



## Do Not Be Conformed to this Age or #DecolonizeIsNotAMetaphor

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*"We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe."* -  
Franz Fanon

In an [academic article published in 2012](#), Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call scholars and activists to account for the way they use the term "decolonization." Tuck and Yang argue that, too often, when we speak of decolonizing education or the decolonization of our minds, imaginations, churches, organizations, etc., we slip into metaphorical language that obscures the heart of the call to decolonize. The true heart of decolonization, however, is the rema/patriation of Indigenous land and life. Unless we keep that concrete practice at the center of our justice-making efforts, they will tend to reinforce the practices and mentalities of [settler colonialism](#).

Since it came on the scene more than a decade ago, Tuck and Yang's idea has taken hold in many Indigenous-led spaces, so much so that it has become its own hashtag. I'm always grateful when this important argument resurfaces around what has come to be known by many as Indigenous People's Day in the United States. It serves as a reminder that our work to decolonize is tangible and substantive—it means real shifts in power, material realities, and resources. Drawing attention to colonial legacies of genocide and the continued presence and importance of Indigenous communities with a specially designated holiday is needed, especially because erasure is a favorite tactic of settler colonialism. Yet, the sacred call to decolonize—beyond the metaphor—means that we must consider how we act in ways that restore, repair, and make amends for these legacies, rising in solidarity with efforts toward #LandBack and Indigenous imagination for the future.

I think it was this kind of sacred decolonizing—this kind of shift in power, material realities, and resources—that Paul had in view in his letter to the

Romans when he urged these new Jesus-followers who benefitted from the privileges of the Roman empire to “not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind” (Romans 12:2, NRSVUE). For the community in Rome, for these settler/colonizers, not being conformed to this age meant not practicing empire; it meant decolonizing their community—and not just metaphorically. In fact, the whole rest of the letter shows just how concretely Paul understands what it means to be part of the decolonizing Body of Christ instead of aligned with the imperial power of Rome.

As I write this commentary, conflict is raging between Israel and Palestine. World powers are posturing and aligning themselves with different groups, each claiming to be on the side of justice and what is right. It is tempting to let the complexities of the historical conflict give us an “out” from trying to imagine a faithful response. But our calling as those “not conformed to this age” demands that we lean into these complexities and ask ourselves what the spiritual practice of decolonizing beyond the metaphor might look like in this moment. How would we find ourselves called to respond if we viewed this conflict through the long histories and legacies of occupation and empire? What would change if we understood resisting erasure and real shifts in power, material realities, and resources as the sacred work of decolonizing? Whose voices would we need to seek out and rise in solidarity with as part of the decolonizing Body of Christ? These are the questions we are called to wrestle with when we recognize that decolonize is not a metaphor but a sacred practice of restoration and repair.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Sharon R. Fennema is the Curator for the United Church of Christ’s [Join the Movement toward Racial Justice](#) initiative and campaign.

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