Indigenous Activism in the Anthropocene: Three Case Studies from the Américas

by

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Preface: Learning and Unlearning

This thesis surveys the work of Indigenous activists through a transnational lens across the Américas. In regions that span from explicit sites of settler colonialism, to those impacted and specifically targeted by United States imperialism and extractive capitalism, Indigenous groups have organized on varying scales to produce movements that confront histories of violence and oppression to fight for land, sovereignty, and ultimately decolonization. Mobilizing through various means, these groups seek to interrogate the extractive gaze and change the hegemonic colonial mindset in order to salvage the world from environmental decay and build a new world, free from violent hierarchical power structures and rich with expansive notions of relationality.

My divergent path through academic institutions and sites of colonialism set me on the combined journeys of learning and unlearning that brought me to this thesis. I came to the field of American Studies by accident. I signed up for a course called “American Movies as American Studies” before my Freshman year, under the impression that it was going to be a film class, and, intrigued by the critical gaze that the course encouraged me to cultivate, I continued with the major. Although I initially focused in the areas of critical race and cultural studies, I took a course called “Native American Health and Medicine” that gave me a new perspective on my Western understandings of wellness and productivity, but furthermore was my first taste of Indigenous and colonial studies. This class also coincided with the events of Standing Rock and the election of Donald Trump. With a newfound theoretical toolset for turning a critical gaze at global extractive capitalism, United States imperialism, and
my positionality as a settler on occupied land, I knew I had found what I wanted to study for the rest of my time at Wesleyan. Furthermore, I hoped that through my studies I could develop myself politically to a point where I could actually help confront the systems that I was now recognizing as oppressive and violent.

Additionally, it was during the ongoing protests at Standing Rock that I first heard about the work of The Red Nation, an Albuquerque-based group that was fighting for pan-Indigenous liberation. I followed one of the group’s founders, Nick Estes, on Twitter and read about how The Red Nation was organizing in response to the material struggle of Indigenous people in the Southwest. The group’s message aligned with the revolutionary theories I had been reading in school. They were calling for the end to capitalism-colonialism in order to build a more reciprocal world, free from corporate greed and state-sponsored violence, and they were acting in solidarity with tribes across the Americas and other colonized groups around the world. Inspired, I realized that the material I had been learning in the classroom was also being enacted out in the world.

With some extra credits under my belt, I took a semester off from Wesleyan to travel in South America after my sophomore year. Although I had set out to learn Spanish and spend some time away from academia, the trip provided motivation to pursue this thesis. In December of 2017, towards the end of my time abroad, I spent a week in Bolivia, in both the Eastern – and largely conservative – Santa Cruz department, and the capital city of La Paz. The first difference that struck me when I arrived in La Paz, aside from the intense altitude, was the intense Indigenous pride. Wiphala flags waved from both kioskos and government buildings, people spoke
Quechua and Aymara languages on almost every street, and “¡EVO SI!” graffiti was just as ubiquitous. This graffiti marked the most recent referendum called by the Bolivian President Evo Morales to determine if he could run for another term. Upon speaking with some locals and reading more, I came to understand the intricacy of the situation in Bolivia. There had been a revolutionary moment at the turn of the century – mobilized by the Indigenous majority around the traditional Andean social unit of the ayllu – resisting U.S. imperialism, the privatization of natural resources, and the eradication of coca. This was a case of Indigenous resistance against an oppressive state formation that had successfully toppled a government. Additionally, it was another case study of activism that I could put into conversation with the work of The Red Nation.

After my Junior year I received a grant from Wesleyan with two peers to travel through the Western United States, hiking a section of the Pacific Crest Trail and conducting interviews to explore the research question: “Recognizing that modern society has largely corrupted our embodied relationship with the environment, how can we improve and relearn this connection to increase our agency in order to create a more viable future?” My independent sub question explored the ways in which colonialism has impacted this relationship and how we can learn from Indigenous knowledge to help salvage it. After traveling on the trail for two months, I volunteered for several organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area, including a 501(c)3 organization called Planting Justice that functions through various mediums to help further food sovereignty, economic justice, and community healing. I volunteered at Planting Justice’s nursery in Sobrante Park, Oakland, a location that
was described to me as “the last neighborhood that has yet to be touched by
gentrification,” and “a place they are too scared to come into.” Planting Justice had
recently developed a partnership with an Indigenous women-led group called the
Sogorea Te’ Land Trust and had offered part of their nursery as the first place for the
Land Trust to reclaim stewardship of traditional Ohlone land. I was immediately
fascinated by the work this organization was doing, both in boldly proclaiming the
continued existence of Ohlone people on their traditional territory, but also in their
leadership structure and the novel ways of organizing they were employing. I was
lucky enough to remain in contact with people I met there and kept up a
correspondence with one of the Land Trust’s founders, Corrina Gould, who would
later provide interview material for this project.

This fall I began drawing together connections between these three case
studies from disparate parts of the Américas into an analysis of organized Indigenous
activism in the context of fighting for and stewarding land to resist state domination.
Based on my reading of Indigenous scholars such as Kyle Whyte and understanding
of the apocalypse of settler colonialism, I have termed the outcome of settler society’s
relationship with the environment as a no-future scenario. With this anxiety regarding
impending climate catastrophe looming, I engaged two broad questions through my
research. How can we change the world and create a new one? How could we create a
world free from coercive power structures and a world that could continue to
sustainably exist for generations to come? Investigating the historical legacy,
intellectual discourses, and everyday work of Bolivian ayllu activists, the Sogorea Te’
Land Trust, and The Red Nation have provided some answers to these queries.
Universalizing the Stakes: An Introduction

In October, 2018, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued a report titled “Global Warming of 1.5°C” announcing catastrophic effects of such an elevation in global temperatures and the “human fingerprint on greenhouse gases.”1 This report confirmed two truths, the urgency with which the world must begin to acknowledge and confront climate change, and the confirmation of what scientists and other thinkers have termed the Anthropocene – the geological epoch in which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment.

Preceding the publication of this acknowledgement and warning of the impacts of climate change from the highest intergovernmental body in the world, high-profile journalists had been reporting on the disproportionate impacts of climate change. In June, 2018, BBC News ran a story titled “Farming underground in a fight against climate change,” that speaks to Bolivian farmers in the altiplano needing to radically reform the way they farm – using innovative underground techniques – because of the drastic impacts of rising temperatures and erratic rainfall.2 The first sentence: “Bolivia is among the nations least responsible for climate change, but one of the most vulnerable to its effects.”3 With Bolivia’s population of Indigenous

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3 Ibid.
peoples sitting over 50%, there is no coincidence that they are contributing the least to – and feeling the most from – the impacts of climate change. This is, and has been, the reality for many of the world’s Indigenous peoples, experiencing apocalyptic scenarios and devastation to their ancestral lands due to the destructive nature of colonialism, while Indigenous methods of subsistence and interaction with the natural environment have left little to no lasting footprint. In one of the hearts of both U.S. industry and environmentalism, the San Francisco Bay Area, the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, the first urban Indigenous women-led land trust, recognize this disparity and are fighting against it by reviving traditional Ohlone practices of land stewardship in order to help return the Bay to its former vibrant state of being pre-colonial contact.

In November 2018, after four years of slow growth following their inception in 2014, Albuquerque, New Mexico-based organization, The Red Nation, a coalition of Indigenous activists working to build a movement for pan-Indigenous liberation, began publishing an online Newsletter. In their first Newsletter, entitled “What We are into is Revolution,” they directly addressed the UN’s dire warning, indicting the nations of the world for inaction and missing the “main driver of global warming and environmental destruction, capitalism.” Furthermore, they highlight the work of Indigenous activists in the Southwest, fighting large extractive enterprises to protect their sacred lands, and in turn, us all. Returning to the title of the newsletter, they

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6 Ibid.
conclude by saying that no true change will be achieved through this system, and that in order to supplant extractivism, capitalism, and imperialism there must be revolution. 7

Looking to Indigenous groups – such as autonomous ayllus in El Alto, Bolivia, non-federally recognized tribes in California reclaiming lands, and the movement being built by The Red Nation in Albuquerque – that are already mobilizing with radical politics and revolution in mind, there is hope for a future beyond the Anthropocene.

This introduction provides context to better understand what has produced this moment of impending, and in many cases already existent, doom. My analysis will proceed through a deep gaze into the prehistory of humans on Earth, the subsequent formation of the state, and ultimately the creation of the U.S. nation state. The inception of the U.S., as a settler colonial project built on the elimination of the Native and the labor of black bodies, and finally the evolution into a hemispheric and global extractive imperial power, begins to reveal the structural underpinnings of the violent and self-destructive 21st century world that has catalyzed the Anthropocene. The case studies in this thesis are all groups that have already felt the most extreme impacts of the state formation and subsequent climate change, providing an inspiration point for universal resistance and healing.

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7 Ibid.
Unpacking the Anthropocene

While the term Anthropocene and other etymological antecedents have been tossed around as early as the mid-19th century, it was widely popularized by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen in the year 2000.8 In the context of a society beginning to come to terms with realities of “global warming” and “climate change,” labeling this epoch the Anthropocene stands out as strikingly honest. Setting aside the climate-deniers and taking this widespread acceptance of the Anthropocene at face-value, the contentious debate that currently rages is when to mark the departure from a human history that is distinct from natural history (or geological history).9

James C. Scott furthers the alternative hypothesis of an “early Anthropocene” with an anthropological eye, employing archaeological findings and history as his primary tools of analysis.10 He proposes a new term, the “thin” Anthropocene, as beginning with the creation of the agrarian state, qualifying “thin” as a reflection of the “so very few hominids [who were] wielding these landscaping tools.”11 At the core of his interest, however, is a hard look at what he calls “deep history” – what is often called “prehistory” – and subsequently the earliest states in the Mesopotamian

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9 Many propose this to have begun with the detonation of the first atomic bomb, the 1945 Trinity Test, while others suggest the industrial revolution and the beginning of widespread burning of fossil-fuels in the 18th century. See James C. Scott, Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 2018. Professor of Environmental Science, William F. Ruddiman, suggested a contentious alternate hypothesis in his 2003 article with the main claim embedded in the title: “The Anthropogenic Greenhouse Era Began Thousands of Years Ago.” His scientific analysis focuses predominantly on greenhouse gas emissions during the so-called Holocene—the geological epoch that predated our current Anthropocene—but also links his scientific findings to the onset of farming, deforestation and other activities of early humans. See William F. Ruddiman, "The Anthropogenic Greenhouse Era Began Thousands of Years Ago." Climatic Change 61, no. 3 (2003): 261-93.
10 Scott, 5.
11 Ibid, 3.
alluvium, seeking to inform a *species* history. Scott’s “thin” Anthropocene is clearly defined by the formation of the agrarian *state*, not simply the advent of crop domestication and sedentism, which comes four thousand years earlier. He writes, “This massive lag is a problem for those theorists who would naturalize the state form and assume that once crops and sedentism, the technological and demographic requirements, respectively, for state formation were established, states/empires would immediately arise as the logical and most efficient units of political order.” Building off of this, he argues that the move out of nomadism solidified history’s fascination with civilization and progress, ingraining the myth that agricultural sedentary subsistence was superior to other mobile forms.13

Coercive, hierarchical power becomes the driving factor in the earliest agrarian states’ push to distinguish themselves from the “savages” that they had “moved beyond,” using agriculture and sedentism as symbols for civility. This use of power is clearly demonstrated in modern hegemonic understandings of human prehistory, the mythology that we were a wandering species until fixed-field agriculture offered us civilization and culture, but also in the attempts to erase the persistence of mobile peoples. While early states were busy domesticating fire, plants and livestock, mobile peoples may have understood this domestication as unhealthy and ultimately unhuman.14

Scott argues that *Homo-sapiens*’ domestication of grains and animals ultimately led to the domestication of their own species; a reality that non-state-

12 Ibid, 7.
14 Ibid, 87-88.
subject peoples continue to understand and actively resist to this day.\textsuperscript{15} Unfortunately, as early states consolidated their power, the historical canon erased this understanding, championing an ideology of human above nature. Many of the markers of post-industrial states can be traced back to these early agrarian states; for example, taxation by means of cereal grains or the domestication of plants and animals serves as an analog to the domestication of women, captives, and slaves.\textsuperscript{16} In short, early formations of the state were foundational to ushering in the “thin” Anthropocene and the production of a dominant notion of knowledge and history tilted in favor of consolidated state power.

Post-colonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty takes a different approach in his view of the Anthropocene. He is less interested with when it began and instead focuses on man’s imagined relationship with nature. Starting with the notion that “nature cannot have history in the way humans have it,” he enfolds the history of nature into the history of humans, based on the belief that only humans can determine what “exists.”\textsuperscript{17} This anthropocentric view has gone through iterations. With the rise of environmental history as an academic field in the late 20th century, humans were recognized as \textit{biological} agents. Not until recently, with climate scientists debating the Anthropocene, have humans been recognized as \textit{geological} agents. Chakrabarty argues that we are neither outside of nature defining the limits of it, nor solely biological agents within it, but a group of dominant actors with a collective and historical legacy that is altering the course of geological history.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 19. See Chapter 1 and 2 of \textit{Against the Grain} for more on non subject peoples.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 22.
Establishing the collapse of the humanist distinction between natural and human history as his “First Thesis,” Chakrabarty outlines three more Theses that begin to inform the question of how humans allowed this impending environmental collapse to occur and where we can go from here. He begins by positing that freedom, in forms “ranging from ideas of human and citizens’ rights to those of decolonization and self-rule...has been the most important motif of written accounts of human history of these two hundred and fifty years.”\(^\text{18}\) He critiques human’s methods of striving for freedom because of the intense energy consumption that they have facilitated. Despite his leap from the pursuit of freedom to our society’s reliance on energy missing some key qualifications, Chakrabarty’s text begins to address an important strand of modern humanist discourse that has helped conceal the capitalist greed the produces drastic inequality and rapidly accelerates the degradation of the environment; human rights.

In his article and subsequent book, *Human Rights are Not Enough*, Samuel Moyn argues that the fight for human rights has been diminished to a symbolic role since the rise of neoliberalism, with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) providing the majority of aid at the behest of their corporate benefactors.\(^\text{19}\) Furthermore, human rights, such as those laid out in the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, are reserved for those with citizenship, a marker of belonging to a nation state.\(^\text{20}\) As James C. Scott’s analysis of deep history and Cedric Robinson’s theory of racial capitalism both clearly trace, those resisting state power

\(^{18}\) Chakrabarty, 208.  
\(^{20}\) Ibid.
have almost always felt the brunt of what could be phrased as “human rights violations.”

Historian Walter Johnson, also makes a point to resist the language of “humane” behavior and dehumanization altogether. He writes,

> We are separating a normative and aspirational notion of humanity from the sorts of exploitation and violence that history suggests may well be definitive of human beings: we are separating ourselves from our own histories of perpetration. To say so is not to suggest that there is no difference between the past and the present; it is merely that we should not overwrite the complex determinations of history with simple-minded notions of moral progress.  

Notions such as freedom and human rights are inherently exclusionary and serve as liberal political tools for concealing the imperial capitalist agenda that is fueled by resource extraction.

In Chakrabarty’s final thesis, he argues that the Anthropocene calls for a new “universal enlightenment,” where humans must recognize the ubiquity of global climate change and act accordingly. Chakrabarty also makes it clear that there is a history of inequality that comes with climate change, but argues that “the whole crisis cannot be reduced to a story of capitalism.” Taking an alternative viewpoint in her book, *The Extractive Zone*, Macarena Gómez-Barris cautions the inclusivity of Chakrabarty’s call for a universal “species” enlightenment. She complicates the Anthropocene with histories of racialization and settler colonialism, arguing that the genesis of the problem is in fact far more specific. She writes, “Colonial capitalism has been the main catastrophic event that has gobbled up the plant’s resources,

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23 Chakrabarty, 219.
24 Ibid, 221.
discursively constructs racialized bodies within geographies of difference, systematically destroying through dispossession, enslavement, and then producing the planet as a corporate bio-territory.”

In line with the critique of thinkers like Gómez-Barris and Moyn, Johnson believes that universalized liberal ideals, or universal rally cries, that do not confront histories of violence, such as slavery – or in the case of Native peoples, land expropriation and colonialism – will not successfully address inequality and injustice. He furthers this critique by framing histories of slavery and stolen land as the tendencies of extraction and unequal distribution in powerful states. Recontextualizing within an anthropocentric view of environmental history, Johnson writes,

Over and against many recent efforts which assert that a forthright treatment of global environmental history requires the elevation of the categories of the “human” and the “Anthropocene” over and against other historical categories—principally those of race, class, gender, and colonialism—it insists upon the intimate and dialectical relationship between domination and dominion.

Domination and dominion form the nexus of what Johnson sees as the root cause of our environmental crisis and reckoning with the structures that enable such a calamitous wielding of power is the path to salvation. That said, Johnson’s work further purports that neither an “uninflected” Marxist critique of capitalism, nor simple black nationalism can lead to a path of justice; however, the “democratic and revolutionary thought of black people living under racial capitalism” can lead to true

26 Johnson.
justice and emancipation.\textsuperscript{27} This notion can be extended to all colonized and oppressed groups who have borne the brunt of colonial and imperialist practices, notably Indigenous people in the Américas.

\textbf{Indigenous Perspectives}

Indigenous groups in the Américas have lived before and after colonial contact with expansive notions of kinship and placed a significant priority on their connection to the land. Furthermore, having been the targets of colonialism and racial/extractive capitalism, Indigenous voices should be uniquely prioritized in any fights against such systems, which I am arguing the environmental movement must be. Looking towards Indigenous scholars we can understand that climate change is not just about rising temperatures. Philosopher Kyle Whyte (Potawatomi) states that climate change has had not only disproportionate impacts on Indigenous people – suggesting that acts such as forcible relocation already constitute apocalyptic climate change – but also that Indigenous peoples have been impacted in ways that the settler society could never be.\textsuperscript{28} He cites several examples of Indigenous groups whose understanding of environmental justice extends far beyond the binaristic realm of human and nature, thus even the action of tourists from the settler society climbing on a sacred site can be seen as a breach of their contractual obligations to the Creator.\textsuperscript{29} Scholar and activist Winona LaDuke (Anishinaabe) has termed this understanding as “natural law,” a cosmological system of mutual respect and responsibility between

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Whyte, 159.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 164.
humans and non-humans.\textsuperscript{30} Moreover, in line with Gómez-Barris’ critique of extractive capitalism, LaDuke writes that, “There is a direct relationship between the loss of cultural diversity and the loss of biodiversity. Wherever Indigenous peoples still remain, there is also a corresponding enclave of biodiversity.”\textsuperscript{31} Some non-Native Western scholars have expressed hesitance towards romanticizing the connection between Native peoples and the land; however, their work ignores the conditions of the extractive zone and the logic of elimination aimed towards Indigenous peoples that have shaped these spaces as “colonial contact zones.”\textsuperscript{32}

Another way of understanding the need for Indigenous voices in environmental discourses is looking to the origin stories of the people on the land. For white settlers, the story is marked by genocide, extraction, and fundamentally altering the conditions for survival. On the other hand, ecologist and enrolled Potawatomi member, Robin Wall Kimmerer tells the origin story of her tribe in the introduction of her book \textit{Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants}. The book opens with the story of Skywoman Falling, the Potawatomi oral tradition that recounts the creation of the world, known to them as Turtle Island.\textsuperscript{33} This origin story connects the people to the land, the animals, and the plants with whom they coexist. Kimmerer explains how the story of Skywoman is intimately related to her own career as an ecologist and botanist but chooses to make this connection through the lens of the students in her class – consisting mostly of

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\textsuperscript{30} Winona LaDuke, \textit{All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life}. (Cambridge, South End Press, 1999), 17.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 1.
\textsuperscript{32} Jon Beasley-Murray, \textit{Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America}. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Gómez-Barris, xix.
\end{flushleft}
white settlers. She explains that on a survey she gave to third-year environmental-protection majors, the median response to a question regarding “positive interactions between people and land [...] was ‘none.’”\(^3\) This disconnect is symbolic of the way so called “climate capitalists” are attempting to solve the environmental crisis. By levying taxes and creating financial incentives to consume less rather than looking at how we can better care for both human and other than human relations, those who are allegedly saving the planet avoid addressing the root problem of capitalism. Finally, Kimmerer proceeds to compare the Skywoman origin story to the Christian origin story of Eve in the Garden of Eden. She writes, “same species, same earth, different stories [...] One story leads to the generous embrace of the living world, the other to banishment.”\(^3\) The choice to include her students’ response to the question of positive interactions between land and people in her book is indicative of Kimmerer’s understanding of where Western society stands today and the task she has undertaken in this book to show that there is the possibility for a harmonious relationship with our other-than-human relatives.

In this current moment of reckoning, where many scholars and concerned global citizens believe that we need a new Enlightenment that casts humans as a single “universal,” Indigenous groups in the Américas have been using radical organizing techniques in order to seek justice for their people. In doing so, they have brought to the fore an intrinsic truth about the way U. S. imperialism and its hegemonic colonial and capitalist mindset has impacted our collective ability to survive. Diverging the conversation away from a “climate capitalist” perspective that

\(^3\) Ibid, 6.  
\(^3\) Ibid, 7.
argues for carbon taxes and technological solutions towards a view that prioritizes Indigenous liberation reveals a litany of power structures that must be dismantled in order to remake a just world based on dignity and respect.

In following this line of thinking, we must return to the titular question posed by post-colonial scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her 1988 essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. In her assessment at the time, the answer was no, “The subaltern cannot speak.” She argues that because Western knowledge production was inherently tied to the project of Western capitalism and colonialism – and articulated in the hegemonic language of such – its subject position in study of the “other” gave the subaltern no voice. Through prioritizing the submerged perspective of those who have felt the effects of Western capitalism and colonialism, the Bolivian *ayllu* activists, the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, and The Red Nation can not only speak, but can and have acted in ways that sound louder than what the Western voice says from the subject position. These groups have fought against genocide, legal policy and countless other obstacles in order to remain on their ancestral lands and resist the destructive forces that only now – once they are impacting settler society – have been acknowledged as threatening.

**Chapter Outline**

The first chapter of this thesis offers a counter-statist history of Bolivia from the submerged perspective of the majority Indigenous population. This history charts

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37 Ibid.
the ongoing forms of violence and oppression that Quechua and Aymara people have faced, but also highlights the resistance, primarily based around the basic Andean social unit of the *ayllu*, that has made Bolivia a hub for anti-state activism. The chapter, moreover, explores the role of the community in creating non-state power, and how resurrecting Indigenous history into the realm of academia can mobilize change. The second chapter considers the Chochenyo and Karkin Ohlone Sogorea Te’ Land Trust in California’s East Bay to show how, even in settler colonial societies with eliminatory agendas, Indigenous groups are able to mount strategic bids for land reclamation and permanence, as well as opening dialogues about decolonized futurities. This chapter will address the novel ways of organizing within the capitalist settler state that are being employed to expose gaps in the system and create more room for change. Additionally, it will seek to explore what an inclusive language of community means on occupied land and what role settlers can play in assisting the larger project of healing. The third and final chapter focuses on Albuquerque, New Mexico based organization, The Red Nation, that in responding to the material struggle of relatives in the Southwest as well as to the environmentally-driven events of Standing Rock, has mobilized queer Indigenous feminist ethics through a democratic centralist structure to fight for pan-Indigenous liberation, the end to capitalism, and the abolition of colonialism. This chapter explores the combined potential of Indigenous politics and Marxist principles of organizing to create fertile ground for revolution and the creation of a world without fear.

One way of understanding the goal of this project is well summarized in a quote used by many Aboriginal activist groups in Australia: “If you have come to
help me you are wasting your time. If you have come because your Liberation is bound together with mine, let us walk together.”

In fights for Indigenous liberation, which is at the core of each of these case studies, there is often a rhetoric of universal emancipation and healing. It may be difficult for someone in the subject position of a settler in a highly competitive capitalist society to understand, but the systems that have explicitly targeted Indigenous and other racialized bodies in the pursuit of wealth are not set up to support us all. Only the select few reap the immense reward of what is otherwise a system that entraps us as workers and producers and does not treat us as humans. Indigenous people around the world who have been exploited for their land and labor have felt these realities since the onset of colonial interaction, but they also understand that it is not just their liberation that is at stake. In order to create a new world, we must begin to understand that the stakes are extremely high for all of us. Following in the footsteps of those who have felt the most impact and have been developing means of resistance against the systems that perpetuate violence against humans and non-humans alike is the first step.

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38 Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s.
Indigenous Resistance in Bolivia

Revolution helps give birth to the new world, but it does not create it. This new world already exists in a certain stage of development and that is why, in order to continue growing, it needs to be delivered by an act of force: the revolution. I feel that what is happening within the social movements is the formation of “another world,” one that is not only new but also different from the present one, based on a different logic of construction.¹

Raúl Zibechi, *Dispersing Power*

Introduction

The first Indigenous President of Bolivia, Evo Morales, hosted the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba in April 2010. This conference was advertised as a response to the 2009 UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, lambasting neoliberal capitalism as the enemy of nature, and was attended by tens of thousands of activists from the submerged Américas.² This was a landmark moment for ecosocialism and the visibility of Indigenous resistance to imperialist extraction on a global scale, but upon closer examination, reveals a hypocrisy that indicts the centralized power of the state.

Morales, a Quechua cocalero based in the Chapare region of central Bolivia, gained popular support in the 1990s campaigning on the basis of defending the Indigenous right to their sacred coca, multiculturalism, and Indigenous liberation through democracy. According to one scholar, “Morales swiftly moves from identifying himself specifically with the ‘Quechuas and Aymara’s,’ then more broadly with ‘Indigenous people’ and finally with the Bolivian people more

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generally.” Similarly, his politics would shift from the radical organizing that he employed in the Chapare during his cocalero days, to liberal progressive politics that continued to engage with transnational corporations in large-scale extraction projects. Morales emerged as the victor in the 2006 Presidential election against Jorge Quiroga, but as his tenure in office progressed, his “revolutionary” agenda wrought minimal change to the neoliberal agenda of the mestizo presidents who came before. Under the guise of transforming racial politics and achieving Indigenous liberation, Morales gained popular support amongst the left, but quietly maintained – and in some cases accelerated – exports on the basis of hydrocarbons and mineral extraction to show economic growth. Through this framework, Morales is an example of a leftist state leader who rose to power after a revolutionary epoch by promising anticapitalist and environmentally responsible reform. In reality he has largely maintained the status quo.

This chapter historicizes state dominance over the Indigenous majority in Bolivia and analyzes the ways the traditional Andean social unit of the ayllu has been mobilized as a force of resistance against the state. The consolidated power of the state must necessarily be disrupted in order to truly achieve Indigenous liberation and transform social structures into those that maintain a harmonious and sustainable relationship with the environment. This story, however, begins with a place.

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4 Webber, 232.
The modern nation state of Bolivia is landlocked in the center of South America, encompassing a large swathe of the Andes mountains, arid salt flats in Uyuni, and the dense Yungas jungles. The capital city, La Paz, serves as a microcosm of a larger division within the country. La Paz is at almost 12,000 feet – the highest capital city in the world. The basin-like shape of La Paz divides the wealthy elites, often mestizaje and non-Indigenous peoples, from the Indigenous masses who populate the adjacent city El Alto. As the name suggests, El Alto rises another 1,500 feet from the bustling streets of downtown La Paz and has come to represent the division between the historical ruling class, and the Indigenous majority in Bolivia.⁵

While Bolivia shares some similarities to the cases of colonialism in other parts of the Américas, it stands apart because Quechua, Aymara, and other Indigenous Andean people have maintained a majority population within the nation-state, comprising approximately 60 percent of the country’s 11 million inhabitants.⁶ This Indigenous majority has created political and social possibilities that are distinct from those in a place like the U.S. where the settler colonial logic of elimination has led to a greatly reduced number of Indigenous people on their ancestral homelands. The most well-documented outcome of this Indigenous majority was the rapid rise of the Indigenous-led political party, the Movimiento al Socialismo and the eventual election of Morales, but this chapter is specifically interested in the ways that this oppressed majority group has continuously resisted forces of colonialism and imperialism and fought to create non-state power. Aymara lifeways that are centered

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⁵ The altitude being the main factor in banishing the Indigenous population to the upper rim.
around *ayllus* (the Aymara word for commune) and the practicing the principle of *ayni* (Aymara word for reciprocity, meaning “today for you, tomorrow for me”) with one another and most importantly with *Pachamama* (Andean Earth Mother), make this a case study of both organized resistance to hegemonic power structures and of imagining lifeways outside the confines of colonized minds and global capitalism.

Western scholars have largely disregarded *ayllu* as a modern political entity. This chapter, in a sense, offers an intervention, arguing for the importance of academic inquiry into the *ayllu*, particularly as a revolutionary alternative to the state. The *ayllu* model has long been a subject of curiosity and debate by anthropologists and scholars. Ethnographers looking for a “genuine” or “untainted” Indigenous institution held up the *ayllu* as the key to unlock secrets of the past. This was harshly critiqued by writers such as Orin Starn who believed that this interpretation was antiquarian and that people should focus on the lived social and political experiences of the present.7 Similar to the analysis offered by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, Starn believed Andean scholars were romanticizing their subject’s ideology from a privileged standpoint, engaging in a form of “colonialist exoticism.”8 While this assessment may have been necessary at the time, it largely diverted the gaze of anthropologists from concepts such as *ayllu* and *ayni*, shifting the focus to examples of Andean society enmeshed in modernity. Mary Weismanelt urges a re-elevation of the term *ayllu* because of emerging Indigenous voices who have claimed its

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centrality. She writes, “While other anthropologists and historians insist on viewing the Andes through the lens of modernity, Indigenous scholars celebrate an institution they see as premodern in origins and explicitly antimodern in conception.”

Modernity and Bolivia are two words that often come up in the same context, with many referring to the country as a place that is “stuck in the past,” and politicians promising to “bring it into the future.” The ayllu is a through line connecting the ancient, pre-colonial history of the region and its people, and the recent history of rebellions that have brought Bolivia into the conversation of radical leftist politics. Ayllus resist the changes that the hegemonic colonial and capitalist gaze attempts to map onto them, while retaining the organization that they maintained for centuries prior to colonial interaction. As Kichwa politician and intellectual Luis Macas from Ecuador writes, “The llacta – ayllu is also the historical institution that became the basis of Indigenous resistance and a vital component of our identity.”

Unfolding in three sections, this chapter shows how the ayllu and ethics of relationality have been a unit of resistance through the course of Bolivian history and continue to resist state power in radical ways. The first section explores the deep history of the Andean region, beginning with the pre-Columbian societies that have their fingerprints on the basis of the ayllu and have heavily influenced the Indigenous

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9 Ibid, 71.
populations who continue to live in Bolivia. Following this, I will chart a history of
the recurrent layers of imperialism and extractive economies that have capitalized on
the land and bodies of Indigenous people, consolidating power through the state
formation and morphing into the current political moment. In the following section I
will trace the inception of the *indigenismo* movement in South America as both the
ethnogenesis of the *mestizo* as the “working class” Bolivian, a category that is used to
erase the Native, as well as the inspiration point for a generation of Indigenous
activism that holds the *ayllu* as central to their resistance. This will foreground the
work of Indigenous scholars and activists who revived their oral histories and
championed the everyday relationships constituting the social fabric of the *ayllu* as an
alternative to the organization and hierarchical structure of the state. Finally, I will
look at how the *ayllu* was mobilized during the insurrectionary moments of the first
few years of the 21st century proving their ability to threaten state power, topple
governments, and imagine a new world.

Ultimately, the *ayllu* movement is a future-oriented project that is interested in
reviving elements of the past. Similar to other instances of Indigenous activism
through the Américas and the world, these actors are pulling from histories of
colonialism that have enacted violence on both their bodies and the land.
Decolonization from structures of imperialism and capitalism that continue to exist
even in leftist, Indigenous-led governments, means a radical rethinking of everyday
relationships and obligations to formal entities such as the state. These groups are an
example of extreme resiliency but are also a harbinger of the types of revolution that
must be realized in order to liberate humanity from the inevitable fate of continued extraction.

**Tiwanaku to the Bolivian National Revolution**

The present-day Indigenous populations of Bolivia closely associate themselves with the culture and lifeways of their predecessors dating back into the early pre-Columbian era. Marked by high altitude, low oxygen levels and challenging agricultural conditions, the Bolivian altiplano provided the basis for resilient populations and the rise of a religiously and technologically sophisticated Andean society, Tiwanaku.\(^1\) William H. Isbell writes, “Tiwanaku diffused very distinctive material culture that was surely employed far and wide to express a new, international identity, associated with [the] metropole.”\(^2\) Tiwanaku was an empire that left a legacy on the region, but it is not well understood how the society organized power or social stratification, with most scholars believing its diffusion was mostly exhibited through “soft power” and enduring cultural predominance.\(^3\) Tiwanaku is also unique from later state formations that came to exist because it was formed by the people that were local to the area. Despite the eventual collapse of Tiwanaku in 1100 CE, the organization and techniques for survival that were mobilized in this era remain integral to ayllu societies living in the altiplano today.

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Following the decline of Tiwanaku, the Inca empire made the area currently known as Bolivia a part of its mass territorial expansion. Throughout the 15th century the Incas took control of large swathes of Western Bolivia, including the Lake Titicaca Basin and regions of the high Andes.\(^{14}\) Upon the arrival of the Incas, the large populations of Quechua, Aymara and other Native tribes who had been organized around *ayllus* were faced with the first foreign – but importantly non-Western – empire and began to feel the effects of tribute or taxation, a marker of the state formation. While some, the *yanakuna*, left *ayllus* of their own accord to become servants to (and have the potential for mobility within) the Inca society, many more were forcibly moved to engage in large scale labor projects.\(^{15}\) The Inca called this process of removal *mit’a*, or in Quechua *mitma*, which means to “disperse” or “spread,” and is estimated to have impacted about a third of the population under the empire.\(^{16}\) In addition to the extraction of labor, the Incas strategically resettled loyal populations into areas that were more prone to rebellion, hoping to disrupt the strength of the *ayllus* and quell any opposition to their command.\(^{17}\) Furthermore, they employed a strict strategy of identification, which tended to included violent methods of body modification, that distinguished the newly settled populations from the ethnically Inca.\(^{18}\) This helped maintain rigid ethnic striations and consolidated state power. The Inca can be understood as the first instance of colonization in the Andean


\(^{15}\) Kolata, 145.


\(^{17}\) Ibid, 97.

\(^{18}\) Ibid, 236.
region, exhibiting the violence and extractive nature of the state formation and the infringement on the ability for Indigenous self-rule.

Less than 50 years after the Inca occupation of modern-day Bolivia and Peru, Spanish conquistadors including Hernando de Luque, Francisco Pizzaro and Diego de Almagro “discovered” the region for themselves and began the bloody conquest of the Incas and colonization of the land and its people. During this time, many of the yanakuna declared themselves “friends of the Spaniards” and left the Inca in favor of helping the Spanish overthrow the empire. Invading from the Western coast of Peru, Pizzaro was able to capture the Inca capital of Cuzco by 1533, just nine years after his first arrival.¹⁹ The sixteenth century was marked by constant challenges of authority between the Incas and the Spanish as well as internal conflicts on either side. By 1548, the Spanish had established La Paz as an important commercial trading center for their expanding empire.²⁰ All the while, the invaders took an immense toll on the local Indigenous peoples, who suffered drastic population losses due to disease and the effects of de facto slavery.

Consistent with the interests of the Inca empire, the extraction of precious materials organized the Spanish occupation of Bolivia.²¹ In a recurrent trend

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²¹ The Spanish interaction with the Native populations took shape primarily through the encomienda system, a labor tribute economy first employed by Spain in the Muslim world, awarding land grants to Spanish conquerors that included the right to the labor of the people who lived there. The system was used to legitimize outright slavery. Queen Isabella had claimed Native Americans to be subjects of the crown in 1501, but through the encomienda the Spanish were able to maintain the Indigenous populations as a source of labor. See James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Early Latin America: a History of Colonial Spanish America & Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). This has been theorized by Andrés Reséndez as “The Other Slavery,” often overlooked in historical discourses of the New World by comparison to the African slave trade. Even after the Spanish throne officially outlawed the encomienda system, the New World conquerors and their descendants continued to enslave Native populations en masse. Reséndez writes that, “one of the most revealing aspects of the other slavery is that since it had no legal basis, it was never formally abolished like
throughout the colonization and capitalization of Latin America, the bodies of Indigenous peoples were forced to engage in violent and dangerous methods to mine silver, gold, copper, and tin from their sacred mountains. This sets the Spanish context of colonization apart from settler colonialism in North America because it was not a land-based project that was organized around a logic of erasure. The Spaniards set up the *encomienda* system precisely with the goal of producing wealth from the labor of the Native populations and the resources of the land.

One such example was the constant mining of the silver mountain at Potosi, known in Quechua as *Sumaq Urqu* (roughly translated as “beautiful mountain”), and by the Spaniards as *Cerro Rico* (“rich mountain”). The mining at Potosi was almost exclusively done by the Indigenous populations because of their superior techniques, and in the mid 1500s many of these miners were *yanakunas* who had defected or lost their position with the Incas. With the arrival of Viceroy Francisco de Toledo, the mita was established, moving Indigenous workers to Potosi to harness the effectiveness of the *encomienda* system and check the power of the *encomenderos*, in many ways imitating the Incan *mit’a*. In the over 100 year history of the mita system

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22 Dennis Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, "Born with a 'Silver Spoon': The Origin of World Trade in 1571" in *Journal of World History*. (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 204.
in Potosí, the Spanish crown moved hundreds of thousands of *ayllu indios* to work the mines in order to raise their communities’ tribute.\(^{25}\) Despite the instructions from King Philip II including the words, “these are not to be forced or compelled,” the system was strictly enforced and ended up killing large numbers of the workers, leaving the rest indebted and removed from their home territories and *ayllus*.\(^{26}\)

While some Indigenous people chose to break with their traditions and attempted to join the developing economy of riches, many were rebellious against the abusive state power. Indigenous peasants had in fact begun organized fights for decolonization (distinct from independence) as early as 1730, aiming to dismantle the hierarchical government and liberate their traditional institutions such as the *ayllu*.\(^{27}\) Tupac Katari is perhaps the best known leader of these such insurrections, successfully seizing the region of Larecaja, east of Lake Titicaca, and leading a six-month assault on La Paz between March and October of 1781.\(^{28}\) These rebellions are the legacy of true fights for decolonization that the *ayllu* activists of the 20th and 21st centuries channel in their resistance to the neoliberal nationalist governments. Unfortunately, these events are often written out of the dominant histories of Bolivia and South America at large, leaving the hegemonic European voice to fill in the gaps.

In addition to the introduction of the *encomienda* and the acceleration of resource extraction, the period of Spanish colonization also provided the foundations for the complex constructions of race that persist in modern Bolivia and throughout

\(^{25}\) Ibid.  
\(^{26}\) Ibid, 30.  
\(^{28}\) Klein, 76.
Latin America. Race came to be defined not only by phenotypic traits but also by birthplace and socio-economic standing. Generations of Europeans in the Américas created a divide in social classes between those born in the New World and those who were born in Europe, producing the *criollo* class of those who maintained near “pure” Spanish ancestry though born in the New World.\(^{29}\) The origins of the *mestizo* class (or the *mestizaje*), those of mixed Indian and European ancestry, can also be traced to this era.\(^{30}\) Lastly, the lowest tier in the racial hierarchy was the *indio*, Indigenous masses – largely rural peasants – which included the Quechua and Aymara ethnic groups.\(^{31}\)

Exemplified by the commercialization of their bodies and labor in the *encomienda* system, the *indios*, distinct because of their lack of Spanish “blood,” were subordinate to all others. Nonetheless, all of these newly formed classes remained beneath the *peninsulares*, the ruling class of Spaniards who directly represented the King.

As the colonial interaction proceeded, and the *criollo* and *mestizaje* grew, the tolerance for Spanish rule in the New World began to waver. In the early 19th century, a growing wave of envy amongst the second-tier *criollos*, as well as the dissemination of Enlightenment thought, gave birth to the struggle for Independence in the region known as Charcas or Upper Peru. After decades of war and rebellion, a constitutional congress declared Bolivia (named after the freedom fighter Simon Bolivar) an independent republic in 1825.\(^{32}\)

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\(^{31}\) Ibid.

independence in the Américas, the formation of the Republic of Bolivia nominally ended Spanish colonization, but Native people remained colonized by the newly-declared rulers of Bolivia, the criollo and mestizaje. To this end, Indigenous people were excluded from the citizenry of the new republic and continued to face the same racism and exploitation at the hands of the nation-state’s government as they did during colonial governance.

The rest of the 19th century and early 20th century saw the legacy of Bolivia crystalize in the context of Latin America. The republic had many political parties come into and surrender power as battles with neighboring countries facilitated the loss of nearly half of the land claimed at the point of independence. The worst of these defeats came at the hands of Chile in 1883 during the War of the Pacific. Bolivia lost access to the Pacific seacoast and large swathes of saltpeter deposits in the Atacama region.33 Meanwhile, the Indigenous majority remained consigned to the lowest tier of society, formally excluded from colonial politics and purely relegated to the extractive zone as cheap labor. As such, they were maintained as the labor force for much of the mining operations that provided the luxurious life of the white and mestizo ruling class.34 The loss of land and life during the Chaco War (1932-1935) against Paraguay punctuated the growing discontent of the Indigenous underclass and set the stage for revolution.

The Bolivian National Revolution in 1952 was the beginning of Bolivia’s modern history and included the first attempts to incorporate Quechua and Aymara peoples into the realm of national politics, but at the same time attempted to recast the

33 Duonghi, 148.
34 Webber, 17.
Indigenous population through the nationalist framework, as Bolivians, distinct from their *ayllus* and tribal affiliations. The *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR) set forth a nationalist agenda that introduced nationalization of resources, agrarian reform, rural education and universal adult suffrage.\(^35\) While the quality of life improved from the prior regime, the revolution was grounded on nationalist ideals that never truly embraced the traditional lifeways of Indigenous peasants and, in fact, assaulted their modes of self-governance. This is best exemplified by the unions formed in response to the sweeping land reform. The 1952 revolution facilitated the removal of the legal category of Indian replacing it with the term *campesino*, meaning country farmer, and in turn manipulated the union system to avoid engaging with the use and customs of Indigenous communities. As Victoria Bomberry writes, “the union system was yet another assault on Indigenous rights that ran counter to the long-term struggles of Indigenous peoples for self-determination and their own forms of government.”\(^36\) The revolutionary nationalism that was espoused by the MNR was a step forwards in the discourse of rights for Indigenous people but maintained the state formation and thus made no attempt at decolonization. By 1964, the MNR was overthrown by a military junta and sent Bolivia into 20 years of disarray controlled by various military regimes. This fragile time resulted in a country more divided than ever, with the *mestizo* elites seeking a privatized market that could help them capitalize on their supplies of hydrocarbons, while the Indigenous majority became

\(^{35}\) Ibid, 18.

more disgruntled and more organized – and determined – to resist the oppression of U.S. imperialism and the state.

**Indigenismo, Native History, and the Resurgence of Radical Organizing**

The academic understanding of the word “Indigenous” has its roots in a primordial belonging to place, but in the context of Bolivia – and Latin America more generally – the word has various meanings and connotations. First, it is essential to make the distinction between Indigenous and *indigenismo*. The term Indigenous is largely a part of modern political rhetoric pertaining to a type of identity. *Indigenismo*, however, refers to an early 19th century movement led by an emergent mixed-race class or *mestizaje* towards reclaiming an Indigenous past. This distinction is important because *indigenismo*, often misinterpreted by both Spanish and non-Spanish speakers alike, fails to recognize contemporary Indigenous people. In fact, Canessa and other scholars argue that the *indigenismo* movement “was an essential aspect of the ideology of national ethnogenesis, the creation of a new national identity based on the *mestizo*.” This ethnogenesis facilitated the creation of an urban Spanish-speaking middle class that glorified Indigenous culture “as folklore rather than contemporary culture,” while those who truly embodied an Indigenous identity were made to form the rural proletariat. *Indigenismo*, as much as it sounds

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38 Canessa, 242-243.
39 Ibid.
like Indigenous, actually supported the erasure of a truly Native identity in favor of a mestizo one.

Despite its being championed by a mestizo middle class that romanticized the lives of rural Indigenous peasant farmers, and ironically erased their identity, the writing that emerged from the indigenismo movement also catalyzed a generation of young Indigenous intellectuals who emphasized and recentered the importance of the ayllu and ayni. The leading writers of the movement, such as Luis Valcárcel and José Carlos Mariátegui, wrote vivid evocations of ancient Andean people – and present-day rural communes – living in harmony with each other, water, the mountains, and the Earth: the ayllu as it could be and should be.\(^{40}\) Weismantel notes that “Mariátegui explicitly posited indigenismo in contrast to ‘criollo’ literatures that borrowed images of Indians to provide folkloric color and to revel in the image of a pleasantly colonial past in which the subaltern races did not pose a threat to white supremacy – what Renato Rosaldo would later refer to as ‘imperialist nostalgia.’”\(^{41}\) While this may sound like a defense for a questionable attempt at anti-racist literature from a mestizo, rather than a truly Indigenous perspective, the reclamation of indigenismo literature by Indigenous scholars seems to be a harbinger of the anti-state social movements. In contrast with the comparison made by Starn with Said’s Orientalism, a purely colonial depiction of the “other,” indigenismo can perhaps better be understood as the “literatures produced by young postcolonial states as they struggled with the internal colonialism that still plagues them.”\(^{42}\) For Indigenous Bolivian activists and

\(^{40}\) Weismantel, 77
\(^{41}\) Ibid, 79.
\(^{42}\) Ibid, 78-79.
intellectuals devoted to the struggle for liberation, the *indigenismo* movement provided inspiration for a renewed belief in the *ayllu* as the basis for radical organizing, resistance, and ultimately decolonization.

One of these such groups, the Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA; The Andean Oral History Workshop) is a leader in such discourses. The work of THOA began as a project of unearthing submerged Indigenous history and subjectivity throughout the colonial interaction. With many members being among the first generation to get mandatory primary education in their rural home communities, they were able to obtain bachelor’s and master’s degrees at universities in La Paz and Quito. With this training and access to archival knowledge, THOA members pieced together the ongoing Indigenous struggle to maintain the *ayllu* in rural communities and created a written history from the Native perspective. In line with the methods of erasure facilitated during the nationalist period, THOA came to the conclusion that “Native historical memory was fundamental to Indigenous resistance to intensifying efforts by the radicalized working class to assimilate Indians as *campesinos* and by the MNR [after 1952] to transform Indians into acculturated *mestizos*. The ethnogenesis of the *mestizo* engendered the possibility for an inclusive taxonomy that could erase the Native and their contingent threat to the state formation altogether. To resist this, THOA linked historical events that had been “traditionally identified by

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44 Ibid, 105.
45 Ibid.
criollo historiography as isolated and irrational rebellions” to a unified struggle across time and space in the Andes.  

As THOA’s work progressed and evolved into fieldwork in the ayllus, they became politically engaged themselves after consistent requests from the communities they were working with. THOA members María Eugenia Choque and Carlos Mamani recount the 20-year history of the organization, describing their evolution from scholarly interventions attempting to decolonize Indian history to “an activism based on the revitalization of an Indigenous form of sociopolitical organization – the ayllu.” The return to the ayllu was a step away from the forms of political organization that had existed since the Bolivian National Revolution of 1952, and was much more effective. Ayllu activism successfully staged mass mobilizations that toppled Presidential rules and fertilized conditions for Indigenous political actors, such as Evo Morales and Felipe Quispe – popularly known as El Mallku, the figurehead of the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP) – to gain legitimate power and recognition. In support of this theory, Choque and Mamani argue that the ayllu movement derived potency precisely from its grappling with the long history of erosion and adaptations that Native communities have faced, resulting in their commitment to survival and transcendence. As Indigenous intellectuals, these theorists reframe the ayllu from its place in scholarship. Previously, disregarded as a

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48 Zibechi, 51. El Mallku translates to “the Condor” in Quechua, but roughly means “prince” or “leader.”
49 Choque and Mamani, 221.
commodified romanticization of Indigenous past lives, the *ayllu* has been central to motivating a generation of activism, literally organizing and defending Indigenous lifeways.

**Cochabamba Water Wars, Red October, and Striving to Build a New World**

As the work of THOA and other Indigenous historians has proven, the *ayllus* have always been active in countering state dominance in order to maintain autonomy. That said, during the end of the 20th century through the turn of the 21st, Bolivia erupted with large scale Indigenous social movements that diverted the course of the nation’s history and communicated the revolutionary potential of the *ayllu* to the mainstream. The first mass demonstration of this insurrectionary cycle is often perceived as the 1991 March for Territory and Dignity. Organized by the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples, this march saw hundreds of peasant farmers peacefully walk from Trinidad, in the Province of Beni, to La Paz with clear demands to end the invasion and exploitation of their lands.\(^{50}\) Consistent with other Latin American movements of resistance – poor Native peoples fighting to protect their lands and confront the neoliberal governments – the march gained international attention and caused the government to quickly pass policies that satisfied the protesters demands.\(^{51}\) Just 10 years later, during the presidency of former military general Hugo Banzer, the revolutionary moment blossomed and the Indigenous

\(^{50}\) Klein, 261.

\(^{51}\) Canessa, 247.
majority mobilized into a powerful force that would topple the presidencies of Hugo Banzer, Jorge Quiroga, and eventually Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada.\textsuperscript{52}

The Cochabamba Water War that started at the turn of the millennium is often regarded as the initiation of “the moment of rupture” in Bolivia.\textsuperscript{53} In response to the privatization of Cochabamba’s water supply, tens of thousands of protestors gathered in the streets to denounce the boost in water prices and the larger systemic oppression of neoliberalism, particularly the injustices caused by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.\textsuperscript{54} By April, the activist group, La Coordinadora organized roadblocks and occupations through communal assemblages that set the Water War in motion. This protest enabled the group to “recover” the municipal water company, SEMPA, and begin community discussions about how water, the resource for life, could be more fairly managed.\textsuperscript{55} The success of the mobilization was marked not by gaining recognition to “redefine the relationship with the state,” but in actually creating a means of “breaking the relationship” in order to allow public decisions to be made through other means.\textsuperscript{56} This is the emancipatory potential of ayllu activism. As both a mobilizing strategy for disrupting the everyday normalcy of state dominance and an internal philosophy of community and responsibility to everyday relationships, this form of activism dispels the need for the state altogether.

\textsuperscript{55} Gutiérrez Aguilar, 16-17.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 18.
After the Water Wars, the most notable, or crescendo, of these social movements was Red October in 2003. Activating an already elaborate network of *ayllus* in El Alto and beyond put the world on notice to the emancipatory potential of the “community machine.”\(^{57}\) The Indigenous *ayllu* activists in El Alto proved an ability to resist the state on military, political, and economic grounds, showing that their traditional – but not antiquated – means of social organization could overcome the consolidated power of the state, and provide a valid alternative. The organization the *ayllus* employed in El Alto during October 2003 showcased some of the basic tenets of Aymaran lifeways in a modern context, drawing them out of deep anthropological discourses of an Indigenous past, and into the present-day radical fights for liberation. Raúl Zibechi writes, “For ten or twelve days in October 2003, residents of El Alto, organized through neighborhood councils and other means, operated as a neighborhood government that supplanted the delegitimized and absent state.”\(^{58}\) This radical organization occurred rapidly and often “without the need for compulsory agreements.” People stepped up to take shifts and rotated in leadership roles, similar to the way *ayllus* had operated in the highlands before and during colonial contact.\(^{59}\) This ability to organize so rapidly and extensively occurred because of the nexus of already existent communities, those based on everyday relationships. These are the connections between neighbors, friends, and relatives – not the obligation to the party, the union or the state.\(^{60}\) The hegemonic understanding

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\(^{57}\) Zibechi, 48.

\(^{58}\) Ibid, 13.

\(^{59}\) Ibid, 16.

\(^{60}\) Ibid, 15.
of organization is that it must be both institutionalized and hierarchical. This is the legacy of colonial order, creating visible and clearly identifiable markings of power.\(^{61}\)

The Western view is held hostage by the institutions that perpetuate its modes of extraction and concentrated accumulation of wealth. Building on the foundational, often invisible, quotidian relationships facilitates a horizontal logic to resistance. The Aymara concept of representation and leadership is not democratic (at least in terms of election). It is based around the concept “to lead by obeying.” The governance is defined by Félix Patzi as “authoritarianism based in consensus,” maintained by the need for equitable access to resources – land, water, food – and effectively denying the concentration of power to anybody besides entire communal assemblages.\(^{62}\) By communally organizing around the resources that are necessary for survival, this model is both equitable and sustainable, radically different than an extractive view focused on profit margins which can leave people with no means of survival.

Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, a founding member of the Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army (EGTK), follows in the legacy of THOA, but as an activist turned academic. She was on the ground during the Water Wars and has written extensively on the activation of the *ayllu* network, specifically the roadblocks in La Paz during the most notable event of the revolutionary period, Red October. She writes,

> During these uprisings, we witnessed the increasing presence of the ancestral community’s deepest strength, which is generally hidden because it corresponds to the subaltern pole, silenced and obscured due to the colonial relationship of exploitation and domination underlying Bolivia’s political, economic, and social structure. It was a striking display of tremendous Aymara community strength that is usually just

\(^{61}\) Ibid, 13-14.

\(^{62}\) Félix Patzi, *Sistema comunal, una propuesta alternativa al sistema liberal* (La Paz: CEA, 2004), 171.
sensed in everyday rural village life, in the ayllus and markas in La Paz’s altiplano.63

This is the firsthand account of an activist from Mexico who went down to Bolivia to join the revolutionary moment because of her belief in the “subaltern” strength and her recognition of the abusive nature of state domination. Her revolutionary agenda has been transferred across space and time to the pages of a book published by a notable university press to elevate ayllu activism to a place of scholarship. Returning briefly to the way the ayllu has been acknowledged by Western scholars canonically, it is easy to see how the tide is shifting from a world firmly entrenched in U.S. imperialism to a world more interested in salvation.

The ayllu has always been an institution of Andean society and has recently been elevated by Indigenous activists, leaders, and international academics as the fundamental organizing principle for resistance against the state formation. Resistance, however, is probably not the most accurate word. The ayllu movement does not simply strive to maintain a status quo – especially when that status quo is based on constant occupations by imperial and extractive forces that threaten exploitation and eradication – it strives to create a new world.

Conclusion

As discussed in the intro, “a wholly new trajectory began on January 22nd, 2006, which presented an unprecedented challenge to Bolivian social movements.”64 Jeffery R. Webber argues that while the “left-Indigenous insurrectionary period

63 Gutiérrez Aguilar, 29.
64 Zibechi, 4.
between 2000-2005 did indeed amount to a revolutionary epoch...its main protagonists have not yet achieved a social revolution.” He goes on to say that the elections of 2006 saw the “common turn toward a dampening of revolutionary possibilities and social movements demobilized as a moderate political party came into office.” These events remain consistent with Gayatri Spivak's theory that regarding the state formation, there is no endpoint to post-coloniality because it is continually deferred; the traces of which remain vital to the consolidation and implementation of power but also within the subconscious of those engaged in decolonization.65 Furthermore, Patrick Wolfe’s theory of settler colonialism, while not entirely applicable to the Latin American or Bolivian context, argues that the colonial state is impervious to regime change.66 The potential for transforming social structures in Bolivia with the goal of Indigenous liberation is intrinsically tied to disrupting the consolidated power of the state. As El Mallku outlined in his 1988 manifesto Tupac Katari vive y vuelve, cajaro! – and this chapter attempted to communicate – there is an alternative and subordinated view of history in which the ayllu has been an organized unit under strategic attack by empire, imperialists, colonizers and capitalists.67 Moreover, Quispe and his colleagues – including Gutiérrez – “systematically expressed, clarified, disseminated, and defended” the mission to create “ayllu socialism...guaranteeing self-determination for Indigenous nations of primarily Aymara and Quechua origin.”68 In response to their concise articulations for the end of the state and its neoliberal logic of order, Quispe,

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65 Bomberry, 1792; Spivak.
66 Wolfe, 402.
67 Gutiérrez, 38.
68 Ibid.
Gutiérrez, and many other EGTK members were imprisoned from 1992-1997.69 The success of renewed *ayllu* organizing and mass mobilizations such as the Cochabamba Water Wars and Red October have driven a massive fissure through the strength of the Bolivian state. By showing alternative means of responsibility and care for humans and non-humans, and emphasizing historical and systemic injustices that ring true for Indigenous and otherwise subaltern groups globally, Quechua and Aymara *ayllus* have illuminated the potential for creating a more reciprocal, equitable, and sustainable world.

While this chapter sought to show that the *ayllu*, and principles such as *ayni*, are central to visions of a non-state, decolonized futurity, simply using the language or holding up the idea without the actions – as Morales often has – is not enough. Bloomberg News recently reported on the discovery of a massive lithium (the mineral needed for electric car batteries) deposit beneath the Uyuni salt flats.70 Morales intends to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on a mine and a plant to process the mineral within the country to insure Bolivia are a player in the global energy economy.71 Climate capitalists in America and Europe regard this move as one of the only possible steps forward for an impoverished country. Looking beyond the ongoing activism and internal conflict in Bolivia to another site of colonialism, the San Francisco Bay Area in the United States, further demonstrates that continued privatization and global extraction is not viable for the future. The Bay Area is the

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69 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
home to Tesla, Elon Musk’s nearly $50 billion electric car company and potentially the largest customer for Bolivia’s lithium market. However, at the same time, there is an ongoing struggle in the Bay Area for long overdue Indigenous recognition and a belief amongst many that these industries looking for technological solutions to the climate crisis are simply clinging to a system that is showing signs of failure. The following chapter will look at the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, the first urban Indigenous women-led land trust. Through a different avenue than the revolutionary ayllu activists in Bolivia – but with a very similar agenda – the Land Trust opposes the capitalist view of climate change, finding radical ways to work within the liberal state formation to reclaim Indigenous lands and begin the process of communal healing.
The Sogorea Te’ Land Trust

Land-based politics grounded in a sustained and nurturing relationship with the natural world and in protecting nature is a means of protecting ourselves. If humanity continues on its trajectory of environmental degradation, the destruction of countless animal species, including our own, is inevitable.¹

Zoe Samudzi and William C. Anderson, As Black As Resistance

Introduction

Due north on the crowded I-680 from the wealthy suburban town of Walnut Creek, across the Carquinez Strait, in the northern region of California’s Bay Area, lays Glen Cove. This is the settler name for the last section of undeveloped land on the peninsula of Vallejo, which is known in Karkin Ohlone, the language of the Ohlone people, as Sogorea Te’. Sogorea Te’ is a sacred burial ground and gathering site in use by the Ohlone and other tribes since 1500 BCE.² Since 1988, the Greater Vallejo Recreation District (GVRD) has planned to build a “full-service” recreational park on the site.³ Part of the plans include the desecration, or “capping,” of two shellmounds – Ohlone burial sites – in the area. This is not the only incident of plans for known shellmounds to be demolished without the consultation of local Indigenous people. In West Berkeley, there was a huge victory for the Ohlone in an ongoing battle in which the City of Berkeley rejected a development application on top of a

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³ Corrina Gould. Interview by Cameron Scott. Phone Interview, Wesleyan University, November 7th, 2018.
sacred shellmound and village site.\textsuperscript{4} This is just one of the most recent iterations of Indigenous resistance in an area where Native erasure has a long history.

In 1998, Corrina Gould (Chochenyo-Karkin Ohlone) and Johnella LaRose (Shoshone Bannock) co-founded the grassroots organizing group Indian People Organizing for Change (IPOC) to resist the injustices of development in the Bay Area.\textsuperscript{5} Their work focuses on protecting the aforementioned shellmounds and sacred Ohlone sites, and illuminating the larger violent history of colonialism in the Bay Area. In 2011, with the City of Vallejo facing bankruptcy, the permits to destroy the sacred site of Sogorea Te’ were given to the Parks District for free.\textsuperscript{6} Continuing the work of Wounded Knee Dale Cassel, who had led the fight to protect the Sogorea Te’ shellmounds since 2000, Gould and LaRose mobilized their network through the IPOC, and joining with a greater community of Native peoples living in California, allies, and accomplices reoccupied the territory.\textsuperscript{7} On April 14th, 2011, the first weekend of the occupation, over 100 people showed up. They would remain at Sogorea Te’, the last 15 acres of open space on the Carquinez Strait, for 109 days until the city understood that the Indigenous protesters would not allow for any more of their sacred sites to be destroyed.\textsuperscript{8} Following this occupation, Gould and LaRose founded the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, self-described as an “urban Indigenous women-led community organization that facilitates the return of Chochenyo and Karkin


\textsuperscript{5} Michelle Steinberg. Beyond Recognition. Directed by Michelle Steinberg, (San Francisco: Underexposed Films, 2014).

\textsuperscript{6} Gould.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
Ohlone lands in the San Francisco Bay Area to Indigenous stewardship,” working through the liberal state formation to mobilize radical politics. \(^9\)

Much like Bolivia, California has a violent colonial history. Clashes between the invaders and the Quechua and Aymara date back to the Inca and the Spanish in the 15th century, though California was not occupied by the Spanish, and subsequently the U.S., until the late 1700s. \(^10\) Once the U.S. appropriated land as an expansion of their settler colony, the Indigenous people held no value, and actually served as an impediment and threat to land usage. In Bolivia, the Spanish never had the intention of creating a new state; thus, Native bodies and their labor were just as important as the land in their extractive project. Using an eliminatory agenda that employed methods such as genocide and forcible removal, as well as legally defining Indigenous people out of existence, many tribes of Indigenous Californians were declared extinct by the settler society. \(^11\) Despite this being a fallacy in many cases, Indigenous peoples in California comprise only approximately 1.5% of the population, with many of these being non-California Native Americans, and Alaskan Natives. \(^12\) This fact alone drastically sets it apart from the Bolivian case. That said, in both cases, there is an Indigenous emphasis on grappling with the violent history, addressing the various systems of capitalism, colonialism, and extractivism, as well as beginning with the land to embark on the process of healing and rebuilding a new society for humans to once again live in harmony with each other and the planet.

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This chapter highlights the work of the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust in the context of the settler colonial and extractive zone of the Bay Area. The first section further contextualizes the Bay Area through the extractive gaze, illustrating how modern-day practices are reflective of California’s history as a site of land expropriation, providing the basis for the specific Ohlone struggle that the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust was founded upon. The second section returns to the work of Gould and LaRose, conveying a first-hand account of the formation of the Land Trust and the showing the novel methods they have employed to reclaim land and open a new dialogue surrounding Indigeneity in the Bay Area. This section will also connect the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust to theories of resistance navigating the small gaps in the U.S. settler colonial project and Indigenous scholarship regarding the concept of stewardship. The final section addresses the importance of communal healing and visions for the future from the perspective of the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, demonstrating what is at stake in the Anthropocene and how Indigenous organizing in Bolivia and California offer some answers to the question of how we can forge a new more equitable and sustainable world. Ultimately, the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust is a radical statement of Indigenous permanence and resistance in a settler colonial state that is hinged on their elimination within a larger dialogue of universal healing through imagining a future where we are once again connected with the land.

**Situating the Bay Through the Extractive View**

With its roughly eight million inhabitants, the Bay Area, is the second most populous region in the most populous state in these United States. The area is
comprised of the peninsula where San Francisco is situated, the North Bay which is bridged to San Francisco by the iconic Golden Gate Bridge, and the East Bay, which is home to the cities of Richmond, Berkeley and Oakland.\textsuperscript{13} Today the area is known for its generally left-leaning politics and the burgeoning tech industry which has jolted the rapid rise in real-estate value and economic growth. Home to software giants such as Google and Facebook, as well as Apple, the world’s first trillion-dollar company, the Bay Area has experienced rampant gentrification extending beyond the city center of San Francisco all across the nine constituent counties. This is a process which increases the capitalistic value of the land and displaces those who had lived there before, disproportionately affecting minority groups.

Gentrification is a late-stage capitalist parallel to the settler colonial logic of elimination that is explicitly mapped onto Indigenous bodies and cultures.\textsuperscript{14} Additionally, the businesses and non-Native residents of the Bay Area see the land as an investment, what can be termed the extractive view, as a place to either embark on their capitalistic ventures, or simply benefit from the pillars of Western society. The mission, and sheer existence, of a group like the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust resists both the settler colonial agenda of land expropriation and elimination of the Native, but also the extractive view of capitalist greed that has not only inhibited Indigenous


people’s ability to care for their land, but ultimately has impacted all of humanity’s ability for continued survival.

In deeper historical colonial discourses, it was only Native peoples that stood in the way of state formation. Wolfe writes, “settler colonialism has both negative and positive dimensions. Negatively, it strives for the dissolution of Native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base—as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event.”15 In the case of settler colonialism, as opposed to the franchise colonialism in Bolivia, the positive and negative binary that Wolfe describes is useful to understanding how the logic of elimination is land-centered and works towards the goal of creating a new society. In the Bolivian case, the Native labor was central to the project of mineral extraction and returning resources to the colonial metropole, while in the U.S. – take the California Gold Rush for example – the profits were to be reaped by the settlers themselves. Furthermore, the important and influential claim that Wolfe asserts is that the “invasion is a structure not an event.” The land could not be owned by settlers if there were Indigenous populations already living there, and thus the ongoing process of eliminating the Native is what constitutes the structure of invasion. While the Spanish invaders clearly had no intention of turning Bolivia into a settler colony, the structure of invasion that is ongoing in the U.S. can be compared to the nationalist era in Bolivia. Much like the boarding school programs in the U.S. that sought to assimilate and “Americanize the Indian,” mestizo ethnogenesis was mobilized as the MNR sought to reframe the Indigenous population as campesinos annulling any primordial

claims to the land.\textsuperscript{16} That said, as history progressed, the populations of those who identify as Indigenous have drastically diverged in both contexts, with Bolivia retaining a majority, and California sitting well under 2%.

In keeping with this comparison, we can turn to the extractive view, and how it relates to both Bolivia and California. Macarena Gómez-Barris theorizes a new analytic for viewing the pervasive domination of Western racial capitalism, colonialism and \textit{extractivism} in the Américas. Her work focuses on the zones of extraction in South America defined by high concentrations of natural resources and biodiversity such as Bolivia. The prevalence of Indigenous peoples in these territories positions them as “obstructions to the expansion of extractive capitalism.”\textsuperscript{17} While her areas of study do not strictly fit into the settler colonial model, I argue that the “logic of elimination” that applies to the settler colonial model in California can also be understood as the “extractive view” of colonizers. She writes,

\begin{quote}
Before the colonial project could prosper, it had to render territories and peoples extractible, and it did so through a matrix of symbolic, physical and representational violence. Therefore, the extractive view sees territories as commodities, rendering land as for the taking, while also devalorizing the hidden worlds that form the nexus of human and nonhuman multiplicity. This viewpoint, similar to the colonial gaze, facilitates the reorganization of territories, populations and plant and animal life into extractible data and natural resources for material and immaterial accumulation.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

The language surrounding Gómez-Barris’ extractive view includes the same temporality as Wolfe’s theory, extending the impact of colonial domination far beyond an initial point of contact. The disruptive nature of extractive capitalism is

\textsuperscript{16} For more on the assimilation and Americanization programs, See Adams, David Wallace. \textit{Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928} (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1997).

\textsuperscript{17} Gómez-Barris, xvii.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 5.
linked to the perpetuation of racial capitalism, and additionally produces new
divisions in “nature and culture through new forms of race, gender, and sexual
exclusions” that can be applied to both cases of franchise and settler colonialism.\textsuperscript{19}
Furthermore, in the interest of counter-hegemonizing, Gómez-Barris attempts to alter
ways of seeing. By examining the visual as both a way of understanding modes of
colonial domination and naming forms of power, as well as the transformative
potential of turning an analytical gaze towards those “submerged and emergent
perspectives within the extractive zone,” it becomes clear how both this dominant
mindset is reproduced, and how to dismantle it.\textsuperscript{20}
In Bolivia, as discussed with the case of Morales, the “submerged”
perspective has sometimes been co-opted and used to sanitize the neo-liberal politics.
In California and the U.S. at large, we can see some of that at play with white
organizers and environmental activists (as will be discussed in greater length in
Chapter 3), but for the most part it is truly difficult to reach the submerged
perspective. For this reason, it is important to recognize the Bay Area, despite being a
part of a developed settler state, as an extractive zone nonetheless. This is most easily
understood from the perspective of the Ohlone.\textsuperscript{21}
While colonialism is relatively new to California as compared to the rest of
the continental United States, a convergence of the rapid acceleration of industry and

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, xvii; For more on racial capitalism, see Cedric J. Robinson and Robin D. G. Kelley, \textit{Black
Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,
2000).
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 3.
\textsuperscript{21} Extractivism and the extractive view have also had an impact on other Native, black, brown, and
Latinx peoples who have been marked as dispensable under the necropolitical power of the United
States. Processes of gentrification and environmental racism have had similarly detrimental effects on
these populations.
the strategic value of Bay Area land had a jarring impact on the Ohlone, and the lands that they had for so long been the stewards of. Generations of colonizers, Franciscan missionaries, Spanish soldiers, Mexican Californios, American miners, and American settlers left their mark on the land and the people.\textsuperscript{22} Ecologist and San Francisco local Kat Anderson writes, “whether they were intent on Christianizing the Indians, extracting wealth from the land, extending territory, or making a livelihood […] [those] who came to California wrought devastation both directly through genocide of Indigenous people – and indirectly – by developing economic enterprises that destroyed and vastly altered ecological systems and made it impossible or increasingly difficult for Indians to continue their traditional livelihoods.”\textsuperscript{23} The desecration of ecological systems differed from time period, ranging from transforming Native burning sites to grazing grounds for European livestock in the Mission period, to altering entire rivers and streams to find the gold that was at the bottom.\textsuperscript{24} Gould, co-founder of the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust and Chochenyo-Karkin Ohlone herself, shares a similar experience of the environmental degradation. She says, “Look at [the current East Bay] and look back at 200 years ago in my home territory […] the water was flowing, there was no hunger and there was no homelessness…everything had enough food to eat.”\textsuperscript{25} The extractive view of colonizers not only informed a logic of elimination towards the Ohlone, but recast the

\textsuperscript{22} Kat Anderson, \textit{Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources}, (Oakland, University of California Press, 2013), 63.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 76, 86.
\textsuperscript{25} Gould.
relationship towards the land to align with the hegemonic goals of extractive capitalism.

Another factor that specifically affected the Ohlone was federal recognition politics. Where other Indigenous tribes in modern-day California remained far enough away from settler society and were under less scrutiny from power actors, the Ohlone’s location posed a strategic threat to the growing Bay Area settler society. Anthropologist Les Field looks at the history of criteria and recognition of Native identity throughout the mid-20th century and indicts anthropological work as a contributing factor in the exclusion of certain tribes from federal recognition. Field gives one particular anthropologist, Alfred Kroeber, special recognition for writing the Ohlone fully out of existence – explicitly using the word “extinct” – in his seminal work *Handbook of the Indians of California.*\(^\text{26}\) Although other anthropologists immediately pushed back against this, the legacy lasted, and while other tribes in California received federal recognition and subsequent reservation lands, the Ohlone did not.\(^\text{27}\) In line with Wolfe’s recognition that race is an organizing grammar of settler colonialism, and is “made in the targeting,” the Ohlone were

\(^{26}\) Les W. Field, *Abalone Tales: Collaborative Explorations of Sovereignty and Identity in Native California,* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2008), 4-5. Kroeber himself also took a step back on this statement when he testified on behalf of Native Californians at the California Claims hearings in 1955. He says, “there is a widespread belief that many Indian groups, especially the smaller ones, have now become extinct … Anthropologists sometimes have gone a step farther, and when they can no longer learn from living informants the speech and modes of life of the ancestors of these informants, they talk of that tribe or group as being extinct—when they mean merely that knowledge of the aboriginal language and culture has become extinct among the survivors. The survivors are there; they may even be full-bloods; racially or biologically the stock is not extinct; but they can no longer help the anthropologist acquire the knowledge about the group that he would like to preserve.” As Leventhal, Field, Alvarez and Cambra note, this comment further proves anthropology’s power to determine a people’s continued existence and the common misconception – and part of a logic of erasure – that assimilation or cultural change in Indigenous peoples nullifies their identity, and makes them non-Native. See Lowell John. Bean, comp., *The Ohlone past and Present: Native Americans of the San Francisco Bay Region* (USA: Ballena Press, 1996).

\(^{27}\) Ibid.
confronted with an exclusive taxonomy with regards to their identity, and legally defined out of existence.\textsuperscript{28} Without a reservation or the limited legal rights afforded by federal recognition, the Ohlone have had the odds stacked against their ability to survive in the rapidly-developing extractive zone of the Bay Area.

\textbf{Navigating the Third Space and Confronting Gendered Power}

The Sogorea Te’ Land Trust proclaims Indigenous permanence in the face of settler colonialism and extractive capitalism. The Land Trust is a new project, a strategic alternative avenue of resistance, from Gould and LaRose, the founders of IPOC. After the successful 109-day occupation of Sogorea Te’ in 2011, Gould received a phone call from her friend, and professor at UC Davis, Beth Rose Middleton, inviting her to a meeting with Native land trusts. At the time she had no idea what a land trust was, but quickly realized that through 501(c)3 status, they themselves could have created the cultural easement that saved the land at Sogorea Te’ rather than relying on a neighboring federally recognized tribe.\textsuperscript{29}

The unique ability of an Indigenous group without federal recognition to use a land trust for strategic bids for permanence falls into what Kevin Bruyneel has described as the “third space of sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{30} His theory argues that U.S.-Indigenous relations, in a political sense, have always been restricted to the imperial

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\textsuperscript{28} Wolfe, 388. Wolfe writes, “Indigenous people obstructed settlers’ access to land, so their increase was counterproductive. In this way, the restrictive racial classification [blood-quantum] of Indians straightforwardly furthered the logic of elimination.”
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
The U.S. is constantly striving in its nation-building project, leaving Indigenous peoples with the best-case scenario of gaining federal recognition and being labelled, “domestic in a foreign sense.” In reality, he argues the resistance of Indigenous political actors exists “across American spatial and temporal boundaries, demanding rights and resources from the liberal democratic settler-state while also challenging the imposition of colonial rule on their lives.” Gould and LaRose have been models for strategically navigating this “third space of sovereignty.” By combining grassroots organizing tactics of IPOC with the political work of the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, they are leveraging openings in the colonial state’s extractive view and using the compassion of settler allies to gain recognition and power where there had formerly been no room.

Of central importance to the mission of the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust is an attentiveness to issues of gendered power and a confrontation of colonial and hegemonic patriarchal structures. As independent scholar Leanne Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) writes, “The gendered nature of colonialism and settler colonialism means heteropatriarchy has to be critically considered in every project we’re currently collectively and individually engaged in. Otherwise we risk replicating it.” In her initial meeting in Southern California with Middleton and representatives from other Native land trusts, Gould was struck by how much of a “boys club” this realm was. She was resolved that the organizational structure and

32 Bruyneel, 220.
33 Ibid, xvii.
35 Gould.
boundary position of a land trust would hold strategic and symbolic value to her and LaRose’s work; however, the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust would first and foremost be an Indigenous women land trust.

Consistent with the decolonial methodologies present in Gómez-Barris’ theorization of the extractive zone and elevating submerged perspectives, the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust enacts a profound female connection to the land through motherhood and fertility. Gould suggests that the devastation of the land has to do with men wielding power over it, and that “whatever happens to land also happens to Indigenous women’s bodies.”

The Land Trust has been a means of reclaiming Indigenous female power over their bodies and feeding that healing energy into “stewarding the land in an Indigenous way.”

That said, they remain firm that their work is expansive in notions of kinship, inclusive of all the women who, moved by the forcible relocation policy of the U.S. government or other factors such as domestic abuse, arrived on Ohlone land. Gould says, “Although it’s on my traditional land and Ohlone territory, it really is open for Indigenous women of all backgrounds to be a part of it [...] in order for us to have healing here for our children and our grandchildren, and then of course for the broader community that lives here on our territory.”

The emphasis on womanhood first is a resistance against their, and their ancestors, lived experience of patriarchal domination throughout the colonial encounter. As Gould, Gómez-Barris, and Simpson maintain, movements towards futurity must fully confront the pervasive structures that are both integral to and

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
perpetuated by the neocolonial and extractivist state. That said, their vision is inclusive of all Native women who have been affected by geo-spatial removal and, ultimately, the whole community that exists on their land.

One novel and successful method that the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust has employed to engage the broader community of the Bay Area and help their project exist within the liberal state is the Shuumi Progressive Land Tax. The Shuumi tax isn’t actually a tax – a fact Gould stresses because taxation is a marker of the nation state. Shuumi translates to “gift” in the Ohlone language, and the model works very much as such. The tax took form as a web platform, launched with the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust website, enabling users to calculate a suggested donation based on the amount of property owned on Ohlone ancestral homelands. Gould sees that tax as “a way of giving back, a way of being a part of this vision, of supporting the Native Folks stewarding their land.” Furthermore, the Land Trust has never made a big point of pushing the tax or making it coercive. That said, Shuumi Taxes now pay for 90% of the Land Trust’s overhead costs, allowing them to circumnavigate other obstructive capitalistic ventures. Gould also sees this model becoming successful for other Indigenous groups throughout the United States. Several groups, including Real Rent Duwamish in Washington State and Native American and Indigenous Studies in New York, have already contacted them about employing a similar template. That said, she recognizes that her homelands happen to be in a progressive enclave and that a Native land tax could “hit or miss depending on where you are in the

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
country.” Gould believes that at the very least, putting the platform out there can begin conversations amongst settlers to reckon with the injustices of the last several centuries.

**Future Visions and Communal Healing**

The central work of the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust is returning lands to Indigenous stewardship thereby creating places where Ohlone traditions can be practiced and the process of healing can begin. After protecting the land at Sogorea Te’, Gould and LaRose received their first parcel of land from an organization called Planting Justice. The directors and founders of Planting Justice, Haleh Zandi and Gavin Raders, came to the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust in August of 2017 after they visited Standing Rock and were advised to “go home and work with the Indigenous people whose land you live on [...] follow their leadership and work with them on the things they wanted to do.” The agreement was to give the Land Trust a quarter acre of land at Planting Justice’s Sobrante Park Rolling River Nursery to steward. However, the process of putting the cultural easement on Planting Justice’s title became difficult as they did not actually hold the title – the land was still under mortgage – and those who did believed that not only would the title change, but the economic value of the land would change as well. In response, Planting Justice decided to pay off their mortgage and turn the entire deed over to the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, establishing a long-term lease agreement for the land they had been using

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43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
for the nursery. In celebration, Gould and LaRose organized a walk in Oakland, from 105th Avenue to 5th Avenue and began work on their first dance arbour on their territory in over 240 years.\textsuperscript{47} With the help of eager accomplices and allies like Planting Justice and Shuumi Tax givers, the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust has begun the process of revitalization, reclaiming land, and rebuilding traditions.

The work of the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust can be viewed as environmental justice that maintains a decolonial approach attentive to the history of extractive capitalism and the categories of race, class, and gender with the prospect for universal healing. First, with the priority placed on land, the Land Trust has begun a radical resurgence that attempts to dismantle the extractive view of the neocolonial state. Operating in “the third space of sovereignty,” they have returned lands to Indigenous stewardship and begun to revive traditions and languages that were moving towards extinction.\textsuperscript{48} This can be framed as uncovering a “submerged perspective” with a goal of ensuring their work can reach the broader society living on Ohlone land.

One way the Land Trust has engaged the wider community is by hosting open work days whereby people from the community help cultivate the land. This effort builds everyday relationships and a community of care that will hopefully supplant the current system that relies on wages and state apparatus to function. Collaborating in this way facilitates conversations and begins the process of healing, while emphasizing, and in many cases learning for the first time, the proper way to treat the land.\textsuperscript{49} The Ohlone practices of relationality and stewardship for the land are very

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\textsuperscript{47} Ib\textsuperscript{id}.
\textsuperscript{48} Bruyneel, 8; Gould.
\textsuperscript{49} Gould.
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similar to the Bolivian *ayllus* in that they strive to maintain equal access to resources and never to take too much. Gould speaks to this in the context of the development in the Bay Area leading to pollution of creeks and waterways that just 200 years ago supplied fresh drinking water and fish, such as red rainbow trout and salmon.\(^{50}\) As the traditional stewards of this land, and as LaRose puts it “the forgotten ones,” the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust has made it their responsibility to tend to the waterways, restoring the flora and species that once lived there. Additionally, since their plot of land at Planting Justice’s nursery is built on a landfill – as is much of the Bay Area – the rising temperatures and subsequent rising sea levels will affect them and their neighbors first.\(^{51}\) Sobrante Park is over 85% Black and Latinx with one of the highest poverty rates of any neighborhood in the Bay Area, so community organizations such as Planting Justice and the Land Trust have made it their responsibility to prepare for the worst. Gould told me that part of their project in building the arbour is “creating a water catchment system so that there's fresh water available to people not just at Sogorea Te’, but also for the people of the neighborhood.”\(^{52}\) She also suggested that they planned to create spaces where there are First Aid kits and healthy food to serve to community members in times of need.\(^{53}\)

Ultimately, beyond the resistance to systemic violence and claiming Indigenous permanence, the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust feels the responsibility of healing this land for everyone who is on it. “For us,” Gould told me, “our traditional belief system is that when people come to your territory you take care of them. It's

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) Ibid.

\(^{52}\) Ibid.

\(^{53}\) Ibid.
your obligation, your responsibility to do that. We're Ohlone people who have not had our spiritual centers for 240 years. It's almost impossible for us to do that unless we get these places built again.’’ The settler colonial model, which has now evolved into an extractive capital model, is so focused on the accumulation of wealth and achieving its set notions of progress – which often entails the destruction of sustainable ecology systems – that, if left unchecked, may very well bring an end to the possibility for any society to live on these lands. “And,” Gould continued, “we're including people that now live in our territory because the healing that will happen to the land, because those prayers and ceremonies come back, will help not only us, it'll help everybody out.”54

The emphasis on healing is explicit throughout all of the work and literature that the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust puts forth. A critique of capitalism, and ultimately the toppling of capitalism, while integral to reckoning with the present and creating the possibility for a future, does not aid in the construction of a new societal paradigm. Gould believes that working together in the community, educating the society on colonial history and Indigenous knowledge, and ultimately simply having conversations and seeing each other as humans again will set forth the real process of healing.55

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54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
Conclusion

The Sogorea Te’ Land Trust is one example of strategic Indigenous resistance in the extractive zone. The Bay Area is a drastically different extractive zone than Bolivia, due to both geographic location and the distinctive histories of colonialism that have unfolded in each case, and has thus informed varied methods of organizing. The Ohlone are working through the state apparatus to reclaim Indigenous lands and push forth radical politics in a place where settlers are beginning to realize the need to listen. On the other hand, ayllu activists of Bolivia have retained a large enough population to mobilize mass-scale social movements demonstrating the possibility for real revolution. That said, both groups are land-based politics and end with a collective vision for the future. They can both be regarded as successful models for discourses surrounding decolonial methodologies in organizing and environmental justice.

In the story Gould told me recounting the Land Trust’s acquisition of land from Planting Justice, the elders at Standing Rock emphasized to Planting Justice’s founders that the most help comes from communicating and working with the Native peoples on whose land you live. For them, that meant returning home to the Bay Area, and listening to the Ohlone. The threats of the extractive view will differ from place to place, but all across the Américas there is a consistent need for healing from the ongoing trauma of colonialism. In imagining a new world, it is often recommended to start in your backyard. The Red Nation in Albuquerque, New Mexico is another group of Indigenous activists who, similar to the previous two

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56 Ibid.
cases, are interested in confronting colonial histories, fighting for Indigenous liberation, and expanding notions of relationality to the natural world. Their work expands on this mission by using a defined organizational structure and set of queer Indigenous feminist ethics to resurrect a Native revolutionary movement in the U.S.
The Red Nation

There was not, and there never had been, a legal government by Europeans anywhere in the Americas. Not by any definition, not even by the Europeans’ own definitions and laws. Because no legal government could be established on stolen land.¹

Leslie Marmon Silko, Almanac of the Dead

Introduction

The tweet pinned to the top of Nick Estes’ Twitter page, published on November 8th, 2016 – the day Donald Trump was elected as the 45th President of the United States of America – reads, “make america not america again.”² A play on Trump’s campaign slogan, Estes’ proclamation substitutes the ambiguous “great,” often understood as the oppressive white hetero-patriarchy and imperial power structure, for a concise negation: “not america.” When the U.S declared independence from Britain, their colonial metropole, the rebels not only sought to usurp Great Britain’s seizure and occupation of Native lands. The treasonous rebels also declared their intention to build a new, more expansive state upon those lands.³ This is the legacy of these United States, a legacy that has been twisted in the imaginaries of generations of settlers who celebrate their “America,” who have been conditioned by the political ideology of liberalism, and believe in concepts such as democracy and capitalism as both a mechanism and justification for the oppression of non-white, non-normative bodies, both domestically and abroad.

The imperialist agenda of Western Europe that intimately entwined the histories of the Américas and Europe since the late 15th century became even more potent as the United States expanded its empire during the 19th century through the present day. So when Nick Estes, Kul Wicasa (a citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe) and a member of the Oceti Sakowin Oyate Nation (the Great Sioux Nation or the Nation of the Seven Council Fires), writes “make america not america again,” he is both making a claim for Indigenous liberation while also calling for the dismantling of the nation state which has occupied his people’s land. In brief, he is demanding the termination of U.S. imperialism and capitalism/colonialism. It is this mission that defines the Albuquerque-based organization, The Red Nation.

Albuquerque is the largest city in New Mexico and shares characteristics with the Bay Area in terms of the legacy of settler colonialism and its current role as an economic hub for the U.S. It is a burgeoning site of development in the technology sector, specifically solar panel production, but it also touts military and nuclear research facilities as two of its largest employers. The city’s demographic makeup is 70% White – with 42% identifying as non-Hispanic – 5% Native American, 5% mixed race and 3% Black. 47% of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latinx of any race. The city’s proximity to the large reservations of the Southwest, such as the Navajo Nation and the Pueblo reservations that surround the city, account for the

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slightly higher percentage of Native Americans than the Bay Area. These reservations also produce a drastically different dynamic with regard to the visibility of Indigenous peoples. More similar to the case of Bolivia in this regard, the Southwest is teeming with Native American imagery. From street murals to tourist brochures, the Indigenous past is a point of emphasis for the city of Albuquerque. That is to say, the current Indigenous people remain marginalized and face racial discrimination from the white supremacists who now comprise the majority population in the area. Working in this context, The Red Nation is primarily interested in resurrecting an organized, Indigenous-led coalition to combat colonialism and the disproportionate violence that Native women, youth, LGBTQ2, and the homeless face.7

In many ways, The Red Nation’s work employs tactics of each the ayllu activists in Bolivia and the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust in the Bay Area. It is faced with a similar settler colonial context as the Land Trust, and the inherent minority representation that aligns with that, but despite this parallel, The Red Nation is strategically working to build a mass movement with revolutionary aspirations, much like the ayllu activists. Combining the academic background and subsequent training in Marxism and organizing of the founders and other core members, with traditional queer Indigenous feminist ethics, The Red Nation seeks to confront the largest neo-colonial power in the world, the U.S., and hold it accountable for the ongoing attack against the world’s oppressed people, the planet, and our collective ability to survive.

This chapter begins by recounting the genesis of The Red Nation based on firsthand interviews with one of the founders. It explores how the material conditions

7 LGBTQ2 refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Two-Spirit People.
of struggle in the Southwest, and specifically the intersecting phenomenon of police brutality and border town violence, inspired the founders to mobilize their academic findings into a revolutionary movement. The next section looks at how The Red Nation was able to elevate their work through high profile symbolic victories against the state. By unpacking the core Indigenous and Marxist ethics and recognizing how these political theories impacted their organizational structure, The Red Nation has both a past and future reference as it builds a successful activist movement. This section will also begin to connect The Red Nation’s work to the other cases of activism outlined in the previous chapters, detailing the common threads of pre-colonial ways of living and principles of anti-state organizing these groups are employing. Finally, I will look to the larger moment of mainstream attention to issues of environmentalism and Indigenous liberation prompted by Standing Rock, and how this has influenced the way that The Red Nation is planning for the future. This section will also highlight the importance of internationalism to the work of The Red Nation and illustrate how the organization has mobilized this ethic to stand in solidarity with all of the world’s colonized people.

**Responding to Conditions: Police Brutality and Border Town Violence**

The Red Nation was formed in 2014 by co-founders Melanie Yazzie (Diné) and Nick Estes out of a desire to create an organized force of resistance against the systemic injustices that Indigenous people face. Yazzie and Estes were PhD students pursuing doctorates in American Studies at The University of New Mexico (UNM). They had discussed a forum called The Red Nation for a few months prior to the
inaugural meeting in November 2014 but first conceived of it as a website, a hub for radical, critical, leftist intellectual discourse.\textsuperscript{8} The evolution of The Red Nation stemmed from the conditions of material struggle that Yazzie and Estes observed in Albuquerque and beyond. The two main circumstances that catalyzed the inception of The Red Nation in its current form were the staggering rates of police brutality against Indigenous people and research that Yazzie, Estes, and other colleagues had been conducting on border town violence.\textsuperscript{9}

In July 2014 in West Albuquerque three homeless Native American men were assaulted by teenagers.\textsuperscript{10} While one of the men, Jerome Eskeets, was able to break free and flee, the other two men, Al Gorman and another man known only as Cowboy, were killed. The article reports gruesome details, saying when the police found the victims they were “disfigured beyond recognition by the thrashing, which included having their heads smashed repeatedly with cinder blocks.”\textsuperscript{11} This type of violence has been called “Indian Rolling,” and is often perpetrated against intoxicated

\textsuperscript{8} Melanie Yazzie. Interview by Cameron Scott. Phone Interview, Wesleyan University, February 17th, 2019.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid. Police brutality can be understood as a display of state power. The Movement for Black Lives, which started around the same time, received international media attention addressing the misconduct of police officers in the United States. The Albuquerque Police Department specifically had a terrible problem with lethal violence, killing the highest rate of citizens for two consecutive years in 2014 and 2015 and getting rebuked by the Justice Department for their actions. Furthermore, the lack of protection provided to minority groups, particularly Native Americans, against hate crimes is an aspect of this police violence. Border towns, meaning white dominated towns or cities adjacent to Indian reservations, have disproportionately high rates of this pairing of violence and lack of justice. For more on The Movement for Black Lives, see “The Movement for Black Lives,” accessed March 25, 2019, https://policy.m4bl.org/. For more writing from The Red Nation on border town violence, see “Tag: Border Town Violence,” The Red Nation, accessed March 23, 2019, https://therednation.org/tag/border-town-violence/.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
homeless Indigenous men by young people as a “sport, or a “rites of passage.”” The article reporting on the 2014 attacks confirms this, saying, “According to a criminal complaint, the teenagers had been ‘randomly attacking homeless people for over a year’ and, by the 15-year-old’s estimates, they had beat up more than 50 since moving to the stucco house some months ago, as if it were a distraction, or a sport. As far as anyone could tell, though, this was the first time the beatings had resulted in deaths.” The tone with which this event is reported about seems almost forgiving, recognizing the situation the perpetrators were in as some sort of excuse for their actions. Furthermore, in this same instance, Eskeets (who survived the attack), speaks to his inability to turn to the police department for help, because “no one cares.” In fact, the New York Times article even addresses the Albuquerque Police Department’s need for an overhaul following their castigation by the Justice Department due to excessive use of force and the senseless killings of over 25 citizens in the prior three years.

The factors of police brutality and border town violence, as Yazzie and Estes noticed, are not independent factors. Yazzie wrote an article for Indian Country Today in 2014 that responded to the above-mentioned events. She cites Estes work on the lived-reality of U.S. colonialism as the foundation for such insipid border town violence and develops her own analysis, arguing that the culture of border towns

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13 Santos.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
operates according to the logic of colonialism. Indigenous peoples pose a constant threat to the security of the state, despite how much hegemonic thought may cast them as extinct. The principles of “lawfulness, abundance and virtue,” are foundational to the liberal political ideology, and when Indigenous peoples resist this, or simply exist, they become the targets of punishment. Yazzie lists these sources of punishment as including “disdain; blame; negligent health care; indifference; exclusion from protection of the law; abandonment; criminalization; incarceration; assault; rape; and death.” The emphasis of this article, and the most important aspect of their work that would evolve into The Red Nation, is that colonialism lays at the core of U.S. state power, manifesting in both civilian and police violence against Indigenous peoples. Before any implications of class, gender or race, rests the history of Indigenous erasure inherent to building and maintaining the settler colonial state and the systemic violence that that facilitates.

The residents of Albuquerque, however, did not sit idly. Yazzie recounts that this spike in institutionalized violence “of course ignited outrage amongst the families. The organizations that did exist at the time, activist or leftist organizations mobilized around us, and it made national news [...] this vibrant anti-police brutality movement that had sparked off in 2013 and reached its crescendo around May 2014 in Albuquerque.” In conjunction with the anti-police brutality organizing in New Mexico, Yazzie and her colleagues compiled research pertaining to racialized

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17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Yazzie.
violence in border towns. During the course of her PhD, Yazzie trained under the Diné historian Jennifer Nez Denetdale. With other UNM colleagues, David Correa and Nick Estes, the cohort worked on urban Native experiences. Denetdale’s participation in the Navajo nation Human Rights Commission – the only tribe with a UN-chartered Human Rights Commission – combined with Yazzie, Estes, and Correa’s scholarship to generate “more action oriented research.” Seeing this type of violence committed against relatives, because, similar to the cosmologies of the Ohlone, Quechua, and Aymara, in Navajo tradition everyone – especially those living on the streets – are kindred, it soon became clear that engaging with this work on a purely academic level was not enough. With an educational background in American Studies and their Indigenous identities priming Yazzie and Estes towards a politics or ethics of action, they recognized the lack of a strong, organized force of Indigenous resistance in the Southwest for several decades. Inspired by the legacies of the National Indian Youth Council, the Coalition for Navajo Liberation, and Indians Against Exploitation, and prompted by their research on border town violence and the anti-police brutality movement in Albuquerque and beyond, The Red Nation held its first meeting in November 2014.

20 Dr. Denetdale was the first Diné person to get a PhD in history in 1999 and was one of several women leading the way for a generation of Indigenous feminists.
21 Yazzie Interview.
22 Ibid.
Galvanizing Action and Principles of Organizing

The current rhetoric surrounding indigeneity and Indigenous peoples has only come to the fore in the past several decades. While the study of colonialism and the Native peoples who have borne the brunt of its global dominion has existed since the first European interactions in the Américas, the nature of historical archives and historical agents have led to a largely one-sided approach. As non-Native scholars looked back and sought to grapple with their history and Indigenous peoples themselves demanded rights and gained access to the pillars of academia, the field of Indigenous Studies was born.24 With the pressure of a robust coalition of Indigenous peoples worldwide, including black South Africans, Palestinians, First Nations peoples from Canada, and tribal governments from the U.S., the United Nations created the UN Decade for Indigenous Peoples in 1994 and followed in 2007 by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).25

For The Red Nation, this is the legacy of organized resistance to follow and perhaps even supersede: elevating the mission of international Indigenous liberation through both symbolic and physical victories. For Yazzie, coming from the often-theoretical field of academia, belief in the project of revolution was the first step. “As I started to organize more, and organize with people, not just Native people,” she said, “the more it occurred to me that being a pessimist – in the sense that I was very sort of focused on kind of an Indigenous only agenda – was actually not how people struggled at all. It actually did not reflect the reality of how political struggle unfolds

and works, so I stopped doing it and became an optimist.”26 This belief in the ability to make radical change is what makes The Red Nation such a strong force. As academics it can be easy to cower at the obstacles you are up against, but being a revolutionary means you must see beyond those obstacles and work to achieve an equitable world. “We call it revolutionary optimism in the Red Nation,” she concluded. Revolutionary optimism is a tenet to organizing that maintains a steadfast belief in the viability of your cause. With the proper work, organization, and focus revolution can and will be realized. In the case of The Red Nation, this translates into truly and deeply believing that liberation is possible, not just for yourself or for your own people, but for everyone.27 Developing this mindset is in many ways the first step for anyone in successfully staging a fight for liberation. Now, in recognizing that capitalism and imperialism are also producing climate change, this mindset should be more easily universalized. The hegemonic colonial mindset is produced in such a way that imagining actions outside of the system is a threat, and therefore unthinkable or laughable. In order to become a revolutionary, you must first understand the system that you are within, but what is often overlooked is having the belief that you can change it.

Equipped with the legacy of resistance and their steadfast commitment to revolutionary optimism, The Red Nation set its sights on their first large movement, the abolition of Columbus Day in favor of an Indigenous People’s Day. Beginning with the Abolish Columbus Day Rally on the steps of the Albuquerque City Hall on February 27, 2015, where Yazzie read the official manifesto of The Red Nation, and

26 Yazzie Interview.
27 Ibid.
ending with the City Council signing into law Indigenous Peoples Day on October 7th, 2015, The Red Nation announced their presence in the region and showed their efficacy in achieving social change.\textsuperscript{28} Yazzie told me that, “When Albuquerque passed Indigenous Peoples Day in October 2015 there was a domino effect all across the country [...] it really did galvanize a certain kind of struggle, it was announcing that Indigenous resistance was back, not just in the region but kind of nationwide.”\textsuperscript{29} This symbolic victory reminded Indigenous people and the U.S., the colonial entity built on Indigenous land, that resistance to these historic and ongoing injustices was not going away. It was also a bold proclamation that there was a new and organized force devoted to mobilizing a movement that would create actual lasting change.\textsuperscript{30}

While this was a huge victory, The Red Nation was focused on developing an organizational structure with staying power. There is a long and ever-present process of political development inherent to being a revolutionary and The Red Nation is most interested in building a community practicing the types of ethics that it wants to enact. For Yazzie, having already worked for the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and becoming disillusioned with what she understood to be the “nonprofit industrial complex,” specifically the “living for funding attitude of nonprofits and the identity politics that are really rampant in the nonprofit sector,”


\textsuperscript{29} Yazzie Interview.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
The Red Nation was an opportunity to realize the knowledge of revolutionary praxis organizing, to make mistakes, learn from them, and make adjustments.\footnote{Ibid. For more on the nonprofit industrial complex, humanitarianism, and the soft power of U.S. empire, see Inderpal Grewal, \textit{Saving the Security State: Exceptional Citizens in Twenty-first-century America} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), and INCITE!, \textit{The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).}

In the early days, The Red Nation worked with a socialist organization local to Albuquerque. They placed an emphasis on building mass movements, using popular struggles, such as Indigenous Peoples Day, as a vehicle to bring people in and then collectively develop their political education.\footnote{Ibid.} That said, coming from the Indigenous perspective, a core principle was the value of being a good relative. Yazzie frames this as queer Indigenous feminism in line with the work of Kim Tallbear, a Dakota feminist.\footnote{Kim Tallbear et al., “Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms,” \textit{GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies} 21, no. 2-3 (2015): . doi:10.1215/10642684-2843323.}

Yazzie says, “First, this means an expansive notion of relationality, claiming all humans as relatives, Indigenous or not, and also claiming the Earth, Water, animals, star beings, and so forth as relatives. Claiming relatives is not something that happens in name only, a relative is someone that you actively treat with reciprocity and respect.” The Red Nation stands out by placing these ethics at the forefront of their radical politics.

The language around relationality central to the queer Indigenous feminism of The Red Nation evokes the Andean principle of \textit{ayni} and respect for \textit{Pachamama} as well as the emphasis on communal healing that the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust puts forth. As Yazzie says, “what it means to be a good relative is simply to show compassion, show empathy and care [...] to lift the hearts of your relatives and your
people.”\textsuperscript{34} Additionally, there must be an emphasis on those relatives that “experience the greatest level of state violence […] so trans relatives, trans women, folks who are unsheltered, our working class relatives, our relatives who haul water every day […] youth, because youth and women were really marginalized in sort of normative concepts of Native politics at the time.”\textsuperscript{35} This notion of confronting gender norms, the patriarchy, and other hierarchical structures is also mirrored in the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust’s emphasis on being a women-led Indigenous land trust. In Bolivia, the issues of gendered power and exclusivity based on ideas of normativity persist in Native politics; however, there are prominent Indigenous feminists, such as THOA’s Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Maria Galindo of the anarcho-feminist group Mujeres Creando, who are pushing forth more inclusive and attentive politics.\textsuperscript{36} This wide notion of kinship and the significance of prioritizing the most vulnerable relatives are both crucial principles to defeating the state because these exclusionary ideas give the state power, thereby allowing it to reproduce itself. The Red Nation emphasizes this in their “Ten Point Program,” modeled off of the Black Panthers Ten Point Program, making demands specifically pertaining to the treatment of Native women, youth, homeless people and the LGBTQ2 community.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{34} Yazzie Interview. \\
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{36} Macarena Gómez-Barris, “Anarchisms Otherwise: The Pedagogy of Indigenous Anarco-Feminisms,” (paper presented at Pedagogies of Anarchist Praxis, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, April 12, 2019); For more on the work of Maria Galindo and her peers in Mujeres Creando, see Mujeres Creando, accessed April 6, 2019, http://www.mujerescreando.org/. \\
These core principles of reciprocity, respect, and care segue into the way The Red Nation is organized. There currently exists both a membership and supporter structure grown out of a need for stability that was lacking during the early days.

Following the Abolish Columbus Day Rally in 2015, The Red Nation saw a massive influx of eager participants but did not yet know how to sustain them. They also faced the constant issue of members pledging themselves to the cause and proceeding to disappear. In response they decided to establish a membership structure that required a certain amount of participation in internal organizational meetings and political development reading groups. Yazzie states,

We decided to develop a membership structure for The Red Nation, because the kind of coming and going aspect that happens a lot in more fluid organizations or movements meant that the work would fall apart if a person left...being a member requires you to come to six organizing meetings and six reading groups and then the people who are already members get to vote on whether or not you get to become a member.\(^{38}\)

It is important to note that membership in The Red Nation, consistent with the notions of kinship and claiming of relatives, is not exclusive to Indigenous people or any other identity category for that matter. Membership structure has helped ensure that people who volunteer are truly down for the cause. Yazzie recounts that “we have had a lot of people that we embraced really early on as members in function and they did a lot of damage to the organization because they ended up not being as committed, or their politics were really off [...] for us it’s a mechanism for making sure that we are making the right decision about folks who come into the organization.”\(^{39}\) With that said, the commitment of being a full time member can be too much for some people,

\(^{38}\) Yazzie Interview.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.
so they incorporated a second level of participation called supporters. Supporters have access to all aspects of organization, can attend meetings and reading groups, but they do not have voting power or the ability to assume leadership roles.40

Leadership may seem like a strange word for an organization that opposes structural power and oppression, but The Red Nation, much like other struggles for liberation, realizes that leadership does not necessarily mean power imbalances. The ayllus achieves organization and productivity through rotational leadership roles and the notion of “leading by obeying.”41 The Sogorea Te’ Land Trust maintains its structure by moving forward with non-hierarchical decision-making and an even distribution of work while the founders guide the vision through the initial stages. Similarly, the purpose of leadership in The Red Nation is to maintain organization and distribute the work to those who are most willing and able. For example, Yazzie serves as the Chair of The Red Nation, but she only has one vote, and every decision is made completely through consensus.42 This method of internal operation is known as democratic centralism.43 In other words, The Red Nation believes limited hierarchy is necessary to get actions accomplished efficiently, but nevertheless decisions are made in an equitable, lateral, and truly democratic way.

**Revolutionary Praxis: Standing Rock and Internationalism**

As discussed in the Bolivian context, there is a very important distinction between revolutionary moments and true social revolution. During the lead-up to the

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41 Patzi, 171.
42 Yazzie Interview.
43 Ibid.
creation of The Red Nation, and in Estes’ home territory, there was a highly
cancelized battle between big oil companies and the Native American tribes of the
Midwest. This would come to manifest itself in the widely acknowledged
revolutionary moment of Standing Rock. The Red Nation, amongst many other
Indigenous activists, were very active in the fight at Standing Rock and saw it as a
moment to further grow and develop their movement. That said, they recognized the
political climate and knew that Standing Rock would not mean true social revolution,
but a warm up, and a signifier that it was possible.

The prelude to Standing Rock began in March 2014 when Bryan Brewer, the
President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, announced the opposition to the proposed
Keystone XL pipeline that would pass through their land. The concerns with such a
project are manifold, but first and foremost was a concern for the land. The
chairwoman for the Meskwaki Tribe – also known as the Sac & Fox Tribe of the
Mississippi in Iowa – Judith Bender wrote in a letter to the Iowa Utilities Board that,

As a people that have lived in North America for thousands of years, we
have environmental concerns about the land and drinking water...Our
main concern is Iowa's aquifers might be significantly damaged, it will
only take one mistake and life in Iowa will change for the next thousands
of years. We think that should be protected, because it is the water that
gives Iowa the best way of life.

Moreover, she expressed concerns for honoring the federal Native American Graves
Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and treaties that dated back to the 1830’s
and 40’s, because the proposed pipeline would pass through both ancestral burial

44 Nick Estes, Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the
45 William Petroski, ”Meskwaki Tribe Opposes Bakken Pipeline,” Des Moines Register, March 16,
2015, accessed April 03, 2019,
https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/politics/2015/03/15/iowa-tribe-bakken-pipeline-
meskwaki/24822867/.
grounds and unceded tribal lands. It is important to note, however, that priority is placed on the environment, emphasizing that when the lands are nurtured and cared for “Iowa” has the best way of life. Bender, on behalf of the Sac & Fox Tribe, is most concerned for the well-being of everyone, Native or not, in accordance with respectful and reciprocal treatment of the Earth. Tribes such as the Sac & Fox and the Rosebud Sioux understand that everyone relies on water. Mni Wiconi (Water is life) - a phrase that was graffitied all over the Navajo Nation prior to Standing Rock – “trumped the sacredness of private property.”

The resistance to the Keystone XL Pipeline became the harbinger for a much greater fight that would begin in April 2016 against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). This pipeline was scheduled to pass under the Missouri River, and run directly through the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s reservation and ancestral burial grounds. Fighting with the same message as those put forth by the Sac & Fox and Rosebud Sioux, this movement, that came to be known by the trending social media hashtag #NODAPL, or simply Standing Rock, gained international media attention and brought together a coalition of over 300 Indigenous nations to oppose Energy Transfer Partners expansive plan for oil distribution. Standing Rock marked the onset of a truly revolutionary moment for Indigenous politics and the intersecting critiques of extractive capitalism and its subsequent environmental impacts.

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46 Ibid.
47 Yazzie Interview; Estes, 26.
For groups like The Red Nation, highly publicized events such as Standing Rock – and Yazzie cites a cluster of ongoing uprisings that include Idle No More (2012), the Oak Flat Struggle (2015), Nihígaal Bee Iiná (2015) and the Thirty Meter Telescope at Mauna Kea (2015) – brought issues of land, water, and climate change into conversations about Indigenous struggle. As discussed in the previous section, and in the Bolivia and California context, Navajo, Sioux, and other Native peoples around the world have always lived by a cosmology of treating land, water, mountains, and other non-human entities as relatives. Events such as Standing Rock opened a platform for these ideas to reach the mainstream media, a trend that The Red Nation capitalized on by publishing many blog posts and using their Twitter presence to reach a wider audience. The mainstream attention and education that was happening at Standing Rock helped clarify the connection between environmental destruction and U.S. imperialism: U.S. military practices in Hawaii at Mauna Kea and extractive capitalism in the cases of DAPL and uranium extraction on Navajo lands. This cluster of events sparked a dialog of protection, with Indigenous people casting themselves as water protectors, land defenders, fighting not only for their ability to live, but for all of their relatives. This was a clarifying moment in which the settler

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50 Yazzie Interview.
majority could see the work of generations of Indigenous activists fighting for decolonization as legitimate in the face of widespread fears of climate change.

The Red Nation recognized Standing Rock in the context of other uprisings. Yazzie says, “Standing Rock was a moment, it was an uprising, what a Palestinian comrade told us was like an intifada on the plains, but it hasn’t materialized into a movement, it just hasn’t.”51 She cites the lack of organization between the participant parties as a main reason for why Standing Rock did not produce a movement, partially because they did not know that the event was coming.52 That said, the elevation of Indigenous voices and alternative ways of seeing that large scale uprisings such as Standing Rock expose cracks in the hegemony and reveals potential for counter hegemonic movement. For Yazzie, this is a “key element of what it means to engage in active resistance.”53

While these struggles are undoubtedly ongoing, the crescendo of the revolutionary moment of Standing Rock reached its peak in December 2016 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced that it would not permit Energy Transfer Partners the easement necessary to continue on the project.54 This was a small victory in the face of an ongoing war, marked by militarized police presence and a striking lack of engagement by the presidential candidates at the time, and a sign that in order to achieve true liberation the entire system needs an upheaval. In the aftermath it became clear to those involved that nothing about the status quo was going to change.

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
Politicians had the same profit-driven incentives and environmental organizations continued to decenter Indigenous voices. With regards to the environmentalist organizations Yazzie says,

> It's shocking to me that these organizations and primarily white environmentalists or academics, have completely missed the point...it's not really a question of whether or not environmentalism is a side thing and Indigenous liberation is at the center, it is that Indigenous liberation is an environmental issue [...] Now it's not on environmentalist agendas I've seen post Standing Rock, but whatever is coming next [...] you're just going to see Indigenous people continue to engage in this way of politics. It will be about land and water until we defeat resource extraction, which means we'd actually defeat capitalism.\(^{55}\)

The Sogorea Te’ Land Trust faced a similar issue about Bay Area land stewardship, since they knew that many environmental organizations were too focused on the big picture to recognize the importance of local Indigenous knowledge. These private sector and liberal interventions that compromise revolutionary movements are also reminiscent of the reform era under Morales that began in 2006 following the revolutionary cycle in Bolivia between 2000 and 2005. Though more people seem to be interested in the topics of environmentalism and Indigenous liberation, neoliberal politics and capitalism remain too ingrained in the dominant way of operation. For true revolutionaries, such as the *ayllu* activists, particularly the anarcho-feminists, in Bolivia, and The Red Nation, these co-optations and general resistance to change means working internally and collaboratively to develop and expand so that everyone invested in lasting change is more prepared for the next moment of fissure.

Following Standing Rock, The Red Nation has maintained its momentum through an inward focus on organizational structure and political development. They

\(^{55}\) Yazzie Interview.
have also found internationalism to be a productive means for developing active resistance and political ideology. For The Red Nation, internationalism means assisting other colonized groups struggling against forces of imperialism and oppression to achieve liberation, self-determination and eventually decolonization.\textsuperscript{56} They see internationalism as fundamental to achieving a decolonized future in the globalized world because the structures of domination, while varying in methods and severity from place to place, effect oppressed people in similar ways.\textsuperscript{57}

Internationalism is a way to protest the colonial mindset fabricated by powers such as the U.S. and the social constructs that help hegemonically maintain that power, such as borders. Borders are imaginary lines that Indigenous people in America understand all too well based on histories of treaties and relocation. They are imposed through both force and consensus and are intimately linked to, and maintain, categories of belonging, for example citizenship in the United States. Belonging is important because the real purpose of borders is exclusion: keeping out those who threaten the power of the state. Indigenous people are always a danger to the settler states because of their claim to the land upon which the state has been built, but other groups, such as South and Central Americans and Muslims, have also been legally codified as threats to the state and have been subjected to the force of policy – deportations and travel ban – as well as the physical state force of police.\textsuperscript{58} This is why flying the Palestinian flag amongst the over 300 other Indigenous nation flags at

\textsuperscript{56} Yazzie
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} This force further extends to those marked “citizens,” or protectors of the state, who can usually be identified as gun owners and white men.
Standing Rock or helping on the front line of activism at the so-called US-Mexico border matter.

On the flip side, U.S. imperialism has shown that the respect for borders is unilateral. As Yazzie says, “The U.S. imposes borders to keep people out based on racist notions of belonging, but then the U.S. presumes that it has a right to cross any border without consent. That’s actually how imperialism works.” Embracing the queer Indigenous feminist notion of relationality and adoptive central to the ethics of The Red Nation, internationalism serves as the foremost way to build a mass movement to resist the U.S. imperial claim to the entire globe. Yazzie further argues that maintaining internationalist solidarity provides a counter-hegemonizing platform for resistance against the nearly ubiquitous ideologies of U.S. imperialism and global capitalism. She says,

We actually believe in supporting decolonization struggles wherever they’re happening in the world. We understand a Vietnam or an Algeria in history, or South Africa, Venezuela, or Bolivia, that the liberation of those places from the imperial clutches of global capitalism in the United States is also our struggle, and the more we support their struggle the stronger our struggle will be as well.

This principle is well illustrated by the interventions made by members of The Red Nation against Trump’s travel ban, marked by the slogan “No Ban on Stolen Land,” and the outpouring of support near detention centers on the US-Mexico border such as Tornillo.

Along with the language and practices of internationalism, The Red Nation embraces use of the Communist term comrade internally as an important tenet of their

59 Yazzie.
60 Ibid.
organizing. Comrade, which simply means someone whom you are engaging in struggle with, avoids the popular framings of accomplices and allies, which The Red Nation believes unnecessarily places an emphasis on “in” or “out” identity categories. Yazzie says, “this is not to erase or flatten those differences and the complexities that arise out of those differences, but it’s to call people into the struggle.” The questions of difference, in identities and politics, among other issues, are addressed through communication and development within the movement, but The Red Nation wants to be explicit that they are not an identity-based organization. Much like internationalism as a way of enacting the concept of intersectionality, using the term comrade prioritizes doing the actual work of a revolutionary, rather than worrying about whether you belong. These seemingly minute decisions collectively serve position The Red Nation as a praxis-oriented organization, focused on enacting the type of ethics and community envisioned in a decolonized future.

**Conclusion**

The question of a decolonized future is a concern that members of The Red Nation frequently consider. One such factor they have become very wary of is the way that mainstream political actors may engage with their struggle. A member of The Red Nation, Jennifer Marley, from the San Ildefonso Pueblo in New Mexico, says that “we should be unabashedly critical of characters such as Deb Halland, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Bernie Sanders” because of how they push forth

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61 Ibid.
liberal politics within a system that reinforces U.S. state power.\textsuperscript{62} With the ongoing struggle that she and other activists engage with, it can be disheartening to see the momentum of a truly non-state radical moment such as Standing Rock fizzle into status quo liberal politics. On the other hand, consistent with the call-in culture of The Red Nation, Marley recognizes that “for most marginalized people, [these politicians] might be a source of inspiration or motivation [...] Ultimately, when it comes to organizing some of the poorest people, whether it be in urban spaces or on the rez, it’s important to meet people where they’re at.”\textsuperscript{63}

In line with this notion, The Red Nation holds a big two big events every November called No Thanks No Giving and Red Friday, that coincide with the U.S. holidays of Thanksgiving and Black Friday.\textsuperscript{64} One emphasis of the event is to provide a place for comrades and unsheltered relatives to get warmth, food, and clothes during the cold season, but it is also an opportunity to have workshops unpacking the legacies of these colonial and capitalist holidays celebrated nationwide, and to discuss visions for the future.\textsuperscript{65} Marley recounted to me that at No Thanks No Giving in 2018 they ended one of the workshops with the question, “What does freedom look like to you?”\textsuperscript{66} She said, “As simple as it is, one of the most outstanding answers was to live without fear, because the fear of violence is what maintains power, power structures and power imbalances. That's not something you need any kind of formal education

\textsuperscript{62} Marley Interview.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Marley Interview.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
to understand, especially when you live it.” In imagining a decolonized future through queer Indigenous feminist ethics, this is perhaps the easiest way to summarize what expansive notions of kinship and nonhierarchical decision-making may look like. To live without fear.

For people like Marley, who has faced the full force of state power while protesting racist and colonial institutions, this fear is active and tangible. For those who do not actively face the most extreme forms of state violence, this fear can still exist, particularly by way of anxiety regarding climate change. As the comrade said during the workshop at No Thanks No Giving, it is the fear that propagates power. In order to get to this decolonized future, a world free from fear, you must first mobilize behind that fear. The Red Nation is an ideal example of a group responding to consistent threats of violence by unifying in the face of fear, and using a strong set of ethics and organizing principles, to galvanize a revolutionary movement.

67 Ibid.

Coda: What Freedom Looks Like to Me

I was born in in Beth Israel Hospital in Lower Manhattan in 1997. My father comes from the outskirts of East London, England, and my mother comes from the Berkshires in Western Massachusetts. They moved to New York City in their early 20s and have lived there ever since, raising my sister and me in the West Village of Manhattan. This vibrant city – that may well have spoiled every other city for me – has given me so much. It is where I first attended school, where I played pick up soccer, where I first went out into the world by myself. Through all this, I began to interact with people of different ages, backgrounds, and opinions. New York beyond its skyscrapers, museums, and pizza, is a place where people come together hoping to achieve their dreams.

For a long time, due to what I now recognize as the hegemony of Western thought, I understood success through two avenues: prestige by way of institutional recognition and capital accumulation. These were the goals that I set for myself, and through the end of my high school education, these aspirations were consistently validated by my guides and mentors. This is not to say that I had not been taught to live my life by a certain set of ethics – kindness, respect, and so on – but my notions of progress and success were very narrow minded. I remember celebrating the election of Barack Obama in 2008 as some sort of landmark moment in establishing the “end” of racism. Though we certainly discussed the history of colonization and slavery that this country was built upon in my history classes, there was a staleness to these discussions, leaving these matters firmly entrenched in the past.
I only started to reckon with the cataclysmic nature of my country’s history in my university level American Studies courses. With the privilege of this higher education I gained access to more radical avenues of academic inquiry that revealed basic truths about why the world looks the way it does. This was a learning process, but more importantly it meant unlearning notions foundational to the Western episteme, such as questioning my ingrained understandings of success and progress. Within the colonial and capitalist mindset, progress is exclusionary and competitive, using ideas such as diversity and inclusion – or more broadly human rights – to veil the neoliberal agenda that always results in extractive tendencies and produces an exploitable class structure. Moreover, it has made me reconsider what the historical legacy and current formation of Manhattan represents.

Similar to the Ohlone’s ongoing struggle for recognition in the Bay Area, the land on which New York City is built is actually occupied Lenape land, recognition that is rarely given. This story that was told to me, and has seemingly survived in the settler imaginary, is that Manhattan was purchased by the Dutch for a handful of beads. The reality is far more complicated, with poorly communicated and non-consensual agreements being drawn up by settlers who had no real intention of sticking to their word.¹ Other demarcations of colonialism and global capitalism are riddled across the city that I call home. The skyscrapers that line Manhattan’s iconic skyline have almost all been erected with the help of Mohawk ironworkers from the Kahnawake reserve outside of Montreal. They made up almost 15% of the

¹ This also holds true for the entire expansion of the U.S. empire across the continent, into the Caribbean, the Pacific and ultimately the globe. See Jean M. O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
ironworkers during the construction boom of the 1950s and still make up nearly 10% of labor force today. The epicenter of global capitalism, Wall Street, was the city’s first slave market for the sale of enslaved Africans and Natives. Naturally, the city levied a tax for the sale of each slave and thus directly profited from it.

That said, New York, the site of eager participation in the slave trade and the center of capital to this day, is also home to the largest Native American population of any place in the entire U.S. Queens is recognized as one of the most ethnically diverse places in the world. Additionally, contrasting the participation in systemic violence, there is also a rich history of protest in New York. Manhattan was the site of the anarchist Wall Street Bombings of 1920, the largest Black Lives Matter marches, and the Occupy Wall Street Movement. Manhattan, for all of its colonial history and role in hegemonizing capitalism around the world, is still churning with people who are disgruntled with the way things are. Turning a critical gaze on the place where I grew up and shaped me has not made me spurn it. Rather, it has given me new reasons to appreciate the people who I have learned from and the way they have situated me to view the world.

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From my position in academia and grappling with the identity crisis of white, settler guilt, I have not actually been doing any of the work to resist or imagine a future. Embarking on this research project I was able to speak to people who have not needed American Studies, or a critical education on the history of New York, to understand systemic and structural violence, because they and their ancestors have felt the effects firsthand and have developed methods of survival and resistance. In Marxian terms, they have responded to the material struggle, which includes responding to the assault against other than human relatives. With the stakes of the Anthropocene clarifying, it is our responsibility to maintain a positive outlook, not that processes will be miraculously reversed through technological innovation or policy reform, but that there is still time to change this world and make a new one.

Returning to the work of Chakrabarty, and the call for a universal enlightenment, it seems to me that the first step is reckoning with our individual place in the present, and in the future. For me, that has meant thinking critically about the land I have called my home, and the privileges I have been afforded because of structures that reproduce power in the hands of white men. On April 13th, 2019, the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust posted a quote from Rabbi Dev Nolly, a Shummi Tax gifter. He said, “As I’ve learned more about the history of genocide, I’ve become more aware of how my life is built on the suffering of others, the theft of land, desecration...The Shuumi Land Tax gives me a way to acknowledge and remember where I am and what has happened here. It allows me to make a small contribution to healing.”7 Through the work of the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, settlers are made to

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confront the past, acknowledge how it has brought us to the moment we are currently in, and also contribute to a future that looks different. That said, the onus should not rest solely on groups like the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust and The Red Nation, but they can serve as guides and models for approaches to environmental and social justice that are attentive to the history of colonialism.

The lessons gleaned from these groups can be summarized into two categories, principles of organizing and guiding ethics. The ayllu activists, and generations of Indigenous Bolivians before them, show the value of rotating leadership and the emphasis on everyday relationships in building both a force of resistance against the state and offering a viable alternative. The Sogorea Te’ Land Trust proposes a method of working through the liberal state formation to elevate historical memory, push forth radical politics, and facilitate the return of Indigenous lands. The Red Nation mobilizes democratic centralism, non-hierarchical organization, and revolutionary optimism to build a movement with staying power. The ethics of each group follow parallel notions of expansive relationality in order to be as inclusive as possible. The ayllu activists of Bolivia offer the Andean principle of ayni, meaning reciprocity and working today to build a better future. The Sogorea Te’ Land Trust emphasizes the historically overlooked role of women in facilitating the process of healing for the land and everyone on it. The Red Nation follows principles of queer Indigenous feminism to claim human and non-human entities as adoptive kin, exemplified through internationalist solidarity.

Indigenous peoples in the Américas have been doing the work of anti-state organizing, reinstating expansive notions of kinship, and healing that we need but are
unfortunately too entrenched in our hegemonic understandings of the way life should be to understand or enact. By following the lead of the so-called “New World’s” longest-standing and most radical activists, I hope that we can build an actual “New World,” free from structures based on power and domination, where healing can be prioritized, and we can live in symbiotic harmony with all of our relations once again.
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