood what he meant. That night, hundreds of people had eaten a traditional buffalo stew cooked primarily by a woman of Native descent, but she was teaching everybody in the kitchen how to make the same stew eaten by her ancestors. Trust was being built through genuine intersectionality and shared rituals. Without societal boundaries, people sat where there was space and talked about more than the protest which brought us there, but also life outside of camp. DAPL was filled with a childlike joy of tacit community paired with serious conversations on dismantling institutional injustice, an experience which changed my life more than I can explain.

Despite the "feel good" atmosphere and albeit cautious acceptance, I couldn't remove the feeling of guilt around the history of my race even though I had never consciously

contributed to oppression. I had come to DAPL primarily because of the environmental issues around oil pipelines but lacked knowledge of the social injustices tied to the pipeline. As I was educated about history from the view of an oppressed racial group, I began to link institutionalized poverty, social, and environmental injustice together. For the first time, I was a minority being exposed to a post-colonial structure I didn't realize still existed. In the privacy of our tent, Maggie and I unpacked the mass amounts of emotions and information we absorbed each day. It was strange to be confronted with the unsettling thought that through lack of action, I had unintentionally supported colonial oppression my whole life.

The community formed at DAPL allowed people from different backgrounds to have critical conversations and allowed underrepresented groups to be heard outside of their community. I was drawn to DAPL to halt the creation of a pipeline, however, the experience started exploration about generational guilt and post-colonial structures. After being exposed to a community which cherishes tradition and culture around the concept of living with the land, I began to wonder how dismantling oppressive systems and creating a healthy sense of place and community are connected. As I left DAPL, shell-shocked and wind burned, Maggie and I brainstormed how we could give oppressed voices a platform at our college and small tasks revolving around the power struggle at DAPL. We continued to come back to larger questions about systemic poverty and creating a sustainable community similar to the one we had just left. Standing in the way were societal problems, but we remained hopeful asking, "Can we reach reconciliation between communities separated by years of distrust and lack of recognition to create the culturally rich and equitable society?"

II.

On the surface, the process of modernizing and "improving" indigenous cultures is called many names: colonialism, westernization, capitalism, manifest destiny, etc. therefore hiding how instead of recognizing oppressed societies, privileged groups value technology and monetary gain over sustainability and a global community. After being exposed to the colonial structures left in place after historical legislation and conquests, I realized the links between institutionalized power and inequality in modern society. Desire for control led previous generations of western societies to conquer others in the name of progression; Thus leading to events such as DAPL where underrepresented groups ask for recognition from those in power. Through a western mindset of colonialism and assimilation, humankind has lost languages, cultures, a sense of place, and connection to the land. Eventually, we may lose our planet, and the post-apocalyptic stories which currently captivate our imagination may become reality. While modern indigenous life should not be glorified, and a full return to historical lifestyles is out of the question, I believe the universal concepts of community and environmental respect across most native cultures can educate westernized societies. The human race will never reach a perfect global community, but we can educate each other on aspects of history to integrate modern lifestyles with traditional ones thus making humankind a more cohesive community. Using Nietzsche's and Hegel's theories on history, guilt and reconciliation, I believe colonial privilege can be further understood and dismantled, thus leaving space to merge traditional and western ways of life and leading to stronger values of community in a broken society.

Conscious or subconscious, xenophobia and racism has created harsh separations in groups of people based on race, social class, religion, etc. to the point that the idea of a world of equality is difficult to imagine. Both Hegel and Nietzsche correctly predicted the course of modern society would lead to divided cultures and conflicting political points of view by accurately holding that; “the modern world lacks a kind of unity, coherence, and meaningfulness that life in previous societies possessed.”¹ The reason historical societies functioned with unity was through local economies focused on mutuality, reciprocity, and exchange.² Once the concept of colonialism took hold, integration between indigenous people and a “westernized” way of thinking was less likely because societies began focusing on wealth and privilege instead of respect and appreciation. Current westernized society is nostalgic for a fictional past where communities are local and easy to navigate instead of the complicated and globalized world of reality. However, because of the actions of capitalist societies generations ago, different classes and races have been institutionally separated, leading to distrust, anger, and frustration among potential communities. As Francis Fukuyama states in his notorious book *The End of History and the Last Man*:

“Religion, nationalism and a people’s complex of ethical habits and customs (more broadly culture’) have traditionally been interpreted as obstacles to the establishment of successful democratic political institutions and free-market economies.”³

As the world globalized, previously isolated communities interacted on many stages, swinging in and out of interstate power and recognition in discussions of land, social, or basic human rights. As international societies interacted for the first times, an opportunity to find similarities instead of differences in culture was missed due to the power of a colonial lens.

From the colonization of North and South America in 1492, to the height of the British Empire in the 1800’s, a foundation of oppression was put in place long before the 21st century. Driven by spices, tea, coffee, sugar, tobacco, rubber, and precious minerals, Western cultures sought to increase their own resources through dominating non-industrialized cultures in the guise of saving them or helping them out of the misery. In Europe, countries competed with each other economically by taking control of countries in the southern hemisphere and the eastern countries. Invisible to a naive individual from a privileged race, colonial and western structures are the cause of modern community separation. In *The Use & Abuse of History*, Friedrich Nietzsche states

“For as we are merely the resultant of previous generations, we are also the resultant of their errors, passions, and crimes; it is impossible to shake off this chain.

¹Hicks, S. (2009). The Project of Reconciliation and the road to Redemption: Hegel’s Social Philosophy and Nietzsche’s Critique. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, [online] Volume 68(1).

² McIntosh, A. (2001). *Soil and soul: People versus corporate power*. Aurum Press.

³ Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The End of History and The Last Man*. England: Penguin Books. [xix]

Though we condemn the errors and think we have escaped them, we cannot escape the fact that we spring from them”.⁴

The historical reasons behind modern privilege, racism, and blame are hidden from public gaze, yet the chains of past events remain. For example, generally the United States’ public education system does not teach the widespread effects of colonization and how settlers assimilated Native Americans Tribes into western culture. Some people might learn a vague history of indigenous vs. settler power struggles, but most students are not told that native children were taken from their homes and then forbidden to speak their native tongue or dress in traditional clothing or the long lasting effects of colonization across the globe.⁵ For privileged people, the presented facts seem historical, but the systems left in place from colonization remain long after oppressed cultures have been fragmented and mixed into a western way of life.

Recognizing historical mistakes of our ancestors starts through education and an open mindset from descendants of oppressors. A process Nietzsche referred to as “unlearning history” would ideally cure people from simply being “shadows of humanity”, meaning they would no longer simply follow the path of privileged ancestors.⁶ Similar to the discomfort I felt at DAPL, acknowledging that by simply being born into a race and doing nothing to counter the effects of colonial oppression, privileged races are strengthening cultural walls. Robin DiAngelo has coined the phrase “White Fragility” to describe the gut wrenching feeling white people have in diversity training scenarios when she explains even stating that One isn’t racist plays a part in overarching scheme of racism.⁷

“This “good/bad binary,” positing a world of evil racists and compassionate non-racists, is itself a racist construct, eliding systemic injustice and imbuing racism with such shattering moral meaning that white people, especially progressives, cannot bear to face their collusion in it.”⁸

Privileged people’s reactions of anger and frustration often stems from the idea that racism is evil actions instead of a system which has been in place for hundreds of years. Recognizing white people’s role in institutional oppression is essential to moving past the remaining structures of a colonial mindset. Hegel strongly believed that the only way to create equality was through recognition of others points of view, therefore a first step to moving past the structures left in place from colonial oppression is pushing past white fragility and acknowledge being born into a privileged race doesn’t inherently mean being evil. Confronting white fragility and learning history through alternate viewpoints to a western one is filled with many emotions, but the point

⁴ Nietzsche, F. (1876). *The use and abuse of history*. New York: Cosimo Classics

⁵ Little, B. (2017). *How Boarding Schools Tried to ‘Kill the Indian’ Through Assimilation*. [online]

⁶ Nietzsche (n 4) [72]

⁷ DiAngelo, R. (2018). *White Fragility: Why it’s so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Boston: Beacon Press

⁸ Waldman, K. (2018). *A Sociologist examines the “White Fragility” that prevents white americans from confronting racism*. *The New Yorker*, [online].

of diversity training and integrating communities is to allow a space to work through the emotions of recognition. The goal of social education not to create guilt or increase cultural separation but instead to step towards a dialectic conclusion of cultural separation through recognition and eventually reconciliation.⁹

Recognition is a hard barrier to penetrate due to the ego of unprogressive people who refuse to see how historical events affect the present. Nietzsche describes “the clever ego” as one fueled by historical knowledge and privilege. This “clever egoism” will protect itself “with all the power of its military and police against the dangerous outbreaks of the other kind.”¹⁰ Colonialism created racial oppression and assimilation, but it also helped create a globalized world view where there is no longer room for an ego to ignore “the other kind.” Instinctual attacks based on defense against difference merely leads to more separation between communities instead of working to acknowledge and reconcile from the past as the dialectic advises. The privileged ego defends against the idea that there could potentially be a different opinion than its own and often unconsciously pushes for assimilation and destruction of “the other.” Fukuyama and Hegel both believed that while identity and difference are valuable traits, the natural path towards a unified community is through creating a “common history” between all humans. If the human race continues on its’ current path, the “common history” linking people together will be entirely manufactured from a westernized point of view.¹¹ Working with the assumption that the only valid point of view is a western one and all other points are unworthy of recognition furthers social inequalities.¹²

For some, the ego defends against “the other” instead of recognizing and accepting differences. For others, the emotion of guilt resonates after the post-colonial structure of privilege is recognized. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche traces guilt to its origin, by using his native language, German, to examine the link between the word ‘guilt’ [Schuld] and the word ‘debt’ [Schulden].¹³ Unlike the justice system where one is “guilty” and pays a debt to society through jail time or service, guilt of inherent privilege is a complicated emotion. Nietzsche acknowledged that through connecting guilt and debt, it could be implied that there is some way to repay the pain of generations past and societal injustice, however there is no way to actually remove the structures of oppression through an apology.¹⁴ Therefore, if a person of privilege uses a lens of guilt when trying to remove themselves from societal oppression, no further progress will come from their actions. Dianne Flynn states in reference to white privilege and interactions with people of color.

“Guilt allows white people to maintain the status quo. Guilt creates paralysis. Guilt transfers the responsibility to people of color. Guilt continues the aspect of racism wherein white people put people of color in a situation of taking care of us.”¹⁵

⁹ Hicks (n 1)

¹⁰ Nietzsche (n 4) [63]

¹¹ Hegel: Hicks (n 1) , Fukuyama(n 3)

¹² Menand, L. (2018). Francis Fukuyama Postpones the End of History. *The New Yorker*. [online].

¹³ Nietzsche, F. (1887). *On the genealogy of morals*. New York [xvii]

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ Flinn, D. (2018). Interviewed in: *White Anti-Racism: Living the Legacy*. [online]

A privileged person stating their guilt is not moving the conversation of balancing injustice forward because the word guilt implies there is a definitive way to be forgiven. Feeling guilty and asking a minority for reconciliation is stealing the spotlight from people trying desperately to be heard. After recognizing there is a debt to pay, a privileged person must also understand how recognition from oppressed communities will not come with straight forward actions, but instead through reconciliation between members of oppressed communities and ones of privilege.

Hegel believed “Reconciling the conflicting political principles of individual liberty and human rights with social cohesion and unity...” would lead to a dialectical conclusion of inequality in social structures.¹⁶ However, the social cohesion and unity found in local communities leads to strong skepticism when placed on a global stage. If a conclusion to the power struggle between oppressed groups and those with privilege comes from placing individual viewpoints aside, the result could be total assimilation into a western way of thought. Frantz Fanon points out historically post-colonialism has only lead to violence and privilege because the rebound from colonial culture being forced into indigenous culture leads to a cultural deficiency.¹⁷ All people, historical oppressors and oppressed, suffer from a cultural deficiency and must recognize the chains of our past to fully reach reconciliation.¹⁸ However, instead of reconciling through assimilation, we must mine history for common aspects such as reliance on the earth and nostalgia for community to reach a shared sense of purpose.

“For the origin of historical culture and of its absolutely radical antagonism to the spirit of a new time and a ‘modern consciousness,’ must itself be known by a historical process. History must solve the problem of history, science must turn its sting against itself. This threefold ‘must’ is the imperative of the ‘new spirit,’ if it is really to contain something new, powerful, vital, and original.”¹⁹

Due to globalization, and colonization, the modern world lacks overarching community purely because there is so much history to be considered. To move forward and reach a dialectic conclusion to the power struggle between oppressed communities and those of power, we must use new methods of recognition to reach a reconciliation which appreciates instead of appropriates. This would be a community of rich culture and languages in opposition to the cultural deficiency running rampant in modern post-colonial societies today. Underneath all the differences, humans are still nostalgic for a combined sense of purpose and community.

Hypothetically, the human race has the ability to reach a dialectic conclusion using the teachings of Nietzsche and Hegel. The teachings include recognizing the hidden structures left from colonization and the inherent hierarchy of privilege which results from them, and working actively against privilege to understand underrepresented cultures point of view. It also includes patience in “unlearning” history with the knowledge that learning about different cultures, a

¹⁶ Hegel: Hicks (n 1)

¹⁷ Fanon: Shatz, A. (2017). No Direction Home: The Journey of Frantz Fanon. Raritan [online]

¹⁸ Shatz, A. (2017). No Direction Home: The Journey of Frantz Fanon. Raritan [online]

¹⁹ Nietzsche (n 4) [50]

common history is being built. Through Nietzsche and Hegel, the process of moving from recognizing one's role in an unequal society is described with unlearning, and guilt, and common history, until the point of reconciliation can be reached. Fukuyama believed we would know when a dialectic conclusion to societies power struggles is met, however I disagree, humanity will not notice the end of a fractured society. As Fanon holds, "for many years to come we shall be bandaging the countless and sometimes indelible wounds inflicted on our people by the colonialist onslaught." Total reconciliation may never be reached, humanity will always be held by the chains of our ancestors actions, but the wounds can be lessened through actively seeking a dialectic conclusion.

III.

Adam Schatz asks "What might be the shape, the identity, of a genuinely free society, an emancipated culture?"²⁰ Humanity is at a unique tipping point of history where we have information at a click of a button and international travel is easier than ever. A world with the potential to reach a dialectic conclusion and create an even playing field for all people. Would a truly emancipated culture learn from elders of all communities while benefiting from the input of the science of modern times? Can we as a collective of the one human race find a common focus that bands all of us to action? A focus that will be so overarching, that the minor differences among us will be considered irrelevant to our most necessary need of survival?

As our planet becomes increasingly engulfed by consumerism, our western world is governed by the economics of how an aspect of living can be priced. Love, compassion, health, beauty, dignity and freedom, must all have a price ascribed to them to have value. Without a consumer based component, items or experiences are considered inconsequential. Unfortunately for the human race, this model excludes the most important elements for survival. The prevailing values of this western world ideal fail the needs of the earth. This is the world of the anthropocentric man who seeks not unity with nature, but conquest.²¹ In this society tomatoes have a higher utility than the priceless and irreplaceable redwoods. However, this view is unsustainable, and the mass amounts of information discovered on a daily basis is being forgotten to history before used.²² The division between the anthropocene and the indigenous is the difference of conquering nature through technology, science, and trade, and working with nature for mutual survival.²³ In an anthropogenic society, humankind works at a fast pace, moving forward without looking back to our ancestors for advice. Humankind must become a collective community that believes Man and nature are indivisible. Once a community understands the connection people must have to the earth as well as each other, people can then work with a common focus and create networks that benefit the earth and all of its diversity. Through actions taken as a global community, humanity will create Nietzsche's

²⁰ Shatz (n 18)

²¹ McHarg, I. (1992). Design with nature. Natural History Press.

²² Nietzsche (n 4)

²³ Kumar, S. (2016). Three Dimensions of Ecology: Soil, Soul & Society. In: Vaughan-Lee, L., Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of The Earth

platform of common history. Our shared history will allow humanity to move past the limits of colonialism, privilege, and oppression.

Luckily, there are many ways to access information about and learn from more harmonious traditions. As noted, many indigenous cultures do have a connection to the earth and there are still living people who can pass on that culture and tradition. There are also non-western traditions that work with the earth while allowing humans to sustainably thrive with natural resources such as a few Aboriginal Australian tribes who still roam the Outback.²⁴ Indigenous people who still live in the ways of their ancestors are not untouched by a western society but can recognize the changes westernization caused and still hold onto the teachings of history. Through Nietzsche's ideas of mining history, humanity is urged to look to the past for useful knowledge which can help improve the future.²⁵ All modern discoveries stand on a platform of previous thinkers and processes which were performed without a reason why. The traditional ecological knowledge possessed by indigenous peoples around the world can help thinkers understand how societies survived before technology and use these methods to create sustainable cities in the future.²⁶ Alastair McIntosh showed the power of combining indigenous forces through the Isle of Eigg Fund where he worked with Native Americans from the United States to help protect the Isle of Eigg in Scotland.²⁷ Through recognizing the similarities of indigenous struggles, two communities were heard by outside communities and effect positive change. After the events protecting the Isle of Eigg, a standard was formed which shows the potential of communities working together and creating a common history. The process of finishing the dialectic and creating an equal society encompasses political, social, environmental, and spiritual activism, but it also requires acknowledging pieces of history one might rather ignore.

Humanity will not be able to see all the possibilities of the world until we have reached homeostasis in privilege and power. In contrast to assimilation of indigenous cultures, people must integrate indigenous cultures into current lifestyles to produce a community balancing economics, science and history equally. As Hegel holds, a society with "reciprocal and equal agreement among citizens to mutually recognize each other" is the end point of liberal democracy.²⁸ But beyond mutual recognition, respect and reconciliation are the points which will move society past homeostasis. Once reconciliation is completed, communities can be formed "**because** of cultural differences" contrary to "**despite** cultural differences."

²⁴ Keenan, S.(2012). Aboriginal Australians are a Part of the Country's Present - Not Just its Past. The Guardian. [online]

²⁵ Nietzsche (n 4)

²⁶ McIntosh (n 2)

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ Fukuyama (n 3)

IV

I entered the conversation of privilege, social justice, and community as a cis-gender, straight, white, middle-class female. I wanted to understand how to work past the feeling of guilt felt when thinking of the relationship between privileged and oppressed groups of people, especially because my family came to America as immigrants, not settlers. My ego and white fragility stood in the way of recognizing the colonial structures of privilege and oppression which I had never played a conscious part in creating or supporting. However, race alone was enough to make me culpable. I share Hegel's dream that through social reconciliation, the invisible structures of privilege and oppression can be dismantled.

Some countries are still under colonial rule, and some areas of the world have never been touched by settlers and assimilation. When looking at all cultures across the globe the spread of knowledge and possibilities for education are limitless.

Hegel's dialectic is a tool to look at interactions between cultures and communities on the world stage. Looking at colonisation, an outsider can see how indigenous communities were not recognized, leading to violence and assimilation. Though many previously colonized areas are now independent, the mindset of oppression leaves communities and cultures fractured, reaching for recognition from people in power with the hope that once recognized, society can move forward.

From a person of privileges perspective, the need for recognition is mostly invisible. Only learning history from the winners point of view has left generations uneducated to the plight of oppressed individuals. The lack of knowledge or ability to see the impact of oppression in the present has lead to an unseen structure to all people, privileged and oppressed. As Nietzsche suggests, looking backwards in time can reveal the structures. Unfortunately, even after structures are revealed, oppression still exists and disrupts the progress of communities from local and separated, to global and unified.

The world economy has grown to a primarily capitalist formation, interdependent on production and communication with all countries. The economy has moved to a global stage, yet our cultures still keep to themselves. Until cultures recognize and respect each other, can society as a whole move towards global community? Fukuyama believes the end of history has occurred and human kind has seen capitalism and liberal democracy win. However, we have not considered integration of cultures who do not share a western viewpoint.

Instead of focusing on speed and gain, great thinkers remind us to stop and think about the structure of our community. Is what we believe "good" truly good? And the same to "evil?" Despite ancestry and ethnicity, are we accepting of all people? Nihilistically, Fanon believes the wounds of oppression will never be healed. But the actions of McIntosh speak louder than words and show the possibilities of what happens when cultures work together to seek recognition and are recognized. Using Nietzsche's and Hegel's theories on history, guilt and reconciliation, I believe colonial privilege can be further understood and dismantled, thus leaving space to merge traditional and western ways of life and leading to stronger values of community in a broken society. Through creating a common history which includes all peoples working to live on a healthy planet, we may not just survive but flourish in harmony with the earth.

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