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The Fire
Decolonizing “Environmental Justice”

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Abstract

The Fire:
Decolonizing “Environmental Justice”

By

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Master of Arts in Chicano and Chicana Studies

There is a large body of literature that attributes the formation of “Environmental Justice” to the legacy of the Environmental Movement. This project examines the formation of the Environmental Movement, places it within the legacy of the United States colonial project, and repositions “Environmental Justice” as resistance to the colonial project. Worldviews of the Environmental Movement are fleshed out through key figures, highlighting how the State is built up through the movement. Pivotal moments in the “Environmental Justice” movement are examined to understand the worldviews that form the movement, and a case study of a family that helped found the Madres del Este de Los Angeles Santa Isabel (Mothers of East Los Angeles Santa Isabel, MELASI) is presented to illustrate how indigenous worldviews in particular stand in contrast to the worldviews that have formed the State and the Environmental Movement.

Chapter One: Introduction

After graduating from UC Santa Cruz, I returned home, to Los Angeles. In one of my many efforts to reconnect after being gone for 5 years, I asked my grandmother to teach me how to make *masa* (corn dough) from scratch. I wanted to feel grounded so I did not want store bought tortillas, or even tortillas made from a ready-made mix like Maseca. I wanted to start with dry corn seeds and go through the entire process to make handmade tortillas. My grandmother, being the elder cook in the family, was my obvious teacher. When I asked her if she would teach me, she laughed and replied, “You Chicanos always want to do things the hard way.” She walked away and then turned and smiled as she led me to the room that housed her *metate*, our traditional stone tool for grounding *maiz* (maize). Her quick-witted reply simultaneously mocked and approved my efforts. My grandmother understood that my intention was not only to enjoy a delicious handmade tortilla; after all we could purchase them all over the Eastside of Los Angeles. I was putting in the work to gain an understanding of a very basic, in it’s simplicity and also it’s position as foundational, component of our culture. I was paying respect and time with an understanding that some day a younger generation in my family might ask me for this knowledge.

My grandmother showed me her *metate*. She explained to me the important roll it plays in our culinary and cultural traditions. She also explained to me that in the movement of my family, the *mano*, the hand stone used to ground corn on the *metate*, was lost. She had tried other *manos*, but none were the right fit. They were either too long or too short to fill the groove earned over time from working the *metate*. I took this as a symbolic lesson. Though a critical component was lost, the information remained. I

was able to use the knowledge handed down to me to make sense of the tools I had available to me in the present.

When we lose context, there is a gap in understanding the formation of the present. This is a kind of disorientation, not completely understanding the present because there is a misunderstanding of the past. Disoriented, we are left susceptible to the master narrative, which is the story from above, or history as told by the powerful and therefore privileging the powerful (read white, male, heterosexual, wealthy, otherwise identified as white supremacist heteropatriarchy). Master narratives normalize the present conditions, justifying or hiding systems of oppression. Counter narratives, which Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told,” are the stories from below that can disrupt master narratives and create space for challenging systems of oppression (p. 26). Counter narratives decenter the master narrative and this displacement provides space for reorientation. Recentering our stories and understanding the responsibilities we hold is a powerful step in the process of decolonization. This thesis is an effort to disrupt the master narrative of environmentalism in the US, including the formation of “Environmental Justice,” and offer a contribution to recentering our stories to reorient us within our struggles, our communities, and our legacies.

In Chapter Two, I engage some foundational texts of environmentalism (Thoreau’s *Walden*, originally published in 1854, and Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac*, 1970) as well as a modern iconic text (Duncan and Burns’ *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea*, 2009) and challenge them directly and with support of Jacoby (2001), Gutierrez (2008) and Delaney (2002). Delaney provides a framework for this

chapter through his examination of ideological spatialities, space and racialization, which is critical to repositioning environmentalism and locating it within the colonial national project. This displaces environmentalism from the narrative of the formation of what has been labeled “Environmental Justice.”

I continue by juxtapositioning the ideas of syncretism and co-optation, specifically pointing to how power functions in these processes. By building the understanding that syncretism is a mutual coming together and combination of ideas, and co-optation is the process of giving meaning to what already exists and already has meaning, this becomes the point of departure for engaging “Environmental Justice” texts. I highlight contributions from Laura Pulido (1996a, 1996b and 2002), who challenges environmentalism and instead centers power as the critical underlying force driving struggles. Robert Bullard (1993 and 2000), Dorceta Taylor (1993, 2000 and 2011) and Devon Peña (2005) all offer foundational critiques of environmentalism but conclude that “Environmental Justice” is part of the legacy of environmentalism.

The master narrative that is developed is that “Environmental Justice” emerges from the Civil Rights Movement and coalesces with environmentalism, offering up a new wave of environmentalism in the 80s. Through examining the Principles of Environmental Justice, it is clear that the struggles coming together to connect as a movement are much more nuanced than what is represented in the master narrative. What is also clear is that the document is anti-colonial (resisting colonization or further colonization) and decolonial (ending colonization and/or reversing the effects of colonization), which points to the communities and struggles being part of different legacies and based in different worldviews than environmentalism.

I also examine academic interventions in struggles identified as “Environmental Justice.” From the early advocacy of Robert Bullard and others targeting the US Environmental Protection Agency, to the Environmental Justice Screening Method (EJSM) developed by Manuel Pastor, Rachel Morello-Frosch and Jim Sadd (2013), academics have played a significant role in the movement. EJSM has been particularly impactful, with the state of California using it as a model to develop the CalEnviroScreen 2.0, which analyzes demographic and pollution data and represents the information geographically, making the issues of environmental racism clearly visible, even as race is excluded as an indicator in the demographic data.

While we contend with the State, we cannot limit our scope of work or our visions for our communities to the State. For this discussion, my definition of the State are the government institutions that rule over the occupied lands identified as the United States of America. The State’s adoption of “Environmental Justice” into its agencies represents a rhetorical shift more than a new ideological or political practice. The ideological state apparatus, defined by Althusser (1971) as the spaces of production seemingly outside the State but that perpetuate the State, is able to absorb “Environmental Justice” with little institutional impact on the repressive state apparatus, which Althusser defines as the mechanical functions of the State (State institutions such as the police, military, or concerning environmentalism, the US Forest Service).

In Chapter Four, the *testimonio* (oral history based ethnography) of my family is offered up with the intent to locate what has been identified as “Environmental Justice”, particularly the work of *las Madres del Este de Los Angeles – Santa Isabel* (MELASI, Mothers of East Los Angeles – Santa Isabel), outside of environmentalism. What

becomes clear through the stories told by two generations of my family is that indigenous worldviews that predate the 80s emergence of “Environmental Justice,” and even environmentalism before that, are what inform multigenerational community building. Dismissing syncretism as the process that forms “Environmental Justice” struggles, Scholar Fernando Ortíz’s (1947) concept of transculturation, which accounts for the complexities of power and resistance in cultural development, moves us away from the master narrative and allows room for diverse experiences to emerge.

Yellow, white, red and blue corn all make different types of *masa*. At the end of the day, it may all just look like tortillas to the novice, or to the disoriented, but there is much complexity and nuance. The value in understanding context is that we are able to embody knowledge and act on it. Reoriented, we hold the responsibility of making a decision to perpetuate the State or original worldviews with our actions. This thesis is a contribution to the latter.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Environmentalism: A National Project

Popular imagery of environmentalism brings to mind tree huggers, anti-whalers, bare-foot hippies, and other deviations from what is “normal.” It would be a surprise to many that initial environmentalism in the United States came through a push for conservation that was coming from urban white elites on the East Coast. Those who were most engaged with the less urbanized environment, Native Peoples and rural whites, became criminalized with “the transformation of previously acceptable practices into illegal acts: hunting or fishing redefined as poaching, foraging as trespassing, the setting of fires as arson, and the cutting of trees as timber theft” (Jacoby 2001, p. 2). The perspective of elites from the East was that Native Peoples and rural whites “lived too close to nature to appreciate it for other than its economic value as raw material” (p. 3). They were seen as not recognizing the grander picture beyond meeting immediate needs. They could not appreciate the leisure of the land. Elite desire for this particular form of resource management reflected the excess of class privilege, accessible through white supremacist heteropatriarchy. Their material needs were met in the cities, disconnected from the impacts they had beyond the cities.

With this colonial style thrust into conservation, it is important to understand the origin. Environmentalism is not a unique piece of Americana. As Jacoby (2001) points out:

The movement’s roots can be traced back to Europe, where scientific forestry first developed in the 1700s. Several leading American conservationists, such as Gilford Pinchot (who would head the Forest Service under Theodore Roosevelt

and help found the Yale Forestry School in 1900), went to Europe for their training. Others such as Bernhard Fernow (the chief of the federal government's Division of Forestry from 1886 to 1898) and Carl Schenk (the founder of the first forestry school in the United States), were direct imports from the famed forestry academies of Prussia and Saxony. (p. 4)

By tracing back these origins, it is easy to see that environmentalism in the US is a Euro-American development. Environmentalism began as a European export that found a home in the US. This was not unique to the US. Jacoby (2001) notes, "After European colonialism exported conservation to Africa, Australia, India, and much of the rest of the world, it inevitably spawned new conflicts in these regions as it crossed swords with preexisting ways of interacting with the environment" (p. 5). The conflicts of colonialism were found throughout European colonies with conservation, and as previously mentioned, this was also true in the US. Though not formally a colony any longer, the origins of the US and its actions continue to be colonial, even within its own defined settler borders.

Like early colonial "heroes" George Washington and Paul Revere, individuals with formative involvement in environmentalism have become icons. Conservation and preservation infrastructure advocates John Muir and Gifford Pinchot, and environmentalism philosophers Henry David Thoreau and Aldo Leopold, with their foundational environmentalist texts *Walden: Or Life in the Woods* (1995) originally published in 1854 and *A Sand County Almanac* (1970) originally published in 1949 respectively, have all become *wilderness preservation pioneer heroes*. Their rugged individualism matches that of other American colonial/pioneer heroes Paul Bunyan, the

mythical figure who cleared the land through logging for westward expansion of the US, and John “Johnny Appleseed” Chapman, an individual who planted apple tree nurseries to lay private ownership claims to land but is remembered as a free spirit who randomly planted apple seeds as he roamed the land. All are seen as visionary individuals with alternative engagement with the land, compared to urban settlement. Though differing from urban settlement, the worldviews they uphold build the colonial State.

John Muir is a Sierra Club founder and was a champion advocate for national parks. He is often juxtaposed to Gifford Pinchot, who served as the first head of the US Forest Service. Pinchot is identified as a conservationist who advocated for sustainable resource extraction for natural areas, while John Muir advocated for the protection of specific lands through preservation of sites that could be visited with as little impact as possible. Given these differing perspectives, Muir is positioned as having higher moral ground, challenging Pinchot’s more anthropocentric view, centering humans and the needs of humans, with what might later be identified as an ecocentric view, centering the environment with the needs of humans amongst the multiple needs of sustaining the environment. Though differing in ideas of how to manage resources, both Pinchot and Muir worked to expand the control of lands by the Federal Government for, albeit different, visions for securing the needs of the State and its individual citizens.

Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1995), a two-year retreat into the woods for transcendentalist reflection, is an influential text that has impacted environmental philosophy. It is valued for Thoreau’s revelations coming from isolation in the environment. True to transcendentalism, Thoreau’s quest for self-sufficiency necessitates his disconnection from the urban setting and reliance on the natural world. Thoreau’s

return to a “simple” lifestyle in nature allows him to perceive himself as self-reliant. What is not considered is how genocide and subsequent occupation of lands makes this possible. Thoreau expresses how nature makes him feel as an individual and how it serves his own needs, as opposed to an actual relationship with the land. Even Thoreau’s observations of spring and the “rebirth” of nature signify his own rebirth as an empowered individual, instead of understanding the rhythms of the land. Despite his connectedness to the natural world through a temporary retreat, Thoreau notes his own sophistication as a source of power. Thoreau’s value of individualism and elitism is evident in his comparison to others he encounters in Concord, a nearby village. His description of Alec Thérien is dehumanizing, describing him as animalistic because he cannot read or write. Thoreau romanticizes a particular lifestyle, while his values show his investment in domination. In this fashion, The National Parks serve as a perpetual land of retreat and potentially a rebirth of a vision for the nation, as a parallel function with environmental degradation at the hands of private and corporate interests enabled by the State.

Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* (1970) is also a reflective piece that has been an influential philosophical text for environmentalism. Leopold served as an agent of the United States Forest Service, where he focused on wild life management. In his writing, Leopold challenges what he sees as the complete destruction of the integrity of the environment, which he has witnessed over the years. He notes the interconnectedness of the environment and its fragility, with small changes having significant impacts. Leopold proposes conservation and being more connected to the environment, though he credits the ability to do so to industrialization and resource management. In his writing,

the white urban dweller is his point of reference for appreciating the environment, and often refers to the utility of the environment. Similar to Thoreau, the value of the environment in relation to humans is one of separation and largely for recreation and leisure. Again, Leopold also fails to contend with the facts of the genocide of Native Peoples and the occupation of lands. The degradation of the environment follows the deliberate destruction of Native communities, though this is absent in the rhetoric of environmentalism.

The land is not a free space. Preservation does not liberate the land, it brings it under private ownership through a government entity. We can look to the American Antiquities Act of 1906, which brings natural and Native “objects of antiquity” found on Federal lands under the ownership of the Federal Government, for an example of domination. Even with challenges to the American Antiquities Act of 1906 through the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, the logic of private citizenship and property ownership is upheld, as only Federally recognized tribes can file petitions for repatriation of objects, but this is restricted to objects held by public institutions or acquired from public lands. There is a rhetorical production of white supremacist heteropatriarchal understandings of the land promoted through the *wilderness preservation pioneer heroes*, and a particular legal production of this justifies displacement, removal, occupation and ownership. Environmental degradation follows the destruction of Native communities, and one of the solutions for environmental degradation, preservation through National Parks, also follows the destruction of Native communities and often necessitates more contemporary displacement of Native communities.

“The National Parks: America’s Best Idea”

The development of National Parks is the continued project of colonization and imperialism, following the European conservation example, which we find at the origins of the US colonies and the establishment of the US (Jacoby, 2001). While it was former policy to push Native Peoples to the “undeveloped” frontier, once Manifest Destiny came to fruition, reaching from *sea to shining sea*, the “undeveloped” lands that were valued aesthetically became the next battle for domination. With the forced removal of Native Peoples and rural whites from these valued lands, as well as new restrictions on what could be done with the resources found on the land, green space became raced, classed and Christianized.

Establishing parkland requires creating boundaries and enforcing regulations, which often leads to conflict with populations residing in the area prior to the new norms. In the Adirondack Park region, rural whites who had previously harvested wood for fire, building materials and to take to market, were subject to fines and arrest when attempting to maintain their harvesting practices. Additionally, fire codes were established that allowed for burning fields for planting, but the periods of allowance didn’t match up with the actual needs of the residents. These inconsistencies inevitably lead to conflict, and in some cases lead to arson as a form of resistance. Describing arsons in the Adirondack, Jacoby (2001) explains the intent in “asserting his disregard for the state’s attempts to control the time and space where fires were permissible”, which “can therefore be interpreted not simply as a manifestation of revenge but as an effort by those residents who believed that the Forest Commission’s regulations had unfairly deprived them of their rights to hunt, farm, or lumber to assert their – and the forests’ – freedom from state

supervision” (p. 77). The State moved to establish greater structural control of the region away from rural whites that had occupied the land with the permission of the State, and in the face of resistance, took the opportunity to increase its presence. Describing the Forest Commission’s observation stations built throughout the Adirondack serving to spot fires, Jacoby (2001) writes, “To facilitate their occupants’ views of the surrounding territory, the stations rose far above the surrounding tree line. Starkly silhouetted against the Adirondacks sky, each stood as a prominent symbol of the heightened state surveillance that conservation had brought to the region” (p. 78). It is clear that the State was strengthened through the establishment of the parkland. Rural whites that may have largely existed outside of the State infrastructure were now forced to contend with, and adapt to, it. While preserving parkland may be seen as halting destruction and retaining preexisting conditions, this is not necessarily the case.

The Havasupai serve as a prime example of how the State develops as a foreign entity and restructures relationships with the land through the establishment of preserves and parkland. A Havasupai creation story clearly illustrates the rhythms of the land and the people in the Grand Canyon region. Jacoby (2001) explains,

According to one of their stories, the Havasupai learned how to cultivate their staple agricultural crop, corn, from Coyote. Coyote planted the first kernels of the plant near the canyon creek from which the Havasupai took their name for themselves: Havsuw ‘Baaja, people of the blue-green water. (Later visitors would corrupt this term into Yavasupai, Suppai, and finally the name by which the tribe is known today, Havasupai.) But Coyote did not have enough seeds. The Havasupai, he told the tribe, could farm only part of the year. The rest of the year

they would have to hunt for their food as he did. As a result, during the prereservation era the Havasupai lived an existence divided between intensive agriculture and extensive hunting and gathering. (p. 152)

This dual life pattern required living in the canyon part of the year, growing and harvesting food, and living the rest of the year on the plateau above the canyon, sustaining on animals and plants available. This traditional pattern was established before the *wilderness preservation pioneer heroes* dreamt of the Nation Parks, and long before Europeans began to colonize the Americas. This traditional cycle was somewhat impacted by early colonizers under Spanish domain, later Mexican rule, and American settlers after the Mexican-American War, but what was most disruptive was when,

in 1893, the federal government had created the Grand Cañon Forest Reserve (later, Grand Canyon National Park), which encompassed the territory that the Havasupai people had long claimed as a hunting ground for game, a gathering area for wild foodstuffs, and a grazing spot for their horses. The establishment of this reserve left the tribe with a reservation completely surrounded by national forestlands, so that any effort by the Havasupai to venture outside their reservation – for hunting, the gathering of plants and firewood, the grazing of animals, or other activities – risked bringing them into conflict with the forest's new federal managers. Unsurprisingly, the Havasupai, much like the rural folk in the Adirondacks and at Yellowstone, continue their customary use of the resources now enclosed within conservation lands. But they did so now as outlaws who often had to dodge the rangers sent to enforce the reserve's regulations (Jacoby 2001, p. 150).

For rural whites, the relationships disrupted by the establishment of parklands were a couple years or a few generations deep at most. For Native Peoples, as exemplified through the Havsupai above, the disruptions erode the fabric of the communities developed over hundreds and thousands of years at specific sites. The land is foundational for traditional cultures and thus, the issues with establishing parklands are part of the longer legacy of colonization. As Jacoby (2001) explains,

Conservation interlocked on multiple levels with other, ongoing efforts – treaties, the establishment of reservations, allotment – to displace Indians’ claims upon the natural world in order to open up such areas to non-Indians. In this sense, conservation was for Native Americans inextricably bound up with conquest – with a larger conflict over land and resources that predated conservation’s rise. Any discussion of the consequences that conservation had for Indian peoples thus needs to take these coterminous incidents into account. From the perspective of Native Americans, conservation was but one piece of a larger process of colonization and state building in which Indian peoples were transformed (in theory, at least) from independent actors to dependent wards bound by governmental controls. (p. 151)

Establishing the National Park system has been a strategic project further entrenching the power of the State over lands and resources through infrastructure and enforcement. Lands have been redefined, becoming raced and classed for the purpose of serving the needs of the State.

The National Parks are colonial theme parks presented as neutral spaces. They are spaces that have been constructed through the colonial gaze, redefined and given

meaning through white supremacy. They are presented as areas in crises or under threat, needing protection. In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Pratt (1992) describes this concept as “anti-conquest,” defined as “the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony” (p. 7). Pratt points to the natural history style of travel writing, where the object, the land, is observed and assessed in a seemingly neutral way, but the perspective is sourced in white supremacy and therefore an imperial production.

Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns’ (2009) *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea*, a narrative on the development of the National Park system filled with quotes from its advocates and architects, serves as a central source for language to understand how the spatial production of the environment is raced, classed, gendered and Christianized. Duncan and Burns’ (2009) Eurocentric point of reference and the absence of Native Peoples is immediately apparent, as the significance of the preserved lands is described through the awe of “trees, still growing, that were already saplings before the time of Christ, before Rome conquered the known world, before the Greeks worshipped in the Parthenon, before the Egyptians built the Pyramids” (p. xxi). Even when a nod is given to the spirituality of Native Peoples, as evident through the description of “an island where a goddess named Pele destroys everything in her path while she simultaneously gives birth to new land,” it is actually more telling of the American colonial fantasy given the destructive acts and policies faced by Native Hawaiians at the hands of European and American colonizers (p. xxi). Some references appear benign, as with “cathedrals of stone,” which references Christianity (p. xxii). Others are much more intricate.

One particular passage carries multiple examples of the construction of a narrative for spatial production, while being especially devoid of historical context. Describing the material and rhetorical value of the preserved lands, Duncan and Burns (2009) write:

They become the last refuge for magnificent species of animals that otherwise would have vanished forever. And they remain a refuge for human beings seeking to replenish their spirit; geographies of memory and hope, where countless American families have forged an intimate connection to their land – and then passed it along to their children. But they are more than a collection of rocks and trees and inspirational scenes from nature. They embody something less tangible yet equally enduring – an idea, born in the United States nearly a century after its creation, as uniquely American as the Declaration of Independence and just as radical. National parks, the writer and historian Wallace Stegner once said, are “the best idea we’ve ever had.” (p. xxii)

The self-centered, and yet so self-unaware, writing is jarring. The National Parks are described as a refuge for animals in danger with no context connecting the crisis to the creation and expansion of the American state. The source of the poison and the proponents of an antidote are one in the same. Also, there is no acknowledgement of how legally redefining the spiritual, material and intergenerational relationships Native peoples are allowed to have with the land is necessary for White wealthy men to inherit the colonial legacy.

Another striking example of the land becoming raced and Christianized is found in the colonial history of the area that has become the Yosemite National Park. Lafayette Bunnell of the Mariposa Battalion, a group of colonizers focused on relocating all

Natives found in the area, upon entering the Yosemite Valley wrote, “I have here seen the power and glory of a Supreme Being; the majesty of His handy-work is in that ‘Testimony of the Rocks’” (p. 2). Here, Bunnell credits the stunning physical beauty of the valley to the Christian God. Connecting the land to something within their own worldview allows for a familiarity and legitimacy that facilitates domination of the land and its people. The history behind the subsequent renaming of the National Park is particularly telling. After burning down the housing and food supply of the Natives who had fled, the colonizers of the Mariposa Battalion agreed that “as the first white men ever to enter the valley, they should give it a name,” and decided on Yosemite given that they believed that to be the name of the peoples who they were intent on displacing (2). In actuality,

natives called the valley *Ahwahnee*, meaning “the place of a gaping mouth,” and that they called themselves the Ahwahneechees, in honor of the valley they had considered their home for centuries. “Yosemite,” it was learned, meant something entirely different. In the native language, “Yosemite” refers to people who should be feared. It means “they are killers.” (p. 2)

The irony here cannot be lost. The colonizers were on a mission to erase Native peoples from the land, decided to name the land after the Native peoples after removing them from the land, and chose a name that reflected themselves more than it did the Native peoples. This is another example of giving meaning to something that already has meaning.

In 1864, California Senator John Conness introduced a bill that would pass and become the Yosemite Grant, establishing the site as a preserved park, making way for

Yellowstone to become the first national park a few years later. Introducing the bill, Conness said “I will state to the Senate that this bill proposes to make a grant of certain premises located in the Sierra Nevada mountains, in the State of California, that are for all public purposes worthless, but which constitute, perhaps, some of the greatest wonders of the world” and made it clear that he did so on behalf of “various gentlemen of California,” particularly “gentlemen of fortune, of taste, and of refinement” (p. 8). Conness identifies the land as worthless, except aesthetically. This land was to be preserved for the leisure of elite white men from the West Coast. The land was repositioned as a resource to be managed and exploited in a different fashion.

Xenophobia in Environmentalism

Managing this newly defined space came through the ideology of appreciation through separation. In order to appreciate the “environment,” one had to be primarily located outside of the “environment,” with occasional entry for leisure. In order for the environment to be preserved for appreciation, access needed to be limited so as to not exhaust resources. These ideas began to thrive through environmentalism and manifest in other white supremacist and patriarchal ways. This is seen clearly through the work of John Tanton, who “was centrally involved in several interlocking organizations, including Planned Parenthood, ZPG [Zero Population Growth], and the Sierra Club, promoting what he defined as the overlapping agendas of immigration, population control, and environmentalism. Tanton used each of these platforms to mount his campaign against what he labeled the ‘modern-day wetback’” (Gutiérrez 2008, p. 75). With the “environment” defined through white supremacy, it is the next logical step that white supremacy would continue to manifest itself in environmentalism.

Racism and xenophobia became institutionalized in environmentalism. Gutiérrez (2008) notes, “When Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb* was published in May 1968 and distributed by the Sierra Club, Tanton was... so convinced by its message of impending world chaos through high birthrate that he handed out copies at every opportunity and encouraged Sierra Club leaders to sponsor a conference on population growth that would call for a national population policy” (p. 77). Tanton’s investment in environmentalism was rooted in white supremacist patriotism and xenophobia, which led to patriarchal activism in birth control. The environmentalist perspective was that in order for the environment to be controlled and managed as a resource, population also had to be controlled and managed. This again, was racialized, as Gutiérrez (2008) explains, “Tanton held strong views about the necessity of family planning, especially for certain women. He felt that some women should bear children, while others should not” (p. 76). This preference for who should reproduce, and who should not, became particularly acute “as concern about the so-called population problem abated after demographers began issuing reports of a declining U.S. birthrate... population control experts identified a new adversary: the Mexican immigrant” (p. 73). At this point, it becomes clear that xenophobia overtook environmentalism, or rather; white supremacist xenophobia fully manifested itself within the colonial project of environmentalism. This xenophobia is a throwback to the efforts to remove *undesirables* from the *environment*.

Through environmentalism, the environment is to be preserved for the betterment of the nation, and xenophobia plays well within environmentalism, particularly when it concerns the need to control Mexican immigration for the preservation of the nation. This happened as, “Many population control advocates ominously pointed out that as the

nation's birthrates dropped, immigration became a larger percentage of the total growth rate... Convinced that unchecked immigration was undoing efforts to control overpopulation, Tanton sought to win other organizations over to the side of immigration control" (p. 79). He was successful at doing this. One bold move was the establishment of Zero Population Growth Inc. (ZPG). Like other organizations advocating for population control, "ZPG believed that immigration presented an impending national disaster" and believed it required "immediate and bold policy action, regardless of its racially charged ideas" (p. 75). "Racially charged" is code for overtly racist. Using the deteriorating environment as an indicator of immigration issues:

John Tanton's advancement of an immigration control platform focusing on the fertility of Mexican-immigrant women clearly shows how policymakers and population activists constructed and manipulated a racialized demographics aimed to incite fear in the general public for the advancement of an immigration control agenda... the interests that drive immigration reform have gone beyond the efforts of this individual advocate and have become a central component of debate in the U.S. environmental movement. (p. 93)

It is important to recognize how environmentalism has worked to protect the nation-state, using white supremacist and patriarchal positions. Codifying indigenous dispossession through the discourse of resource conservation allows environmentalists to position themselves as rightful protectors and guardians against degradation, and rationalize their nativist xenophobia through the same discourse.

Development has Identity

Environmentalism and the environment, especially the National Parks, are seen as neutral, but it is important to understand their development and the worldviews through which they are created and the logics they perpetuate. Delaney (2010) implores us to understand how “engagement with race has enriched our general understanding of how space works to condition the operation of power and the constitution of relational identities” (p. 6). The Parks are not neutral or natural spaces. In fact, they have been produced through specific worldviews of coloniality. The idea that land can be fractured and kept separate, generating a seemingly democratic space for the enjoyment of all citizens, negates the reality of the dispossession and exclusion perpetrated on Native peoples who had developed their worldviews in direct connection to the land. This process redefined Native peoples and their engagement with their homelands, racializing the peoples and the lands. It is essential to understand that these types of racial formations¹ are “integral to the formation and revision of *all* American spatialities at all scales of reference, from the international (constructions of the foreigner, the wetback, the American) to the corporeal” (p. 7). Racial formation is engrained in State formation. Normalizing displacement and dehistoricizing lands initially generate a narrative of discovery and later justify the moral imperative for preservation.

Erasing the context of these formations simultaneously racializes and color-blinds. This logic appears to contradict itself, but Delaney explains:

¹ For more on the social construction of race, see Omi and Winant’s (1994) *Racial Formation in the U.S.: From the 1960s to the 1990s*

² The term “Raza”, meaning “the peoples,” is used here as a term of reclamation rather

Spaces may be produced in accordance with ideologies of color-blindness or race consciousness, of integrationism, assimilationism, separatism, or nativism. These race-centered ideologies combine with other ideological elements — such as those centered on public-private, ownership, sexuality, citizenship, democracy, or crime— and with other axes of power to produce the richly textured, highly variegated, and power- laden spatialities of everyday life. The questions for geographers might then be: how does the racial formation shape space, give meanings to places, and condition the experience of embodied subjects emplaced in and moving through the material world?” (p. 7)

Though destructive resource extractive capitalism and land preservation are seen as oppositional, as are urban settlement and rural living, they both contribute to, and are essential for, the maintenance of the State.

Co-optation, imposing meaning on what already has meaning, is a necessary process for environmentalism, the establishment of National Parks, and the State. Co-optation was accomplished through the infantilization of the land through stewardship. Indigenous people were infantilized in this process as well, often being removed from traditional homelands and becoming wards of the state through the establishment of reservations. The relationship of peoples and the land had been different, with the indigenous understandings that we are the land. Lands and Peoples are subjected to protection from expansion, ironically in the service of expansion. This protection does not inhibit exploitation. It instead manages exploitation. In the logic of coloniality, destruction and disconnection are a norm, with some relief provided through the occasional visit to a National Park, or some other open space. The National Parks present

a narrative of public space for public good, while necessitating dispossession and harm for its establishment. The environment is for “Americans” (Raced, gendered, classed and Christianized), opened to everyone instead of being recognized as the traditional homelands of Native Peoples. The uses of the lands are redefined as well. What does “enjoyment” mean? Lands that sustained Native peoples in intimate relation over thousands of years are now colonial theme parks that allow visitors to escape their ordinary routine and embody the rugged individualism of the first colonizers hundreds of years back, equally exempt from accountability.

Environmental Justice: Syncretism or Co-optation

The belief that Europeans and Native Americans are at different stages of development has underpinned European attitudes since the time of Columbus. Through the centuries, it has validated the certainty that some force greater than ourselves (God, History, Evolution) destines Europeans and Euro-Americans – for better or worse – to subdue the wilderness and supplant the “Indian”

-James Wilson (1998)

According to Merriam-Webster, syncretism is “the combination of different forms of belief or practice” and to co-opt is “to cause or force (someone or something) to become part of your group, movement, etc... to use or take control of (something) for your own purposes.” These two processes are fundamentally different. Given these definitions, syncretism might seem like a mutual process, where the beliefs or practices involved would give and take, resulting in a new set of beliefs or practices retaining components of the previous existing beliefs or practices but in a new form. Co-optation is appropriating and giving meaning to what already has meaning. While syncretism could describe a process where different beliefs and practices are equally valued as they are combined, co-optation involves a dominant set of beliefs or practices that reshape, redefine, and/or supplant subordinated beliefs and practices.

Social organization, in what has become the United States, has not been syncretic. It would not even be appropriate to describe the ideas as borrowed from Native Peoples because of the dispossession that has been foundational to the establishment of the State. Many ideas of democracy, anarchy, communism, confederation, and union have been co-opted by Europeans/Euro-Americans and have been distorted to the point that they are not easily identifiable as concepts that originate with Native Peoples (Wilson 1998, p. 120-122). Scholars such as Donald A. Grinde Jr. and Bruce E. Johansen with their texts *Exemplar of Liberty: Native America and the Evolution of Democracy* (1991) and *Debating Democracy: The Iroquois Legacy of Freedom* (1997), the latter with contributions from Barbara A. Mann, have reclaimed some social organization intellectual property for Native Peoples.

Similar to the social organization concepts above, concepts of the environment and relation to the environment have been co-opted. As discussed in Chapter 1, the “environment” has been raced, classed, gendered and Christianized. With the “environment” becoming White space, particularly reinforced through intense forced relocation and urbanization, we can be limited to understanding the environment through a lens which privileges Whiteness and Western worldviews. One example emerging from early colonial times is the ceremony of the Blessing of the Animals, part of the festival celebrating Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and ecology. With Catholic conversion, particularly coerced conversion of Native Peoples in the Americas, you have a transition from recognizing animals as being sacred unto themselves, understanding a greater interconnectedness, to animals having to be blessed by an intermediary. This Christian authority positions itself between Native Peoples and

animals, containing power over sacredness, redefining it and bestowing it upon others.

This is exemplified through this prayer, common in the Blessing of the Animals ceremony:

Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures. You called forth fish in the sea, birds in the air and animals on the land. You inspired St. Francis to call all of them his brothers and sisters. We ask you to bless this pet. By the power of your love, enable it to live according to your plan. May we always praise you for all your beauty in creation. Blessed are you, Lord our God, in all your creatures! Amen (Mackin, n.d.).

Through this process, we are compelled to center a Western concept of God and its authority on Earth, the Church. The animals in themselves are no longer sacred, but must have sacredness bestowed on them through the medium of a Saint that is called upon by an ordained member of the Church.

Among the distinctions between syncretism and co-optation, the power dynamics at play in the processes, and the outcomes, it is important to understand the infantilization that manifests when meaning is given to things that already have meanings. This is important as we look at the development of “Environmental Justice,” particularly in relation to environmentalism.

Race and “Environmental Justice”

A false collective memory facilitates subordination.

-Rudy Acuña (1998)

The terms “environmentalism” and “Environmental Justice” are inadequate in capturing the full breadth of the conditions of, as well as work being done in, communities of color. *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on*

the Racial and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice (1987) is a report that was groundbreaking in bringing environmental racism to light using empirical data. The report found an undeniable correlation between the placement of toxic waste facilities and communities with a high rate of people of color and also concluded that communities with little or no toxic waste facilities have a low ratio of people of color. According to the data, the higher the percentages of people of color living in a community, the more hazardous waste facilities are found in that community. Using zip codes, the study discovered that class was less of a factor than race for determining proximity to toxic waste facilities. Direct connections between health affects to people of color and hazardous waste industry were made. This report was foundational in identifying community organizing against toxic waste facilities as environmentalism, which later developed into what is known as “Environmental Justice.”

Moving beyond naming the connection between racism and the environment, Laura Pulido (1996a), in *A Critical Review of the Methodology of Environmental Racism Research*, examines how racism works to create situations where people of color are forced to live under certain circumstances and are denied economic and political access to resist these situations. In doing so, Pulido rebukes the challenge that environmental racism does not exist and calls for the development of an anti-racist and left movement, not environmentalism. Pulido’s deep engagement with racism is in direct contrast to some of the shallow analysis, or lack of analysis, of race found in environmentalism. Pulido does not take race or class for granted, but instead works to pull at the fabric that normalizes marginalization. Concerning what at that time was coalescing as a movement

in some areas, in *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest* (1996b), Pulido writes,

subaltern environmental struggles fit the mold of neither old nor new social movements. Instead they combine elements of economic struggles, identity politics, and quality of life issues... environmental struggles of the marginalized are very much about power. Only through gaining more power to change their conditions can oppressed people live in dignity and work toward social equality” (p. xvii-xviii)

Pulido, points to the need for recognizing emerging struggles in new contexts. Exploring further in the same text, Pulido explains, “this new form of environmentalism goes by a variety of headings: grassroots, popular, livelihood, resistance, environmental justice, and resource struggles. What they all share is a counterhegemonic, or subaltern, location – they exist in opposition to prevailing powers” (Pulido 1996b, page 4). Here, Pulido pushes the analysis of the factors that contribute to the struggles, and identifies power as a place of contention, regardless of labels placed on the struggles. In an attempt to group the struggles, Pulido opens the door to a more nuanced analysis that has common ground, but also emerges in different contexts, especially outside of environmentalism. Further challenging normalized connections between race and environmentalism, Laura Pulido (2002), in *Reflections on a White Discipline*, develops the understanding of race as a spatial relation. Recognizing race as a spatial relation deepens the analysis of the work that Raza² engage in that may be labeled “environmentalism.” This directly challenges

² The term “Raza”, meaning “the peoples,” is used here as a term of reclamation rather than “Hispanic” or “Latina/o” which limit reference to Spanish or Roman colonial experiences attempt to homogenize people through nation building and erode the true

the renaming that has occurred to fit this work into environmentalism post 1987. The deeper analysis allows for movement towards acknowledging the work that Raza engage in for its uniqueness and legacy.

“Environmental Justice” and Environmentalism: Where do we stand?

Robert Bullard is often referred to as the father of “Environmental Justice” for his early activism and framing of the issues and struggles through his scholarly work. In *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (1990), Bullard presents the argument that concerns involving the environment were not relevant for Black people until the issues were presented through a civil rights discourse. He describes “Environmental Justice” as the junction between the struggle for civil rights and environmentalism. Directly challenging environmentalism, Robert Doyle Bullard (1993), in *Anatomy of Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Movement*, presents an array of environmental issues concerning people of color. This is followed by an analysis of how mainstream environmentalism does not possess the tools to deal with these issues. Included in this field of tools that are lacking are analysis, vision and strategy. These tools are essential in any movement, but Bullard also challenges that mainstream environmentalism lacks a suitable organizational base to meaningfully address the real conditions of communities of color. It is asserted that race needs to be centered in the

value of diversity in culture and experience. “Raza” refers to communities that have Indigenous origins in the Americas mixed with Spanish linguistic and cultural customs. This definition allows individuals and communities to navigate their own histories and identities while still recognizing common experiences of colonization and other forms of disorientation brought about by the historical legacy of oppression. This definition is particularly useful for discussions of Indigenous migrants and disorientation in Chapter Four: *Testimonio* of this thesis.

work in order to be adequate. Bullard provides yet another concrete analysis attesting to the insufficiency of environmentalism. Despite Bullard's eloquent theorizing of the struggles, challenging environmentalism, he continues to locate "Environmental Justice" within the legacy of environmentalism.

Also addressing environmentalism, Dorceta E. Taylor (1993), in *Environmentalism and the Politics of Inclusion*, writes of the development of mainstream environmentalism and the lack of people of color in this movement. Taylor notes the struggles of people of color in the 80s as "Environmental Justice." The struggles Taylor categorizes as "Environmental Justice" shift toward an analysis of race and class and a focus on health and hazards. Though Taylor attempts to connect the work in the 80s to environmentalism, she lays out the groundwork for understanding how this work is radically different. One of the most noted differences in ideology is the move away from NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard, defined as not wanting the issue in ones own community, but being okay with it being in a different community) prevalent in environmentalism, which shows the work of communities of color to be cognizant of a larger struggle. Despite these differences, Taylor (2000) locates "Environmental Justice" within environmentalism by explaining that the Environmental Justice Paradigm is the combination of civil rights discourse and concepts of the New Environmental Paradigm, the latest evolution of environmentalism These struggles are being tied in name to the legacies of oppression. More recently, Taylor (2011) continues to identify "Environmental Justice" within environmentalism and merely as a response to environmental racism. What is missed here, is that the responses are grounded in worldviews, some of which or not Western. Understanding the communities where these

struggles emerge, it becomes clear that analysis needs to go beyond simply how communities respond to oppression. It is crucial to engage the worldviews that are at the foundation of responses to oppression.

Devon G. Peña (2005) follows the same path that Taylor (1993) takes as far as examining the “environmentalism” work of communities of color. In his thorough book *Mexican Americans and the Environment: Tierra y Vida*, Peña (2005) presents scientific understandings of how the environment functions as well as different beliefs around these understandings. The two possible directions for where environmentalism could have headed are presented through John Muir’s ideas of wilderness preservation and Gifford Pinchot’s ideas of natural resource conservation, with Muir’s ideas eventually winning out and continuing to be at the core of mainstream environmentalism. Peña covers a great deal of work in the Raza community that is deemed “Environmental Justice” including farm workers against pesticides and urban communities against toxics. Also chronicled are efforts of Raza to assert land and water rights as well as recoup and retain cultural ways of engaging in the environment. One of the most unique aspects of this book is that it covers a large history of Raza engagement with the environment before the initial invasion, challenging the notion that Raza began to engage in the environment in the late eighties. While Peña works to distance the struggles of Raza from mainstream environmentalism by showing a unique history and contemporary engagement with the environment, he still ties it to the legacy of environmentalism by labeling it “Environmental Justice” and identifying its emergence as a convergence, similar to Bullard and Taylor.

It is important to recognize the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit of 1991 for producing the *Principles of Environmental Justice*, which represents the foundational step in identifying a large portion of grassroots activism within working class communities of color as “Environmental Justice.” There was a large representation of organizations challenging environmental racism from around the nation that came to a consensus on the basic principles of the movement. At the heart of the agreement was the prioritizing of the preservation of spiritual relationships with the land, culture, language, beliefs about the land, and ways of healing, all grounded in non-Western worldviews. Along with this, economic alternatives to the industries harming communities were called for. In the document, there is recognition of the history of colonization and its contemporary manifestations of genocide and hazards in communities. There is a call to work for liberation of communities politically, economically and culturally. In reading the document, it becomes apparent that the call is actually anti-colonial (against contemporary colonization), and decolonial (reversing colonization) in its efforts. The words “Environmental Justice” begin every principle in the document but the principles themselves run counter to many of the aims and tactics of mainstream environmentalism. Associating with environmentalism through the term “Environmental Justice” is done to create lines for coalition building, but what is lost is the nuance of the communities leading struggles. There is a clearer and less restricting field for coalition building, which can be found in histories of, as well as resistance to, colonization.

In a reflection on the “Environmental Justice” movement, Paul Almeida (1998), in *The Network for Environmental and Economic Justice in the Southwest: An Interview*

with Richard Moore, interviewed well-known community activist Richard Moore, who is often identified as a leader within the “Environmental Justice” movement. Moore covered a large history of “Environmental Justice” work across the nation as well as in the borderlands on the south side of the United States-Mexico border. The diversity of the movement and the determination of working class people of color, and women specifically, to resist oppression is clear. Moore characterizes the movement as multiracial coalition building with a focus on the environment and the economy. He connects the struggles to environmentalism but doesn’t couch the struggles within environmentalism just because the struggles involve air, land and/or water. Moore noted the need for broad based community organizing and de-emphasized the “environment” from a mainstream standpoint in favor of a more general movement, which shows where Moore sees the work he and others engage in within a larger context.

The tendency of scholars and activists that engage in “Environmental Justice” to locate the work outside of environmentalism but still part of it points at the inability of environmentalism to capture the full breadth of the conditions of communities of color as well as the struggles in response to these conditions. This emphasizes the importance of analyzing our communities and the activism of our communities within a larger anti-colonial and decolonial framework which allows for more nuanced narratives. If “Environmental Justice” is left as the latest evolution of environmentalism, the struggles become disconnected from longer legacies. Environmentalism is not needed as a medium to understand the struggles identified as “Environmental Justice.” In fact, locating “Environmental Justice” within environmentalism disassociates it from being overtly anti-racist.

Academic Intervention, State Response and the Need for Continued Struggle

As “Environmental Justice” has been embraced in academia and the State, it is important to understand the ways in which it builds the capacity of struggles, and ways in which it becomes a barrier. Academics have worked hand in hand with communities in struggle consistently, helping to theorize the struggles, research the issues, and provide tools for communities to challenge the problems in ways the State views as legitimate. The State has engaged “Environmental Justice” begrudgingly at times, in ways that generate a rhetoric of condemning past wrongs, while at the same time reproducing these wrongs in contemporary ways, through processes and projects.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Environmental Justice webpage includes a narrative of the development of “Environmental Justice” which is consistent with the narrative presented by Robert Bullard (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). The narrative highlights the role of activists and academics in pressuring the State into action on issues of environmental racism. It grounds “Environmental Justice” in the Civil Rights Movement and brings the movement up to the 90s, with the Congressional Black Caucus presenting it’s case to the EPA that people of color and low-income communities face disproportionate impacts from polluting industries. President Bill Clinton’s 1994 Executive Order 12898, “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations,” represents a pinnacle moment in the struggle of the academics and activists pressuring the State. The Order calls for communication across agencies, access to information for marginalized communities, analysis and action on federal projects that disproportionately impact low-income and communities of color, and highlights existing law that should protect

disproportionately impacted communities. These are all actions that should have already been happening, so the Order subtly admits the State was enabling environmental racism.

EPA's definition of "Environmental Justice" is problematic. One especially unfortunate aspect of the definition of "Environmental Justice," as defined by the EPA, is that it seems to dehistoricize the issues as it calls for "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income" (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). In my experience dealing with the I-710 Improvement Project, agencies do not see a problem with the project negatively impacting communities as long as it is "fair," in that all the communities are impacted, and distributes the impacts without regard for race or income, in that they do not see a problem as long as there is consistency in who gets impacted. Given that the I-710 is located in the South East area of Los Angeles County, the communities are relatively consistent communities of color and low-income. Because of the consistency, the agencies leading the project feel justified in explaining that the project does not have any "Environmental Justice" issues. This reasoning negates the fact that this facility and other existing goods movement infrastructure already disproportionately impact low-income communities of color, and these communities carry the burden for the movement of goods across the nation. Also, the definition limits the focus of the matter to issues "with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies" (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). With the I-710 project, what this has resulted in is the lead agencies using the requirements as a maximum instead of a minimum. The laws, regulations and policies that should be in

place to protect vulnerable communities become a ceiling instead of a platform to remedy existing and future issues.

When it comes to local jurisdictions, such as the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the “Environmental Justice” policies come from outside the agency. Specifically, SCAG recognizes Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as the federal policy they comply with by disclosing information on burdens from their projects, particularly when they relate to communities of color and low-income communities. Unfortunately, this seems to be treated as a formality at times, just a box to check off but without value placed on meaningful public participation. Regarding “Environmental Justice,” SCAG’s website shares, “Environmental Justice is about equal and fair access to a healthy environment, with the goal of protecting underrepresented and poorer communities from incurring disproportionate environmental impacts” (SCAG). This comes across as a loose acknowledgment that communities of color and low-income communities are facing disproportionate impacts, but does not commit the agency to action. For communities on the front lines of these struggles, a goal is meaningless if there is no accountability. The only way this has come about is under pressure from activists and academics.

One of the most impactful tools developed by academics has come from Manuel Pastor, Rachel Morello-Frosch and Jim Sadd. The Environmental Justice Screening Method is an analytical tool that combines demographic data, data on exposure to pollution, and represents this data geographically to show toxic hot spots, which are identified as “environmental justice communities” (Pastor, Morello-Frosch, and Sadd 2013). This tool has proven to be very successful and has been transformed by the state

of California into the CalEnvironScreen 2.0, a state program that has taken demographic data (not race) that might make communities more vulnerable (examples: large population of children and elders, low levels of education, language isolation), along with data on exposure to multiple pollutants, represents the data geographically and issues scores up to 100 per census tract around the state. This government acknowledgement of disparities has been useful for raising visibility to issues of environmental racism, particularly in Los Angeles, the Bay Area and the Central Valley. This data is taken by communities and used for self-defense, adding more weight to the struggles to build healthier communities. The U.S. EPA has been working on a similar tool at a national level, which is expected in 2015.

The Case for Nuanced Analysis

The destructive force of the colonial State and Western worldviews has impacted Native peoples, people of color and low-income communities in varying ways. This legacy continues today with the contemporary State and is challenged with diverse strategies and tools from historically aggrieved communities who continue to be negatively impacted disproportionately. As we examine these struggles, we must relocate their origins by understanding the specific worldviews that inform the struggles. Through the analysis of case studies, we will better understand in which ways these communities, their struggles and the worldviews at their foundation, are in conflict with the Western worldviews that have formed the State.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In a conversation with my *compañera* (partner) Floridalma Boj Lopez, she brought up *The Ethnography of Empowerment: The Transformative Power of Classroom Interaction* (H. A. Robinson, 1994). In her interpretation of Robinson's argument about research not just being about extraction, but also empowering for the informants, Floridalma extended the analysis by posing the possibility of "changing research from a process of extraction to a process of instruction" (personal communication, June 9, 2014). This approach is reflective of my work. I started this academic project in 2008, but the conversations that inform my work have been taking place for my whole life, in car rides, over meals, in the streets, at parks, and in living rooms. My grandparents and mother are not informants. They are co-creators.

The reality is, these conversations have been taking place for generations in my family, with three generations building community on the Eastside of Los Angeles for six decades, and the fourth generation currently emerging. This is an effort to lay out more of our story. In order to contextualize our specific stories, the emergence of environmentalism and "Environmental Justice" needed to be analyzed. Understanding environmentalism as part of the colonial legacy of the State, and "Environmental Justice" as not located within environmentalism, creates the space for the oral history of my family to demonstrate the longevity of the indigenous principles/worldviews that inform the community building we have done.

Recognizing the uniqueness of Indigenous Peoples and experiences with colonization, the importance of qualitative research when attempting to engage in a process of understanding is especially apparent. A qualitative approach to conducting

interviews allows those being interviewed to elaborate on their responses and gave us, my grandparents, my mother, and myself, the opportunity to allow conversation to flow and topics to develop through the conversation. Because I interviewed family members, I had a background on which to conduct the interviews, contributing to the quality of the interviews. Also, because everyone interviewed is related, it was easy to see that stories matched up and perspectives were similar.

I chose to conduct interviews because conversations are the most familiar activities my family members and I engage in. I conducted one paired interview with my grandparents and one individual interview with my mother. My grandparents are accustomed to talking to me together and I chose to interview them together because this provided the most comfortable environment for the interview. This was beneficial when my grandparents were fact checking with each other and piggy-backing off of each others' stories. It became problematic when they would talk over each other or would have to wait for a long story to be over in order to share as well, though this did not hinder the goals of the interview. My mother is accustomed to talking to me individually, and the individual interview ran smoothly. I chose to record both interview sessions in order to preserve the information for family members and future generations.

My research focuses on my family in the Eastside. My grandparents migrated to the Eastside and my mother is part of the first generation to be in the Eastside, being born in Boyle Heights. I chose to focus on the Eastside because it is what I consider home and coupled with the fact that I chose to interview my family members, the research process was very personal and intimate. Focusing on those two generations also allows for further study in my family into the next two generations that already exist. The two

oldest generations were also the focus because they represent the initial establishing of community on the Eastside as well as the first generation to spend their entire life in the Eastside.

I analyzed the content of the interviews through notes I took during the interviews and also listening to the tapes of the interviews multiple time. By doing this, I was able to group similar ideas and found a running pattern of contributing to community. I then proceeded by attempting to establish a pattern or progression of contributing to community, which I was successful in doing, especially through a generational analysis. This framed Chapter Four: *Testimonio*.

I made sure to omit anything that was not particularly relevant to the research or anything that I felt did not have the potential to be relevant to the research. Though none of the individuals interviewed asked to see the product of the interviews, I shared my findings with them as well as other family members. This may have presented an issue if they were not my family members, but because all of the individuals interviewed have shared the stories with other family members, the new information I am sharing is mostly connections and analysis. I discussed my analysis with my grandparents and mother, and they approved of the connections and conclusions I came to.

Given the topic, the settings of the interviews are intimately tied to the interviews themselves. The interview of my grandparents, Juana and Ricardo Gutierrez, took place in the East Los Angeles community of Boyle Heights. They have lived in this community for 59 years, since 1956, and the interview took place in the home they have lived in for over 45 years. The area once housed a heavily Russian, Jewish, and Japanese population but now is almost exclusively Raza. My

grandparents' home has been the site and source of much of the activism of the organization co-founded by my grandmother, Madres del Este de Los Angeles – Santa Isabel (MELASI). This is where organizational meetings took place as well as the office for much of the organization's existence.

Multiple generations of our family can be found in the household regularly, with three generations recently living in the household together. The interview took place at the dining room table, a room that is directly connected to the living room. Both of these rooms have been places where many stories have been passed down to me from both of my grandparents, as well as my mother, aunts, and uncles. The house was the site of my mother's childhood as well as my own. This made for an especially intimate setting. As the interview progressed, others in my family who were not part of the interview sat near, and occasionally stood by and contributed, as the stories came out. These portions were omitted because of the focus of this paper on my grandparents and my mother.

The interview of my mother, Elsa Gutierrez Lopez, took place at the home of my mother and father. The house has always been a financial priority in my family to establish security, given our background of poverty. This prioritizing has been established verbally through stories as well as actions. The house sits about one block away from the line of unincorporated East Los Angeles and Montebello, on the Montebello side. That line once divided Raza from Whites, but Montebello now has an almost exclusive Raza population in South Montebello and areas connected to unincorporated East Los Angeles.

This household also regularly has multiple generations of my family at once. Before I was able to begin interviewing my mother, we had to wait for my brother, nephew and niece to leave in order for the house to be settled down enough to proceed. My partner, Floridalma, was present but not part of the interview, similar to other individuals at the interview of my grandparents. The home has been one of the sites of my childhood as well as one of the sites of the childhoods' of my nephew, niece and my two daughters. The interview took place in the intimate setting of the living room, also a place where many stories have been passed down to me.

The two locations, the homes of my parents and grandparents, have defined what the Eastside is for me. Traveling back and forth on Whittier Blvd between Garfield Blvd and Soto Street has been a regular experience in my life and to this day I can find myself not leaving this particular area for long periods of time besides for school, work, or visiting my partner's family. It is because of being rooted in the Eastside and the intimacy of the home setting that I brought the interviews directly to them. It did not make sense to me to conduct the interviews anywhere besides a place that is theirs or ours, especially because we would all be going through a process we are not accustomed to. I made sure to conduct the interviews in a place they are naturally in at that time of day. I was careful to not move them too far out of their norm. One of my goals for the interview was that they would retain a sense of power throughout the process, which was evident by my grandmother feeling free to get up and welcome people at the door as they arrived at the house and my grandfather getting up to answer the phone and occasionally getting up to see if someone had arrived. These interruptions did not negatively impact the interviews,

as they were similar to other conversations we have had. It is normal for my grandmother to get up and warm up tamales for arriving family members during the holiday season, and the interview was normal enough for this to happen in the process as well. My mother was sitting on the couch I interviewed her in before I even approached her to interview her. She also remained seated on the couch well after the interview concluded.

It is important to note that both of the interview locations were sites that are comfortable for me. This allowed me to retain a sense of power through the highly academic process of interviews. In turn, this affected my questions, which sometimes moved away from attempting to attain information for research and instead engage in conversation and the process of story sharing, knowing this would benefit future generations of my family. There were several moments where my grandmother told my grandfather to stop speaking to allow me to ask more questions because it was an interview, but I assured her that all of the stories are valuable. The conversations in both interviews started before the tape recorder went on and continued after the tape recorder went off.

Expanding the scope of the interview settings further, these homes, sites of interviews, and communities, the Eastside, currently hold four generations of our family, all living. We have existed in the Eastside since the 1950's and this was reflected in some of the major events that shaped our families movement to and experience in the Eastside, which came out in the interviews. In the 1950s my grandfather was enlisted in the United States Marines, and this decade also marked the end of the Korean War. In the 1960s my grandparents began to challenge

English only schooling. The Chicano Moratorium Riots took place in unincorporated East Los Angeles in the 1970s. The rise of what would later be coined “Environmental Justice” took place in the 1980s and included the work of MELASI. In the 1990s the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed and began to affect Raza on both sides of the United States-Mexico Border and spurred involvement of MELASI in stopping the construction of toxic release facilities south of the Border. The new millennium brought on anti-im/migrant legislation in the form of HR-4437, which threatened to criminalize my grandmother, though she continued her regular actions with no fear. This is just a glimpse at the major events that have shaped my family. Currently gentrification threatens the Eastside and because of this, engaging in this story sharing process is especially important and has been especially impactful.

Chapter 4: *Testimonio*

Colonization has impacted Indigenous communities from the Northern tip of Native North America to the Southern tip of Native South America. There are distinct Indigenous Peoples that have existed all over both continents, and despite the constant force of colonization continue to exist. The communities have been affected in varied ways depending on the time of contact with Europeans, the type of contact, the community response, and later nation building. I will not be examining these initial factors, but instead I will address the disorientation that comes with migration for Indigenous Peoples or descendants of Indigenous Peoples who may not necessarily identify as such. This disorientation furthers the colonial project as it serves to distance people psychologically from themselves (read history, culture, ceremonial life, land). The impact of all of this ranges socially, economically, and politically, and varies amongst Indigenous Peoples and even within families. Though some may reach economic success or failure, as defined by the mainstream, the focus on indigeneity lay in the survival and sustaining of self (read history, culture, ceremonial life, land).

I start with examining the relationship my family has with place and land across two generations. The first generation has three distinct localities, which include Cantuna in the Mexican state of Zacatecas, the Juarez-El Paso border region, and the Eastside of Los Angeles. The second generation has two distinct localities, which include the Juarez-El Paso border region and the Eastside of Los Angeles. The focus will be on two generations and their orientation and stability in the Eastside of Los Angeles through experiences at the location, but I will also examine how the other localities inform the relationships with place and land that the two generations have with the Eastside.

The idea of a continuum homeland that exists where the people have existed and continue to exist will be fleshed out. Through this research, land will be the center with a focus on sovereignty. Lyons' (2000) idea, as quoted by Grande (2008), that sovereignty is the "right to rebuild and demand to exist" guides this work (p. 245). This moves away from ideas of a land locked indigeneity that is supported by Western ideas of land relationships based on property. This is not to say that land is not an essential component of indigeneity. To the contrary, Indigenous migrants build community, including relationships with the land, based on worldviews originating in ancestral homelands.

Grande's (2008) quotes Lyons' (2000) idea of, "an adamant refusal to disassociate culture, identity, and power from the land" (p. 245). This research is a humble attempt in this regard. I will engage with my family to explore our experience on the Eastside and how this defines our relationship with the land and our existence through that land.

Conceptual Framework

I think it is time to think indigenous and act authentic even at the price of rejection.

-Manulani Aluli Meyer (2008)

In Raza communities of Mexican decent on both sides of the Unites States-Mexico Border, often we do not know things as "Indian," they are called Mexican. We do not know things as "Indigenous," they are called Chicana/o. The problem with this is that we are not able to see what is European, African, Asian, or Middle Eastern either. This generalization and upholding of a national identity, "Mexican," makes it difficult to distinguish what and who is and is not Tarahumara, Concho, Toboso, Chizo, Tepehuan, Yaqui, Apache, O'odham, Tzotzil, Mixtec, Purepecha, Mexica, Zapotec, Huichol, or any of the other Indigenous Peoples that have existed, and continue to exist, in what is today

the nation of Mexico. This becomes especially acute with migration and crossing of the United States-Mexico Border, where Raza are identified by post-initial invasion nationality, or worse Hispanic or Latin/a/o, and often take up pride in this nationality as a response to disorientation.

The terrible acts of the initial invasion and subsequent project of colonization have created a great deal of death and migration for the Native Peoples of the Western Hemisphere. Through this migration there is a disorientation, as much internal and external migration has been involuntary or due to dire circumstances, which I would argue are also involuntary. This disorientation comes as a result of a disconnection from community and land, which form identity. The results of disorientation range and include attempts at total assimilation and alcoholism and drug addiction. At the other end of the spectrum, responses to disorientation can also include community building and identity reaffirmation or restoration.

The underlying importance in dealing with the process of disorientation in a positive productive manner for Native Peoples lay in sovereignty, land, and identity. The power of story, oral tradition, is at the center of these three relationships.

Deconstructing Colonial Nationhood, “Imaginary Identity,” and Disorientation

Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1996), in his book *Mexico Profundo*, challenges the notion of a national identity for the people of Mexico. The term *Mexico profundo* (deep Mexico) refers to the “Indian” communities, rural “de-Indianized” communities, and urban poor of Mexico. These communities are characterized as possessing ways of life that originate from Mesoamerican civilization, whether they identify them or not. Bonfil Batalla (1996) challenges, “Since the Conquest... the peoples of *Mexico profundo* have

been dominated by an ‘imaginary Mexico’ imposed by the West. It is imaginary not because it does not exist, but because it denies the cultural reality lived daily by most Mexicans” (Back Cover). This “imaginary” is a deliberate tool of the colonial project that serves to disorientate the colonial subjects and bring them tighter under the colonial rule.

Examining “civilization” and nationality is especially important in a time where the nation of Mexico is struggling economically, politically and socially. Because there are two civilizations that currently predominate in Mexico (Indigenous and Western), an examination of the Indigenous is key to exploring options for the future. Bonfil Batalla (1996) clarifies the position of Mexico as he explains that, “Two civilizations mean two civilizational programs, two ideal models for the society sought after, two different possible futures. Whatever decision is made about reorienting the country, whatever path is chosen to escape from the current crisis, implies a choice for one of those civilizational projects and against the other” (p. XV). Bonfil Batalla argues that *Mexico profundo* has never been in power in Mexico, and instead those that have been in power since Mexico’s separation from Spain have been attempting to achieve the same ends as the initial invasion. The choices that are made for Mexico’s future have implications for future migration of peoples within and out of Mexico. The condition of the country with the Western leadership has furthered disorientation within the country as well as outside of the country for those migrating into the United States.

The analysis of nationality and the “imaginary identity” are also important for descendants of the people of Mexico in the United States and moving forward in the United States without sacrificing the relationships of sovereignty, land, and identity.

Because our community is seen as an invading group, it is important to recognize and deconstruct colonial nationhood and colonial national identity. Raza are not an invading group, but rather are part of the indigenous hemisphere navigating through various colonizing forces. This is not to say boundaries of various distinct ancestral homelands of Indigenous Peoples are to fade away. Movement from country of origin to the United States marks a new stage in the colonial experience as indigenous peoples, not a nationality. With this distinction recognized, we are able to continue to construct identities and ways of life that continue in line with ancestral ways of being despite the crossing, and often re-crossing, of a colonial border. Indigenous worldviews based in ancestral homelands guide us as we relate to other Indigenous on non-Indigenous peoples outside of our ancestral homelands.

Bonfil Batalla (1996) explores the resiliency of *Mexico profundo* in response to colonial forces within the nation of Mexico. Bonfil Batalla (1996) explains:

The *Mexico profundo*, meanwhile, keeps resisting, appealing to diverse strategies, depending on the scheme of domination to which it is subjected. It is not a passive, static world, but, rather, one that lives in permanent tension. The peoples of the *Mexico profundo* continually create and re-create their culture, adjust it to changing pressures, and reinforce their own, private sphere of control. They take foreign cultural elements and put them at their service; they cyclically perform the collective acts that are a way of expressing and renewing their own identity. They remain silent or they rebel, according to strategies refined by centuries of resistance. (p. XVII)

This eloquently encompasses the survival of peoples (identity and land) in the colonial context within Mexico. This survival is also true for those of us that have migrated north, beyond the United States–Mexico border, and the importance of exploring the story, examining the power, and recognizing ourselves within it is key to overcoming the disorientation that comes with the migration that is a result of colonial forces.

In Rudy Acuña's (2007) work, *Corridors of Migration: The Odyssey of Mexican Laborers, 1600-1933*, on the San Joaquin Valley Cotton Strike of 1933, he shows that the migration and story of the people leading up to the latest experience, the strike itself, are significant. Generations give context to the event, or as Rudy puts it by referencing an article by Ernesto Galarza, "La Mula No Nació Arisca... la hicieron" ("The mule wasn't born stubborn... they made it this" (p. x). Understanding the power of story is key to addressing disorientation. It is common to hear members of our communities say, "Por eso no avanzamos" ("That's why we don't advance"), blaming individual acts for the reason our communities as a whole continue to exist in oppressive conditions. This dismisses the story, excuses the actors, and rationalizes colonization.

Sovereignty and Identity

Mexico currently does not differentiate "Indigenous" as a people in its census. The United States has been criticized by Native Peoples for using enrollment in recognized Tribes, and limiting the recognition of Tribes, to identify Native Peoples. Both of these serve to further the colonial project as they move towards reducing the ability of Native Peoples to be identifiable by the government. Intermarriage amongst United States Native Peoples can result in being identified as non-Native due to the blood quantum or other restricting recognition practices, not enough of one specific tribe,

despite the fact that this does not respect some traditional Native ways. Defining sovereignty for Native Peoples, S. R. Lyons' (2000), in *Rhetorical Sovereignty: What do American Indians want from Writing?*, writes, "It is a people's right to rebuild to demand to exist and present its gifts to the world... an adamant refusal to dissociate culture, identity and power from the *land*" (p. 457). Lyon's clarifies that Native sovereignty is the right of Native peoples to define their lives for themselves. It is important to understand that the power of identification resides with both the national governments, and Native Peoples, but with very different implications for both. The governments are concerned with land and resources, while Native peoples are concerned with this as well but because it is tied with culture and identity.

Complicating this further, Sandy Grande (2008) in her article *Red Pedagogy*, defines space for Native Peoples as defined by "a matrix of *legacy, power, and ceremony*" (p. 241). This cannot be explored without an understanding of our communities in relation to the dominant group. Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle (1984), in *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty*, examine this idea as well by explaining, "Contemporary Indian communities, both reservation and urban, represent the continuing existence of a particular group of people who have traditionally had a moral and legal claim against the United States" (p. 2). Though we, as Raza that have migrated past the Mexico-U.S. border, do not have the same legal claims that U.S. Native Peoples do, morally we do. As Native peoples, as *Mexico Profundo* demonstrates, we have a moral claim against European colonization and imperialism, which constructs national borders and decides who has and who does not have legal claim in it's courts. We do not have to give up our legacy as unique

Indigenous Peoples, though of course we must contend with our relations with other Indigenous Peoples. We are constantly struggling with power and for power. Both of these inform our ceremonial life.

Kathryn Lucci-Cooper (2003), in *To Carry the Fire Home*, writes about the disconnectedness she felt upon moving from her reservation to an urban area. She notes that the basics of life on the reservation, “place,” were missing. From the sky to the water to the insects, the urban area did not provide this “place.” Lucci-Cooper presents her transition from the reservation to an urban setting and constructing new sacred life through activism. Lucci-Cooper explains, “My prayer offerings became picket signs; political chants and slogans were my prayer songs” (p. 7). The power in prayer offerings, picket signs, political chants, and prayer songs lay in its significance to the land and community, which construct identity. The sovereignty for Lucci-Cooper and other Native Peoples that experience these kinds of transitions is in the ability to continue to recognize the connectedness of indigeneity. Bonfil Batalla (1996) explains that for Native Peoples, “Health is related to human conduct, and community service is often part of each individual’s life obligation” (Back Cover). I would argue that collective human conduct is related to the health of the community, bringing it full circle. A sense of responsibility to the collective, serving the collective, responsibility for community, and working for the community is traditional knowledge that is passed down.

Continuing with the relationships between healing, land, community, and ceremony, Vine Deloria Jr. (2003), in *God is Red*, explains Native religious experience is, “primarily a matter of participation in terms of the real factors of existence – living on the land, living within a specific community, and having religious people with special powers

within that community” (p. 295). I have witnessed that the “religious people” within the Raza community of the Eastside have a “religion” of the people, a belief in the power of the people to create mass healing (not the Christianity that dominates the official religious space of the community). Those “religious people” are the community organizers and leaders that are able to feel the “rhythm,” as Deloria Jr. describes, of the community and the land, and address the issues to create healing or prevent further need for healing. Deloria Jr. (2003) notes, “We live in time and space and receive most of our signals about proper behavior from each other and the environment around us,” and this certainly remains true for Native Peoples in an urban context and through migration (p. 282).

Land and Identity

Issues concerning land and Native Peoples that were in what has become the United States at the point of initial invasion are often legal when in relation to the government. Vine Deloria Jr. (2003) explains that for the U.S. courts, because they restrict sacred sites to areas that have been historically visited for ceremony, “God is dead” (p. 281). This understanding of sacred sites, or rather lack of understanding of the relationship of Native Peoples and the land, is founded in an ignorance of Native Peoples and Native worldviews. This ignorance limits indigeneity at every turn to further the project of colonization. This exact ignorance, which feeds the colonial master narrative, also works to limit Raza indigeneity as it grounds our people in an ahistorical framework that attempts to prohibit our sense of being from crossing the border, along with fruit, pork, lead candy, and pharmaceuticals.

The effects of colonization and the relationship between Native Peoples and land run wide. Deloria Jr. (1999), in *For this Land: Writings on Religion in America*, explains that though the damage done to Native Peoples by taking away land is devastating, the effect this has on ceremonial life, essentially disrupting it, causes disorientation in the Peoples. The disorientation Deloria Jr. writes about is with respect to the land. Identity and land for Native Peoples are intimately connected, as the land informs identity. Disconnection from the land is a disconnection from self, which leads to a multitude of issues and furthers the project of colonization.

The severity of the consequences of disconnection call for the need to reconnect. Contributing to this effort, Deloria Jr. (2003) quotes James Jeans as stating, “When we pass beyond space and time, they [separate individuals] may perhaps form ingredients of a single continuous stream of life” (p. 93). Having this understanding allows for the possibility for us to connect to our relatives from past generations as well as the land along our migratory journey. For many in our community, we have migrated from lands we have been on since time immemorial to lands we are the first generations on. This does not mean it is not possible to continue our relationships with the land in a new context, though, again, it must be in relation to other Native Peoples, especially those groups whose ancestral homelands we find ourselves on.

This is not just a possibility, it is something that has been actualized and continues to happen. U.S. Native Peoples have been pushed around the country into reservations but have fostered a continued relationship with the land and their culture, while also remaining connected to the land of their ancestors. For those that are of Mexican decent

and migratory, Acuña (2007) discusses the role of Mexican womxn³ in Arizona in creating space differently than Whites. These womxn created space that was physically reminiscent of a homeland and kept memories, stories, and essentially community. In the larger community context, through the creation of Sonora Towns and Chihuahuillas, Acuña (2007) recounts how Mexican migrants reconstructed community in an area distant from the original point of departure, or homeland. In Los Angeles, “By the late 1920’s, five little Mexicos formed in Belvedere Park, Maravilla Park, Boyle Heights, Palo Verde, and Lincoln Heights” (Acuña, 2007, 220). This community persists today with families running multiple generations deep in the area.

The relationship of Native Peoples and land is profound. Deloria Jr. (2003) describes, “Indian tribes combine history and geography so that they have a ‘sacred geography,’ that is to say, every location within their original homeland has a multitude of stories that recount the migrations, revelations, and particular historical incidents that cumulatively produced the tribe in its current condition” (p. 121). Sacred geography is what is difficult to, but needs to be, fostered amongst Native Peoples that have migrated past national borders. This is the importance of story.

Continuing on the depth of the relationship of Native Peoples and land, Grande (2008) identifies, “The indigenous conception of land is defined as ‘the inalienable foundation for the processes of kinship,’ distinguishing it from ‘property’ which is defined by relations of alienability” (p. 252). Manulani Aluli Meyer (2008), in *Indigenous and Authentic: Hawaiian Epistemology and Triangulation of Meaning*, adds,

³ “Womxn” is spelled with an “x” instead of an “e” here to move the reader to question patriarchal gender formations.

“Land is more than just a physical locale; it is a mental one that becomes water on the rock of our being” (p. 219). The Eastside of Los Angeles is not just an area that is East of the Los Angeles River. The Eastside is simultaneously an area as well as a people that exist at that physical location. The Eastside is a distinct legacy, a power, a people, a land, and a ceremonial way of life. Meyer (2008) also contributes, “How you are on land or in the ocean tells us something about you. *Absolutely*. It opens doors to the specificity of what it means to exist in a space and how that existing extends into how best to interact in it” (p. 219). The history held in the Eastside speaks to this concept that Meyer develops. The health of the land and community has consistently been attacked, which spurs the activism, the responsibility of the Eastside. The desire for land and community to be healthy is consistent.

Entering the Eastside, you can feel all of what has been described. By being physically on the land you can feel the legacy and the power. You get a sense of the people and the way of life. Deloria Jr. (2003) differentiates between experiences (Indigenous) and concepts (Western). This resonates in this work, an attempt to humanize the Eastside, the people, the land, us. The Eastside is experience. The Eastside is not a concept. The Eastside is not the deficit that is placed on it. The Eastside is not movie scenery or newspaper headlines.

To reclaim their identity, American Indian urban youth need to learn the stories of the People. They need to learn, remember, and tell the ancient origin and migration stories, the stories that focus on Native values, attitudes, and beliefs. And they need to tell new stories about growing up and living urban lives. These new stories need to incorporate the wisdom of the People about the land and relatedness to all of creation. To tell new urban stories requires learning about the people who first inhabited the land in the urban area where they now live. Once these stories are learned, it is important to tell stories about those People. They need to tell stories of their accomplishments and tragedies. What they believed and experienced. Link those stories with those of the People from whom urban Native youth are descended. In this Internet age there is no excuse for not

knowing. It is in the stories, old and new, where urban Native youth will be able to reclaim their Native identity. They will be able to know their harmonious place in the order of all creation.

-Lee Francis (2003)

The Physical Movements

My grandmother, Juana Beatriz Gutierrez, experienced two physical movements that I have identified as distinct and significant geographical movements. These movements are significant because they have created a change physically, culturally and socially and have resulted in the development of community and home for my family. The movements have been from Cantuna/Sombrerete, Zacatecas to Juarez, Chihuahua/El Paso, Texas and to the Eastside of Los Angeles (Unincorporated East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights).

My grandfather, Ricardo Gutierrez, has experienced one physical movement that I have identified as a distinct and significant geographical movement. This movement was from Juarez, Chihuahua/El Paso, Texas to the Eastside of Los Angeles (Unincorporated East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights). He was also enlisted in the United States Marines, which involved a great deal of physical movement away from home, but I do not identify this as a significant geographical movement. Though enlisting created a change physically, culturally and socially, being enlisted itself did not result in the development of community and home for my family.

My mother, Elsa Gutierrez Lopez, has experienced no physical movements that I have identified as distinct and significant geographical movements. She has lived on the Eastside of Los Angeles her entire life. She was born in Boyle Heights and initially lived in unincorporated East Los Angeles before moving to Boyle Heights. After getting

married she moved back to unincorporated East Los Angeles before moving to Montebello. Though she experienced a change in housing various times, and I am in no way saying that the Eastside is homogenous, all of the changes were part of developing community and home for my family on the Eastside, physically, culturally and socially.

The Eastside: Big Obstacles of Disconnect

When asked what she brought to East Los Angeles from where she is from, my grandmother simply stated she had clothes, crochet and nothing else, including family. She characterized her arrival in Los Angeles as a departure from family and described a great sadness because of the lack of family. The bleakness of her arrival is captured in her statement. My grandparents were not welcomed into an existing community they could identify as their own.

Both of my grandparents explained that upon their arrival they were surprised by the lack of Spanish being spoken by Raza. My grandfather specifically expressed, “There was a bunch of people who looked Mexican and when you tried to talk to them they said they did not speak Spanish even though it was apparent that they where Mexican.” My grandmother expressed a similar sentiment but with the more cultural statement, “Traían el nopal en la cabeza” (“They had a cactus on their head”). Both of my grandparents received this as an attempt by the people to distance themselves from Mexico and Mexicaness, and in effect distance themselves from my grandparents. My grandfather shared his feelings that, “They were trying to act like they were something better.”

After being in Los Angeles for a short amount of time, my grandparents began to understand the situation that the people of Mexican decent in Los Angeles were in.

Explaining this understanding, my grandfather stated, “Later I found that Spanish was prohibited in schools.” It was this circumstance that would initiate my grandparents’ building community and home for my family on the Eastside.

Initiation and Involvement

Not only was Spanish not allowed to be spoken at schools, students were told that if their parents did not speak English it was because they were not intelligent. They were taught to distance themselves from their parents and view them as inferior. They were instructed to learn English and forget Spanish. My grandfather shared a story of our family clashing with this rule and how the situation was handled. He explained:

Laura and Socorro went to First Street School and one day they came home sad because they were punished for speaking Spanish and the school wanted to talk to me. The principal and the teacher called me into a meeting and they started to yell at me and I told them “Wait a minute you asked me to come over here to talk and no one hollers at me. If you want to talk we’ll talk, if not I’ll be out of here.” They said it was sad my daughters were born here but did not speak English. They said that the problem is that the Mexicans prefer to be Mexicans and it harms the children. They said they will never speak English good or without an accent and that they will only work at McDonalds. I said, “That’s my problem. I’ve been here since 1944 and my accent has never gone away. You understand me and that is all that matters. Many have accents, even from the East. I have come across this in the service. The Jews have accents as well. I don’t want to hear that you are punishing my children because of this or else I will go over your heads.”

My grandfather was able to successfully debate the grounds the Spanish only rule was based on as well as challenge the ideas the school officials had about Raza parents on the Eastside. He was also able to support the identity development of my aunts while helping to create a safer sense of community and home for our family.

As a result of this conflict, my aunts were moved to a private Catholic school named Santa Isabel. However, my grandfather did note that, “After they saw what happened in the school, many who would not say anything when they were chastised or would just cross their hands, they began to see that it was possible to do something and they began talking back.” There began to be a change in relationships parents had with First Street School that shifted power from solely being in the possession of school officials, to parents being able to challenge the school.

At Santa Isabel, my grandfather noted that there was much more freedom than at the public school but the students still did not speak Spanish. My grandparents continued speaking Spanish with my aunts and uncles and even received support from a school official. According to my grandfather, Mr. Chin “said he was sad to see so many brown people that did not speak Spanish. He would say that Juana and I were good to have our children use Spanish because it would benefit them in the future.”

Outside of the schools, my grandparents contributed to building community in additional ways. My grandmother explained, “Here at the park we started sports for the children of the community and we got high school students to be coaches.” My grandparents acknowledged the lack of resources that existed in the community and began to mobilize the youth of the community to engage in constructive activities. They noticed that it was common for parents to work long hours and send their children out of

the house in order to have some time for relaxed rest at the house. My grandparents acknowledged this though they did not have this practice. My grandmother shared that, “We kept them in the house. They would fight amongst themselves but I would use the *chancla* (sandle) to keep them under control and would not let them out until they finished homework.” Understanding that their children were not the only ones in the community, my grandparents organized at the park, *El Hoyo*, a park called The Hole because it is in a valley.

After these initial stories, my grandparents shared many additional stories of being involved. Growing up, I already knew my grandparents loved the community, but a sense of deep care for and investment in the community of the Eastside became very apparent through the stories. Also, my grandparents have an understanding of the community and are not ashamed of the community. They have no desire to distance themselves from anyone in the community. My grandmother shared:

When I would go talk to colleges they would be interested that I am from East Los Angeles. At one college I talked to them about everything we do, all the programs, and one man asked me how many gangs we have. I replied that, “Yes we have gangs, but wherever there are gangs. In Palos Verdes there are gangs, in Beverley Hills there are gangs, but they don’t call them gangs, they call them clubs.” The gang members around here go to school and they are people. And me, they know I am against gangs but we have helped them by giving them scholarships and helping them find jobs. I am proud of them because they respect me and respect elders. Wherever you go there are gangs and there are potheads.

My grandmother was able to humanize some of the most vilified members of the Eastside community. She holds herself responsible for and accountable to these members of the community.

My grandfather spoke to the diversity of the community that has been constructed in the Eastside and how it has developed over time. He explained, “Here in the barrio there are doctors and lawyers now but at that time many people who would leave would never come back when they would become professionals.” He shared about how when Vero, my aunt, attended Bolt Hall at UC Berkeley people told my grandparents that she was going to set up her offices on the other side of town and never return to the Eastside. She returned after she graduated and continued to engage in the community through her work. He also shared about how Gabriel, my uncle, got his PhD and returned to the community and helped with the work of MELASI. Speaking about our family, my grandfather shared, “Everyone makes good money but they didn’t leave.” Reflecting on her time on the Eastside and its importance, my grandmother shared:

I don’t care what they say about our barrio. I don’t think I could go to another neighborhood and be tranquil and at peace. For me all of East Los Angeles, all the churches, all the community. When we got here there wasn’t a strong community... I love East Los Angeles because I have lived here for years and all my children have been born here and I have nothing to complain about thank god. And the people, the people, whether I know them from the church or from the organizing, when they see me on the street they are very kind/friendly. It matters how you are, how you act, that’s how they treat you and I have helped many people here in the community.

Where does this come from?

With all of the stories of contributing to community, the question of “Why?” surfaced. My grandparents both shared stories as to why they have contributed and continue to contribute so much and they were even surprised at the similarities that arose.

My grandfather shared his story explaining:

I grew up with my grandmother. We lived in the neighborhood of one of my aunts, niece of my grandmother. We lived there... In December we killed two pigs, one for the 12th and one for the 24th. From each pig we would distribute it in the neighborhood. Eight families lived in the neighborhood. We all shared like we were from the same household. There were no divisions of family, we all shared. There was one woman that lived in the neighborhood after my grandma died and my mother took care of the neighborhood. That woman still stays in communication with Techa, my sister. Her family is like our family.

There was a communal sense of living with extended family networks as well those who were part of the community and therefore were like family. Concerning the constant contributing to community, my grandmother shared:

That comes from the family, from his and mine. My mother and father raised animals and when they would kill a pig I would get mad, but I was young, because my mother would take it apart. They would make chicharones, meat, hermosilla (blood), and then they would make baskets with meat, chicharones, and hermosilla and what ever would come from the pig and they would say, “Take it to this person, take it to that person, to the neighbors, to the friends.” My brothers and sisters and I would be the ones going around taking the baskets to all

the people. By the time we got home all that would be left was the chicharones at the bottom of the pot. I would get mad at that. I would say “¿Mama porque usted da todo?” (“Mom, why do you give away everything”) and she would say it’s because the aroma would reach them.

This similar practice was happening in Juarez, Chihuahua/El Paso, Texas with my grandfather and in Cantuna, Zacatecas with my grandmother. It is important to note that my grandfather’s mother is also from Cantuna, Zacatecas. My families kept what they needed and delivered to others what they needed as well. Both my grandmother’s and my grandfather’s families were engaged in continual contribution to community as part of a community where contribution was a common practice.

Tapping into this practice as being part of my family’s ceremonial way of life, my grandmother shared a story explaining roles my family played in the community in Cantuna, Zacatecas. My grandmother expressed:

My father would hold an offering/commitment for the 19 of March. We would do a festival of *danza* (dance), of *danzantes* (dancers). That’s what they call the *Matachines*⁴. But the dances would start since the 17th, and the 18th and 19th and they would not finish until the 21st. All of those days my mom would cook so much, and her sisters, and they would bake so much bread in outdoor ovens made of adobe and brick. They would bake baskets and baskets of bread. They would put some cloth over them when they come out of the oven and that would be for all the people. That would be to give to all the people that would come to dance

⁴ This term is applied to various traditional dances, including the Pueblo Native communities of the Southwest and different areas of Mexico. The *Matachines* vary in style, meaning and purpose depending on region.

and then the day of San Jose we would make big pots and put grilled beef, meat with chili, soups of different kinds, beans and then the people would come with their little pots and they would make line and they would come for their *reliquia* (Literally meaning relic, but in this case used as offering). They would ask if Don Jesus was going to be giving *reliquia*. “Well yes.” And people would come with their pots to get their *reliquia*.

The dates of the *danza* lead up to the Spring Equinox, with four days of dancing before the day of the Equinox. This date is sacred as it marks the beginning of the new year on various Mesoamerican calendars. The offerings/contribution are sacred, both the food and the *danza*. This tradition of contributing is what has been passed through generations.

This sense of responsibility for the rest of the community also came with another teaching. My grandfather shared that his elders taught him that, “Tu no eres nada pero nadien es más que usted” (“You are nothing, but no one is more than you”) and “Nosotros no somos más que nadien pero nadien es más que nosotros” (“We are not more than anyone, but no one is more than us”). Immediately after my grandfather shared this, my grandmother shared that her elders had taught her those exact same principles. This humble yet stern indigeneity has been passed through generations of my family and continues to guide the way my grandparents engage in community.

For years my grandparents have stored clothes and food to distribute to anyone who needs it, including our family and complete strangers. It is common to find homeless individuals come to the front of my grandparents’ house and call out to my grandmother. Their house is also a common stop for im/migrants who have just arrived

to Los Angeles from their home countries. My grandfather shared a story of earlier Los Angeles explaining:

Many people would come on the train and would get off on Soto and come to the Park and they would be very dirty because of the journey. We had a lot of clothes people would give us because they knew we would give it out. We would give people pants, shirts, sweaters and they would wash up out front. We would take out soap and they would wash their face and hands and everything. By the time they left you would not recognize them as the same people as when they got here.

My grandmother shared a different, more current story, about similar circumstances.

With the terrorizing of im/migrants especially in recent years, my grandmother shared:

One time, we were here inside and two knocked on the door. They were youngsters from Mexico. They asked for a cup of water and I saw how dirty they were. I said yes hold on. I got them cups to get water from the hose. A bunch of youngsters came from behind the wall. Who knows if they had been dropped off? The women were really dirty and their faces had dirt on them. So I asked them, “¿De donde son? ¿De donde vienen?” (“Where are you from? Where are you coming from?”) “From Mexico” one of them said. “We just got here.” The women showed more shame than the men so I said come in. I told them I would bring them soap and at the very least they could clean themselves with the water hose. I brought out towels and while they were cleaning themselves up I made them eggs and beans and what ever I had and I gave it to them. They left happy and grateful. I had clothes downstairs and they distributed it amongst themselves. The mom of Lupita that lives in Lancaster, when they heard that they were going

to make a law that they would arrest anyone who helped the undocumented...

Lupe told Angelita, how will it go for Juana who helps the people so much. "You weren't scared" she asked. "No. Why? Come arrest me if they want. I will give the people food. Why would I throw it away if I have it?" That comes from our roots, from our people, because all the people in Mexico that is our way, we share, the people share. It wasn't just my mom and dad who shared.

It is the final statements my grandmother expressed that reminded me of Bonfil Batalla's (1996) *Mexico Profundo* and how our ways have remained consistent from before colonial times throughout the nation of Mexico, even with threats from colonizers.

My grandparents shared how this practice is common with others that are involved in the movement. My grandmother explained, "When we were with the movement of Cesar Chavez we would gather clothes and pots and we would take vans to La Paz. We went one time with two vans full of clothes and they would distribute it to the *campesinos* (farmworkers), and Pablo the son of Cesar Chavez and his wife Socorro didn't let us leave till they gave us something to eat." This simple yet profound gesture expressed a mutual appreciation and contribution. Solidarity was established through these practices.

Building/Solidifying Community

In my mother's interview, she revealed to me that my grandparents intended to return with the family to El Paso. The Eastside was not going to be a long-term stay. I asked my mother how this changed and she shared that, "They started their own history here... Once they planted their roots here I think it was even harder for them to try to uproot us and move us back to Texas." My mother recognized that my grandparents

were engaging in a process of building community on the Eastside. She expressed that my grandmother and grandfather established roots in the area making it home for the following generation. These roots made it so movement somewhere else would be a move away from home. My mother also expressed, “I think once my mom and dad started getting more involved with the community stuff outside of the schools with the PTA it just came as second nature to stay and get involved. Once they saw the changes were possible they felt it was worth staying for my younger brothers and sisters, that they could make a difference as things got tougher in the area.” Once they were able to participate in a role that is very much cultural, contributing to building community, they were able to construct cultural relationships that made the Eastside home.

Aside from changing their minds about moving back to El Paso, there have been physical changes on the Eastside, which my grandparents have lived through. Concerning the physical make up of the Eastside, my grandmother shared, “We did not have freeways, just the Santa Ana with 2 lanes. We would go outside and there would hardly be people in the streets. There were streetcars and maybe 2 or 3 people would be on the corner waiting. Everything was calm. We lived on Boyle and Garnett, which they knocked down to build the freeway.” These changes pushed community members around, including my grandparents twice. Equally significant have been the drastic changes in the characteristics of the population of the Eastside since my grandparents arrived. Initially, as my grandmother expressed, “At that time on that side of La Primera (First Street) there were only Japanese. On this block Russians. When we all started coming in, Latinos, they started leaving. On Cesar Chavez, at that time Brooklyn, all the Jews lived there. When we all came in they left.” My grandfather also shared, “On First

and Evergreen there was a Black church, and they all talked Spanish. Howard grew up near the park and worked at the park, but when they gangs grew they didn't want them here." My grandparents witnessed, and were part of the reason the ethnic transformation of the Eastside occurred.

A more recent and very significant change in the Eastside came in the change of Brooklyn Ave to Cesar E. Chavez Ave. With this change came historical turmoil, which my grandmother recounted with one of her stories. My grandmother shared:

When we started the movement to change the name of Brooklyn to Cesar Chavez, the Jews who still own property there protested that because it was tradition because they were the ones who founded it... They started with that but then Richard Alatorre, City Council Member, helped a lot. We had meetings with the people. Why, if the Blacks could have a street named Martin Luther King, couldn't we have a street named after one of our heroes? They said no. We had more meetings and help from Richard Alatorre and we went to City Hall. We gathered signatures and they gathered signatures as well but they don't live here anymore they just have business here. Richard asked me to speak on the microphone to explain the reason why we wanted the name change. I explained that in memory of Cesar Chavez we deserved to have it. Many of us there had worked with him and it would be an honor for us to have the street named after him. Then, one of the Jews that had supported the Madres (Mothers of East LA – Santa Isabel), who had buildings from Soto to Bridge on Cesar Chavez, the block was theirs, was... At that moment I was against him because he didn't want the name change. He said no and I asked him why. I told him that they, when the

Latinos started coming in, started moving to other areas but kept their business there so they are living off of us, the Latinos. They don't like us but they live off of us. Why didn't they leave with their businesses and all? Other Latinos would have put business there. All of the Council was paying attention to what we were saying and since then they have not talked to me. At the hour of the vote we won. The street would be named Cesar Chavez from Olvera to East Los Angeles."

The street was honored with a march and a rally ending with the street signs being revealed. That marked a huge signifier for the community that the Eastside is Raza. That was a great day for our family and my grandmother retelling the story brought back memories of standing near her front door as she received the phone call that Cesar Chavez had passed away and the silent sadness that fell over the house.

It has been with all that my grandparents have contributed to the Eastside that our family has been able to establish itself. When asked what she has gotten from the Eastside, my mother expressed, "I think more strength in being who I am and recognizing the culture that I was brought up in. Culturally always knowing where my ancestors, my parents, came from and how they decided to be here in the U.S. more for us than anything." My mother shared that her identity is based in the Eastside as part of a larger cultural-historical context, acknowledging generations of our family.

Community for the Next Generation

My mother was born in Boyle Heights but first lived in unincorporated East Los Angeles. When asked about living in this area, she explained that all she remembered was the riots. She shared:

I remember when the riots... we were in Juarez and we were coming back from Juarez. We actually came back early when we saw the riots because when we were watching it on TV they were showing all these mannequins on the ground and it looked like dead bodies. So you know my mom wanted to get back home as soon as possible. So when we drove back I remember that my dad had to show his driver's license and show proof that we actually lived in the area because they weren't letting anybody in or out. So when we got back... it was... we got back that morning after they first started the riots and it was a Saturday and then that Sunday morning we get there and it still smelled like fire. They burned down some of the stores and everything and there was police in riot gear still patrolling the streets and they were hauling away people out of their houses pulling them out of their houses and I remember we were on our porch and I remember that they pulled... there was this lady that had four sons that lived across the street from us. They went in there, pulled them out and handcuffed them and took them and we were like "What's going on? What happened?" and then later we found... we saw a Sheriff truck drive up and carry a bunch of TVs and sofas and everything because they had actually been in the riot. They had pictures of them so they were just going up and down the streets, you know, just taking them because they were the ones actually doing it... and I just remember we couldn't go out. I remember my mom had a nervous breakdown. She had us inside the house 24/7."

My mom does not identify specifically with the unincorporated East Los Angeles area of the Eastside because she was not allowed outside while she lived there. She did not interact much with the land or the people because of the riots and was not able to engage

in the community. As a direct result of the riots, my grandmother called for the family to move back to Boyle Heights. This is when my mother was able to engage in the community because she was able to go outside and there is a large park across the street from my grandmother's house.

Through the interview, I got the sense that my mother did not feel like she was part of the community for a period between her move back to unincorporated East Los Angeles and her work at the schools in the area as a teacher's assistant. It was through her ability to engage with youth and contribute to their development, especially Special Education youth, that my mother felt part of the community. It was while she was working at the schools that my grandmother asked her to work for MELASI managing a program. My mother acknowledged that though there was a move she was still able to engage with youth, which kept her sense of belonging to the community intact. My mother shared, "When I worked with Mothers of East LA I think that was my first chance to get back into the Boyle Heights area." My mom's relationship with Boyle Heights as an adult was defined by her political and cultural involvement in the area. She expressed a sense of removal from the community until she engaged again through activism, building community, taking up the role that has been ancestral in the family.

When asked if she would say East Los Angeles is her community, my mother replied:

I did for a long time. I think because I am not involved with what goes on in Montebello even though I live here. I'm more involved in what was going on in Boyle Heights. When I started getting more involved with the Audubon center, raising money and making sure that this center that would normally be put on the

Westside was put in East Los Angeles, I always looked at it as coming into my community, coming into my neighborhood.

There are various examples of engagement in the community defining what community is for my mother, and whether she is part of it. The Audubon Center at Debs Park is one example with El Mercadito, the Jewish Temple on Breed and the Roybal Youth and Family Center on First Street and Chicago all being significant places to my mom on the Eastside. For my mother, these have all been sites for building community through activism. My mother shared, “Fighting for it I learned to appreciate it more... Once you got involved to save something it really made it different.” It was through the work of saving historical and cultural sites for the Eastside, as well as working with youth, that my mother engaged in community.

Engaging the Youth in Community Through Activism

My mother has spent a large amount of time building community culturally through engaging the youth in the Eastside. Helping youth become part of the community, even though they already live in the area, happened by establishing relationships with the land which was evident through their contributions to the physical landscape in the form of painted walls on streets, raising awareness about poisoned walls in homes, and contributing to healthy breathing in polluted air. My mother shared the stories of individuals involved in the programs that were sparked and have continued to engage in contributing to the community even after leaving the Graffiti, Lead Poison Awareness, and Kick-Asthma programs run by MELASI.

An especially impactful program that my mother talked about is the Outdoor Learning Experience Program, which took youth from the Eastside to Mono Lake, the source of much of the water consumed in Los Angeles. My mother shared:

Kids that have worked with us, that we took up to Mono Lake through the Outdoor Learning Experience Program, kids come back and they remember that we took them up there and gave them their first experience of camping, first experience of seeing a river that doesn't have cement under it, first experience to actually see fish in a river and stream. It's their first experience. Even though they live in LA most of them have never been to the beach so this was like a very overwhelming experience for them and now I've known of a lot of them that have actually gone back up to Mono Lake with their kids... So it is interesting the dynamics, the diversity of the kids we would take up there and how that really made a difference in their lives. We had one group that went up, I believe it was the second or third year we went up. To show their gratitude, it was the track team from PCC (Pasadena City College), and to thank us they wanted to do a clean up. They organized it themselves and everything and one of the kids actually let the cat out of the bag you can say and we found out so we had the firemen come and cook hot dogs for them and they were able to get 200 volunteers to clean the streets and sweep and take out weeds and paint over graffiti. Even though they were doing it to thank us they had to borrow the tools from us anyways so we would have found out anyways and our way of appreciating what they had done, all the advisory committee of Madres got together and had a potluck and we had all kinds of food for them.

The Mono Lake experience is an example of bringing kids into the cultural practice of building community. It took taking the youth outside of the physical space of the community to get them to engage more in the community, or build the community. The youth contributed to the community through the clean up and MELASI contributed to the community by initiating the trip and providing food at the clean up.

There are multiple examples of youth that have been built up as leaders for the community and who continue to engage in contributing to the community. The work of my grandparents and mother contribute to building the legacy of engaging in the community through political involvement leading to the enrichment of the community.

Cultural Not Physical

It is important to note that there was a physical departure from Boyle Heights with a move to unincorporated East Los Angeles that came with marriage, but my mother identified engagement in the Eastside as being reinitiated through her activism. There was never a physical move of residence out of the Eastside for my mother, nor a physical move of residence back into Boyle Heights, but my mother's relationship with the Eastside lay in the engagement in contributing to community well being.

There have been multiple transitions in my mom feeling part of the Eastside. In the interview, her engagement with the Eastside and being part of the Eastside were past tense. This is directly related to her decline in direct involvement in community building in the Eastside with the result being feeling a disconnect from the Eastside.

Space and Community

Laura Pulido (1997), in *Community, Place, and Identity*, moves beyond ideas of space as an object and instead explores space as social relations. This idea is developed

to include class, race, agency and monetary resources, as well as the histories of all of these things, amongst others. Space is the manifestation of these aspects. An example of this idea is that the spaces, or neighborhoods, that working class Raza communities exist in are known as “barrios.” Barrios are not only the physical locations but also the class and cultural based social relations that exist at those physical locations. Pulido presents examples of this idea through a history and personal accounts of activists who identify by race *and* place. This identification becomes an act of resistance. The two aspects, race and place, inform each other, as is evident through the physical and social construction of barrios. The resistance is in an identity of race and place, which creates community and fosters activism in response to racism that is spatialized. Pulido documents this form of self-defense, which has taken place in the working class communities of color in South Central and East Los Angeles. Because these areas and peoples have been under resourced, the development of toxic waste industry is racism manifested through space, or spatialized racism. Simply stated, working class communities of color experience racism through place, environmental racism.

Giovanna Di Chiro (1996) in *Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice*, challenges traditional constructs of community by identifying people and the environment as “the community.” A community’s functioning is based in a place and in relationships, which Di Chiro (1996) terms nature. At the foundation of this understanding is that the ways of being for communities are sustained by the environment. Community and environment are inseparable, and can even be considered one and the same.

Moving beyond thinking of space as an object and recognizing it as social relations serves well in understanding the Eastside as not just the physical space, but also the people that exist at that place. With this understanding, we are able to see contributions to community as an engagement with space, and in effect land. Di Chiro's definition of community is crucial to understanding contributing to community being ceremonial life. It is the multiple engagements of people and space and the intimate relationships that are developed through contributing communally that have been passed through my family through generations.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Being able to identify how my family continues to live a ceremonial life through our contributions to community, our struggle with power, and our relationships with the land through the stories of my elders in a sense is a practice of sovereignty. I began this research with ideas and through this process my elders have built up a greater sense of communal and ancestral self within me. This work will not have the same significant impact on anyone outside of my family as much as the possible impact for those within my family, but this work does carry the potential to move others in the direction of engaging in similar processes of gaining greater familial/communal understanding. At the very least I hope to have highlighted the importance of consistently having intergenerational conversations within our communities. It is only through these conversations that we will be able to adequately support and bring our next generations along.

A limitation of this study to anyone outside of my family and family's communities is that the stories shared and explored in this writing cannot be generalized to speak some broad truth for entire groups of people. This writing will not have the same significance for every reader. However, it is this inability to generalize this information that makes it especially potent, and stands as a call for further specificity in our work for social justice and accountability. The analytical concepts of this piece can be applied broadly.

In a discussion paper prepared for the National Black Environmental Justice Network (NBEJN) Environmental Racism Forum World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Global Forum in Johannesburg, South Africa, Robert D. Bullard

specifically identifies 1982 and Warren County, North Carolina as the temporal and spacial origins of “Environmental Justice.” This is inconsistent with other histories of “Environmental Justice” (See Pulido’s 1996, *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest*), and the point of highlighting the narrative of my family is to decentralize the origins of what has been a convergence. Bullard has led the narrative that “Environmental Justice” is the convergence of the Civil Rights Movement and Environmentalism. Others may identify a convergence of the Labor Movement and Environmentalism. While the experiences of colonization are material and multigenerational, the superimposing of environmentalism over “Environmental Justice” is largely rhetorical. The convergence I identify is historical context and contemporary struggle. In any movement, there are multiple points of departure. We do not acknowledge them simply to move on, we engage to help guide.

The problem with “Environmental Justice” issues being framed within the State apparatus is that solutions to the issues will always be geared in ways that reproduce and strengthen the State. With the discourse around origins in the Civil Rights Movement, the State is a primary perpetrator and the place for solutions. Challenging the dominant narratives of environmentalism and “Environmental Justice” should move us to thinking about continuing to challenge the State, but also towards visions and projects outside of the State. Moving from disorientation to reorientation positions us to use the guidance of Bonfil Batalla (1996), who challenges the imaginary Mexico, to challenge the imaginary “Environmental Justice.”

Potentially, this work could be part of emerging writings exploring the experiences of unique Indigenous migrant communities. What is lacking in our

communities as well as in academia is an analysis of Raza within the United States dealing with sovereignty, land, and identity from an Indigenous migrant framework. This could deconstruct the generalizing of people under identifications of nation states. Concerning this deconstruction, Tilley (2005) explains, “For example, a narrow association of Indians with western desert landscapes and the great horse cultures of the Great Plains suggests that Indians never cultivated crops, never built towns—and so never used land in ways directly in competition with white settlers” (p. 46). A wider spectrum of analysis of Indigenous communities who retain ancestral ways can lead to greater identification of what is Indigenous, which could help efforts of decolonization and combat racist generalized characterizations of Indigenous Peoples. Many solutions to issues facing Indigenous Peoples today can be found in Indigenous worldviews.

Also for further study, the development of emerging Raza communities could be researched. I was able to explore the development of the Eastside as a Raza location, formerly Russian, Jewish and Japanese. I was also able to acknowledge the unincorporated East Los Angeles and Montebello line that used to divide Raza and Whites. Raza continue to be a growing population, especially in California, and continue to populate areas where Raza have not existed in significant numbers before. The important aspect of this research to be captured is the significance of it being intimate.

Growing up with all of the “researched” people made the research extremely intimate. I personally did not feel any disorientation until I left to the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) after graduating high school. Before I left I had never really been to an area without a significant amount of family members, whether they be at the destination and/or along for the trip. UCSC was the first environment I did not feel

supported emotionally, psychologically and culturally. I also never felt part of the community in the Santa Cruz area since the nearest significant Raza population was about 30 minutes from where I lived, and Watsonville is nothing like the Eastside of Los Angeles.

Coming back home has been like a reorientation process for me as I have had to find and create my place again through contributing to building community. The good thing is that I know this is home and I am able to engage in the community again. It was not until engaging in this interview experience though that I was able to notice the parallels between experiences of generations, which are even evident in the significance of the settings the interviews took place in. These interviews have helped to expand my understanding of my relationship with the Eastside.

Acuña (2007) notes that his work is not theory, it is narrative. The same is true with this work. Though it may be perceived as theoretical in nature, our stories are our history, real tangible experiences. It is with that truth that I end with these following thoughts.

I believe our survival as people has come from our knowledge of our context, our environment, not from some active beneficence of our Earth Mother. We had to know to survive. We had to work out ways of knowing, we had to predict, to learn and reflect, we had to preserve and protect, we had to defend and attack, we had to be mobile, we had to have social systems which enabled us to do these things. We still have to do these things.
-Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999)

Knowledge that does not heal, bring together, challenge, surprise, encourage, or expand our awareness is not part of the consciousness this world needs now.
-Manulani Aluli Meyer (2008)

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