



Marisa Elena Duarte. *Network Sovereignty: Building the Internet across Indian Country.* Indigenous Confluences Series. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017. 192 pp. \$90.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-295-74181-9.

Reviewed by David Gaertner

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Commissioned by F. Evan Nooe (University of North Carolina, Charlotte)

There is a famous photograph of Bedonkohe Apache leader Geronimo sitting in a Cadillac. It was taken in 1905. Geronimo was in captivity at the time, having surrendered to the US government in 1886, and the photograph was shot as a publicity stunt for Oklahoma's Gala Day. Geronimo is behind the wheel of the car, wearing a top hat and a vest; the man beside him wears a full plains-style headdress; the two men in the back are in furs and feathers. To quote Dakota scholar Philip J. Deloria's 2004 work *Indians in Unexpected Places*, the photograph plays on the "unexpected." [1] Marisa Elena Duarte, author of *Network Sovereignty: Building the Internet across Indian Country*, elaborates: "in the modern settler imaginary, any Native or Indigenous use of modern technologies was unexpected precisely because Native and Indigenous peoples themselves were unexpected in the subjugated, mediated landscape. They were expected to have faded away like the shrinking herds of buffalo" (p. 11).

While it contends directly with Indigenous engagement with technology, Duarte's work does not tarry with the unexpected. Rather, it is a passionate and rigorous theorization of the ways in which Indigenous peoples are already using technology—particularly Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)—toward tribal goals. In this

very sense, Duarte's work is a significant contribution to an increasingly robust corpus of literature on Indigenous technologies, by Indigenous scholars, programmers, and artists, such as Angela Hass, Jason Lewis, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Steven Loft, and Skawennati, among others, who push back against the unexpected, and who center Indigenous peoples and knowledges within technology as agents of resistance and resurgence.

As the first book-length study of Indigenous ICTs, Duarte's work makes further space for this work to grow and develop by firmly anchoring technology to at least three key tenets in Indigenous studies: land, decolonization, and self-determination. The result is a meticulous practical and theoretical grounding, from which the author not only critiques and deconstructs the technological infrastructure of settler colonialism but also articulates the contours of sovereign Indigenous technology—which can and should be expected from Indigenous communities, communities that have always carefully collected and disseminated information.

At the center of *Network Sovereignty* is the connection between land and information. Land and territory are central to Indigenous studies. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer Leanne Be-

tasamosake Simpson writes that “the land, aki, is both context and process.”[2] But the tools and metaphors we are given to imagine the internet unbinds it from the land. The “cloud” is the example *par excellence*. Cloud technology is, essentially, the promise of groundless information: data without territory, without context. This allegory distracts from critical thinking. “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang tell us in their 2012 publication, but what does this mean in a territory, the internet, in which metaphor dominates? Tuck and Yang’s claim is based on the idea that decolonization should not be operationalized unless it is done so with the intent of returning land to Indigenous peoples.[3] So how do we think about decolonization and Indigenous studies in a space that, in the way it is realized through language, is a landless territory?

Duarte expressly contends with this issue by emphasizing ICT infrastructure: the towers, dishes, and optical cables that make wireless communication possible; the roads and trails that must be cut to install equipment; the specific knowledge of terrain and climates that is necessary to purchase and install equipment that can be sustained in a given location: “this is why working with the traditional historic preservation officers, tribal archeologists, and land management personnel is so important,” Duarte writes (p. 119). ICTs function with and for Indigenous communities when they respond to “the ecology and internal rhythms of tribal homelands” (p. 46). (Re)connecting ICTs to land is one of the fundamental interventions in Duarte’s book: it calls readers back to the ways in which information is spatialized and literally grounded in Indigenous territories.

To understand Duarte’s conception of decolonization, however, it is necessary to understand how settler colonialism is articulated through ICT infrastructure. Indeed, a key element of *Network Sovereignty*, is Duarte’s willingness to situate ICT’s within the larger settler colonial project, therefore

illustrating, in a much more precise way than any work preceding it, the stakes of digital technologies within the Indigenous studies framework. Just as railway barons began to push Indigenous peoples from their homelands across North America in the 1860s, wire-line telegraphy posts, sheltered by the military and railway stations, played a significant role in displacement. As an early ICT, “telegraphy was an important medium for transmitting messages about Indian mobilization” and the infrastructure developed around settler communications was instrumental in generating and maintaining state sovereignty (p. 10). Today, server farms, fiber optic cables, and internet towers are built and maintained on Indigenous land and are made possible by the displacement facilitated by early colonial ICTs. In this sense, the decolonization of new media and digital technologies means directly addressing and unsettling ICT contribution to Manifest Destiny and the displacement of Indigenous peoples from their homelands.

In political terms, self-determination and sovereignty are determined by a community’s ability to define and control their own statehood, but with the work of such Indigenous critics as Jolene Rickard and Michelle Raheja, how sovereignty is maintained and proliferated is also directly tied to cultural production. For too long, film and media both reflected and instantiated structures of *terra nullius*. Insofar as they played into myths of the vanishing Indian, they eroded Indigenous sovereignty by falsely insisting on the impossibility of self-determination. “Visual sovereignty,” as Rickard names it, allowed Indigenous storytellers to articulate Indigenous representation from Indigenous points of view.[4]

Like Rickard and Raheja, Duarte’s conception of self-determination is tied to the ways in which information travels within and against systems of settler colonialism. This sentiment is perhaps best captured in a quotation from Valerie Fast Horse of Coeur d’Alene’s Red Spectrum Communications,

which Duarte cites in chapter 5, “Internet for Self-Determination”: “our challenge is to revitalize the spirit of our people through self-determination. It is our hope that by lighting up the reservation with fiber-optic network we will spark our most creative minds and encourage the knowledge-based economy we’ve been striving to develop” (p. 97). As this quotation helps to illustrate, Duarte advances the conversation around Indigenous sovereignty by shifting the focus of analysis to hardware and practical engineering knowledge. Information has the potential to galvanize and restore, to mobilize resistance and to facilitate cultural resurgence, and to push back against systems of settler colonial oppression. However, if that information moves within and through settler colonial infrastructure, its potential impact is undermined, not because the content is any less impactful but because using colonial ICTs reinforces the need for the colonial information infrastructure that provides for the continued displacement of Indigenous peoples.

Since ICTs facilitate the movement of information, they are germane to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, but only inasmuch as an Indigenous community has control over the means of production. For Duarte, the question then becomes, how do Indigenous communities support technical training and professional development for the community that will provide for ICT development controlled and sustained internally? Media studies, film studies, and cultural studies are beginning to make space for Indigenous students and Indigenous experiences, but the same cannot be said for engineering programs. Duarte follows up: “thus there is much description of possible media effects and the matter of gaze but less on the functionality of information and devices as habitus in Native peoples’ lives” (p. 133). Self-determination, if it is to be found in ICTs, will require new approaches to education.

In the settler imaginary, the 1905 photograph of Geronimo in a Cadillac perhaps articulates colonial erasure facilitated by the march of progress: the vanishing Indian (represented by Geronimo) set against the inevitable settler future (represented by the automobile). This interpretation, of course, denies the possibility of Indigenous engagement with technology and suggests that Indigenous needs and goals cannot be aligned with technology. Connecting to core issues in Indigenous studies, *Network Sovereignty* gives the lie to this ideology, concretely illustrating the ways in which ICTs are supporting land-based, decolonial initiatives and providing an infrastructural backbone for Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. Duarte’s turn to infrastructure and material aspects of ICTs marks this book as a significant contribution to the fields of information science and Indigenous studies. It will have a significant impact on the way research is done in both fields and hopefully beyond.

Notes

[1]. Phillip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 147.

[2]. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation,” *Decolonization* 3, no. 3 (2014): 7.

[3]. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40.

[4]. Jolene Rickard, “Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand,” in *Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices*, Aperture 139 (New York: Aperture, 1995), 51–59; and Michelle Raheja, “Reading Nanook’s Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and Atanarjuat (Fast Runner),” *American Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2007): 1159-1185.

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