

Sky Roosevelt-Morris on the meaning of Four Winds

When we talk about decolonization, we're talking not only about giving land back but about decolonizing our minds and our lives.

by [Sky Roosevelt-Morris](#) in the [March 11, 2020](#) issue

Read [*Terra Brockman's article about the ELCA Rocky Mountain Synod and the Four Winds American Indian Council.*](#)

One of my first memories of this place was of my Auntie Jolynne's daughter's funeral. She was 19 years old. I was four when she passed in 1995. [Later] I remember coming to meetings here. There was a real community, there was a real vibration in this space. It was very empowering, especially for a young native person. This space is where I came into consciousness. It's a safe space for native people to just be who they are. And that's a revolutionary thing. I always tell native people that come through that door, "This is your home, you know, this is your home too."

It's good for us to see that not all religious-oriented folks are indoctrinated in colonialism or indoctrinated in racism—that there are people who see the error in the history of their religion or their spirituality or their life ways, and take an opportunity to do something different.

The people of the Rocky Mountain Lutheran Synod made me deeply question some of my own biases toward religion. My mom was one of the lost generation. She was taken by missionaries when she was really young and she never really fully recovered. But there was a part of her that they could never really kill as an indigenous woman either. And there was always a part of her that was very proud to be White Mountain Apache. And she died being proud White Mountain Apache.

This place right here is proof that decolonization can happen. And that it does happen. I really am thankful that you wanted to talk more about it, and have other folks really deeply contemplate that . . . because it is possible.

Decolonization is giving land back to indigenous peoples, period. Because this is our land. And we belong to the land; the land doesn't belong to us. We were a part of it long before invasion happened. So decolonization, in the simplest terms, is giving land back to native people. But it's also understanding and unpacking this conflict between the invader world and the indigenous world. We're asking people to stop colonizing us, and stop engaging in colonial actions and colonial behaviors—because it's still very prevalent in the world.

And so when we talk about decolonization, we're talking not only about giving land back but about decolonizing our minds, decolonizing our lives . . . so that indigenous life can exist in this time, in this space, in an authentic, original, ancestral way, without being questioned, without being diminished, without being appropriated, without being captured or misconstrued. For too long we've been refugees in our own homeland. And so when I think about decolonization, I think about indigenous peoples being free in their own homeland.

And to me, this is what decolonization in practice looks like—decolonizing this small space in the city of Denver and making other people aware of it. We can talk about giving land back, but when people actually start doing it . . . that's something next-level . . . that's something that I didn't know if I would ever see in my lifetime.

Read [Jolynne Locust Woodcock on the meaning of Four Winds](#).

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "Native Voices on the meaning of Four Winds."