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RETHINKING WATER, PLACE & COMMUNITY

WATER & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE THIRTEEN

By Laurie Moberg

I met Simi Kang early in her graduate career at the University of Minnesota. As graduate students, we were committed to our research and our projects, but Kang has always demonstrated an even greater commitment to people, to community, and to work that makes change. I was delighted when she agreed to bring her politics, perspective, and provocations into guest editing this issue of *Open Rivers*.

As the guest editor for the issue, Kang moves *Open Rivers* toward questions of environmental equity and justice, and, by extension, their opposites: environmental inequities, injustices, and racism. As pieces in this issue of the journal demonstrate, environmental justice is complicated and multifaceted; environmental injustices are layered in our social structures, institutions, geographies, and language. Yet environmental

Aerial of dock on water at Belle Isle, Detroit, United States. Photographer Aaron Burden.

justice is perhaps also one of the most important and unequivocal goals to which we must aspire together. So how do we begin to do this work, to do better, to not just attend to injustices but be allies, and to work to make change together?

In this issue, Kang brings together what she calls in her guest editor's introduction "an alarmingly beautiful set of calls to action, meditations on, and new directions toward our relationship with injustice and water" to offer some insight into these questions. There is much to learn from the community of authors she has brought together here. The individual pieces are both inspiring and challenging; together, the collection moves *Open Rivers* in a new direction and into new conversations we look forward to continuing in the future.

Happy reading!

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About the Author

As a Postdoctoral Associate in the Institute for Advanced Study at the University of Minnesota, Laurie Moberg works as the Research Coordinator for the River Life program and Assistant Editor for *Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community*. She graduate from the University of Minnesota with a Ph.D. in anthropology in 2018. Her doctoral research investigates recurrent episodes of flooding on rivers in Thailand and queries how the ecological, social, and cosmological entanglements between humans and nonhumans, people and the material world, are reimagined and reconfigured in the aftermath of disasters. At River Life, Laurie brings her ethnographic sensibilities, attention to story, and interest in human-nonhuman relations to questions of water and absented narratives closer to home.

INTRODUCTION

GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE THIRTEEN: WATER & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

By Simi Kang

Dear readers,

The work collected here was written about and on the sovereign land of many First Nations. The place it was assembled—the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities—is a land-grant institution that operates on *Mni Sota Makoce* (called Minnesota), Dakota land, and alongside and over the Mississippi River[1] whose watershed is the major artery of Turtle Island (called North America).

Detail from cover of Issue Thirteen: Water & Environmental Justice. Image courtesy of Matt Huynh, http://www.MattHuynh.com/.

While land acknowledgements often feel like folks checking a box on a list of things one must do as a good liberal, multicultural scholar, I think they are spaces for non-Indigenous settlers and arrivants[2] to begin reshaping our relationship to environment and water. As a mixed-race person whose families are composed of settlers and arrivants, I believe that learning about local histories (here, that includes The Dakota War of 1862, which was central to the U.S. government's ongoing genocidal project) and patronizing American Indian–owned spaces for arts, business, and cultural production are politically imperative for those of us who live on settler colonial land.[3]

Given my research, I have spent a good deal of time learning about the bodies of water on which I rely. This has allowed me to understand how governmental and personal decisions impact their health and the health of all beings—including our oceans—who live downstream from me. I have learned to identify what being in a better relationship with water might look like and to create practices that support this goal. I am grateful to so many of my friends and chosen family for guiding me in my ongoing education on coloniality and Indigeneity. This is an ongoing process that overwhelmingly burdens people who live with the generational and daily harm of settler colonialism. It is important to build this knowledge with our non-Native circles rather than expecting First Peoples to guide us. Above all else, it is our political imperative to listen to and believe Indigenous peoples on these matters always and forever.

Throughout this introduction, my goal is to reorient you, the reader, toward stories—how they are told for and about Native people and people of color, those that we tell about ourselves, and what narratives might be mobilized as we reorient ourselves to old and new ways of being in relationship with persistently colonized spaces. In this spirit, I would like to share some of my own stories about what brought me to work on water and environmental justice. In so doing, I hope to give you a sense of my deeply specific and situated approach to this issue.
I have been lucky to have many water teachers.

My father's family cultivated my thinking about how to be in right relation to land, water, air, fire, and spirit from a very early age. I went to our farm in Uttarakhand, India for the first time when I was one. I was fascinated by my Dadaji's (grandfather's) big red tractor, watched as calves were birthed and chickens slaughtered, helped my Dadiji (grandmother) collect peas and potatoes from her kitchen garden, and relished how cool fresh well water tasted from squat tin cups. Every year we would return, and every year I would learn lesson after lesson from the place, the people, who are my roots. As Jatt Sikhs whose own roots live in Punjab—land of five rivers, which my Dadaji left during the violence of Partition (1947)—Kangs learned to cultivate and protect the soil for as long as anyone can remember. These lessons are equally of place and heart; they show that caring for and cultivating the elements is as much about who you come from as where you are.

As an undergraduate, my most important water teachers were three nuns at Thiền Viện Trúc Lâm, a Zen Buddhist monastery in Đà Lạt, Việt Nam. The nuns and monks of Trúc Lâm made all of their own clothing and bedding, cultivated everything they ate—fruits and vegetables, tofu, soy sauce—and cared for the animals, communities, and landscape that they lived alongside. Rather than a relationship of extraction—of seeing everyone that isn't human as things available for our use—they practiced communion, deference, and respect with, to, and of all beings. Halfway through my month-long research stay, I spent the morning with one of my mentors weeding and harvesting in the vegetable greenhouse. As we worked, a mosquito landed on my face. When I moved to swat it away, she reached for my hand

and reminded me that it deserved life as much as I did. When I have repeated this story, folks think it is plain ridiculous to allow a bug to bite you. But what if we were raised with the knowledge that a mosquito was as valuable as us?[4] What fundamentally would that do to how power is consolidated in service to so few and at the expense of most? A decade later, I carry what the nuns of Trúc Lâm taught with me as I assess my environmental, personal, and scholastic impact in the world.

Today, I am finishing a dissertation that mobilizes the knowledge and stories of Vietnamese/American and Cambodian/American fisherfolk in Southeast Louisiana, where oil extraction, governance, and settler colonial structural racism put Chata, Houma, Chittimacha, Atakapaw, and Chikasaw first peoples as well as Black, Chicanx, Latinx, and Asian/American residents, migrants, immigrants, and refugees in life-threatening and future-foreclosing positions. Alongside fisherfolk and their beloveds, water has been my biggest teacher in this work. Salt and fresh, poisoned and healing, life-making and community-erasing, water is weaponized against people I care for, is essential to their well-being, and is itself a seeker of justice in the bayous of Louisiana.

This is all to say that I did not come to environmental justice and water work as an individual. Rather, the people whom I care about brought it to me; they have taught and continue to teach me my place in it. They have also ensured that I approach the scholastic and community-based work of environmental justice critically, knowing there is no outside of colonialism, capitalism, and the violence of governance as they continue to be wrought on the least resourced, most class-immobile, and overwhelmingly racialized peoples. With an understanding that environmental racism, this "violent control over bodies, space, and knowledge systems," is truly "a form of state violence," I come to the present where I am here the editor of an alarmingly beautiful set of calls to action, meditations on, and new directions toward our relationship with injustice and water (Pellow 2016: 230). I am not proud of this volume because I assembled a knockout set of contributors, which I did, but rather, because they, some of my most significant teachers, answered the call.

I want to be transparent about how this issue was assembled. Environmental justice is an ongoing movement created[5] and maintained by Indigenous folks and people of color (POC) in response to viscerally and communally experienced environmental injustice. This movement has and continues to be led by women, queer and trans folks, people with disabilities, formerly and historically incarcerated folks, people who have and continue to live under overlapping and intersecting colonialisms and imperialisms, and folks with tenuous access to regional and/or national citizenship. Powerful people and corporations regularly weaponize water against human and more-than-human communities that stand in the way of their goals. These same powerful people and corporations overwhelmingly craft the stories that authorized and sustain this harm: stories that identify who matters and who is sacrifice-able. Stories, even, that erase whole people and more-than-human species from the landscape.

For these reasons, every contributor to this issue identifies as Indigenous and/or POC (person of color); most identify as women, trans, and/or gender nonbinary, and many are queer, disabled, in diaspora, and/or are reclaiming ancestral land. As you read, it will become clear that their own subject positions fundamentally shape whose stories—whose joy, other ways of knowing, histories, presents, and futures—each contributor chooses to make central to their work in the world.

This, in turn, is important because for many generations and still in a great many academic disciplines and cultural contexts, bearing witness to one's own stories—the stories of one's communities, childhood friends, ancestors, chosen kin, and on and on—is "illegitimate" knowledge

production. As community-based environmental justice thinkers, then, everyone here is, as David Pellow will tell us in a roundtable of the same name, producing and articulating “contraband” practices.

They also know, as I do, that there is always more to do and a better way to do it. However, if we let the imperfections of research, community organizing, and education stop us from starting, we would never have the opportunity to change how power works or knowledge is produced. So we do this work while striving to do better—to do good—each time.

To orient you in current conversations about environmental justice and water, our first feature is a roundtable of writers, makers, scholars, and dreamers: 신 선 영 辛善英 Sun Yung Shin, Merle Geode, Chika Kondo 近藤千嘉, Karen Bauer, 심 제현 Jae Hyun Shim, and David Naguib Pellow. Each brings their personal, ancestral, observed, and chosen communities’ experiences to bear on three questions: (1) What is environmental justice? (2) What is water’s role in environmental justice? Or why and how does water matter to environmental justice? (3) How do you do environmental justice? In so doing, they, as one person remarked, “explode conventional ideas of what environmental justice work means,” giving us new inroads into these often opaque and always fraught conversations.

This roundtable is a place for us to set down some roots and gather up tools that will help when reading the three single-author features that follow. These pieces are, in their own ways, dense and generous archives of water as acted upon, agent, and kin. Macarena Gómez-Barris uses a decolonial queer femme relational approach to complicate Rachel Carson’s work on water and environment at the ocean’s edge, asking “how can we theorize sea edges as places of coloniality, encounter, financial speculation, yet also as sites of hidden imaginaries and potentiality, and even sites of ongoing resource resurgence and individual and collective resilience?” Yvonne P. Sherwood, too, thinks coloniality, encounter, and speculation alongside missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW), their kin, and governmental processes that disproportionately harm both, claiming what happens to our lands happens to our bodies. Taking this imbrication of land and body seriously, Tia-Simone Gardner closes out our features with “There’s Something in the Water,” a visual and textual patchwork that erupts and interrupts violence against Black and brown people along the lower Mississippi River. Together, these pieces offer a rich set of analyses that erupt, interrupt, and refuse many of the ways we think about the environment, justice, and water and how they each travel differently for those who cultivate and build relationships with them and for those who seek to commodify them.

The issue’s seven columns help us rethink how we are networked into places, histories, lineages: the seeds of our environmental knowledge. We begin with Lisa Marie Brimmer’s interdisciplinary and poetic review of David Todd Lawrence and Elaine Lawless’ *When They Blew the Levee: Race, Politics, and Community in Pinhook, Missouri* (2018). Brimmer’s meditation on what it means for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to flood an historically Black township emphasizes that “In this era of state-of-emergency thinking, *When They Blew the Levee* ruminates on the power of the nation-state to sanction violence, erasure, and invisibility that can, intentionally or not, remove whole communities from the map.” This meditation on a community’s life post-flood leads us beautifully into “the river.” A story that Jayeesha Dutta calls “a visionary journey to a Detroit of the future where all of our social, environmental, and economic ills have come to a catastrophic crescendo,” adrienne maree brown’s work of visionary fiction is the beating heart of this issue. I extend my deepest gratitude to brown for sharing it with us in this context; no volume on environmental justice should be without creative

writing, one of the movement's long standing guiding lights, and there is no better guide into the liberatory, apocalyptic, water-contingent future that looms large for all of us assembled here than adrienne maree brown.

In Geographies, Caroline Doenmez maps pasts and presents along the McIntyre and Kaministiquia Rivers in Thunder Bay, Ontario and the Assiniboine and Red Rivers in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which have "become associated with the pervasive crisis of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG)." In this piece, Doenmez refuses a holistic narrative of injury and loss, showing that "caring for the dead and the water is vital for the survival of the living." In the Primary Sources column that follows, many folks who have carefully considered their relationships to movement and personal ancestors share their own ways of caring for water and community in the form of articles, films, and practices you can use to extend your own environmental justice and water work.

Our last two columns are at once incredibly different and inextricably linked. David Todd Lawrence uses Teaching and Practice to share a deeply personal meditation on what it means to do folkloric work as a Black scholar in Black communities. Following Zora Neale Hurston (1931), Lawrence ultimately forwards a hoodoo ethnography, which "has the willingness to see, to recognize the value of black places, black community, black history, black traditions, and black ancestors—and to imagine the possibilities of a black future" that "allows us as ethnographers to surrender power and submit to the traditions and histories that lie within ourselves and our collaborators—and in the souls of our ancestors." While emerging from discretely academic pursuits, hoodoo ethnography is a richly personal and ancestral practice and it is work that Adriel Luis takes up, albeit differently, in his Perspectives column. Pivoting around a persistent refrain—"where are you from?"—in Asian American life, Luis apprehends the knee-jerk response, "I'm from here," by reading Chinese American history and Navajo presents in New Mexico. Seeking to "learn to understand [one's] immigrant experience in relation to Indigeneity as opposed to Westernism," Luis, like Lawrence, draws on communal and ancestral fragments, half-memories, failures, and triumphs to offer us new ways of understanding ourselves as arrivants.

As a collective, our column contributors show us that what we do with our ancestral water knowledge is often as complex as unearthing it.

I will leave you with one final story. When my Dadaji passed on, we celebrated him in proper Sikh custom. My uncle chose a spot by a spring to burn his body, then collected his bones from the ashes. For three days and three nights, our family listened as four Gyanis, or learned men, read the Guru Granth Sahib in its entirety, the Punjabi washing over each of us as we did chores, told stories, tried and failed to sleep. On the last day, after closing the ceremony, we went to Gurdwara Sri Nanak Matta Sahib, the *gurdwara* my Dadiji had brought me to so often as a child. Descending the steps to the Nanak Matta's *baoli sahib* or step well, I looked down, feeling the water's heft as it echoed up toward us. My father took a linen bag from his brother, and, reciting words I no longer remember, let Dadaji's bones into the dark below. Having experienced no Sikh funerary rites before my Dadaji's passage, I didn't know that we always send our dead on by giving them to water. This is because by returning to water, we return to the source of all of us. By returning to water, we are able to become all over again. Before that day, I also did not know that *baolis* were constructed on *gurdwara* property to ensure that surrounding communities had access to fresh water, the denial of which was one way rulers at various moments in our history tried and failed to convert Sikhs to other faiths. Not only had we returned our patriarch to everything, we had sent him on in

water heavy with our histories of survival and resistance. For me, there was no better way to say goodbye, which, I reminded myself, was ultimately just another beginning.

With that, I welcome you and thank you for joining with us in what has become a collective journey to understand how we might recuperate, reprise, and re-envision water and environmental justice in our pasts, presents, and, hopefully, futures.

In source and solidarity,
Simi Kang

Footnotes

[1] All of the Mississippi River's first names are listed in Tia-Simone Gardner's feature, "Reading the River;" where I live, it is called *Misi-Ziibi*—(*Anishinaabemowin* [Ojibwe]), "Great river" and *Mníšošethąka*—(*Dakȟótiyapi* [Dakota]), according to The Decolonial Atlas.

[2] Here, I am referring to Jodi Byrd's use of Bahamanian poet Edward Kamau Braithwithe's "arrivant." Byrd uses the term to "signify those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe" (2011: xix), differentiating these people from European and Anglo-Americans who deliberately and consistently colonized and imperialized Native peoples in the past and present.

[3] In the Twin Cities, these spaces include Minneapolis American Indian Center, All My Relations Arts, and Birchbark Books & Native Art. A good resource to learn about whose lands you are on, what languages they live in, and how treaties have shaped what you are able to say, see, and do in that place is The Decolonial Atlas.

[4] Let me say this example is illustrative of a larger point I'm trying to make about right relationship; I understand that mosquitoes often carry and spread disease and thus, should be understood as potentially threatening.

[5] See Robert Bullard's reflection on the history of the discipline "Environmental Justice in the 21st Century: Race Still Matters" (2001).

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About the Author

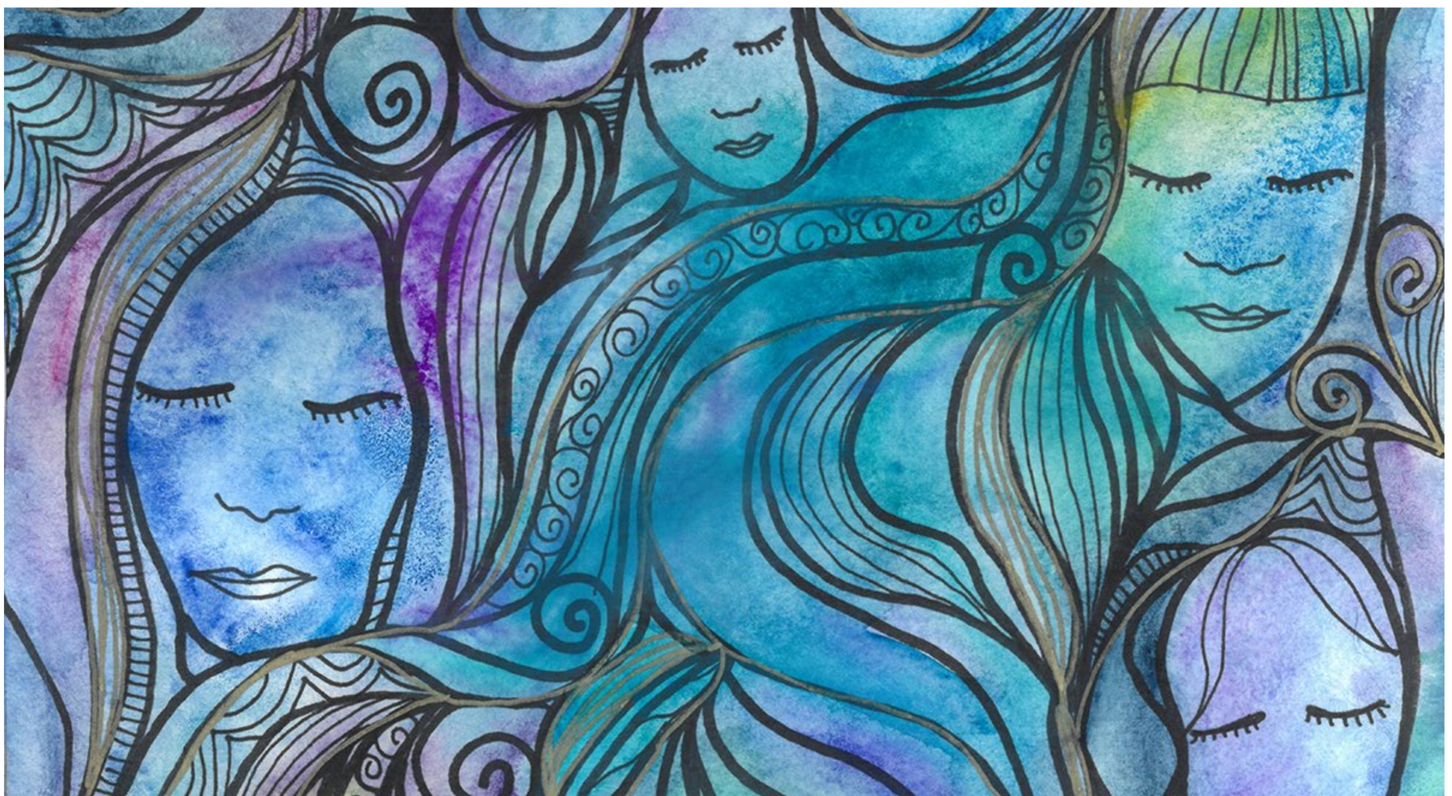
Simi Kang is a Doctoral Dissertation Fellow in the Feminist Studies Program at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. A Sikh American educator, scholar, artist, and community advocate, she centers Asian/American stories and knowledges to interrogate the intersection of environment and policy. Kang's work has been supported in many ways big and small by her interlocutors in Louisiana and was funded by the UMN Graduate School and Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change. Her work has appeared in *The Asian American Literary Review, Gravy Quarterly, Hyphen Magazine, Kartika Review, Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community,* and *Jaggery: A DesiLit Arts and Literature Journal*.

FEATURE

"CONTRABAND" PRACTICE: DOING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE WITH WATER

By Karen Bauer, Merle Geode, Simi Kang,
Chika Kondo 近藤千嘉, David Naguib Pellow,
심제현 Jae Hyun Shim, and 신 선 영 辛善英 Sun Yung Shin

When I asked the following six artists, theorists, community advocates, organizers, and members to contribute to this issue, it was primarily to share a reading or practice related to water and environmental justice (EJ) in our Primary Sources column. In soliciting these citations, I also asked them to answer a series of questions (which you will find below), the answers to which, Open Rivers' *editors and I agreed, warranted their own feature space. This is because while so many of us know the term "environmental justice"—maybe even have a working relationship with it in our lives or those who we care for—how the idea circulates, is deployed, and is increasingly misused, is much more opaque. So to start this issue off, poet* 신 선 영 辛善英 *Sun Yung Shin, writer/artist Merle Geode, master's student at Kyoto University*



Detail from 'womxn in water' image courtesy of heather c. lou.

'womxn in water' image courtesy of heather c. lou.

Graduate School of Agriculture Chika Kondo 近藤千嘉, University of Minnesota Cultural Anthropology Ph.D. student Karen Bauer, Food, Land and Community Program Coordinator at Hope Community Inc. and Subversive Siren 심제현 Jae Hyun Shim, and the indomitable David Naguib Pellow, Dehlsen Professor of Environmental Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, orient us in environmental justice and its relationship to water.

I thank each and every voice here for building presents and futures beyond the violences they each identify below—we won't survive without their work.

—Simi Kang

What is environmental justice?

Sun Yung Shin

As a lay person, as someone not involved in environmental justice, someone who is neither a scientist, naturalist, or activist, I would define environmental justice as a set of values and practices that create the conditions under which all peoples and communities live in balance with the natural world without degrading the conditions of life for other species. I would say that EJ would have to include an iterative truth and reparations process to repair past and ongoing harms to vulnerable, exploited, and abused human communities and non-human life forms and their ecosystems. Industrialism and capitalism are externality-producing machines and it is historically marginalized peoples bearing the brunt of those multiple and interlocking toxicities.

Environmental justice is a mysterious term to me. The word "environment" implies that what is around the subject, and in some ways can be seen as making that which supports the life of the animal, or the plant, or living thing, an object. I may be reaching, but I have always felt that that's how the white environmental movement portrays its work. "Our" environment implies, sometimes, a possession. Or that we are active, agents, the center, and what's around us, "nature," "land," "animals," is our background. It seems to relate to 19th century Romanticism, in which Nature is sublime but in some way exists to be beheld by humans, that it's our gaze (or the gaze of white men) that creates the relationship of awe.

> environ (v.)
> late 14c. (implied in *environing*), "to surround, encircle, encompass," from Old French *environer* "to surround, enclose, encircle," from *environ* "round about," from *en-* "in" + *viron* "a circle, circuit," also used as an adverb, from *virer* "to turn." (https://www.etymonline.com/word/environ)

Merle Geode

I think environmental justice, to me, is about fighting for transparency and access to resources.

Chika Kondo

To put it as simply as possible, EJ is a daily practice where any decision being made puts the health and wellbeing of the environment and the people and ecosystems connected to that environment over profit and greed.

Karen Bauer

To me, environmental justice is an ongoing process of self-reflection, collaboration, and action. It begins by re-evaluating my place in the world as only one entity intimately connected to others, and continues by me listening to and working with people inside and outside of academia to restore and secure the rights of others—human and nonhuman—in this world.

Jae Hyun Shim

Environmental justice can be defined in so many ways: through a lens of anti-racist environmentalism or as an act of true justice as it intersects with the land and water. More clinically, environmental justice is a way historically white environmental initiatives can (and should!) look to communities of color to lead processes that heal spaces they and their ancestors have continuously been stewards of. For me, the most essential things that need to be included in environmental justice are intersectionality that is clearly named and a mindfulness towards the planet and the ways humans impact our natural environment.

David Naguib Pellow

In my community and in my view, environmental justice is a goal, a vision, and a practice in which no community is unfairly burdened with environmental harms and when social justice, democracy, and ecological sustainability prevail. It is also a process and a goal of recognizing that we live in and have always lived in multispecies societies and that we must work to make those multispecies societies *multispecies democracies*. [1] It is also a vision of regenerative development, where our activities don't seek to merely *reduce* socioecological harm (which is generally the rather limited goal of *sustainability*), but rather

Kawahara, Tottori. Farm trucks called (kei-tora—translates to economic van) serve a vital purpose for farmers. The annual registration fee and associated taxes are less than regular cars. While you might not see very many in urban areas they are a common sight in the rural areas of Japan. Image courtesy of Chika Kondo.

they seek to produce benefits and prosperity for the denizens of our socioecological systems. [2] In other words, it is a practice and theory of indispensability—where we are all viewed as critical participants in creating and sustaining our democratic collective present and futures.

What is water's role in environmental justice? Or why and how does water matter to environmental justice?

Sun Yung Shin

The Dakota people say that water (and everything else) is a relative, not a resource. Hearing this triggered a profound paradigm shift for me. It is working its way through my thinking as I read and consider more. To attempt to rid myself of a relationship that has been based in colonial resource thinking is not easy, but I am committed. I don't want to have a relationship to water that is one of domination and subjugation.

Chika Kondo

Water is a precious and essential gift from nature to be shared with all beings. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's resistance against the Dakota Access Pipeline reawakened an important lesson for me: *Mni Wiconi*. Water is life. I had for a majority of my life taken for granted my relationship with water.

I think there is a fundamental brokenness we have with our connection to water. Oversimplification removes the responsibility we have as people and hides the importance of our dependence on water. It also largely ignores the many communities and indigenous people who have been critical caretakers in making sure we give back. Water is not something that moves in just one direction.

David Naguib Pellow

Water is everywhere in EJ struggles. In my current research and activism around the intersections of EJ concerns and incarceration in the U.S., I have found that water contamination is perhaps the single most prominent environmental threat in the prison and jail system. There are literally dozens of confirmed and documented cases where water contamination in U.S. jails and prisons is so bad that the water is visibly discolored, has a foul odor, and has made prisoners sick, producing skin lesions and rashes and other ailments. Recently, a prisoner at Avenal State Prison in California took a video of visibly contaminated water coming out of the faucet in his cell and sent it to me as documentation of environmental injustices in that facility. I was horrified not only at the site of the most precious and basic building block of life being polluted and forced upon caged people, but also at the fact that this person was risking further repression and state violence by simply recording and documenting that reality because he used a cell phone to do so, the possession of which is considered contraband. But as much as I am terrified for these imprisoned folk and our ecosystems, I am heartened by the resistance movements that have been unbroken throughout the history of incarceration. Prisoners, former prisoners, their families, and allies have worked to make visible these environmental injustices and to improve the lives of the

caged and work toward the eventual abolition of prisons. Mumia Abu-Jamal wrote and spoke out about water contamination affecting him and his fellow prisoners in Pennsylvania as early as the mid-1980s. In 2005, eighteen prisoners at the St. Louis and Central Michigan Correctional Facilities (in the state of Michigan) sued the prison system over what they claimed were unconstitutional conditions, including the fact that the city's drinking water was contaminated with p-CBSA, a byproduct of the banned insecticide DDT, and that was the same water prisoners were forced to drink. The city of St. Louis, Michigan's schools switched to bottled water but the area prison officials did not, so the prisoners brought a lawsuit in U.S. District Court. In 2003, the women's correctional facility in Texas known as the William Hobby Unit experienced a water contamination crisis since it received its water from the nearby town of Marlin, Texas, which was also contaminated. Prisoners brought a lawsuit against officials claiming that the water contamination caused serious injuries. More recently, Wayland Coleman, who is imprisoned at Massachusetts Correctional Institution Norfolk, has fought for the right to drink safe and clean water at that facility after contaminated water left a sizable percentage of prisoners with health

Keihoku, Kyoto, Japan. Keihoku is a region of Kyoto city up in the mountains before you reach the Sea of Japan. The village of Shimokuroda and its people safely protect the flowing rivers that feed into greater cities like Osaka and Kyoto. Farmers and residents gather regularly to clean up any landslides and clear up river channels. Image courtesy of Chika Kondo.

complaints. Coleman purchased and stored water bottles in his cell for distribution to his fellow prisoners and was punished by prison authorities for doing so because that water was considered "contraband." Imagine that—for some of us, water is life, but for the state and the prison industrial complex, the storage and distribution of this life-giving substance is defined as a crime. Fortunately, Coleman never gave up his fight and has been supported by a group of allies on the outside called the Deeper than Water Coalition.

Karen Bauer

I think I was only able to begin to understand environmental justice once I started doing research in the community of Junín in the Intag Region of Northern Ecuador. The Junín River flows throughout Junín and to many of Junín's residents, the river—along with other natural features—is an animated entity that deserves respect and protection. However, when transnational mining corporations enter the community and begin to pollute the river, it becomes a multipurpose site. Once a site of irrigation and life, the presence of copper-deposit mining has now transformed the river and other water sources in the area into a location for conflict, contamination, and death.

By working with environmental activists in Junín, I began to understand the importance of respecting the agentive nature of the land and the river. To be quite frank, the earth doesn't owe humans shit. It existed before humans and can exist without humans. Humans, on the other hand, owe our lives to the earth and therefore must constantly work to give thanks, building and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with the earth and its human and nonhuman residents.

Pro-campesino/anti-mining protest art on a community building in Junín , Ecuador. The message roughly translates to "If the miners try to rule over us, we're not going to leave because that is why I am part of my people and I do not get tired of fighting! Long live the farmers, long live the fight, long live Junín!" Image courtesy of Karen Bauer, 2017.

Merle Geode

I'm a 36-year-old Minneapolis resident. I grew up in California and spent grades K–8 in Rancho Cordova, in Sacramento County. Although I am not finding data for the current cancer rankings for this county, Sacramento County was a cancer hotspot in the state for a number of years. As of 1999, it was in the number one position for a number of major cancers. I moved from Rancho Cordova in 1997. It was only many years later that I found out I had been living within 10 miles of the epicenter of an Aerojet dumping site which had been the source of groundwater contamination since the 1950s, and it was designated a Superfund site in the early 1980s, but due to illegal dumping of a slew of harmful chemicals and known carcinogens (including perchlorate, a major component of jet fuel that has been linked to thyroid cancer and hormonal disruptions) as well as failure to disclose to local residents exactly what was being dumped, the pollution went on for decades under the radar. There have been a number of lawsuits and organizing by residents (notably in 1997–2000) that led to different testing methods which revealed that the levels of perchlorate in the drinking water were about 50 times higher than the permissible value. Aerojet (and its parent company GenCorp) have been slapped with a number of settlements to clean up the water, which the EPA estimated would take about 240 years to turn around the damage that had been caused. It is hard to say how my body

If not justice, then water brings healing. Image courtesy of Merle Geode.

has been damaged by this directly—however it has lingered in my mind as a potential cause for why, at 31 and with no significant genetic predisposition for cancer, I was diagnosed with ER/PR+ invasive intraductal breast cancer (stage IIb) in January 2014. In October 2015, I had a recurrence and was diagnosed with bone metastases to the spine. As I looked back on other factors (like getting my period very early at age 8) as well as being exposed to contaminated drinking water through the height of my developmental years, I am left to question polluted groundwater as a very likely contributor to my current state.

How do you do environmental justice?

Merle Geode

I think my framework [for environmental justice] feels very personal; it isn't an area in which I have scholarly or professional background but I have been feeling the pull to become more engaged with environmental justice activism, especially locally (just talked with a friend last night, actually). I think the most insidious things are the things that remain invisible until it is too late. I happened to find out about Aerojet's contamination plume (which spans several thousand acres in the county) through word of mouth from a sixth grade teacher who also had breast cancer and still lives in Sacramento and taught in Rancho Cordova. I guess the resource I would advocate for would be to trust one's body, talk to others in the community, etc. Environmental justice may not be possible for me (and others) who may already be dealing with the consequences of toxic exposure. The cases that went to court are long gone and it's difficult to prove harm in these sorts of cases in which there is not necessarily a direct link, albeit the circumstances create a believable and likely hypothesis that something happened in my young developing body because of what I ingested. I can't change the past, but I think that this has made me feel concerned about preventing similar damage in the lives of others—that justice might take the form of preventative actions, or giving visibility to the underbelly of what I have alluded to before: the insidious things that like to hide. I now check for news articles, public records, etc., in the places where I live to look at histories of recorded pollutants, etc. I don't know if that is helpful but that is my first reaction to your question. That the most troubling things may actually still need to be revealed, and people need to trust their bodies first, and to use the resources available to them to be their own self-advocate, and for those who have the ability, advocate for others in the community who are less able to do so. I am privileged to have an educational and professional background that has given me a lot of resourcefulness when it comes to looking up information and I realize not everyone will have that same background—and that said, there is still a lot of information that remains purposefully inaccessible to protect corporate interests.

Chika Kondo

[As I said before,] Water is not something that moves in just one direction. I'm currently living in Japan where I've been building relationships with farmers who also play vital roles in making sure that water is utilized as a shared, common resource. Communities who live up in the mountains hold great respect and pride in making sure that the waters flow abundantly through the many rivers, tributaries, and other channels so that all families, both rural and urban, can also drink and use clean water. Not only do farmers work cooperatively to irrigate their fields, they also hold great respect in knowing that each grain of rice is the creation of life thanks to water. And with each grain of rice they plant, they are also providing sacred grounds for the many tree frogs, dragon flies, and other life that help to maintain and build a thriving ecosystem. I think

this give and take and deep respect for water and the surrounding environment is another kind of embodiment of *Mni Wiconi*.

As I learn more about my own ancestral roots in Japan, I am also reclaiming my own personal relationship to water and hold deep appreciation for how water not only is an integral part of me but is something I share in common with all living beings. Without water there truly is no life.

Sun Yung Shin

I was born on what is in some ways an island—South Korea, which is the lower half of the Korean peninsula. With the border with Northern Korea running east-west, it creates an island of South Korea. Water is everywhere in South Korea, clear spring water running down the black mountain rocks, cutting rugged and wild shapes as it flows over millennia. The water is so pure

Keihoku, Kyoto, Japan. This photograph, showing the river under snow, is also in Keihoku, a region of Kyoto city up in the mountains before you reach the Sea of Japan. The village of Shimokuroda and its people safely protect the flowing rivers that feed into greater cities like Osaka and Kyoto. Farmers and residents gather regularly to clean up any landslides and clear up river channels. Image courtesy of Chika Kondo.

that Koreans have always drunk lukewarm (barley) tea and developed thin celadon ceramicware. In China, there is not as much natural spring water, I have been told, which is why they drink very hot tea in thick cups. They traditionally have had to boil their water to ensure it is drinkable. This may have been some celadon museum propaganda, but it seems plausible.

I grew up in the Chicago metro and Lake Michigan is an essential part of my topographical psyche and created my mental map of what a city should be—built alongside a large body of water. The Chicago River, which used to be horribly polluted, and was dyed green every Saint Patrick's Day, also looms large in my childhood memories of water.

Jae Hyun Shim

When I think about the water—and I think about it a lot—I think about the ways that it has healed me. Some of my water memories are from when I was small. I would spend hours in the pool or bathtub. Others are from the past two years: time spent in an isolated float tank, a lake, a therapeutic pool, even just in a steamy bath.

This past November a friend invited me to the community pool one Saturday morning. A year prior, she had joined a synchronized swim team and has been sharing the joy of swimming with as many folks as possible. The first time I was in the water with the Subversive Sirens, I completely understood the hype. We collectively move through the water, manipulating our bodies in ways not possible on land. I've felt privileged every time I sink into the pool, sharing these experiences with artists and movement builders over the past two and a half months.

Now my memories are almost exclusively of time spent in pools. And pools are political. All of the ways we access water are. Swimming, and access to water in all of its forms, have long been weaponized by white folks as ways to exclude communities of color. Possibly the most well-known example of this is when a Las Vegas hotel drained their pool in the 1950s because Dorothy Dandridge had dipped her toe in. This attitude and lack of access persists; according to a study done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from 1999–2010, for people under 29, Indigenous folks were twice as likely to drown as white folks and Black folks were 1.4 times as likely. It wasn't until the most recent Summer Olympics (2016, Rio de Janeiro) that an African-American woman won a gold medal for an individual swimming event. Simone Manuel is also, notably, the first Black woman to have won a gold in any individual swimming event. True to the adage of having to be twice as good to get half as far she also won another gold and a silver.

The feeling I get from swimming synchro is that being present with my body isn't something I can opt out of when I'm in the water. When we swim together, we are moving a different world into existence, a world where little black and brown children of all genders see people like themselves swimming and speaking to issues that we care about. The four pillars we swim for are Black liberation, equity in swimming/aquatic arts, body positivity in athleticism, and queer visibility. Our team insists on being political with our routines, with how we show up. We do this because we need to create spaces for ourselves and our joy regardless of the ways dominant culture and capitalism try to dictate how that can or should look.

Karen Bauer

Realizing that the earth does not need me to survive and will only continue allowing humans to stay if we protect and restore it fueled my call to environmental justice.

My environmental justice is also critically attuned to recognizing what violent work naming can do. While the West's recent focus on the "international crisis" of climate change has caused people to be more conscious of their actions, it

also conceals not only the primary source of the problem, but the everyday, lived conditions that many marginalized people endure and protest due to others' actions. The current state of the environment has been primarily shaped by the actions of large-scale corporations and the government, not by the everyday person. People of color, Indigenous people, and those with low-income are burdened the most by these actions. Not surprisingly, many of these communities have worked towards establishing and maintaining environmental justice long before it was considered an issue by the national and international public.

Anthropologist, Zoe Todd's article "An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word For Colonialism" precisely illustrates the problems that occur from the practice of naming. In her article, Todd focuses on Euro-Western academics' recent desire to develop scholarship that thinks beyond the human, ignoring long-standing, critical, Indigenous-led ontological scholarship. I strongly believe the same framework can be used to critique the desire to turn climate change into a recent crisis. Linguistically changing the temporality of climate change produces very particular types of environmental justice. It also leaves little room for other (often Indigenous, WOC (women of color), low-income, disabled) practices that aim to disrupt and work outside of the broader environmental justice movement in order to fight for the rights of all, not just some. In Junín, for example, environmental and human rights organizations entered into the community at a very

Kawahara, Tottori Prefecture, Japan. Rural Japan rice paddy fields taken during the summer season. Image courtesy of Chika Kondo.

particular time, giving the people of Junín very Western ways of discussing the issues happening in the village. These organizations have already left, even though the effects of mining and the fight to protect local land have been happening in the area long before the organizations entered and are continuing to happen long after they leave.

Environmental justice to me is ultimately about grounding myself to the earth. It involves me constantly reminding myself that while humans have been given the ability to live on earth, while we are here, everyone has the right to be taken care of equally. Environmental justice to me also means engaging with other forms of knowledge production outside of Euro-Western academia in order to restore the degradation that has been done to the planet. These forms of knowledge must also be community-based and require active listening from those in power in order for reparations (to local communities, environments, health, and economies), alternative economic and environmental practices, and redistribution of resources to occur. Moreover, environmental justice is about taking seriously the social, economic, and environmental concerns and practices of marginalized folks before they become a crisis to the rest of the world.

David Naguib Pellow

The lessons I take away from each of the cases I discussed above are (1) that environmental justice calls us to support the struggles of those under the heel of the state, and (2) if the state views efforts to document and confront environmental injustices anywhere as criminal behavior, then perhaps we should all cautiously, responsibly, and gleefully embrace such "contraband" actions as a regular practice everywhere because they are vital for our collective liberation.

Footnotes

[1] In recent years, scholars have pursued what has been called the post-humanist or multispecies turn in which researchers across a range of disciplines are grappling with the realization that humans are not and have never been autonomous, discrete individuals since we are entangled within and comprised of networks of multiple nonhuman organisms. The implications of this turn are enormous. Scholars of critical animal studies and ecofeminism are more comfortable taking this acknowledgement even further to explore the ways in which humans and more-than-humans can interact, collaborate, and co-exist in more respectful relationships that are not premised on dominance. That is what I mean by multispecies democracy, which is also informed by my goal of linking environmental justice (whose primary emphasis is on social justice for humans in the context of environmental threats) with ecological justice (a framework that seeks greater balance and integration between human and nonhuman justice). This project is challenging and potentially controversial because people of color, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized populations have historically been cast as "closer to nature" as a means of controlling and devaluing them. Multispecies democracy is a theory and practice that embraces justice for all with attention to the unique contexts and histories that shape these struggles for specific groups and populations.

[2] The term "socioecological" signals my view that social systems and ecosystems are intimately linked, and to separate them in our minds and actions reinforces the age-old scourge of dualism, or the false opposition between (human) "culture" and (nonhuman) "nature." Thus the environmental crisis is also necessarily a social crisis because it impacts both humans and ecosystems and is driven by social practices that are only made possible by drawing on the wealth of ecosystems.

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FEATURE (PEER REVIEW)

LIFE OTHERWISE AT THE SEA'S EDGE

By Macarena Gómez-Barris

Editor's note: This feature article has been peer reviewed.

As part of a longer project on sea edges and coloniality, this essay studies ways of being that exceed the human, nonhuman, and colonial divide, and that find historical nodes of power and affective density at the boundaries of the Americas oceanic.[1] It does so by thinking with and alongside the work of environmentalist and writer Rachel Carson and multimedia mestiza artist Cecilia Vicuña to find sources for ecological feeling, connectivity, and praxis across the hemisphere. Their views have shaped my own understanding of ecological memories and how the surround has shaped a way of being and living at the sea's edge.

In the midst of the Anthropocene's destructiveness, how can we theorize sea edges as places of coloniality, conquest, encounter, financial

Along the North Atlantic Seaboard, image courtesy of Macarena Gómez-Barris (2019).

speculation, yet also as sites of hidden imaginaries and potentiality, and even sites of ongoing resource resurgence and individual and collective resilience?[2] What can we take from Rachel Carson's view despite knowing it is steeped in the settler logic and scientific gaze of Western domination of the natural world? How does Cecilia Vicuña's visual art and performance offer a form of decolonial play that exposes extractive capitalism and also finds sources for living otherwise? Thinking from the liminal and harsh pounding spaces of the sea's edge is one way to consider the beautiful and terrible current condition of planetary existence. Attuning our attention to a historical grounding of place and to the global ecologies of the sea is requisite for producing action and for unspinning the network of colonial-capital relations. Rachel Carson peers into tidepool communities and is able to name the fragile and resilient condition that exists at the sea's edge. Yet without Cecilia Vicuña's attention to the Global South, to extractive industries, and to the buried and omitted Indigenous histories in the Americas, we risk reproducing our fascination with the ocean and its sea edge without a tethered sense of the colonial Anthropocene. Both of their forms of encounter and observation have profoundly influenced the sea edge epistemology I begin to outline here.[3]

Pacific Encounters

From an early age, I yearned to live otherwise, between land and sea, between liquid worlds and those constituted as solid. As a small child, I spent long hours searching for anemones in the dense tidepools along Chile's central coastline, where the accumulated secretions of the natural world overpowered my sensibilities. Making my way slowly through the sharp rocks of the tidal pools, navigating around the omnipresent purple sea urchins, I sought ways to feel and peer into microbial worlds. Standing on flat surfaces along the Pacific Ocean in northern Chile on Aconcagua territories, I would extend my view to the sight line along the magenta horizon to imagine swimming submerged as the mermaids, or *pincoyas*, did, moving for days beneath the water's surface. Gulping ocean air, I would pretend to rise slowly from the depths to fill my half-human, half-fish lungs. Being at the shore allowed me to feel the precarity of the Southern geography and the sense of wonder, otherness, awe and exhilaration that came from edge-based living. Looking across the Pacific and perceiving the continental edge space gave me the sense that we lived at the world's margins, far from any planetary center.

The sea's edge offered a refuge from the expectations of normalcy and from the confines of a life indoors. On claustrophobic family Sundays, when most public life retreated to the space of the hetero-domestic, my desire to be at the sea's edge grew even stronger. Even though I knew I would later be scolded for my transgressions, I would wake up early and put on an old pair of grey boots to quietly make my way outdoors. Once on the corner, I would hail a small *colectivo* to take the short ride to the Valparaiso port, where those working in the market invited me to touch the still-living sea creatures on offer. This was the oceanic life that thrived prior to the arrival of transpacific fleets. Those I met at the market worked closely with the Mestizx artisanal fishermen and women in what more than forty years later has become a ghost enterprise. I never saw the *picoroco* sea creature at the edge of the ocean or hovering in the crevices of deep rock formations where they encouraged me to look for them. Yet by visiting local stalls I could observe the *picoroco's* alien-like movement within barnacle shells. For what seemed like hours I would watch a single claw emerge and withdraw

again, remembering that Pablo Neruda had once called the animal prehistoric. Indeed, the diversity of species, oceanic life, and smells at the marketplace stretched my young mind like the sea's limitless horizon.

Such experiences were my first forays towards developing a decolonial queer femme perspective that centers intimate human and nonhuman relations and the letting in of the surround as key to imagining life otherwise.[4] Awe, amazement, and play in relation to the environment were how I perceived these early worlds, even as I could not yet attend to the histories of colonization and eradication that undergirded these experiences and that would later become central to my decolonial praxis as a non-Indigenous scholar. In this essay, I begin to work out how edge perception contributes to a *cuir* femme method that engages the surround and remembers the sweep of colonization and histories of social and ecological disappearance. In times such as these that demand politically committed research, writing, and activisms, we might consider wonder, curiosity, porosity, and imagination as superfluous to our worldly engagement. Yet these forms of living and perceiving are not immature or secondary, but deeply invest in sensual experience as a way to oppose the colliding structures of amnesia and loss represented by racial and extractive capitalism. In other words, play and perception are key to our imaginary of life otherwise on the other side of the colonial divide.

As Southern ways of thinking, knowing, and being opened this inquiry, my reflections and search

Shelter Island, image courtesy of Nicole Hayward (2019).

for sea-edge imaginaries have also been deeply imprinted by a more Northern geography, both in terms of embodied experience and through a vast literary tradition on ecology written in English and troubled by the workings of empire. After September 11, 1973, we fled U.S.-backed authoritarianism in Chile, seeking refuge and becoming settlers in the belly of the beast. We arrived at another Pacific horizon, first moving to Los Angeles upon Gabrielino and Tongva territories and then to Northern California where we rented a home upon Maidu lands in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains near the fork of the American and Feather Rivers.

As a teenager, I continued to feel the pull of the sea's edge, though I had not yet been able to make connections between my own exilic condition and how extractive capitalism had already organized so much of the global economy. In my public high school, I took courses in marine biology, learning the scientific names of the ocean's life zones and its myriad shelf ecologies and species, such as the *pycnopodia helianthoides*, or sea sunflower. It was with my mother and sister that I began my field research on sea edges, taking weekend trips to Mendocino and later to Fort Bragg, staying at a clean, budget motel that clung to the very threshold of the North Pacific Ocean. Oceanic life brimmed in deep tidepools until recently when unconscious tourism and the warming of the oceans has gutted much of this sea-periphery density. Armed with a small camera, I would arise at dawn, making my way to the still-dark ocean edge to explore and trample upon the slippery rocks filled with glistening green and blue sea life that responded to the galloping tides.

These smaller, barely discernible worlds fastened me to the submerged spaces of the oceanic as a life-long obsession, a way of imagining otherwise that liberated me from our state of unbelonging toward fluid ways of relating and being in tune with our liquid planet. Only later would I come to know that the Mendocino Coast was Indigenous Pomo territory named for the Spanish explorer Antonio de Mendoza, the Viceroy of Spain, and to understand how regional histories of the founding of the Noyo Reservation in the nineteenth century represented yet another iteration of colonialism's violent trace. These hemispheric histories of exploration, domination, and occupation continue to haunt the landscape and connect the geographies of the Americas.

If we are to understand the destructive capacity of the colonial Anthropocene, its sheer power and capacity to make lively worlds extinct, then we must also reckon with our ecological memories and affective sensibilities in relation to the natural world that sustains us.[5] We must also acknowledge our intimate knowledge of the Earth as that which moves and shapes our affective, psychological, and collective attachments to the delicate web of social and biological life. Partial memories along the shores of the Southern continent organize my view of the Pacific and living otherwise, a personal story that connects to a shared inheritance of disappearance. These experiences guide my desire to better understand the in-between zones of land and sea, and where sea edges meet with oceanic histories of enslavement, occupation, transit, migration, empire, and industrial impact.

Salvaging the Sea

> The river is within us, the sea is all about us;
> The sea is the land's edge also, the
> granite
> Into which it reaches, the beaches
> Where it tosses
> Its hints of earlier and other creation:
> The starfish, the horseshoe crab, the
> whale's backbone;
> The pools where it offers to our curiosity
> The more delicate algae and the sea anemone.
>
> –"Dry Salvages" by T. S. Eliot (1943)[6]

What modes of writing, enacting, living, and being route us out of the colonization of the senses to open up an ecological imaginary of what is to be salvaged? T.S. Eliot's mid-twentieth-century poem "Dry Salvages" describes the relational connections between the human and nonhuman, where the substance of water is literally "all about us." It reminds us how we, too, are deeply linked to and with the planet's water, its rivers and the oceanic as liquid bodies shaped by lunar ebbs and flows. Eliot's poem, with its ecological vision of curiosity and wonder from the Anglophone literary canon, was available to Rachel Carson as she wrote her famed ocean trilogy.[7] At that time, Rachel Carson was struck by how similar T.S. Eliot's language was to her own poetic descriptions of the sea, a language that came on the precipice of global social and cultural awakening in relation to environmental justice.[8] Almost seventy years later, overfishing, industrial activities, the shipping industry, and real estate overdevelopment have vastly changed the coastlines of the North Atlantic seaboard. Perhaps an Anglophone writer's ecological connection during the mid-twentieth century had a different structure of feeling than our current condition, when we cannot write ourselves out of the practices of contamination and extraction, especially in relation to Indigenous dispossession, the structure of racial segregation, and dangerous overexposure to waste, hazards, and polluted environments within communities of color.[9]

Ten chapters from Carson's first book, *The Sea Around Us*, first appeared in consecutive issues of *The New Yorker* on June 2, 9, and 16, 1951, with the title "The Sea: Unforgotten World."[10] As her biographer describes, Carson challenged the magazine's readers "to think of the sea as a living entity," matching the long form of the articles that wound around the pages of the magazine.[11] The opening of *The Sea Around Us* describes the geological origins of the ocean:

> Beginnings are apt to be shadowy, and so it is with the beginnings of that great mother of life, the sea. Many people have debated how and when the earth got its ocean, and it is not surprising that their explanations do not always agree. For the plain and inescapable truth is that no one was there to see, and in the absence of eyewitness accounts there is bound to be a certain amount of disagreement. So if I tell here the story of how the young planet Earth acquired an ocean, it must be a story pieced together from many sources and containing whole chapters the details of which we can only imagine. The story is founded on the testimony of the earth's most ancient rocks which were young when the earth was young; on other evidence written on the face of the earth's satellite, the moon; and on hints contained in the history of the sun and the whole universe of star-filled space. For although no man was there to witness this cosmic birth, the stars and the moon and the rocks were there, and indeed, had much to do with the fact that there is an ocean.[12]

Carson's work engaged her audience by using scientific material that revealed a long timeline of evolution and geological change. Despite the fact

that some of the science she relied on at the time was later revised or disproven, the thick descriptions Rachel Carson provided of oceanic life, of "wind and wave and salt, the life of the darkest deep ocean, the great currents that traverse the globe and set the climate," helped to develop an environmental imagination in the United States that was sensitive to ecosystems and the earth's natural climate cycles.[13]

Attending to the local ecologies and dynamics of the intertidal zone, Carson writes that "although abandoned briefly and rhythmically by the sea, it is always reclaimed by the rising tide."[14] This permanent reclaiming by the pull and force of the ocean offers a mode of being that is non-linear yet constant, an oceanic rhythm of time and space that is recurrent, insistent, and that withdraws and abandons only to return again. Through a scientific and poetic lens that names the sea's force, Carson understands the ocean as an entity of relational ebbs and flows. How can we theorize this nonhuman force at the center of the earth's webbed ecologies? How do we remember the power of the ocean's connectivity to lunar and to cosmic extra-planetary gravitational forces?

In its thick descriptions of liquid sea life, reading Rachel Carson's oceanic chronicles demands that we suspend our own present-day knowledge of ecological destruction and this suspension highlights how the scientific ecological view is informed by the settler colonial imagination. As John Gatta discusses, Carson's *The Edge of the Sea* expresses a mystical sense of the world that, while not explicitly theistic, is far from narrowly positivistic.[15] Carson's view rests somewhere between the scientific and the mystical, or what we might call a phenomenological or experiential perspective that considers scale and complexity. Its close attention to the surround and to the sea's edge with its animated tidal waters teeming with the nonhuman: little fish, willets, flying skimmers, and searching ghost crabs. Rather than a pure space of organic matter, however, the intertidal zone is also a metaphor for life that is defined by Carson as the "delicate, destructible, yet incredibly vital force that somehow holds its place amid the harsh realities of the inorganic world."[16] Though this bumping up of organic and inorganic in Carson's ocean does not yet assign life force to anthropogenic change, the trilogy perhaps anticipates a posthuman or new materialisms theorization of oceanic vitality.

Written largely from her individual observations and time spent along the northeastern seaboard, the intertidal zone provided Carson with a fecund site for her research on oceans. Sitting and walking alongside the coastline of Maine allowed her to describe algae worlds where clinging life resists the pounding waves and the subtle relationships that bind each living thing to its community and patterns of life, creating a complexity of earthly seashore design.[17] In her observations along the Maine coast, Rachel Carson imagined the sea edge as a geography as old as the earth itself, where "life first drifted in shallow waters—reproducing, evolving, yielding that endlessly varied stream of living things that has surged through time and space to occupy the earth."[18] Entering the earth's older geographies, Carson views from the stream of living things.

What is striking is Carson's laser-sharp attention to and focus on the intertidal zone, or the area that is defined between tide marks, or above water at low tide and under water at high tide. There is a fluidity to the taxonomic methodology of Carson's trilogy that scientifically observes from the sea's edge. Indeed, her biographer notes that though one imagines Carson as a high adventurer type, most of her work was spent in quiet libraries or pondering from relatively small geographies along the Maine coast, rather than immersed deep in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Carson's delicate view of sea life is powerful in its scalar vision and also represents an ecological commitment to illuminating the web of life by focusing very directly on the sea's edge.

There is also a grounded epistemology at work in Carson's narrative, where organic matter is captured both through a sense of wonder and through the affective and intimate relational edge networks. For instance, Carson creates physical and emotional ties between the worlds of the Atlantic coast near her home and her earlier life "memories of a southern coast, where the sea and the mangroves, working together, are building a wilderness of thousands of small islands off the southwestern coast of Florida, separated from each other by a tortuous pattern of bays, lagoons, and narrow waterways."[19] By spinning a geography of intimately known places, Carson uses the technique of memory and her own visceral response to the textured oceanic ecologies as ways to experientially connect the edge of the Atlantic seaboard to the archipelagos of the southern coast of the United States.

For those of us reading the text nearly seventy years after its original publication, the trilogy produces feelings of nostalgia as it documents the life cycles of a plethora of oceanic species that are disappearing or already extinct in our increasingly contaminated world. We might also ask why the Indigenous ontologies of the North Atlantic seaboard, such as the First Nations territories of the Penobscot organized in relation to the Penobscot River that flows to the sea's edge, were not in Carson's purview? Further, the oceanic trilogy is not yet focused upon naming the toxic disruptions of industry or what we might directly call the destructions wrought by racial, extractive, and financial capitalism.[20]

I am taken with how Carson documents edge-based systems whose geological temporality predates the colonial imaginary of the ocean. Yet the exclusive focus on the nonhuman in the ocean trilogy both omits coloniality and industrialization, and evacuates Indigenous social ecologies. Such an extractive scientific and monocultural view has the capacity to objectify the sea as a mere site of pleasure, speculation, and even as a commodity resource. At the same time, the vitality of Carson's edge work in conversation with her later work on industrial toxicities, the pollution of waterways, and the ambient concentration of chemical substances provides a multiscale analytical resource for our own ways to critique and imagine the planetary otherwise.

Sea Edge Disappearances

A growing environmental movement reading Carson's *Silent Spring* during the 1960s placed renewed value on the notion of a webbed planetary ontology, or more simply put, an ecological perspective.[21] Yet during the 1950s, mainstream U.S. culture benefited from Jacques Cousteau's accounts of undersea life and Thor Heyerdahl's rediscovery of seafaring as part of an expanded consumer market of ocean voyeurism. In an illuminating paper, Amanda Hagood writes that in the sea trilogy, Carson participated in this view by avoiding "the human bias" that worked against "the background of the United States' growing geopolitical expansion into the world's oceans—and with it, the assumption that the sea was a virtually unlimited resource, as well as a readily available dumping ground, for the growth of American industries."[22]

As commodity culture expanded during the mid-twentieth century, the ocean became increasingly represented through the logics of the extractive view, a view that is epitomized by the ocean documentary.[23] The sea was not only an object of voyeuristic pleasure, national entertainment, fascination, leisure, danger, and scrutiny, but especially a geography of use-value, where the primary modes of mediation fetishized the ocean. To address the destruction, we might bring forward the forceful tone of Carson's S*ilent Spring* which states, "The time had come…when it must be written. We have already gone far in our abuse of this planet. Some awareness of this

problem has been in the air, but the ideas had to be crystallized, the facts had to be brought together in one place. If I had not written the book I am sure these ideas would have found another outlet. But knowing the facts as I did, I could not rest until I had brought them to public attention."[24] The urgency of Carson's political tone in this quote matches our own climate justice moment, when denial, planetary damage, and the need for remapping local ecologies represents a monumental, yet necessary, future-oriented challenge.

Even as Carson's trilogy either ignored or was not able to attend to the theory of rising levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere caused by human activity as amplification of the natural greenhouse effect, these absences were not out of step with the 1950s moment and its growing ecological awareness, a landscape of already irreversible ruin. By the 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of the Red Power movement led by Indigenous youth, the work of anti-nuclear coalitions, the Delano grape strike, and other new environmental justice efforts, Carson's focus in *Silent Spring* would ride the crest of a new ecological awareness within U.S. politics. How can we reconcile the expansive and wondrous imaginary of the sea trilogy with the acute political urgency of *Silent Spring*? Is there room for writing about the poetic and supple in-betweenness of earth and liquid life that does not dilute or contain modern/colonial extractive violence?

Though Carson's writings contribute to an ecological ethos, what has remained unsaid in the celebrations and revitalization of her work is the degree to which she participates in a Western scientific and extractive view, a view of the earth and the oceanic that is based upon a relational network that binds the human and nonhuman and writes out the contributions and presences of America's Indigenous ontologies, critical scholarship, and the theories and practices of its social and environmental justice.[25] Carson's omission of Indigenous inhabitance at the sea's edge and its contribution to an "American" ecological perspective contributes to how Native peoples are representationally evacuated from the narration of the U.S. mainstream environmental movement.[26]

Carson did not live long enough to witness the acceleration of anthropogenic toxicity, especially in relation to the toxification and depletion of the world's oceans. The mega-real estate developments of our times, the long effect of the shipping industry and port industrialization, and the complex land-fill urban infrastructures located along the sea's edge have dramatically reshaped the shoreline. Indeed, after the 1970s neoliberal and deregulatory turn, the sea became the dumping ground for sludge, waste runoff, and sewage justified through the logic that the deep sea and the sea floor could absorb human and chemical pollution without being harmed. With respects to the Atlantic and New York City, in 1986, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported that the 106-Mile Site designated area of sludge would not affect the ocean floor. Contradicting this report, in 1995 an interdisciplinary team of scientists researched the waste area and collected evidence of the impact of the sludge. The stain that was supposed to be only 106 miles had at least doubled; the fecal matter in the sludge tripled the population of surface deposit feeders, the animals that feed upon small specks of organic matter, expanding the population of polychaete worms, sea cucumbers, and sea urchins as part of a carbon dense environment. Though *Silent Spring* offers plenty of tools to reckon with ocean extractivism and dumping, including important warnings about the urgency of contending with planetary toxicity, the method of Carson's earlier ocean trilogy does not express the empirical view of the sea's edge as an environmental disaster zone.

We might read Carson's edge perspective not only as descriptive of nonhuman life, but as a missing archive of coloniality and industrial capitalism, where a partial edge perspective of scientific wonder and exploration stands in for

a deeper analysis of the extractive zone. From a universalizing nostalgia of the present, the natural beauty Carson describes in relation to the ocean is disorienting. Describing the sea's biotic worlds, Carson writes, "Each time I enter it I gain awareness of its beauty and its deeper meanings, sensing that intricate fabric of life by which one creature is linked with another, and each with its surroundings."[27] How can we attend to both the beautiful and awful as a methodology of the sea edge? When referring to the writings of Edouard Glissant, Dionne Brand, and Toni Morrison, geographer Katherine McKittrick has suggested their collective works enact a "beautiful attention to space and place."[28] As McKittrick says in an interview, "by beautiful I mean pleasing and delicate and dazzling and brilliant even if it is putting forth a sense of place that is wrapped in awfulness."[29] Is it possible to construct an edge view that attends to both the beautiful and awful embedded within the geographies of over-extraction?

Rachel Carson's study of the planet's oceans remains a vital chronicle of an animated sea prior to late capitalist intensification of extractive tourist, fishing, industrial, military, and chemical intrusions upon liquid environments. In describing the vast oceanic currents that carry great volumes of water across great distances to maintain the temperatures of the shoreline, Carson writes, "The importance of climate lies in the fact that life, even as broadly defined to include all living things of every sort, exists within a relatively narrow range of temperature, roughly between 32 degrees F. and 210 degrees F.," making planet Earth "particularly favorable for life because it has a fairly stable temperature."[30] Noting the tidal zones sensitivity to temperature change, Carson describes a sense of what is to come, what we have yet to become fully aware of: the killing of our own planet and its sea edges by not heeding the warnings. What can we learn from the resiliency of the sea's edge where life is constantly battered yet evolves to resist extinction?

Kon Kón as Sea Edge Knowledge

Situating much of her work in the Global South and in spaces that tether ecological views to the quality of fragility, Cecilia Vicuña's vision over her more than forty-year artistic career has aimed at expressing the intimate violence of coloniality and its devastating impact upon social ecologies. Yet Vicuña's body of work also attends to life's plurality and forms of being and knowing otherwise that cannot be fully eradicated by the civilizational paradigm, or by what Nelson Maldonado-Torres refers to as "the paradigm of war that is modernity."[31] Cecilia Vicuña's precarious art weaves a web of connections and relations by showing us life otherwise at the sea's edge.

In the evocative film *Kon Kón* (2010), Cecilia Vicuña pays homage to the Pacific Ocean and to the disappearing Concón beach within Chile's Central Valley, offering a way to imagine the interactivity between sea, sand dunes, mountains, marshlands, and the local ecologies of an endangered future.[32] Rather than disconnect the political urgency of the ocean's acidification and the rising algae blooms (that are sometimes referred to as red tides), Vicuña directly addresses the operations of global power by showing regional human and nonhuman changes and disappearances. Through long takes and her direct addresses and performances, she anguishes over the sand dunes' fragility where extensive new condominiums have been built. Vicuña also ponders the meaning of the Concón oil refinery's presence as central to the region's history of colonial evacuation. Vicuña's attention to Incan Andean cultural histories in the film provides an experimental mode and form of seeing that critique the extractive capitalist present.

Kon Kón was filmed at the foot of the Aconcagua mountain in the rich valley where the Aconcagua River meets the Pacific Ocean, and where Andean Indigenous dance rituals once took place that Vicuña recreates. As a mestiza artist with deep connections to Indigenous communities in South America and as someone whose art has always been intertwined with Indigenous praxis, I am cautious to define this as resurgent *Indigenismo* since the term harkens back to the nation-building period of the Andes, when literary, photographic, and visual artistic production had a very specific middle-class politics that sought for entry rather than dis-identification with the nation-state. Vicuña's work is distinct in that her family's long-standing connection to the region and her preference for submerged perspectives over the span of her artistic work does not claim an authentic Indigenous past, but resurfaces collective amnesia over buried histories of coloniality.

Comprised of twelve films that were each made separately and then re-edited into a new narrative structure, *Kon Kón* draws upon oral histories with fishermen and women, images of the coastline now overdeveloped by real estate companies, dances at the sea's edge, and documentation of Vicuña making improvisational sculpture made from refuse, plastic, and bits of drift wood. By inserting environmental testimonials, the vanished livelihoods of artisanal fisheries, and her own narration of an enlivened childhood, Vicuña offers a series of experimental videos that incorporate local cultural and Indigenous memory. Vicuña's locus of enunciation takes a poetically damning stance on the speculative capitalism that has overrun delicate and intricate micro-ecologies located at the sea's edge; she visualizes this by showing us the overbuilt condominium in the sand dunes, a monstrosity looming over a delicate local ecology.

In the film *Kon Kón*, we learn that the region was once an important site of artisanal fishing that thoughtfully considered the complex system of the ocean's ecological balance. As I attended to briefly in the opening paragraphs, this way of life is currently endangered by the transpacific industrial fishing companies that dominate the Central Coast shores. Chinese, Japanese, and North American companies routinely vacuum the ocean floors and "fish down" to extract the most sought species, such as Chilean sea bass, inadvertently netting several tons of smaller varieties of sea life. In Vicuña's film language, the emptying out of the ocean's life forms, and the resultant impending death of its layered ecologies, is multiply equated with the colonial evacuation of Indigenous memory, especially of the Aconcagua peoples that populated the region along the mountain, river, and Pacific basin of north-central Chile.

As Vicuña told me, she first conceived the film *Kon Kón* in relation to *The Night of the Species* (*La Noche de la Especias*, 2009), an exhibition that attended to the sea as a subject of extinction through tall glass panels that encrusted small forms of sea life within them. *Kon Kón* represents a phenomenological view of place, regional history, and ecological sensibility, but one that is powerfully decolonial in its view from the sea's edge. In other words, Vicuña's 52-minute composite study of the Concón region becomes a direct alternative to the deadening effects of global capitalism, primarily through lifting up Aconcagua Indigenous and popular cultural memory that experiments with minor viewpoints, dissonant soundscapes, unusual juxtapositions, performativity, scale, and oral history to ritually and collaboratively envision a way out of the oft-stated inevitability of the planet's dystopic future. Put differently, the film reckons with the dialectics of life and death, creativity and destruction, presenting critically hopeful local alternatives as modes of cultural memory and resurgence.

Like Rachel Carson, Vicuña narrates the memory of place: "Since childhood I played on these beaches. One day I felt the sea sense me. In this instance, I knew the body and the sea dialogued

in a language I needed to hear." A few minutes into the film, Vicuña reveals that the Concón beach is located just a short distance from her childhood home, near what continues to be her mother's residence. Vicuña's situated viewpoint offers an intimacy into the region's historiography, where the insertion of autobiographical notes allows her to comment authoritatively upon the pre-colonial archaeological archive. This personal lens does not overwhelm the film's narrative; instead, the filmmaker portrays the ocean as a protagonist, possessing its own autonomous and interactional vitality. Vicuña assigns the pronoun "she" to the Pacific, visualizing the ocean's capacity to reach out, sense, and orient to other life forms, including dynamic communication with the filmmaker.

What Vicuña crafts in *Kon Kón* is relative proximity and distance between her physical form and that of the Pacific body through the strange subject-ness of the declaration, "One day I felt the sea sense me." That the "the body and the sea dialogued" is a poetic phrase that shifts one's perspectives out of the Western and Kantian division of the human as separate from the natural world.

Aconcagua Refinery. Photograph by Mariela Morales, (CC BY 2.0).

Moreover, rather than romanticize the deep past, Vicuña finds interest in the meaning systems of recent local and popular culture.

I am drawn to Vicuña's feeling that the sea sensed her because it regenerates ideas in relation to ecological thinking and its activisms, and compels renewed thinking about the sea as a protagonist. In conversations with her, Vicuña notes how this ecological view is part of who she was; she did not have to learn it and it was ingrained in her from a very young age. The perspective that Vicuña has in the film is also not naïve or childish; indeed the film is a fully realized work of awful beauty and sublime terror, an aesthetic that explores through a porous relationship to the surround referencing disappearance, extraction, oil, and real estate development along the sea's edge.

Over the course of almost five decades, Vicuña developed important and novel strategies of representation that address local and global precarity by drawing our attention to what Candice Amich describes as a refiguring of the "fragility of life and culture under conditions of neoliberal globalization."[33] In *Kon Kón*, a nearby oil refinery is a recurrent visual trope that symbolizes many layers of buried histories. In juxtapositions between the extractive industry and more pristine views of egrets and the surrounding landscape, Vicuña visualizes how purity and contamination, nature and artifice, untouched and industrial worlds co-exist in proximate, if unstable, orbits.

Vicuña narrates on the soundtrack what cannot be seen above ground, namely an ancient Aconcagua burial site that underlies the oil refinery. Thus, she layers the continuities of hidden genocidal histories though a lifting up of minor and submerged perspectives. The colonial irony here is that Aconcagua simultaneously refers to the Aconcagua Indigenous people, the river, and the Concón oil refinery that is owned by the transnational Chilean oil company Aconcagua.

'Kon Kón' inundated excavation, photograph by James O'Hern, image courtesy of Cecilia Vicuña.

The Aconcagua oil company has made efforts to extract petroleum deposits from the pristine natural preserves of the Mississippi delta in the United States, an important connection that situates another kind of web of relationality that we might weave by working from Vicuña's regional perspective.

If precarity organizes Vicuña's ephemeral installations and performance work, then in Kon Kón it is expressed through fragile ecological relations as well as Vicuña's use of found materials such as pebbles, seashells, and sticks. Through the layered use of both found and elaborated materials, and scenes where she engages all of these, Vicuña produces a fragile sense of time, space, and instability of place. For instance, she invites the ocean to play with her as she picks up sticks and forms a beautiful sculpture along the shore made up of odds and ends and different heights of found objects. Vicuña says she is "arranging them for the high tide to erase and knock them down, completing the work." Vicuña's camera views the tide retreat and return. The ocean completes the work as the word vanishes in the air.

Toward the end of the film, we begin to understand Vicuña's full investments in shifting our way of seeing and relating to the sea's edge. Alongside several other dozen local residents who are banging on sticks and drums and digging with their feet into the sand, Vicuña dances. On the soundtrack, she narrates, "These are sacred sites, where the ancient people created middens…. the people came to the beach. They came at low tide to dig the sand dancing with their feet in the sea." Following this scene, she says that "this is a war against the dunes, and it's a war against the connection we have with the land…30,000 clams, the clams disappeared." With the dissonant note of the Andean stone pipe in the background, she mourns and whispers, "The way it sounds is kinship as a crying flute…the cultures died and died, and the names died, and this love for this sound

'Kon Kón' found object sculptural edge, photograph by James O'Hern, image courtesy of Cecilia Vicuña.

continues." In these lines, Vicuña insists that this regional landscape is a site of colonial occupation and disappearance that must be counteracted.

How might we think with the porous boundary between land and sea, through intertidal zones, and at the same time consider these spaces as racialized geographies rather than pure and untouched spaces? Like ecotones, areas that transition between two biomes and between distinct plant communities (such as forests and grasslands), intertidal zones have historically been fecund and vital spaces teeming with heterogeneous life forms. Yet these geographies have historically been cross-cut and violated by real estate speculation, shoreline industry, colonial shipping systems, and contact-sites with Indigenous peoples that live in close proximity to the sea. The sea's edge is not only increasingly vulnerable in the Anthropocene, but a site of mare nullius where extractive capitalism increasingly disappears human and nonhuman life.[34]

Images on lines, screenshot from 'Kon Kón,' image courtesy of Cecilia Vicuña.

'Kon Kón' red stained hands, photograph by Pllar Polanco, image courtesy of Cecilia Vicuña.

Reimagining the Ocean

In transits between continents and archipelagos, between North and South America, between the western and eastern United States, I have come to see the sea edge as a conditional space, an in-between geography where the land meets the sea, a transitional zone between solid and liquid, where heterogeneous and biodiverse life once populated dense and lively sea shores. During the latest phase of anthropogenic climate change, these delicate worlds that both Rachel Carson and Cecilia Vicuña describe have become untethered, destroyed, and all but extinct because of overfishing, over-tourism, and overconsumption, and because of the human exceptionalism that ignores our responsibility to oceanic life.

The representation of the ocean in Rachel Carson's trilogy is not what we encounter today; instead, we encounter seas filled with plastic swirls, algae blooms or red tides, and the tremendous loss of sea life species diversity. Pondering from the sea's edge, the evolutionary process looks different during the anthropogenic era of species loss and contaminated waters. Most of the earth's sea edges are colonized by real estate speculation, by urban cities and

Red tide algal blooms. Photograph by Marufish (CC BY-SA 2.0).

petrol-infrastructures, by sewage and waste systems, and by industrial toxicity. We might consider the scales of precarity and global wealth that live along sea edges, the loss of sustenance for fishing communities, the lost imaginaries of living with and being with the ocean, the buried histories of colonization and the visible evidence of industrial ruin.

Cecilia Vicuña's film *Kon Kón* connects these histories of human and nonhuman disappearance and extinction. The film locates itself between the disappearances of Indigenous Aconcagua histories in relation to Spanish colonization, the disappearances of U.S.-led Cold War, and the disappearances of oceanic life.

Writing during the aftermath and continuation of the devastating practices of colonial, financial, and industrial capitalism, how can we represent the layered world of extractive violence at the sea's edge? In transitioning between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans as places of mutability, murkiness, violence, and wonder, we might consider how the sea and the sea's edge themselves reveal the layered histories of what Anibal Quijano first called the coloniality of power.[35]

I have written about rivers, below-surface oil deposits in the dense eco-pools of sub-tropical forests, mineral-filled mountains that exist within Indigenous biodiverse territories, and my research and writing practice now takes me to the sea's edge. The conversion of living matter into surplus depends upon violent acts and states of terror by which governments and corporations cast Indigenous communities and other land and water defenders as criminal others in the latter's quest for environmental and multispecies justices. By turning to the sea's edge, where rivers pour into the ocean and where oceans connect us through shipping routes, I investigate what is specific about this extractive zone and edge-based land and sea defense.

Given that both Carson and Vicuña's work both dates back to the mid-1950s, we might see with them the damaging consequences of late colonial and consumer capitalism. Making these interconnections, Silvia Federici similarly reminds us that to recombine what the social division of labor in colonial capitalism has separated requires a profound transformation in our everyday life.[36] Federici writes, "The distancing of production from reproduction and consumption leads us to ignore the conditions under which what we eat, wear, or work with have been produced, their social and environmental cost, and the fate of the population on whom the waste we produce is unloaded."[37] Federici addresses how globalization has worsened the social and ecological crisis, "widening the distances between what is produced and what is consumed, thereby intensifying, despite the appearance of an increased global interconnectedness, our blindness to the blood in the food we eat, the petroleum we use, the clothes we wear, and the computers we communicate with."[38] By focusing on the edge we make a profound shift towards understanding what Federici names as "the quality of relations, a principle of cooperation, and of responsibility to each other and to the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals."[39]

How do we act in the world both to dismantle colonial structures and revitalize the ocean as connective tissues of living otherwise? How can we make lively connections between seemingly disparate oceanic geographies?[40] At this time of crisis, rather than retreat into nihilism which only perpetuates the logics of capitalist destruction, we might sense and approach sea edges as a way to better understand our capacity to live otherwise.

Footnotes

[1] See my book *Beyond the Pink Tide: Artistic and Political Undercurrents in the Americas* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2018), and forthcoming work *At the Sea's Edge*.

[2] The list of works to cite here is extremely long and the space for essay footnotes brief. See Jodi A. Byrd, Alyosha Goldstein, Jodi Melamed and Chandan Reddy's "Predatory Value: Economies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities" (*Social Text* 36 (2), 2018: 1-18), an important essay that brings forward the potentiality of grounded relationality. On emotional and intellectual labor in relation to Indigenous critique, see Joanne Barker's "Decolonizing the Mind," (*Rethinking Marxism* 30 (2), 2018: 208-231).

[3] Given that it has been twenty years since Linda Tuhiwai Smith published *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), we might remember the author's explanation that her book "identifies research as a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other" (2). The ability of knowledge production to settle and rule over its findings is a pitfall I seek to avoid by articulating a sea edge epistemology that eschews a universalizing or singular disciplinary frame of analysis, and that takes into account multiple submerged perspectives as well as poetic and scientific viewpoints.

[4] See Macarena Gómez-Barris' *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

[5] By colonial anthropocene I refer to human led planetary climate change and environmental destruction as a spatial and temporal structure with accelerating consequences, one that spans more than five centuries of colonial domination. Put more simply, it is the war against the Earth, Indigenous and racialized peoples, and the nonhuman. See my essay, "The Colonial Anthropocene: Damage, Remapping, and Resurgent Resources," for more elaboration, Antipode, https://antipodefoundation.org/2019/03/19/the-colonial-anthropocene/.

[6] T. S. Eliot, "Third Quartet," *Four Quartets* (London: Harcourt, 1943).

[7] See Rachel Carson's Sea Trilogy, *Under the Sea Wind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1941), *The Sea Around Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), *The Edge of the Sea* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1955).

[8] For early work on migrant labor and Chicanx contributions to environmental justice movements in the United States, see Laura Pulido's classic book *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest* (Phoenix: University of Arizona Press, 1996).

[9] See Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). Also see Dorceta E. Taylor's *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

[10] Rachel Carson, “The Sea: Unforgotten World,” *The New Yorker* (June 2, 1951); “The Sea: The Abyss,” *The New Yorker* (June 9, 1951); “The Sea: Wind, Sun, and Moon,” *The New Yorker* (June 16, 1951).

[11] William Souder, *On a Farther Shore: The Life and Legacy of Rachel Carson* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 146.

[12] Carson, *The Sea Around Us*, 1.

[13] Souder, *On a Farther Shore*, 150.

[14] Carson, *The Edge of the Sea*, 4.

[15] John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred, Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from The Puritans to the Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[16] Carson, *The Edge of the Sea*, 5.

[17] For a well-written account of algae and a poetic view of coastal Maine see Susan Hand Shetterley’s book *Seaweed Chronicles: A World at the Water’s Edge* (New York: Algonquin Books, 2018). She too does not include marine coastal Indigenous epistemologies, yet her ecological imaginary considers the elaborate network of algae in useful ways.

[18] Carson, *The Edge of the Sea*, xiii.

[19] Carson, *The Edge of the Sea*, 5-6.

[20] For a discussion of racial capitalism see Cedric Robinson’s *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

[21] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

[22] See Amanda Hagood, “Wonders with the Sea: Rachel Carson’s Ecological Aesthetic and the Mid-Century Reader,” *Environmental Humanities* 2 (1), 2013, 60.

[23] By the extractive view I refer to a host of monocultural practices of visuality that shift in their technologies from the sixteenth century to the present, but share the continuing conversion of land, territory and liquid geographies into commodities for capitalist accumulation. See my book, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

[24] Rachel Carson, quoted in Paul Brooks, *The House of Life: Rachel Carson at Work* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989 [1972]), 228.

[25] For a discussion of grounded relationality see Jodi A. Byrd's "'Variations under Domestication': Indigeneity and the Subject of Dispossession" in "Economies of Dispossession: Indigeneity, Race, Capitalism," *Social Text* 36 (2), 2018: 123-141. There is a very long and important body of work to cite, and I can only point to a few works here. On Indigenous resurgence, see Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). On Indigenous lands, settler law, and the concept of Ea, see J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex, and the Colonial Politics of State Nationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018). For a fuller discussion of this in relation to Patagonian Ona and Selk'nam peoples see chapter five in my book *Beyond the Pink Tide: Art and Political Undercurrents in the Americas* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2018).

[26] On Indigenous approaches to environmental justice see Kyle Powys Whyte's "Indigenous Environmental Movements and the Function of Governance Institutions," in Eds. Teena Gabrielson, Cheryl Hall, John M. Meyer, and David Schlosberg's *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 563-580.

[27] Carson, *The Edge of the Sea*, 2.

[28] James Hudson, "The Geographies of Blackness and Anti-Blackness: An Interview with Katherine McKittrick," *The CLR James Journal*, 20 (1-2), Fall 2014: 234.

[29] Hudson, "The Geographies of Blackness and Anti-Blackness," 234.

[30] Carson, *The Edge of the Sea*, 18.

[31] See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

[32] Cecilia Vicuña, *Kon Kón* (Concón, Chile, 2010), digital film.

[33] Candice Amich, "From Precarity to Planetarity: Cecilia Vicuña's Kon Kon," *The Global South*, 7 (2), Fall 2013: 134.

[34] By *mare nullius* I am referring to the emptying out of the sea's inhabitants and absenting of rich social human and nonhuman ecological histories.

[35] See Anibal Quijano's classic essay "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1 (3), 2001: 533-580.

[36] Silvia Federici, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019).

[37] Federici, *Re-enchanting the World*, 2019: 109.

[38] Federici, *Re-enchanting the World*, 2019: 109-110 .

[39] Federici, *Re-enchanting the World*, 2019: 110.

[40] We might also refer to this in non-binarized terms as the inhuman. On this point, see Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen's "Has the Queer Ever Been Human," *GLQ* 21 (2-3) 2015: 183-207.

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About the Author

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FEATURE (PEER REVIEW)

THE POLITICAL BINDS OF OIL VERSUS TRIBES

By Yvonne P. Sherwood

Editor's note: This feature article has been peer reviewed.

In late 2018, while researching the connections between environmental justice and Indigenous womxn's activism[1], I was invited to story about how *water* might respond to environmental injustice and racism. In preparation, I thought about how the lands and peoples to which I belong struggle against "slow violence" brought on by the toxic effects of uranium contamination

Reminiscent of graffiti on Alcatraz Island, Indian Land is written across a concrete divider. Dividers were used as barricades to stop water protectors nearing construction of the DAPL pipeline. Image courtesy of Alex Flett.

and nuclear pollution (Dillon 2015: 1; Nixon 2011). I also reflected on the ways that activists across the hemisphere have pointed out the connections between the struggle in Standing Rock and their own local, ongoing battles against state extraction. In these sorts of cases, I wondered, what would the water say? It was an exciting and inspiring proposition to think with. Yet as an Indigenous womxn familiar with the romanticization of Indigenous peoples' abilities to act as mediums between the environment and humans, the call to imagine what water might say sat uncomfortably with me.[2] I thought I'd better leave the medium work to someone more qualified and instead explore the state's stories to ask, "What stories does the state tell and how does it tell them?" So I dove in and began to unweave how political actors—in this case Senator Heidi Heitkamp in her re-election bid—told stories about their responsibility to the nation, Native Americans, and the environment. What tensions were proposed to be undone by her story? What binds might remain? To ground this incursion, after the introduction of key terms, I begin with the story of Senator Heidi Heitkamp and how she proposed to support both women and big oil. I then briefly explore Indigenous womxn activists' reassertion of their relations to land and water through the expression: "We are Water! We are Sacred!"

Working from the premise that both racialization and settler colonialism are always gendered processes, I reflect throughout this story on the way that white supremacy—the valuing and ordering of racial hierarchies—and settler colonialism—the occupation of Indigenous lands through erasure of the Indigenous peoples—are underlying structural conditions that are performed and reproduced through the ways that political dilemmas and legislation are articulated. Furthermore, I suggest that these structures are the problem and that they create untenable sets of options that place energy extraction and humans, pipelines and Indigenous womxn at odds. Yet, as the story will reveal, these tensions are falsely constructed sets of options and conditions that are dependent on the very structures that promise to get us out of these sorts of binds.[3] We must, then, reassert our relations otherwise.

White Supremacy and Settler Colonialism

White supremacy is a structure of power that is the foundation of white privilege (Bonds and Inwood 2016). It is different from, but related to, the concept white privilege, which focuses our attention to the benefits of whiteness. White privilege, in order to operate, needs white supremacy, the ideological and material domination by white subjects over people of color. White supremacy, as Leonardo (2004: 139) explains, "does not form out of random acts of hatred, although these are condemnable, but rather out of patterned and enduring treatment of social groups. Ultimately, it is secured through a series of actions, the ontological meaning of which is not always transparent to its subjects and objects." In other words, white supremacy is secured through historical and ongoing acts of racial domination, even when these acts are not recognized as securing power over people of color, particularly through anti-black beliefs, laws, and actions.

White supremacy is also spatial. To understand the spatiality of racism, Pulido (2000) asks her readers to imagine the comparison between industrial zones versus suburbs and who lives in which. White supremacy, then, is a process of domination that shapes landscapes and bodies in particular ways. Whiteness, as a relational category, has its origins in the ways that Black and Native peoples were and continue to be differently racialized in relation to property. Natives were massacred for property and Blacks made enslaveable to work that property; arguably these sorts of practices continue (Harris 1993).

Anti-blackness is made possible through its confluence with settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is a specific colonial formation that includes the ongoing attempt to permanently settle a territory through Indigenous erasure, assimilation, or the outright murder of Indigenous peoples (Tuck and Yang 2012; Veracini 2010; Wolfe 2006). Further, it influences the way we think about and react to race and gender, for example by privileging whiteness and discriminating against women and queer family structures (Simpson 2014; Smith 2005, 2012). The goal of settler colonialism is furthered by imagining certain bodies and lands as disposable, as sacrifice zones. These logics—white supremacy and settler colonialism—enmesh to form a network of power that make them inseparable. To better understand how they interact and bolster one another, I now turn to the story of Senator Heidi Heitkamp and her maneuvering of the oil versus people bind.

Sen. Heidi Heitkamp
@SenatorHeitkamp

Following

My statement on U.S. Supreme Court nominee Judge Brett Kavanaugh:

record during this evaluation process—including the nonpartisan FBI investigation which I called for. After doing my due diligence and now that the record is apparently closed, I will vote against his confirmation.

We need to take politics out of the Supreme Court as much as possible, and it takes Republicans and Democrats in the Senate, the administration, and individuals around the country to help make that possible. We live in a very divisive time, but we can change that. Both sides horribly handled the process around this nomination. We must learn from these mistakes.

I voted for Justice Gorsuch because I felt his legal ability and temperament qualified him to serve on the Supreme Court. Judge Kavanaugh is different. When considering a lifetime appointment to Supreme Court, we must evaluate the totality of the circumstances and record before us. In addition to the concerns about his past conduct, last Thursday's hearing called into question Judge Kavanaugh's current temperament, honesty, and impartiality. These are critical traits for any nominee to serve on the highest court in our country.

There has been much public debate about Thursday's hearing, and it has furthered a national discussion about stopping sexual assault that is long overdue and we must continue to have. I have spent much of my time in public service—including as North Dakota's Attorney General—focused on combating domestic violence and protecting women and children from abuse. Our actions right now are a poignant signal to young girls and women across our country. I will continue to stand up for them.

When I served as North Dakota's Attorney General, I helped implement the original Violence Against Women Act and I saw how it helped survivors and victims across my state. As a U.S. senator, the reauthorization of the law was the first bill I helped pass, and I insisted that it include increased protections for Native American women and girls. My lifetime of work, advocacy, and commitment to these issues, and to these women and girls, helped inform my decision today.

Dr. Ford gave heartfelt, credible, and persuasive testimony. It took great courage and also came at great personal cost. She had nothing to gain and everything to lose by coming forward with her deeply personal story. It was clear that she was testifying not because she wanted to, but because she felt it was her civic duty. When I listened to Dr. Ford testify, I heard the voices of women I have known throughout my life who have similar stories of sexual assault and abuse. Countless North Dakotans and others close to me have since reached out and told me their stories of being raped or sexually assaulted—and expressed the same anguish and fear. I'm in awe of their courage, too. Some of them reported their abuse at the time, but others said nothing until now. Survivors should be

11:29 AM - 4 Oct 2018

Senator Heidi Heitkamp publicizes her vote against then U.S. Supreme court nominee Judge Brent Kavanaugh as being guided by both concern about his past conduct and her experience combating domestic violence and protecting women and children from abuse.

Protecting Women and Children from Abuse

Senator Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) tweeted in October of 2018 a call to the Senate and others across the country to "take politics out of the Supreme Court." In this tweet, the North Dakota senator provided an explanation of her vote against the confirmation of Judge Brett Kavanaugh. In addition to pointing out Kavanaugh's questionable "temperament, honesty, and impartiality," Senator Heitkamp noted that her vote against his confirmation was informed by her time in public service that "focused on combating domestic violence and protecting women and children from abuse" as North Dakota's Attorney General. Heitkamp goes on to explain:

> I helped implement the original Violence Against Women Act and I saw how it helped survivors and victims across my state. As a U.S. senator, the reauthorization of the law was the first bill I helped pass, and I insisted that it include increased protections for Native American women and girls. My lifetime of work, advocacy, and commitment to these issues, and to these women and girls, helped inform my decision today.

For many, Senator Heitkamp has, across her years of service, pursued a clear goal to eliminate violence against women, particularly for Native women.[4] The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994, the first comprehensive federal legislative package to address domestic violence, was and is a big deal. I remember my undergraduate student discussions in both Chicano/a Studies and American Indian Studies about its potential impact in our communities. The Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund, Legal Momentum (n.d.), has called it a "triumph for women's groups" and acknowledged the four long years of networking and lobbying that enabled the movement to produce a "paradigm shift in how the issue of violence against women is addressed."

As Senator Heitkamp indicated, VAWA was extended over the years to reach underserved communities. The VAWA 2000 and 2005 reauthorizations expanded the initial mandate that focused on criminal justice responses to also include prevention and "protection for battered immigrants, sexual assault survivors, and victims of dating violence" (Legal Momentum n.d.). The 2005 reauthorization, which Heitkamp helped to pass, was meant to improve the original legislation "by providing an increased focus on access to services for communities of color, immigrant women, and tribal and Native communities" (Legal Momentum n.d.). Further, the 2013 VAWA reauthorization extended access to LGBT communities and reaffirmed tribal authority to assert jurisdiction over non-native perpetrators. Heitkamp (and, by extension, the state) joined efforts with others to eliminate violence against women.[5]

Yet despite Senator Heitkamp's lifetime advocacy for ending violence against women she is also a long-time supporter of gas and oil pipelines: she served as an external director at the Dakota Gasification Company until her election to Attorney General of North Dakota. North Dakota's production and export of oil is second in the nation. The extraction and production of energy that serves the state (both at the local and national levels) and industry disproportionately burdens communities of color.[6]

On the Front Line of Environmental Contamination

That is worth repeating: people of color and low income communities often bear the largest burdens of environmental contamination and within those communities, women's and children's bodies are particularly susceptible (Bullard 2000, Mohai et al 2009). The Environmental Protection Agency reports that tribal communities live in close proximity to the nation's most polluted sites and "environmental mitigation for these communities lags significantly behind that for nontribal communities" (Hoover 2017: 8). Infant mortality, a basic measure for public health across the world, decreased for all racialized groups in the U.S. from 2005–2014 *except for Natives* (Mathews and Driscoll 2017). As Johnston's (1994) research makes clear, the price for consumption and environmental degradation is not paid equally.

Indigenous lands are more likely to be "sacrificed" and as such, Native women's bodies are more likely to experience the embodiment of environmental toxins. This is what is meant by saying these logics *literally* form our bodies, human and non, in particular ways. It was a conscious and strategic choice to reroute the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) away from its first permitted water crossing north of Bismarck,

Reminiscent of graffiti on Alcatraz Island, Indian Land is written across a concrete divider. Dividers were used as barricades to stop water protectors nearing construction of the DAPL pipeline. Image courtesy of Alex Flett.

North Dakota to just upstream of the Standing Rock Sioux tribal reservation. It is also true that Indigenous women experience gender-motivated violence more often than any other racialized group and environmental ruin has been correlated to violence against women.[7] Like rape as an outcome of militarization, intense sites of development can similarly manifest violence against women (Falcón 2001). Paraphrasing Bea Hanson, former Principal Deputy Director of the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence against Women (OVW), the OVW *2014 Tribal Consultation Report to Congress* informed readers that the "rapid development for oil production in the Bakken region has brought a massive influx of itinerant workers and a sharp increase in crime and law enforcement issues, including sex and human trafficking" (Department of Justice 2014: 3). Furthermore, the *2014-2015 Violence Against Women Act Conferrals with Stakeholders* reported to congress that funding was increased to Native communities in the Bakken region because of the increase in violent crimes associated with the population boom tied to gas and oil exploration (Department of Justice 2017). The response by the OVW reported in these documents, however, goes only as far as to provide services to affected communities and does not address the underlying issues of settler colonialism and white supremacy.

Despite the disproportionate environmental burden on communities already marginalized, Senator Heitkamp framed energy development, whether in the form of extraction or transportation, as for the nation. As Spice (2018: 40) points out, the state often legitimizes its settler projects through the reference of "critical infrastructure," the material and technological energy networks like oil pipelines meant to support the state and its citizens. This critical infrastructure for the nation-state and its citizens approach is explored and reframed by Spice (2018: 44) to show how critical infrastructure is, in fact, "invasive infrastructure." As she writes, "In North America, the expansion of oil and gas networks is tightly linked to the continued displacement, pacification, and expropriation of unceded and treaty-guaranteed lands historically inhabited and cared for by Indigenous peoples" (Spice 2018: 45).[8] What is for the nation, in other words, is often not for Indigenous peoples.

Regina Brave (background), also present at Wounded Knee 1973, picks up around the camp at Oceti Sakowin. The sign outside her camp at Oceti Sakowin reads, "Article VI – Treaties are the Supreme Law of the land (U.S. Constitution). Treat Territory. You are in violation! State has no jurisdiction." As others were readying for a "mandatory evacuation deadline," Brave was asked if she was going to relocate to another camp. She responds, "I will not relocate. I'm staying right here." Image courtesy of the author.

Picking Sides

Senator Heitkamp, considered an ally to both Native women and big oil, was pressured to pick sides. With the DAPL protest supposedly behind us, the press and the public discussed Senator's Heitkamp's second-term run for Senate as being stuck in a bind between North Dakota's tribal vote and pipeline supporters.[9] Associated press member James Macpherson (2018) quoted Dave Archambault saying:

> Former Standing Rock Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault, who was the face and voice of the fight against the Dakota Access oil pipeline, said he met with Heitkamp when the pipeline was first proposed and long before the protests "to let her know this was going to be an issue for us."
>
> "I think she was caught in the middle. But when her hand was forced, she chose the pipeline," Archambault said.
>
> "She always said she supported Indian Country, but when all of Indian Country from across the nation was at Standing Rock—she didn't show up.... She didn't truly listen to what Indian Country was saying," Archambault said. "Now she's in a bind."

My highlighting of Heitkamp's bind is not an attempt to undermine the Democratic Party in general or Heitkamp in particular nor to diminish her contributions; after all, many other government leaders across the two-party system have far less progressive records and there are substantive differences across the parties.[10] Though she lost her re-election bid to senate, her self-positioning in relation to oil and gendered violence remain important to consider. Furthermore, I focus on Heitkamp as an agent of the state more than personally because I believe her to be sincere in her concern for women in general and Native women and children in particular.

Heitkamp, in fact, and here is the rub, said she supported oil pipelines and supported women. Yet for the senator to overcome the bind, Native womxn find themselves in the double-bind of being protected while simultaneously being threatened. The point that the state cannot protect Indigenous people broadly, and Indigenous womxn particularly, from threat of its presence makes obvious that decolonization is not about sincerity and commitments to democracy (see Tuck and Yang 2012). When any of us commit to turning to the state to redistribute resources we are limited to particular strategies that cannot be truly transformative of the settler state and thus cannot undo the inherent and interconnected oppressive logics of settler colonialism and white supremacy.

Intersections of Power Create Place

Heitkamp's bind, as described above, highlights intersections of power that literally inform the construction of land and water in particular ways. As a set of ongoing material practices, white supremacy and settler colonialism are not things of the past nor some rare extreme position (Bonds and Inwood 2016). Rather, these ongoing ideologies and practices lay the foundation for differently constructed land and bodies. As Harris (1993) writes, race and property are deeply interrelated concepts. She explains that whiteness, initially constructed as a form of racial identity, evolved into a form of property historically and presently acknowledged and protected in American law. The state, as distributor of resources and enforcer of laws that are based on hierarchies of race, is itself a racial project. Citing Pulido (2006), Bonds and Inwood (2016: 728-729) make the point that

movements challenging unfettered accumulation and racism must recognize settler colonialism as a material condition that was foundational for "differentially racialized geographies" to occur in the first place. That is to say that the material conditions of settler colonialism inform the way that land, including the people that live on it, are both imagined and produced.

As such, white supremacy is not a problem to be solved outside of our selves, but rather a socially and politically productive force that must be countered (Bonds and Inwood 2016). The actions of our allies and leaders, then, speak louder than words; quite simply, what you do to our lands you do to our bodies.

Highlighting the link between the Water Protector movement and the MMIW movement, Ann Ford (Coeur d'Alene) at the Indigenous Peoples March in Spokane, WA 2019, holds a march poster that reads, "I stand with Standing Rock and Want to Bring Awareness of Missing Indigenous Women in our Country."
Image courtesy of Rawhide Press, Spokane Tribe, February 18, 2019.

Making the "Indian Problem"

From this perspective, Heitkamp's work with VAWA and simultaneous dismissal of Standing Rock's sovereign right to refuse the pipeline is not a double-bind. Rather, it is an extension of the long-running maneuvering of the state to deal with the "Indian Problem" (for discussion on maneuvering in education see Lomawaima and McCarty 2006). The "Indian Problem," from the perspective of the state, began with Indigenous interference of westward expansion. This perspective on interference of westward expansion motivated the doctrine of "Killing the Indian and Saving the Man," the goal to culturally eliminate Indigenous peoples from the so-called Americas (Churchill 2004). The "Indian Problem" later manifests in locating dysfunction in the form of violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and suicide as inherent to a community, and especially of our youth. Our youth are marked at risk and become the problem that needs to be solved through state-led interventions (Dhillon 2017). We continue to be perceived as a problem and Indigenous nations across the world, particularly their leaders (like Berta Caceres), are strategically targeted and murdered for their refusal to allow attacks against the people and land.

Two womxn rest next to Community Gardens water tank at camp. Image courtesy of Kyra Antone.

Groups of Water Protectors march through camp with banners that read 'Mni Wiconi' and 'Indigenous Sovereignty Protects Water.' Image courtesy of the author.

Marches north on Highway 1806 to the Backwater Bridge militarized barricade and back through camp were part of actions to hold prayerful space and bring attention to the threat of the Dakota Access Pipeline. November 1, 2016. Image courtesy of the author.

In the context of Heitkamp's bind, tribal nations in the U.S., particularly their voters, are read as something that needs to be out-maneuvered. When Heitkamp refused to speak up against the violation of Indigenous sovereignty during the Indigenous-led protest to DAPL, reporters warned she could potentially lose too many votes from the Native community to secure her second term. Along these lines, Martin (2018), in an on-line news outlet, wrote that Heitkamp had a "Native voter problem." I argue, based on what has been outlined here, the problem is the structure, actually, of settler colonialism.

Not only is it important for allies to come to terms with settler colonialism, but environmental justice advocates need to equally address the ways in which environmental justice practices have supported the logic of Indigenous erasure. In fact, through Heitkamp's legislative moves, she perpetuated a failure common in much environmental scholarship that "seeks a path to justice through the state" and fails to recognize the relationship between environmental degradation and settler colonialism (Pellow 2018: 5). As Dhillon (2016) firmly asserts, settler colonialism is connected to environmental ruin. Yet settler colonialism is a difficult thing to acknowledge and discuss for many people. Heitkamp, we learn, is not alone in this struggle. The state, really not represented by any one senator, is borne through our daily actions and practices. We have to tell different stories about who we are and how we are related.

Reasserting Relations to Land

So, I was asked, "What story does *water* tell?" I want to say that I don't know. That we are all related? Perhaps. It is a powerful assertion but one that is often appropriated into mainstream environmental activism to assert belonging while forgetting what it means to be a good relative. Despite co-optation, Indigenous teachings and counterimagery continue both because of and in spite of settler colonialism (see LeFevre 2013). Importantly, Water is Life, an aphorism that became increasingly popularized during the Standing Rock campaign, continues to be accompanied by related expressions: We are Water and Womxn are Sacred.

Gathering Native and non-native womxn into a teepee at Standing Rock and surrounded by onlookers including myself and my seven-month-old, Melaine Stoneman (Sicangu Lakota) explained the long-theorized relation between these expressions by asserting:

> People ask me how they can help. I tell them your first responsibility is to reconnect with the water. Water is Life. Your presence here is of no help if you do not first connect to water. And remember that women are Water Carriers, we give life. We hold life for nine months in water, and *through water each of you* entered this world. See that little one there [she points to my child intonating in my lap], we do not "shush" him; we recognize him; we acknowledge him; he is sacred. *Mni Wiconi* is not just a phrase to shout across camp. It…is a prayer.

At Standing Rock, where thousands from across many different Nations gathered, where protest and prayer came together, womxn activists highlighted the sanctity of life and the important relationships we hold with water and, even if just by extension, with our children and with each other.

Well aware of feminist scholarship that refuses to frame women as sacred and critical postmodern feminism that questions the very category of women, I want to make my reasoning clear here of why I hold up the importance of the statement made by Indigenous womxn activists that water, womxn, and children are sacred. The point is not to reproduce or hierarchize a particular category

of sex or gender or erase important differences; instead the words reassert Indigenous womxn's place in the sacred web. This assertion made by Indigenous womxn across Turtle Island and echoed by Melaine Stoneman is not meant to partake in the construction of Indigenous womxn as "caretakers of the land" that occludes the violence both inside and outside of our communities (Simpson 2014: 148). The two-spirit nation, as Candi Brings Plenty (2016) points out, continues the long history as frontline healers and warriors and now must fight against the derogation of queer Indigenous peoples both inside and outside of Indian Country. In this vein, as my first section showed, the point is to assist in the work that moves beyond any one category of innocence and instead to reassert our relation to land, self, and other. Water is Life was not shared as a new rallying cry to produce a flat, colorless, disembodied reality, but rather was transmitted as an embodied practice that asserts our connections to land, water, and others within a context that separates our existence.

As outlined earlier, these prayers are made within and against a space that arranges us in particular ways, and diverts and harvests energy toward capitalist ends. This story continues and these words, then, call us both to participate and to responsibly *move* from, with, and toward a different world (see Sherwood 2015). A world of different belonging where we are not made sick. A different belonging where to live we are not forced to violently extract energy from our rivers or other sacred elements. Where Black lives matter, women are sacred, and children are not ripped from their families for the sake of a corporate-state border war. Where we don't have to cite statistics like "On some reservations, Indigenous women are murdered at more than 10 times the national average" and testify that this violence follows the violence experienced by our

Tribal treaty flags standing against the evening sky. Standing Rock is noted as a time when Indigenous nations from across the country and world came together in an unprecedented united front. Image courtesy of Rawhide Press, Spokane Tribe.

First Mother—like the violence passed through my great grandmother, to my grandmother, to my mother, and through me (*Indian Law Resource Center* n.d.). As these womxn have taught me, and Tamara Bernard (2016) reassures, we are so much more.

The Land Speaks Through Our Bodies

When we and the land are more than property and the state is inherently white supremacist and settler, it can be problematic when anti-violence movements depend on the state to solve the problems of injustice. As important as the focus is on providing multicultural services to survivors of violence, it is limited. Therefore, providing "culturally appropriate" services for

When asked by young men of the Red Warrior camp to help provide direction in the days approaching the evacuation deadline given by the state of North Dakota, young womxn responded by organizing an Honoring our Grandmothers Gathering and practiced a ceremonial raising of the teepee, explaining to participants its relation to the womxn, family, and stars. The womxn hurriedly but steadily dressed the teepee as militarized police approached, who warned that they would disassemble the teepee and remove it from Highway 1806.
Image courtesy of the author.

tribal communities to address gendered violence evades the foundational issues in which this arrangement, called nation-state development, is unlivable for *all* of us. As youth from the Native Youth Sexual Health Network put it: we need to talk about and work from these connections because the land speaks through our bodies.

And so I close by turning toward a young Native womxn who organizes with other youth against suicide in their community. Jasilyn Charger (2016) was asked to comment on the fight against the Black Snake, understood as both DAPL and as a greed that feeds into our communities, and why she ran over 2,000 miles with others from North Dakota to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Washington, D.C. to draw attention to the violent threat posed by the DAPL pipeline against the Missouri River. She explained:

> *We wanted to run for our lives*. We connected the past and the future and we put them together. Because the past is what we're leaving behind for our youth, and the future is us. What better voice for the past, than the future...because we are the embodiment of both. We carry our past and our future with us. And that's what we have to pass down to our children as a legacy....It's our lives that are on the line....We need to make way for our future.

For Jasilyn, this future is a very real embodiment of both her ancestors and the children to come.

Conclusion

To overcome the bind of energy development versus Indian tribes, Heitkamp said she supported both big oil *and* protecting Native women. Given the fact that increases in sexual violence and assault have been shown to increase where energy development is enacted, the double bind, a declaration of conflicted statements, exposes itself in the proposition that we, Indigenous peoples, are both superfluous to the nation-state project and protected by it. More particularly, what the story of Heitkamp's choices demonstrates is how liberal attempts to overcome supposed binds ultimately fail to get at the foundations of the gendered structures and processes of white supremacy and settle colonialism. As such, water politics and activists' strategies must be understood against the background of these logics if we are to ultimately undermine environmental ruin and put back into order our sacred relations.

I started this story by explaining my hesitancy to story what water might say or do in response to environmental injustices. In reflection, I realize I cannot escape storying water or my responsibility as a medium. In fact, we all share this responsibility. As this article has demonstrated, in more ways than one, the land and water speak through our bodies. We are water.

Footnotes

[1] Womxn is a term used to highlight and push back against the power dynamics that are expressed through languages, cultures, and institutions that situate women as an extension of men, and men as the natural category of human. The term also acknowledges in our communities our transgender womxn and womxn of color.

[2] For discussion of the Fourth World that conceptualizes Indigeneity as informed by the settler colonial context but not contained please see Manuel and Posluns' 1974 *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* published by Collier-Macmillan Canada, Ltd; for a discussion on the term Indigenous in international legal framework see Anaya's 2003 *Indigenous Peoples in International Law* published by Oxford University Press; toward an Original Nation approach in international law see Fukurai's 2019 "Original Nation Approaches to 'Inter-National' Law (ONAIL): Decoupling of the Nation and the State and the Search for New Legal Orders," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 26 (1): 199-262; and for a discussion on the capitalized versus non-capitalized form of Indigenous please see Veracini's 2017 "Decolonizing Settler Colonialism: Kill the Settler in Him and Save the Man" in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 41 (1): 1-18.

[3] Thank you to reviewers and editors for helping me draw out the arguments and lines of this story.

[4] Many Native womxn and their communities have themselves long organized against domestic violence. Tillie Black Bear (Sincangu Lakota/Rosebud Sioux) was one of these leaders, recognized as one of the 10 founders of the domestic violence movement in the United States. Elsewhere, I focus on the contribution of these leaders.

[5] I use the state to stand in for the settler state, which by definition is also inherently racial, hetero-patriarchal, and economically driven. To learn more about the discussion of the settler state, gendered violence, and understandings of how the settler state and these forces "move through bodies," see Audra Simpson 2016.

[6] To learn more about the ways that extractive industries disproportionately impact communities of color and Indigenous Nations see O'Rourke and Connolly 2003; Pellow 2016; Pulido 2016; Voyles 2015; Checker 2007; Preston 2013 (with full details listed in the references). NYC Stands with Standing Rock Collective 2016 provides a wonderful syllabus that helps readers begin to explore these connections. The state and industry are increasingly hard to disentangle. Pellow (2001) urges sociologists of social movements to move toward highlighting the political and economic processes involved in environmental contamination and responses.

[7] Here I am pointing out the racialized experience of violence. We cannot forget, however, that race is both sexed and gendered, and must keep in mind that the violence affecting the LGBTQ2 community is grossly underreported.

[8] I would like to thank a peer reviewer for bringing my attention to this important source.

[9] The resistance to DAPL is an extension of a long and ongoing struggle against settler colonialism, as Nick Estes (2016) points out. While the official line is that DAPL contestation is resolved, the reality is more complicated and the fight continues.

[10] For information on rates of sexual violence particular to Native women, a critique of what the government chooses to privilege, and how the Trump administration restricted the U.S. DOJ's definition of domestic abuse and sexual assault, please see Christine Nobiss 2019 "VAWA'S Expiration was Devastating For Indigenous Women. But It's Part of a Larger Problem."

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About the Author

Yvonne P. Sherwood (Spokane and Coeur d'Alene, born and raised within the Yakama Nation) is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology and feminist studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is currently writing her dissertation on activism and embodied knowledges on the frontline of anti-colonial protest. Her work provides an analysis of settler colonialism, environmental justice, and intergenerational traumas that has taken her as a participant observer across Indigenous activist spaces to better understand the politics of knowledge, enactment of sacred relations, and decolonial alliance building.

FEATURE (PEER REVIEW)

THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE WATER

By Tia-Simone Gardner

Editor's note: This feature article has been peer reviewed.

This essay is a collage of images and writing from an ongoing project "Reading the River: Yemayá and Oshun." I am approaching it as is an experimental documentary that looks at the relationship between Blackness and the Mississippi River as a collision of ideas, cultural practices, political geographies, and intimacies. This manner of working emerges out of a Black feminist practice of unsettling how we think and know place.

—Tia-Simone Gardner

Image courtesy of the author.

S S

M – I – CROOKED LETTER CROOKED LETTER – I

S S

CROOKED LETTER CROOKED LETTER – I

P P

HUMPBACK – HUMPBACK – I

Mississippi, or THE **Mississippi**, is a body memory. The **Black Body** and **Mississippi** stick to one another, in pleasure and in violence, through metastasis and re-membering.

“The natural levee along the Mississippi River is a mass grave, filled with the city’s earliest workers and slaves.” [1]

when I was a child, we had a chant.

we learned to spell

M I S S I S S I P P I

by singing the letters aloud, clap-
ping our hands in time, and hunching our
shoulders up to our ears. It is a useful
chant; it helped us to also keep time as
a song to jump rope.

M – I – CROOKED LETTER CROOKED LETTER – I

CROOKED LETTER CROOKED LETTER – I

HUMPBACK – HUMPBACK – I

...I'm still not sure if we were singing about the
land or the water.

...they are not always so distinct, the land and the water.

Image courtesy of NASA.

...perhaps it was both.

Neither are the land, water, and body completely distinct.

Like land and water, the **Black body** was remapped. Rearticulated through a range of regimes: racial capitalism, colonization, labor exploitation, into a site of extraction. The **Black body** was, is, undifferentiated from the land and water that are habitually used to make life, for some, more livable.

"…we must now consider the roads, rivers, and showrooms where broad trends and abstract totalities thickened into human shape." [2]

Moved, overworked, defiled abstracted as an object of trade, the Black body is an important feature, like the pot ash tree or the bald cypress of the Southern landscape. And the river is a part of this strange abstraction.

"In the seven decades between the Constitution and the Civil War, approximately one million enslaved people were relocated from the upper South according to the dictates of the slave- holders' economy, two thirds of these through a pattern of commerce that soon became institutionalized as the domestic slave trade…

As those people passed through the trade, representing something close to half a billion dollars in property, they spread wealth wherever they went." [3]

"I was soon inside, cowering with fear in the darkness, magnifying every noise and every passing wind, until my imagination had almost converted the little cottage into a boat, and I was steaming down South, away from my mother, as fast as I could go." [4]

"What the New Orleans slave pens sold to these slaveholders was not just field hands and household help but their own stake in the commercial and social aspirations of the expanding Southwest, aspirations that were embodied in the thousands of black men, women, and children every season: the slaves out of whom the antebellum South was built." [5]

…it is both an old and a new acquaintance. When I lived in the South, I knew it by one name, but it was too far away to enter into my sense of place. Living now in a place where I am never more than few miles from its banks, its presence cannot help but be a part of my everyday life.

Now, I also know that it has many names:

Báhat Sássin – (Hasí:nay [Caddo]), “Mother of rivers”
Beesniicíe – (Hinóno’eitíít [Arapaho])
Hahcicobá – (Kowassá:ti [Koasati])
Ȟaȟáwakpa – (Lakȟótiyapi [Lakota]),“River of the falls”
Kickaátit – (Paári [Pawnee])
Mäse’sibowi – (Meshkwahkihaki [Fox-Sauk])
Ma’xeé’ome’tää’e – (Tsėhésenėstsestȯtse [Cheyenne]), “Big, greasy river”
Mihcisiipiiwi – (Myaamia [Miami-Illinois])
Misi-Ziibi – (Anishinaabemowin [Ojibwe]), “Great river”
Misha Sipokni – (Chahta’ [Choctaw]), “Beyond age”
ᎻᏏᏏᏆᎤᏪᏴ – (ᏣᎳᎩ [Cherokee]) “Mississippi [transliteration] river”
Mníšošethąka – (Dakȟótiyapi [Dakota])
Ny-tonks – (Okáxpa íe [Quapaw]), “Great river”
Ohnawiiò:ke – (Kanien’kéha’ [Mohawk])
Uhtawiyú?kye – (Ska:rù:rę’ [Tuscarora])
Yandawezue – (Wa^{n}dat [Wyandot])
Yununu’a – (yUdjEha [Yuchi]), “Great river”
Xósáu – (Cáuijògà [Kiowa]), “Standing Rocks” [6]

“pointe ouski” = “cane point”

“bayuk loosa” = “bayou black”

“bayuk ouski” =” bayou cane”

from the Houma language [7]

"water of mars" = war water [8]

"What they gone do with all this property? What the oil company gone do?" [9]

Fort Cities. Port Cities.
Colonization, Spanish, French, British,
American, still marks the landscape
and our bodies.

St. Paul
Cairo
St. Louis
Memphis
Natchez
Vicksburg
New Orleans—

The militarized and commodified rivers-
cape flows from Minnesota to the Gulf and
our bodies flow with it.

Image courtesy of the author.

New Orleans was the largest and perhaps the most feared of the slave port cities along the Mississippi, no one wanted to be sold down river to New Orleans.

Ports and forts tell stories about mobility, Black death and Black life. The commodified Black body. Commodified landscapes and bodies of water. They do not perhaps look like the castles and forts of Elmina or Gorée, but the ports and the forts are there.

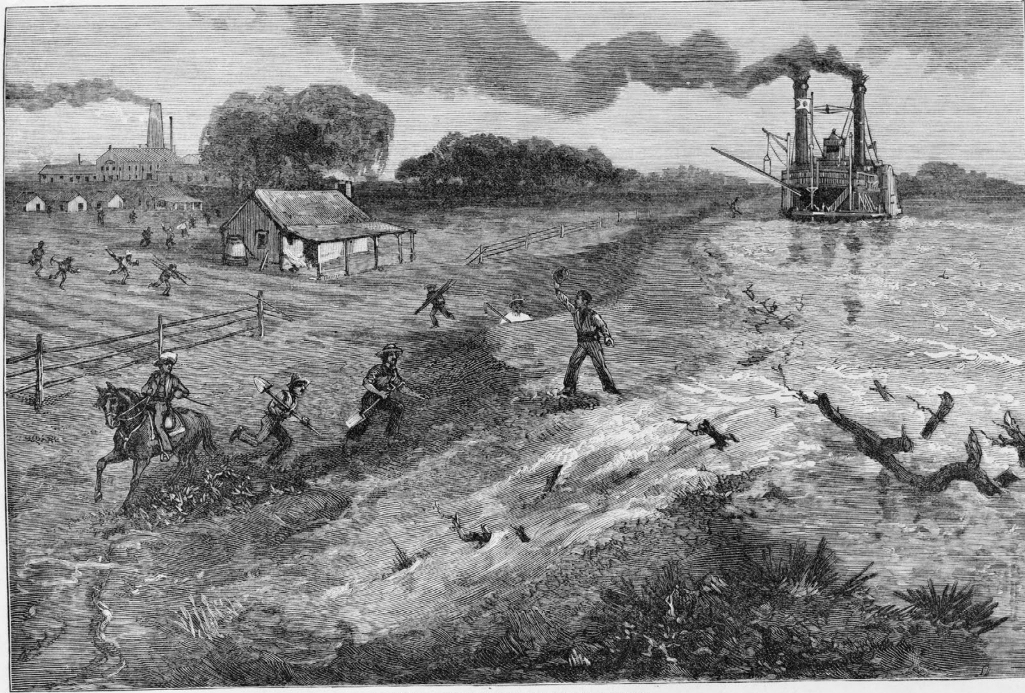
Aerial view of the Mississippi River near Fort Jackson circa 1935. Image courtesy of United States Department of Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places.

Aerial view of the Mississippi River near Fort Jackson circa 1974. Image courtesy of United States Army Corps of Engineers.

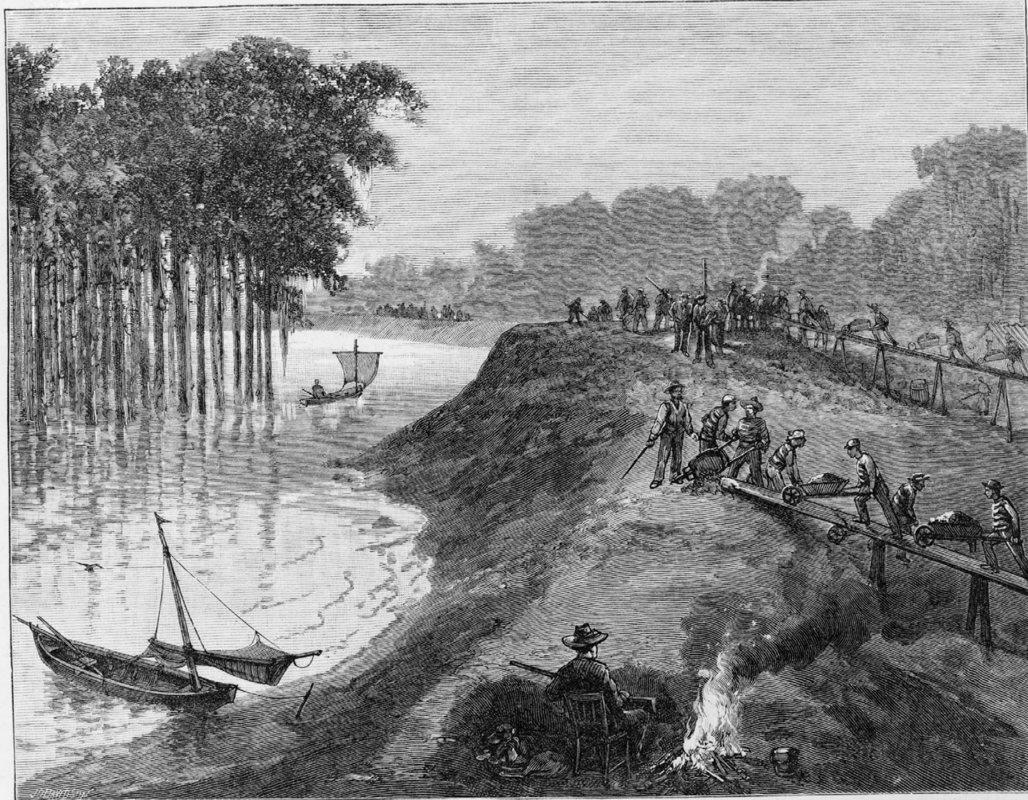
Near the confluence of the Missouri and the Mississippi sits Fort Belle Fontaine, the first established American military fort, which predates the Louisiana Purchase. It was once a fur trading post. Now deaccessioned, it lives down the road from a juvenile detention center.

So I ask: what do histories and cartographies that trace and locate Black mobility along a river that moves between the Gulf of Mexico and Minnesota reveal about the lives and struggles of Black populations contemporarily in and between these spaces?

MARCH 15, 1884. HARPER'S WEEKLY. 169



A BREAK IN THE LEVEE—GIVING THE ALARM.



BUILDING A LEVEE.

THE MISSISSIPPI LEVEES.—Drawn by J. O. Davidson.—[See Page 170.]

"Harper's Weekly", March 15, 1884, 169.

Image courtesy of the author.

he says…the levee took the place of the Sugar House. They had to move the houses to place the levee. [10]

Image courtesy of the author.

Ochún…?

Image courtesy of the author.

“Yemayá

I come to you, Yemayá,
Ocean mother, sister of the fishes.
I stop at the edge of your lip
Where you exhale your breath on the
beach
Into a million tiny geysers.
With your white froth I anoint my brow
and cheeks,
Wait for your white-veined breasts to
wash through me… [11]

I stare at the sea, surging silver-plated
between me and the lopped-off corrugated
arm, the wind whipping my hair. I look
down, my head and shoulders, a shadow on
the sea. Yemayá pours strings
of light over my dull jade, flickering
body, bubbles pop out of my ears. I
feel the tension easing and, for the first
time in months, the litany of work
yet to do, of deadlines, that sings
incessantly in my head, blows away with
the wind.
Oh, Yemayá, I shall speak the words
you lap against the pier.
But as I turn away I see in the distance,
a ship’s fin fast approaching. I see
fish heads lying listless in the sun,
smell the stench of pollution in the waters.” [12]

"Because of its qualities as a tangile, visible scene/seen, it follows that not only can we interrogate the historical and geographical dimensions of the landscape as an object in and of itself (as a material thing, or set of things), we also can read and interpret cultural landscapes for what they might tell us more broadly about social worlds of the past." [13]

"…rather than seeing surveillance as something inaugurated by new technologies, such as automated facial recognition or unmanned autonomous vehicles (or drones), to see it as ongoing is to insist that we factor in how racism and antiblackness undergird and sustain intersecting surveillance of our present order." [14]

Image courtesy of the author.

...the Police-like people I encountered on the levee were ICE agents, Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

They might have taken my camera and what I thought were harmless images of the ships in the channel.

I wonder what, or who, is aboard the ships? Would it, they, have to be quarantined? How did ICE determine the border in the river?

...do borders float? Not all people do.

Image courtesy of the author.

Footnotes

[1] Rich, Nathaniel. 2013. "Bodies." In *Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas*. Rebecca Solnit and Rebecca Snedeker, eds. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

[2] Johnson, Walter. 1999. *Soul by Soul : Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 8.

[3] Johnson, Walter. 1999. *Soul by Soul : Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 6.

[4] Delaney, Lucy A. 189-?. "From the Darkness Cometh the Light, or Struggles for Freedom." In *From the Darkness Cometh the Light, or Struggles for Freedom*. St. Louis, MO, Publishing House of J. T. Smith II.

[5] Johnson, Walter. 1999. *Soul by Soul : Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 7.

[6] "Native Names for the Mississisippi River" in *The Decolonial Atlas*. January 5, 2015.

[7] Verdin, Monique. 2013. "Southward into Vanishing Lands." In *Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas*. Rebecca Solnit and Rebecca Snedeker, eds. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

[8] Hurston, Zora Neale, and Miguel Covarrubias. 1935. *Mules and Men*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co.

[9] Dent, Thomas. *Thomas Dent Papers*. Amistad Research Center at Tulane University.

[10] White, Frank. "River Road Interviews." *Thomas Dent Papers*. Amistad Research Collection at Tulane University.

[11] Anzaldúa, Gloria. 2009. *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*. *Latin America Otherwise*. AnaLouise Keating, ed. Durham: Duke University Press. 242.

[12] Anzaldúa, Gloria. 2009. *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*. *Latin America Otherwise*. AnaLouise Keating, ed. Durham: Duke University Press. 114.

[13] Schein, Richard H. 2006. *Landscape and Race in the United States*. New York: Routledge, 5.

[14] Browne, Simone. 2015. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Durham: Duke University Press. 8.

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About the Author

Tia-Simone Gardner is an artist, educator, and Black feminist scholar. Her creative and scholarly practice are interested interdisciplinary strategies and engage ideas of ritual, iconoclasm, and geography. She received her BA in Art and Art History from the University of Alabama in Birmingham. In 2009 she received her MFA in Interdisciplinary Practices and Time-Based Media from the University of Pennsylvania. She recently received her Ph.D. in Feminist Studies from the Department of Gender Women’s and Sexuality Studies at the University of Minnesota. She is currently working on a project on Blackness and the Mississippi River as well as expanding her dissertation, titled *Sensing Place: House-Scale, Black Geographies, and a Humanly Workable City*, into an artist book and a series of site-specific installations.

GEOGRAPHIES

RESONANT RIVERS: WATER, INDIGENOUS RELATIONALITY, AND OTHER FUTURES

By Caroline Fidan Tyler Doenmez

Two sets of rivers in what is now known as Canada are vital actors in urban landscapes. The McIntyre and Kaministiquia Rivers in Thunder Bay, Ontario and the Assiniboine and Red Rivers in Winnipeg, Manitoba are sites of colonial violence and disappearance: in both cities, dead Indigenous people have been pulled from their depths. Others are thought to still be in the water. In this sense, they are unsettled graveyards where the disappeared *might be*

Memorial event for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Winnipeg, July 2015. Image courtesy of Caroline Doenmez.

and are sometimes found. What do missing and murdered Indigenous people desire, caution, or demand? How can we be accountable to them? How do the rivers in which they were found emit the resonance of their stories and unfulfilled possibilities? How do those still living answer the haunting of the rivers and those within them?

In Winnipeg, the bodies of multiple Indigenous girls and women have been found in the Red River, including Jean Mocharski in 1961, Felicia Solomon in 2003, and Tina Fontaine in 2014. Across the border in Fargo, North Dakota, Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind was found dead in the Red River in 2017 after her baby was violently taken from her body. Thus, the Red River itself has become associated with the pervasive crisis of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG). In May 2014, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police released its first statistical assessment of the epidemic, which listed a total of 1,181 cases of murdered and missing Indigenous women between 1980-2012.[1] However, grassroots activists say the number is closer to 4,000.[2]

While Indigenous women and girls are subjected to specific forms of gendered and sexualized colonial violence, Indigenous men and boys are also being murdered and disappeared. In

Mural for MMIWG by Tom Andrich on Portage Ave in Winnipeg.
Image courtesy of Caroline Doenmez.

Thunder Bay, seven Indigenous youth between the ages of fourteen and eighteen died between 2000 and 2011; five of them were found in the McIntyre or Kaministiquia Rivers. In May 2017, two more Indigenous youth were found dead in the Neebing-McIntyre floodway. Several of their deaths were immediately deemed "accidental drownings" in spite of the fact that their families and friends disputed that they would ever enter the freezing currents of their own volition.[3] Jethro Anderson, Curran Strang, Paul Panacheese, Robyn Harper, Reggie Bushie, Kyle Morrisseau, Jordan Wabasse, Tammy Keeash, and Josiah Begg had all been sent to Thunder Bay from their remote reserves in northern Ontario to attend high school or seek medical services. The federal government is responsible for the education of children on reserves, but many of these communities still do not have high schools because First Nations education programs in Ontario are "massively underfunded."[4] Therefore, youth who want to pursue their education have to leave home. Tanya Talaga emphasizes that this situation replicates the residential schooling system, wherein approximately 150,000 Indigenous children in Canada were compelled—sometimes through force, sometimes through necessity—to leave their homes for western educations: "Families are still being told—more than twenty years after the last residential school was shut down—that they must surrender their children for them to gain an education."[5]

After years of Indigenous family members voicing their concerns, the Thunder Bay Police Service was excoriated in a report by the Office of the Independent Police Review Director for systemic racism in December 2018.[6] The report found that many of the cases of dead Indigenous people were insufficiently investigated and recommended reopening at least 9 cases. While the report signifies an institutional exercise of accountability, we must still ask: what other forms of accountability are needed to address the dead youth? What other modes of healing and redress are possible? What kind of justice could also take account of the rivers themselves? If we understand rivers as more than resources or passive features of a landscape, but rather as sentient life-forces, we would also have to think about the violence inflicted on these waters, as they have been polluted, controlled, and turned into death places. Several Indigenous communities have shown us what it means to respect, defend, and speak for the water, and have articulated the extent to which violence against Indigenous people and water are deeply intertwined. For example, thousands of water protectors at Standing Rock rallied under the phrase "*Mni Wičoni*," water is life, to defend their waters and communities from the Dakota Access Pipeline. In the Great Lakes region, Anishinaabe women "water walkers" such as Sharon Day and Josephine Mandamin have walked thousands of miles to express the importance of caring for water and protecting it from pollution. Water protectors have demonstrated that seeking justice for Indigenous people also means seeking justice for the water, and these efforts are rooted in radical relationality and care.[7]

Indigenous community members in Winnipeg and Thunder Bay have enacted care for both the missing and murdered people and the rivers. In Winnipeg, for the past two summers, a ceremony has been held for the Red River. Speaking of the river, one of the organizers, Shauna Taylor said: "It needs to be blessed because there are so many souls in there. They just need to come up and feel like someone actually cares for them."[8] Another expression of care for the women and the water was created in early January 2019, when Métis artist Jaime Black[9] sculpted figures of women out of snow lying on the Red River.[10] Here, the river becomes not only a site of disappearance but one of presence and remembrance. Similarly, in the spring of 2018 in Thunder Bay, a group of Indigenous women and girls performed a jingle dress dance on the banks of the McIntyre River to heal the water and mark it as a site of renewal, memory and connection.[11] These modes of

address demonstrate that caring for the dead and the water is vital for the survival of the living. The young women dancing for the river as well as the people holding ceremonies on the riverbanks are both initiating forms of connection that respond to the haunting of the missing and murdered people, and to the waters which hold, conceal, and sometimes reveal them.

In thinking of all the people within these rivers, one form that their haunting takes is the cutting sense of who they could have been. What lives could they have led if they were not stolen?[12] What roles might they have played as parents, siblings, aunties, uncles, teachers, friends, and knowledge-holders for their families and communities? What would their presences mean for the children who are now growing up without their parents, or the parents growing old without their children? What other stories would they have been able to tell for the rest of their lives? In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon helps us understand the "unfulfilled possibility" that haunting figures force us to recognize.[13] This attention to what *could have been* is animated by the water. Each river shows us the importance of envisioning the fulfilled lives of all the Indigenous people killed or disappeared through various techniques of colonial neglect, disavowal, and murderous violence by making it impossible for

The Red River. Image courtesy of Caroline Doenmez.

us to ignore their deaths. As sites of ceremony, the rivers also emanate the ongoing love their families and communities sustain for those who have been taken. While state institutions may attempt to doubly disappear Indigenous people through their failure to investigate or even search for them, the rivers bear witness and remind us always of these stolen lives. Mojave poet Natalie Diaz writes: “Do you think the water will forget what we have done, what we continue to do?”[14]

In the face of the Canadian state’s incredulity or fleeting sorrow in response to these lives taken, and in light of the ongoing simultaneous dispossession of Indigenous land and life, the rivers compel us to remember and imagine other futures for missing and murdered Indigenous people. As unfixed conduits of memory and loss but also vital sources of new beginnings and survival, rivers hold open the possibility of more expansive visions of justice and relationships to the dead. They also prompt an imagining of the futures that might have been, and might still be.

There are days when the boundaries of the present fall away and I see myself in one of these other futures. On a warm summer afternoon, rather than looking for traces of missing women on a patrol, I might instead pass by some of them on these very streets.[15] They would not be watching us from beneath the shimmering surface of the river. No one would need to put up missing person posters or desperately search throughout the city, pouring messages into the ground with their footsteps and into the air with their breath. In this future, their families didn’t need to call out or wait. The women were already almost home.

The Red River near The Forks in Winnipeg. Image courtesy of Caroline Doenmez.

Footnotes

[1] “Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview,” *Royal Canadian Mounted Police*, 4 May 2014. http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/missing-and-murdered-aboriginal-women-national-operational-overview.

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[3] Tanya Talaga, *Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, Death, and Hard Truths in a Northern City* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2017): 122.

[4] Jody Porter, “Deep Water” *CBC News*, 4 April 2016. http://www.cbc.ca/interactives/longform/news/deep-water-indigenous-youth-death

[5] Tanya Talaga, *Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, Death, and Hard Truths in a Northern City* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2017): 267.

[6] Gerry McNeilly, “Broken Trust: Indigenous People and the Thunder Bay Police Service,” *Office of the Independent Police Review Director*, December 2018, http://oiprd.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/OIPRD-BrokenTrust-Final-Accessible-E.pdf

[7] Melanie K. Yazzie and Cutcha Risling Baldy, “Introduction: Indigenous peoples and the politics of water,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* Vol. 7, no. 1 (2018): 2-3.

[8] “‘There are so many souls in there’: Group gathers to bless the Red River,” *CBC News Manitoba*, 30 July 2017, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/bless-the-red-1.4228403

[9] Jaime Black is also the creator of the REDress project, a travelling installation of red dresses hung in public places to bring awareness to the MMIWG. http://www.theredressproject.org

[10] “Red River snow sculptures honour murdered, missing Indigenous women and girls,” *CBC News Manitoba*, 4 January 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/red-river-snow-sculptures-mmiwg-1.4967005

[11] Willow Fiddler, “Can the jingle dress change the river of tears to the river of hope in Thunder Bay? Some say yes,” *APTN National News*, 28 April 2018, https://aptnnews.ca/2018/04/28/can-the-jingle-dress-change-the-river-of-tears-to-the-river-of-hope-in-thunder-bay-some-say-yes/

[12] Jean M. Langford, “Toward a Hauntology for the Other-than-Human,” Presented at “Ghosts, Haunting, and the Subject of Culture: Toward an Anthropological Hauntology,” Meeting of the Society for Psychological Anthropology, April 10, 2015.

[13] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008 edition): 183.

[14] Natalie Diaz, "The First Water Is the Body," in "Women and Standing Rock," *Orion Magazine*, 28 December 2017, https://orionmagazine.org/article/women-standing-rock/

[15] Indigenous community members have organized the Bear Clan Patrol and Mama Bear Clan to walk the streets of Winnipeg and provide support and protection to their neighbors.

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About the Author

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IN REVIEW

STORYING PINHOOK: REPRESENTING THE COMMUNITY, THE FLOODS, AND THE STRUGGLE

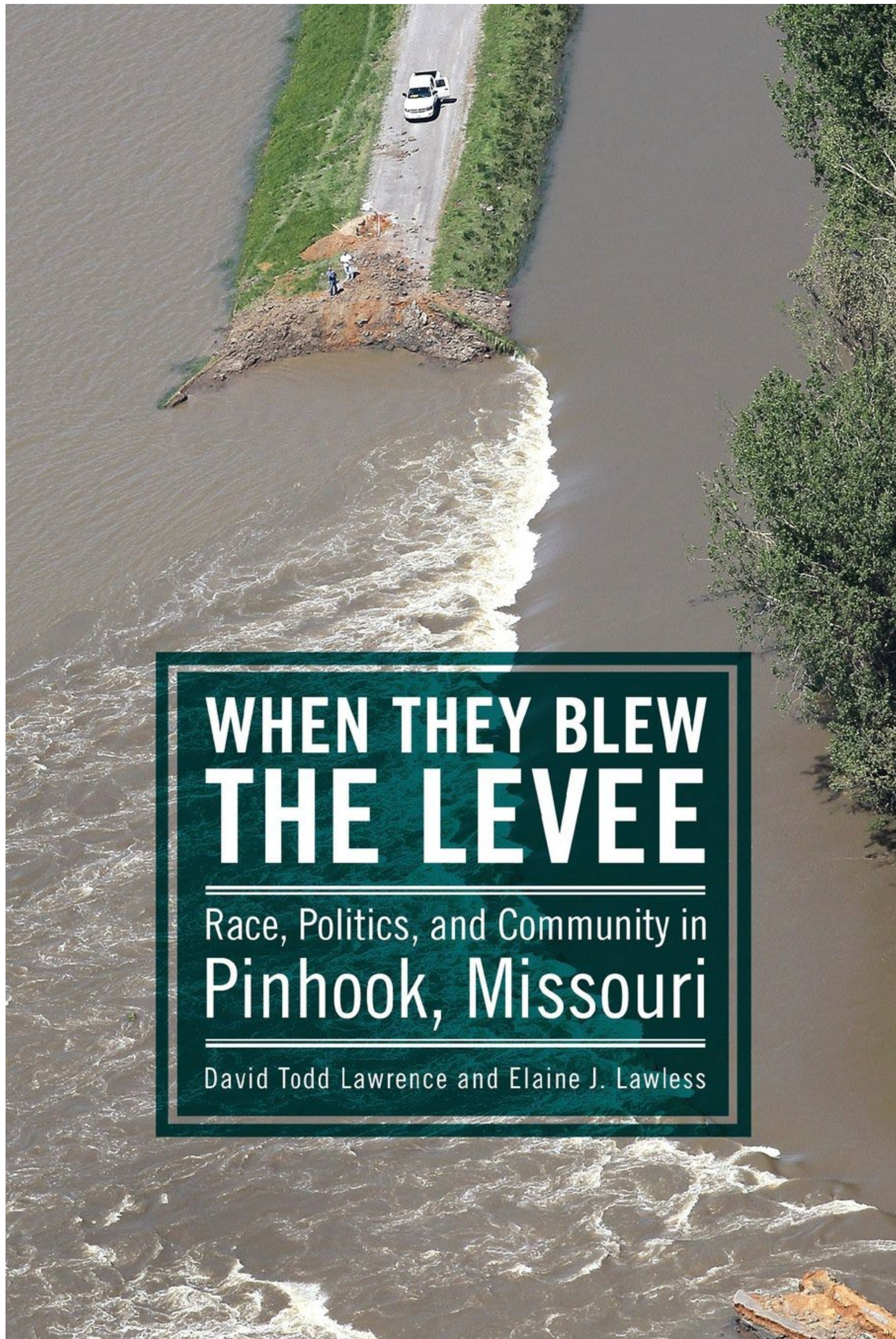
By Lisa Marie Brimmer

"The Refugee symbolizes the present as the passage through simultaneously felt pasts and futures….The Refugee can be a warning that what appears to be a gift might be the imposition of a debt, and what is heralded as resilience might be the imposition of responsibility for a crisis not of one's making."

Mimi Thi Nguyen, "The Refugee Tarot Card."[1]

When They Blew the Levee is a fierce love letter to the power of community, one encoded to Black sociality, the broader American social imaginary, and the mythical power of the Mississippi River. In praxis, it is a political tool—a lyrical baseball bat—for the residents of Pinhook, Missouri to wield in a rally against the sustained structural violence of a biased

Pinhook Day Embrace, 2015. Image courtesy of David Todd Lawrence.



David Todd Lawrence and Elaine J. Lawless, "When They Blew the Levee: Race, Politics, and Community in Pinhook, Missouri." (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2018).

justice system and racialized world. In style, it is a careful requiem for the past/present/future generations of Pinhook, and perhaps Black folks (still) in migration in the United States.

Authors David Todd Lawrence and Elaine J. Lawless find a new way to look at the intricacies of state and national emergency response efforts, the legacies of the Atlantic Slave Trade and Jim Crow, practical Black Feminism(s), and community resilience through a deep rumination on the power of narrative. Like many stories about flooding and human loss, the intersection of natural events and imperfect (human) environmental management produced a dangerous event in which nature had its day. In the Spring of 2011, rising waters created historic flood conditions that endangered many along the length of the Mississippi River, including communities in Missouri's lower Bootheel region. In fact, by May 11, 2011, *The Atlantic* reported the following: "The upper Mississippi River basin has been experiencing near-record flooding for weeks now. Across Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, and Arkansas, heavy rains have left the ground saturated and rivers swollen…experts estimate that as many as three million acres may become submerged in the next few days."[2] They quickly did. Few areas would come to know the unique varnish of destruction the waters of the Mississippi would produce quite like Pinhook, Missouri. As an all African American town, Pinhook's singularity and survival through the twentieth century is itself significant. As a Black city, Pinhook was a rural sanctuary of Black community, tradition, and social life. Common to the American story, the value of this community was lost on those in power. Pinhook has continued to be submerged by the official, government-sanctioned narrative of events. Lawrence and Lawless offer an unofficial narrative to counter the weight of federal and state agencies that they say neither prevented nor responded adequately to the flood emergency.

The front matter of *When They Blew the Levee* introduces a conversation on the power of story and, in the pages that follow, the book goes on to illustrates the multifaceted determination of a steadfast Pinhook community: from the town's formation to a now displaced city of over 300 residents and extended family whose homes were washed away when the Birds Point–New Madrid floodway was intentionally opened by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2011. In what was considered a success to the Corps, massive amounts of water plowed through floodway, through Pinhook, and essentially flushed the city in order to save the adjacent—only thousands larger—industrial city of Cairo, Illinois. This "intentional breach" caused irreparable damage to the homes, the families, and the town of Pinhook.[3] The townspeople had limited time to leave with anything but the essentials. They made it out with their lives, but lost pictures, heirlooms, and valuables.

As trained folklorists, the authors of the text carefully map their pragmatic methodology: Lawrence and Lawless work in a reciprocal ethnographic style and attempt to "include participants in studies where they share the articulation of their own intellectual and social history."[4] This critical intervention in the field of folklore and ethnography is significant across disciplines of twenty-first-century research and publication. This is especially so as it regards underrepresented rural communities and the particular voices of Black women like Pinhook's mayor, Debra Robinson.

For me, the presence of Debra Robinson resonates with the recent ethnography scholarship of Terrion Williamson's *Scandalize My Name: Black Feminist Practice and the Making of Black Social Life*.[5]Williamson (re)discovers her hometown, upbringing, and popular culture in order to advance discussions centering Black women through a Black Feminist Practice.

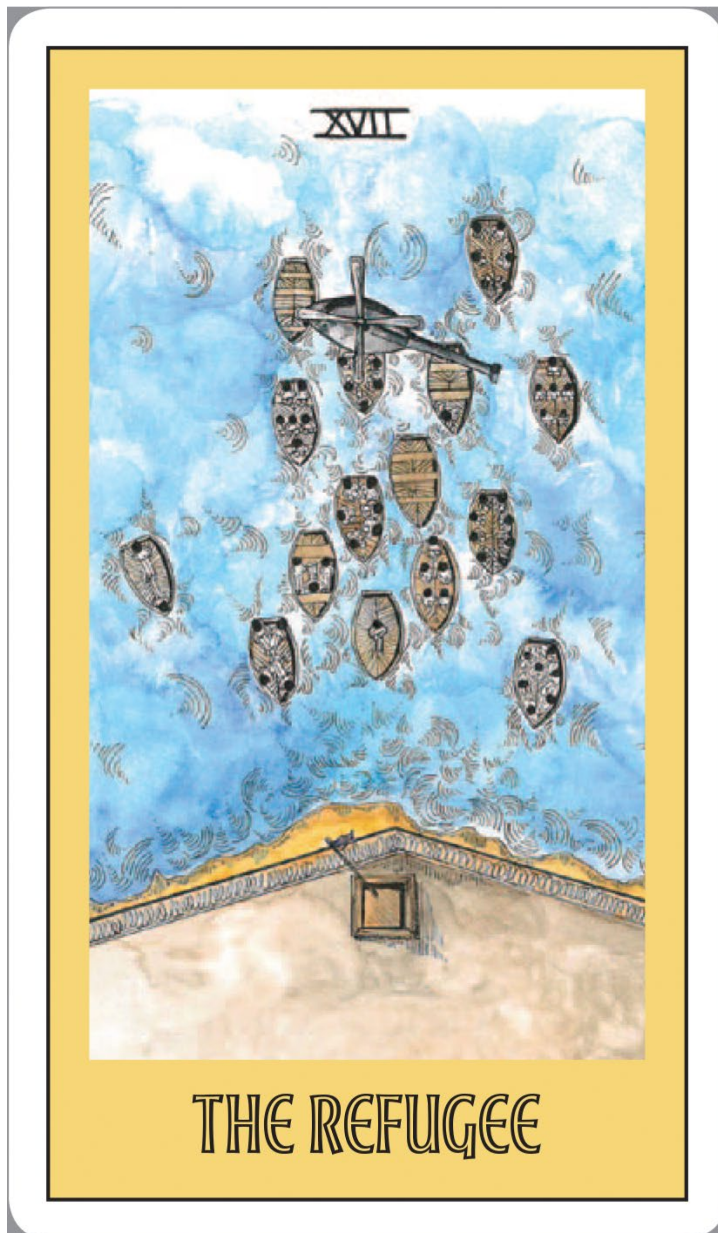
In episodes both exemplary and ordinary, Williamson combs both with and away from the grain of mainstream narratives about Black presence in the United States. Similarly, as a reader, witnessing Robinson's journey, and the journey of her sisters and mother, encourages me to think about the ways in which the fields of ethnography (and autoethnography) makes space for first-hand accounts through the prioritization of oral histories as a valid source of knowledge. The voices of Pinhook work to undo the single-story violence of erasure and establish a presence that allows for more pluralized representation of Black communities in the post-civil rights era. As Williamson writes: "Rather than being seen merely as the relics of a bygone era whose lives have no bearing on the lives of post-civil rights black women other than as historical lore, our grandmothers, mothers and other mothers help us to reckon with what it means to live wholly and completely, *in spite of*."[6]

Likewise, Lawrence and Lawless disrupt common logics of representation that often render Black and feminine voices invisible and unheard. They position the value of these narratives as "more likely to be 'heard' and supported by those in power when the efforts of women are framed in non-confrontational discourses," especially since in the "racialized cultural context of Missouri's conservative Bootheel region…power is held largely by white males who demonstrate little regard for the African American communities in their midst and often find black men intimidating and expect them to be confrontational." [7] This pair of quotes illustrate the ways in which processes that affect Black and feminine voices are also at work upon broader narratives of the Great Migration.

These stories, like many post-emancipation narratives, reach back to a United States history of enslavement and legacy models of sharecropping

Debra Robinson and Elaine Lawless, Pinhook Day 2015, Sikeston. Image courtesy of David Todd Lawrence.

and land leasing in order to relay a sense of national progress away from the anti-blackness (and inherent anti-indigeneity) of the country's foundation of agrarian capitalism.[8] This trend is contested by the authors as they reference the great 1803 land deal known as the Louisiana Purchase.[9] Lawrence and Lawless offer a clear depiction of the ongoing modern-day challenges of landownership in Missouri's Bootheel region: from clearing the land and managing wildlife to the difficulties of living with recurring and regular floods. The authors display a resilient community that lived with the quirks of the land. However, the intentional levee breach by federal forces, forever altered this way of life for the citizens of Pinhook.



The Refugee is the seventeenth card in the major arcana. Floating on the ocean's changing currents, the Refugee imparts strength to those living with uncertainty. The plant in the Refugee's hands is emblematic of a treasured home, but also the groundlessness of new beginnings. The Refugee symbolizes the present as the passage through simultaneously felt pasts and futures. In a reading, the Refugee can signal a crisis requiring an intervention. But while crisis might intensify as a catastrophic event, the danger might well be an ongoing condition or structure. The obstacles presented on the card are scenes of misplaced faith. Both the wall and the helicopter stand for outside forces that aim to regulate your movement; but they might also represent your own attachments to enclosure, or rescue, under another's power. The Refugee can be a warning that what appears to be a gift might be the imposition of a debt, and what is heralded as resilience might be the imposition of responsibility for a crisis not of one's making. The Refugee warns that while the crisis might describe the limits of a condition or structure—even a habit of being in the world—the desire for security and protection can also recruit control or even submission. The Refugee urges you to examine your objects of desire, and how their promises have brought you before obstacles to your own flourishing. ⁕ Mimi Thi Nguyen

Mimi Khúc, guest editor. "Open in Emergency: A Special Issue on Asian American Mental Health," The Asian American Literary Review vol. 7, issue 2 (Fall/Winter 2016). Image courtesy of Mimi Khúc.

Lawrence and Lawless march us through emotional personal interviews and radical political accounts of this loss. Because of this style, it is with an empathetic Black feminism that we come to understand Black sociality to be something beyond the urban experience of Great Migration narratives that brought a group of black families to "Swampeast Missouri" in search of land on which to build their new world.[10]

Lawrence and Lawless write: "For those in power, the African American community of Pinhook was invisible, unimportant and dispensable."[11] We are assured as readers that we are encountering an "erased town, but not an erased community."[12] This helps me think through a potential solidarity in the relative position of both the refugee and the Black/African American citizen in migration along with Nguyen in the tarot card below. In the situation of 2011 Pinhook, the past and future are felt simultaneously in the present. As with the refugee, Pinhook residents are part of a greater generation which required African American folks to take on a responsibility for a crisis not of one's own making and the inheritance of a debt that at first appeared a gift. *When They Blew the Levee* enlists Critical Race Theory, Critical Urban and Critical Rural Studies, and Folklore to excavate the loss sustained by Pinhook. The crystalline structures Lawrence and Lawless create in the title chapter stun as they build a beat-by-beat analysis of the levee's intentional breach. It veers toward filmic as we come to understand the language of this rural place off the Mississippi River: with sand boils, backwaters, and floodways.[13] The authors animate the titanic amount of water (550,000 cubic feet of water per second rushed into the 133,000 acres of spillway) and the substantial loss of home.[14] In this era of state-of-emergency thinking, *When They Blew the Levee* ruminates on the power of the nation-state to sanction violence, erasure, and invisibility that can, intentionally or not, remove whole communities from the map. Lawrence and Lawless remind us that, at least for Pinhook, community lives on, however changed.

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[10] Lawrence and Lawless, *When They Blew the Levee*, 37.

[11] Lawrence and Lawless, *When They Blew the Levee*, 13.

[12] Lawrence and Lawless, *When They Blew the Levee*, 15.

[13] Lawrence and Lawless, *When They Blew the Levee*, 130.

[14] Lawrence and Lawless, *When They Blew the Levee*, 131.

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About the Author

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PERSPECTIVES

THE RIVER

By adrienne maree brown

You might be surprised to find this beautiful dystopian science fiction story, written by my movement sister adrienne maree brown, in the midst of an academic journal. During this moment of political turmoil, social inequities, economic uncertainties, and accompanying deep disrespect of cycles and needs of nature, it is precisely the type of wake-up call in the form of metaphor we need: a visionary journey to a Detroit of the future where all of our social, environmental, and economic ills have come to a catastrophic crescendo. This story is a warning alarm providing insight into the heart of what environmental justice is about: that we must find the harmony and balance of our people's needs and the planet's resources where all can survive and thrive or suffer a common demise. Nature ***will*** *fight back, and take all of humanity with her, not just those systemically oppressed, though we are the ones to feel her wrath first and worst. Like the River Woman, it is time for us to listen to the rivers being polluted, to the mountains being clear-cut, to the barrios being destroyed, or risk all of us being swallowed by the very water that keeps us alive.*
– Jayeesha Dutta, New Orleans, LA

Rue d' Isle de Jean Charles. Image courtesy of Jayeesha Dutta.

1.

something in the river haunted the island between the city and the border. she felt it, when she was on the waves in the little boat. she didn't say anything, because what could be said, and to whom?

but she felt it. and she felt it growing.

made a sort of sense to her that something would grow there. nuf things went in for something to have created itself down there.

she was a water woman, had learned to boat as she learned to walk, and felt rooted in the river. she'd learned from her grandfather, who'd told her his life lessons on the water. he'd said, "black people come from a big spacious place, under a great big sky. this little country here, we have to fight for any inches we get. but the water has always helped us get free one way or another."

sunny days, she took paying passengers over by the belle isle bridge to see the cars in the water. mostly, you couldn't see anything. but sometimes, you'd catch a glimpse of something shiny, metal, not of the river—something big and swallowed, that had a color of cherry red, of 1964 American-made dream.

these days, the river felt like it had back then, a little too swollen, too active, too attentive.

too many days, she sat behind the wheel of the little boat, dialing down her apprehension. she felt a restlessness in the weeds and shadows that held detroit together. belle isle, an overgrown island,

housed the ruins of a zoo, an aquarium, a conservatory, and the old yacht club. down the way were the abandoned, squatted towers of the renaissance center, the tallest ode to economic crisis in the world.

she had been born not too far from the river, chalmers, on the east side. as a child she played along the river banks. she could remember when a black person could only dock a boat at one black-owned harbor. she remembered it because all she'd ever wanted was to be on that river, especially after her grandfather passed. when she was old enough, she'd purchased the little boat, motor awkward on its backside, and named her bessie after her mama. her mama had taught her important things: how to love detroit, that gardening in their backyard was not a hobby but a strategy, and to never trust a man for the long haul.

mostly, she'd listened to her mama. and when she'd gone astray, she'd always been able to return to the river.

now she was 43, and the river was freedom. in that boat she felt liberated all day. she loved to anchor near the underground railroad memorial and imagine runaway slaves standing on one bank and how good—terrifying, but good—that water must have felt, under the boat, or all over the skin, or frozen under the feet.

this was a good river for boating. you wouldn't jump in for any money. no one would.

she felt the same way about eating out of the river, but it was a hungry time. that morning she'd watched a fisherman reel in something, slow, like he didn't care at all. what he pulled up, a long slender fish, had an oily sheen on its scales. she'd tried to catch his eye with her disgust, offer a side eye warning to this stranger, but he turned with his catch, headed for the ice box.

she was aware of herself as a kind of outsider. she loved the city desperately and the people in it. but she mostly loved them from her boat. lately she wore her overalls, kept her graying hair short and natural, her sentences short. her routine didn't involve too many humans. when she tried to speak, even small talk, there was so much sadness

and grief in her mouth for the city disappearing before her eyes that it got hard to breathe.

next time she was out on the water, on a stretch just east of chene park, she watched two babies on the rocks by the river, daring each other to get closer. the mothers were in deep and focused gossip, while also minding a grill that uttered a gorgeous smell over the river waves. the waves were moving aggressive today, and she wanted to yell to the babies or the mamas but couldn't get the words together.

you can't yell just any old thing in detroit. you have to get it right. folks remember.

as she watched, one baby touched his bare toe in, his trembling ashy mocha body stretched out into the rippling nuclear aquamarine green surface. then suddenly he jumped up and backed away from the river, spooked in every limb. he took off running past his friend, all the way to his mama's thighs, which he grabbed and buried himself in, babbling incoherent confessions to her flesh.

the mother didn't skip a beat or a word, just brushed him aside, ignoring his warning.

she didn't judge that mama, though. times were beyond tough in detroit. a moment to pause, to vent, to sit by the river and just talk, that was a rare and precious thing.

• • •

off the river, out of the water, she found herself in an old friend's music studio, singing her prettiest sounds into his machines. he was as odd and solitary as she was, known for his madness, his intimate marrow-deep knowledge of the city, and his musical genius.

she asked him: what's up with the river?

he laughed first. she didn't ask why.

here is what he said: your river? man, detroit is in that river. The whole river and the parts of the river. certain parts, it's like a ancestral burying ground. it's like a holy vortex of energy.

like past the island? in the deep shits where them barges plow through? that was the hiding place, that was where you went if you loose tongue about the wrong thing or the wrong people. man, all kinds of sparkling souls been weighted down all the way into the mud in there. s'why some folks won't anchor with the city in view. might hook someone before they ghost! takes a while to become a proper ghost.

he left it at that.

she didn't agree with his theory. didn't feel dead, what she felt in the river. felt other. felt alive and other.

• • •

peak of the summer was scorch that year. the city could barely get dressed. the few people with jobs sat in icy offices watching the world waver outside. people without jobs survived in a variety of ways that all felt like punishment in the heat.

seemed like every morning there'd be bodies, folks who'd lost Darwinian struggles during the sweaty night. bodies by the only overnight shelter, bodies in the fake downtown garden sponsored by coca-cola, bodies in potholes on streets strung with christmas lights because the broke city turned off the streetlights.

late one sunday afternoon, after three weddings took place on the island, she heard a message come over the river radio: four pale bodies found floating in the surrounding river, on the far side. she tracked the story throughout the day. upon being dragged out of the water and onto the soil by gloved official hands, it was clear that the bodies, of two adults and two teenagers, were recently dead, hardly bloated, each one bruised

as if they'd been in a massive struggle before the toxic river filled their lungs.

they were from pennsylvania.

on monday she motored past the spot she'd heard the coast guard going on about over the radio. the water was moving about itself, swirling without reason. she shook her head, knowing truths that couldn't be spoken aloud were getting out of hand.

she tried for years to keep an open heart to the new folks, most of them white. the city needed people to live in it and job creation, right? and some of these new folk seemed to really care.

but it could harden her heart a little each day, to see people showing up all the time with jobs, or making new work for themselves and their friends, while folks born and raised here couldn't make a living, couldn't get investors for business. she heard entrepreneurs on the news speak of detroit as this exciting new blank canvas. she wondered if the new folks just couldn't see all the people there, the signs everywhere that there was history and there was a people still living all over that canvas.

• • •

the next tragedy came tuesday, when a passel of new local hipsters were out at the island's un-secret swimming spot on an inner waterway of belle isle. this tragedy didn't start with screams, but that was the first thing she heard—a wild cacophony of screaming through the thick reeds.

by the time she doubled back to the sliver entrance of the waterway and made it to the place of the screaming sounds, there was just a whimper, just one whimpering white kid and an island patrol, staring into the water.

she called out: what happened?

the patrol, a white kid himself, looked up, terrified and incredulous and trying to be in control. well, some kids were swimming out here. now they're missing, and this one says a wave ate them!

the kid turned away from the river briefly to look up at the patrol, slack-mouthed and betrayed. then the damp confused face turned to her and pointed at the water: it took them.

she looked over the side of the boat then, down into the shallows and seaweed. the water and weeds moved innocently enough, but there were telltale signs of guilt: a mangled pair of aviator glasses, three strips of natty red board shorts, the back half of a navy-striped tom's shoe, a tangle of bikini, and an unlikely pile of clean new bones of various lengths and origins.

she gathered these troubled spoils with her net, clamping her mouth down against the lie "I told you so," cause who had she told? and even now, as more kinds of police and coast guard showed up, what was there to say?

something impossible was happening.

she felt bad for these hipsters. she knew some of their kind from her favorite bars in the city and had never had a bad experience with any of them. she had taken boatloads of them on her river tours over the years. it wasn't their fault there were so many of them. hipsters and entrepreneurs were complicated locusts. they ate up everything in sight, but they meant well.

they should have shut down the island then, but these island bodies were only a small percentage of the bodies of summer, most of them stabbed, shot, strangled, stomped, starved. authorities half-heartedly posted ambiguous warning flyers around the island as swimmers, couples strolling on the river walk paths, and riverside picnickers went missing without explanation.

no one else seemed to notice that the bodies the river was taking that summer were not the bodies of detroiters. perhaps because it was a diverse body of people, all ages, all races. all folks who had come more recently, drawn by the promise of empty land and easy business, the opportunity available among the ruins of other peoples' lives.

she wasn't much on politics, but she hated the shifts in the city, the way it was fading as it filled with people who didn't know how to see it. she knew what was coming, what always came with pioneers: strip malls and sameness. she'd seen it nuff times.

so even though the river was getting dangerous, she didn't take it personally.

she hated strip malls too.

then something happened that got folks' attention.

• • •

the mayor's house was a mansion with a massive yard and covered dock on the river, overlooking the midwestern jungle of belle isle, and farther on, the shore of gentle canada.

this was the third consecutive white mayor of the great black city, this one born in grand rapids, raised in new york, and appointed by the governor. he'd entered office with economic promises on his lips, as usual, but so far he had just closed a few schools and added a third incinerator tower to expand detroit's growing industry as leading trash processor of north america.

the mayor had to entertain at home a few times a year, and his wife's job was to orchestrate elegance using the mansion as the backdrop. people came, oohed and aahed, and then left the big empty place to the couple. based on the light patterns she observed through the windows on her evening boat rides, she suspected the two spent most of their time out of the public eye happily withdrawn to opposite wings.

she brought the boat past the yard and covered dock every time she was out circling the island looking for sunset. as the summer had gone on, island disappearances had put the spook in her completely, and she circled farther and farther from the island's shores, closer and closer to the city.

which meant that on the evening of the mayor's august cocktail party, she was close to his yard. close enough to see it happen.

dozens of people coated the yard with false laughter, posing for cameras they each assumed were pointed in their direction. members of the press were there, marking themselves with cameras and tablets and smartphones, with the air of journalists covering something relevant. the mayor was aiming for dapper, a rose in his lapel.

as she drifted through the water, leaving no wake, the waves started to swell erratically. in just a few moments, the water began thrashing wildly, bucking her. it deluged the front of her little boat as she tried to find an angle to cut through. looking around, she saw no clear source of disruption, just a single line of waves moving out from the island behind her, clear as a moonbeam on a midnight sea.

she doubled the boat around until she was out of the waves, marveling at how the water could be smooth just twenty feet east. she looked back and saw that the waves continued to rise and roll, smacking against the wall that lined the mayor's yard.

the guests, oblivious to the phenomenon, shouted stories at each other and heimlich-maneuvered belly laughter over the sound of an elevator jazz ensemble.

again she felt the urge to warn them, and again she couldn't think of what to say. could anyone else even see the clean line of rising waves? maybe all this time alone on the boat was warping her mind.

as she turned to move along with her boat, feeling the quiet edge of sanity, the elevator music stopped, and she heard the thumping of a microphone being tested. there he was, slick, flushed, wide and smiling. he stood on a little platform with his back to the river, his guests and their champagne flutes all turned toward him. the media elbowed each other half-heartedly, trying to manifest an interesting shot.

that's when it happened.

first thing was a shudder, just a bit bigger than the quake of summer 2010 which had shut down work on both sides of the river. and then one solitary and massive wave, a sickly bright green whip up out of the blue river, headed toward the mayor's back.

words were coming out her mouth, incredulous screams twisted with a certain glee: the island's coming! the river is going to eat all you carpet-baggers right up!

when she heard what she was saying she slapped her hand over her mouth, ashamed, but no one even looked in her direction. and if they had they would have seen naught but an old black water woman, alone in a boat.

the wave was over the yard before the guests noticed it, looking up with grins frozen on their faces. it looked like a trick, an illusion. the mayor laughed at their faces before realizing with an animated double take that there was something behind him.

as she watched, the wave crashed over the fence, the covered dock, the mayor, the guests, and the press, hitting the house with its full force. with a start, a gasp of awe, she saw that the wave was no wider than the house.

nothing else was even wet.

the wave receded as fast as it had come. guests sprawled in all manner of positions, river water dripping down their supine bodies, some tossed through windows of the house, a few in the pear tree down the yard.

frantically, as humans do after an incident, they started checking themselves and telling the story of what had just happened. press people lamented over their soaked equipment, guests straightened their business casual attire into wet order, and security detail blew their cover as they desperately looked for the mayor.

she felt the buoys on the side of her boat gently bump up against the river wall and realized that her jaw had dropped and her hands fallen from the wheel. the water now was utterly calm in every direction.

still shocked, she gunned the engine gently back toward the mansion.

the mayor was nowhere to be seen. nor was his wife. and others were missing. she could see the smallness of the remaining guests. all along the fence was party detritus, similar to that left by the swallowed hipsters. heeled shoes, pieces of dresses and slacks. on the surface of the water near the mansion, phones and cameras floated.

on the podium, the rose from the mayor's lapel lay, looking as if it had just bloomed.

• • •

the city tried to contain the story, but too many journalists had been knocked about in the wave, felt the strange all-powerful nature of it, saw the post-tsunami yard full of only people like themselves, from detroit.

plus the mayor was gone.

the crazy, impossible story made it to the public, and the public panicked.

she watched the island harbor empty out, the island officially closed with cement blockades across the only bridge linking it to the city. the newly sworn-in mayor was a local who had been involved in local gardening work, one of the only people willing to step up into the role. he said this was an opportunity, wrapped in a crisis, to take the city back.

she felt the population of the city diminish as investors and pioneers packed up, looking for fertile new ground.

and she noticed who stayed, and it was the same people who had always been there. a little unsure of the future maybe, but too deeply rooted to move anywhere quickly. for the first time in a long time, she knew what to say.

it never did touch us y'know. maybe, maybe it's a funny way to do it, but maybe it's a good thing we got our city back?

and folks listened, shaking their heads as they tried to understand, while their mouths agreed: it ain't how I'd have done it, but the thing is done.

she still went out in her boat, looking over the edges near the island, searching inside the river, which was her most constant companion, for some clue, some explanation. and every now and then, squinting against the sun's reflection, she'd see through the blue, something swallowed, caught, held down so the city could survive. something that never died.

something alive.

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Jayeesha Dutta is a tri-coastal, nearly tri-lingual Bengali-American multi/inter-disciplinary artist, activist, and strategist. She is a co-founding core member, space activator, and people convener for Another Gulf Is Possible Collaborative, galvanizing the voices and experiences of brown (indigenous, latinx and desi) women from across the Gulf South to the Global South working towards a just transition for our people and the planet. She is a co-founder emeritus of 826 New Orleans board of directors. Jayeesha is an avid traveler, home chef, live music lover, and adores being near (or in) any body of water. She was born in Mobile, raised in New York, aged in Oakland and is deeply grateful to call New Orleans home.

PERSPECTIVES

EXTRACT: LOCATING INDIGENEITY IN IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCES

By Adriel Luis

When the first major wave of Chinese people voyaged to the United States in the mid-19th Century, their collective journey was not yet a tale about belonging somewhere. It was about extracting resources—namely gold. Beckoned by the rush for mining this precious metal, early Chinese in America saw California as "Gold Mountain"—a trove of a certain element high in local value that could be exchanged for money to be sent home to China, where the miners would eventually return. But because of economic circumstances, the complexities of transportation—and because this is just how diaspora unfolds—many Chinese did stay. The Gold Rush was followed by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, a decree that these "guests" had no permanent

View from atop Tsoodził (Mount Taylor, New Mexico) during filming for 'Ways of Knowing.' Image by Carmille Garcia, courtesy of Bombshelltoe.

place in the fabric of American society.

But exclusion has a funny way of seeding stories of belonging, and a new immigration story emerged. *The Chinese Must Stay*, Yan Phou Lee's 1889 pronouncement that a Chinese person could indeed see oneself as American, echoed through the civil rights and ethnic studies movements of the 1960's and 70's where terms like *Chinese American* and *Asian American* became a part of the lexicon. I was born in California a century after the Chinese Exclusion act. I am not a descendant of a civil rights activist, but as a Chinese American I have inherited the struggle to belong.

I am not a descendant of a gold miner, but—as I recently came to understand—I have also inherited the legacy of resource extraction.

In 2017, I began frequenting New Mexico to work on a documentary entitled *Ways of Knowing* about the complex histories that connect Navajo Nation and the nuclear industrial complex. Led by Lovely Umayam, a nuclear policy analyst (and my partner), the film is part of a larger response to formal nuclear sectors, which have systematically ignored the Indigenous people and communities of color most intensely affected by nuclear processes such as resource extraction and

Open pit uranium mine in Grants, New Mexico circa 1968.
Image via United States Department of Energy.

weapons tests worldwide. Throughout the Cold War, over 1,000 uranium mines were established throughout Navajo Nation, and thousands of Navajo mined this substance critical to nuclear weapons and energy. Today, Navajo and other First Nations people continue to suffer the repercussions of this history through cancer, birth defects, and poverty. Yet, even for those whose families did not have direct encounters with uranium mining, a trauma reverberates throughout all of Navajo Nation: mountains and landscapes that have long been sacred sites holding deep spiritual and ancestral memory have been left blighted. Some are even marked as restricted areas due to their high levels of toxic radiation.

As I speak with people from this region, it becomes ever more apparent that the America they know is not the same one my parents and grandparents were introduced to upon arrival: Sunny Dooley, a storyteller and co-producer of our film, reminds us that Mount Taylor's enduring name is Tsoodził and that it sustained thriving ecosystems and civilizations for eons before it was designated as a uranium well or national park. Navajo activist Janene Yazzie is careful to note that her home of Lupton, Arizona is not actually where

Chinese Gold Miners in California. Pen and ink drawing by Roy Daniel Graves, 1889-1971.

her people are from, despite it being within an hour drive from Navajoland.

In such moments, I think about growing up with the politics of my Asian American identity, which adamantly center a very American sense of belonging. This is in part because immigrants and their descendants' Americanness is so often challenged that in order to survive we must dig our heels into the ground. When asked, "Where are you from?" we have trained ourselves to straighten our shoulders, make unwavering eye contact, and say, "I'm from here, dammit!" For Asian Americans, this directive applies no matter where you are in this place we call the U.S. Whether in California where I was born, New York where I moved to, or Washington, D.C. where I now live: "I'm from here." My time in New Mexico has upended my relationship to this claim for obvious reasons. There is no way I am going to approach Native American communities insisting that I'm *from here*. For the first time, I've truly had to face that even my own indignance is framed by whiteness. As a Chinese American, I embody a term that was first uttered to insist our belonging. This belonging was born out of a sense of entitlement that depopulated a continent.

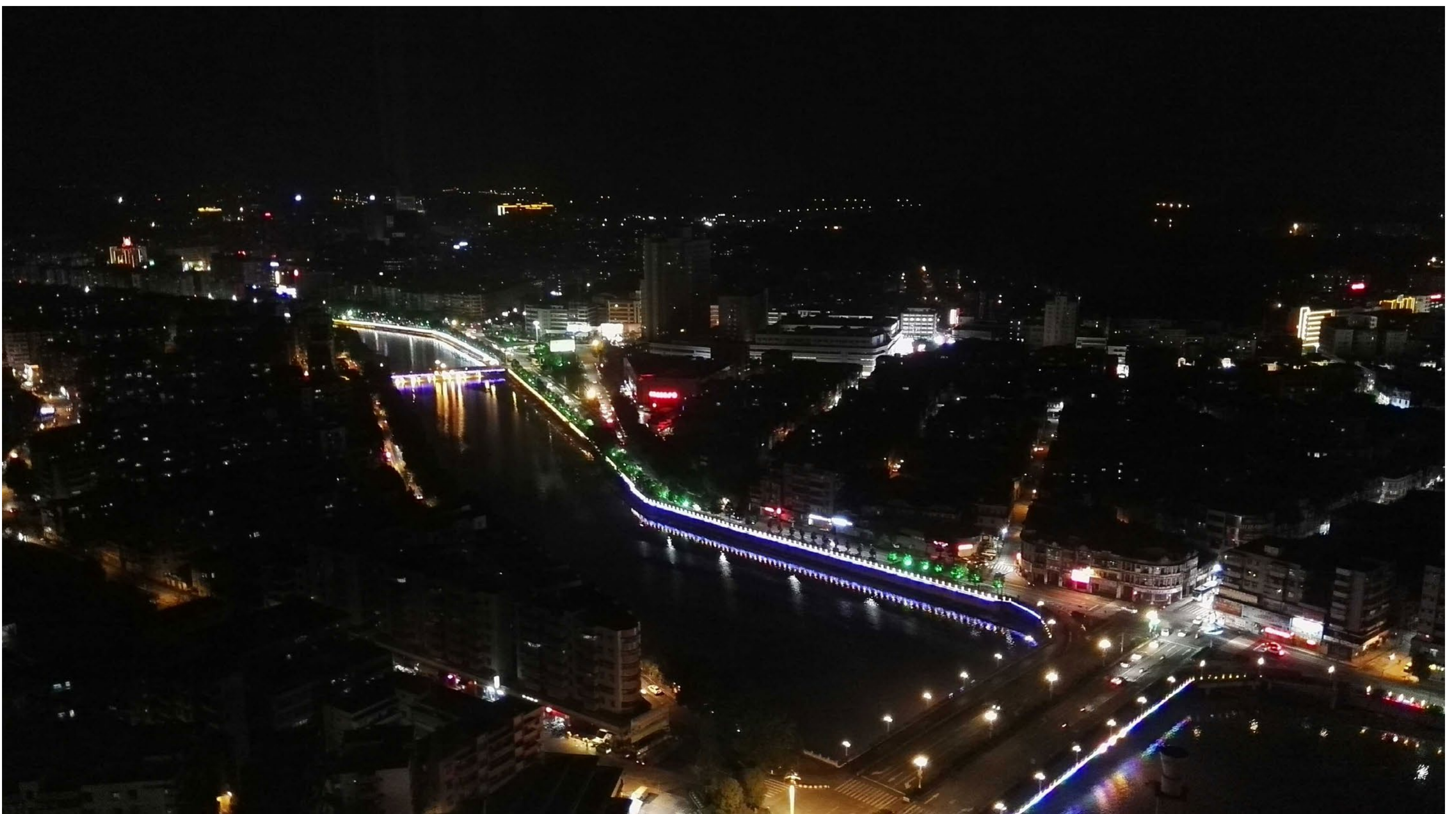
I do not fault my grandparents for not considering Native Americans when they immigrated from Hong Kong in the 1970's. Nor do I fault my parents for not raising me to be aware of the Ohlone people who were intentionally displaced by the rise of the California Bay Area. For this, I give the same justification that others use to shrug off the injustices of the past: they didn't

Illustrating the tensions that rose when Chinese people began establishing themselves in the U.S., Uncle Sam is shown here leading them back to China with what was perceived as a suitable inducement. Image circa 1880s.

know any better. That said, I can't help but long for an alternate history where Chinese settlers consulted tribal elders upon arrival, honored the sacredness of the mountains instead of exploding them with dynamite, and considered that the gold in the earth was there because it was meant to stay there undisturbed. Were these lost opportunities attributed to an immigrant's ignorance of geography and history? Did these people have a respect for their own land that did not seem to apply to that which they arrived upon? In New Mexico, the Navajo miners are understood to be both purveyors and pawns of history, and perhaps I can see my own predecessors in a similar fashion. To be an immigrant is to play the hand you're dealt, and in the United States that hand is settler colonialism.

This re-investigation of my state of belonging might beg a question any ethnic studies freshman would cringe at: *Then why don't you just go back to where you came from?* This exercise first leads me back to Hong Kong, where my family participated in yet another complex history of conquest and displacement, then to my "native" Taishan, a distant village that none of my blood relatives call home, and to which I have never been. To consider resetting roots there would be disingenuous, based more on aspiration than memory. If my ancestors had an intimate connection with that land, that thread was broken decades ago. Indigeneity, in my relationship with it, requires a continuous connection between a people and a land, of which three generations of absence cannot be bridged.

Rather than going back to where I "came from," then, I think it is more productive to reframe concepts that, in my journey to belonging, I learned to reject. I can learn to understand my immigrant experience in relation to Indigeneity as opposed to Westernism. Resting my Americanness on a history of vexed arrivals forever suspends me between inevitable-invader and perpetual-foreigner.



Downtown night scene of Taishan taken from the top of Tongji Tower, Taishan, Guangdong, China, January, 2016. Image courtesy of Zhuiyi302 (CC BY-SA 4.0).

But if I recognize the depth of this land's history and humbly ask to be welcomed in, I can see "not being from here" as an ongoing process of becoming familiar. Assimilation can be less about losing myself in exchange for favor in a social system powered by Indigenous erasure, and more about internalizing the knowledge and practices that have been the foundation to this place since long before my people called it home. And because I have already spent ample time manicuring my answer to *Where are you from?* I can shift my focus to *Who is from here?* (an inquiry that I am practicing everywhere I go, and to which tools such as Native Land have proven to be indispensable). While the past cannot be undone, the future can be approached with restored intention—and this is true no matter where we go.

This quest for belonging is deeper than Americanness, and even identity itself. In the Southwest, I hope to frame my immigrant history as one where outsiders came from afar to not just extract, but ultimately, to contribute; one where we arrived and didn't simply aspire to blend in to things as they were, but sought intimacy with a more enduring foundation. And one, finally, I can learn from and improve on in the present.

Note: Some of these reflections were originally shared during Adriel Luis' presentation, "What is Indigeneity to the Immigrant?" at Elemental Talks & Dialogue on Land, Water, Air, and Fire hosted by Miss Navajo Council in Window Rock, AZ on October 31, 2017.

Filmmaker Kayla Briët prepares to interview Navajo storyteller Sunny Dooley for 'Ways of Knowing.' Image by Carmille Garcia, courtesy of Bombshelltoe.

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About the Author

Adriel Luis is a community organizer, artist, and curator who believes that our collective imagination can make a reality where we all thrive. His life's work is focused on bridging artistic integrity and social vigilance. He is a part of the iLL-Literacy arts collective, which creates music and media to strengthen Black and Asian American coalitions, is creative director of Bombshelltoe, which works with artists to highlight marginalized communities affected by nuclear issues, and collaborates with dozens of artists and organizations through his curate and design engine, Phenomenoun. Adriel is the Curator of Digital and Emerging Practice at the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, where he advocates for under-served communities to be treated and represented equitably by museums and institutions. He and his team have been curating Culture Labs—an alternative to museum exhibitions, built on community-centered beliefs.

Adriel has recently curated shows at the Smithsonian Arts & Industries Building in Washington, D.C., the Asian Arts Initiative in Philadelphia, and an abandoned supermarket in Honolulu. His writing has appeared in Poetry Magazine, the Asian American Literary Review, and Smithsonian Magazine. He has spoken at the Tate Modern, Yale University, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the China Academy of Fine Arts. His performance venues include the Brooklyn Academy of Music, SXSW, the John F. Kennedy Center, and the American University of Paris. He has a degree in human sciences from UC Davis in Community and Regional Development, with a focus on ethnic studies.

Adriel is based in Washington D.C., has lived in New York and Beijing, but has never forgotten his roots in the California Bay Area. More information about Adriel and his work at https://drzzl.com.

PRIMARY SOURCES

WHAT HELPS YOU DREAM?

By Simi Kang

To create this list of "contraband" practices (forwarded by David Naguib Pellow in our feature of the same name), our contributors responded to the following question: If you were to gift someone one thing (reading/practice/site of engagement) to guide them to environmental justice or a different relationship with water, what would it be? The resources below were shared with me largely in informal context; I welcome you to experience this list as a living conversation rather than a formal, grammatically or structurally precise document.

As the issue editor, I want to offer my own answers as well, including a few organizations and initiatives that have been central to my ongoing education regarding environmental justice (EJ), water, and community advocacy:

First, I am constantly overwhelmed by the work of two environmental justice and water-related projects in what is called Louisiana: Another Gulf is Possible, whose name is also their platform, and the L'eau Est La Vie Camp, which continues to mobilize against the southernmost end of the Dakota Access Pipeline in Chata Houma Chittimacha Atakapaw territory.

Detail from "Washing Rice," 2018. Image courtesy of Tori Hong.

Second, Southerners on New Ground (SONG) is truly doing the work of reshaping what justice is and can be in the U.S. South. They are "committed to restoring a way of being that recognizes our collective humanity and dependence on the Earth" by envisioning "a movement in which LGBTQ people—poor and working class, immigrant, people of color, rural—take our rightful place as leaders shaping [the South's] legacy and future." This, I think, is the most concise definition of environmental justice I have encountered.

Third, BYP100 is "a national member-based organization of 18-35 year old activists and organizers creating freedom and justice for all Black people" and part of the Movement for Black Lives. Their blog is incredible and includes posts like "Turning the fight to save the environment into a fight for racial justice."

Finally, here are a few podcasts I listen to regularly that either directly engage environmental justice or whose work critically parses identities, moments, concepts, histories, and futures related to EJ:

- The Racist Sandwich is hosted by Soleil Ho and Zahir Janmohamed and focuses on "food x race x class x gender"
- How to Survive the End of the World, where adrienne maree brown and Autumn Brown commit to "learning from the apocalypse with grace, rigor and curiosity"
- Healing Justice Podcast "for stories + practices at the intersection of collective healing + social change"
- flyover, a Minnesota Public Radio series on the places and cultures of the Mississippi River

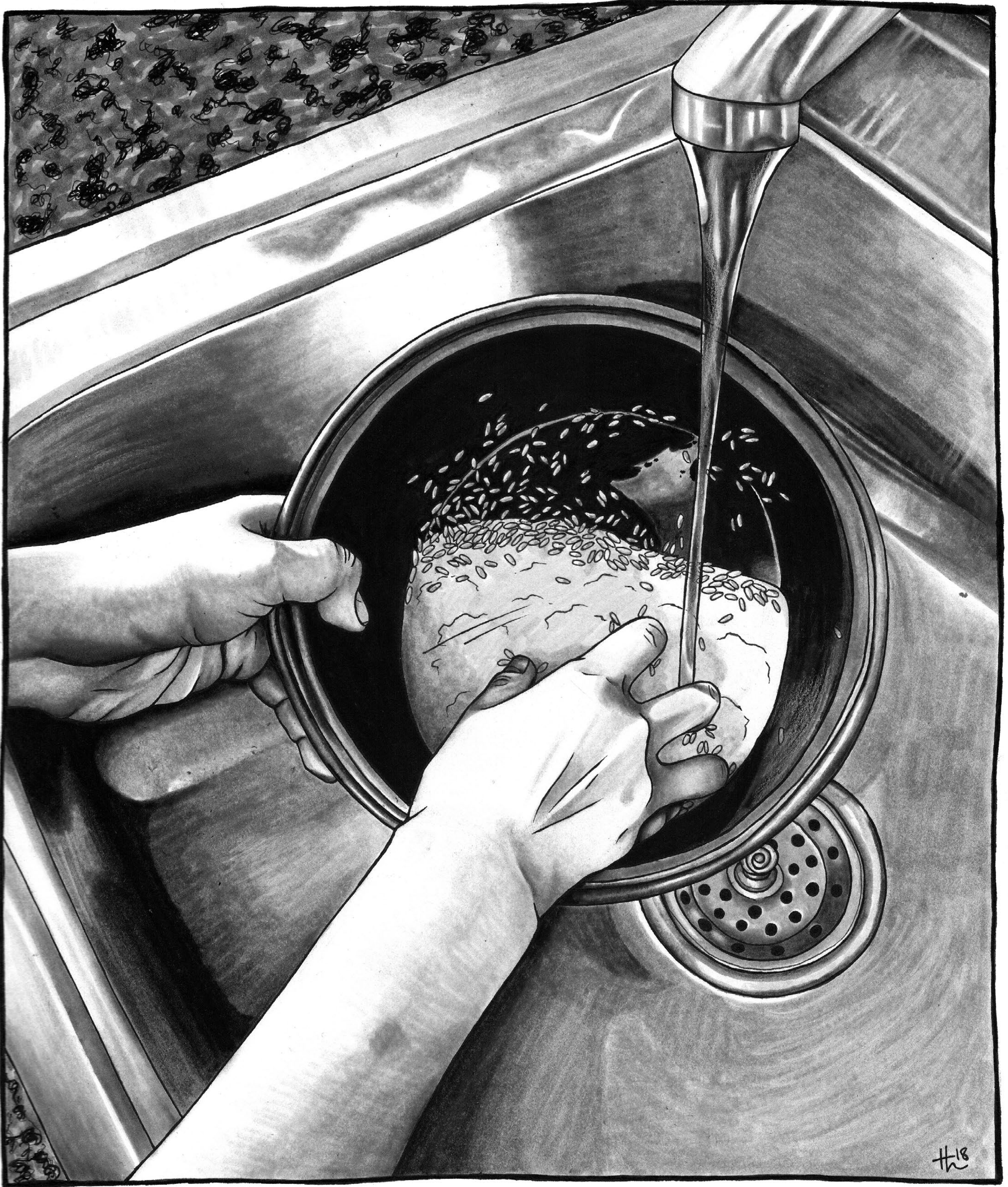
I sincerely appreciate how everyone below gave of themselves and encourage you to dig into the media, rituals, and stories from a place of curiosity and with your own work and knowledge in mind.

Siddharth Bharath Iyengar

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Ecology, Evolution and Behavior & Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change Fellow, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

As a practice, I always greet any significant body of water when I meet it. If possible, I walk down to the edge and put my hand in. In the past year, whenever I've gone to a beach, I step ankle deep in the water, and do the pranaam we use in Ananya Dance Theatre's practice of Yorccha. I do this greeting in part because I find myself very oriented to land and thinking from the terrestrial. This practice helps me decenter the terrestrial and think more of flows and connections in that moment.

As a reading, Robin Wall Kimmerer's piece titled "Learning a Grammar of Animacy" in *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World* is short, beautiful, and not beholden to any academic jargon.



Washing Rice,” 2018. Image courtesy of Tori Hong.

David Naguib Pellow

Dehlsen Professor of Environmental Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

A suggested reading that I would offer as an invaluable tool for understanding the prison system and radical forms of resistance against its brutality is Victoria Law's book Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women. While it may not seem to be explicitly tied to environmental justice (EJ) struggles at first glance, if you sit with it and engage deeply with Law's writings and the words of the imprisoned women who speak throughout the book, you will make those linkages and generate new possibilities for transformative EJ practices concerning water and for every other terrain of the struggle.

Yuan Ding

Ph.D. Candidate in English, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*. They are both great works that engage specifically with the water motif from an ecocritical point of view.

And of course, local poet and Macalester professor Wang Ping has been working on [environmental justice and water] for years and can be a fantastic resource.

Hyun Joo Oh

Ph.D. Candidate, Anthropology, University of Toronto

"Fighting for Water and Democracy against the Neoliberal Flood," a 2016 interview with Anthropologist Andrea Muehlebach on water and democracy in Italy created by This is Hell: Manufacturing Dissent since 1996.

Also, *A Vital Politics: Water Insurgencies in Europe* by Andrea Muehlebach, currently in progress.

Robert Smith III

Program Officer, Thriving Cultures, at Surdna Foundation

Definitely this podcast: The City. It is very well done investigative journalism through a racial justice/environmental justice lens.

Senah Yeboah-Sampong

Writer & High School Paraprofessional born and based in Minneapolis

I earnestly believe that the film *Princess Mononoke* is a perfect place to open questions around physical, emotional, traumatic, institutional, and even gendered elements around violence in general, environmentalism in particular. I feel like I have to repeat the fact that I'm dead serious about this. The film saw a domestic theatrical release right after I completed the most in-depth research based presentation I'd ever done, on deforestation, and it really drove a lot of what I'd been learning home.

Sasha Suarez

Ph.D. Candidate, American Studies, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

The first thing I thought of was the artwork of Lianne Charlie.

I also feel very strongly that a Nibi Walk, which is led by Anishinaabe elders, offers so much through the work they do in relation and responsibility to water.

신 선 영 辛善英 Sun Yung Shin

MAT, MFA, poet, healer, and educator

A book that is helping me understand the history on this land and water, and what it means to the Dakota, is *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota* by Gwen Westerman and Bruce White. It's not a water book, but Westerman says the direct translation of *Mni Sota Makoce* is "land where the water is so clear it reflects the sky." She says that is the version of the Dakota name used in the Treaty of 1851.

Karen Bauer

Ph.D. Student, Cultural Anthropology, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

Anthropologist Zoe Todd's article "An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word For Colonialism" precisely illustrates the problems that occur from the practice of naming. In her article, Todd focuses on Euro-Western academics' recent desire to develop scholarship that thinks beyond the human, ignoring long-standing, critical Indigenous-led ontological scholarship.

Chika Kondo 近藤千嘉

Master's Student, Kyoto University Graduate School of Agriculture, Division of Natural Resource Economics

There are over 100 Japanese proverbs and sayings that center on water. I would like to share two.

我田引水

This is a proverb that means "putting everything to suit your own personal interests will lead to isolation." It originates from the idea that water is a shared resource: the village works together and therefore they irrigate each farmer's field; because it is a resource they will all use it is also something that the village works together to share and utilize. If someone selfishly diverts the water flow to just their own field, the surrounding fields will suffer and become a breeding ground for harmful insects and disease. Therefore, everyone in the village must work cooperatively to ensure that water can continue to serve its cyclical function. Even though there are only four characters to this proverb, there is so much behind the idea that we should not ever take water for granted or use it selfishly.

流れる水は腐らず

This proverb means that water that flows will never rot. It translates to "if you keep putting in effort and trying, there will always be progress." Water teaches us that we must never stop flowing. I always admire the great, beautiful boulders and tiny pebbles you find in the rivers— they become what they are, become their formation, because of flowing water. I hope that in my efforts to always practice and live out environmental justice (EJ), I will never stop moving.

A daily practice that anyone can do even if they are not by a body of water is to take a moment to drink water (hydration is vital to healthy bodies)

and give a small thanks. A thank you to knowing that the water you are drinking flowed through many channels and spirits and working hands of both people and nature.

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About the Author

Simi Kang is a Doctoral Dissertation Fellow in the Feminist Studies Program at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. A Sikh American educator, scholar, artist, and community advocate, she centers Asian/American stories and knowledges to interrogate the intersection of environment and policy. Kang's work has been supported in many ways big and small by her interlocutors in Louisiana and was funded by the UMN Graduate School and Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change. Her work has appeared in *The Asian American Literary Review, Gravy Quarterly, Hyphen Magazine, Kartika Review, Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community*, and *Jaggery: A DesiLit Arts and Literature Journal*.

TEACHING AND PRACTICE

"THE SOUL TO SEE": TOWARD A HOODOO ETHNOGRAPHY

By David Todd Lawrence

In his book, *How Racism Takes Place*, George Lipsitz (2011: 5, emphasis mine) contends that "race is produced by space," and that "it takes places for racism to take place." While Lipsitz focuses primarily on the intersection of race and space in *urban* settings, racialized spatial practices in *rural* environments can be just as devastating to communities of color, if not more so. In the case of Pinhook, a black village in southeast Missouri whose displaced residents I have worked with for almost eight years along with my colleague, Elaine Lawless, the

Ruins of Pinhook Union Baptist Church circa 2014. Like all buildings in the village, the church was completely submerged for more than two weeks. It was set ablaze by an arsonist soon after the water subsided and was later demolished along with remaining town buildings in 2015. Image courtesy of David Todd Lawrence.

devastation occurred because of an unwillingness to see followed by a callous indifference to black suffering. A village[1] of black farmers who had lived on the same piece of land for seventy years was not noticed, not consulted, and not effectively warned that the levee separating them from the dangerously swollen Mississippi River during the historic flooding of 2011 would be breached to save an historical industrial city that no longer exists.[2] The most common question people ask about Pinhook is, "how could this have happened?" We wondered the same thing when we first began working with its displaced residents, and have argued subsequently that Pinhookians were rendered invisible, erased by a society that should have seen them. What I am considering here is how could ethnography (the study and description of people and cultures)—a specifically black ethnography that resists and refuses the racist and colonialist scripts that render blackness abject—illuminate the wonderful past, present, and future of blackness in whatever spaces it occupies?

The black farmers and rural folk of Pinhook, whose ancestors arrived in the Missouri Bootheel in the early 1940s seeking to purchase land and build a community, discovered that the only land available to them was located inside the Birds Point–New Madrid Floodway—swampland designated for river overflow. It was land that nobody wanted, but they bought it anyway, cleared it, and made something good out of it. They made a home. They made a community. They made a life. Yet in an instant, that home, that community, and that life were all violently upended by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' operation of the floodway. As official narratives of the Corps and other agencies suggest, the operation of the floodway was compelled by extreme weather conditions; the Corps had no choice but to do what it did—and what it did was destroy the village of Pinhook, Missouri.[3]

Yet, as countless scholars of disaster have argued, it is all too easy to attribute such events to nature, to call them "natural disasters" and cast them as unforeseeable and unpreventable occurrences. As Anissa Janine Wardi (2011: 117) explains, disasters—and flooding in particular—bring "into relief societal inequity, racial hierarchies, resource allocation, and government policies" that manifest with disproportionate impacts on marginalized communities. Scholars focusing on race and class have written about this quite frequently with regard to Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans. Much Katrina scholarship has clearly demonstrated that the effects of disaster are not borne equally. Those effects are unequally distributed largely according to the space communities occupy. The social, economic, political, and racial dynamics of space play an undeniable role in determining who is affected and the ways in which they are affected.

In her TED Talk on black people and time, scholar Brittany Cooper (2016) explains how historically black people have been perceived as "space takers" while white people were "world makers." According to the logic of white supremacy, "space takers" occupy space they are not entitled to. They must be moved out of those spaces into less valuable, more precarious ones, and once there, their bodies and the communities they have built are erased from social, political, and historical reality. Like Lipsitz, Cooper focuses on black people in urban spaces in her analysis. Both scholars are responding to a white racial imaginary in which black people exist only in urban spaces; however many black people do live in rural spaces, and they often suffer doubly because their existence in rural spaces that have already been undervalued is made even more precarious by their erasure from spaces in which they are not understood to exist. Urbannormative practices devalue rural spaces as uninhabited "nowhere[s]" or spaces "out of which resources can be extracted" (Alexander et al 2012: 64, 66). From an urbannormative perspective, people don't exist in rural spaces—*black people especially*. As a result, the rural existence of a black village like Pinhook becomes an aberration in our spatial imaginary

that renders its inhabitants unheeded, unseen, and unprotected.

In this way, preexisting slow violence is concealed by the more legible mechanism of the natural disaster itself, which as generally understood, is not attributable to human causes. Thereby, the harms of structural racism and the violence of environmental injustice on communities of color are obscured. Consequently, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the federal government could deny any responsibility for the destruction of Pinhook; in fact, as they claim, their actions saved lives and land in almost miraculous fashion. The Corps was not the author of devastation; it was more accurately the divine hand of God.[4]

Failure to interrogate such racialized structures will lead to a future in which people of color and other marginalized communities or "space takers" will be increasingly funneled into the most precarious, dangerous, and vulnerable spaces—rural coasts, floodplains, and water insecure or environmentally hazardous areas—and then forgotten. Historically this has been the case and it continues in our present. Once devalued urban centers and coastal areas will be deliberately repossessed from under-resourced and marginalized communities pushing more people into precarious spaces, subjecting them to erasure and vulnerability to increasing environmental harms.

The recognition of a re-imagined future is necessary to prevent such erasure from continuing. We must endeavor to shift the valuation of communities and their places from economic measures to those that recognize cultural, traditional, and community significance. One way this can be fostered is through a collaborative ethnography that embraces and encourages marginalized communities to tell their own stories and to mark their rightful places in our world. Collaborative and community-based research can help enable voices and agency in marginalized communities by working to create environments where research collaborators can be empowered to take agency and wield their own voices in powerful ways.

To this end, I call for an ethnography that engages the political ramifications of place, otherness, invisibility, and precariousness. So often qualitative research in communities of color has been undertaken by white scholars within a "neutral" or "objective" framework. This so-called neutrality or objectivity, in fact, obscures and devalues the true value of communities of color and their places. Following theorists Christina Sharpe (2016: 13) and Zensele Isoke (2018), I am calling, instead, for an ethnography that participates in a reconnection with a black "past not past" as Sharpe puts it, a re-turning toward black ancestry, black traditions, and black ancestral land.

As others already have, I call for an ethnography that functions in collaboration with and recognizes the impossible yet necessary project of advocacy with the people we collaborate with; an ethnography that interrogates structures of power and oppression that impact marginalized people and communities of color disproportionately; an ethnography that embraces liberatory practices, that is radical and speaks along with the folk we collaborate with. More specifically, I, like Isoke (2018: 154), call for a distinctly black ethnography that "studies the way blackness moves, the way it speaks, the way it articulates itself—and reimagines the world to make itself belong—for a fleeting moment *in the break*." We need a Hoodoo Ethnography.

Hoodoo, an African American spiritual practice, is, as Zora Neale Hurston (1931) has explained, improvisational and flexible—it adapts, conforms, borrows from the contexts it finds itself in contact with. Rather than arriving cloaked in the power and authority of institution, Hoodoo Ethnography seeks to commune with cultural contexts and recognize their power and value. As Hurston (1931: 358) realized during her "negotiation" with Hoodoo doctor Samuel Thornton,

Zora Neale Hurston, 1938. Via the Carl Van Vechten Collection, Library of Congress.

the extraordinarily high price he quoted to share his knowledge with her was not about money at all, but rather a way of assuring that she "had the soul to see."

Hoodoo Ethnography has the willingness to see, to recognize the value of black places, black community, black history, black traditions, and black ancestors—and to imagine the possibilities of a black future. Like Hoodoo itself, which relies on a belief in the permeability of the boundaries between times, between worlds, and between ways of being, Hoodoo Ethnography requires a surrender and vulnerability to another presence that cannot be controlled or even fully understood, that may overtake us without warning. The boundaries to be crossed should be done so in a way that allows us as ethnographers to surrender power and submit to the traditions and histories that lie within ourselves and our collaborators—and in the souls of our ancestors.

A Hoodoo Ethnography cannot help but be radical and political. It refuses the imposition of judgment and opens to a radical sensibility of the other and the self. It interrogates injustice. It is open to the horrors and terrors of black existence—past and present—and it roots itself in the beautiful future realities produced by black cultural innovations and improvisations which emerge along with and in spite of haunting injustice.

Pinhook descendent Edward Lee Williams and his son enjoy fellowship during Pinhook Day Homecoming in May of 2018. Each year Pinhookians return to celebrate their community's history and traditions. In 2018 they celebrated on Pinhook land under a picnic shelter built and donated by Mennonite Disaster Services. Image courtesy of David Todd Lawrence.

I have witnessed this very emergence in my work with the still surviving community of Pinhook; I have witnessed the beauty and power of this group of people who built a home in a place nobody wanted alongside the Mississippi River. I have been astonished by the beauty of their refusal to be erased by an indifferent and powerful oppressor. Had their community been recognized and considered as valuable as the farmland and industrial capital on the other side of the Mississippi, perhaps the decision whether or not to blow the levee might have been taken differently. A Hoodoo Ethnography has the potential to understand and convey the immense value communities of color have created in their places—precarious and otherwise.

As Cooper calls for a shared temporal re-conceptualization as a way to mitigate the theft of black time, we must embrace an ethnography that contributes to a collective re-imagining of communities and their places which recognizes their value and refigures space not as a competitive racialized zero-sum competition, but as an assemblage of meaningful places wherein we can imagine and build equitable futures together. Hoodoo Ethnography has a vital role to play in making that re-imagining possible and legible.

Footnotes

[1] As an incorporated community of less than 100 people, Pinhook, Missouri was designated a village by the state of Missouri. At the time of its destruction, the population of Pinhook was somewhere between fifty and sixty residents according to resident accounts.

[2] For a more detailed description and discussion of the destruction of Pinhook, see David Todd Lawrence and Elaine J. Lawless, *When They Blew the Levee: Race, Politics, and Community in Pinhook, Missouri*, University of Mississippi Press, 2018.

[3] Official narratives and reports commissioned by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and other federal agencies generally present this conclusion.

[4] Astoundingly, the official narrative commissioned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and written by Charles Camillo detailing the Corps' actions during the historic flood of 2011 is titled *Divine Providence*.

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