

Defining the Transnational through Anti-colonial Digital Humanities Pedagogy

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While the common perception of the digital is as a global, democratic environment, there are countless ways that digital environments are inaccessible and oppressive. One way we witness the fallacy of the global digital is through the nationalism [1] of many DH pedagogies. With Silicon Valley, the pervasiveness of US capital, and US imperialism, the nationalism of digital spaces is often US-centered [2]. Nevertheless, we have also witnessed DH nationalism beyond the US, including within Global South, purportedly postcolonial, contexts. We see the move to nationalistic DH as part of a colonial digital divide. The project of Digital India, for example, extends right-wing Hindu nationalist and settler colonial mobilizing to digital learning, increasingly in the name of “decolonizing” how, what, and where we learn with/in the digital. This digital nationalism enacts digital erasures of Indigenous, Black, Dalit-Bahujan, queer, feminist, and disability justice scholars who push against the nation-state.

Our collective, Pedagogy of the Digitally Oppressed, seeks to refuse digital nationalism. By starting as a coalition, and working within university and community coalitions, our approach to pedagogy follows Paulo Freire’s call for conscientization through learning and teaching: to become aware of the sources of one’s oppression—including nationalistic impulses—and critically reflect on that oppression to imagine a co-liberatory future. In this presentation, we define the transnational as the dialectic of the digital nationalist, contending with a series of questions related to digital nationalism as it relates to DH pedagogy: What does it mean to teach a transnational, translocal DH, and why is this crucial to anti-colonial DH? How have we fallen short in our practice and how are we working to be accountable to this need? At the heart of this presentation and these questions is a larger project of defining what must be an integral keyword in DH pedagogy: transnational.

Footnotes:

[1] That is, nation-state nationalism is different from Indigenous nationhood, and this is an integral distinction. Nation-state nationalism perpetuates colonial movements and ideologies of patriotism, whereas Indigenous nationhood is grounded in the anti-colonial sovereignty and knowledge systems of Indigenous nations, which have continued to survive and thrive despite the violence of settler colonial nation-states.

[2] By US-centered, we specifically mean the settler colonial US regime, not the sovereign Indigenous lands which are currently occupied by the US nation-state nor the Indigenous peoples who have always been sovereign and distinct from the US nation-state.