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Claudia Pochita January 6, 2026

Le Grand Dérangement Numérique: When Colonial Logic Colonizes Our Conversations

There is something profoundly melancholic—*mélancolique*, if you will—about watching discourse unfold in these digital territories we've carved from silicon and light, where every tweet becomes a territorial claim, every comment thread a minor war of attrition, and where the very architecture of our platforms reproduces the extractive logic of empire with such breathtaking efficiency that we barely notice how our thoughts themselves have become raw materials to be harvested, processed, and sold back to us as engagement metrics and targeted advertisements.

The French have a word—*bavardage*—which captures something essential about chatter, idle talk, the kind of conversation that fills space without necessarily creating meaning, and I find myself thinking of this word often when I scroll through the endless feeds that structure our contemporary consciousness, because what we call "online discourse" has become less about the exchange of ideas than about the performance of identity, the staking of claims in digital territories that mirror, with uncanny precision, the colonial project's fundamental impulse to map, categorize, and control.

Consider how the platform shapes the thought: Twitter's character limit doesn't just constrain our expression—it colonizes our cognition, training us to think in fragments, in soundbites, in the kind of abbreviated fury that generates clicks but rarely generates understanding, while Facebook's algorithm creates echo chambers that would make the most sophisticated colonial administrator weep with envy, sorting us into demographic categories with a precision that makes the *mission civilisatrice* look like amateur hour, and Instagram reduces the complexity of human experience to aestheticized moments that must compete for attention in an attention economy that mirrors the resource extraction of classical imperialism with such fidelity that it's almost beautiful in its horror.

But here's where it gets interesting—*c'est là où ça devient intéressant*—because within these colonized spaces, we witness the emergence of what I can only call resistance vernaculars, the ways marginalized

communities hack the master's tools, creating new languages of survival and solidarity that the platforms cannot quite anticipate or control, from Black Twitter's deployment of coded language that simultaneously includes and excludes, to the way queer communities on TikTok develop visual languages that slip past content moderation algorithms, to the manner in which postcolonial voices use these ostensibly Western platforms to build transnational networks of critique and care that would have been impossible in the analog age.

The tragedy—and there is always tragedy in these digital stories—lies in how quickly these innovations get recuperated, absorbed, commodified, turned into trends that can be packaged and sold, because the platform economy requires constant novelty, constant disruption, constant extraction of value from human creativity, and so the very tools we use to resist become the instruments of our own subsumption into systems of control that operate through the fiction of connection while actually producing unprecedented forms of isolation and alienation.

Yet I remain cautiously optimistic—*prudemment optimiste*—because I see in online discourse not just the reproduction of colonial violence but also its potential subversion, in the way conversations can spark across geographical boundaries that once seemed insurmountable, in how marginalized voices can find amplification and community, in the possibility that these platforms might—might—become spaces for the kind of radical democracy that exists nowhere in our offline political institutions, though this possibility remains perpetually deferred by the corporate logic that governs these spaces.

Perhaps what we're witnessing is less the death of discourse than its transformation into something we don't yet have adequate language to describe—a hybrid form of communication that is simultaneously more democratic and more hierarchical than what came before, more connected and more fragmented, more immediate and more ephemeral, operating according to temporalities that compress centuries of colonial logic into microsecond transactions while also opening possibilities for futures we can barely imagine.

The question becomes not whether online discourse is good or bad—such binary thinking belongs to the colonial epistemology we're trying to escape—but rather how we might inhabit these digital territories differently, how we might practice what I call *résistance numérique*, finding ways to love and think and speak within systems designed to capture and commodify our very capacity for love and thought and speech.

C'est notre défi—this is our challenge, and perhaps our opportunity.

Dave Standing There (Hoocąk Haci Nįįc) January 6, 2026

When Federal Policy Meets Tribal Sovereignty: The Perpetual Dance of Power and Promises

The federal government's relationship with tribal nations has always been a masterclass in contradictions. On one hand, the Constitution recognizes tribes as distinct political entities with inherent sovereignty. On the other, nearly every federal policy toward Indian Country reflects an uncomfortable reality: Washington still struggles to treat us as equals rather than wards.

Take the recent discussions around infrastructure spending in Indian Country. The Biden administration deserves credit for increased tribal consultation and funding allocations that actually moved the needle. But let's examine the underlying structure. When tribal nations must compete for discretionary grants to fix roads and water systems that should have been maintained through treaty obligations, we're not talking about federal generosity—we're talking about federal amnesia about its own legal commitments.

This is where federal policy gets legally and morally murky. The trust relationship between the United States and tribal nations isn't a favor Congress decided to bestow upon us. It's a constitutional obligation rooted in treaties, trade agreements, and the fundamental recognition that tribal nations preexisted the United States. Yet federal agencies consistently approach tribal issues as if they're doing us a courtesy rather than fulfilling legal duties.

Consider the Indian Health Service's chronic underfunding. For decades, federal policy has treated tribal healthcare as a discretionary program rather than a treaty obligation. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court's recent decisions have emboldened states to challenge tribal jurisdiction in ways that would have been unthinkable twenty years ago. The Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta decision didn't just create jurisdictional confusion—it revealed how federal policy often fails to defend tribal sovereignty when states push back.

But here's what's strategically important: tribal nations are increasingly refusing to accept federal policy as something that happens *to* us rather than *with* us. The most successful tribal advocacy in recent years

has focused on reframing these discussions. Instead of asking for federal programs, tribes are demanding fulfillment of federal obligations. Instead of accepting consultation as a checkbox exercise, tribal leaders are insisting on meaningful government-to-government relationships.

The Violence Against Women Act reauthorization provides a perfect case study. For years, federal policy created a jurisdictional nightmare where non-Native perpetrators could assault Native women on tribal land with near impunity. Tribal advocates didn't just ask for better law enforcement—they demanded recognition of tribal courts' authority to prosecute non-Native offenders. The 2013 reauthorization was groundbreaking precisely because it acknowledged tribal jurisdiction rather than creating another federal program.

This distinction matters enormously in how we approach future federal policy debates. Climate change legislation, for instance, often treats tribal lands as scenic backdrops rather than sovereign territories with their own environmental laws and priorities. Energy development policies still reflect the paternalistic assumption that federal agencies know what's best for tribal resources. These approaches don't just disrespect tribal sovereignty—they produce worse policy outcomes.

Smart federal policy would recognize that tribal nations often have more sophisticated approaches to long-term resource management than federal agencies. The Ho-Chunk Nation's sustainable forestry practices didn't emerge from federal guidelines—they reflect centuries of ecological knowledge that federal policy could learn from rather than override.

The challenge for tribal advocates is maintaining strategic focus amid constantly shifting federal priorities. Every new administration brings policy changes that can either strengthen or undermine tribal sovereignty. The key is establishing legal and political precedents that survive these transitions. Treaty rights don't disappear when administrations change, but federal policy interpretations absolutely do.

Moving forward, tribal nations need federal policies that strengthen rather than circumvent tribal governance. This means supporting tribal courts, recognizing tribal environmental regulations, and treating tribal economic development as a sovereignty issue rather than a welfare program. It means understanding that when tribes succeed economically and politically, everyone benefits.

Federal policy toward Indian Country works best when it remembers what the Constitution actually says about tribal sovereignty. The Commerce Clause doesn't grant Congress unlimited power over tribal affairs—it recognizes Congress's authority to regulate trade with tribal nations as distinct political entities. That's a profoundly different legal framework than the one reflected in most federal Indian policy.

The question isn't whether federal policy will continue affecting tribal nations—of course it will. The question is whether federal policy will finally align with federal law. Tribal sovereignty isn't a policy preference Congress can abandon when convenient. It's a constitutional reality that smart federal policy must accommodate.

Until federal agencies understand that distinction, we'll continue this perpetual dance where tribal nations must constantly defend rights that were never actually in dispute.