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Interdependence as a Lifeway: Decolonization and Resistance in Transnational Native
American and Tibetan Communities

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Religious Studies

by

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September 2015

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June 2015

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American and Tibetan Communities

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by

Natalie Avalos Cisneros

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ABSTRACT

Interdependence as a Lifeway: Decolonization and Resistance in Transnational Native
American and Tibetan Communities

by

Natalie Avalos Cisneros

Struggles for decolonization are not only national but also transnational and global. While decolonization projects are diverse, they generally call for both the undoing of colonization as a structure and the amelioration of its psychological and ideological effects. Native American communities have been waging resistance to settler societies in various ways for over 500 years. In the last 50 years, Tibetans in exile have mobilized a global project to resist Chinese occupation through the ‘Tibet movement.’ Native American religious traditions are rooted in a sacred relationship to the land, one’s community and the spirit world. The spirit world consists of the dynamic ‘life force’ immanent in all natural phenomena. Native American peoples cite an interdependent relationship to all natural phenomena as the fundamental logic driving the protection of sacred sites, sustainable ways of living and nationhood. Tibetan Buddhism combines land-based conceptualizations of relatedness to Buddhist philosophical concepts of ‘dependent origination’ –meaning that all phenomena are inextricably ‘dependent’ on one another—to theorize a unique form of interdependence. Buddhist ethics rooted in interdependence encourage empathy and compassion for all others, since they are ultimately an extension of one’s self. This dissertation analyzes the role of religion in the decolonization movements of transnational Native Americans and Tibetan communities living in the U.S. A core focus of many decolonization movements is resisting culture erasure through religious revitalization—the

logic being religion constitutes the core values and traditions of a given community. When cultural identity is strengthened these communities are better able to resist colonial advances as well as practices of extermination. I ask, how does interdependence as a ‘lived’ tradition resist colonization as both a structure and ideology? In addition, how are these religious traditions informing global movements for decolonization? I argue that cultural regeneration—centrally in the form of religion practice—is a driving factor in resistance, if not sometimes the very practice of resistance. This research demonstrates that religious praxis not only resists cultural erasure and assuages colonization’s psychic/psychological effects but also *regenerates* Tibetan and Native peoplehood, contributing to their projects of sovereignty. Religious praxis heals and strengthens these communities but is also understood to create the material conditions for liberation—in essence, spiritual phenomena reconfigures the material world—for example, through the ritual purification of karma or the purification of one’s body in the sweat lodge. The dynamic intersection of religion and politics in these movements provides a new perspective on social justice and humanitarianism, illustrating that the just and humane treatment of others is necessitated in world in which others are an extension of one’s self.

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Introduction

Global struggles for decolonization are increasingly transnational. While decolonization projects are diverse, they generally call for both the undoing of colonization as a structure and the removal of its psychological, structural and ideological effects. Scholars have recognized the ways religious continuity among colonized peoples strengthens in-group identity, particularly in diaspora—the logic being religion constitutes the core values and traditions of a given community. Native American religious traditions are rooted in a sacred relationship to the land, one’s community and the spirit world. Native American peoples cite an interdependent relationship to these sacred phenomena as the fundamental logic driving the protection of sacred sites, sustainable ways of living and nationhood. Tibetans combine an indigenous conceptualization of interdependence with the Buddhist concept of ‘dependent arising,’ which argues against intrinsic existence, to formulate a unique ontological conceptualization of interdependence. Buddhist ethics rooted in interdependence encourage empathy and compassion for all others, since they are ultimately an extension of one’s self. Considering the interdependent relationships Native American and Tibetan peoples have with their homelands, how do these metaphysical frameworks shape strategies for sovereignty in transnational and diaspora communities? My research analyzes how the religious lifeways of these two traditions act as socio-political framework for their respective decolonization movements. I argue that religious continuity not only serves as a form of resistance and survival but also that the lived expressions of these traditions facilitate both the personal and political dimensions of decolonization. Although their struggles for sovereignty are multivalent, placing Native American and Tibetan decolonization movements in conversation illustrates the ways religious identity re-imagines communities as exceeding

the bounded nation and religious discourse shapes global struggles against colonialism and its effects.

Over twenty months of ethnographic research in Santa Fe and Albuquerque with their sizable transnational Tibetan and Native American communities and found that religious retention and regeneration is framed as an integral factor in resistance. Tibetan religious life consists of complex relationships with deities, chthonic powers embedded in the natural world and enlightened beings.¹ Interdependence or ‘dependent arising’ is a fundamental Buddhist concept that conveys the nature of reality, and the self, as devoid of intrinsic existence, and thus ‘empty.’ The original conceptualization of this notion is therefore metaphysical. But Tibetan refugees, specifically its most famous one, the Dalai Lama, have extrapolated from this context to broaden the notion, constructing themselves as immigrant ambassadors in an “interdependent” world that transcends the nation-state and is in need of a moral center that Tibetan Buddhism can inform.² Similarly, Native scholars and activists also use metaphysical conceptualizations of the world, such as interdependence with the land and one another, to argue for the protection of Native American religious traditions and for the ethical treatment of the earth and the phenomena residing within it.³ It is these sacred relationships to the land, sacred *power* and “all one’s relations” that is most often cited as the basis for Native American religious traditions and Native identity.⁴ Due to parallel

¹ See Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, Samuel, *Civilized Shamans* and Mills, *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism*.

² See Hess, *Immigrant Ambassadors*.

³ See Gregory Cajete’s *Native Science*, Vine Deloria, Jr.’s *God is Red*, Oscar Kawagley’s *A Yupiak Worldview*, and Taiake Alfred’s *Wasáse*.

⁴ See Vine Deloria, Jr.’s *God is Red*, Suzanne Crawford O’Brien’s *Religion and Healing in Native America*, Chris Jocks’s “American Indian Religious Traditions and the Academic Study of Religion: A Response to Sam Gill,” Joel Martin’s *The Land Looks After Us*, and Ines Talamantez’s “Teaching Native American Religious Traditions and Healing.”

metaphysical orientations that theorize the ‘interdependence’ of all phenomena, one’s words, thoughts and actions are understood to have material results. Thus, religious praxis is understood to both assuage colonization’s psychic/psychological effects and create the material conditions for liberation.

Colonial violence and displacement has complicated the lives of these two communities. A growing body of literature on historical trauma argues that trauma inflicted in cases of a holocaust or genocide continues to affect generations of people, even after the initial incidents, manifesting into a group traumatic experience. High rates of suicide, domestic violence and substance abuse in Native American communities have been attributed to continued structural violence and historical trauma. Studies have shown that cultural retention and revitalized religious traditions enable Native communities to heal from this form of trauma. While there is no research that specifically connects historical trauma to Tibetan refugee communities, the literature reveals that religious practice plays a pivotal role in ameliorating the forms of trauma that Tibetans do exhibit. While expressions of anger and grief abound, transnational religious and community leaders encourage their peoples to redirect their energies to the spiritual path. My research demonstrates that in doing so, many Native American and Tibetan peoples regenerate or retain their sense of agency, which may have been otherwise compromised through the multiple structures of colonialism, such as racialization. In this way, the regeneration or continuation of religious praxis and views help both communities explore what decolonization looks like.

Transnational Native American and Tibetan peoples use their religious/traditional knowledge and practices to assert their sovereignty in relation to settler states. Some establish sacred sites or places of practice in their new homelands, while others may travel back

‘home’ to participate in ceremony or rituals. Although scholars have noted that identity is mostly asserted through common cultural modalities, such as religion or dress, this framework flattens the complexity of personhood among Native and Tibetan communities. Instead, I frame their cultural modalities as ‘lifeworlds’ in order to convey an embodied notion of personhood that is constructed in complex relationship to indigenous metaphysical concepts, the land/natural world and the mundane/transmundane spiritual *powers* that are active in that world

Native scholars often frame their lifeworlds as a ‘lifeway,’ not as a practice external to self, but rather as a set of ethics that shapes one’s way of life. It follows that assertions of identity and self-determination would be demarcated by these ‘lifeways.’ However, study on the persistence of traditional Native lifeworlds, particularly on its metaphysical and spiritual conceptualizations, in a transnational context, or outside of the ‘nation,’ has not been explored in depth.⁵ Self-determination for purposes of this project means that distinct peoples, whether they define themselves as “nations” or not, have the right to be acknowledged as autonomous “and, as such, to be in control of their own destinies under conditions of equality.”⁶ This study demonstrates that it is largely through the mediation of their traditional lifeworlds and the struggle to retain a personhood that embodies the aesthetics, values and practices, rooted in these lifeworlds, that these communities manage to remain or regenerate

⁵ The exception is Renya Ramirez’s *Native Hubs*, which explores the persistence of Native identity in a transnational context. While the persistence of Native spiritual lifeways in these contexts is mentioned it is not the central focus of her study.

⁶ James S. Anaya, “International Law and U.S. Trust Responsibility toward Native Americans.” In *Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance*, edited by Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker and David Eugene Wilkins (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 170-71. Additionally, the International Encyclopedia of Human Rights explains self-determination as: “the notion that any group of people who consider themselves a separate national entity on the basis of shared characteristics or history is uniquely and exclusively qualified to determine its own political status.

“Native” and “Tibetan” identities and lifeways. It is this creative regeneration of individual identity in relation to the community that facilitates personal decolonization, which, in turn, informs larger projects of decolonization that seek to overturn the structures of settler colonialism. This study explores the relationship between the construction of agency via the practices, values and aesthetics of these respective lifeworlds and discourses of nationhood and decolonization—demonstrating the dialectic between the two.

A large swath of existing scholarship Tibetan communities frames their lifeworlds, or worldviews, as animistic, shamanic, supernatural or even primitive. These pejorative perspectives are rooted in a social evolutionary framework that distorts the complexity and meaning of these traditions. Scholarship on Tibetan communities generally focuses on Tibetans as religious, and even political, subjects rooted in exotic lifeworlds but often neglect how the “magical” or metaphysical concepts of these lifeworlds combine in efforts for self-determination.⁷ The intervention this study makes is to foreground transnational Tibetan and Native constructions of subjectivity, negotiations of healing and political mobilization as primarily religious phenomena that engages metaphysical and spiritual conceptualizations that are often misunderstood or ignored by current scholarship.

Transnational identity has come to be synonymous with ‘global’ citizenship, a position that transcends individual citizenship and emphasizes participation in a group, a particular people or an ethnic group. For instance, an indigenous person in the U.S. may be a citizen of a “Native nation,” the U.S., Canada, Mexico, or elsewhere in Latin America but may also recognize a “cultural citizenship” among their own people because many transnational peoples seek to retain their identity and lifeways outside of their home nations.

⁷ An exception is Ronald Schwartz’s *Circle of Protest* however this work focuses on Tibetan protest in the TAR. He distinguishes between ethical/rational aspects of religious life with ‘magical’ or superstitious aspects, failing to explore how they may work together while noting they co-exist.

Thus, self-determination for these peoples is often the ability to maintain cultural citizenship and may be exemplified in various acts of resistance to oppression, assimilation or cultural erasure. This layered identity complicates definitions of nationhood and sovereignty for transnational peoples. They may align themselves with their own peoples but also see themselves as citizens of the world, broadening nationhood to include hemispheric peoples or even all peoples. These definitions are further complicated by metaphysical perceptions of the world, which include spirits, deities and various spiritual forces. Tibetans, as Buddhists, pray for the benefit of “all peoples” and are instructed to respect all living beings. Native American peoples are instructed through their creation stories to act as stewards of the earth and care for their community, which would include all living phenomena in the natural world: animals, rocks, wind etc. With communities as broadly defined as these, the negotiation of nationhood and sovereignty is complex for transnational Tibetan and American peoples. Thus, I frame the religious modalities of these two communities as ‘lifeways’ in order to convey an embodied notion of personhood that is constructed in complex relationship to these metaphysical conceptualizations.

The meta-narrative of this study explores how decolonization projects, rooted in or informed by traditional lifeworlds, are reshaping anticolonialist activisms and the transnational struggle for human rights by Indigenous peoples, who forge a diverse “global community.” In this way, this project explores the possibilities of decolonial ways of being by analyzing how both Native American and Tibetan communities look to the past and into the future to forge new identities and forms of resistance. By tethering religious lifeworlds to political discourse and mobilization, this project highlights the relationship between the kinds of world-making involved in religious engagement and related forms of creative regeneration

necessary to cultivate nationhood. The very world-making involved in regenerated practice provides the ground of new social and political forms that do not rely on asymmetrical or exploitative power relations to exist and thus, construct diverse possibilities for a more just world. Thus, this study illustrates how decolonization is a *process*, a creative process that transforms persons, communities, and relations of power.

Chapters

Colonial violence and displacement has complicated the lives of these two communities. While expressions of anger and grief abound, transnational religious and community leaders encourage their peoples to redirect their energies to the spiritual path. My research demonstrates that in doing so, many Native American and Tibetan peoples manifest attitudes and action that is self-determining. Self-determination is a critical expression of decolonization and in this context includes: healing from historical trauma; regenerating as individuals and peoples; and being actively invested in the wellbeing and survival of others. Chapter one provides a short history and context for each community—what is their experience of colonization and how have its effects transformed their lives, catalyzed diaspora, etc.? This chapter also includes a discussion of my methodological approach and a short snapshot of each community in New Mexico. In chapter two, I lay out my theoretical framework for this project—the existing literature related to this project in both Native American studies and Tibetan studies as well as a more detailed exploration of the discourses on healing, decolonization, sovereignty, and nationhood that will be drawn from throughout the chapters.

Chapter three, “Planting Yourself in the Land: Native American Religious Regeneration in Transnational Perspective” demonstrates that Native American religious

practice thrives in urban/ transnational spaces like Albuquerque, due to an increasingly hemispheric pan-Indian identity that unites urban Indians from diverse backgrounds in their struggle to resist cultural erasure, articulating a form of “nationhood” in diaspora that exceeds the singular Native nation. Chapter four, “Regenerating as People: Re-Enchantment in the Land of Enchantment,” argues that the regeneration of Native American religious lifeways actually facilitate decolonization—healing colonization’s psychological and structural effects. For instance, it explores how the creation and use of a community sweat lodge works to heal the violence and historical trauma of a mostly Native American and Chicano community. Chapter five, “Extending the Sacred World: The Religious Logics of Native American Decolonization,” demonstrates that decolonization as a project transforms persons, who in turn work to make structural changes from an indigenist agenda in their communities.

Chapter six, “The Tibetan Religious Landscape: Politics and Religion in Exile,” argues that the creation of a Tibetan religious landscape in exile, consisting of a community center, dharma centers and stupas allows the Tibetan community in Santa Fe to combine religion and politics in a new way, which nurtures transnational cultural identity and integrates dharma in all community related events—most of which are directed at the liberation of Tibet. Chapter seven, “Cultivating Liberation: Religious Praxis as Tibetan Decolonization,” I argue that Tibetans in exile use Buddhist practice to assuage both the suffering they experience due to the occupation of Tibet as well as the suffering of all others; practice is also utilized as a means to create the causes and conditions for the liberation of Tibet. Chapter eight, “Tibetan Resistance in Exile: The Lhakar Movement,” explores the Lhakar movement as a project of decolonization. It analyzes the discourses of sovereignty

and nationhood on Tibetan Uprising Day to argue that their confluence amounts to the regeneration of Tibetan ‘peoplehood’ and thus sovereignty.

Religious continuity not only serves as form of resistance and survival but the lived expressions of these traditions provide a means for self-determination and community empowerment, ultimately translating to decolonization. The populist nature of these movements articulate a form of citizenship that de-centers the nation-state, imagining “nations” united by their religious aesthetics and worldviews. The conclusion, “Indigenous Futurity: A Sociopolitical Vision of Interdependence,” argues that the socio-political frameworks of transnational Tibetan and Native American decolonization movements envision a more just world—where the understanding that others are an extension of one’s self necessitate their just and humane treatment. In addition, Tibetan and Native American decolonization projects challenge materialist interpretations of political praxis by positioning religious practice as an efficacious tool of resistance and social change. Thus, we can understand these transnational movements as a form of anti-oppression politics that can potentially “unsettle” the settler state by offering alternative forms of citizenship and nationhood in opposition to statist systems.

Chapter 1: History and Context

Native American Colonization and its Effects

Native American communities have been waging resistance to settler societies in various ways for over 500 years. Colonization in the U.S. and Canada was facilitated by state policies of extermination and assimilation, resulting in the systematic dispossession of Native peoples over a period of hundreds of years. This dispossession separated Indigenous peoples from their lands and ways of life. For instance, Native American religious traditions, such as the Sun Dance, were banned at the end of the Indian Wars in the 1880's, when most Native tribes were confined to reservations and Bureau of Indian Affairs agents, along with missionaries, policed their activities.⁸ BIA agents and missionaries targeted medicine men and other religious leaders, as a "corrupting force" in the community. They were often jailed or even executed, leaving many tribes devoid of traditional leadership and spiritual guidance. These bans would not be lifted until 1934 and protection for Native American religious life would not be enacted till the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978. However, many tribes are still trying to not only understand the damage wrought by the myriad forms of dispossession but how to recover from them.

Native scholars describe the current period of Native-U.S. relations as the phase of self-determination—where Native tribes are seeking autonomy and also demanding that the U.S. government honor its treaties with Native nations. Self-determination, often theorized in terms of nationhood and sovereignty, is typically conceptualized in structural, legal and socio-economic terms. However, self-determination also involves the protection and

⁸ Clyde Holler, "The Sun Dance Under Ban, 1883-1934/1952," in *Black Elk's Religion* (NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995) 110.

reinstitution of what Vine Deloria, Jr. calls a “way of life,” which means the restitution of knowledges, practices and beliefs:

The pressing need today is that the United States not only recognize the international status of the Indian tribes, which survives the determinations of the Indian Claims Commission, but that it also authorize the creation of a special court to settle treaty violations... The claim of American Indians against the United States is not simply a demand for compensation for lands lost, but also a demand that a way of life that nearly lost be protected from further depredations. The movement to reclaim that life and the independence which characterized it lies at the heart of the current Indian unrest and demonstration.⁹

Native peoples do not see themselves as ethnic minorities within the US or Canada but as separate nations that are autonomous, necessitating nation-to-nation relations with the US and Canada. Native attempts at large scale assimilation continually failed in Indian country and in cities because the white majority only conditionally accepted Native people.

This shift from almost total repression in the late 19th century to an active resistance movement for self-determination can be attributed to a shift in cultural consciousness in the Indian community. Many scholars cite the work of Deloria itself as catalyzing radical change. His 1972 religious manifesto, *God is Red*, where he takes the U.S. government to task for breaking nearly every Indian treaty, is cited by contemporary Indian activists and as the rallying cry for Native cultural regeneration. The initial movement for self-determination for Native peoples in the U.S. was modeled on Western standards of education, economic independence and self-government.¹⁰ While this reformist movement led to the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, which gave Indian tribes greater autonomy over their public works, public intellectuals like Deloria questioned the ultimate value of these reforms. He argued that the institution of Western models led Native peoples

⁹ Vine Deloria, Jr., *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1974), 228.

¹⁰ Vine Deloria, Jr., *Spirit and Reason: The Vine Deloria, Jr., Reader*, edited by Vine Deloria, Jr., Samuel Scinta, Kristen Foehner, and Barbara Deloria (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999), 144-46.

to objectify others in ways that do not correspond to Indigenous values and resulted in an ethical deterioration among tribal communities.¹¹ The fallout of this decline led to, in turn, a critical reevaluation of Western ideals and structures and then to an ideological shift among many Native peoples during the 1960's and 1970's. This shift contributed to a cultural renewal that has been theorized as an important step towards self-determination.¹² Deloria speaks to this shift in 1974's *Broken Treaties* as follows:

It has been only within the last decade that Indians have taken a critical look at their history, their conditions, and the answers that American society ha[s] given them to explain their fall from prosperity.... For the first time in history, American Indians are exploring the old legal doctrines, the cultural attitudes of themselves and white society, and the history of the peoples of the world to find answer to the present confusion. As this search has proceeded, the rejection of the old ideology of the innate inferiority of the tribal culture and the superiority of the Western European way of life has been profound and extensive, especially among the younger and more educated Indians. The more the Indians discovered about themselves and about American history and the history and the fate of the other peoples of the world, the more they have sought refuge in the tribal customs, beliefs, and traditions that have remained.¹³

This time period catalyzed a cultural renaissance of sorts as well as a growing awareness that the everyday oppression experienced by Native peoples was not a social fact that needed to be accepted by a structure superimposed upon them by the state, which they now could strategize to work against. For instance, the American Indian Movement, which was made up of mostly urban Indians, began in 1968 in response to the civil rights movement. These Native activists were not seeking civil rights, although they did have grievances over racism and poverty—particularly police brutality—but instead sought human rights and called on the federal government to honor its treaties with Native nations. After this period, it became

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹² See Joanne Nagel's *American Indian Ethnic Renewal*. Nagel argues that a creation of 'pan Indian' identity through pow-wows, AIM and a renewal of traditional practices, such as language programs and the reintroduction of past ceremonies since the 1960's, has enabled many Native communities to theorize themselves as a cohesive group who can achieve self-determination collectively.

¹³ Deloria, *Broken Treaties*, 249-50.

more common for Native people to assert their “Native” identity in order to survive and thrive under colonial rule.

In recent decades, many Native American and other dispossessed scholars and activists began to frame their often-parallel resistance movements as one of “decolonization.” Indigenous peoples who continue to struggle for the recognition of their rights as nations, through US courts and International courts, and those who are considered ‘minorities’ in the West: exiles, diaspora communities and those who have been totally dispossessed of their lands. In the U.S., that would include Chicanos, African Americans, Japanese Americans, Hmong peoples, Guamanian Chamorros, Filipino Americans, Vietnamese Americans, Hawaiians, Arab Americans, etc. They recognized that it was not just civil rights or political autonomy that they sought but also cultural autonomy—a right to assert one’s own cultural perspective and sensibility with out fear of being deemed “inferior.” And so, while Native activists still seek out self-determination and full autonomy for Native nations began to understand “decolonization” as a process that would contribute to their ultimate goal of self-determination. Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, defines colonization as a the state of being— to be “colonized” is to the internalize the logics that sustain colonization, such as racialization. The somatic expression of colonization is most harmful because, “its impact is still being felt, despite the apparent independence gained by former colonial territories.... we perceive a need to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to recover an authentic humanity.”¹⁴ I will say more about the contemporary decolonization movement below.

Tibetan Colonization and its Effects

¹⁴ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2002) 23.

Over the last 50 years, Tibetans in exile have mobilized a global project to resist Chinese occupation through the Tibet movement. This movement is transnational and is facilitated by Tibetan refugees around the world. While China and Tibet historically have had a complex relationship throughout history. Whatever that relationship was like in the past, after the overthrow of the Kuomintang and the creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the new communist government laid claim to Tibet in October 1949:

As soon as the Communists came to power in Beijing in October 1949, General Chu De, the Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) declared that Tibet was part of the PRC and that the next task of the PLA was to "liberate" Tibet and Taiwan. This was followed by propaganda broadcasts from Beijing and Sichuan beamed towards the Tibetans. The Communist leaders had made their intentions clear from October 1949 onwards: "peaceful liberation" negotiation or armed intervention and forceful takeover.¹⁵

A central characteristic of colonialism is to justify conquest and management of a given community as a 'civilizing' mission. Colonial actors position themselves as 'saviors' that seek to 'better' the community through missionization, education (in the foreigners tongue and cultural values), 'democratization' or 'modernization.' In the case of Tibet the PRC framed its invasion and subsequent takeover as a form of 'liberation' that would 'civilize' the Tibetans and free them from 'oppressive' theocratic rule. The irony of this discourse is that it essentially objectifies persons and whole communities as devoid of the agency and intelligence to make their own decisions. It frames Tibetan lifeways that have been demarcated by a system of aristocracy, monasteries and peasant communities over the centuries as dysfunctional because they do not reflect PRC norms.

This colonizing discourse was rooted in previous overtures of power by China that objectified Tibetans as the flawed and helpless Other. Dawa Lokyitsang, a Tibetan activist and scholar, cites the ethnographic discourse produced on Tibet by the Republic of China

¹⁵ Dawa Norbu, *China's Tibet Policy* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001) 180.

(pre-PRC) as seeking to create a picture of Kham (Tibet's southeasternmost region bordering China) as always having been a territory of China.¹⁶ China also made strategic use of socio-cultural evolutionary theory, positioning Tibetans as primitive peoples in need of “modernization” and China as its saviors:

Ren's work on Tibet, and others he influenced, reproduced the *orientalist* framing of Khampas, and, therefore, Tibetans as “primitive” and in need of “civilizing” from the translated works of early orientalist western writers on Tibet. His discursive work on the Khampas placed them in China's primitive past, as a civilization left behind in China's primitive history, that needed the Nationalist State's *help* to “modernize” Tibetans to bring them on par with the rest of China's civilization. The *purpose* of the ethnographic discourse produced at the time in framing Tibetans as Chinese (through the construction of Tibetans in China's historical past) helped to explain and justify the Nationalists' presence in Tibet and the construction of Tibetans as “primitive” helped to justify the Nationalists projects in Tibet.¹⁷

While Buddhist studies scholars have not often considered the affects of racialization to analyze the contemporary experience of Tibetans (within and outside of their homelands) it has provided the foundation for how Tibetans are perceived and studied by the Chinese today. Racialization is a structure based on several intersecting factors, such as phenotype, character, intelligence and disposition—these criteria are evaluated through a power differential in which those in a position of power claimed the authority to evaluate others. Generally, racialization is attributed to European colonial projects that were ‘legitimated’ by crude forms of pseudoscience and social evolutionary theory. ‘Race science’ as it was called in the in the 19th century, conveniently justified the dispossession of racialized others by European imperial powers. Dibyesh Anand argues that Europeans projected their exiting racial categories on to Tibetans and then these misreadings of Tibetans remain in the western imagination today:

¹⁶ Dawa Lokyitsang, Lhakar Diaries blog, 12/19/2012. <http://lhakardiaries.com/2012/12/19/the-art-of-chinas-colonialism-constructing-invisibilities-in-tibetan-history-and-geography/>

¹⁷ Ibid.

While some classifications may be essential for understanding, often the classifications of non-Western peoples was a corollary of the hierarchization and racialization of cultures. Classifying the Other as barbarian or savage validated its dehumanization and was seen as justification for the use of violence to impose European norms. At the top were the white Europeans and at the bottom were “primitive” Africans and aboriginal populations in the “new world.” Chinese, Arabs, Indians, and others occupied different positions in the hierarchical table. The nineteenth and twentieth-century obsession with racializing culture can be seen in the case of Tibetans too where different commentators sought to identify characteristics of the Tibetan “race.” A typical example was Sanburg, who was unflattering in his comments about the “‘Tibetan race’ as a ‘weak and cowardly people, their pusillanimity rendering them readily submissive.’” The fact that racism has less to do with color and more to do with power relations becomes evident in the British treatment of the Irish as “colored,” as “white negroes” during the nineteenth century. Captain William Frederick O’Connor observation at the start of the twentieth century about Tibet is illustrative: “Common people are cheerful, happy-go-lucky creatures, absurdly *like the Irish* in their ways, and sometimes even in their features.... Differentiation, evolutionism, and hierarchization, lead to the debasement of most non-Western native and idealization of some.”¹⁸

These characterizations of Tibetans serve as a genealogy of contemporary PRC knowledge production on Tibet. European visitors to Tibet compared Tibetans to other known ‘undesirables,’ also perceived to lower on the racial hierarchy, such the Irish and ‘Negroes.’ Although Tibetans do not bear any phenotypic similarity to these two groups, it was the characterization of their persons as *essentially* ‘less civilized,’ ‘weak,’ ‘passive,’ and ‘happy-go-lucky’ that allowed them to be compared and even conflated with these two other unrelated peoples. The absurdity of this logic is better understood in the context of intended dispossession. Tibetans were “commonly compared to obstinate, illogical children” for refusing to accept British imperial rule, as if their resistance signaled a misunderstanding as opposed to a shrewd negotiation of power.¹⁹ We can understand the racialization of Tibetans as ‘like big children’ and in need of ‘help’ from a patriarchal polity as a projection with ulterior motives. These examples reveal not only the way Tibetans were superficially and

¹⁸ Dibyesh Anand, *Geopolitical Exotica: Tibet in Western Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

unfairly characterized by imperial visitors but also how a hunger for power was justified through these very characterizations.

While the discourse of the ‘primitive’ is mostly associated with the European imperial endeavors in the Americas, Oceania and Africa, this social-evolutionary framework was also adopted by imperial powers in Asia. In Åshild Kolås and Monika P. Thowsen’s work, *On the Margins of Tibet: Cultural Survival on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier*, they argue that Western social evolutionary theory had been assimilated into China’s political strategy by the early twentieth century:

This “mission to civilize the natives” should be all too familiar from the justifications offered for European colonialism. The roots of Chinese minority studies, so closely connected to political ideology, can in fact be founded on Europe and the United States. Lewis Henry Morgan’s *Ancient Society* and Herbert Spencer’s *Principles of Sociology* were among the first sociological works translated into Chinese in the first years of the twentieth century. Morgan’s theory of social evolution subsequently became the cornerstone of Chinese ethnology.²⁰

The writings of European travellers and scholars eventually found their way into the discourse on Tibet taken up by Han Chinese. In his response to Chinese writer, Wang Lixiong, Tsering Shakya notes that popular Chinese discourse on Tibetans as puzzlingly resistant to continued PRC ‘liberation’ is itself a form of propaganda rooted in a characterization of Tibetans as devoid of real agency. In fact, these crass characterizations are grounded in the same logic and even language of the British imperial elite:

This approach will be familiar to anyone who has studied the implantation of Western colonialism in Asia and Africa, or read the works of Christian missionaries on the religions and cultures of the peoples they subjugated. The strategic positioning of the natives as living in ‘fear’ and ‘awe’ of the gods drains the people of agency. It is a device used by colonizers to strip their subjects of humanity and of the ability to reason. Wang’s text accordingly reveals next to nothing of the native worldview but divulges a great deal about the mindset of the colonizer. This seeks to reduce the native’s status to that of an infant—allowing the colonial master, by contrast, to

²⁰ Åshild Kolås and Monika P. Thowsen, *On the Margins of Tibet: Cultural Survival on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005) 38.

assume the position of wise adult. The crude environmental determinism of Wang's imagined Tibetan *Weltanschauung* is, in fact, a redaction of the works of such early colonial cadres as Austin Waddell, whose book on 'Lamaism,' as he disparagingly called it, was published in 1904—the year of the British invasion of Tibet, in which Waddell played a leading role. It is still used as an authoritative source in China.²¹

Shakya's observation that this racialized discourse reveals more about the mind of the colonizer than the colonized is critical. These characterizations of Tibetans are not only unfair judgments but appear to have been culled directly from 19th century documents. For a nation that claims to be invested in 'progress,' such a reductionistic discourse is embarrassingly unsophisticated and even laughable. More importantly, Shakya's insightful response to Wang Lixiong reveals that Tibetans are acutely aware of how racialization serves to justify their dispossession. Thus, the continued discourse along these lines by the PRC and 'public intellectuals' such as Wang reveal these parties as intentionally tone-deaf, refusing to engage Tibetans on rational terms.

It is this absurd genesis of racialization that China inherited and has continued to propagate. According to Anand, China has produce quite a bit of knowledge on Tibet as the perennial Other:

Knowledge production about Tibet, especially since the mid-twentieth century when the Chinese communists consolidated their political control, is no longer the preserve of Europeans. Very much in the traditions of Orientalist scholarship and British imperialist writings, the manufacturing of scholarly truths about Tibet within the Chinese representations of Tibetans as essentially backward, primitive, and barbaric are witnessed not only at the popular level but more dangerously within state discourse too. Analysis of the Chinese representations of Tibet will show how Tibetans, like most of the non-Han Chinese, are seen as an exotic but backward people requiring Chinese leadership to help them progress.²²

In this way, Western colonial discourses are used popularly and institutionally to inform and justify the imposition of Chinese state power over Tibet. It is only through this racialized

²¹ Tsering Shakya, "Blood in the Snows: Reply to Wang Lixiong," *New Left Review* 15 (May-June): 39-60. 45-46.

²² *Ibid.*, 134.

discourse that we can understand the extent to which the PRC is undertaking a colonial project in Tibet as well as better conceptualize the structural but also psychological violence waged against Tibetans through this colonial project.

In order to discuss how the practice of Tibetan Buddhism contributes to cultural regeneration and facilitates Tibetan decolonization, I will briefly explain the shifting discourses that have violently transformed the monastic system in Tibet and compounded feelings of alienation and distress among Tibetans causing many to flee despite PRC assertions that they have become ‘liberated.’ Tibet has experienced significant violence, structural and psychological as result of Chinese occupation. José Cabezón writes: “From 1959 to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, thousands of monasteries and nunneries were destroyed, tens of thousands of monks were forcibly laicized, scores of high-ranking monastic officials were imprisoned or executed, and a large portion of Tibet’s religious-artistic patrimony was confiscated, destroyed, or sold on the international antiquities market.”²³ Tibetan life centered on local monasteries and served as one of the few means of formal education. Monks made up about 12% of the total male population. “Most Tibetans had close family members—children, siblings, aunts, or uncles—who were monks or nuns. Monasteries served as a focal point for many lay religious practices. They were places that people visited to worship, to circumambulate, to make offerings. Monasteries were also the cite of important village-wide or regional festivals and pilgrimages.”²⁴ As Cabezón notes, it is no wonder that Tibetans viewed their systematic destruction as an attack on Tibetan cultural identity.

²³ José Cabezón, “State Control of Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism in the People’s Republic of China,” *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formations*, ed. Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) 261.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 261-262.

The Chinese transformation of Tibet has proved detrimental to Tibetan traditions in a number of ways. In particular, radical transformation of Lhasa, Tibet's capital city, poses a problem for Tibetans because historically, Lhasa, as the seat of the Dalai Lama and home to the Jokhang monastery, is perceived as Tibet's pre-eminant religious site. While the majority of Tibetans live as farmers in small villages or towns and only 10-15% live in Lhasa, most Tibetans would make a pilgrimage there at some point in their lives.²⁵ According to Åshild Kolås:

After restrictions were lifted in 1978, Tibetans have spent a considerable amount of voluntary work and donations on the rebuilding of shrines and monasteries. The new political climate in China during the early 1980's brought a virtual revival of religious practice in Tibet. In contemporary Lhasa people commonly visit sacred sites and circumambulate along the pilgrimage paths... turn prayer wheels, do prostrations and make offerings."²⁶ However, Tibetan religious revival is not popularly received by Chinese society, which continues to characterize Tibetans as 'backward.' Their religious and 'traditional' lifeways are seen as the root of this 'backwardness.' "News reports often point to the 'traditional ideas' of farmers and herders, and their 'poor sense of commodity,' as obstacles to prosperity. Religious practice and particularly 'superstition,' is blamed for the lack of progress."²⁷

Tibetans, conversely, characterize 'modernity' as less than desirable, describing the "four modernisations' in Lhasa as inflation and price rise, privatisation and corruption, economic polarization and environmental and spiritual pollution." While Tibetans recognize that some forms of 'modernity' brought to Lhasa, and Tibet more generally, by the Chinese have been beneficial, many appear to have lowered their quality of life. Thus, the revival of 'tradition' allows them to reject derisive characterizations on the part of PRC elites and assuages the hardships resulting from the negative aspects of modernity, such as drinking, nightclubs, street crime and prostitution.

²⁵ Åshild Kolås, "Modernising Tibet: Contemporary Discourses and Practices of 'Modernity,'" *Inner Asia*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2003): 18.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

[T]he widespread tradition of offering is not simply a reaction to modernization, but more importantly it is a means of relating to personal concerns and responding to social tensions. Although for some Tibetans the revival of religious traditions can be understood as a ‘counter-discourse’ to modernist narratives, for others religious practice may be just another way to achieve progress, towards worldly as well as spiritual goals.²⁸

Religious life has been revitalized in Lhasa, however, its position as a sacred site has been compromised by a shift in culture—one more cynical and less amenable to honoring its sacrality. Tibetans in Tibet who wish to continue to live culturally as Tibetans are in a double bind in which they are damned to cultural loss if they accede to modernity and damned as backward if they don't.

While religion has returned to some degree in Tibet, it is far from what existed pre-occupation. Currently the state tightly manages the monastic system through an elaborate system of bureaucratic control, which limits enrollments, has eliminated large portions of the traditional ritual life and has shifted its aims from religious education and community to tourist attraction. In a Tibet that is controlled by the state's agenda, religion must serve the interests of the state.²⁹ José Cabezón provides evidence of this shift in agenda clearly articulated by Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) propaganda that contends religious organizations should:

endeavor under the direction and oversight of government, to increase virtuous and generally beneficial activities conducive to social progress and thus help to improve the economic growth and lifestyle of ordinary believers, that in making more effort towards a happier existence in the present life, the masses of ordinary believers set their minds to economic construction.³⁰

Not only must religion serve the aims of the state, PRC documents frame Tibetan religious leaders as responsible for facilitating these aims.

²⁸ Kolås, “Modernising Tibet,” 33.

²⁹ Cabezón, “State Control of Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism,” 267.

³⁰ Ibid.

In Tibet in particular, it is necessary for “Tibetan Buddhist personalities to preach the goals of social progress as an essential religious duty.” From the CCP’s viewpoint, the chief value of Tibetan Buddhism lies in its ability to instill a sense of ethical uprightness in the common people, so that it will be possible to “gradually eliminate the grounds which are unhelpful to the Socialist system and unhelpful to the productivity, livelihood, and physical well-being of the masses.” Religion must therefore contribute to the goal of progress, and progress is measured in economic and material terms—in terms of productivity, livelihood and physical well-being “in this life.”³¹

The central aim of empire is state security and wealth accumulation. The central aspiration of modernity (the pre-cursor to empire) is ‘progress.’ In order to actualize these intersecting projects the PRC must transform the aims of the pre-existing forms of self-governance and the desires of the Tibetan people. As Foucault noted, shaping the desires of the citizenry is critical to the project of ‘modernity.’

This PRC approved version of religion is attested to by one of my consultants, Kalkyi, who describes an experience from her childhood in Tibet before her family fled to Nepal. In a discussion about the differences between religious practice in exile and in Tibet, she says:

If you live in Tibet it would be a little bit different because you don’t have this openness. I remember when I was a little girl, my parents used to hide the Dalai Lama’s picture in the closet, stuff like that. Over here [in the U.S.] you can put Dalai Lama’s picture almost anywhere and no one says a thing. [There’s] even more religious freedom over here. Over there you’re still Buddhist but you want to hide whatever you’re doing. I was a little girl but I remember [someone] knocking at our house in the middle of the night. My parents used to say ‘they’ll come to your house and search.’ And that’s why people have Dalai Lama’s picture in the small closet and put the butter lamp there. So no religious freedom exists. That’s why the monks can’t really enjoy their religion. There’s like police all over their monastery. Yeah, even though you’re Buddhist, the way you practice might be a little bit different; there is no freedom.³²

Kalkyi’s memories of religious life in Tibet are of secrecy and fear of persecution. Religion is tolerated and even performed in monasteries but there are limits. Some portions of

³¹ Ibid.

³² Interview with Kalkyi Dundrup, 03/01/2012.

‘religion’ are criminalized and constrained—in essence, Tibetan identity is also criminalized and constrained.

Cabezón observes that Tibetan monastic institutions are attempting to regain the integrity of their tradition under PRC rule by cultivating a critique of modernity. In these critiques, monks warn of the ethical erosion that comes with modernity:

Monks, however, have more idiosyncratic reasons for opposing modernist ideologies and institutions. The wholesale destruction of Tibetan culture, they point out, took place in the name of material and scientific progress—in the name of modernity. Monks also say that history has shown them that modern nation-states, their derivative institutions (such as the United Nations), and the ideologies that undergird them are either impotent or too self-serving to remedy the plight of the powerless. Modern political institutions, after all, failed Tibetans in their greatest moment of need. Finally, modernist secular skepticism—the denial of karma and reincarnation, of deities and spirits—undermine ethics and create obstacles to maintaining a proper relationship between the human and the nonhuman realms, something that is necessary for human flourishing.³³

Cabezón argues that there is a fundamental tension at the heart of the ‘Tibet question’: that between the between the modern, secular, materialist PRC worldview and an essentially religious, traditional Tibetan worldview. I will explore the role of worldview in greater detail in the next chapter. Despite fears that modernization would corrode a Buddhist society, Buddhism has survived a secular and even anti-religious environment. In fact, many contemporary monastics actively criticize modernity as a project and thus, alluding to its failure to provide real existential or spiritual meaning for citizens.

The Tibet movement for liberation facilitated by the Tibetan exile community began right after the Dalai Lama fled to India from Tibet in 1959—along with thousands of Tibetans. This movement has since shifted from multiple smaller organizations to becoming more consolidated in the 1990’s, as the exile community grew in number and was joined by

³³ Cabezón, “State Control of Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism,” 265.

non-Tibetan supporters.³⁴ These larger transnational organizations include the International Tibetan Independence Movement, co-founded by Thubten Jigme Norbu, brother to the Dalai Lama, in 1995, as well as youth oriented organizations such as the Tibetan Youth Congress and Students for a Free Tibet—the former generally composed of Tibetan exiles and the latter of Tibetans and non-Tibetans. Other organizations that are less pointed about Tibetan liberation but nonetheless act as supporters to Tibetan people include the Free Tibet Campaign and the International Tibet Support Network. These organizations work to raise awareness of Tibet’s occupation but also to make structural change such as campaigning for the release of political prisoners, “stopping International Financial Institutions (such as the World Bank) from collaborating with the Chinese occupation, and sabotaging efforts by multinational corporations to exploit Tibet.”³⁵ While the Dalai Lama initially supported the liberation movement, he has since changed his position on Tibet to a “Middle Way” approach, which no longer seeks total independence from China but rather autonomy and the protection of human rights—particularly the freedom for religious expression.

In 2008, a practice oriented resistance movement called “Lhakar” erupted among Tibetan protesters in Tibet and in diaspora. Lhakar translates to “white Wednesday” and honors the auspicious birthday of the Dalai Lama by making a “special effort to wear traditional clothes, speak Tibetan, eat in Tibetan restaurants and buy from Tibetan-owned businesses.”³⁶ The Lhakar website explains that this movement as a “grassroots revolution” where Tibetans “channel their spirit of resistance into social, cultural and economic activities that are self-constructive (promoting Tibetan language, culture and identity) and non-

³⁴ “History,” Students for a Free Tibet, accessed May 21, 2015.

<https://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/about-tibet/tibet-movements-history>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “About Lhakar,” Lhakar: The Tibetan People’s Grassroots Revolution, accessed May 21, 2015. <http://lhakar.org/about/>.

cooperative (refusing to support Chinese institutions and businesses).” This movement has gained traction with millennials over social media and most reflects the aesthetic investment of other “decolonization” movements that seek to resist cultural erasure by returning to a regenerated cultural identity.

Methodological Notes

Critical theory forced disciplines such as History, Anthropology and Religious Studies to reevaluate the use of theoretical assumptions long held by positivist modernist frameworks such as socio-cultural evolutionism that tout norms like objectivity and universal truths. Similarly, postcolonial theory and the subaltern school extended the interventions made by critical theorists by outlining how the logics of colonialism, along with modernist frameworks, mostly projected Occidental knowledge on to the Other instead of understanding non-European communities on their terms. Gayatri Spivak famously criticized French intellectuals for their “naïve sense of the global”³⁷ and their inability to hear the voice of the other, suggesting this was a task for female intellectuals.³⁸ Subaltern and decolonial thinkers such as Walter D. Mignolo and Nelson Maldonado-Torres have suggested that through “border gnosis,” or postcontinental scholarship the multilayered voices of the margins will be heard. However, their work continues to struggle with issues of translation and how to produce knowledge outside of Western frameworks. One of the primary reasons for both issues is a lack of engagement with Indigenous languages and thus the lack of indigenous rubrics.

³⁷ This is the phrasing of Bhaskar Sarkar in discussion of Spivak’s article, during his *Postcolonialism* seminar, University of California, Santa Barbara, 02/01/2011.

³⁸ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Laurence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

More recently, the field of Indigenous and Native American Studies has been greatly influenced by a few Indigenous scholars who have offered up new possibilities for hearing Indigenous voices via their own layered conceptual frameworks, or lifeworlds. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests that we, the global community of scholars and activists have all been indoctrinated in the ideology of colonialism, and must decolonize the ways in which we understand history, writing and theory. It is in the process of writing our own histories from our own perspectives that we as colonized peoples will reclaim our humanness. Decolonizing research means privileging a research agenda that reflects the needs and concerns of Indigenous and colonized peoples. It also means exploring “religion” in a radically different way, recognizing that the spiritual dimension of Indigenous and colonized peoples’ lives is not something that can be compartmentalized but instead must be understood in relation to a whole worlds of metaphysical ideas. By taking into account community needs and values researchers are prevented from easily replicating the colonizing processes of knowledge production, i.e., asking questions for the sake of the academic industry and its demands for knowledge as opposed to questions that may actually be productive for that community. However, I acknowledge that this process is not so simple.

I have attempted to prioritize the clarion calls to research among Native intellectuals who ask that we further explore Native religious/metaphysical worlds if we are to transform our political and social landscape.³⁹ But as we cannot return to a past that is already gone we must turn to the present and evaluate what traditions and practices remain and persist. Also,

³⁹ See Vine Deloria, Jr.’s *God is Red: A Native View of Religion: the Classic Work Updated* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994); *Metaphysics of Modern Existence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979); *The World We Used to Live In* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006) and Taiaiake Alfred’s *Wasasé: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2005) and *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1999).

how do we translate these traditions in such a way that prevents violence to their integrity? My solution is to pull fundamental themes and metaphysical concepts out of each tradition and explore how they are utilized for more general social and political purposes. Smith asserts that decolonization does not mean a rejection of all existing analytics but instead a reevaluation of how analytics are productive in relation to Indigenous knowledge, “Decolonization... does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and our own purposes.”⁴⁰ Inquiry must be both meaningful for a community and grounded in a theoretical framework that reflects the metaphysical world(s) of that community, which is what this project attempts to do. This kind of theory must be developed, not to posit “a ‘pure’ sense of what it means to be indigenous” but to “put the many experiences of being and living as an Indigenous person into perspective.”⁴¹ In other words, the use of concepts, such as *interdependence* or *spiritual power* does not seek to claim a new essentialized notion of Indigeneity but can rather serves as a framework to understand the experiences of these two communities.

While Indigenous scholars and activists are pursuing Indigenous models of research the academy expects scholars to use existing analytics, which have traditionally been formulated to reflect scientific methods. Science as an ideology has pervaded the realm of our academic, social, economic and political life and its suppositions are translated into moral reasoning and codes that we should live by. Its logic came to dominant our ideology and marginalized the ideologies of others, particularly the lifeworlds of indigenous and non-

⁴⁰ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 39.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

European peoples. As a result, our moral fabric is not united by the nature of reality as reflected in our cosmology or metaphysical world but instead by the variable interests of scientific and economic endeavors. Knowledge making rooted in the objective or ‘rational’ realms came to generally silence knowledge production rooted in the subjective or ‘enchanted’ realms, or that makes explicit use of two, in the ‘modern’ era.

Religious movements have been characterized as being motivated by a search for meaning. And although they may become systematized over time through dogmas and practices that are “rationalizing” they are still an avenue for the immanent or supramundane.⁴² However, these movements and traditions may simultaneously contain metaphysical or philosophical elements that are highly rational, such as the complex and varied treatises on logic, deductive reasoning and the nature of reality that exist within the Buddhist canon. While many scholars of religion and anthropologists have sought to understand the dialectic between the ‘rational’ and ‘magical’ practices of any given tradition⁴³ the pejorative attitude towards the ‘magical’ persists. Ultimately, subjective and supramundane aspects of life are integral for understanding the world at large. Themes of this nature are central to this project because they are the often the site of resistance to imperial control, assimilation and cultural genocide.⁴⁴

Many analytics utilized by the social sciences and humanities have changed to reflect postmodern logics and ideologies, for instance, they may no longer pursue a structuralist approach for understanding culture. However, because these analytics are rooted in Western

⁴² Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 153-154.

⁴³ See Geoffrey Samuel’s *Civilized Shamans*, while Samuel is not attempting to treat the ‘shamanic’ aspects of Tibetan religious life pejoratively the outcome of such a characterization has put many Tibetan elites on the defensive, conversations with anthropologist Jill Sudbury, October 2010-June 2011.

⁴⁴ See Ronald Schwartz’s *Circle of Protest* and Vine Deloria, Jr.’s *God is Red*.

epistemology, which privileges texts, false dichotomies such as irrational/rational, the telos of history and an ontotheological subjectivity of a divine human in relation to God (described by Derrida) they are not well suited to unpack the “texts,” cosmologies, and subjectivities of non-Western communities. Recent interventions in critical race studies have argued that knowledge production in the West fetishizes the ‘rational’ nature of man in such a way that persons becomes stratification by ‘race.’ Brazilian scholar Denise da Silva argues that racialization continues to be justified through ontological constructions of autonomous subjects via Descartes and Kant, which formulated the seemingly naturalized state of the ‘Other’ as prone and privy to violence due to his uncivilized and irrational “nature.”⁴⁵ Because the subjectivities of Indigenous and colonized peoples are the very site of settler colonial epistemological and ontological violence these are also, I argue, the sites of resistance.

Methodology and Method

My research methodology is interdisciplinary and draws from theoretical approaches to religious studies, anthropology, and ethnic studies. However, given the nature of my questions, it is firmly situated in a critical indigenist framework, meaning it does not impose a foreign theoretical framework on my data but will use a framework that reflects the existing concepts and categories of the lifeworlds of these communities. My work reads ‘across’ these two traditions to gain a greater understanding of religion and resistance in exile. This study privileges the aesthetics, perspectives and practices of indigenous communities, not to provide a “pure” or totalizing picture of Native American or Tibetan religiosity but instead to position these knowledges as sources of pedagogical efficacy because they are multilogical,

⁴⁵ See Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

or contain many perspectives. I consider my consultants intellectual agents, who are choosing to share their own knowledges and experiences through a dialogic process. For instance, in my use of Tibetan Buddhist concepts, such as dependent arising or karma, or broader Tibetan concepts such as *la* (life force) or *gnas* (sacred place) and similarly, when I use Native concepts of *wakan* or *power* (life force) I will attempt to utilize them in a way that emphasizes the meaning these terms have in their respective communities. Utilizing an indigenous conceptualization of personhood may reveal a fluid selfhood that remains outside of postmodern theories of self/personhood, which acknowledges a discursively constructed personhood but does not acknowledge or negotiate a personhood that may be shared with other deities/personas or one that does not exist in the ontological mode of “being.”⁴⁶ In doing so, I believe a fuller and more meaningful conception of personhood and its relation to healing and political praxis will emerge. In this way, my research enables a dialogue with members of these communities as opposed to a project that seeks to totally redefine indigenous concepts so that they fit into an existing academic rubric (rational/irrational, teleological, social evolutionary). Although I use the categories “enchanted” and “disenchanted,” they are provisional and will be explored, and in some sense redefined, by the data received in this project.

Data collection has consisted of the analysis of texts, in the form of primary and secondary source religious/philosophical/historical documents; participant observation; ethnographic interviews, structured and unstructured; and reflexive journals. Through the use

⁴⁶ The work of Nathan Henne asserts that Maya conceptualization of personhood resist a static ontological position, such as ‘being,’ and must be understood as ‘uncertain,’ and thus always in flux and ‘becoming’ according to context. He argues that through a careful analysis of Maya poetics it becomes clear that Maya peoples recognize a spiritual companion, *nagual* as an extension of their persons. See Henne, “A Poetics of the Uncertain: Trajectories of the Maya Mind and Tongue in American Literatures,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2007).

of such methods I immersed myself, to the greatest degree possible, in the lives of these two communities, attempting to learn the subtleties of their respective lifeworlds and sense of themselves through questions as well as careful observation. This research method enables the study religion ‘on the ground.’ Rudy Busto argues that to only study the doctrines of a religious tradition denies the embodied notion of religiosity; it is in the lived practices of any given tradition where we find religious life.⁴⁷ By understanding how one chooses to *act* and *think* in response to these traditions one comes to understand orthopraxy, or ‘religion’ *in practice*. As oral traditions are also texts, I have treated these interviews as primary sources analyzed using theories indigenous to each community.

This study also necessitates the explorations of “texts” in order to explore the traditional lifeworlds that act as a metaphysical backdrop for these two groups. While I expect to focus on traditional aspects of these lifeworlds I am aware that they are already “in dialogue” with Western or “modern” lifeworlds and will attempt to tease out how these negotiations are reconciled, if at all. For Tibetan communities, I will trace the ways Buddhist doctrine and Tibetan folk traditions, particularly those narratives that have ‘traveled’ with Tibetans in exile, create a many-layered lifeworld(s). For Native communities, I will explore the ways in which oral traditions (local lore, creation narratives) may contribute to a “common” lifeworld outside of the nation as well as lifeworlds specific to the particular peoples I consult. In the interpretation of these texts I heed the observation of Georges Dreyfus who argues that tradition must be explored on its own terms as opposed to understanding it only in relation to modernity. These ‘texts’ have no central authority; of doctrine he says it is “constituted around the transmission of a given truth based on the

⁴⁷ Rudy Busto, "Pujando pero Ilegando: Rasquache Religious Thought and Scriptures" (paper presented at the Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium, New Knowing in Latina/o Philosophy and Theology, Drew University, Madison, NJ, November 22, 2008).

authority of the past. But that transmission is neither simple nor univocal, as traditionalism would have it, for truth needs to be constantly interpreted.”⁴⁸ In other words, these ‘texts’ and traditions are continually being redefined, and contested, by these respective communities and so any reading of them must consider these present tensions.

Ethnographic field research took place in and around Albuquerque and Santa Fe, New Mexico from December 2011 till June 2013. New Mexico has a relatively large Tibetan refugee population, estimated at several hundred, as well as large populations of Native peoples living outside of their home nations. New Mexico claims a complex and rich heritage of Native American, Chicano and Hispano peoples that is reflected in much of the Southwest and extends through California. Many Chicano peoples are estranged members of Native nations, north or south of the Mexican border, and have sought to continue or revitalize their Indigenous traditions. Therefore, Chicano peoples number among my Native American consultants in order to reflect this diversity. Consultants actively engage their religious traditions and also engage in some form of political praxis, meaning they are either were/are activists or work in service to the empowerment or self-determination of their peoples. I attended community events such as ceremonies, festivals (Losar) and other group activities in order to develop social contacts in these communities and also to learn why and how these events are meaningful. My questions were mostly open-ended queries about day to day “religiosity,”—how one’s lifeworlds and conceptions of self shapes one’s day to day actions and attitudes—as well as discussions of political activity and ideals.

Native New Mexico

⁴⁸ George Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 7.

New Mexico has one of the largest Native American populations in the country, besides Oklahoma and Arizona. It is the site of my own Native roots north of the border. My Apache grandmother, Estella Gutierrez, grew up in Hurley, NM after her mother and grandmother became separated from their band during the Apache Wars of the late 19th century. This scenario reflects the experience of many Native people in the U.S.; they live on or near their native lands but have become estranged or separated from their peoples. Native identity is made more complex in the Southwest, due to its colonial history. Former Native slaves and mixed-blood peoples, referred to as ‘genizaros’ by the Spanish caste system, formed a peasant class that worked for the landed Spanish aristocracy.⁴⁹ Genizaros were the first urban dwellers of towns created in the Spanish colonial period, including Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Although, many New Mexicans who trace their families to this time period consider themselves ‘Hispano,’ meaning of ‘Spanish’ descent, implying that they are descended from the Spanish elite, others recognize that they are in fact descended from local Native tribes or ‘genizaros.’ New Mexico is often understood to be the home of tripartite cultures: Hispano, Native American and Anglo, but for many New Mexicans whose roots go back to the Spanish colonial period the distinction between Native and Hispano is not so clear.

The land base that is now New Mexico was traversed, roamed and settled by many Native peoples: Utes, Comanches, Apaches, Navajos and Pueblos. Large clusters of these tribes still reside within its boundaries; however, their ancestral homelands may extend beyond its borders into Mexico, Texas, Arizona or Colorado. New Mexico is home to 19 Pueblos and 3 reservations: the Jicarilla Apache in the North, Mescalero and Chiricahua

⁴⁹ Ramon A. Gutierrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

Apache in the Southeast and the largest Native nation, the Navajo, in the Northwest. Most small towns and rural agricultural communities in New Mexico were settled by genizaros and many of their descendants still live there today along with more recent Anglo settlers. Its larger cities, such as Albuquerque or Las Cruces, are home to genizaros, Anglos and dense populations of Native peoples from nearby tribes as well as tribes from all over the country. New Mexico residents that claim a Chicano identity recognize themselves as Native as well, some as descendants of genizaros and others as having an Indigenous heritage from north and south of the border. Most tribes in the New Mexico region that were intact after the 1848 Mexican-American War were confined to reservations by U.S. forces in the late 19th century. However, many Native peoples, like my father's family, escaped confinement, fleeing into Mexican territory for a generation or posing as 'Mexicans' to avoid capture. Thus, many Southwestern Indians were never listed on tribal census rolls and/or became 'Hispanicized' yet recognize that their Native identity is not contingent on the criteria established by the settler state. Federal strategies to address the 'Indian problem,' such as boarding schools, unlawful adoption and relocation programs have compounded estrangement. Contemporary issues like disenrollment or family conflicts have also contributed to estrangement from tribal communities and have fostered new inter-tribal or pan-tribal communities in urban spaces.

There are 565 recognized Indian tribes and approximately 5.2 million Native peoples in the U.S., or 1.7% of the total population.⁵⁰ Native peoples make up 10.7% of New Mexico's population but given that 47% are listed as "Hispanic" and many of these people may actually be of genizaro descent the percentage is likely much higher. As of the last census (2010), 71% live in urban areas and thus, can be considered "transnational." Native

⁵⁰ United States' Census Bureau, 2010 Census, accessed May 21, 2015.
https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb11-ff22.html.

people in New Mexico, and in the greater U.S., are diverse—some are enrolled members of tribes, others are not, some descend from one tribe, others from multiple tribes or are mixed-race, some grew up with ‘traditional’ ceremonial lifeways, others as Christians or Catholics, still others were raised with exposure to both. While some Native people in Albuquerque and Santa Fe travel home—to Navajo, Gallup, or one of the 19 Pueblos—for ceremony on the weekend, others have developed a ceremonial life in the city—building sweat lodges in backyards or even starting the day with blessings and prayer. Many of my Native consultants have a basic context for their religious traditions. They cite parents or grandparents who have exhibited or shared with them ancestral and traditional knowledge for how to live properly in the world. Some have come to know and deepen their understanding of religious traditions through spiritual communications.... either in the form of dreams, visions or spiritual experiences they have sought out, such as the sun dance. A few have also done research, such as, reading books, and talking to others in their communities to learn more about their traditions. And still others may go back home and begin learning Native lifeways from their own people or from neighboring Native communities.

I began my work with the Native American community of Albuquerque by attending activist meetings, workshops and classes. I also contacted local community leaders via email. It took two months to develop a few connections that would become consultants. The majority of my consultants were Apache, Pueblo, or Navajo; however, many were from more than one tribe or “mixed-blood,” meaning they were mixed with European, “Mexican,” or African ancestry. Although it was initially more difficult to find Native consultants for this project, once I knew a handful they often connected me with others. One major advantage I held was that I identify as Apache and Chicana so am an “insider” to some degree, despite

not being from New Mexico proper. My general understanding of social protocol also helped me forge relationships quickly and establish trust.

New Mexico Tibetan Community

There are approximately 5.4 million Tibetans in Tibet, while approximately 122,000 live in exile.⁵¹ Calculating the Tibetan population in the U.S. is difficult because they are listed as “Chinese,” however, the current estimate is 9,000. There are about 300 Tibetans living in New Mexico, in the cities of Albuquerque and Santa Fe specifically. The Tibetan Association of Santa Fe was established in 1997 by a group of Tibetans who were among the first to immigrate to the U.S. A visa lottery was created to offer assistance to Tibetan refugees seeking asylum through the Immigration Act of 1990. Initially, 1,000 visas were offered. The Tibetan Resettlement Project offered Tibetans a chance to emigrate to U.S. from India or Nepal. They would be placed among 22 different host cities, many of which had an existing Dharma community who agreed to receive them and would help them transition to life in the U.S. The first group of Tibetans arrived in Santa Fe in 1992.⁵² Although they originally hailed from different regions of Tibet and lived in different parts of Indian or Nepal they quickly formed a tight knit community, now numbering nearly three hundred.

I began my research with the Tibetan community in New Mexico by attending Dharma teachings in Albuquerque and Santa Fe in order to understand the local religious landscape. There are seven Tibetan Buddhist meditation centers in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. These centers are designed for Westerners. They focus on learning Buddhist texts and participating in rituals (almost weekly) and occasional retreats. It is a pretty engaged form of

⁵¹ Seonaigh MacPherson, Anne Sophie Bentz and Dawa Bhuti Goso, “Global Nomads: The Emergence of the Tibetan Diaspora.” Accessed May 21, 2015.

<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/global-nomads-emergence-tibetan-diaspora-part-i/>.

⁵² <http://www.taosf.org/about-us.html>, Accessed August 28, 2014.

practice, calling for hours of commitment. Tibetans generally do not have the time or money to engage practice in this way.⁵³ Historically, day-to-day practice for lay Tibetans consisted of making offerings at home shrine, circumambulating the temple, and reciting mantras. A smaller percentage of the community would elect to receive teachings from a lama and pointedly study Buddhist texts and rituals. The only centers frequented by Tibetan, even then very few, were those with resident Tibetan teachers, particularly ones with a resident or visiting tulku. I soon learned that the Tibetan community preferred to practice in one another's home or at the Tibetan Association Center in Santa Fe, which was owned collectively by the Tibetan community. The community bought and maintains this center itself. They collectively contribute to its maintenance and pitch in to pay teachers of the Tibetan language classes and any other events that take place there. The meditation center I attended most frequently was Pema Khando Ling in Santa Fe. This is a small one-room center with a fluctuating group of about twenty to forty students, some of which travel from as far away as Colorado to attend retreats and special teachings. This center was created by a charismatic Rinpoche, Tulku Sang-ngag, and his students. As a reincarnated lama of the Nyingma school of Buddhism, he is considered special and esteemed among Buddhist teachers; however, I soon realized that his reputation as an excellent teacher was enhanced by his incredibly peaceful and joyful presence. My friend, Sangay Wangmo, a young woman from Bhutan, who studied at UCSB, recommended I meet him, when I told her of my research plans. "He will tell you what you'd like to know," she said. I initially met Tulku

⁵³ Eve Mullen argues that Dharma centers in the West are geared towards self-help and often consist of costly workshops, which doesn't appeal to Tibetans, who may be working more than one job and do not have the time nor resources to frequent these centers but instead make calls or visits directly to lamas when they can. See Eve Mullen, "Tibetan Religious Expression and Identity: Transformations in Exile," *Materializing Religion: Expression, Performance and Ritual*, eds. Elizabeth Anweck, William J.F. Keenan (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

Sang-ngag in January 2012 during a Tara Empowerment and teaching at Pema Khandro Ling but it would be another year before I would interview him for this study.

I found that my Tibetan consultants were generally more at ease with me once I explained that I was a Buddhist and why I was interested in doing this project. In this sense, I became familiar but remained a curiosity at Tibetan events over the 1.5 years I spent attending meetings and social gatherings. While I was considered a “Westerner,” the fact that I do not identify as “white” but instead as Native American and Mexican American appeared to make a difference. When I sat down to talk with my Tibetan consultants I explained my own family’s history of dispossession and the struggle for cultural retention that exists in my own communities. For Tibetans, this struggle is one of the most challenging aspects of life in diaspora. Tibetans were eager to share their thoughts and feelings about Tibet’s occupation but were somewhat guarded about their personal lives. One of my Euro-American friends in Santa Fe, a member of the Dharma community, described the Tibetans as “somewhat secretive.” However, I did not take their reluctance as rudeness but instead as caution. They knew that their words could have far-reaching repercussions and feared that a wrong word could possibly compromise the safety of relatives in Tibet.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The study of religion has often alluded to religion's role in world making—how one orients oneself in relation to the cosmos. One of the major hurdles in the study of religion is finding the right set of hermeneutical tools to properly understand religious phenomena. New religious movements have been characterized as being motivated by a search for meaning in a modern and mostly secular society. However, how can we understand contemporary religious movements wherein the religious tradition itself is not new, it may be ancient or has existed for thousands of years, yet its frameworks and practices remain meaningful among its adherents? Although religious movements may become systematized over time through dogmas and practices that are “rationalizing,” they often remain an avenue for the immanent or supramundane.⁵⁴ In this way, we can understand religious traditions as fluid and dynamic structures that change based on the needs of the society. While anthropologists and scholars of religion have sought to understand the dialectic, and even intersections, between the “rational” and “magical” practices of any given tradition contemporary discourses in Indigenist studies have sought to disrupt this false binary. This project builds upon this disruption to explore the ways metaphysical religious workings are relevant among contemporary peoples.

Through a careful consideration of the metaphysical underpinnings and lifeworlds that shape the subjectivities and praxis of transnational Native and Tibetan peoples, this study seeks a fuller understanding of their respective conceptualizations of personhood, particularly in relation to the land as a sacred relation and concepts *power* and nationhood. It is through the exploration of these traditional lifeworlds, as living breathing phenomena that that we can also truly understand their value on the world stage. In this way, this study is concerned not

⁵⁴ Tambiah, *Magic, Science and Religion*, 153-154.

only with Native and Tibetan transnational identity formation but also with decolonization, individual and community empowerment, the re-enchantment of the world, self-determination and modes of resistance to colonizing and imperialist projects.

Indigenism is an identity that has developed out of conversations around decolonization and resistance. It is different from ethnic identity, which sees itself an in-group identity determined by shared culture but does not relate to other groups. While there are several definitions of indigenous, a contemporary discourse positions indigenous peoples as the original inhabitants of a particular land base, who now face some form of dispossession or exploitation by a colonizing force who now has political control of said land base. Indigeneity as a common demarcation of experience was born out a meetings at the UN and other international forums, where these peoples began to recognize their shared concerns and mobilize through international networks to work together as allies. There are two intersecting registers for Indigeneity in this project. One is to understand Indigeneity as a construction, a social phenomenon, or social fact, that links peoples who have been colonized and dispossessed. It is a political consciousness vis a vis a colonizing force. The other is to recognize the way religious studies as a discipline has begun to understand “Indigenous religious traditions” as religious phenomena that have shared characteristics, particularly metaphysical characteristics that defy a simple binary of sacred and mundane but instead see religious life as present and interpolating daily life, through one’s attitude and actions.

Native American Literature Review

Native scholars describe Native lifeworlds as a matrix of related concepts.⁵⁵ This matrix describes the world and what it is to be human in that world, given the shared

⁵⁵ Viola Cordova, *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of A.F. Cordova*, eds. Kathleen Dean Moore, Kurt Peters, Ted Jojola and Amber Lacy (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 61.

observations and experiences of a group in a specific location. A central feature of this matrix is that there is “something rather than nothing.”⁵⁶ The world did not arise out of no-thing, it may have been understood to be a void or “a blackness” in the beginning but it is not empty. She says, “For the Eastern Apache one of the indefinite contents of the ‘the blackness’ is energy, which is depicted by lightning. It is the action of the lightning on the rest of the blackness that brings distinct things into being.” This something is variously named among Native communities, *usen* in the Apache, *wakan* in the Lakota but is generally understood to be the life-force immanent in all of creation. Cordova asserts, “this mysterious *something* precedes everything else; it serves at the same time as the *ground* of things and the manifestation of itself.”⁵⁷ In other words, this mysterious something, or *power* is a defining metaphysical characteristic and source of knowledge and guidance among Native communities.

Another fundamental concept is the idea that creation is diverse and specific to people and places. Cordova explains “each group sees itself as being created for a specific place,” unlike Western theoretical models, which often posit society or culture as independent from the natural world, Native communities recognize no such separation.⁵⁸ Cherokee scholar Brian Yazzie Burkhart characterizes Native knowledge as centered on and through experience. Knowledge is not produced in isolated contemplation but in and through relating and communicating with other beings.⁵⁹ Cherokee scholar Brian Yazzie Burkhart characterizes Native knowledge as phenomenological as it is centered on and through

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁸ See Tim Ingold. “Hunting and Gathering as Ways of Perceiving the Environment,” in *Redefining Nature: Ecology, Culture And Domestication*, eds. R. Ellen and K. Fukui. (Oxford: Berg, 1996), 117-155.

⁵⁹ Brian Yazzie Burkhart, “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us,” in *American Indian Thought*, ed. by Anne Waters (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 21.

experience. Knowledge is not produced in isolated contemplation but in and through relating and communicating with other beings.⁶⁰ He explains, “we must *maintain* our connectedness, we must maintain our relations, and never abandon them in search of understanding, but rather find understanding *through* them.” While a metaphysical backdrop may be shared among Native communities, and a sense of *interrelatedness*, or *interdependence*, it is the differences between them, such as *place* and relationships to the beings in that place (possible sources of *power*), which make them unique.

Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. echoes these observations, asserting that it is through the mediation of *power* and place that humans come to know themselves and the world:

The Indian world can be said to consist of two basic experiential dimensions that, taken together, provided a sufficient means of making sense of the world. These two concepts were place and power, the latter perhaps better defined as spiritual power or life force. Familiarity with the personality of objects and entities of the natural world enabled Indians to discern immediately where each living being had its proper place and what kinds of experiences that place allowed, encouraged, and suggested... knowing places enabled people to relate to the living entities inhabiting it.⁶¹

Deloria’s assertion frames the intellectual journey of knowing the world as also a fundamentally spiritual one. He says, humans “understood that their task was to fit in to the physical world in the most constructive manner and to establish relationships with the higher powers... that created and sustained the universe.”⁶² It is both through the guidance of spiritual powers and other beings that people survive and thrive. This knowledge was often sought after in dreams, visions or in ceremony. Sometimes plants, animals or other spiritual beings befriended individuals in order to provide them with guidance. Ceremonies were the institutions in which this knowledge was sought after in a more formalized way. They also

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Vine Deloria, Jr. and Daniel Wildcat, *Power and Place: Indian Education in America* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Resources, 2001) 2.

⁶² Vine Deloria, Jr., *The World We Used to Live In* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Resources, 2006) xxv.

served to mediate life transitions, for instance puberty ceremonies, as one is considered to never *be* but instead is always *becoming*.⁶³ Thus, while a metaphysical backdrop may be shared among Native communities, it is the differences between them, such as place and relationships to the beings in that place, which make them unique.

Given these two frameworks, a spiritual something or *power* and shared heritage specific to place, we can understand how Native subjectivity is shaped through community and land. Cordova explains, “In a Native American sense the individual is always part of something greater than himself, a family, a clan, a tribe, a place. He or she can be “located” in a “larger whole” offering him or her “*a sense of belonging*.”⁶⁴ Because of this “enlarged sense of self” one is understood to be “involved in an *interrelationship* rather than a mere *relationship* with the ‘other.’” It is through the experience of living in an interdependent world that Native peoples understand other beings, mountains, rocks, animals and plants as not only relatives, hence the often heard phrase ‘all my relations’ but also co-constitutive of oneself. It is this interdependent relationship with the land, one’s relations and with spiritual beings that constitutes religious life for Native peoples.

These interrelationships with higher powers connected to place remain with many Native communities today, variously co-existing with other beliefs such as Christianity. Because this belief of interdependence is rooted in a basic metaphysical understanding of the world I have met many Native people who are able to reconcile this understanding with other religious beliefs. While settler colonialism has greatly affected all of Native America many Native communities in the US and Canada continue their ceremonial lives, some after much struggle. The sacred relationships to land and *spiritual power* that were once central to the

⁶³ Ines Talamantez, conversations with author about her forthcoming work *Becoming*.

⁶⁴ Cordova, *How It Is*, 149.

survival of Native peoples has disrupted due to policies of forced removal, boarding schools and urban relocation. Some peoples are still fighting for their land, others are reclaiming their knowledges and languages, and still others are struggling to survive emotionally and physically amidst the structural violence of poverty and marginalization on and off reservations.

Healing Historical Trauma

A critical theme in this project is healing the trauma created by colonization as a set of structures. A growing discourse in Indigenous studies and medical anthropology focuses on historical trauma—a trauma specific to those who have experience genocide and dispossession through colonization. The work of psychologist Eduardo Duran and Lakota social worker Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart explores the ways in which the trauma of colonization has engendered an epidemic of domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide and depression within Native America.⁶⁵ These scholars reframe this phenomenon as ‘historical trauma,’ which is understood to be a more acute form of PTSD that is cumulative over generations. Their work evaluates how traditional methods of healing and ceremony in addition to the re-emergence of other Native religious/traditional practices ameliorates or even eradicates the symptoms of historical trauma. These health care workers recognized that Native peoples and people of color did not respond well to traditional forms of Western therapy because it failed to consider their *experience* as peoples who are inherently connected to all creation.⁶⁶ Thus, they created modules of wellness that focused on

⁶⁵ Eduardo Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound: Counseling with American Indians and Other Native People* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2006): 13-28 and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, “The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration.” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 35, 1 (2003): 7-13.

⁶⁶ Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 8.

reconnection to one's traditional practices and metaphysical conceptualizations, which have proven to be effective in healing this kind of trauma.

Many works in the anthology, *Religion and Healing in Native America*, explore the relationship between Native religious traditions and self-determination. Native studies scholar, Susanne Crawford O'Brien, frames these works as primarily interested in healing, arguing that healing in Native communities must entail a restoration of an appropriate self-identity, one that exists in proper relationship within spatial, human, and ecological communities.⁶⁷ When Native communities, urban or on reservations, revitalize relationships with one another, the land and *power*, they are both *healing* and actualizing self-determination.⁶⁸ These scholars theorize self-determination in Native communities as both a political and *spiritual* process, and one that involves both the material and immaterial realms. My project extends the work of these scholars to explore how Native peoples these practices and relationships in a transnational context. How are such revitalizations or persistence of tradition possible in urban environments or 'outside' of the nation? Do they include the same metaphysical and spiritual dimensions?

The work of Winnebago scholar Renya Ramirez scholarship appears that it may answer these questions. Her book *Native Hubs* focuses on transnational Native identity. She describes these 'hubs' as spaces of political and social empowerment, "urban Indian culture and community... are unbounded entities created within various gathering sites located in the urban area."⁶⁹ She uses the notion of the hub to reflect the way transnational communities of

⁶⁷ Suzanne J. Crawford O'Brien, introduction to *Religion and Healing in Native America: Pathways for Renewal*, Religion, Health and Healing Series (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 5.

⁶⁸ See the work of Suzanne Crawford O'Brien, Michelle Jacob, Dennis Kelley, Denise Nadeau and Alannah Earl Young in *Religion and Healing in Native America: Pathways for Renewal*.

⁶⁹ Renya Ramirez, *Native Hubs: Culture, Community and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 24.

Native peoples have formed in urban areas despite being “physically displaced from our Indian lands or discursively marginalized from the nation-state.”⁷⁰ Ramirez argues that transnational spaces cultivate what she calls transnational spirituality, where peoples from diverse backgrounds can acknowledge and grieve the violence of colonialism wrought upon Indigenous peoples, particularly women. In addition, including spirituality in group spaces such as a decolonial move wherein “restoring and recovering Native spiritual practices becomes central to Indians' assertion of our right to maintain our own cultures, identities, and tribal nations.”⁷¹ Healing from this trauma as a community empowers Native women to, “potentially become politicized and begin to change the world around them.” While Ramirez’s work is admirable and compelling she paints Native religiosity with broad strokes, describing ceremonies and why they are empowering but not giving much detail on *how* or *why*, such as providing a more nuanced analysis of their metaphysical foundations and traditional meanings. Thus, I position my project as extending Ramirez’s work on transnational Native spirituality and healing by explicitly exploring the processes embedded in these transformations.

Tibetan Literature Review

Tibetan lifeworlds have fundamentally different metaphysical frameworks. While Tibetans do not explicitly refer to themselves as indigenous peoples, the term has informed the way Chinese scholars are framing Tibetan peoples, lands, plants etc. In addition, Tibetans in exile utilize a similar land-based rhetoric to identify themselves as environmental

⁷⁰ Renya Ramirez,. “Healing, Violence and Native American Women.” *Social Justice* Vol. 31, No. 4, (2004): 110.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

stewards.⁷² Anthropological data suggests that the land, *né* (*gnas*), is a fundamental variable in the construction and mediation of Tibetan identity and religious praxis.⁷³ It is imbued with chthonic *power* utilized by human oracles and other ritual specialist, which co-exists with transmundane *power* utilized by Buddhist elites like tulkus and lamas.⁷⁴ In other words, Tibetan religious life does not consist of a perfect syncretism of folk traditions and Buddhism but instead assumes a metaphysical backdrop of a ‘chthonic world,’ which is in dialogue with Buddhist ritual and belief. Although Buddhist, or Indian, cosmologies have informed Tibetan ones, they co-exist as dialogic layers and are variously meaningful for laypeople, scholars and religious virtuosos. Given this perspective it is clear that renegotiating relationships embedded in place, *né* (*gnas*)—in essence creating “Tibet,” or a simulation of Tibet, wherever Tibetans reside—as well as chthonic and Buddhist ritual *power* may constitute a major component of Tibetan transnational identity. So while, these various lineages are most certainly “Buddhist” there also contain elements that are “indigenous” to Tibet. Thus, Buddhist doctrine and Tibetan folk traditions have “traveled” with Tibetans in exile to create a many-layered lifeworld(s).

Tibetan transnational identity is explored in Julia Hess’s excellent ethnography of Tibet refugees living in New Mexico and India, *Immigrant Ambassadors*. She found that Tibetans developed what she called a “diaspora consciousness” that allowed them to identify as “Tibetan,” in essence construct cultural citizenship, despite never having been to Tibet.

⁷² See Emily Yeh’s “Tibetan Indigeneity: Translations, Resemblances and Uptake,” in *Indigenous Experience Today*, eds. Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn (NY: NY, Berg/Wenner Gren, 2007).

⁷³ See Toni Huber’s *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet* (NY: Oxford, 1999).

⁷⁴ See Toni Huber’s *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, Stan Mumford’s *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Geoffrey Samuel’s *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); and Martin Mills’s *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism The Foundations of Authority in Gelugpa Monasticism* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

Through this diaspora consciousness Tibetans in exile are able to act as “immigrant ambassadors” of Tibet, raising awareness of its political situation internationally while being stateless in India, citizens of India or citizens of Western countries. She finds that Tibetans define their culture and thus “Tibetanness” essentially Buddhist, but also as peoples who are ethnically distinct from Chinese with common traditions and language. Interestingly, Tibetans in exile frame Tibetan culture as containing an elevating central ethic that is relevant to all peoples.⁷⁵ For instance, the Dalai Lama uses both religious and political rhetoric to describe a global paradigm of *interdependence*, which emphasizes “peaceful relations” with other persons, beings and our world at large. Hess says, “The key point is that his notion of Tibetan culture as being beneficial to others besides Tibetans is framed in a way that reflects current transnational imaginings. Tibet has come free of its bounded geographic territory, and as such, is more available to the world.”⁷⁶ Although Hess’s study illuminates the complex motivations of Tibetans in diaspora her work fails to explore Tibetan religious and metaphysical concepts in relation to their project of nationhood. Thus, my project extends Hess’s by considering the role of Tibetan religious lifeways in Tibetan pursuits of sovereignty.

Sociologist, Ronald Schwartz’s study of Tibetan political resistance in the TAR (Tibetan Autonomous Region), *Circle of Protest*, uses Victor Turner’s theory of ‘communitas’ to explain the formation of Tibetan solidarity through group protest in resistance to Chinese oppression. His work is rich because it provides first hand accounts of a nation actively struggling to resist cultural genocide. Schwartz constructs Tibetan resistance as either ‘religious’ or ‘cultural’ phenomenon and, unfortunately, often frames Tibetan

⁷⁵ Julia Hess, *Immigrant Ambassadors, Citizenship and Belonging in the Tibetan Diaspora* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 62.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

religiosity in compartmentalized ways, such as either rational/ethical or supernatural. For instance, he assigns characterizes forms of protest that are “religious,” such as *kor wa* (ritual circumambulation) as ethical and the political interpretation of “magical signs” as such as rainbows, as supernatural signs of “religious longing” which becomes the “substitute for effective political power.”⁷⁷ Although he acknowledges that for Tibetan religion and politics have historically been combined, wherein Buddhist elites in the form of tulkus acted as the power structure due to their ‘enlightened’ status and ability to subdue the chthonic elements of the world through transmundane *power*, he fails to understand how the supramundane and the mundane work together in this community by framing “magic” in opposition to the rational/ethical elements of religion. In essence, he believes the latter political discourse is a relic of folk tradition and serves no serious material use in Tibetan projects of resistance. Another shortfall of this work, and scholarship on contemporary Tibetan political and religious identity in general, is its lack of engagement with postcolonial theory. If a Fanonian analysis were applied to this scenario it would reveal Tibetan’s call for ‘human rights’ is also about the right to full human existence, the right to retain one’s lifeworlds and one’s land. In this way, it is parallel to other postcolonial and decolonial claims to full humanness and ontological freedom.⁷⁸ By framing both Tibetan and Native transnational resistance and identity formation as a decolonial project this study is in conversation with other activisms that seek to deconstruct colonizing/imperial projects. In this way, I understand both Native and Tibetan knowledges to be sites of insurgent philosophies from which we can understand two dialogic visions of being and living in our world. I will define decolonization from a Fanonian perspective below.

⁷⁷ Ronald D. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising* (NY: Columbia, 1994), 226.

⁷⁸ See Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1967).

Decolonization

While decolonization projects are diverse, they generally call for both the undoing of colonization as a structure and the removal of its psychological effects. Decolonial scholar, Franz Fanon says, “The problem of colonialism includes not only the interrelations of objective historical conditions but also human attitudes towards these conditions.”⁷⁹ In other words, colonialism isn’t just a structural phenomena, it’s one that takes place within persons—in their own perceptions of self and as well as the world’s perception of them. Thus, it is the “psychological phenomena that governs the relations between the colonized and the colonizer” that must also be addressed when strategizing for true autonomy.⁸⁰ Fanon argues that racist perceptions of the colonized as fundamentally inferior are dehumanizing. In the colonizer’s world, the colonized cannot escape this gaze:

The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man—or at least a nigger. I shouted a greeting to the world and the slashed away my joy. I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I belonged.⁸¹

This dehumanizing gaze not only unfairly characterizes the colonized—what Dené scholar Glen Coulthard calls “misrecognition”⁸² but it re-shapes one’s subjectivity wherein one becomes a ‘subject of empire’ and thus, more easily ‘ruled:’

Fanon convincingly argued that the long-term stability of a colonial system of governance relies as much on the ‘internalization’ of the forms of racist recognition imposed or bestowed on the Indigenous population by the colonial state and society as it does on brute force. In this sense, the longevity of a colonial social formation depends, to a significant degree, on its capacity to transform the colonized population into subjects of imperial rule.⁸³

⁷⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁸¹ Ibid., 114-115.

⁸² Glen S. Coulthard, “Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the ‘Politics of Discernment’ in Canada.” *Contemporary Political Theory* 6 (2007): 444.

⁸³ Ibid., 443.

The colonized, as subjects of empire can no longer seek refuge in their own cultural forms because they have either been destroyed or are reviled “The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man... His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him.”⁸⁴ Thus the struggle for freedom includes freeing oneself from an ontological double bind in which one’s own access to traditional forms/ customs is compromised yet any action towards assimilation and acceptance is rebuffed.

This double bind leads to internalized racism, feelings of inferiority and other forms of internalized violence, such as depression and anxiety—a state described as historical trauma by contemporary scholars. I’ll say more about historical trauma below. Fanon argues that it is the colonized that must recognize their own value, their own self-worth on their own terms.

Fanon says:

I find myself suddenly in the world and I recognize that I have one right alone: That of demanding human behavior from the other. One duty alone: That of not renouncing my freedom through my choices.... I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists in introducing intervention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.⁸⁵

In other words, one can choose to recognize one’s own agency, assert one’s own identity and make one’s self anew by one’s own/ community standards. One can take back their power to name one’s self and shape one’s future. All other oppressed and colonized people searching and fighting for freedom can do this as well.

⁸⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin*, 110.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 229.

Fanon's two-pronged approach to decolonization has heavily influenced the contemporary discourse on decolonization. Coulthard says:

Fanon correctly situated colonial-capitalist exploitation and domination alongside misrecognition and alienation as foundational sources of colonial injustice.... he was also much more perceptive than many Marxists in his insistence that the subjective realm of colonialism be the target of strategic transformation along with the socio-economic structure. The colonized person 'must wage war on both levels.'

In fact, Coulthard argues that many contemporary Native movements for self-determination are really just politics of recognition—projects that ask for 'rights' or for the colonizer to recognize Native autonomy—and instead must follow Fanon's call to develop a politics of decolonization that asserts autonomy on Indigenous terms.

Thus, this project recognizes that decolonization is much more than a historical moment, an event; it is way of life, a way of being in the world. Fanon emphasized that decolonization was a creative project, a making anew. In this way, my project outlines the ways that two communities, one Native, one Tibetan, are making themselves anew. I argue that they are drawing from the multilogical strengths of their religious traditions to regenerate as peoples and assert their sovereignty. It demonstrates that neither Tibetan nor Native people must rely on static notions of what it means to be 'Native' or 'Tibetan' and can continue to explore this collectively. However, it also reveals the ways that community reliance on religious traditions and cultural forms accommodate their respective needs to honor their histories as peoples. My research shows that both communities creatively engage their religious traditions dialectically with their individual persons as well as through their communities in order to fashion new ways of being/ acting in the world. In this way, there needn't be one form of 'Native-ness' or one form of 'Tibetan-ness'—there are multiple expression of identity that act like a matrix instead of a spectrum from 'more' to 'less'

authentic. In addition, contemporary discourse on decolonization describes it as a political project with the potential for massive social change.⁸⁶ Thus, decolonization is understood to create structural change in the world. Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith discuss decolonization as a project that facilitates resistance to empire and its many forms, requiring a large-scale mobilization of the dispossessed:

The politics of decolonization requires the building of mass movements capable of dismantling settler colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism. The intellectual project of decolonization would necessarily be broad based as anyone and everyone who can help think of and imagine ways out of the moral and political impasse of recognition and into different modes of possibility would have to be enjoined to this intellectual and political process.⁸⁷

Decolonization is a project consisting of multiple theories and practices as well as multiple peoples in varying social positions, that envision “modes of possibility” that disrupt and dismantle empire and its many forms. Thus, I frame the regeneration of Native and Tibetan peoplehood as decolonization projects that enable a pedagogy of possibility—an psychic and social opening that re-envision not only who they are as people but new ways of being in the world. While their transnational dislocation has compounded the psychic affects of colonialism, their regeneration as peoples allows them to re-envision nationhood outside of their bounded nations. And explore the larger critical mass working towards the dissolution of settler states and empire more generally.

Nationhood and Sovereignty

This project employs indigenist understandings of both nationhood and sovereignty into to analyze the decolonization projects of Tibetan and Native American peoples.

Nationhood is understood to be the result of cultural and historical factors whose discursive

⁸⁶ See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a Metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Volume 1, No. 1, 2012 and Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith, *Theorizing Native Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014).

⁸⁷ Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith, introduction to *Theorizing Native Studies*, 10-11.

ribbons combine to create a bounded abstraction held as a “nation.”⁸⁸ It is defined by Vine Deloria, Jr. as follows, “Nationhood implies a process of decision-making that is free and uninhibited within the community, a community in fact that is almost completely insulated from external factors, as it considers its possible options.”⁸⁹ Audra Simpson argues that nationhood must be understood within a Native philosophical order. She critiques the use of race as a framework to understand the complexity of Native American identity as it distorts the real issue at hand, “much of the struggle within Indian country (broadly defined) is about Native peoples regaining authority and institutional power to define and recognize themselves as well as the need for institutions of recognition and resolution that are free from state power.”⁹⁰ When articulations of Native nationhood are perceived as contingent on their race as opposed to their efforts for social justice, these latter efforts are elided. Simpson argues that the difference between Indigenous peoples and settler societies is not just race; it is a way of being in the world:

[T]he “difference” of indigenous moral and philosophical orders, their matrix of connectedness, and their complexity, all of which lay before and now lie within, settler societies. The shorthand for this is “nationhood,” not race. So, in this context, the language of “race” must be deeply contextualized, as it can do the work of settlement when discussions of race refuse an engagement with what enables it and what it obfuscates.⁹¹

While race exists as a social fact, it is not the sole criteria for “nationhood,” which in a Native philosophical order corresponds to the real needs and experiences of Native peoples. I interpret Simpson as repositioning race as a rubric in which colonized and Indigenous

⁸⁸ Audra Simpson, “Paths Toward a Mohawk Nation: Narratives of Citizenship and Nationhood in Kawnawake,” in *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, eds. Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton and Will Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 114-122.

⁸⁹ Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998) 13-15.

⁹⁰ Audra Simpson, “On the Logic of Discernment.” *American Quarterly* 59.2 (2007): 483.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 483-484.

peoples have been subjected to—a projected category constructed by the colonizer to justify colonization—that is not a central characteristic of Native identity. However, this does not preclude the social fact that Indigenous and colonized peoples continue to be racialized through projects of empire and experience racism in their everyday lives.

Nationhood is a lived expression of peoplehood; a “consciousness” shared by a people and lived through their traditional lifeways. It is informed by their pre and post-contact experiences:

In carrying a consciousness of themselves as members of a nation that pre-dates Canada and the US, the *contemporary* among Mohawks is conjoined to the postmodern, the colonial and pre-colonial—to an indigenous Iroquois past and present. Here, *culture* is both a self-conscious, deliberate and politically expedient formulation and a lived, and implicit, rather than contemplated phenomenon. *The nation*, similarly, is a collectively self-conscious, deliberate and politically expedient formulation and a lived phenomenon. Both constitute a terrain of consensus, disagreement, discord, and hopeful contemplation that connects the categorical ‘Mohawk,’ to the individual, their family and the extension of their family to a living entity: their nation.⁹²

Nationhood is primarily ontological. “It is the prism through which many Indians view their historical experiences, themselves and their aspirations and thought... It is a Herculean gesture away from the enframing efforts of the Canadian state, toward a place and a state of being that is our own.”⁹³ Nationhood, and more abstractly self-determination I argue, is an effort to assert and reside in this physical and ontological space, without the “enframing” efforts of a dominant nation dictating the practices and ideology of this process. In this way, decolonization can be understood as an assertion and embodiment of this ontological space wherein a people are free to construct their own structural and discursive arrangements and *be* as a people as a result of them.

⁹² Simpson, “Mohawk Nation,” 118.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 126.

Similarly, Dene author Glen Coulthard claims that the appropriate strategy necessary for the self-determination of First Nations peoples is *self*-affirmation. He questions the utility of “recognition” models, which is dependent on the Canadian state and would, Coulthard argues, continue to put First Nations communities in a disadvantaged position. He employs Franz Fanon’s critique of the master/slave relationship to argue that the inevitable result for Native peoples will be misrecognition (or even non-recognition, given the history) and pain through a “profoundly *asymmetrical* and *non-reciprocal* form of recognition” and worse continue to construct First Nations peoples “Indigenous subjects of empire.”⁹⁴ Coulthard suggests Fanon’s solution to this conundrum: self-determination through *self*-affirmation, “the colonized must struggle to critically reclaim and evaluate the worth of *their own* histories, traditions, and cultures against the subjectifying gaze and assimilative lure of colonial recognition.”⁹⁵ Much like Smith, Coulthard is suggesting that Indigenous peoples construct self-determining strategies on his or her own terms, grounding them in their own traditions and sensibilities. Instead of *asking* for recognition they are affirming their own sovereignty by *living* out their peoplehood.

Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred argues that because colonization separated indigenous peoples from their responsibilities to the land and “one another,” self-determination can only be accomplished, by prioritizing the re-deployment of this sense of responsibility and respect.⁹⁶ He explains that many Indigenous people are suffering from what he calls a “lack of conscience and consciousness” as a result of this fragmentation and exist in a “deep pool of internal suffering,” which at its root “is alienation—separation from

⁹⁴ Coulthard, “*Subjects of Empire*,” 439.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 453.

⁹⁶ Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, 5.

our heritage and from ourselves.”⁹⁷ He asserts that we can only reverse this situation by finding true leaders, who aspire to a different ideal, “instead of mimicking the bad character and greed of mainstream politicians, Native leaders must aspire to embody traditional values.”⁹⁸ While he concedes that the diversity among Indigenous peoples is great he believes that they share a common value, “a commitment to a profoundly respectful way of governing based on a world view that values autonomy but also recognizes a universal interdependency and promotes peaceful coexistence among all the elements of creation.”⁹⁹ The ultimate goal for Native nations is peaceful co-existence with settler states. He argues that it will only be achieved through the *regeneration* of peoples through what he calls a “self-conscious traditionalism” or a traditionalism that is consciously re-constructed to embrace such values, not as a reactionary contrivance of colonialism, but as a movement grounded in Indigenous concepts of what is right and just—such as a respect for land and all relations—for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.¹⁰⁰

Alfred notes that Native expressions of sovereignty may be distorted by Western philosophical constructs and must be redefined using concepts that adhere to Indigenous values and lifeways.¹⁰¹ “Sovereignty is an exclusionary concept rooted in an adversarial and coercive Western notion of power.”¹⁰² In short, Indigenous peoples’ struggles for self-

⁹⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰¹ The *Encyclopedia of Political Theory* explains sovereignty as follows, “The concept of *sovereignty* is conventionally used to connote supreme authority within a given polity. In practice, however, sovereignty is one of the most contested concepts in political theory. The meanings of sovereignty vary widely depending on the context in which this concept is used, as well on its inferential connections to other political concepts. Although crucial to modern political science and international relations, the concept of sovereignty is notoriously ambiguous and thus hard to define with any precision.”

¹⁰² Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, 83.

determination are only undermined when ascribing to an authoritarian system by replicating an inherently imbalanced system that does not cohere with Indigenous worldviews. Alfred notes that the inequities created by such authoritarian ideology and praxis lead to injustice. Since personal and community power is compromised due to the dysfunction created by injustice, self-determination means reinstating justice, a justice that is naturally enabled through a renewed notion of relationship with all aspects of the universe. Alfred explains that indigenous justice means, “respectful coexistence—restoration of harmony to the networks of relationships and renewed commitment to ensuring the integrity and physical, emotional, health of all individuals and communities.”¹⁰³ Responding to colonialism’s abuse of power with coercive force and reactionary retaliatory tactics only serves to perpetuate the imbalanced dynamic of power between the state and indigenous peoples. If indigenous leaders understand power as a source that comes from within oneself that is procured independently from the state, they will no longer enable this unhealthy cycle of force and coercion. Alfred illustrates that an indigenous approach to empowerment is “not inherently conflictual” or “statist,” “nor does it require a contractual surrender of power” as defined by “sovereignty.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, citizens of Native nations need not give up their individual power to a “sovereign” but instead work together in web of interrelatedness that considers the wellbeing of the community—including that of the land and its inhabitants.

Audra Simpson echoes Alfred’s critique of sovereignty and explains that sovereignty is conferred; yet nationhood is not. It is an extension of who you are as a member of a particular tribe or people:

My opinion is that “Mohawk” and “nationhood” are inseparable. Both are simply about being. Being is who you are, and a sense of who you are is arrived at through

¹⁰³ Ibid., 66.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 72.

your relationships with other people—your people. So, who we are is tied with what we are: a nation. Now, sovereignty—the authority to exercise power over life, affairs, territory—this is not inherited. It's not a part of being, the way our form of nationhood is. It has to be conferred, or granted—it's a thing that can be given and thus can be taken away. It's clearly a foreign concept, because it occurs through an exercise of power—power over another.¹⁰⁵

It is this assertion of Native personhood and identity as actually determining the “nation” that reveals where power resides—with the people, not the sovereign. Thus, we can understand Native nationhood as one that deals with power in a more equitable and just way—it must be distributed among the people but also negotiated through the spirit world.

Alfred argues that the most effective resistance to statist forms of power is the *regeneration* of Indigenous power.¹⁰⁶ He explains that Indigenous peoples, particularly Onkwehonwe (Mohawk) peoples, will become the warriors they need to be by confronting their own fear and regenerating their personal *power*. Here *power* is understood to be a spiritual force in the universe through which one has the ability to exert power in their lives as well as maintain or restore natural balance. Regenerating sacred relationships to the land and one's community enables one to restore their spiritual *power*. “Indigenous empowerment involves achieving a relationship between peoples founded on the principles of autonomy and interdependence.”¹⁰⁷ It is from this position of balance that new relations of power can be made, “from colonial-imperialist relations to pluralist multinational associations of autonomous peoples and territories that respect the basic imperatives of indigenous cultures as well as preserve the stability and benefits of cooperative confederal relations between indigenous nations and other governments.”¹⁰⁸ Imperialist projects will end when Indigenous peoples have regained their personal (spiritual) *power* and approach settler states without

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 89.

¹⁰⁶ Alfred, *Wasáse*, 151.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 77.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 266-67

compromising their values. Ultimately, we can understand Indigenous nationhood as a form of cultural regeneration in which a people retain or reclaim their sense of identity. Thus, Native nations do not exist as nation states in the same way as the U.S. or Canada. They are not legitimated through violence but in and through relationships with the land, all one's relations and spiritual power.

In addition, sovereignty can be understood in Indigenous terms as well. Vine Deloria, Jr. framed sovereignty as the continuity of peoplehood:

Sovereignty, in the final instance, can be said to consist more of continued cultural integrity than of political powers and to the degree that a nation loses its sense of cultural identity, to that degree it suffers a loss of sovereignty. When we view sovereignty in this broadly expanded light, new possibilities for constructive action arise. Cultural integrity involves a commitment to a central and easily understood purpose that motivates a group of people, enables them to form efficient, albeit informal social institutions, and provides for them a clear identity which cannot be eroded by the passage of events. Sovereignty then revolves about the manner in which traditions are developed, sustained, and transformed to confront new conditions. It involves most of all a strong sense of community discipline and a degree of self-containment and pride that transcends all objective codes, rules, and regulations.¹⁰⁹

A people remain sovereign by retaining their culture and identity. Thus, we can understand the reclamation of peoplehood as an assertion of sovereignty and nationhood itself as an expression of peoplehood.

¹⁰⁹ Vine Deloria, Jr., Self-Determination and the Concept of Sovereignty, in *Economic Development In American Indian Reservations* 22,22 (Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz ed., 1979) 27.

Chapter 3: Planting Yourself in the Land: Native American Religious Continuity and Regeneration in Transnational Spaces

Spirituality to me is 24/7, it's not something you do once a week or twice a week or sometimes... Nobody can prohibit me from praying anytime anywhere that I want. If I'm going to be like the Pharisee who makes a show of giving his offerings, then that's wrong, that's religion. I don't have to kneel down, I don't have to bow my head; I have to pray. We're free to pray 24/7 and that's the difference between religion and religious people and spiritual people regardless of their belief system. That's basically the way I was raised. That's the way I've tried to live my life and the way I try and interact with my family—DNA way and Indian way. – Gregory Gomez, Albuquerque, January 24, 2013.

Despite the estrangement and loss wrought by colonization and its effects, transnational Native peoples continue to practice their religious traditions. Contrary to a popular assumption that American Indians are ‘vanishing,’ or even worse, no longer ‘authentic,’¹¹⁰ complex contemporary religious movements among transnational Native peoples are taking place throughout the Americas. Renya Ramirez’s work explicates that Native identity is not a one-way road to dilution but acts dialectically from reserves to urban spaces. This chapter examines the diverse religious landscapes of Native American peoples living in diaspora. Many consider themselves ‘urban,’ others consider themselves living in their Native homelands (despite the fact that a city has erupted in the middle of it) and other see themselves as making a return home—the home of their ancestors. Through a series of vignettes, I illustrate the ways that Native peoples continue their traditions in the ‘urban spaces’ of Albuquerque and Santa Fe, tracing the ways that these religious lifeways intersect Native struggles for self-determination and decolonization. I argue that an increasingly pan-Indian and hemispheric indigenous identity fosters community regeneration and resists cultural erasure. It is the regeneration of Native lifeways that serve as a foundation for larger movements of resistance. While the articulations of these religious traditions are diverse, their varied expressions intersect and overlap in transnational religious landscapes. These

¹¹⁰ Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

landscapes foster a broadened pan-Native identity that is hemispheric, even global and envisions a form of nationhood that exceeds the singular Native nation.

Transnational Native American Identity

Several eminent scholars of Native American studies, such as Vine Deloria, Jr. and Gregory Cajete, have noted that Native traditions are not static and continue to change based on the needs of the community.¹¹¹ Jicarilla Apache scholar, Myla Vicenti Carpio, explains that Native people who live in Albuquerque may travel home for ceremonies but they develop communities in the city to foster their cultural identity.¹¹² In fact, she argues, Indigenous people have been migrating through the Americas for centuries and bring their traditions with them wherever they go. Native traditions, religious and otherwise, are alive and well outside of Native nations. However, maintaining ties to traditions is difficult if one is estranged from one's home community, which is an increasingly common problem.

In *Native Hubs*, Winnebago scholar Renya Ramirez argues that Native people who live in urban centers form hubs of community that help them retain and celebrate their Native identities. She explains that the national identity of many urban Native peoples is a complex one and framing them as transnational can trouble the oversimplified identities of urban Indians that have been assumed popularly and in academia:

...many urban Indians are transnationals who maintain connections to their tribal communities or sustain their tribal identities while living without a land base. Because Native Americans in urban areas have been portrayed as dysfunctional people without culture, stuck within the “incarcerated zones” of their tribal land bases, this argument that many urban Indians are transnationals is important. This assertion will, I hope, begin to rectify the negative portrayals of urban Indians in some past academic works and popular discourse that assume that Indians' move to the city is a *one-way* trip that not only means cultural dysfunction but also loss of

¹¹¹ Deloria, *God is Red*, 67.

¹¹² Myla Vicente Carpio, *Indigenous Albuquerque* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2011).

Indian culture, community, identity, and belonging. Indeed, somehow this moves breaks all substantive connection to tribe and homeland. Thinking of urban Native Americans as transnationals complicates prior definitions of transnationalism that were based on relationships between nation-states, ignoring the importance of tribal nations as well as other cultural or national identities.¹¹³

When Native people are understood as ‘transnationals’ their relationship to their homelands and people is emphasized—Native nations become salient agentive. This broader definition of transnationalism also recognizes those that retain cultural citizenship or reclaim their Indigenous identities, whether they are enrolled members of tribes or not. As Ramirez explains, cultural identity does not stop at national lines, for those living under colonization or forced diaspora, citizenship often involves multiple sites of allegiance:

My focus on Native Americans’ experience as transnationals also highlights the paradoxical relationship between landless Native Americans and dominant notions of citizenship. Citizenship usually refers to peoples’ relationship to a *singular* nation-state. This ethnographic study, in contrast, discussed Indigenous peoples’ connection to multiple social and political communities, bringing together the hub and Yuval-Davis’ notion of the multi-layered citizen.¹¹⁴

Through this term we can better imagine the possibility that inter-tribal communities may articulate a claim to community and thus, nationhood, outside of their singular Native nations. While some Native transnationals have cultural allegiances to both a Native nation and an inter-tribal community in the city, several others have become estranged from their home community due to dislocation—a common effect of colonization—and thus view inter-tribal communities as their new ‘tribe.’

Native American Religious Regeneration

Taiaiake Alfred, a Mohawk scholar and currently one of the leading theorists on Native self-governance, argues that the first step in attaining true autonomy for Indigenous

¹¹³ Ramirez, *Native Hubs*, 200-201.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*.

peoples is their *regeneration*.¹¹⁵ For Alfred, regeneration means choosing to live a distinctly Native way of life. This way of life has often been described as a ‘lifeway.’ Native lifeways are the lived epistemologies of Native peoples, from their languages and ceremonies to their cosmologies and values. *Regeneration* can be understood as a form of conscious re-traditionalism where one looks to the past, the lifeways of their peoples, and chooses to embody it in a new way in the present. Because Native lifeways are contingent on land, the spirit world and all one’s relations, nurturing and regenerating the sacred connection to them is vital. Thus, in an interdependent world, one has the responsibility to care for oneself as well as for others (land and community) because they are all contingent upon one another.

The Spirit World

The spirit world described by Native peoples can be defined as the spiritual dimension of the universe. The spirit world is characterized by spirit—the animating principle inherent in all natural phenomena. Spirit is referred to by various names, *wakan* among the Lakota, *usen* among the Apache, and in a more contemporary context ‘Creator.’ It is understood to be the source of intelligence in the universe, thus Native people beseech the spirit world for guidance on matters of healing, governance and one’s spiritual destiny. Spiritual power is the active form of spirit. Spiritual power can come to you in a dream, or while on a vision quest. Most often spiritual power is understood to be the guiding force that enables healers to heal, but it can be the source of other special abilities as well, such as, the ability to see into the future or communicate with a particular animal. Apache scholar, Inés Talamantez, explains that one is expected to conduct oneself appropriately within tribal community life, maintaining one’s balance in relation to the multi-faceted world—other beings, corporeal and non-corporeal, and the landscape—in order to “assure the possibility of

¹¹⁵ Alfred, *Wasáse*, 19-38.

acquiring sacred powers—what Apaches call *diyii*.¹¹⁶ These sacred powers are important to develop, as they are a source of sacred knowledge and when used wisely could benefit the entire community. They also served as a source of personal strength, nurturing one’s “connectedness to life” and one’s ability to “commune fully with nature, to feel its sensations, as well as the sensations of his own body.”¹¹⁷ It follows that spiritual power, as understood in the Apache context, is central to the formation of personhood, literally shaping individuals through their relationship with *spirit*—into who they can and will be. While the nature of *spiritual power* varies among Native peoples, the unifying expression is that the entire community relied on the spirit world for protection, guidance and survival.

It is this interdependent relationship with the land, one’s relations and the spirit world that constitutes the fundamental nature of Native American religious traditions, or what are often referred to as Native lifeways. It is the renegotiation of this kind of spiritual agency that Alfred argues will engender empowerment for Native peoples. Spiritual power must not only be regenerated on a personal, spiritual level, it must simultaneously be transformed on a relational level, enabling nations and communities to peacefully coexist.

One cannot talk about Native survival without recognizing the role of resistance; the two are intimately linked. Native efforts to resist multiple forms of genocide are essentially about survival, surviving as a people who live in a particular way, not just staying alive. We can think of Native survival as dependent on resistance and resistance as an expression of survival. Thus, Gerald Vizenor’s expression, *survivance*, has become a ubiquitous shorthand

¹¹⁶ Inés Talamantez, “Teaching Native American Religious Traditions and Healing,” in *Teaching Religion and Healing*, edited by Linda L. Barnes and Inés Talamantez (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 118.

¹¹⁷ Inés Talamantez, “Ethnopoetics Theory and Method: A Study of ‘Isánáklesdé Gotal with Analysis of Selected Songs, Prayers, Ritual Structure, and Contemporary Performance,” (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 1976), 24.

for this relationship in Native studies and is often utilized with little to no elaboration.¹¹⁸ In this chapter, I frame Native religious revitalization/ continuity among urban Native peoples in the U.S. as an expression of survivance. The following vignettes illustrate the diverse approaches Native peoples in New Mexico have taken to either continue or regenerate their Indigenous traditions.

Native American Religious Landscapes

As described above, Native American religious traditions do not center on churches or a written text and associated dogma from which to teach its adherents. They are based on relationships to land and spiritual power residing in it as well as origin stories and the plethora of narratives that have developed over time within a particular tribe or community. These traditions are recognized as lifeways passed down for generations that can only be understood over the course of one's life. Native American religious landscapes are a vital dimension of cities like Albuquerque and Santa Fe. As I mentioned above, many Native inhabitants may travel to nearby reservations to participate in ceremonial life but others continue an active ceremonial life in the city, whether they build their own sweat lodges, practice Native lifeways along with other traditions or are members of the Native American Church. While many ceremonies, such as the sweat lodge, also known as the *inipi* ceremony, have strict protocols, other approaches to Native spirituality are less proscribed and only necessitate prayer and communion with spirit. The experiential quality of these traditions demand that one's spiritual sensibility develop and unfold as one reflects on life's experiences. Thus, wisdom and 'spiritual attainment' is often reserved for elders, or those who have seen enough life and have developed the maturity to put these life experiences in

¹¹⁸ *Survivance* is a term used by Chippewa scholar Gerald Vizenor to frame Native articulations of resistance as a process that simultaneously ensures Native survival and recognizes survival itself (given the continued colonization of Native lands) as a unique demarcation of Native identity.

perspective. For this reason, I'll begin my illustration of narratives with several of the elders I met with and who were kind enough to share their experiences around religious continuity, regenerating Native lifeways and living transnationally.

This is Native Land

Gregory Gomez is about 65 years old and is Mescalero and Lipan Apache. He grew up throughout the south and southwest, doing ranch and farm work. His large extended family taught him how to practice medicine and gifted him with stories. He moved to Albuquerque from Texas with his wife and two children about 17 years ago. Gregory runs an organization called the Indigenous Institute of the Americas, which seeks to share and promote Indigenous American culture all over the world. Before he retired he was a social worker and licensed therapist. As a federal employee he worked on the Indian Child Welfare Act, which gave Indian tribes more oversight over the transfer of Indian children from their homes to non-Indian families. He is a Vietnam veteran and attends a Native veterans support group regularly at the VA Hospital on the Kirtland Air Force base in Albuquerque. He describes his life as one where he had been active in Indian country. He's coached Native basketball teams and has acted as a board member of many urban Native organizations, such as the Dallas Intertribal Center.

His organization, the Indigenous Institute of the Americas (IIA), is essentially voluntary and self-funded. His 'Indian-way' niece, Lawnikwa Spotted Eagle, assists him in these efforts. For example, she makes donations of blankets or books to the chapter houses on Navajo. When they receive donations of clothes, etc., they pass them along to those in need. He said that he had been doing this kind of work well before IIA got started, which is why he often says that he began IIA well before he did. He explains that spirituality is a

lifestyle, a way of life, in opposition to religion. He gives to others because it is his spirituality to do so; it's the way he was raised. In other words, community sharing and giving is spiritual. This spiritual practice ensured his survival and likened it to a quality of life issue, saying he was rich for it, not in money but in spirit. This spirituality extended to all humanity, not just the two-leggeds but the flowers and grass, anything that has Spirit is 'human.'¹¹⁹

For Gregory, helping others and building community was a reflection of the values he learned growing up. His family expanded continually as a child, whether it was to take in other relatives as immediate kin and make non-relatives family. He explains that nurturing relationship and expanding your 'family,' is a fundamental part of spirituality—one ought to care for others as if they were your family:

That's the way my family was. Somewhere in the late 1930's, 40's, 50's, there was something that happened, several of my Aunties died from TB or some other things. Some of their sons and daughters, my brothers and sisters came to live with us. My parents always seemed to get by... If we weren't on the road doing migrant work, we always had that with us. There was always family and extended family, friends of... That concept of people being family I grew up with. I was taken in by a family my senior year of high school. For me that was very normal. That's all part of spirituality. For me it's very hard to separate it.¹²⁰

Although he was exposed to other forms of religion, and even studied world religions in college, he was always sure of his spirituality and learned this through watching his family, his grandfather in particular. He would watch his grandfather get on his knees and pray or go outside and look up at the sky and pray. Gregory describes his practice as very simple, he prays in the morning and at night and sometimes throughout the day. He sees spirituality as steeped in prayer and ceremony. He has also developed a gift for healing, in which he feels his spirit will leave his body and go out to be with others that need healing. Others in his

¹¹⁹ Field notes 01/24/13.

¹²⁰ Interview with Gregory Gomez, 01/24/2012.

family or social circle often asked for prayer and ceremony and so sometimes he wills it this process but other times he can just feel it going out and he'll rest in prayer while its gone. He says that people often think that spirituality is a very complicated thing and they ask him how he does it but he thinks it's very simple, just being in himself praying. His spirituality is what allows him to do what he can to help others. It gives us the strength that we need to face life's obstacles. Gregory and his friend Will are currently constructing a sweat lodge on Gregory's daughter's property. When we discussed working on the lodge the following weekend, I joked that I would do some push ups to try and build up strength to help out. He said that if one is connected to Spirit and doing work like that in Spirit, they will be given the strength and energy to do whatever they need to do. So, working and living in Spirit strengthens us to do good works in the world.

Living in urban areas has complicated the spiritual lives of Native peoples but Gregory explains that the new communities formed that enabled the spiritual life of these urban Indians to continue. Since honoring relationships is a fundamental part of Native spirituality, the fellowship developed in urban spaces nurtured a core value—interrelatedness, or a sense that people are contingent on one another and thus must work towards their mutual wellbeing:

Coming to the early part of the 1940's a lot of the Indian men go to war, they come back home and all of the sudden they're not willing to put up with the bullshit of the racism and bigotry that they grew up with because they went off to war. They had been willing to lay their lives down and all of a sudden same old same old. That's when the National Tribal Chairman Association started, which no longer exists and when the National Congress of American Indians started, which still exists. The next big movement that came about after the 50's was the relocation program, taking Indian families off of reservations and into cities. New York, Chicago, Denver, Chicago, wherever. So all of the sudden the boarding school system started making us intertribal. Our children were punished for speaking their own languages. That's where more of the intertribal marriages first started. And then with the relocation

program—you come together for church, bowling, softball, basketball and powwows. And those things...

When I started working for the federal civil service in '75, I could go to Boston and call the police department and ask, "where's the Indian center?" I already knew where the center was but I asked. So an Indian person could go from home and not even know anybody in Dallas or Boston and know there were going to be an Indian center and an Indian community somewhere, an Indian bar and maybe an Indian church. A lot of the Indian centers were called American Indian centers or the name of the town and 'intertribal center' so you have a lot of Indian people in, I'll say Dallas because that's where I was mostly involved in the Indian community... You have 240 different tribes represented that come together for some of those activities that I'm talking about. In nearby Oklahoma, the largest group is the Choctaw and they had their own group. The second largest group was the Navajo and they had their own Diné club.¹²¹ And then there were a bunch of us that were from all over and we would come together for activities. That's when we would all support each other as family. I was on the board and president of the American Indian center and the board and president later in the Dallas Intertribal center. So we all just knew who the poorer families were. We knew who the veterans were that drank a lot and got into fights and went to jail and what their families needed. Urban Indian centers were largely set-up to address those kinds of issues. Something that came into urban Indians community was health clinics. We were able to tap into federal health service money and then specifically Indian Health Service to get money into urban areas to help urban Indian people. Oklahoma City had an incredible urban Indian population but it was like Albuquerque or Santa Fe, they're close enough to go back home for ceremony on the weekend. But you go to Denver, you go to Dallas, you go to Chicago or New York or Philadelphia and that's not true. So those are some of the variances of urban Indian communities. What I starting pushing and other people starting pushing was re-prioritizing the needs [of the] community. Any poor community regardless of ethnicity, poor people have a commonality as far as needs... they'll be the same but the priority changes. So what do we do when there are Indians from Alaska, from Canada, from Pennsylvania, from Mexico? Although <sarcastically> we don't accept any of the Indian people that are south of the border because we don't accept them as Indian. They don't have a card. So what can we do? Have as many for real people and for real organizations that are spiritually based, rather than material based. Rather than just economic based. We need to recognize our differences. I mean there are 19 Pueblos here; the largest language group is Ceres. We need to recognize that. We need to honor that. But we also need to capitalize and build on the similarities.

For me the easier way in my spirituality is offering myself to best of my abilities. I also offer myself as a storyteller. Not just as a traditional storyteller but telling stories like I'm doing right now. To me this is story. It's a story that I've been given because it's my life. And it's the story of my life because I have chosen to live this to the best

¹²¹ Diné is the term that Navajo people used to describe their community. It roughly translates to "the people."

of my ability. And I'm not saying that people who don't are wrong. We all have our own walk. And we choose our own walk. I have chosen to walk this way for whatever reason. So whatever I can do individually and collectively. Wherever I'm at, it's critical for survival that it's spiritual based. My spirituality has enabled us, as a family now, to do some of what I talked about earlier. Our spirituality allows us to have a little extra put away to help our brothers and sisters who need more relief. I always go back to "it's my responsibility and I accept it as such," it's my spiritual responsibility to help people help themselves. But if people are not willing to help themselves then I have a moral right and an obligation to walk away from them and go elsewhere. There are people who also need and are willing to do the best they can to help themselves.

In this passage, Gregory makes several important points. American Indian identity emerged in the 20th century out of cultural shifts, such as, Native veterans coming home from WWI and WWII and refusing to tolerate racism, inter-tribal relationships formed at boarding schools and the federal relocation program that shifted large numbers of reservation Indians to urban areas. Pan-tribal identity and inter-tribal marriage only increased in this move to cities. Thus, a growing awareness was fostered among Native tribes, that they were a people who had common values and common needs, despite their diverse tribal identities. Urban Indian centers were created to meet the social, physical and spiritual needs of these people, and soon acted as pillars of community outreach and social life. These spaces nurtured what Gregory would call "Indian way" family, meaning when people would treat one another like relatives, even if they're not related. He recognized that these spaces were most successful when they honored the differences between Indian people but also built upon similarities to support one another. He explains that it is was one's own spiritual path, and sense of responsibility to others, that could best bridge the differences between them and enable the survival of all. Gregory has chosen to live his life in a spiritual way; his spirituality has enabled him to help others. The central logic of this spirituality—interdependence—catalyzes

his sense of responsibility to help others. In this way, being responsible to others is an expression of his spiritual lifeway.

Gregory explained that there were two spheres that have shaped the spirituality of Indian people in a contemporary context, pow-wows—that were initially ceremonials and feasts that became intertribal events due to relocation and urbanization—and the Lakota Sun Dance, because it has revitalized so powerfully and has begun to be taken to other parts of the world. Gregory observed that these traditions have changed over the years and sometimes shifted somewhat from their initial intention saying, “whether this is a bad thing, I don’t know.” He began attending pow wows in the 1960’s but didn’t dance because at that time only certain tribes pow wow’ed and one had to be initiated into society to do so. He was eventually adopted by another tribe, the Comanche, and began to dance. Although he grew up with his own spiritual beliefs, he was initiated into the Lakota Sun Dance tradition in the 1970’s and danced for sixteen years.

While the Sun Dance has now become open to many non-Indian people, at the time, it was relatively closed. His partner was Lakota and her family asked him to participate in spiritual activities because they deemed him spiritually able, which is significant because many partners were not invited, whether they were Indian or not. He stressed that Spirit must be negotiated respectfully, particularly in ceremonial contexts. He describes attending a Sun Dance organized by a high profile Lakota Sun Dancer in Arizona in the early 1980’s. Gregory noted that some aspects of the dance were not being observed and expressed this to him. After they exchanged words, Gregory fell ill during a dance; a cold sweat came over him and he felt faint. He sent a message in prayer to his brother Chico, who was nearby playing the drum. Luckily, Chico sensed Gregory’s call and came over to help him. Chico

carried Gregory back to his camp so he could sleep for a bit but even after resting he was unable to return to the grounds. He was too sick. Gregory suspected that the lead Sun Dancer had bewitched him, so they left. He was teary and emotional as he told me this story, remembering the frustration he felt that someone would use spirituality in this way, to potentially hurt others.

Many Navajos were at this Sun Dance. At that time, they were in a bitter land dispute with the Hopi, due to arbitrary lines drawn between their communities by the federal government. Gregory believed that many of the men who were dancing were praying to win against the Hopi. “Watching all these people wear their finery and dance to win against a nearby people—what is that?” he said with exasperation. Many of these men gave him a hard time, accusing him of having money and access to “all kinds of women.” In essence, they implied that Gregory had relative privilege compared to them because he was an urban professional. He admits that he was privileged; he had been given spiritual knowledge that they hadn’t and they were jealous. While this isn’t always observed, these ceremonies were intended to pray for the wellbeing of all people, not just their own. They’re done regularly to honor and sustain all creation. At this particular event, this ethic was not observed.¹²²

One of the factors that complicate Native religious continuity and regeneration in urban areas is conversion. Missionization was a central structure that helped facilitate colonialism in the Americas. Most Indian people have been exposed to some version of Catholicism or Christianity, conversion was often compulsory and thus, many have become practitioners. Some refuse to acknowledge traditional religious lifeways as valid, while others happily engage both traditions—seeing them as quite separate practices, one cultural, and one religious. Others have merged the two, recognizing the Christian ‘God’ as

¹²² Field notes 04/04/2013.

‘Creator’—an association that is not such a difficult leap given that Creator is often described as the divine force imminent in all natural phenomena. Gregory explains that much of his family identifies as Christian—one of his brothers is even a trained theologian. He believes that many Indian people are able to justify their conversion because “they are praying” and so view all prayer as essentially the same. He doesn’t agree; it’s not the same. For Gregory, living a spiritual lifeway is not just about praying, it’s how you live your life. And for him, many Indians who are Christian are not really living a spiritual lifeway. They may practice their tribally specific traditions as a cultural artifact, not as a spiritual lifeway. What bothers him is that people don’t question this distinction. When he has voiced this concern, it’s “gotten him in trouble” so he no longer brings it up among his ‘DNA-way’ family.¹²³

As Deloria noted above, for Native people, identity has traditionally been defined by place—one is a member of a particular tribe, a particular clan and connected to a particular place. Native people look to their origin stories for details on their identity; these stories act as tribal history as well. Gregory explained that these stories may be passed down carefully for hundreds of generations and were often more accurate accounts of places (climate, environmental features, etc.) and migrations than what scholars know. And so while urban and transnational Indians may not be physically residing in their ‘places’ of origin, they often know their personal and tribal histories quite well. Gregory learned stories from his grandfather about his great-grandparents and their parents; he has stories that go back seven generations. He says they needn’t be written down because they were “living stories.” For instance, earlier that day he gave his son, Itsa Litchi, a beaded keychain that has belonged to his mother. Gregory had initially given it to her as gift and now it was his sons. He explained

¹²³ Field notes 02/28/2013.

that his son would hear the stories that go with this object and it would teach him about his ancestors.¹²⁴

Connecting to the Sacred Hoop

Will “Rockeagle” Naranjo, is a friend of Gregory’s and also a member of the Native veterans group in Albuquerque. Will is also about sixty-five years old and is Santa Clara Pueblo and Navajo. Although he grew up in Santa Clara Pueblo, located near Los Alamos, NM, he now lives in Los Lunas, NM with his second wife, Cheri. Will did two tours in Vietnam from 1967-69 as part of the ‘Signal Core.’ He began getting treatment for PTSD through the VA in Denver in 1997. At this time, an all Native veterans’ talking circle was formed. When he moved back to New Mexico, he joined the group at the Albuquerque VA. Will is a colon cancer survivor and is currently getting treatment for prostate cancer. Will is a potter, as was his first wife. They spent many years making pottery and traveling around the U.S. and Canada showing their pottery at various art fairs and events. They even presented on their pottery at college campuses around the U.S. He is currently a resident potter for the Institute for American Indian Arts in Santa Fe and holds workshops for kids teaching them how to work with pottery. He has also become an educator for the VA over the years. He and Gregory speak at VA retreats intended to orient new employees, discussing the specific needs of Native vets and about living with PTSD. At these events, people often ask Will how they can connect with a parent who is also a Vet and has isolated themselves. He often counsels people and gives them advice. He is even approached for healing and ceremony sometimes and will offer whatever help he can.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Field notes 04/04/2013.

¹²⁵ Field notes 3/15/2013.

After the death of his first wife, fourteen years ago, he experienced a spiritual crisis and became somewhat isolated. He recalls attending a powwow in Taos “to listen to the drum” and met a Comanche man, who recognized Will’s pain and asked him to lay out some tobacco on a drum and then bring it up to his chest to heal what he was carrying. This man brought him into his circle and made him his brother. Now Will travels to Oklahoma to participate in their gourd dances. This man’s family adopted him and asked him to be the head gourd man dancer for three years, which is a great honor. His eyes twinkle when he describes how these new relatives have honored and respected him. He credits this experience and his re-immersion in pottery that helped him recover. “When one faces a hardship, it’s how you come back to have an enjoyable life. My life was again connected to mother clay. I had to rejuvenate myself by getting myself totally involved with mother clay again. And so it was a fulfillment. And the fulfillment that I have today is the hell I went through with my hardship when I lost my partner.”¹²⁶ We all face hardships, but for Will it’s how we choose to respond them that’s most important quality of life.

I don’t want to fall back in the past, maybe bad things that have happened in the past. I want to leave that behind by filling this gap... by what I enjoy doing. This is working with those children with my clay. And when I go to the speaking engagements, it gives me an opportunity to have a new lease on life because I’m giving back something that may help someone, perhaps that’s looking for answers... knowing that there are a lot of people out there in search of finding ways to make improvements. My spirituality [has] given me this opportunity to give back. They say give back a little something. There’s a sense that fills this gap, you might say a spiritual need, a spiritual need that is fulfilling me and enables me to go forward. Just to do, to give back to whomever I happen to come into contact with. It makes me feel good, just knowing that I could be able to offer something that I can give, something that they may be looking for. So this in itself is this new lease on life if you want to call it. And I’m very happy with it.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Interview with Will “Rockeagle” Naranjo 03/15/2013.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

It's important for Will to not dwell on negative events in the past and focus on positive things like pottery and working with kids. Giving back to the community, making an effort to help others, fills a spiritual need for him and makes him happy. For Will, it's important that he lives his life with spiritual integrity. Like Gregory, he describes his spiritual life as one where he recognizes a responsibility to others.

This sense of reciprocity and giving back is rooted in his experience of the world, particularly in working with clay. He refers to the clay as 'Mother' and describes it as alive and agentive. According to Will, it decides on what form it will take. Working with the clay is a conversation:

When you work with mother clay, mother clay gives back because what I put into kneading this clay and making it, it's not me, the final product that's going to come out, because mother clay has a mind of its own and mother clay tells me what I want to be. So when I see that [the form it decides to take] I say "alright." I know it wasn't me saying, "I want to do this, I want to do this." This is the way [the clay] wants to come up. This is the way I see it.

Working with clay is life affirming and cathartic because it is alive. The act itself is meditative and absorbing. In essence, it is a sacred conversation where he connects to the creative energies of life. "This connection I make with mother clay. I totally focus myself, anything else around me can go, because I'm just totally focused on mother clay when I'm working with her. It makes my heart feel like dancing, when I'm working with her. It's a one time thing and the final result is her beauty that comes up." Working with the clay allows for a total absorption—total focus and engagement with the conversation. This process is blissful. He is connecting to Spirit and also able to appreciate the beautiful form she chooses to embody.

He forgets about all else when he is working with the clay, they are communicating and he is healing from any sorrows of the past. Will describes how working with clay helps him overcome hardships and why it's meaningful spiritually:

It all goes back to my upbringing with mother clay because this is where we're all connected to, the four ways of life they call it. These four ways, is when you're walking in this sacred hoop. You are connected. You are connected to this path and these pathways are going to open for me as I go in my walk in whatever I want to undertake, it's going to allow me to overcome difficulties, because we all have difficulties, and be able to overcome my needs mentally, physically and spiritually. This is the way I do my spiritual walk, with my connection—how am I connected. So if one of these areas might be lacking, in one area I need to work to fulfill myself and to overcome this need, to go forward and just to enjoy one more day; because that's how I do my walk, one day at a time. And when I'm able to do that, it makes me a happy person.¹²⁸

Working with the clay literally connects him to the life force of the earth and the four ways of life, which are the four stages that we live: birth, childhood, adulthood and old age, as well as the continual cycle of everyday life, wherein the sun rises in the east and passes through the four times of day: dawn, mid-day, evening and night. When he works with the clay he is reminded that life is a dynamic process, a sacred hoop that is always cycling. As he does this, he is connected with this sacred process of life again and is able to heal. Part of his spiritual practice is to recognize where he is having difficulty—in his physical, mental or spiritual wellbeing. Since they are ultimately connected, this spiritual practice of working with clay helps him rebalance his mental, physical and spiritual self once again.

Although he doesn't participate in ceremonies back at Santa Clara Pueblo, he says he has a rich religious life because he goes to pow wows and gourd dances with his adopted Comanche family. He also has Navajo family in Farmington that has adopted him, 'Indian way,' and invites him for their events, so he doesn't feel as if he's missing out on ceremony. He explained that what he really learned about being a spiritual person is goodness and

¹²⁸ Ibid.

thinking of life in terms of the sacred hoop and all the others he is connected to on this hoop. These new relationships have allowed him to stay connected to the sacred hoop, the spiritual connection we have to one another and the cycle of life:

I see how I'm connected when I see myself in this hoop, I'm focusing, I can center myself and reach out and see where I'm going and how I'm going to get there. And the doorway is open. This is the way it has been for me. This doorway is open and when I see myself in this sacred hoop, in this sacred way, in the sacred hoop. That's how I'm able to see something that needs to be done, and then I'm able to do that. That's how it is for me in this sacred way. I can go in any direction when I see myself in this hoop, in this sacred way, in the sacredness that's there. I do that with the respect that I give. I just don't barge in on doing anything; I have to do it in a sacred way, in a rightful way.¹²⁹

When he sees himself on this sacred hoop and looks at life in a sacred way, he sees his possibilities. When he is connected to others in a sacred way, connected to the sacred hoop, he can choose to act in a particular way. He is provided insight but this process also demands accountability. Acknowledging that this hoop, these relationships are sacred, allows him to think "in a rightful way" and act accordingly. If he is struggling with a decision, he prays on it and thinks of himself in this sacred way and it is resolved, he is guided:

I have to stop and allow myself to give myself some space, some quiet time. And then I ask, evaluate the situation with what I want to do and then I do it with prayer before doing it. And that's the way it's been with me, it's always put prayer first before doing. That's how I do things today. And I know by doing this I have gotten answers that I'm looking for. I've gotten to where it's given me an opportunity to overcome something that may have come by way of bothering me, where I may have questions that need answers. So now I can see those things, those questions that needed answers.

For Will, acting in the world, making big decisions and working through your difficulties are rooted in prayer and connecting to Spirit. He recognizes that relationships and the cycle of life are sacred so they demand respect and careful action. When he is confronted with how to best live his life, what direction to take in a given scenario, he takes the time to stop and

¹²⁹ Ibid.

think about it in a prayerful way. His actions reflect a logic of interdependence that acknowledges that one's actions have powerful effects in the world and thus must be negotiated carefully.

On Native identity he says that ultimately, it means to be connected to the land, recognize that you are the land, an extension of it—it nourishes you and you experience the same cycles it does:

I think the best description of my upbringing is when I was small and following my grandpa's footsteps and he was planting corn. He had the corn pollen in his hand and he reached out and said to me "what do I have in my hand here?" And so I said "that's the corn. And that's what we're going to plant. And that's what we're going to put in the ground and then that's what we eat." And he looked at me and he told me "no." He said, "this is you, and I'm going to plant you here. And I'm going to have to watch you grow. I'm going to have to nourish you properly. Water you. The weeds have to be weeded so they don't choke you when the leaves come up." And he said, "One day if you're lucky, you're going to reach that full ear of corn. And that's the meaning of life, that's all I know what life is all about. And in that Indian corn, you see all colors of mankind and that's who we pray too, all colors of mankind, so that takes away discrimination, that takes away hatred all of the bad things that you here today." And that's who I am, I'm an Indian man and this is Indian corn. That's how I would give you a definition of "what is an Indian man?" That's who I am.

Indian corn represents all of mankind; we're one people but have our differences. We're all connected to the earth and need nourishing from it and one another. Recognizing this connection and 'praying' to the corn, honoring it as a teacher, counters the superficial divisions between us. In essence, humanity is connected but his experience and recognition of himself as connected to the land in this way is what makes him an Indian man.

Spiritual practice not only helps individuals, it can heal communities. Although Native communities are struggling with destructive forces, such as drugs, alcoholism, gangs, etc., Will explains that good role models and modeling healthy behavior for the youth can make lasting, transformative change.

[T]here are communities who have done this, who have those role models that they can look up to, whether it be teaching those young ones their language, their cultural ways and cultural values. This is the most important ways with the Native peoples and how they can reach out in these communities. This way, with these role models, with these good stories coming out, this is the success that I see. And I've been in communities who have this success going on, they broke this web you might say. And how they were influenced with drugs, with alcohol and how they completely wiped that out and brought in a new way, using a different format of fulfilling and reassuring the community... of having these good roles that they could follow. When they have it, you can see a happy community, thriving. One in particular is called Alkali Lake in British Columbia. I've been with those people... they brought that community back by bringing in the sweat.

In his travels, he's witnessed incredible change among Native communities that have made an effort to revive their languages and traditions. Role models can create positive change by setting an example of how to live in the world. He believes valuing culture, language etc, is critical for Native people to be happy, healthy communities, since many of these positive changes are rooted in returning to traditional lifeways. One community, Alkali Lake, revived the sweat lodge ceremony and it eliminated the high rates of violence and alcoholism. They were healed as a people.

The Lodge is a Pregnant Woman

Both Gregory and Will suffer from the emotional and physical effects of their experiences in Vietnam. The cartilage in Will's knees is almost gone; he'll need both knees replaced soon. In Vietnam, he was a parachuter and would jump about 10 feet from a helicopter, roll and take cover. He would scale telephone poles wear an 80 lb. pack with a radio. And so, although he was never wounded, he is now living with the after effects of these jumps and the trauma it created in his body. Gregory joined the Marines because he wanted to see combat, as did Will. He was wounded a couple of times and like Will has undergone several surgeries over the years to treat these injuries. Adding insult to the injury of war, as soldiers they experienced racism. Will says, "I didn't learn bigotry till I got to boot

camp.”¹³⁰ When they returned home, they were met by white liberal hippies who called them baby killers and threw bottles at them. They were both stunned and outraged at this treatment. Neither of them was informed that they were entitled to benefits through the VA. They only learned of it through other vets years later. Once they realized how the system had used and abused them, they each experienced a time of anger and mourning.

When Gregory began getting medical treatment from the VA in the 1990’s, a counselor asked him if he had heard of PTSD and if he had it. He replied that he had heard of it but that he didn’t have it. When she read a description of PTSD he was devastated to learn that he had been in fact living with PTSD since his return from Vietnam:

She swiveled around in her chair and started reading a medical journal and started reading my whole life history. Even now I get emotional about it because I had spent all of these years living a very good life, personally and professionally. I was very active and involved in Indian Country and my people. One of the beauties of being Indian is that the veterans are honored and we’re looked up to. No matter what our behavior is, we’re respected—particularly those of us that have been in combat. Whether they know about it or not, whether we talk about it or not, you can pretty much tell. I sponsored, coached and played a lot of men’s basketball—Indian men’s basketball and softball around the country. I was safe; I was in a safe environment. I never talked about Vietnam. It wasn’t important.¹³¹

He realized then that Vietnam had been a traumatic experience for him—one that he hadn’t known how to cope with because he hadn’t associated his personal struggles with it. He was so immersed in Indian country; it was such a safe environment that he was able to essentially compartmentalize his experiences in Vietnam. He never talked about Vietnam; it was sealed off until that moment. Right then, he knew why.

When she started reading me my life history, I had tears running down my face. I was really angry. I wanted to jump up. I wanted to scream. I wanted to hit something. That feeling of “how dare you”—the system—do this to me and deprive me and not help. Thinking back to generational trauma of my family... and personally my younger brother who also served as a medic and my cousin Joe who was at boot camp. And

¹³⁰ Interview with Gregory Gomez and Will Naranjo 9/28/2012.

¹³¹ Interview with Gregory Gomez and Will “Rockeagle” Naranjo 07/11/2012.

the system wouldn't allow me to see [Joe] and the next time I saw him was at his funeral after he stepped on a land mine, April '67.

Gregory was angry. He realized that he had been violated by the system—a system that treated him with contempt by not allowing him contact with his brother and cousin. He had been willing to lay down his life for this country and in return the system had been violent and destructive to he and his family—compounding whatever existing trauma they already had. Generational trauma is another term for historical trauma, or the trauma created by genocide and colonialism that is cumulative and carried down for generations by Indian people.

Unfortunately, the injuries wrought by war continue in the form of bigotry and prejudice through their dealing with the VA. Will says, “we’re still fighting a war, but now it’s a paper war.”¹³² He often has to fight the VA system to get his basic medical needs met. He and Gregory give talks at the VA outlining the needs of Native vets, explaining that Vets must be respected and treated with dignity. Ironically, the VA continues to evade their requests that culturally relevant care be honored. While the VA initially supported an all Native veterans talking circle in the 1990’s, the VA has intermittently cancelled or put it on hiatus over the years, for inexplicable reasons. Years ago, their talking circle decided to build an inter-tribal sweat lodge so that they could address their healing in a culturally relevant way. At one point, they had full access to their sweat lodge. Gregory says, “the last time the brothers and I were there it was because I had been given a key—that’s how much freedom we had. I had been given a key so that at any time, any of us who wanted to either go there and sit and have a conversation or actually have a sweat ceremony, we could do that.” After changes in administration, they were barred access and it was leased out to a third party.

¹³² Ibid.

These affronts by the VA have alienated many of the men in their talking circle and several have stopped attending.¹³³

Despite these complications they explained that the talking circle has ultimately been a good experience. In this circle, they realized that they shared many cultural affinities even though most were from different tribes. This allowed them to form a bond of trust with one another. After he realized that he had PTSD, Gregory began advocating for his health and took advantage of the various forms of therapy offered by the VA. He's found the talking circle most helpful:

The talking circle group was, is and continues to be and will be my favorite. We can sit and talk. We can sit in silence. And we have a commonality of Indian people who walk the walk. I used the term the walking wounded. So specifically to the talking circle for me, it became a band of brothers who had cultural similarities, even though we're from different tribes. But we had the commonality of culture, of dealing with the system. Things like this established stronger bonds and commonalities of what sets us apart. And then our spirituality... I would say 99.9 of the men, if not 100%, who were there from the very beginning were very spiritual people, medicine people. They had grandfathers or uncles or whatever. We all have had elders who are medicine people in their own way, recognized that way... so when I go to a talking circle even today, there's a sense of I can come in and rest. I don't have to watch my back. Like my brother here said, we're a band of brothers.

The talking circle was special because it became a brotherhood of men, who were from different tribes but were all Native. They, like other urban groups, formed a family that could relate on shared cultural values and logics. They were all very spiritual people, which put him at ease. He can rest easy and trust when he's there because he knew that these men all respected medicine and the sacred dimensions of life. In other words, there's an integrity there that he can recognize and trust.

I see that's its generational because we have so many commonalities since 1492 and it's part of life everyday. I can pick up the phone and say to my brother "hey, I'm hurting." And he can do the same with me. My family, his family is my family. The newest member that came in recently said that he really appreciated that we referred

¹³³ Field notes 9/28/12.

to each other as brothers, because we are brothers. Anything that happens to any one of these guys affects me. I'm willing to die for this guy. That's the way we are. That's the way we were made. Me myself as a Marine, that's who I am, what I am. But as an Apache it's even stronger.

The connections between them are clear—they, as Native men, are all dealing with the effects of colonization, the way it wrought chaos into the lives of each Native tribe.

Contending with these after effects, such as forced removal, poverty, loss of culture, and forced assimilation is a daily reality for Native people. As veterans, they are even more invested in supporting one another. But as Indians, who recognize that bonds between others are sacred, these relationships take on a spiritual significance.

Will described the circle as a brotherhood and the sweat lodge as a womb saying, “it is a pregnant woman.” He says when they are inside with the grandfathers—the heated rocks—they are connecting mind, body and spirit. He makes a triangle with his hands and shows me how they came together in the lodge:

It's given us a basic way of dealing with our lives. In a spiritual way, it's given us this connection.... collecting and bringing our thoughts, with our mind and our hearts and to bring this connection to our bodies. You know, the feeling way, and all senses. This is for us—it makes this connection—mentally, spiritually and physically. When you look at a tipi that's what you see. This sweat, our grandfather's, the rocks, that we bring in. It heals. It takes all this poison out and then heals. This is what it does.

The sweat lodge itself facilitates their spiritual lives, connecting them with a means to balance their mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. Like a tripod, it balances. Praying to Creator in the lodge is a spiritual detoxifier; they are cleansed in this process. It's also healing—the sweat removes poisons from their bodies and connects them with spirit. The trauma they carry as both veterans and Native men is washed away. Will explains that the sweat is powerful. It can catalyze great transformations—those that may even be deemed impossible:

These ways, these ways they say “well it’s so impossible.” It’s not impossible, I say. When you have the ears to hear in that way, all your senses that you may have... when you use them, it’s going to show you. It’s going to guide you. It’ll tell you and you’ll know, you’ll know where you are. You’ll know where you stand. You’ll know about those ways that you were taught, an infant, as a child. This is what the sweat does, takes you all the back when you were in your mother’s womb. Look at that sweat lodge, the way it’s built, that’s where you’re gonna be born. When you come out, you’re going to be that child and you come out. You’re going to come out just like a child that crawls. You’re going to come out crawling. Look at that child, it’s innocence, before contamination hits that child. They say, when a child makes it’s little noises, what’s it doing? Talking to the Creator. That’s how pure and innocent this child is, it can communicate with the creator. So when somebody asks me about the lodge, I say “that’s a pregnant woman because that’s where you’re going to be born.”

Any transformation and healing is possible. The impossible is made possible through spiritual practice, through prayer and the sweat lodge. The sweat purifies but it also renews. It’s a womb where one is reborn, reconnected to the Creator and can overcome any obstacle.

Will knows this renewal and healing first hand. He described a period of time, when he was confined to a wheelchair. He has used peyote medicine for healing and attended Native American Church ceremonies for years. While peyote medicine has been a powerful healer, he attributes a significant shift in his health to the sweat lodge. Years ago, he was asked by the veteran’s group to tend the fire of the sweat lodge, which meant he would bring in the hot coals from outside. When he was outside of the lodge, he heard a voice telling him to stand up so he did. He then decided to grab a coal and bring it into the sweat lodge. Gregory asked him if he was ok and he said, “yeah, how many coals should I bring in?” The other men in the lodge said “one at a time” and so he continued bringing them in.¹³⁴

Gregory agrees that the sweat lodge has made a major difference in his life, helping heal his PTSD and generational trauma:

Individually, speaking for myself, it makes it easier for me to deal with what’s out here, in there. I can go in there and I’m not going to repeat it... Will has very clearly

¹³⁴ Field notes 8/10/2012.

described it—it's that rebirth. It's shaking off all of the contact that's out there and being clean and purified and coming back and going forward. That's as simply as I can say it for myself.

The sweat lodge makes it easier for Gregory to cope with the stressors of daily life. He can live better with this spiritual practice renewing him regularly. Most importantly, he can cope with living in a white world that is still hostile to Indians.

It's very, very difficult for a lot of the Euro-American people, regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, etc., to look at us and have a clear conscious. When I say Euro-American people I mean the socialization of [people in the] U.S. including Indian people, even Hispanic, black and Asian people. All they are focused on is me and they're rights and me and my family and then me and my church group, me and my work group. The circles, the concentric circles tend to get a little bigger, but I am the center of my universe and I decide who gets in and who doesn't. And if you're not like me, then you don't fit.

Euro-American people ignore the needs of Native people because they are a reminder of the theft of this land. They have been socialized to think about their rights as individuals (vs. responsibilities) and the rights of their insular communities and so do not have the social tools to deal with the history of genocide and dispossession of Native peoples that birthed this nation.

[A]nytime those folks look at us, we're a living reminder of who their ancestors are and what they have done and continue to do, whether it's at the VA, whether it's at UNM or a Baptist church or just walking down the street. We live with that. I have developed a very hard shell up to a point. But beyond that, this is my country. This is my piece of Mother Earth. If you don't like it, go back, wherever your ancestors came from, go back. They keep saying that to immigrants. But they don't like to be reminded. And we remind them. We're a constant reminder of a whole lot of conflict that they don't like. They don't like to be reminded about how their ancestors were and about how bad they are.

Indian people remind settlers of their own tenuous relationship to this land and thus, Indians are still mistreated by mainstream institutions and peoples. Gregory will not tolerate this treatment or bias. For him, this is still Indian land and needs to be acknowledged by the

settlers as such. If they do not like his presence or him standing up for himself, the settlers are welcome to return to their home countries.

Ultimately, the work they do in the talking circle, trying to hold this shared sacred space for themselves and the younger generation of Indian Vets, is immensely important. It provides a place where they can honor the experiences of one another and heal the many psychic wounds that they have incurred. Gregory plans to build a new lodge on his daughter's property and they will hold the talking circle in this new space, inviting all the former members to join them. He explains that our existence in this world and all of our actions affect change, creating a "break in the universe."¹³⁵ When we decide to be harmful to others, dismiss them or alienate them we are creating a particular kind of break. Alternately, when we act for the good of others it has far-reaching effects that we may never know.

Will echoes this sentiment. He explains that the best solution to discrimination and marginalization is to support one another in our struggles:

[L]et's be one, in all our struggles... the ways we try to understand equality, what it stands for and how we suffer, as humanity. [Let's continue to work on] our needs to be heard, to be able to express ourselves. These are some of the ways that I was saved. [Let's recognize] the great need in our struggles to be understood and to overcome and say "hey, I don't want to be isolated. I want to be acknowledged. I want to be treated with fairness." When someone has been turned away or neglected... when we say, "we are one," this is what they need to know. Don't divide us because we are all here. Give us a fair break.

Indian people can address their struggles by uniting in the struggles of others. We're in this life together so recognizing one another as valid and sacred voices to be heard and cherished will help us heal these rifts in our shared history. He was healed from isolation and suffering by connecting with others, who treated him with respect, like a family member. Bringing others into a sacred hoop of relations helps them overcome struggles. We need to be accepted, understood and recognized. Division equates to struggle. In this way, he and

¹³⁵ Conversation with Gregory Gomez 10/25/12.

Gregory acknowledge that a logic of interdependence, our dividual nature, is not only a spiritual ethic to live by—it is a means to heal the isolation and pain wrought by colonialism.

Everything Has Spirit

I met Solis Lujan through my friend Charlene, a friend in the Santa Fe dharma community. Solis is a charismatic woman in her early 60's with dark brown skin, long black hair and a broad engaging smile. She identifies as Native-American and Mexican-American. She lives in Santa Fe but was raised in East Los Angeles by a Zapotecan grandmother, mestizo grandfather, Chicano mother and a Taos Pueblo and Mescalero/ Chiricahua Apache father. Solis and her sister Mitra lived primarily with her grandparents—their parents lived next door. Her grandmother was a curandera, a healer, with a large community following. Curanderismo is a healing tradition that combines indigenous Mexican healing modalities with European folk medicine. Despite being a devoted Catholic, her grandfather assisted in these curings. She describes her father as an agnostic beatnik, who took heroin and questioned social mores. He read Plato and other works of Western philosophy to Solis and her sister as children, encouraging them to contemplate existential questions. Despite these spiritual and intellectual influences, she happily asserts that they were raised “without any religion,” meaning institutional religion.¹³⁶ She says with pride “we never followed any dogma and I feel so blessed about that... we were left to be free thinkers, to think for ourselves.” Her spiritual sensibility was most profoundly influenced by the respect and awe her grandparents expressed for the natural world and others in the community, “their love of nature, their love of plants, animals, the dirt, the planet... their love of outer space.... And a spirit of giving, my grandmother gave and gave and gave to those that needed it.” This love of nature was not just an appreciation of its beauty but an acknowledgement that it was

¹³⁶ Interview with Soliz Lujan 4/12/2012.

alive—plants and animals were sentient and must be treated with care. In essence, an ethic of reciprocity, doing for others and honoring the sacred dimension of the natural world demarcated her young life.

The radical counter culture of the 1960's appealed to both Solis and her sister Mitra. Solis was active in social justice movements, such as the Free Speech and Peace Movement in Berkeley, and attended the Institute of the Study on Nonviolence with Joan Baez. She and Mitra also began attending and supporting American Indian Movement events, noting the gender dynamics at these events were somewhat rigid—women were generally expected to work in the kitchen and provide support for the men who strategized. She was exposed to more traditional forms of Native religiosity, such as sweats and sun dances, during her association with AIM and other urban Indians. While she gained some spiritual insights from these ceremonies, she was turned off by what she describes as a 'do what I say not what I do' attitude of many of its spiritual leaders. The expropriation of Native spirituality from strictly Native spaces to urban settings and non-Native practitioners by urban (and reservation) Indians wrought a complex dynamic, wherein newly minted Native 'spiritual leaders' gained social prestige and power yet often did not have the spiritual integrity to not exploit this power. It was at this time when she experienced a more pronounced bias from other Native people because she was also of Mexican descent. She notes with disappointment that she's met many Native people in the U.S. that are unwilling to acknowledge that Indigenous and mestizo people south of the border are also Native peoples.¹³⁷

In the 1970's, Solis found a new spiritual home when she became involved with a community in the Bay Area that used what she referred to as "plant medicine." They ingested ayahuasca and other psychedelic plants to explore the nature of reality, heal themselves and

¹³⁷ Field notes 4/15/2012.

assist in the healing of others. It was through the use of these psychedelics that she became the “most spiritually connected” and aware of “this thing called God that I see is the essence of the creation of our known universe... that was God to me.”¹³⁸ She came to recognize that everything has spirit, recalling a vision where she became acutely aware of this fact, “I saw Spirit even in the muddy swirls of puddles—it’s in all things.” In other words Spirit, as an animate property of life inhabits all natural phenomena, even muddy puddles, not just the most beautiful things in our world. She committed to the aims of this healing community for many years, exploring her own psychic life thoroughly in the process. After a number of years, she reached a point where she no longer had visual experiences and would enter a deep state of rest, which restored her energies during trying times. Soon after, Spirit told her that she no longer needed the medicine and must integrate what she learned into her daily life—difficulties she had been contending with her husband, ex-husband and children. While this period of her life was challenging, she felt the medicine had prepared her to confront her challenges with more openness and grace.

The use of plant medicine profoundly shifted Soliz’ perspective and lifeway. While she was raised in an environment where the natural world was honored and respected, she gained deeper insight as to why in her visions. It even brought her closer to her father, who had been caring yet somewhat enigmatic. Although he didn’t appear particularly religious, he attempted to convey spiritual insights to her saying, “You should study math; it will lead you to God.” An urban Indian, he was born and raised in LA with little to no exposure to traditional Pueblo or Apache knowledge, that she knew of, yet he appeared to understand the connectedness of the universe—an insight that began to be clear to her after her experiences with plant medicine. She remembers him saying, “you can do whatever you want to do, there

¹³⁸ Interview with Soliz Lujan 4/12/2012.

are no real obstacles, you can always find a solution to whatever problem you have.” Solis interprets this to mean that he understood obstacles were most often an illusion of our minds that could be overcome with effort and insight—a perspective she came to know through plant medicine. As she reflected on his words and behavior over the years, she came to understand, “he had a wide and expansive understanding of the universe” and was essentially trying to teach her about the nature of reality—a reality that she would, through the use of plant medicine, have to experience for herself.

Solis tends a large garden in her yard, cultivating much of the fresh produce she eats. She explained that her family had done the same, growing most of their food. They also kept animals, goats and chickens (?). It was her grandmother who taught her how to care for plants “she would talk to them and had a personal relationship with every living creature in her large garden—the plants and animals.” She described this garden as an oasis, where all plants grew vibrantly. “She could make anything grow. She could stick a little sprig in a cup of water and it would grow into a beautiful plant.” Living with her grandparents gave her a sense of security and a philosophical foundation for how to live. Solis explained that this sense of nurturing life extending out into their surrounding community of mostly immigrant Mexican families. This small community often bartered for goods and so Solis’ family was able to trade fresh produce for meat or other household necessities. In addition, her grandmother often gave things away to those that were in need—including remedies and curings for those that sought her healing expertise. Even into her very old age, when Solis’ grandmother lived in a nursing facility, she continued to give things to the other residents, living out an ethic of doing for others.

Solis' commitment to social justice and healing is rooted in her family's spiritual lifeways. The ethics and values they lived—sharing and caring for others, as you would care for yourself—are reflected in her grandmother's insistence on giving and helping others in need. Her grandmother's actions reflect the logics of a gift economy—one that values giving instead of consuming. Solis took this to heart. Gift economies were the norm for pre-Colombian peoples in the Americas. Their logics still live on among them. We can understand a gift economy as a form of social justice because it is a means for the community to provide for those in need, without any other justification other than that they are in need. This framework is rooted in a logic of interdependence, wherein the wellbeing of one person or family is understood to be intimately linked to the wellbeing of the group. Thus, providing for others is understood as an important means to community survival.

Solis moved to Santa Fe from California about fifteen years ago to join her sister, Mitra. At that time, she was applying for enrollment at Taos Pueblo, her father's tribe. The process took many years. They eventually rejected her application, citing that since she was raised outside of their community she did not qualify for enrollment. She was disappointed with this decision but eventually made peace with it and her mixed Native identity, saying "I don't find it tough anymore, as I did when I was younger... walking in two worlds. Now I really feel we are one humanity and we are one people and to think anything different is kind of ridiculous." Many peoples who are mixed Native and Chicano are rejected by Native American peoples as being not 'Native' enough or as just 'Mexicans,' forcing some to choose one identity over the other. The complicated colonial history of the Southwest in particular has birthed this perplexing phenomenon.

Currently, Solis studies Buddhism and is inspired by the Dalai Lama and Garchen Rinpoche, who is a Kagyu lama that has a large following in the U.S., because she sees them as living examples of truly spiritual beings. Over the years, she has become cautious of ‘spiritual’ people saying, “I don’t like the term enlightened,” because it’s overused and misunderstood by Westerners. Many of the people she knows in the dharma community talk about getting enlightened but she perceives much of this talk as an ego trip. In other words, there are pitfalls of spiritual exploration, such as self-righteousness, that can detract from real spiritual attainment. She sees this a real problem for spiritual communities in the U.S. and is reluctant to present herself as a ‘spiritual’ person for this reason¹³⁹ However, Solis explains that her Buddhist practice has been transformative, enabling her to let go of the pain and anger around racism and class warfare that initially inspired her social justice work. She is also profoundly inspired by the “open-heartedness” of Mexican Indigenous traditions and it is this characterization of love and openheartedness that she says is reflective of her grandparents and the Dalai Lama. Her Buddhist practice along with the lifeways instilled by her grandparents and parents has motivated her to focus on her own spiritual journey and foster a joyful and harmonious relationship to others as well as the natural world. For Solis, the recognition that everything has spirit—and that the world is an interconnected through this life force—is the fundamental religious logic that shapes her life. She describes herself as 90% Indigenous and doesn’t need enrollment or membership # to validate her identity. She is a Native person in a global community of Native people.¹⁴⁰

While living in New Mexico was ancestrally significant for her, she didn’t feel as if the land itself was more or less special than that of California. In fact, it was the ocean that

¹³⁹ Field notes 7/30/2012.

¹⁴⁰ Field notes 4/15/2012.

often had the most profound on her, providing her with a cathartic spiritual release. She explained that she appreciated the land, all of nature, in general. In other words, while place has historically been a critical component of Native identity and spiritual practice, in a contemporary context, one can build a relationships with any place. What matters most is recognizing its spiritual dimension—that it is sacred and an expression of Spirit. This issue was raised at the 2012 Indigenous Book Festival, which takes place at University of New Mexico every spring. In a discussion on Native dispossession and dislocation, two Native scholars, Michael Yellow Bird and Jennifer Denetdale, pointed out that we are all indigenous to somewhere and that contemporary Native peoples must actively connect themselves to the land—the latter saying “plant yourself in the land.”¹⁴¹ In essence, while colonization as a structure has removed peoples from their traditional homelands, they are able to make a sacred connection to it wherever they go. My next narrative illustrates this idea more pointedly.

Belonging to the Earth

I was connected with Broderick Wood through a mutual friend, who is active in the Native American Church and suggested I interview him for this project. Broderick is about fifty years old and is Navajo. He grew up on the Navajo reservation but has lived in other parts of the country, such as the east coast, before returning to live in New Mexico. When we spoke in 2013, he lived in Santa Fe but now lives in Oakland, CA. We initially met up to talk in Albuquerque, while he was there on business. Broderick is a carpenter, building and installing cabinets for a living. He grew up attending ‘big tipi’ ceremonies, also know as ‘peyote meetings.’ These meetings are a relatively new expression of Indigenous religion north of the U.S./ Mexico border.

¹⁴¹ Field notes 4/18/2012.

While Native tribes near and south of the U.S. border, such as the Apache and Huichol, have been using peyote ritually and medicinally for centuries, contemporary peyote use among Native tribes north of the border—through the ‘Native American Church’—did not begin to proliferate until the late 19th century. The first members of the peyotist movement that later became the Native American Church, combined Christian elements, such as the recognition of Jesus, the use of the cross, and the Lord’s Prayer, with traditional Native ceremonial practices, such as the use of the drum, singing and the acknowledgement of Creator. The Native American Church considers peyote a holy sacrament. It was introduced to reservation bound tribes in Oklahoma by tribes in Texas, such as the Kiowa, and spread quickly among reservation communities, who could now participate in a ‘pan-tribal’ religious practice together. In the Southwestern U.S., it is particularly popular; it has been noted that over 50% of Navajos within the Navajo nation identify as members of the Native American church.¹⁴² However, there is no actual church structure to speak of, as in the Christian tradition. Instead, the church consists of the community and the all night ceremonies that take place in the big tipi, where adherents ingest peyote, sing songs and pray until dawn. Unlike other Native ceremonies that are place specific, peyote meetings can take place anywhere and so, like the Sun Dance, it has traveled to all parts of the country and to other regions of the world. Thus, Native American Church activities take place both on reservations and in urban spaces.

In our first discussion, Broderick provided an overview of his religious views. He was raised to think about life as a circle. “All life is a circle, the world is not square—in squares there are corners where one can get stuck.” In other words, all things were connected. The

¹⁴² Thomas C. Maroukis, *The Peyote Road: Religious Freedom and the Native American Church* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

power that moves it all is the “great mystery, not God.” This ‘great mystery’ doesn’t have a name because it’s true nature is unknown; it is beyond human comprehension and, thus, our ability to name it. This ‘circle’ that connects all phenomena works in multiple ways. While Native people don’t have a written history, their oral history is powerful. Broderick says “when told in a ceremonial space, it will heal you and re-adjust you if you’re out of balance.” In essence, the act of telling the story in a sacred space has material effects; it has the power to actually change your physiological wellbeing. The logic of the circle is also reflected in the Native American Church teepee, which is a circle itself with an opening at the top, directed at the sky to communicate messages to Creator. “This circle continues no matter what we do.” He explained that humans think we’re so powerful and begin dictating how things should be but in reality “we are so vulnerable—little things, like a thorn, pain us and our feelings get hurt so easily.” We need Creator’s guidance in order to survive. We also need one another. “When Indian people would bring home deer, they cut a piece for everyone to eat. White men would sell little bits of his deer from behind a fence and ask for money.” Making these superficial divisions between us, such as using a fence, not sharing, etc., doesn’t change the nature of reality; the circle still continues.¹⁴³

Broderick has a unique view of colonization and contact. He referred to white men as “our brother” and his coming as a lesson we all have to learn from. He says Europeans had spiritual ways at one time, “but they lost them and now everyone wants to be an Indian.” Nevertheless, we all have Spirit so meditating or taking peyote as medicine helps us connect with that spirit and gain spiritual insights. Ultimately, our aim is to learn. “We’re animals and we’re still learning all the time.” Life is hard but we must learn from life’s challenges. It’s our responsibility to understand the spiritual significance of our experiences so we can grow

¹⁴³ Field notes 5/13/2013.

and mature. We should be thankful for these lessons too, “because we are being led.” Even Native American Church meetings are influenced by this circle, he said, “that the old people used to say that Creator chose” who would be at which meeting, meaning every person was there for a particular reason. In essence, the meeting you end up attending is the ‘right meeting’ for you. In our everyday lives, when we notice others are struggling with isolation and spiritual seeking, we should say “something to turn them around. Just say hello or ask how they are and these words may bring them back and realize they’ve been going the wrong way. Their spirit will lead them again.” In essence, the logic of interdependence, exemplified in the circle is about caring for others and bringing them back into the circle.

In our second meeting, Broderick discussed his experience growing up in the Peyote tradition. Since he began attending meetings as a young boy, he made sense of them over time:

What drew me to it is my family, they were already – my grandparents and aunts, uncles, family, they were already into that kind of religion anyway, so when I was growing up, I would be amongst groups like that, like people, family people and what drew me to it really, really was I guess the drum, when I heard the drum, I said, “I wanna hit that drum,” but when you're a kid, just like any other kid, you're not allowed to touch any valuable or sacred object until you're further in age, but that was one of the things that really drew me to it. I'd been in a tipi [a lot], but had been mainly trying to keep myself from falling asleep, I was interested in what was going on and what everything was – what people were talking about, praying about and stuff like that, but of course, there was always the drum, the heartbeat, they always had the drum in there and singing and praying. That, all that, that family feeling and togetherness and spiritual awareness of it all, I think that kinda all put together drew me to wanting to learn more and be a part of it. I've been a part of it since I was [little].¹⁴⁴

Broderick was initially drawn to the ceremony by the visceral experience of the drum, the sound appealed to him and made him want to participate in the peyote meetings. He describes the drum as a heartbeat, meaning it accords with the fundamental rhythms of our

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Broderick Wood 05/18/2013.

own bodies. In time, he became curious about the significance of the meeting itself and why they were held. The togetherness these meetings fostered, his family coming together for a spiritual purpose also appealed to him.

While he was raised in this tradition, he needed to understand how it worked on an individual level—what does one do in the ceremony? What are one’s ideal attitude, responsibilities and aims?

Over the years, I learned how to hit drums, sing, pray, and you just basically just humble yourself in front of creation and on a good relation that you have with the spiritual of it all, the – even the – everything, the Earth, the wind, the light, everything, everything that we see and feel, you're connected with it. Try to use it to the best of your ability; I guess you want to say. That way it's – what we want to do in life is try to live in harmony, so that's what that is, when you go in a tipi, take part of that medicine and it reminds you of that of the connection that you have with all these things. It reminds you and then you start to pray. It's a spiritual experience.

The principal purpose of the ‘big tipi’ ceremony is to humble yourself in “front of creation” and connect with it on a spiritual level. The theme of the circle is reprised here, one must recognize one’s self as an extension of creation. When we do this, take this connection seriously, one will make efforts to live in accordance with the nature of that connection—to “live in harmony” with it.

Natural elements like fire and water are understood to be sacred components of Native spirituality because their use nurtures human survival. These elements are included in the ceremony to both facilitate its effectiveness and symbolize their significance to humans. Broderick wonders if the significance of nature is universally understood, since other religious traditions include these elements in their churches:

All these churches, I don't know what happens in there, but I'm sure there's a little bit of spirituality in there as well. They have water in there. And for us as well, we have water in there, we have drum music that represents all the animals. The drum cover is a deer hide, it's beat through all the animals and through us as well. Fire keeps us

warm. [T]hose simple little things, you get to realize what they really mean in life to you and to others and the animals, everything... everything that we know and see.

The components of the tipi ceremony, such as water, the fire, the animal hide, act as a microcosm of the natural world. Each element reminds practitioners that these elements are necessary for living. As humans, we need water, fire and animals in order to live, but the logic of interdependence, exemplified in ‘the circle’ tell us that they are also an extension of us—we are constituted by the elements of earth as are all other natural phenomena. He goes on to say “those are the things that you – [that need] to be awakened in yourself. Then you learn how to pray or you already know... but sometimes it doesn't come from the heart.” In essence, the tipi ceremony makes the reliance on the natural world salient; practitioners are reminded of their sacred connection to the world—and that they must respect it because it enables them to live. With this sacred connection in mind, one is better able to understand what it means to live in the world—what kind of attitude to have, what conduct is appropriate. The visceral experience of this connection incites feelings of gratitude for the earth and spirit world, enabling one to pray “from the heart.”

Broderick explains that prayer is something that we need to cultivate to some degree, so that's it's genuine—not just a mental exercise but one where our emotions are engaged. Conversely, our deep connection to all of creation is innate. We needn't learn to be ‘spiritual’ because we're born with this connection. It's just a matter of recognizing what this feeling is and calling it forth when necessary:

There's no certain time or big moment that we realize that. We know it already. It's already within us, so we just need to feed it, the goodness, the good energy. That way you're whole, you're a part of creation. That way you're included, if the rain falls, you're included when you have that connection with creation, Creator, mother earth. People have their own way, different religions have their own – however they feel comfortable, but with Native Americans, we feel comfortable sitting on the ground, Mother Earth. [I]n ceremony, you sit on the ground, maybe just bring a cushion or

something to sit on while you're sitting on the ground. And then when you touch the Earth, [you realize] it's alive, it's everything.

Our spiritual sensibility is innate. It's always already with us. One just needs to “feed it” through prayer and ceremony, through literally connecting with the earth in order to see how we're a “part of creation.” We are “included” in creation, meaning that we recognize ourselves as part of the circle of life. The processes of nature, like rain, are not removed from our own existence; we participate in the rain. We are in conversation with the natural world—the rain may be a response to our interactions with it. Native religion traditions are anchored on the earth, literally connecting with the earth by sitting on the ground and having gratitude for creation. In this way, one can additionally feel and thus, “feed” the “goodness”—the positive energy we feel when we acknowledge our sacred relationship to the earth and all of creation. When you recognize that it is alive and you are a part of it.

Even though the ceremony came to Navajo in the late 19th century, it is understood to be resonant with their existing ceremonial lifeways. Many people who participate in the Native American Church also practice traditional ways, specific to their tribes.

[I]t's not like you're limited, because we're free to... You want to be comfortable with your traditional ways, your peyote way, your everyday life, you try to work it together to where you can – when you're aware of it spiritually, it's all there, just... I don't know how to explain this, but it feels like you're not juggling. You can go with this one, you know it's gonna help you. You go to this one, you know it can help you and go to this one and everything works together in harmony.

The big tipi ceremonies are not mutually exclusive with other traditional ceremonies. It has generally become very naturalized among their traditions and is understood as an extension of Native life. One's spiritual sensibility helps them understand that these traditions are congruent and working towards the same goal—harmony and balance.

[E]lders believe that there's five different medicines that were put on this Earth that humans could use to pray and connect with Earth, so [the peyote way] is one of them

and then there's traditional ways, but the way I see it, is that I don't push it away, I don't think it's foreign, I don't think of it as a different way or another way. It's all the same. With traditional ways, there're little differences, songs are different, drum is different, but there's always a drum. Every Native American ceremony there's always a drum there and singing wherever you go. Everybody kinda took to it like that. Thought it was a nice way. You can connect with Earth that way, too and it gets to travel. You get to travel. Where traditional ways, you have it only one spot and you – on a Navajo reservation or Sioux reservation, whatever traditional ceremonies that they have, but this way, the peyote way travels tribe to tribe, all over, East Coast, West Coast. Now it's all over and I think – to me it's like – at the same time, you gotta be careful the way you use it. You don't want it getting out of hand... I know it's a good way, the people that are involved with it, they know that it's a good way, but we gotta be careful not to abuse it in any way. Just respect it the way it was given.

One of the central advantages of peyote ceremonies is that they can take place anywhere, as opposed to traditional ceremonies that are often limited to one place or sacred territory. In this way, the peyote way is understood to better meet the needs of urban and transnational Native peoples who may be living all over the country. While mobility draws more potential practitioners, Broderick warns that it simultaneously warrants greater potential for the peyote way to be misunderstood or misused.

The ceremony's mobility also provides a critical insight on Native religiosity—it is not necessarily bound to place. Broderick explains that while he lived in the east coast for many years, he can practice his spirituality wherever he goes because he belongs to the earth:

I think if somebody leaves the community, maybe the rez... To me, the way I experienced it, when I left, I knew in my heart and in myself that I belonged over there [in the east coast]. When I travel, I keep that belief with me so it feels like I belong. I belong to Earth, wherever I go. I was saying earlier that some people probably think, is it hard for you to leave the reservation? Is it hard coming back? The answer is no. It's not hard to leave the reservation. It's not. As long as you believe in your traditional ways and you know—because you're not traveling anywhere else—you're traveling on Mother Earth. It's already protecting you. Your mother's already there. When I left, I had that relief. When I ended up in New England, I knew that I belonged there and everybody thought so, too.

For Broderick, traveling and living outside of the Navajo nation hasn't been difficult. He was confident in his travels because he recognized that he belongs to the earth, not any one place

but the entire earth. Thus, he can travel and always be ‘at home.’ He explains that it’s safe to travel once you have a solid sense of self and your own traditions. Through spiritual practice, he trusts his sacred connection with the earth and he feels protected by it. He goes on to say:

Because you keep that sense of you belong, you belong not here, not over there, but you belong to Earth, that's the one that's taking care of you. In that sense, I always believe that wherever I go, once I was in North Dakota, East Coast, West Coast, I believe that in me, ‘all right, I belong here.’ Who is going to take that away from me, but Earth, she's the one and the creation, not man. We're all in this together, so people have every right to go – to be anywhere on this Earth as long as they respect it. They disrespect, then, of course, somebody's gonna maybe hurt you or something's gonna happen, but as long as you have that nice connection with Earth, that's the main one I would say.

Belonging to the earth means that you know the earth is taking care of you. The earth is your protector. So prayer and spiritual practice help you feel secure in that relationship. We, humans, are all experiencing the same vulnerabilities and needs. As long as we continue to stay connected to earth, we can withstand all the trials and hurts of the human experience. The most sacred and fulfilling relationship is with the earth because as a mother, it nurtures and protects. The earth is more powerful than human, we are an extension of it but it is ultimately more powerful and must be honored and respected.

Broderick has benefitted from the participating in ‘big tipi’ ceremonies. It helps to ground and calm him, which is important to do in our chaotic, over stimulated lives:

I know it has helped me in the long run and I enjoy drumming and singing, because it clears my mind and makes me more in tune with nature, it makes me sane, and it seems like I can pray and ask for what I want. It helps out. Everyday stress kind of gets to people sometimes, but every now and again slow down, take a look around, and the ground that you stand on is the one you supposed to be thanking first.

It slows him down, reminding him what is most important—to have gratitude for the earth that we stand on, have gratitude for the cycle of life. In essence, this practice radically shifts your perspective—from your busy life to acknowledging that your existence is tethered to a

world of creation that is alive and constantly shifting around you. The peyote ceremony provides a space for our needs to be heard and met. In essence, he's saying that when we honor our sacred connection to the earth we are able to explore what is of ultimate concern and anticipate that our needs will be met. Peyote meetings not only benefit the person who has sponsored the meeting, to specifically ask for healing or help in some way, but all people who attend to support them:

Everybody. Everybody benefits from it. That's what they used to say, old people. Everybody benefits from it when you sit in that circle. Not only that person, but everybody, whatever it is they're having trouble with they get to pray for their own home, maybe something that's missing or something that they want or that they don't want, things.

In essence, the big tipi ceremony helps everybody present. It may be focused on one person's healing and wellbeing but everyone who attends receives a benefit because they were present, participated and undertook the same process—a process that is essentially healing. In this way, a logic of interdependence helps us understand why it may be even more effective—when one prays for and cares for others, one receives benefits from this act. One is ultimately tethered to others.

As a plant with psychoactive properties, peyote helps people become more aware of their thoughts and behavior. It acts like a microscope on your own mind. In the stillness of the ceremony you can see how your mind works more clearly. Broderick explains that the transformations made possible through peyote meetings must be facilitated by our own minds:

I've seen miracles happen in there, like people get really good jobs and really – they get healthy overnight, they might be ailing and all of a sudden the next day, they're fine. They go to the doctor, they're fine... like somebody might have cancer and they go back for a checkup and it's gone. [T]he people, human race, we're able to heal ourselves, through our mind. Yeah, through our thoughts, we can cure ourselves. We have that ability, like animals. Animals have that ability to heal themselves...

Imagine yourself already healed. Your mind is so powerful that it can do that for your body. Your body is just like a tool, but your mind is the main engine or whatever you might call it. That's the main thing—that it can heal.

Broderick has witnessed first hand the incredible effects of the 'big tipi' ceremony. The results can be immediate. But these outcomes are essentially embedded in our capacity to will our own healing; our own minds have the ability to facilitate our healing. In other words, we manifest what we envision. We're able to heal through this natural tendency to look towards the future and imagine ourselves different, healed, better, well. He goes on to explain that our ability to heal makes us special—it may be the reason humans are considered stewards of the earth:

We're able to heal ourselves that way, the human race. We were put here because the Creator believes in us, somewhere, somehow, somewhere, we did something right to gain his attention and he says this guy – take care of Mother Earth... it's our responsibility to take care of Mother Earth and in return it takes care of us. [We must] respect it.

While we are flawed, we have this incredible capacity to heal ourselves. We were given the responsibility to take care of the earth so we must have some powerful abilities.

Broderick emphasizes that we're all just human and constantly learning so we need this kind of spiritual guidance because creator may be trying to tell us something and we need to be able to hear it.

[W]e're a fragile race. We think we can conquer the world. We're on top of our game and little things bring us down. Sometimes you need to reevaluate yourself. Just go out in nature, think about all the things that are happening in your life. If you're stressed out, why are you stressed out? Go take a walk, by yourself. Clear your mind, you wanna see what's going on. Sometimes we're so blind that we need to step back and take a look at it from another angle. When you get approach it again, you get a different result, maybe even better than the original. That's what they talked about too in the peyote ceremony. It's all you. It's nobody else. Responsibility for your own action, whatever it is. You take it; you don't try to blame it on that guy or this guy or that guy.

As humans, we're fragile but also arrogant. We think we can act in the world in any way we want. But when we get hurt or things don't go our way, we need to reflect on our behavior, on our actions. A spiritual practice motivates us to contemplate what we can change or improve in our behavior or attitude. The peyote ceremonies allow you to do this as well—reflect on your behavior and what needs to change. It reminds people of their responsibility—to take care of the earth and act with integrity.

Broderick explains that this ceremony doesn't just benefit Native people but all people. When I ask him if he thinks its continued use can create lasting social change, he says:

I'm hoping for that and I pray that way, I try and meditate that way... this peyote ceremony is kinda new and we want to take care of it in a good way so that in the long run, it benefits everybody, not just Native Americans, indigenous people, everybody. Everybody needs to feel this and hear this. Everybody needs this. Not just the Natives. Everybody, the whole human race needs to hear this because we're not gonna get far. We're already destroying the rain forest right now and it's pretty sad.

Broderick prays for a change in our society, a re-awakening of our spiritual identities and responsibilities. This shift may be possible because the peyote ceremony is relatively new and it's spread so quickly. It's been helping people develop their spiritual life for generations now. He acknowledges that it's helped non-Native people as well, in fact, it's become common for non-Native people to participate in the Native American Church; they are readily accepted there as long as they are respectful of the tradition. The inclusion of non-Native people is important because ultimately he feels that this spiritual paradigm shift is necessary for all peoples if we're going to live responsibly on the earth. In his view, we all need these spiritual lifeways to survive but also because human actions without this lifeway

are destructive. We're destroying our own habitat and it's critical that we re-evaluate these actions.

Conclusion

These four vignettes illustrate the ways that contemporary Native American religious experience not only survives but thrives in a transnational context. While Gregory and Will have had to fight, and continue to fight, racism and other forms of structural violence, they have pushed on and pushed back to live lives full of dignity and peace. Solis has explored various forms of resistance and empowerment on behalf of indigenous peoples and now carries on the spiritual lifeways she's learned in her own family. Broderick is truly cosmopolitan—he is confident living in any part of the world because of his strong connection to Spirit. The regeneration of Native American religious traditions in these transnational contexts is supported by continuing and emerging forms of practice that meet the needs of the people there. These new iterations of existing forms, such as the peyote way extending from the Native American Church is a celebration of hemispheric connections and associations that have existed before contact. These Native lifeways are carried on in new spaces but are still fundamentally about connecting to the land, spirit and community in a sacred way. Spirituality is not only necessary for living right; it is critical to survival, particularly for Native people experiencing trauma, displacement and loss. In this way, religious continuity facilitates Native survivance.

These four people are committed to their diverse Native identities and are invested in the survivance of other Native peoples, whether this is a more hemispheric distinction or a heterogeneous community of urban Native peoples. While their lives have had to accommodate the demands of modern urban living, they are not fully assimilated into

normative U.S. culture. In fact, they all assert that Native lifeways can shift and improve mainstream American society. A fundamental difference among Native peoples and normative U.S. society is a rights discourse vs. a responsibilities discourse. American Indians generally recognize themselves as stewards of the earth. They prioritize the needs and welfare of their communities instead of their own personal ‘rights.’ As these four persons: Gregory, Will, Solis and Broderick live out this responsibilities discourse in urban spaces, they are actively transforming that space into ‘Native’ land. I will say more about this responsibilities discourse in a later chapter.

While they do not live within the bounded territory of a Native nation, they nonetheless perceive themselves as members of one or more Native communities. Their experiences challenge the notion of what constitutes a nation by illustrating the ways that Native identity can have multiple allegiances—one can be a member or affiliate of multiple tribes and Native communities. In this way, their Native ‘nations’ are simultaneously deterritorialized—imagined communities exceeding the singular Native nation—and also rooted in local affiliations and contexts. They all continue to practice their religious lifeways as well as honor and abide by the spirit world. They remain committed to their Native identity and ‘nations.’ What’s important to think about here is the way that Native identity, practice and thus ‘nationhood’ can travel. It is not bound to any one place. These transnational persons “belong to the earth” and can continue to live as Native people wherever they are. While they continue to negotiate survivance in their daily lives, their existence exceeds survival and resistance at times. As people who have “planted themselves in the land” and recognize it as ‘Native,’—in essence, re-indigenizing the land—they are

asserting a derritorialized Native nation that lives on in the minds and hearts of individuals like them.

Chapter 4: Regenerating as People: Re-Enchantment in the Land of Enchantment

The dynamic interaction between a Native religious discourse and practice with a Native centered political discourse and practice continues in Native social movements today. In New Mexico, a land-based rhetoric dominates, shaping the social movements of both Native and “non-Native” peoples. While New Mexico’s large ‘Hispano’ populations is generally mestizo and has retained values of *tierra* and *libertad* for centuries, some of its more recent European American residents are drawn to this discourse because they also share these land-based values. This chapter explores the Indigenous pedagogy of a local organization, La Plazita Institute, which conceptualizes itself as taking a hemispheric approach to Indigenous identity—meaning they integrate both Mesoamerican and Native American traditional languages, aesthetics and practices to serve the spiritual needs of their clients and the entire surrounding community of the South Valley. They argue that Native and Chicano peoples have overlapping identities and thus need to work in solidarity for the welfare and empowerment of their shared communities. A popular discourse among this Native community is to point out the ways that a consumerist and ecologically destructive lifestyles is in itself a natural outcome of an imperialist culture, which is antithetical to an Indigenous lifeways and harmful for all peoples. Thus, decolonization for these Native peoples is understood as processes that dismantle neo-colonialism, resist ecological destruction and fight economic exploitation.

Indigeneity has traditionally been perceived as a characteristic of identity—something or someone is ‘indigenous’ to a particular place. However, in the growing field of Native American and Indigenous studies, Indigeneity is increasingly utilized as an analytic framework. For instance, an Indigenist research agenda priorities the needs and sensibilities

of Indigenous communities. Andrea Smith argues that Indigeneity must be understood in light of queer theory in that it “rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interests-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal.”¹⁴⁵ Indigeneity acts as a logic that exceeds identity politics and speaks to larger processes of resistance to normative structures imposed by settler colonialism, such as white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. In this way, Indigeneity acts as a broader framework that potentially deconstructs the legitimacy of the state and its institutions, thus “unsettling colonialisms.” When Indigeneity is framed as both an analytic and personal identifier, we are better able to understand the assertions of community forged by urban or transnational Native peoples.

If Native peoplehood is based on the regeneration of sacred and interdependent relationships to land, spirit and community, then, I argue, the religious discourse and praxis negotiated by this transnational Native community reflects a successful expression of Native nationhood. As transnational Native communities regenerate their relationships to land and one another, they are actively resisting the nation-state as colonizing power and asserting a nationhood that is not bound to a geographic region but instead is rooted in and bound by the shared religious aesthetics of its peoples. This chapter explores the refusal of Native peoples to identify as ‘minorities’ complicit in the colonizing apparatus of the nation-state and their pursuit of Indigenous lifeways—lifeways that are pedagogical in the sense they ‘instruct’ and are generative. Like the Native consultants in chapter three, these people are laying claim to the land despite their estrangement or displacement from the singular Native nation. Not a claim that reflects settler logics of ownership but instead a regenerated relationship to land and spiritual power that recognizes oneself as a steward of the land and the entire planet as

¹⁴⁵ Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 16, Number 1-2 (2010): 41.

‘home.’ While the negotiations of survivance and nationhood in Native communities are diverse, they articulate a shared Indigenous identity predicated on Native logics of justice and stewardship of the land. In this way, they are redefining nationhood based on shared values and aesthetics.

La Plazita Institute is a grassroots organization that serves the local Native and Chicano community by holding community meetings and workshops, connecting residents with local services, running several large community gardens and mentoring youth, former gang members and ex-cons. It is located in the South Valley, an unincorporated area that borders Albuquerque’s SW side, an area many people consider to be a part of Albuquerque. This neighborhood dates back to the Spanish colonial period and was initially settled by Navajo genizaro slaves.¹⁴⁶ These families became farmers and many properties sit on large lots containing large gardens or small crops. While the South Valley is rich in culture many of its residents are struggling to get by. Like the “war zone” in SE Heights, drug trafficking and gang violence plague the neighborhood. The central philosophy of La Plazita is “la cultura cura” or culture cures, meaning one’s culture and traditions are the antidote to life on the street or in the system. Their director, Albino Garcia, an ex-con, is Apache/Chicano and was inspired to open the institute after his life changed due to the Sun Dance. La Plazita has access to several farming spaces throughout the South Valley. Some of these lots are community based and others are on private and donated lands. They sell the resulting produce at local farmers markets and direct the monies to La Plazita’s cultural works. The primary objective of La Plazita is providing a spiritual base for the surrounding community

¹⁴⁶ Genizaro is a term used during the Spanish colonial era in New Mexico to distinguish the mixed-blood Indian peasantry, who often acted as servants, from the Mexican or Spain born full blooded Spaniards.

of Native and Chicano peoples. They hold sweats and host a group of curanderas, who provide spiritual cleanses, on a weekly basis. They also provide Lakota and Nahuatl language classes, along with classes on tai chi and yoga.

When I first visited La Plazita, I noticed two large teepees and a sweat lodge located in the rear part of their large lot. Tomas Martinez greeted me when I walked in. Tomas is in his mid 50's, covered in tattoos, with dark brown skin, and a wiry build. He had his long black hair pulled back in a ponytail and looked like a Chicano biker from the 1970's. He ran the TMAC Program, which stands for 'Thugs Making a Change.' He explained that this program was intended to bring youth into a supportive community of men, like Tomas who are ex-cons or former gang members who have turned their lives around by reconnecting with traditional Indigenous practices and values. They act as role models to the young men and women who come through La Plazita, encouraging them to consider life beyond the streets—gangs, dealing drugs and other illegal activity. They help these people of all ages, by advocating for them in court or helping get their GED's or enrolled in school. Tomas and the other men there explained to me that many of their mentees have gone on to become social workers or educators, some receiving an AA, BA or even a Master's degree.

Chicano and Native men are disproportionately affected by structural violences, such as, poverty, inadequate schooling, and low-wage employment. When they get caught up in the criminal justice system, they are stigmatized for life. An ex-con can't easily get a job or an apartment. Michelle Alexander argues that contemporary levels of incarceration are a modern day form of slavery, resulting in generations of disempowered peoples in mostly black, Chicano and Native communities.¹⁴⁷ The men and women at La Plazita are attempting

¹⁴⁷ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

to break this cycle. La Plazita seeks to affect change by reconnecting these men and women to Creator and ceremony—modalities for healing and purification. They are educating one another on the importance of personal accountability and acting as stewards of the earth’s sacred cycle. In conversations with the director, Albino Garcia, he explained that one of their central missions was to provide alternatives to assimilation and loss of culture; to disrupt the school to prison pipeline; and create an Indigenous oriented community, a *tiyospaye*, that serves the community.¹⁴⁸ He uses a model based on the creation narrative of the five worlds or ‘suns’ of the ‘Aztec’ or ‘Mexica’ people. He adapted this model from a similar program that he worked for in Salinas and Watsonville. He says it helped bring down recidivism rates among ex-cons and former gang members. La Plazita asks participants to complete five actions, one for each ‘world.’ When he described these five worlds, he drew them like constellations on a white board. They are oneself, family, community, institution and in the center is Spirit. Albino explained that they were interconnecting parts that must be followed like a pathway. Participants are asked to do something significant for each component for instance, cook dinner for one’s family or interview someone in the community. As participants follow the steps of the paths, they must evaluate the significance of each world. Ideally, these steps help them see the humanity and value of others.¹⁴⁹

Albino shared a couple of examples of how effective this model was for integrating youth and ex-cons back into the community. He tells me the story of ‘Kenny,’ a young man who had been in jail several times for gang related activity, such as drug dealing and fighting. Kenny was seventeen years old when he came to La Plazita and like many young men in his position was reluctant to change his attitude or behavior. For his ‘family’ world assignment

¹⁴⁸ A *tiyospaye*, is a Lakota term for community. It traditionally referred to the cluster of families who would set up their tipis in a group and would travel together.

¹⁴⁹ Field notes, 08/10/2012.

he decided to cook a spaghetti dinner for his family, which consisted of his parents, who were in their mid-thirties and were part of the working poor. He had never cooked before. After spending over an hour in the kitchen, he finally served his meal to his perplexed and distressed parents. Albino attended this dinner as well to honor Kenny efforts. Kenny's father begins eating first and is stunned. Tears roll down his cheeks. He says to his son, 'this is the best meal, I've ever had.' The whole table is in tears. Albino also helped Kenny with his community assignment. They were downtown sitting at a donut shop discussing Kenny's options when Albino noticed a homeless man sitting nearby. Kenny shot the homeless man a dirty look and snickered, 'he smells.' Albino suggested that Kenny interview this man for his community action. Kenny is reluctant but won't say why. Days later Kenny and Albino meet again. Kenny is in tears and explains that he didn't want to interview this man because 'I know that man! I kicked him in the head a few months ago. I saw him sleeping on the sidewalk near my partner's house and I just kicked him in the fucking head.' Kenny ended up interviewing the man and learned that he was a Vietnam vet and struggled with drug addiction and PTSD. He was devastated to learn of this man's struggles and how the system continued to fail him, even though he was a vet. This assignment helped Kenny better understand the people in his community. Now when he sees this man, he smiles and says hello. The rest of this chapter will explore the work of La Plazita through the voices and experiences of its employees, volunteers and those who it has served.

In this chapter, I argue that community spaces like La Plazita act as pedagogies of possibility for urban Native and Chicano peoples, instigating change for individuals who have been marginalized and whose community position is tenuous. The education that La Plazita offers is grounded in Indigenous aesthetics and lifeways that seek an authentic

connection to the spirit world. In the following vignettes my consultants explain how they and their work bring deep transformative to those that they serve.

Learning to be Human

Rosie Thunderchief is a young woman who works at La Plazita Institute. She is soft-spoken and reserved. Her pretty round face is adorned with wire-rimmed glasses and her long black wavy hair is kept tied back in a knot. She is Diné, Pawnee, Arapaho and was adopted Ho-Chunk and raised in the southeast heights of Albuquerque, with strong community ties to the South Valley. Her parents, who were estranged from their home communities, are both Sun Dancers and Rosie attended her first Sun Dance at two years old. She became committed to her spiritual path as a Sun Dancer at six years old. Typically someone will begin dancing in adolescence, but Rosie had a clear sense at this time that this was something she should do. This commitment has often set her apart from her peers:

[I]n my teenage years I felt like no one understood me because I saw life through a spiritual lens, and I still do, first and foremost in everything that I do. And other people don't. And that realization that other people don't was kind of shocking and surprising, and kind of sad to me. Because it made me feel like not that something was wrong with me, but like there's very something different about me.¹⁵⁰

She met La Plazita's director, Albino Garcia, at a Sundance many years ago. Once their respective families realized they were neighbors, she began coming to La Plazita regularly and is now working for them through AmeriCorps.

Although people are often sent to La Plazita to do community service through a court mandate, Rosie believes people really end up there for spiritual reasons saying "for some reason or another, their spirit has called them to this place... I kid you not, people just come here off the street, saying 'I was walking by and saw these tipis and these murals...'"¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Rosie Thunderchief 11/09/12.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Rosie Thunderchief 9/21/12.

Unfortunately, the projects at La Plazita are sometimes complicated by what she calls ‘tribalism.’ When I asked her to explain she said “my people don’t accept me because of my hair and the fact that I was born and raised here.” In other words, ‘tribalism’ is the bias that tribes hold against those that are mixed or have been raised off reservation. She says that when tribal members get in trouble in some way their own tribes may kick them out. When this happens they often come to Albuquerque because it is a big town with lots of other Indians. La Plazita attempts to address the needs of these displaced peoples along with those of genizaros, who have been living here for centuries. They do this by using basic features of ceremonial knowledge, such as the medicine wheel, and generalizing upon them to bring ceremony to community members. Rosie counts over 40 people on average at their weekly sweat. Because La Plazita acknowledges that people of “Mexican” descent are also Indians, it brings this occasionally divided community closer together for such occasions. She and Albino also visit nearby jails and prisons to bring medicine and prayer to incarcerated Native people.

Rosie is keenly aware of her spiritual life and mission. She asserts that we’re all in a struggle—a struggle to reconnect with spirit and come to understand what it means to be human. Rosie explains that what makes the human experience unique is that we don’t necessarily know what it means to be human—how to be in the world. We must ask this and figure it out:

I feel like the life we live and the fight that we’re fighting is a spiritual one. And it involves politics, and it involves finances, and day-to-day little things, but like on a grander scale... we’re all here to learn something together. And with this whole – the reason I like working here in this space so much is because a lot more people are conscious and conscientious about the whole movement and the changing in the cosmos, and how it’s affecting us. I feel that there’s a struggle for us as human beings to remember what it means to be human beings and that a lot of us—maybe not even myself—don’t truly know what that means to be a human being. Sometimes I get so

caught up in the day-to-day, like oh, ‘I’ve got to get up. I’ve got to go to work. Or I’ve got to take the kids to school, or I’ve got to stop at the bank, or I’ve got to go grocery shopping.’ You know, those kinds of daily things that we forget or neglect to notice... we are a part of something greater.¹⁵²

She says all daily struggles, such as, illness, depression, poverty etc. as symptoms of the disease—the disease being a disconnection from Spirit. She enjoys working at La Plazita because many of the other people there also recognize the spiritual dimension of their collective struggle. Rosie sees this struggle as a need to remember and understand “what it means to be human.” Humans are connected spiritually to the forces of the universe and so their experiences hold greater significance than they often realize.

In our community, we’re a part of this earth that is alive. That is not only spinning, but orbiting around the sun, that’s alive as well. It’s almost like there’s something keeping us from making that realization, because when we are in tune with that, we understand that the matrix of modern society is not a reality. It’s a human created matrix for people to be herded into workhorses and the division of labor, so that human society can function into what we have created it to be. But on a grander scale or at least from a spiritual lens, that’s not real. What’s real is the sprinkles that we felt today outside. Or the clouds that are there right now. There has never been or will ever be that same exact moment... just to be conscious and aware of that.

Rosie notes that the process of life continually unfolding around us is so dynamic yet many of us seem to barely acknowledge its significance. People are caught up in what she calls “human created” endeavors, working, trying to survive, etc. These are just distractions for real life—real life being the dynamic action of the cosmos. When one is in tune with this dynamic process they are in touch with what is really important. All these other happenings are secondary.

And I mean like the sun, the moon. The earth. The wind. The clouds. All coming together to create life. And our experience of life and what can we learn from those entities if we are conscious and aware of them. Other than, you know, our day-to-day lives of driving in traffic, and things like that.

¹⁵² Interview with Rosie Thunderchief 11/09/12.

Rosie insists that when we are “in tune” with the dynamic flow of the universe, we can gain insight; learn about what it means to be human—what our ultimate purposes are.

Rosie feels that her spiritual path has lead her to La Plazita. Working there has taught her a valuable lesson about treating the Sun Dance as a “way of life.”

Just being here at La Plazita it felt like I was guided to be here one way or another by some kind of power unknown, unnamable to me. Something draws me here from the moment that I met Albino and his family at the Sun Dance... I wanted to be involved here because there's nowhere like it. It introduced to me – I think I said this last time. The idea of sun dancing as a way of life. Not just as a ceremony, but as a way of life. And really working here I really feel that, and it's an entirely different feeling. It's almost indescribable. It's like taking those four days and stretching them out and wrapping them around the year.

The work done at La Plazita helps her understand what it means to live the Sun Dance everyday and bring the sacred dimensions of that ceremony into her work at La Plazita. In essence, there is a sacred quality to the work there of rehabilitating people, reintegrating them into the community in a sacred way. By helping others recognize themselves and one another as spiritual beings that are worthy of respect, that are valuable and can in turn give respect and value to others. In this way, La Plazita acts to regenerate a healthy and strong community that is committed to one another and honoring a spiritual lifeway and value system. It does this one person at a time.

She categorized the struggle we face as primarily a spiritual one, not a political one. Part of this human struggle is finding connection, which is something that we all need. We seek community and seek belonging. For Rosie, politics is secondary to religiosity. In a spiritual context we must govern ourselves. We are responsible for our own behavior, our own shortcomings and our own failures. It is a struggle undertaken with Spirit.

The struggle again at its most basic, for me, it's remembering your own spirit. And for us as Indigenous peoples, that is people of color, our cultural traditions had their own teachings and ways of life to help an individual realize their own spirit and

remember their own connection to the original source. They had different ceremonies. They had different songs. They had their own languages, and within that language an entirely different worldview which was much more conducive to opening the mind up to understanding the intricacies of how our histories, how the cosmos all come together to create your own body as a manifestation of creation and understanding your specific role within this world, within this life, within this community.

Rosie describes the struggle as a process of remembering. Part of the human experience, particularly for Indigenous and colonized people, is remembering who you are in relation to the metaphysical framework that says that all phenomena are an expression of spirit and thus, must be consciously honor this connection in order to live well. This connection allows one to understand their role in the world, more specifically their role in the community. In essence, it helps one understand their own identity in relation to others and thus, whom they are responsible to. This connection was described by many of my consultants. It is the spiritual tether to the processes of life. Access to this connection is described as a struggle because colonial processes have made this relationship more elusive and constrained.

As Indigenous peoples, as people of color, in the past 500 years or so we've been taken away from that, or that has been taken away from us. Not only was there histories of violence and genocide, but there was also – which physically ended that connection but then there was also the spiritual disconnection that happened when [colonizers] did things like physically remove us from our land and put us somewhere else. Because for a lot of Indigenous peoples or people of color, there's a very strong connection to a particular area. That particular area has its own teachings, has its own spirits, has its own way of life particular to that area. And when you take them away from that the teachings are there, but maybe the understanding is disconnected because you're in a foreign environment. There's also the taking away of our languages, forcing us to speak a language that does not honor those connections, or makes them even sound crazy, or improbable, or nonsensical.

Since Native lifeways are generally “place based,” when a tribe or community is removed from their place, the spiritual connection to that place is severed. Other features of colonialism, like forced assimilation, compulsory education and loss of language only compounded the loss of this connection. She notes that speaking the settler's language

actually makes Indigenous spiritual phenomena seem improbable or crazy because the language itself is not structured to acknowledge a Native metaphysic.

But on a spiritual level, everybody's just hungry. Hungry for something. Hungry for answers to those questions that we all ask. What is our purpose here? What is this life? Why am I alive? Why does it matter? Why do we suffer? And for me personally, I always know that there will always be suffering in some form or another, but that there's something to learn from that suffering. So I find solace even in my most pitiful states. You know, that there's something to be learned from this in some way, shape, or form. And for me, that's what I mean by seeing things through a spiritual lens. And that's what I mean about the struggle, is struggling to retain, remember, and even revitalize a culture that will help us to understand our place in the cosmos.

We hunger for meaning for understanding of our life's purpose. These existential questions have been answered to some degree for Rosie. She understands her suffering. She knows it has a purpose and so it brings her catharsis to know that suffering is a part of life. She has come to understand that:

[S]uffering and healing is a continuous process of self-transformation; it is never ending. I always know that there will always be suffering in some form or another, but that there's something to learn from that suffering. So I find solace even in my most pitiful states. You know, that there's something to be learned from this in some way, shape, or form. And for me, that's what I mean by seeing things through a spiritual lens."¹⁵³

In this way, her spiritual lens allows her to make sense of life and helps her understand what it means to live—here in this place.

Religious studies scholars have challenged Weber's theory that rationality, alienation and disenchantment—a loss of wonder and magic—are inevitable processes endemic to modernity. Sam Gill's exploration of Hopi religious life argued that disenchantment was a necessary "crises" that ultimately led to a "quest for a fuller understanding of the world."¹⁵⁴ In essence, a period of religious disillusionment often catalyzes an authentic exploration of

¹⁵³ Email exchange with Rosie Thunderchief 05/27/2015.

¹⁵⁴ Sam Gill, "Disenchantment: A Religious Abduction," in *Native American Religious Action: A Performance Approach to Religion*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 70.

religious experience. Rosie is aware of Gill's argument but frames disenchantment in different terms—as a way to make sense of the estrangement and loss of religious knowledge through the colonial project—an experience shared on a grand scale by many Indigenous peoples in the Americas:

[A]t some point every human being goes through this, where they become disenchanted with their spirituality. They feel like it's a lie. It's not real. There's no possible way that can be real. You know, like you've been duped this whole time. But in any human being's life I think that we go through that moment when we like totally question everything we've ever believed in. It's only through questioning everything that we've ever believed in can we come to a greater understanding of it. So I feel sort of like the past 500 years have been on a spiritual scale for an entire people in multi-generations a disenchantment so that we can somehow find a greater, deeper, fuller, more meaningful understanding of our spirituality. And obviously not take it for granted. I don't know if that was the case 500 years ago, but it's definitely something that we cherish now because it has been taken away from us. It's something that we protect now because it has been taken away from us.

For Rosie, this contemporary move to re-enchantment is a form of self-determination in the sense that indigenous people are determined to protect their spiritual knowledge because this connection was broken or compromised for many. In addition, she argues that this period of rupture and disconnection from the spirit world may have been a necessary spiritual lesson for different Indigenous communities and possibly—reflecting Gill's thesis here—a necessary stage in developing spiritual insight. In essence, the current struggle to re-connect with the spirit world fosters an authentic pursuit of religious experience.

I've noticed that in a way some people, but not all, are willing to share with anyone who will listen—anyone who will carry on those teachings. Whereas traditionally speaking, it only went to a certain person, then that one person was the keeper of knowledge. But now because of the last 500 years, I think that some of the elders are like 'we just need to pass on the knowledge, however and to whoever wants to carry it. It doesn't matter their skin color or the language that they speak, you know, or where they live. It's the message that's important, not who carries it so much. And I think in that way it's growing into something not necessarily new. One of my uncles would say that it's so old it looks new.

Spiritual knowledge is shared differently—with people who are eager to know and respect it, whether they are Native or not. In this way, it is ‘new’ because this knowledge had often been quite guarded (and still is for some tribes) yet in some ways quite traditional because tribes often adopted outsiders and treated them as kin who would eventually become privy to religious knowledge. In addition, it is difficult to generalize on who had access to spiritual knowledge pre-conquest, it differed among tribes but was also quite democratic when we think of how spiritual power, ‘diyii,’ came to almost everyone in the tribe in one form or another among the Apache, for example.

Ultimately, Rosie argues that our disconnection from spirit causes us to believe that society’s matrix—part of the illusion she alluded to earlier—is real even when it is an illusion. This spiritual disconnection or rupture (disenchantment) actually makes us sick. We manifest it in other physical and even emotional ailments but at the root is our disconnection to the spiritual world that is harming us. Like samsara, we believe that these daily struggles are real life when in actuality our REAL struggle is to recognize and honor our connection to the spirit world. However, like Amalia and Caro, she recognizes that social change is not only possible it’s happening through changes in relationships to power

When the people who lead us understand that they are public servants and not high and mighty on top of hill and that we should bow down to them, then I think we can make some real changes. As a people and especially as people of color, I think we’re coming to understand that we have to break down those walls between us and them. Between the man and the people. Because as long as there’s that separation, the us versus them mentality, we’re going to be fighting. And until we can learn to work together across the entire spectrum nothing’s going to change. And I think that we are starting to make those changes. I think that colonization not only created the sickness among humans, but that we extended that sickness to Mother Earth. And in our spiritual teachings, Mother Earth, she is alive. She is her own entity. She’s not this piece of rock that we live on. She is a being. And we have made her sick. And I think people are starting to hear that cry. It’s definitely not something we can fix overnight. But I think that we can help change those things. And I think that’s part of what this whole organic movement is about, too. On one hand it’s about providing

good, healthy food for the community by the community, but it's also talking about keeping the water clean. It's also talking about revitalizing the respect for Mother Earth, and creating that reciprocal relationship between the land and the people.

For Rosie, a critical component of moving forward spiritually is breaking down the barriers between “us” and “them” meaning the power structure and the community. In essence, the community must become the power structure and vice versa. Colonization contributed to the objectification and abuse of the earth. Since the earth is sentient and alive it is also suffering the repercussions of our disenchantment and thus, we need to consider the earth's wellbeing in this move to re-enchantment. Making social changes, like choosing to farm organically is significant from an Indigenous perspective because it honors the needs of the earth to be cared for and protected from harm and also honors a reciprocal relationship, which is necessary to maintain a healthy connection to the spirit world.

Asserting Native Lifeways

La Plazita and the many intersecting organizations it works with share some of the same earth-based values that have come to signify life in New Mexico. Many of it's community organizers and activists have echoed Rosie's observation that real social change is bottom up—coming from changes made in the community not through national structures—but also rooted in Indigenous ethics that honor and protect the land. I met Joseluis at La Plazita. He works for the Agri-Cultura Network, a local farmer owned brokerage that grows and sells food to local businesses but had been working for La Plazita as well. He explained that the traditions of people in New Mexico were rooted in reciprocity—interactions where one is expected to give if they'd like to receive. He is about 21 or 22 years old, but he speaks with the conviction and authority of someone much older. Like me, he is somewhat light skinned but the features of his face reflect his Indian heritage.

He moved to Albuquerque from his hometown of Peñasco, in northern New Mexico several years ago. As we talked he explained that his Indigenous identity was very important to him. He identified as genizaro, mestizos that had initially lived in the urban centers of New Mexico, serving the Spanish elite, and were moved up to Northern New Mexico by the Spanish government to become the landed peasantry. Although his community in Peñasco knew they were related to the surrounding Pueblo tribes and many Pueblo acknowledged this, genizaro people were barred from participating in Pueblo ceremonies. Thus, the danza azteca movement has grown there due to its utilization of Indigenous Mexican religiosity and its acceptance of mestizo peoples. Interestingly, genizaros were acknowledged as Indigenous peoples by the state of New Mexico in 2007.¹⁵⁵ Joseluis described the South Valley as made up of old Mexican families, many having had lived there since the 18thc. A source states that in 19th c. negotiations with the U.S. government Navajos claimed that over half the tribe at that time was held in captivity as genizaro slaves, many of them in the South Valley.¹⁵⁶ This population became “Mexicanized” during the transition from the Spanish to American colonial period, however, many families still acknowledge their Native identities. Given this context, La Plazita’s mission and framework made sense.¹⁵⁷

Joseluis was drawn to the Indigenous oriented ceremonial life that intersects the social justice model at La Plazita and so began volunteering in their community garden. He was raised in a land based tradition, his father and his father’s father had all worked the land, so he wanted to cultivate a lifestyle that allowed him to stay home in Peñasco and not have to find work in Los Alamos or commute to Taos etc., which were the main options for

¹⁵⁵ *House Memorial 40 (HM40)*, "Genizaros, In Recognition," 2007 New Mexico State Legislature, Regular Session.

¹⁵⁶ David M. Brugge, *Navajos in the Catholic Church Records of New Mexico, 1694-1875*, Window Rock, Arizona: Research Section, Parks and Recreation Dept. Navajo Tribe, 1968.

¹⁵⁷ Field notes 8/1/2012.

employment. He says small towns like Peñasco are riddled with problems: substance abuse, violence and poverty but have a long history of struggle after U.S. rule over the recognition of land grants and against assimilation and gentrification. It is this history that inspired him to both claim an Indigenous heritage and work as a farmer. He began a ceremonial life with Concheros, an Indigenous spiritual tradition from Mexico, at a young age, through a teacher and mentor. He is a *danzante*, or a dancer, with an Albuquerque based Conchero group that claims a lineage to the Chichimecas. Once connected to the *danza* tradition, he began to better understand his identity as a *genizaro*, giving him a “justification for who I am,” meaning the relationship between Indigenous people and their land based tradition that he was raised in. It also gave him a sense of faith in the divine, a divine that is not God in the Christian sense but rather a divine force that inhabits the world. Recognizing this divine force allowed him to understand and relate to other religious traditions that have similar concept of divinity. Practicing this traditions made him more understanding and accepting of others, especially himself. He rejects the Christian idea of innate sin and instead embraces the idea of man as frail and fallible. This sensibility reinforces his sense of *querencia*, which he defines as a sense of care for the land—treating it as a home or sanctuary.

Like Rosie and others at La Plazita, he is concerned for the health and well being of his people as well as of the land. He believes that food sovereignty is the most critical issue of our time. Access to healthy food is a basic human right and without it we will perish. Thus, he focuses much of his energy on community farming and teaching others to grow their own food. He notes that his spiritual tradition has helped him understand the sacred dimension of growing food as well. The Conchero ceremony emphasized a connection to the earth; food growth reflects the sacred cycles of life, from planting a seed to its germination

and harvest. Humans are dependent on this sacred cycle to live but also experience their own cycles of birth and death. In this way, the harvest reflects the cycles of life that we all share. Joseluis teaches others to tend the land because it nurtures a spiritual consciousness, where others who learn to work the land are better able to reconnect to this sacred cycle.

Becoming a Warrior

Gabriel has been working with La Plazita for several years but initially came to in to use their services. He's 19 years old and Chicano and Apache. With large brown eyes, light brown skin and a sheepish grin, he radiates a kind of sweetness that seems both natural and manicured, not like he's trying to fool you but like he's learning how to be unguarded. His baggy clothes and tattoos reflect his recent life as a gang member. Gabe initially was arrested for armed robbery at 16 and was able to post bond because it was a high profile case and he was being tried as an adult. Once out on bond he was placed in a daytime detention center and has worn an ankle bracelet for about about three years ago. He will be on parole till he's 21, maybe longer, he says, "they won't tell me a definite time."¹⁵⁸ He had been on the streets involved in gang life for years, selling drugs. Although he used lightly he never really got hooked. He met Tomas, from La Plazita, through some family friends and was recruited to participate in their program. La Plazita helped him get his GED. Soon after he began classes at CNM, the local community college. He did well there for two semesters until he slipped up again. He says "I got too used to freedom" and thought he could dabble in his old habits of selling and using again. Despite these slip-ups and new charges he continued to receive support from La Plazita, who would advocate for him in court. At some point after this, he got into a fight with rival gang members and was shot with a shotgun, which destroyed many of his internal organs. He was unable to finish his semester during his months in the hospital

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Gabriel Vargas 8/3/2012.

and so failed all his classes and was put on academic probation. After his recovery, he was picked up at CNM for charges of distribution and got expelled. At the time of our interview, he was petitioning this decision and hopes to return to school and get his degree.¹⁵⁹

Gabe feels La Plazita has helped him develop personal accountability as well as spiritual insight. At first he didn't really listen to the elders, or 'OG's,' but eventually he realized that they were right—he did have a choice not to be in this life. Both his parents struggled with addiction, were in gangs, and in and out of prison, so he thought it inevitable for him as well. His grandparents raised him. His grandfather, who is Lipan Apache, held sweats at their home in a rural part of SE New Mexico. However, Gabe left to live with his Mom in Albuquerque when he was eleven years old, which is when his street life began. The ceremonial life at La Plazita resonated with his memories of the sweats held by his grandfather; even some of the songs that were sung were familiar. Initially, he would lie on the floor of the sweat lodge in order to resist the heat and wait for it to be over but more recently he's sat up and given over to the process of purification. He explains that he's learned to let go and release whatever burden he's carrying in these sweats. Reconnecting to his Indigenous identity has helped him understand his role in the community in a new way. He has a lot of respect for the other guys who run the sweat lodge, such as Albino, saying that he would eventually join them at the Sundance, supporting them in prayer but he wasn't ready to dance. He valued what they did there, praying for the "sins," or mistakes of everyone. This appeared to really move him. To Gabe, these men were warriors—warriors fought to protect their people and land, because they had to. "Soldiers don't do this; they just take orders." In other words, his sense of masculine identity has shifted from wielding masculine power through money and guns to gaining respect by serving and protecting one's

¹⁵⁹ Field notes 8/3/2012.

community. He also recognized that he wasn't on his own in the way he had previously believed. He now understood Creator as a force, an energy, and higher power that is there for him—supporting, protecting and guiding him—just like his new community at La Plazita.

He has gained a wider sense of possibility through his experiences at La Plazita and wants to be a social worker. Currently, he acts as a mentor to many of the other youth at La Plazita, defining himself as a community outreach worker. In this process, he has become more understanding and less judgmental of others. He understands that everyone has a story and you never know what kind of hardship or history he or she has. The casual but often pointed discussions about structural racism and dispossession of Indigenous peoples has also helped him understand his own lot in life. I was surprised at some of the analysis he shared with me during our discussion: from criticisms of history, told from the perspective of the colonizer to the corruption of corporations. He says he's learned more at La Plazita than he ever did at school, although he sees school as valuable. He used to bristle at sympathy and put on a tough guy act because he never wanted to appear like a victim. Gabe admits that he had been really cocky when he was a gangster; he thought he was larger than life. Blushing as he recalls this, he shakes his head; laughing he exclaims, "what an idiot!" Eventually, the guys at La Plazita confronted him on this issue, challenging him to recognize the structures of violence that shaped his life but also to own his vulnerability. At one point, the men at La Plazita encouraged him to think about himself differently, asking him to say out loud "I am a good person." He found it really awkward at first but after doing it realized how powerful this acknowledgment was. He recognized he didn't have to live up to the stereotype of a gangster and he was more than his bad choices. He had become a different young man—thoughtful and intelligent, yet earnest and honest too, with no trace of arrogance. At La

Plazita, cultivating a sense of personal responsibility for one's attitude and actions was a fundamental feature of its program. This accountability was grounded in a metaphysical system that recognized Creator and a cycle of life that is sacred. And thus, one could step into one's own power with the knowledge that they were held in a sacred way by the universe and greater community. These logics facilitate community empowerment by teaching young men and women, ex-cons, and former gang members that they not only have value but they can and must become stewards of their community.

Inner Transformations for Social Change

Another powerful testimony to the process of re-enchantment and its facilitation of possibility rests in one of La Plazita's pillars—Tomas Martinez. The following week I visited La Plazita again to interview Tomas, who works as mentor and runs the TMAC meetings—TMAC stand for 'thugs making a change.' Tomas is considered a BTDT, or a 'Been There Done That,' meaning he is an elder that has experienced life on the streets and in the system. He has no illusions that it's a viable option for anyone. He has done three terms in prison for drug dealing. The last term was for fourteen years. He was in a one of the first gangs in the South Valley and lived life as a drug dealer for 38 years. Eventually, he became tired of being in the system. He had been involved in a 1980 prison riot, where he was almost killed, that allowed him an opportunity to later negotiate a contract for better conditions at the prison. When he got out, he got back into the life—dealing and using drugs. It took another short term of one year and long term of 14 years for him to recognize that he didn't want to continue living this way. After the death of his partner, from cancer, and an accident that left him with a broken neck he decided to fight his last charge. He enrolled in school and a friend connected him to La Plazita for work-study. At first, he struggled to see himself as someone

who could help others. Once he started to participate in the sweat lodge and “cleanse himself” his transformation began.

So, I came, and I sat down, and I talked to Albino. I listened to what he had going on, what he was talking about, La Cultura Cura, the culture. I knew I was a Chicano and an Indio, but I had never really got into my roots. I mean I had never really gone back to 'em and done anything with it. So, when I started working here through work study and started working with these youth... and I did the sweat lodge. That thing saved my life. It changed me completely. You know, cleansing myself inside the mother's womb. Something I always tell everybody, ‘You know what? You have to find a spiritual – something spiritual is gonna change you, because we can't do it alone.’ You know, ex-convicts, addicts cannot do it alone. I don't care who you are, I'm saying you have to find something that's gonna help you. And that helped me. It changed me; it changed me for the better.¹⁶⁰

He began to recognize that Creator was there to help and support him. He realized that after all the damage he had done—the “evil” he had visited upon his community—he should be dead. Yet, he wasn't. He has now been with La Plazita for 7 years and says it has given him a new purpose in life. He sees himself a warrior. Not someone who is fighting the law or rival drug dealers but fighting for his people, like a steward and protector. “I'm a warrior now because I live for my people. I want to help my people.” He is able to give back to his community in a way he never imagined. He is respected and sought out by others because they know he can help them.

I grew up right here in this barrio. I did my dirt here. I did my gang banging; I did my drug dealing; I did my drug using right here in this barrio, right here in the South Valley, *sureño valle*. Now I do positive work here. I see a lot of people, and they know me. They know what I'm doing. They know who I am. People call me and ask me for help. It's a great feeling that I'm giving back to the community. You know what I'm saying? I'm not taking anymore 'cause I took so much. If you had a known me years ago, I was an evil man. I was. So, it was all about me and what you could do for me. What do you have? What can I take?

He no longer is out to serve his own needs but things about how he can serve the needs of those in his community. This shift in identity has also changed his relationship to himself—

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Tomas Martinez 08/09/2012.

he feels good about who he is and recognizes that he is happier being an actively supportive member of his community. He notes that this work sustains him in the same way that he works to sustain others. “These youth help me every day. They think that I’m helping them. In reality, they’re helping me. I’m saying we’re helping each other, because when I see one of ‘em making it and changing, it’s like me. Change comes from oneself. You have to want to change.” He had no children; he never wanted kids because of his lifestyle but now he acts as a father to many of these young men, many of who have no other father figure.¹⁶¹

While he does not consider himself an activist, he is invested in helping others. However, he was ambivalent about the potential for organizations like La Plazita to contribute to large- scale social change. The structures around them were too powerful and profit driven, particularly the private prison industry. He wears a shirt that reads ‘education not incarceration,’ and promotes education among those who have re-entered life after serving time. In Tomas’s experience, people do well once they’ve empowered themselves through education and an authentic spiritual life. Focusing on individual and local change was a more realistic goal for he and La Plazita:

We need to make ourselves a better person because we can't change nothing like that, but we can change what we do here. We can learn how to be healthy. We can learn how to get education. We can learn how to work and do everything that we have to do for ourselves and not worry what's going on out there, because we're not gonna change that out there. Never. You know, the world's what it is. But we can be better. We're not ever gonna change the system, the courts, or our prisons. They're all privatized. Privatized why? Because it's all about money. You know, they get close to \$90,000.00 a year to keep one inmate locked up.

Tomas realizes that the system is stacked up against poor Native and Chicano peoples. Now that private prisons have become such a lucrative industry, men of color are grist for the

¹⁶¹ Field notes 8/9/2012.

mill.¹⁶² He also notes that Native American men serve the longest prison terms among Black, Chicano, white and Native men. Ideally, La Plazita enables the community to eat better, live better and be self-supporting.

When you come here, it's like being at home. You feel at home in this place. Everybody that comes through these doors thinks they're like at home because we're so grassroots. We're our own world right here. We're against everything out there. So, you know what? We're kind of "change oneself," whatever that change involves. You know, you got these probation officers. There's some of them that want to help, but they have such a big case load; they'd rather lock 'em up and get rid of it. And we work with the worst of the worst. Those are the ones that I want to help, that society wants to lock up and throw away the key, because everybody deserves a chance. Everybody. They can make it if they want to try, but they have to want to.

They also seek to create a stronger more healthy community by nurturing strong, functional individuals, who have worked on developing themselves spiritually. Many of the men and women that come to La Plazita have never had a stable home or no longer have any real resources. La Plazita acts as a 'home' for these individuals—a base of support in which they can grow and develop into better functioning members of the community. Their approach of 'la cultura cura' also helps ground their mission in an ethic rooted in their own identities. When he says they're against "everything out there" he means normative settle (white) culture—a culture that not only devalues Native and Chicano lives but profits from their incarceration. By providing a space that not only actively resists assimilation and normative settler culture but also actively promotes Native/ Indigenous lifeways, they are essentially creating a safe space where Native/ Chicano individuals are celebrated, appreciated and nurtured instead of policed, criminalized and alienated. He explains that social change is possible, but it is rooted in individual change. He speaks at schools frequently and remarked that if what he says affects one person out of thousands, it's worth it. Tomas hits on a critical

¹⁶² Michael Cohen, "How For Profit Prisons Have Become the Biggest Lobby No One is Talking About," *Washington Post*, April 28, 2015. *Washington Post*, <http://wapo.st/1PR5k1y>

point. Social justice work relies on a transformed individual. If you have not affected change within yourself, how will you affect change in the world? For Tomas, guiding those who are most alienated, who are most deemed failures in our society is a major win for the entire community:

I went to talk to a boy the other day, and I don't usually go into their houses. They need to come here and show me that they're for real. But this one lady, she made begged me, "Please, *por favor, ayudame mi hijo*," So, I went down there and I talked to him, and now he's coming to the meetings. And he loves it. He said, "You know what, Tomas? When I go talk to counselors it's bullshit—when I talk to you, you're for real. You're for real because you've lived that life." And I don't try to bullshit 'em. Sometimes I can be hard, but it's called 'tough love.' It's about tough love.

It is Tomas's own criminal history and life as a 'thug' that gives him credibility with even the most hardened young men. He earns their trust and respect because he is one of them. He serves as a living testament for living differently.

He explains that while he's tough on them, holding them accountable for their behavior and choices, he gently nudges them to take advantage of La Plazita's spiritual resources and participate in the sweats. It was his own experiences in the sweat lodge that help him envision a whole new life:

I think when I got in that sweat lodge, and I started to pray, and I started to experience the whole thing, and I started to visualize and seek of what I wanted to be, of who I wanted to be – you know, because I never knew who I was really. I was looking for my identity all these years. I didn't know – I always thought that this was gonna be my life, that I was gonna be this drug dealer and spin out that I was gonna die in prison, or die of an overdose, or die by gunshot. But when I got in that sweat lodge, and I started to pray in that darkness, and I started to see that there was a better life, there was a bigger world than just the barrio, that there was more out there. And I started to experience that.

In the sweat lodge, Tomas gained perspective on the petty everyday power struggles of the barrio that had previously meant so much for him. He realized that life could be radically different. As he begin to envision this, he and his life were able to change. At La Plazita, he

seeks to foster this kind of change. He recognizes that many people that come through are carrying a lot of emotional burdens from the hardships they've faced in their lives and encourages them to seek help from Creator to heal these emotional wounds:

You know, if you hold everything inside, it's like a powder keg ready to explode. You need to express it. I tell these guys – a lot of 'em haven't done the sweats. I got new guys coming in all the time. And I always tell 'em, 'You know what? We do a thing called 'La Cultura Cura,' culture heals. And then I explain about the mother's womb. I explain about the Earth, working with the farm and learning the whole culture of all of it. So, they need to experience that in order to understand what we're about. They can sit in these pews, and we can talk. But if they don't experience it, they'll never get it. So, they have to go through it. And I always encourage 'em, 'Come to a sweat.' Some of 'em can stay through the whole thing, and some of 'em need to come out of there, 'cause it's so hot in there, and they haven't really been through that. So, we have to be gentle with it. But the more they get into it, and the more they start to learn it, the more knowledge they gain. They're getting a whole bunch of wisdom out of it, and that's what I've gotten out of it: knowledge and wisdom.

While releasing emotional and even psychic burdens is an important step in healing and transformation, Tomas notes that gaining insight on your life is another critical factor.

Without this inner knowledge one can never develop wisdom—the kind of deep spiritual knowledge that helps guide to live a good life, a life with integrity and heart. It is this kind of spiritual transformation that La Plazita is invested in—fostering a Native lifeway that not only connects people to their community in a meaningful way but helps them connect to a fruitful spiritual path; a path that serves as a productive alternative to white settler consumer culture and systemic violence. Over the course of several conversation with Tomas he said, “it's not quantity its quality.” I heard Gabe say something similar. In other words, political action and protest may accommodate greater structural change but it is affecting major inner transformation among individuals one at a time that is the real work.

Conclusion

La Plazita acts as a beacon of spiritual healing in Albuquerque's South Valley. Through a diverse set of Indigenous aesthetics, that combine Mesoamerican logics with Lakota style ceremonies the people at la Plazita assert a hemispheric approach to reclaiming Indigenous identities and regenerating Indigenous lifeways. They are acutely aware that as Alfred has noted, assimilation doesn't work. It has only continued to alienate Native and Chicano communities in New Mexico who have strong ties to the land, *querencia* if you will, and a long history of resisting assimilation. The many modalities that they offer from the five worlds model, to the sweat lodge enable participants to reposition themselves in the community—recognize who they are, what they have to offer and how to relate with compassion to others. As Tomas says, many of the young men in particular, although there are many young women who also feel this way, relate deeply to the role of warrior. Not a warrior that is violently fighting the power structures but instead a warrior who “works for his people” and seeks to strengthen his community. Joseluis stresses the importance of learning how to work the land, get to know its cycles and recognize those cycles as sacred to your life. In this way, people simultaneously train to become stewards of the land that act as warriors for their community. The deep spiritual transformation described by both Gabe and Tomas illustrate the ways that mentorship and a renewed spiritual life help one heal from the structural violences that have shaped their lives, such as, poverty, abuse, and racism. As Rosie notes, the work of La Plazita brings the sacred healing and regenerating energy of the Sundance to others year round. They work to heal one another and in turn heal the entire community.

La Plazita integrates spiritual practice in ways that make them productive for these communities by regenerating lost or compromised relationships to the land, others and the

spirit world. In this way, spiritual practice and an Indigenous metaphysic act as pedagogies of possibility, where Native and Chicano people are able to step into their own power and live life in a productive way. They become ‘balanced’ once again and connected to the land, which provides them with spiritual guidance, personal strength and the faith to act with integrity in their communities. In this way, they *regenerate* as a people, sovereign and united against structures of colonialism. As a people, they form a nation that seeks to protect the land and all their relations. They do not look to the U.S. to be governed but instead to the spirit world and renewed relationships to land in order to learn what it means to “be human” and live with integrity. They are a nation that exceeds the singular and bounded nation—a nation that exists in their hearts and minds but also *acts* in solidarity to produce new ways of living and being in the world. The Native regeneration demonstrated by the La Plazita articulates a form of nationhood that is hemispheric, even global. More importantly, this transnational ‘nationhood’ envisions community alternatives to neoliberal statist systems and thus, has the potential to “unsettle” the settler state.

Chapter 5: Extending the Sacred World: The Religious Logics of Native American Decolonization and Resistance

This last weekend spent with (un)Occupy at UNM's Yale Park was interesting. I learned a lot about their consensus decision-making process and what they mean by having "actions." The police were there already when I arrived Friday morning. They declared a thirty-minute warning to vacate the park within a few minutes of my arrival. I noticed that Amalia had been busying herself burning copal and sage, what she later described as "laying down medicine" in order to create a ceremonial space for the three days of teach-ins. When the police began approaching we vacated the park and retreated to the 8 foot wide sidewalk. The twenty or so members of (un)Occupy present set up signs, tables and banners in a business as usual manner. The rest of the action proceeded to take place on the sidewalk until Saturday mid-day when we regained a patch of dirt to have teach-ins in. The campus police remained a constant presence for those three days, making sure that (un)Occupy did not move their event or set-up an encampment back into the center of the small park, as they had in the fall, since they had no permit to do so. Amalia and other members of (un)Occupy did not see the need for a permit from the university, since Yale Park was a public space for the community and students. People sat on the ground or in camping chairs listening to whoever speaker was sharing information. Most of the teach-ins lasted from about 20 to 40 minutes and discussion was encouraged. The crowd ranged from about five to fifty people at a time, attracting students, homeless folks, community members and local activists of all ages. I enjoyed hanging out and hearing the teach-ins, making signs and helping out with whatever was needed. I am fascinated by the many factions that vacillated in and out of the park, such as the young white students, the anarchist-looking subversives, the random intellectuals and longtime activists, the Chicano and Native

*longtime activists, and the transient Indians. It's a colorful collection and it seems to work somehow.*¹⁶³

The above section describes my first experience at an ‘action,’ or activist oriented event, organized and implemented by (un)Occupy Albuquerque. This three-day weekend of teach-ins was intended to bring the local community together and engage them in consciousness-raising conversations. Experts of various backgrounds were invited to speak about issues deemed important by the collective: homelessness, foreclosures, socialism, the UN and its declaration process, colonization and its effects, passive resistance, the history of anarchism, unions, climate change and at least a dozen more. Between these teach-ins were complementing workshops, such as a demonstration on non-violent direct action, or on silk screening, with accompanying hands on demo. While my research has not focused solely on the Native American members of (un)Occupy Albuquerque, I preface this chapter with this experience to illustrate the way that Indigenous religious traditions do not always take place in Indigenous only spaces but often become a part of the urban landscape.¹⁶⁴

This chapter explores contemporary transnational Indigenous American religiosity and how it fuels the political movement for rights and self-determination in Native America, providing local movements with an ethical backbone from which to act and a nurturing community in which to take refuge. It also explicates the forms of healing that take place in the negotiation of religiosity and political praxis. Considering the dynamic nature of transnational religiosity in Native America, I argue that the negotiation of traditional lifeways

¹⁶³ Field notes from 2/29/2012.

¹⁶⁴ In Renya Ramirez’s work *Native Hubs* she argues that transnational Indigenous people in the U.S. maintain their cultural identity and traditions by forming hubs of community that help them retain and celebrate their Native identities. She explains that the national identity of many urban Native peoples is a complex one and that framing their experiences as transnational can trouble the oversimplified identities of urban Indians that have been assumed popularly and in academia.

inform struggles to heal from a history of violence and shape efforts for community empowerment. These lifeways serve as the ground from which these efforts arise. Critical in this process is an orientation or (re)orientation to traditional frameworks of relatedness and *interdependence*, which is accomplished through fostering a relationship with the land, one's community and the spiritual phenomena in the land. In this way, I frame the resistance work of (un)Occupy as an Indigenist project of decolonization that seeks to transform the settler state from within.

New Mexico has a long history of Indigenous resistance. Social justice collectives, such as, (un)Occupy are seeking solidarity with the oppressed and colonized, as its members are composed of both oppressed and colonized peoples as well as peoples who negotiate various levels of privilege and normativity. (un)Occupy Albuquerque reframes Occupy Wall Street's fight against economic injustice to one that privileges discussions about colonization and its effects, the continued exploitation of Indigenous peoples, here and worldwide, and white privilege, pursuing what we call in the academy an 'intersectional analysis,' or an analysis that recognizes the many intersecting variables that perpetuate social inequity and injustice. (un)Occupy Albuquerque is one of the few chapters in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street movement to directly interrogate a history of colonialism by asking, "how do you occupy a place that is already occupied?"¹⁶⁵ (un)Occupy Albuquerque reframes Occupy Wall Street's fight against economic injustice to one that privileges discussions about colonization and its effects, the continued exploitation of Indigenous peoples, here and everywhere, and white privilege, pursuing what we call in the academy an 'intersectional analysis,' or an analysis that recognizes the many intersecting variables that perpetuate social inequity and injustice.

¹⁶⁵ (Un)occupy FAQ's, see <http://unoccupyabq.org/>

Resistance movements have historically been linked to religious frameworks—from the Zapatista movement of Chiapas, catalyzed by tenets of liberation theology, to the civil rights movement of 1960’s, rooted in the Baptist church. Native American religiosity not only facilitates cultural retention for Native peoples in the U.S. and elsewhere but also serves as a rejection and criticism of normative settler colonial culture, particularly the individualism and consumerism that has come to characterize the U.S. since the middle late 20th century.¹⁶⁶ In addition, as the history of Native American religious movements shows, continued or revitalized religious practice serves as an ethical foundation from which to facilitate empowerment and self-determination among individuals and communities. This observation does not intend to frame religiosity as working in one direction only but in dialectic with persons and communities. Self-determination in this context includes: healing from historical trauma; regenerating as individuals and peoples; and being actively invested in the wellbeing and survival of others. This chapter utilizes ethnographic data in the form of short narratives to illustrate how interdependence is operationalized as a ‘religious’ metaphysic among urban and ‘transnational’ Native American peoples, producing personal regeneration and empowerment and myriad possibilities for resistance and survival.

Native American religiosity in particular, facilitates cultural retention for Native people in the U.S. and also serves as a rejection and criticism of consumerist normative culture that developed further in the middle late 20th century.¹⁶⁷ Through the course of my fieldwork I observed that various political or community movements, located in and around Albuquerque or Santa Fe, are steeped in Indigenous values and religiosity. The unbounded nature of religious life allows these movements and aesthetics to give life to related or

¹⁶⁶ James Treat, *Around the Sacred Fire: Native Religious Activism in the Red Power Era* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 25-26.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

overlapping movements.¹⁶⁸ A central theme shared by many local movements is solidarity. Collectives, such as, (un)Occupy are seeking solidarity with the oppressed and colonized, as its members are composed of both oppressed and colonized peoples as well as peoples who negotiate various levels of privilege and normativity. They seek the eradication of oppression for all peoples, not just Indigenous ones. Like the folks at La Plazita, (un)Occupy strategizes resistance to ecologically destructive lifestyles, such as resource extraction in particular, and offers a critique of imperialist culture in general from an Indigenist perspective. Thus, these Native individuals and communities are working in solidarity with non-Native people who are invested in dismantling neo-colonialism, resisting ecological destruction and fighting economic exploitation.

While colonization and its effects have certainly constrained Native American religious practice, it has never been entirely eliminated. Religious practice is made more complicated for transnational and urban Indians, considering Native religion is generally a *place* based practice, however, these individuals and communities have found creative ways to pursue and regenerate their traditions. Oftentimes, transnational Native peoples make an extra effort to know and understand their religious traditions because of their distance from their tribal communities. In fact, religious practice appears to be growing among the millennial generation, as two-thirds of Native peoples are now urban and are sharing their traditions in pan-tribal contexts.¹⁶⁹ A critical component of this negotiation is an orientation or (re)orientation to traditional frameworks of relatedness and *interdependence*,

¹⁶⁸ In Thomas Tweed's *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). Tweed argues that religion inhabits two spatial dimensions: dwelling and crossing. Religion moves with transnational communities, allowing them to establish new homelands as they cross borders into new places.

¹⁶⁹ US Census data quoted in Carol Berry. "Urban Indians: Greater Numbers, Fewer Dollars" in *Indian Country Today*. 5/23/2012. <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2012/05/23/urban-indians-greater-numbers-fewer-dollars-114332>

accomplished through nurturing a relationship with Spirit (or Creator), the land, and one's community (which includes human and other than human persons).

New Mexico because is home to (un)Occupy Albuquerque, which is one of the few chapters in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street movement to directly interrogate a history of colonialism by asking, "how do you occupy a place that is already occupied?"¹⁷⁰ (un)Occupy Albuquerque reframes Occupy Wall Street's fight against economic injustice to one that privileges discussions about colonization and its effects, the continued exploitation of Indigenous peoples, here and worldwide, and white privilege, pursuing what we call in the academy an 'intersectional analysis,' or an analysis that recognizes the many intersecting variables that perpetuate social inequity and injustice.

As I outlined in Chapter two, Native peoples describe the interdependent relationship to the land and the spiritual *power* that resides in it as the basis for Native American religious traditions. These religious traditions, in turn, serve as the foundation for social and political praxis. Native American religious movements have been utilized to resist missionization and forced assimilation since contact. In the last few decades the Red Power Movement has become the most visible Native response to structures of oppression. While it appeared to be a popular movement, it was undergirded by years of religious renewal and practice. In his work, *Around the Sacred Fire: Native Religious Activism in the Red Power Era*, James Treat connects the rise of ecumenical conferences organized by Native peoples in the 60's to a pan-Indian movement towards traditionalism among urban, transnational and rural Native people in the US and Canada. He describes modern traditionalism in Indian communities as a post contact phenomenon that sought to preserve culture in resistance to assimilationist efforts:

¹⁷⁰ (Un)occupy FAQ's, see <http://unoccupyabq.org/>

Even the very notion of a traditionalist orientation had emerged, in the aftermath of European imperialism, as a common native tradition, a convenient strategy for tagging the factionalism provoked by assimilationist aggression. Intertribal traditionalism was born in colonial-era experiments in military alliance, retreated underground during the repressions of republican expressionism, and has flourished in the postwar period as a distinctly postcolonial phenomenon. Developing in the context of nation-state policies aimed at extinguishing tribal land claims, terminating tribal governments, and relocating tribal people to urban environments, the traditional movement was intertribal and transnational, nationalist and populist, intergenerational and prophetic. As the growing consciousness that would soon be labeled Red Power gathered momentum, native activists formed a multitude of organizations that built on these efforts.¹⁷¹

Treat explains that traditionalism, while preserving first instructions and other lifeways, continued to be shaped by contemporary issues. His essential argument is that the movement towards traditionalism and religious revitalization among Indigenous communities in North America was the foundation upon which Indian activism was born. This movement demarcated itself through its retention and championing of land-based pan-Indian values:

As the traditional movement found expression in the institution of the unity convention and caravan, traditionalist leaders measured the land according to spiritual values and forged a communal refuge from the barbs of commerce. They pursued a vision of earthly existence that negates colonial border and transcends tribal boundaries—the precarious fusion of old and new, of stability and disruption, that is named by a paradoxical juxtaposition: traditional movement.¹⁷²

Traditionalism was not only a refuge for those that sought to remain Indian in a world that demonized them but also became an avenue to reject an increasingly exploitative and alienating American consumerist culture.

Compounding this loss of connection to land and community are fragmented identities, forged through decades of missionization, compulsory education—such as boarding schools—living among societies that do not reflect your own values and beliefs, and loss of traditional knowledge. Alfred argues that the disconnection from traditional

¹⁷¹ Treat, *Around the Sacred Fire*, 22.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 25-26.

knowledge leaves urban and reservation communities without a roadmap for how to live life in a good way—in a way that accords with traditional values. This lack of cultural grounding had compromised the personal strength of Native peoples and communities. Alfred provides an example shared with him by a Kwa'kwa'ka'wakw woman from Vancouver who says, “[B]ecause no one has the real internal, individual knowledge no one is able to work together. So there are all kinds of fragments [of knowledge] floating around. When you talk about what’s missing—it’s some very basic, individual healthy sense of self.”¹⁷³ These losses are not only disempowering, they are contributing to social discord. This young woman goes in to say that common concepts, such as respect or self-respect, are often misunderstood to be what one *should* do to please others as opposed to what one must do for oneself to live well among others. Thus, many Native individuals are prevented from developing the confidence and sense of identity that comes from knowing who you are and what it means to live a good life in relation to others. In essence, the logics of colonialism that sought the eradication and assimilation of Native peoples have resulted in communities who are struggling to survive, emotionally and physically.

While not every Native religious practitioner I spoke with engaged a typical form of activism in their lives, most had, whether it was taking to the streets or reaching out to others who needed help in their communities. Many have a basic context for their traditions via parents or grandparents, who had exhibited or shared with them ancestral and traditional knowledge. This context may come in the form of understanding a central ethic, such as, ‘the land is sacred and one must have a respectful attitude towards the natural world.’ Others recognized that one must ‘be in a good relationship with the land,’ thus creating balance in their own lives. Some have come to know and deepen their understanding of this relationship

¹⁷³ Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, 32.

with the land and the spiritual power within it through spiritual communications.... either in the form of dreams, visions or spiritual experiences they have sought out, such as the sun dance. A few have also done research, such as, reading books, and talking to others in their communities to learn more about their traditions. Still others go back home and begin learning from their own people or from neighboring Native tribes. They renew a relationship the land, to their people and Spirit, bringing a renewed understanding of self with them wherever they go.

An Indigenist Agenda for Radical Social Change

In contradistinction to the greater Occupy Wall Street, (un)Occupy Albuquerque, which is one of the few chapters in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street movement to directly interrogate a history of colonialism, asks “how do you occupy a place that is already occupied?”¹⁷⁴ This movement, which started in October of 2011, negotiates a relatively complex analysis—at least among its core members—that relates global oppression to neocolonialism and their own disenfranchisement to this larger system. This analysis reflects the scholarship and social criticism of scholar Andrea Smith and public intellectual Arundhati Roy. Roy gained notoriety in the Occupy Wall Street movement by speaking at their rallies in New York, writing editorials and giving public interviews on Democracy Now, championing the movement as important because “it is from the heart of empire.”¹⁷⁵ She argued that the movement is an opportunity to dismantle the imperial project from within and (un)Occupy takes this directive to heart. They perceive their movement as interrogating economic injustice by constructing it as racially motivated and thus evidence of continued colonialism here in the U.S. and around the world. While many members are reformists, who

¹⁷⁴ (Un)occupy FAQ's, see <http://unoccupyabq.org/>

¹⁷⁵ See Democracy Now interview 11/15/2011

http://www.democracynow.org/2011/11/15/arundhati_roy_occupy_wall_street_is

seek to better the existing system of democracy and rebuild the middle class, many more are seeking a full-scale revolution, with the eradication of our exploitive economic system and seek an entirely new system built on egalitarian values and sustainable practices.

The following vignettes illustrate the diverse approaches Native members of (un)Occupy have taken to either continue or revitalize their religious traditions and thus, “decolonize.” In addition, these narratives, put in conversation with the kinds of work (un)Occupy has pursued with and for the community, attests to the ways their Indigenist agenda extends a Native sacred world to urban and non-Native spaces, reinforcing processes of personal/community regeneration, social justice and resistance to cultural genocide.

Amalia Montoya made a big impression on me at the first (un)Occupy general assembly I attended in February 2012. She was facilitating the discussion and at that time I thought, “wow, an Indigenous woman is the leader of (un)Occupy!” I later learned that members take turns leading their bi-weekly meetings, as it is a non-hierarchical collective of activists. I soon came to recognize what members acted as leaders in particular situations. Although there were a handful of graduate students present at this meeting of about 25 people, who would provide an academic analysis of racism, white supremacy or settler colonialism, the group often deferred to her, her partner Maria or the few other Native peoples present on issues that affected Indigenous peoples. The group was mostly white with a few Chicanos, one South Asian male and a few Native folks. I was somewhat surprised by this mix. I had heard that (un)Occupy, in contradistinction to the greater Occupy Wall Street movement that began in September 2011, was framing the Americas as “occupied” land, which is a utilization of language rooted in Native studies and communities. However, as the

meeting wore on I realized that this group was negotiating a relatively complex analysis—at least its core members were—that related global oppression to neocolonialism and their own disenfranchisement to this larger system.

I attended (un)Occupy events for several weeks, getting to know the social dynamics of its members. Amalia and her partner Maria were very likable and appeared both resolute in their activism yet mature in their years enough to negotiate it wisely. I gravitated to them and a few other members because I felt a sense of kinship and familiarity. Since the three-day teach-in was the next big project on their agenda I volunteered to give a teach-in on historical trauma and postcolonial healing. In the days that led up to the event I had an opportunity chat with Amalia about her perspective on the movement and I inferred she had been working along these radical lines for much longer than this movement was around. At one point during a discussion with a former member of the Weather Underground on radical violence she remarked that it was time for “white men” to step aside and let women of color take over and lead the movement against injustice. I was impressed by her resolute candor. She had a clear vision for social justice—one born out of a captivating story.

Amalia is 58 years old and has lived in Albuquerque for about twelve years. She is one of the central members of (un)Occupy Albuquerque and has been an activist in various forms for most of her adult life. She speaks fiercely about racism, white privilege and the rights of indigenous peoples, particularly how we must honor the land as sacred. Both Amalia’s parents are of Apache and Mexican descent. They left the Las Cruces area before she was born because of the random deportation sweeps of “Mexicans” that haunted the area, moving to a rural area of Wyoming on the edge of the Shoshone reservation. Her initial

experience with resistance was actually in the womb. Her mother was fighting cancer during her pregnancy with Amalia:

I just think my whole life was about resistance. You know my mother couldn't get health care. We had to fight and insist on a Dr. seeing her when... and this was when I was just a baby. And by the time she got help, her cancer was too far gone to treat and so she died because we could not push through the system to get her health care so I mean, just my very birth and being part of her body during that traumatic time for her was resistance, you know she was dying and bringing life at the same time.¹⁷⁶

She vicariously experienced her mother's struggle to get care and to live. At that time and place, getting care as a woman identified as 'Indian' was quite difficult. Her mother died shortly after Amalia was born. In a sense, she was born into struggle and grave injustice. At four years old a white couple adopted her. After her mother died, and as the youngest of 10, her father and siblings couldn't care for her properly. Her adoptive parents encouraged her to be proud of her Indigenous heritage. They were friends with the nearby Shoshone people and often took her to attend Shoshone ceremonies. Her birth family, conversely, rarely if ever did this due to her father's apparent shame at being 'Indian.'¹⁷⁷ She notes that her political consciousness developed as a result of attending these local ceremonies but that she didn't recognize its significance till she was older.

She grew up with many Indian friends and considered herself one of them although she was not Shoshone. Later, she associated with an all female sun dance led by a queer Lakota woman. While she was supportive of her Lakota friends she never participated in the dance because she "didn't feel Indian enough."¹⁷⁸ However, she admits that she recognized herself "as a spiritual being from the time I was young" despite not having the language for

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Amalia Montoya 5/11/2012

¹⁷⁷ Field notes 3/23/2012.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Amalia Montoya 5/11/2012.

it, something she attributes to colonialism. In the years just previous to (un)Occupy, Amalia had had a revelation about her indigenous identity.

I was really coming to terms with being indigenous in a way... not being an enrolled member of a tribe and living on a reservation that was not my own. And so I was coming to terms with not being on reservations and who my tribal people are, which is Mexica and Apache. And that I am probably never going to be accepted into those tribes, you know the Mescalero...

She eventually found her spiritual teachers among the Nahua infused tradition of Danza Azteca and has been steeped in this practice for about fifteen years. Her eyes well up with tears when she speaks of finding this spiritual home, "it was as if I had a tribe." Through her own spiritual work with this group she has come to find not only a spiritual home but an indigenous community that accepted her with open arms:

Every year at UNM, curanderas... there's a university for curanderas in Mexico, south of Mexico city. And every year that university works with this university and brings the curanderas here to teach a class for five days. And because of people we knew in the community we were asked to help volunteer... to help people get to where they needed to be and bring the food in for them and just help them in whatever way they needed. And so we were able to go to those classes. We were in one class that this woman did and she specifically was talking about adoption and the ramifications of adoption and what that meant to indigenous people. When she would talk about indigenous people, she talked about people up and down these two continents, she wasn't really talking about "Mexican," "Chicana," or like that. She didn't make that separation; she was talking about all of us being indigenous, all of us have indigenous blood, which is a concept that I believe in. So in that discussion, its very interactive, the way the curanderas from Mexico have a class, it's not really a lecture. And so she asked for some experiences and so... I had said a couple of things about my experience and she said to me "we are your people, and we embrace you." That was so profound. That was life changing. Right? Because someone validated who I was and that was deep.

Growing up on a reservation in which she was not a member of the tribe she felt like an outsider to some degree. This experience of estrangement through adoption and being an 'unenrolled' Native person was validated by a Mexican healer and transformed Amalia's self-perception. She recognized herself as an indigenous person, even if she wasn't an

enrolled member of a tribe. Also as an indigenous person that had a community, even if she had been estranged from it. To be welcomed and acknowledged in this way was a psychic and spiritual homecoming for her.

This transformation is important for our discussion because as she developed her spiritual practice she notes that she developed her own personal power, enabling herself to be personally and spiritually empowered—meaning she had the agency to pursue a sacred ceremonial life that would help her cultivate her inner spiritual life and thus, develop as a person in a sacred way. She explains that this transition was aided by her spiritual teacher, a *danzante* named Paz Zamora. His generous approach to teaching helped her step in her own power:

The first time I offered him medicine, he showed me the way that you give medicine. There's a certain ritual to it and I didn't remember all the things that you did. 'I can't do this right.' And he said 'do what you remember and soon it will become yours and you won't do it the way that I do, you'll do it the way you do it because it's going to come from you. I just showed you basic and so you do the basic and then make it your own.' And so an excellent teacher is willing to share and that's what I find so much with indigenous people, you know we've been so denied our traditions that people guard them so much that people don't want to share them. But he wasn't like that, he would share his... but we had built a relationship as well, right. But still he was willing to share and that empowered me, just like the *curandera* from Mexico, it embraced me. It empowered me. Or it didn't empower me; it supported the power that I already had. It supported me in using that power. Right? So those are profound moments.

This relationship was significant because it allowed her to learn more about a ceremonial lifeway, such as how to offer medicine. She notes that colonization has wounded indigenous peoples in ways that make them fear sharing their knowledge. Centuries of dispossession have made Indigenous and colonized communities desperate for resources and so thus, often fight amongst themselves to guard them. Paz, this *danzante* leader was generous in his approach to ceremonial lifeways. He offered his knowledge to Amalia and she was

enriched—empowered. As her spiritual practice developed under the tutelage of this danzante, she realized that she had an ancestral memory of this kind of ceremonial life.

The Mexica used the somador to hold the fire and the first time I saw the somador physically it actually was here in New Mexico. But really that wasn't [the first time] because actually in my dreams I had dreamed it from the time I was a child. Right? I had seen that. I had no idea what it was until I came here and actually physically saw one and somebody told me what it was. So you know that's what they're talking about when they say it's innate—it is who you are.

The somador had come to her in dreams and so she recognized it when she saw it. This epiphany confirms that this spiritual knowledge is already a part of her, part of her ancestral memory and who she was born to be. To live a ceremonial lifeway or learn to offer medicine and pray is a human phenomenon that comes naturally, intuitively to many. It's part of an indigenous way of life that was compromised by the multiple structures that sought to eliminate and alter it. The spirit world continues to exist, even if we don't have the language to speak about it. We can regain the language and learn how to relate to it.

After a period of disillusionment from political action she says she became inspired to join the Occupy Wall Street movement for its potential to raise awareness around colonization and its effects—such as racism and continued structural violence against Native people.

I really had given up resistance in this country; it just felt really futile. My sister got really sick. Like a year ago, she got really sick, she had problems and she went to the emergency room and they turned her away because she was just another drunk Indian, that's their assumption and she was actually having symptoms of a stroke, so they turn her away, she left and a few hours later she had a massive stroke. And now she's paralyzed on her left side and her speech is completely slurred and so it was like my mother and her problems had just played out all over again and here we were 40 years later and we're still doing the same damn thing, *oh my God!* (emphasis added) My friend Caroline, who is a lesbian of color called me up and she said 'do you see what's happening in New York?' So my sister's thing happened in April and then that was in September when Caroline called me and so, we talked about it and she said 'we gotta do something' and I said 'well I can't afford to go to New York' and she said 'well let's do something right here' and we called a meeting.

They decided that they should have an event in solidarity, a march of some kind. So they gathered with a group of activists and set a loose agenda, then sent out a call for this event. They agreed to meet at the UNM campus a few days later. When they did, there were about 100 people there. They marched down Central, the former Route 66, from UNM to downtown and back to the campus. Once downtown, Amalia decided to burn some copal in a somador and pray, holding the medicine the whole way as she led the return march. “There were about four of us indigenous women who went out and laid down medicine. And well, we swept the land there and then people started gathering and we just kept the medicine going the whole time.” The following weekend they had another march. This time there were hundreds of people present, totaling about 700 at one point. After the march the group wasn’t sure what to do next, so they decided to return to the UNM campus and camp. During this encampment they made camp agreements, such as “we practice anti-oppression politics,” on the first evening.

That night we all gathered and consensed on our camp agreements, just right then and there. The same camp agreements we use today were decided via consensus that night, which I think is amazing. We had people there that are profoundly experienced and spiritual people. Not just one or two, we had several. And they were willing to work in the consensus process and be present. And that’s what brought those things forward. And I think having medicine there brought all that forward too, you know. And made these things possible.

Amalia attributes this spontaneous formation of community and agreement on the medicine that was laid down; it provided the spiritual foundation for this kind of balance and harmony to develop so quickly in such a large, diverse group of people. These “profoundly experienced and spiritual people” understood the value of this process on another level—it was not just about agreement but holding a particular kind of space that would support and nurture that collective agreement. In essence, this process was rooted in an ethic that values

shared power as opposed to valuing the voices of few over the voices of many. An ethic and framework of shared power allows the voices that have been structurally marginalized: queer, Native/ indigenous, and poor people, for instance, to be heard and represented.

As the group began to explore what might anti-oppression politics looks like the term “occupy” was challenged by a queer woman danzante. This challenge opened up a much larger discussion for the group on the nature of occupation and a history of colonialism, not only locally but in the U.S. Many admitted their lack of understanding around the term “occupy” and so a sometimes painful discussion of the U.S.’s history of colonialism and how it currently shaped the lives of Native/indigenous peoples and other persons of color was explored in depth:

And so for the next two and half weeks, it was a major part of the discussion at the GA’s. We took care of business and other things as well but that was also the big piece of the conversation. At one point became the focal point and that’s when we had those two Sunday’s in a row of 7-hour meetings. And they were completely around the name. And we came in with decolonize. And I think Hawaii had gone to de-occupy at that point and Puerto Rico had gone to de-occupy, I think... so of course those two places would immediately get it. And here we are in New Mexico, of course we have to get it because we’re on one of the largest indigenous land held bases in the country so we have to... we can’t ignore this. So it was a profound discussion and people really spoke from their hearts. And the whole time medicine was burning. Medicine was in the middle. And medicine was being moved on the outside of the circle. And I think what that did was it allowed people to open up their hearts and speak from their heart. The medicine helped to create a safe place to do that whether you were in agreement or disagreement. It was a safe place to say what you thought.

There was a push back among the group around race, many among them felt that this was not a critical issue; instead it was really class or economic injustice. Amalia explains that the conversations around race teased out how racialization was an internal logic to the U.S. colonial project—a project that cultivated sexism and classism as well. So challenging the logics of occupation was really challenging all of these ‘isms’ that colonialism and it’s

resulting economic inequities are built on. As the group wrestled over the name and its possible changes, medicine continued to burn, enveloping the group discussion. Amalia attributes the candid and honest contributions to this conversation to the medicine.

We had people there that had really done their work. They had been working on these issues and I mean specifically white males, who had done their work around oppression and colonization. And were able to articulate what this meant and how it affected them. They recognized that they were part of an oppressive system and participated in that oppression and they didn't want to do that anymore. So I mean these were deep critical thinkers. That made a huge difference to have those kinds of white allies and of course there were women there who were those kinds of white allies too that were very strong. But I was really taken by the white male allies that we had.

She was most impressed by the contribution of white allies, particularly white male allies that had “done their work” meaning they had made efforts to understand the history of colonialism and their own privilege—in relation to colonized peoples—that has resulted from this history. The acknowledgments made by white male attendees who positioned themselves as allies seeking radical social change is significant because the admission of white privilege—the idea that white men and women enjoy social benefits solely on the basis of their whiteness—by this demographic is a relatively new and still rare phenomenon. Their willingness to admit this, allowed the group to again, authentically explore what shared power might look like—meaning a more egalitarian society—not just in this space but in the greater world.

These conversations around the name were so critical because they laid out a totally different trajectory for their movement in distinction from the Occupy Wall street movement at large, which over the course of many months was invested in a somewhat different set of goals. Amalia notes that most in OWS are invested in building the middle class as opposed to reconstructing the system to be more equitable across the board:

As we see now, six months later, a big part of the movement is going towards rebuilding the middle class and if you have an analysis in why the word occupy is harmful then you have to have an analysis of the class in this country and so for all people to be equal, you can't rebuild the middle class. That can't be the focus, there has to be equality across the board and if you rebuild the middle class that means you have the poor and you're ok with that. So yeah, it made a huge difference in the direction.

While (un)Occupy Albuquerque works towards social and economic justice by carrying out direct actions, such as picketing banks who are unlawfully foreclosing on local homes. Their altered agenda allows them to do things that the greater OWS movement isn't doing such as, organizing teach-ins for the community on subjects like white privilege or the prison industrial complex. These events are meant to be both consciousness raising and practical actions to empower those that are being exploited by corporate greed. Amalia sees the movement as an opportunity to eradicate poverty and transform power relations, saying:

Solidarity is a white person who has a critical analysis of how colonization has perpetuated racism in this country. It's 'I have an analysis of that and I understand that I have to give up some of my privilege and follow your lead'--that's shared power. Not all the time but at least some of the time, which is not the truth in our society. You have to live what you're talking, that's the other part of (un)Occupy—it's about shared power, which is key. This country will not change unless we have that. And unless the most marginalized, which is women, women of color and in this particular country, I think it's indigenous women and their children, until they are put in leadership positions and put in the central focus of this movement, I think this is just going to be another movement. It's going to come and go and its not gonna really do much for any of us. So we have to accept leadership from women of color. That doesn't mean that they tell us what to do and we just all do it—that we blindly follow anybody but we have to have that shared power. ¹⁷⁹

In Amalia's vision of justice, the voices of the marginalized—even voiceless—can be made central to the movement and radically shift it's agenda for justice. In this way, this movement is about both acknowledging the many ways that indigenous peoples are struggling to survive amidst this kind of oppression and working to eradicate this oppression by changing relations of power.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Amalia envisions not just more equality but a more just world where we are its stewards instead of exploiters. She insists that we recognize how spiritual power contributes to this potential shift saying, "There are 19 Pueblos surrounding us. Every day elders meet the dawn with prayer and call in the four directions... this effects everything that happens in New Mexico and Albuquerque."¹⁸⁰ Spiritual power is being moved and harnessed by elders around Albuquerque in the surrounding Pueblos. Amalia believes it affects everything that happens there. In other words, indigenous religious lifeways actively shape the life of this land base, whether its people recognize this or not. One of the strongest points of resistance is for indigenous peoples throughout the Americas to stand in solidarity with one another to fight continued neocolonial projects:

Our people have been migrating up and down these continents for thousands, thousands of years. This is ancestral. And you can set all the borders you want to but it's still not going to change that energy. And it's in all of us that have ancestors from this land. And that ancestral piece is... that is our documentation. That is our papers. We have the right to move on this land freely, and its colonization that's trying to stop that because then if they can divide us from each other and divide us from our land then they can... perpetuate their genocide cause they're still trying to wipe out our people. It's not over. [Outright genocide is] not happening anymore. It's just gotten different. Maybe it's just not done that specifically in this country but it's done through economics or drugs...

She remarks that the Americas were migrated by peoples before these borders existed so these borders are arbitrary. The spiritual power being moved transcends those borders and any other arbitrary divisions that have been forced upon indigenous peoples in the Americas. For Amalia, one of the deeper more pressing issues among indigenous peoples is how Native communities are reaching out to those who have become estranged, moved to the city, etc. When this isn't even acknowledged as an issue, Amalia is concerned because this loss of population also amounts to extinction.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

It's a deep, deep issue because there's thousands of us that are disconnected from our tribes. If we were able to find a way to connect – and that doesn't mean necessarily going back to the reservations or whatever. I think there's other ways to do it. If we can connect then that doubles our power as a people. We could double our power, which is what we need.¹⁸¹

For Amalia, the work she does in the city is both for the marginalized here but also to acknowledge the struggles of Native peoples on reserves. She notes that this should be an issue for reservation communities as well.

She attributes the enormous yet sometimes painful progress made among members of (un)Occupy around issues of race and colonization in part to these prayers and the medicine she and other Indigenous people have laid down before every General Assembly and event from the very first march in October:

Even now when sometimes I don't know what direction we're going or what we should do and I just go back to the medicine and I sit with the medicine and then I give over and then wherever I go that's what we're supposed to do. I just think that's the way it is. That's the way it is. When you put your trust in your medicine, that's what happens. And it's always worked out even though I'm like "well, why are we doing this? And why are we doing that?" But then it all works out and then after it's over you can look at it and go that's exactly what we should have done! And the consensus though, I think, having the ability to work in consensus with shared power with people of color and white allies, having shared power. That is key. That is key.¹⁸²

Of the trajectory of the movement Amalia says, "We have to find ways to feed ourselves and to help each other. I don't see that moving forward very fast. *[Laughter]* And maybe it doesn't need to. I don't know."¹⁸³ Amalia recognizes that any movement that depends on government monies is essentially compromised. When there is no dependence on money then these movements and organizations can really be sustainable. A better future also depends on building relationships with others:

¹⁸¹ Interview with Amalia Montoya 03/07/13.

¹⁸² Interview with Amalia Montoya 5/11/2012.

¹⁸³ Ibid

Coalition building. I can come and I can work with you and help you with whatever you're doing. And I can help you with that, and it's okay. It doesn't compromise what I'm doing. It doesn't stop me from doing what I'm doing. It's okay to help each other. And some days, your issue is more important than mine, and that's okay. Let it go. Have some humility. That's how we're going to build coalition, and that's how we're going to survive.

Coalition building also means checking your ego and being willing to help others with their own causes, whether its fracking, foreclosures, uranium mining or police violence. All these issues can be better addressed by a large group working together instead of through small, disconnected clusters of activists.

After witnessing (un)Occupy's general mode of harmony and receptivity to one another overall, Amalia's reasoning that the laying down of medicine created a fertile space for building relationship, deep listening, respect and consensus is convincing. This kind of deep listening and patience is rare but the group has also dwindled significantly from the hundreds it began with. By summer 2012 there were about 15 people that attended the general assembly bi-weekly meetings regularly. According to Amalia these movements are a process, one in which we recognize that if "another person is oppressed than we are all oppressed."¹⁸⁴ In other words, we are deeply connected and the oppression for one group becomes an oppression we all share. By acknowledging the deep connections between us, individuals like Amalia move the struggle for a more egalitarian and sustainable life forward. She explains that this is the purpose of this kind of intersectional struggle: to come together and recognize that our wellbeing is intimately tied to the wellbeing of others.¹⁸⁵ Initially, Amalia, her partner Maria and their two children moved to New Mexico to restore their relationship to her ancestral homeland; even though she no longer has ties to her home nation. Her relationship to the land runs deep saying, "my ancestors know this place... my

¹⁸⁴ Conversations with Amalia Montoya.

¹⁸⁵ Field notes 4/11/2012.

grandmother and her mother before her walked these mountain ranges.” For Amalia, revitalizing this relationship to the land is a fundamental part of her spiritual life and identity. She may not be a member of a Native nation but she knows herself and her history through this land. The Native logic of interdependence—that we are co-extensive and that our wellbeing is tied to the health and wellbeing of others—fuels her efforts to make this land base a more equitable and just place for her and other Native and Chicano peoples.

An important contribution that the (un)Occupy movement is making is its attempt to coalition build with other local activist groups, who have shared concerns, as well as movements for decolonization around the Americas. The following is from my field notes:

The (un)Occupy GA today discussed what Amalia would say at the Occupy National Gathering that’s coming up next week. A couple of people suggested that she connect or make a call to other decolonize groups and coalition build with them. (un)Occupy has struggled with attendance in Spring and Summer. Many people are traveling but they are also a bit out of the loop. It looks like Maria and Amalia are going to go give a teach-in on issues around colonization and shared power among people of color and whites. There is also a Decolonize North America meeting that is being called by some First Nations folks in the Toronto area. It’s July 15th-20th. So far we don’t know who can go or even if we can get funds for someone to go.¹⁸⁶

While there is no specific or tangible outcome of these discussions around decolonization in the OWS movement, it is clear that these conversations are having an enormous effect on people. When Amalia spoke about decolonization and shared power at the Occupy National Gathering in July, attended by thousands, she received a standing ovation. It appears that there are many non-Native peoples that support the rights and claims

¹⁸⁶ Field notes 6/24/2012.

to land by Native peoples, the question remains: what does decolonization look like for (un)Occupy and its members, such as Amalia? Right now, it looks like conversations around shared power, interdependence, the sacredness of the land and anti-oppression politics. These efforts for solidarity among the motley radical left allow Native people to exercise their social and spiritual power by fighting for the recognition of Native rights and acting as a spiritual compass in a chaotic world. While many of these individuals seek self-determination and social justice for their own peoples, they recognize how this movement is fundamentally invested in the eradication of oppression for all peoples.

Decolonization and Nationhood

I met Caro Acuña at a weekend of teach-ins arranged by members of (un)Occupy in February 2012. She and another Chicana spoke to the crowd about an event called “Medicine for the People By the People” that they, as (un)Occupy members were seeking volunteers for. In their vision, health care was not something to pay premium rates for; it is a right, a necessity even, and should be available to all. The event was intended to provide free health care, allopathic, traditional and alternative, for one day in the SE heights. They were particularly invested in providing exposure and access to traditional Indigenous medicine and eastern medicines. The SE heights is a neighborhood formerly know as “the War Zone,” redubbed the “International District” a couple of years ago. I was acquainted with this area as my own neighborhood bordered it by less than a block. This neighborhood was home to poor and working class Native American and Chicano peoples. It was known for drug dealing, gangs and prostitution. Caro explained that because indigenous and eastern medicine healed her she wanted others to have access to it as well. She viewed the health care systems as not

only ineffective but also financially out of reach for many people, particularly people of color.

Caro is about 45 years old, petite and athletic with rich brown skin, piercing black eyes and short black hair. She is a member of (un)Occupy Albuquerque and works and drums for a local Flamenco troupe. She grew up in California and moved to Albuquerque several years ago. She identifies as Chicana, born in the US, with mixed African and mostly Indigenous ancestry. Although she was involved with Danza Azteca, a Mexican indigenous spiritual tradition, in the Bay Area and connected with other folks in this tradition when she arrived in Albuquerque years ago she describes her root spiritual tradition as a practice of love and connection to her ancestors:

I would describe myself as a spiritual being. As somebody who practices spirituality... And that doesn't necessarily mean that I don't learn from and take from certain religions. I certainly concede lessons in all religions. And I can see lessons in all people.... If I were to describe the basis of my spirituality it would be based in the practice of love and the practice of compassion. And the practice of my ancestors first and foremost. I also do draw from Buddhism as well. I wasn't really deeply in touch with Buddhism up until I would say six years ago. And it spoke to me, specifically Tibetan Buddhism spoke to me because a lot of it did match what I was already doing. But it gave language to my practice, which I love. And so I really draw from that as well. And I would say music is also my spirituality. So my ancestors, music, and love are the three areas in which I study, practice, have intention, have prayer in.¹⁸⁷

Caro was not raised with these beliefs necessarily—they developed over time, intuitively.

She notes that her approach to spirituality is eclectic and draws from different traditions: indigenous American, Tibetan Buddhism, yet concedes that a 'foreign' tradition like Tibetan Buddhism resonated with her due to its similarity to what she had already been practicing. In this way, its more canonical approach to spirituality reflects a spiritual sensibility that she developed independently, confirming her beliefs. During times of meditation and prayer she

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Caro Acuña 05/25/12.

calls on her ancestors, such as her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother to guide her. “I have direct contact with my own blood council of ancestors and sometimes I will put up alters to one ancestor and call that ancestor specifically into my existence or into my realm. For example, my mother who has passed or my grandmother who has passed.” She also makes special trips to the Sandia Mountains, which border Albuquerque to the east, in order to meditate and pray in a more ‘powerful’ place.

This practice developed after years of therapy and inner work due to childhood traumas of sexual abuse and a bout with cancer at age 27.

I would first say that I came to it – I got to know that deeper part, you know what we call our intuition or our spirit voice. I got to know that richness and that purity of that voice inside of myself when I did a good four years of emotional detoxification from being an incest survival. So I did a lot of psychotherapy. And in that process, there was also dream work involved in that. And so I detoxed myself emotionally. Literally detoxed everything. I relieved everything and I remembered everything. I believe that our childhood experience is tucked away in certain parts of our body and certain parts of our organs. And they could affect our health in a lot of different ways. So I would say that was the first door opening to actually understanding my own internal wisdom. Then when I was diagnosed with breast cancer because I was tapped into that part of myself, I started building an altar. And I started having intention of prayer to my great grandmother and I started calling her. And once I started calling her into my life and through her ancestral portal, I began to gain wisdom from her and from the ancestral world. And so she taught me how to tap in further to the other ancestors. She was the one who opened the door.

Caro notes that as an urban Chicana with primarily indigenous ancestry, her life has been shaped by colonialism. Thus, she framed this process of healing and self-discovery as ‘decolonization,’ saying “being urban means that you grow up within capitalism and colonization. I didn’t think ‘oh, I need to decolonize myself,’ it was more about the spirit world giving me knowledge that I began to decolonize myself.”¹⁸⁸ In other words, she began to recognize that her life was constrained by colonial logics instead of choices that accorded with an indigenous identity and understanding of the world. For example, she changed her

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Caro Acuna 3/13/2012.

relationship to food and recognized that plants, grains and legumes were not only alive but also medicine. Thus, she began a special diet that, in conjunction with acupuncture, helped her recover from cancer. In addition, her relationship to the spirit world and the guidance received in her practice has enabled her to see all events in her life as having spiritual significance.¹⁸⁹ In this way, her lifeway now accords with indigenous values and logics as opposed to being primarily consumer driven leading her to feel ‘liberated’ in multiple ways.

Of this spiritual lifeway she says:

I feel like a liberated Chicana woman of color, queer, walking on the planet. That I feel like I have compassion. I feel liberated. I feel like I am liberating still. It’s impacted my life in every possible way. There’s not an area that it hasn’t impacted my life because I’m spirit and I’m of my ancestors. So I am it. I am of it. I am of the love of it. So every aspect of my life, it has influenced it. Musically, spiritually, academically, politically. I mean, yeah. There’s no – it’s more like where hasn’t it. And the places that it has not is just places that I still have to work on in myself. But really, it’s just like my every day walk in my life is my spiritual practice. Whatever that looks like. I don’t go to church on Sunday. I go to church every day. I wake up to my altar.

For Caro, spiritual practice has permeated every aspect of her life, shaping her everyday decisions. She also attributes this practice to literally saving her life. She’s been cancer free for almost 20 years.

This spiritual sensibility inspires Caro to be of service to others. Caro explains that the identity she embodies led her to not only fight injustice through social justice work but also to support the healing and wellness of others:

I was born into politics. I was born a woman. I was born a queer woman. I was born a dark, Chicana woman. I was born already into the earth as a problem. Or as a – something to not hear. Something that the world wants to make invisible. So it’s not like, I was like ‘oh I want to do social justice work.’ It’s because of who I am.... I can’t ignore the illnesses of the world. If I believe that I am connected to you and that man down there who’s bald and that guy over there who’s in the camouflage military outfit and the guy behind the counter. If I believe that I am part of all of them, and for all of us to be well – for all of us to be a well bodied of human species, I have to see

¹⁸⁹ Field notes 3/13/2012.

myself in all of them. And work until we are all – until we are well. You know, I work toward wellness. I work toward liberation for all of us, not just for myself.

Here, Caro recognizes a logic of interdependence that says, if we're all connected then we should work for the wellbeing of others. This is why she is spearheading (un)Occupy's Medicine for the People event but also why she integrates healing and wellness into myriad aspects of her life. She explains that her most important contribution to social justice is to continually confront false divisions (between persons, such as racism or classism) and interrogate forces of oppression. She does this currently by working as a music teacher at a Flamenco school for low-income youth. She frames the Flamenco tradition of music and dance as a form of medicine. She explains that it enlivens the young people who practice it to be empowered in their bodies, connect to the rhythms of the earth and become more receptive to their own spiritual nature.

For Caro, the contemporary social justice movements in the U.S. are stalled by their lack of spiritual understanding and unity. She says:

The United States is very new to spirituality. The nation of the United States has not really grasped the spirituality underneath social justice action. When you look at protests in the United States, you see it's so compartmentalized—this organization for that, this one for this, this one for that. We're so compartmentalized and so individualized and so ego-driven in the United States that it's really hard for us to grasp what it would mean for us to put down our organizational egos for the better of the whole social justice movement in the United States. It's very ego driven and the funding for social justice organizations also drives it, which most comes from ego driven foundations and governments. So there's the connection of capitalism.

Caro argues that the U.S. as a nation would be better off socially if it's many factions of activists not only checked their egos but also recognized that they had shared goals and actually began to work on them together. Unfortunately, social justice orgs are often dependent on the market economy, which is essentially the source of structural injustice in the U.S. and around the world. In this way, they are compromised to begin with. She believes

that change is possible, however, this shift necessitates a “deep spiritual unification” and a radical spiritual awareness of our interrelatedness. “Social justice movements need to recognize the spiritual dimension of what they are doing if they want to be truly effective.”¹⁹⁰ In other words, if environmental or other labor movements do not recognize the spiritual nature of reality they will never reach their goals. Institutions, in particular, need to reevaluate their own imbalanced nature, particularly the biased attitude they have towards two-spirited or queer persons, such as her. She notes that the socially engaged Buddhist movement is on to something that other activists can learn from—recognizing resistance as spiritual:

There are some religious groups that I see who do social just work like engaged Buddhism in the United States that I believe are in the right path in that way... Really there has to be a marriage of goals and to name our social justice movement as a spiritual movement as a whole. Cause it is a spiritual movement. We light candles. Any time you light a candle and you call in something, it's a spiritual act. Any time you have an act towards an intention of something, it's a spiritual act. So when I'm out in the street and I'm saying 'no more nuclear weapons.' You know, 'disarm the United States!' Those chants matter. What we say out in the universe matters. Language matters. We have not yet owned that in ourselves as a social justice movement yet in this country.

Speaking out isn't just about making a political statement, for Caro, these words have power to literally shape the world:

You know we're connected on a lot of different levels in the universe as spiritual beings. So you know it matters what we say, how we say it. If we really mean what we're saying—what our intention is behind what we're saying—it matters. The more you believe it, the more you love it and the more you're in it, the bigger a vibration and light that it has as an intention or as a prayer. When you deepen yourself, what comes out of you deepens. So it goes to a deeper place. And then when we do that together as a whole people, then that's really powerful. I mean that's why music is so powerful. It touches us without having sometimes even any words. It has a vibration that touches our heart. Right? It's being heard, not just on the planet earth but from different dimensions that we're connected to that we're not even aware of most of the time.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Caro Acuna 3/13/2012.

Thus, unifying our social movements in this country is essentially strategic. The combined voices and intention of social justice activists will have more powerful results to inspire and catalyze social change.

Caro refers to Indigenous models of governance for insight on how we can improve our approaches to governing and even power. She explains that Mexican Indigenous traditions used councils that were balanced between the masculine and the feminine modes to make social decisions. For Caro, a more ‘feminine’ approach to conflict resolution is authentic connection, listening and response. Currently, the world’s governing powers use a more masculine real politik approach to conflict and even communication—what she describes as ‘hardness.’ This masculine ‘hardness’ expresses itself in institutions through hard boundaries that separate ‘us’ from ‘them.’

Institutions. Big structural. Major structural institutions. Whether that’s religious, whether that’s government. Major institutions. Hard like ‘this is our border, this is our line, this is our government, this is our money.’ That hardness. In order to walk away from that belief, there are already structures in place that we need to relearn from. That look like redwood trees, that look like a river, that look like a little bird, that looks like an ocean, that looks like a volcano. There’s so many lessons that we’re completely missing because we’re so invested in the hard lines.

In essence, Caro describes the violent nature of our society that tends to separate and exclude instead of integrate and include. Instead we could be learning from very different structures, such as birds, trees and the ocean, which follow a dynamic flow of life. Social change on a larger scale must integrate more ‘feminine’ modes of being and communicating that are inclusive of all peoples. “We have so many resources to actually sit at the table and work something out with our word. With the word, with the language, with the understanding of somebody else. That to me is feminine. I understand you. You understand me.” She believes that as nation, we must recognize such a balance in order to achieve a nationhood that is just.

She describes nationhood as “being in deep relationship with one another... active listening and honoring others.”¹⁹¹ She explains that nationhood must include all peoples since nationalism based on borders is “an illusion.”

Once we understand our own liberation, once we see how ridiculous borders are – how ridiculous it is to have a government, you automatically get to that place from de-colonizing yourself. You get to that place by liberating yourself. Because those things are no longer real to you. They no longer matter. They no longer exist. What matters is my presence with you. What matters is how I treat him or how I treat her. Or how I share my resources or how we share with each other. That’s what matters.

Caro’s vision for nationhood transcends governments as exclusive institutions. Instead nations are built on connecting with others in an authentic way. This is the basis for community and any future ‘nation.’ Her ultimate goal is for people to recognize the spiritual power of the earth and reconnect with it:

I would want people to turn towards the earth. I would want them to understand the lesson of being a human being in nature. I would want people to get reconnected with the planet Earth. I would want them to remember what it would feel like to not have to hold up such hardness in the world.

Thus, building a functional community means challenging the Western cultural assumption that the universe is not sentient, alive and co-constitutive of persons; eradicating the ‘masculine,’ heteronormative structures that are inherently unequal; and honoring our interdependent natures as we learn to respectfully co-exist. Ultimately, Caro stresses that we must prioritize our spiritual realities and practice if we want to create real change in the world.

It is important to frame this phenomenon of religious exploration as one that is within a settler colonial context of genocide, displacement and estrangement. Native American religion has no central text or dogma and is a tradition ‘lived’ and actively negotiated

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

between tribal communities and spiritual phenomenon. Thus, Indigenous people don't always have a common or ideal conceptualization of what they are experiencing spiritually. Adding displacement to this dynamic only exacerbates this issue. Practitioners may not have clearly formed theological knowledge of their religious tradition, since there is none, however, as it is an experiential form of religiosity they eventually learn to trust their own insights leading them to spiritual insights or 'truths.' Traditionally, only a small number of people had access to religious training, under the tutelage of a medicine man for example.¹⁹² This was undertaken with great care and over a long period of time. However, rites of passage were common for young men and women. Through the vision quest or puberty ceremony, one was expected to connect with spiritual phenomena associated with the tribe and learn, with the help of a sponsor or guide, what their responsibilities were to the community. What little knowledge people had about the spirit world, Creator, etc. was still effective in their lives; it did not prevent them from supplicating spiritual power and expecting results.¹⁹³ Again, these traditions are personal, experiential and intuitive. If you understand the world and all phenomena as sentient and having personality—a personal universe, as Vine Deloria, Jr. would say—then one intuitively begins to ask for guidance in this world, expecting a response.¹⁹⁴ Caro embraces an Indigenous worldview and begins to learn from it in her prayer and meditation. What she learns is both 'healing' and 'decolonizing' because the knowledge she is given helps her understand how to ultimately restore balance and personal wellbeing in her life. It is this awareness that leads her to evaluate nationhood and justice the way she does. These conceptualizations reflect a Native logic that says that all phenomena in the world are sacred because they are an expression of Spirit.

¹⁹² Deloria, *The World We Used to Live In*.

¹⁹³ See Ella Cara Deloria's *Waterlily* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

¹⁹⁴ Deloria, *Power and Place*.

The Medicine for the People by the People event took place in July 2012, again in June 2013, April 2014 and April 2015. Caro and a small group of volunteers from (un)Occupy spent months planning this event. I participated heavily because wellness and healing are issues close to my heart. As the months went on, it shifted from just a healing and wellness event to one in which public health were discussed, free healthy food would be provided and a speaker series developed. The members of (un)Occupy agreed, over many meetings, that these many components were complementary and served their mission, which is printed in the flyer I posted below but will copy here as well:

Medicine for the People by the People

No Fear Just FREE!

Saturday, July 14, 2012

A DAY OF FREE HEALTH CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY

All Welcome!

Schedule of Events

9–10 AM Opening Ceremony/Laying Down Medicine

10 AM–6 PM Activities and treatments, including:

- › Chair Massage › Acupuncture › Reiki › Kinesiology › Traditional Healers/Curanderas › Yoga/Meditation
- › Wellness Checks › Health Info (Therapeutic Options, Cancer Screening Recommendations, Preventive Health)
- › Speakers (Justice, Empowerment, Health Policy, etc.) › Healthy Snacks & food from the Food-as-Medicine kitchen

Workshops

Enrique Cardiel, M.A., Public Health Educator

11am–12pm “Politics and Health | **2–3pm** “Health as a Human Right”

Speaker series starting at 12pm

Dick Mason and Barbara Webber, Health Action New Mexico,
“Health Care Reform after the Supreme Court Ruling”

Bruce Trigg, MD, President of PNHP, “Single-Payer National Health Care”
& “Narcotics Addiction in NM”

Dora Wang, MD, reading from her book *The Kitchen Shrink*

Yoga Instruction with Katja Lauterstein of *High Desert Yoga*
10:30–11am | **12–12:30pm**

Yoga therapy with local Yoga master Aparna Levine
3–3:30pm Upper body | **3:45–4:15pm** Breath therapy
4:30–5pm Yoga therapy for lower back and hips | **5:30–6pm** Meditation

To be held at: **Endorphin Power Company** 509 Cardenas St. SE, Albuquerque

Mission We hope to empower each other with awareness about health justice and our inherent right to heal and be cared for during times of illness and transition. This event is intended to be part of a movement to change the model of health care provided in our community. We will be serving those who live in fear of limited or no access to health care, as well as those who have had no success with the health care provided to them. We will make available knowledge and exposure to many forms of health care available within our community. By providing exposure and education to many paths of wellness, we wish to freely share what we believe is innately human: a right to heal! We believe that all seekers of wellness, mind, body, and spirit may find empowerment and freedom. —(un)Occupy Albuquerque



FOR MORE INFO: <http://unoccupyabq.org> or <https://www.facebook.com/events/322650147811006/>

Flyer for Medicine for the People by the People (designed by Tina Kachele)

Mission Statement: We hope to empower each other with awareness about health justice and our inherent right to heal and be cared for during times of illness and transition. This event is intended to be part of a movement to change the model of health care provided in our community. We will be serving those who live in fear of limited or no access to health care, as well as those who have had no success with the health care provided to them. We will make available knowledge and exposure to many forms of health care available within our community. By providing exposure and education to many paths of wellness, we wish to freely share what we believe is innately human: a right to heal! We believe that all seekers of wellness, mind, body, and spirit may find empowerment and freedom. —(un)Occupy Albuquerque

Thus, the event was about fostering a dialogue around the relationship between health care as a system—a system that disproportionately fails the poor and people of color—and wellness.

In addition, it also served as an ‘action,’ wherein attendees would be empowered with information and an opportunity to receive healing for whatever ailed them. For instance, a workshop on ‘Politics and Health,’ led by (un)Occupy member Enrique Cardiel, explored how poverty and dispossession contributes to stress-born illness, such as hypertension and diabetes—health issues that, again, disproportionately effect the poor and people and color. In this way, attendees could not only receive care, by seeing a healer of some sort, they could also understand how their own marginalization affected their health. These workshops and the speaker series were held like town hall meeting, providing attendees an opportunity to ask questions and share their own experiences around health care, healing and wellness.

At the first Medicine event, about two hundred fifty people attended. Subsequent events served about 250-300. Many of the practitioners—whether traditional healers, acupuncturists or masseuses—who volunteered the first year have continued to volunteer year after year and say that they look forward to the event because it’s so uplifting and energizing. It’s true—the space that’s created is unique and difficult to put into words. It feels almost like an ethereal alternative universe where people and their needs are celebrated.

It's a telling glimpse into the worlds that can be created through creative effort. The following is a short excerpt from my field notes after the first Medicine event.

The last two weeks have been pretty intense, planning and executing the Medicine for the People event. It turned out awesome but was really draining, exhausting actually. However, I did get a lot out of it actually. I feel really happy that many people got treatments and really got something out of it. People were coming by the appointment desk on their way out saying, 'thank you, I feel great!' or 'I'm so happy you guys are doing this—when is it happening again?!' This outcome is amazing and irreplaceable. I got a chance to meet a few more folks in the spiritual/healing community, such as Izaklli Kalpulli, a local curandera group that volunteered to give limpieas and do reiki.¹⁹⁵ I've been thinking about how these spiritual movements, happening locally, are moving and giving life to other movements. A theme that I can see now is solidarity. (un)Occupy is seeking solidarity with the oppressed and colonized, it is composed of the oppressed and colonized. The people who are invested in healing and wellness are also often invested in self-determination and an indigenous worldview/value system. Those who are militant and political are not always invested in spiritual wellbeing or in an indigenous/ spiritual worldview. This has become a somewhat clear distinction but I see the way that less 'spiritually' minded (un)Occupy members have found a way to participate anyway, whether it was helping out in the 'Food as Medicine Kitchen' or volunteering for the kid's space doing crafts. Maybe the fluid 'femininity' that Caro speaks of is working on them? One of the things that I liked the most was meeting many local people, who sat in the 'lobby/ waiting area' and chatted amongst

¹⁹⁵ A kalpulli is a collective of curanderas. There are several kalpulli in the Albuquerque area. Many are New Mexican born but a few come from Mexico or Puerto Rico, where they were trained in the curanderismo healing tradition. This tradition is a synthesis of Indigenous American and European folk medicine.

themselves. It felt like community formation in action. At the end of the event some of these people even stayed to clean-up. I found out later that one woman, an older Vietnamese woman named Hien, who lived down the street came by early on and volunteered in the kitchen the whole day!¹⁹⁶ I also met a Native woman named Beaver who works with Rain Cloud, an urban Native group that lobbies for Indigenous people rights.

I just returned from the Medicine for the People follow-up dinner at EPC. It was really great. A few practitioners came and several volunteers, like JP, Tina, Amalia and Maria. Several of them talked about how special they thought it was and how cared for they felt. This really moved me because this is what I wanted and ultimately what I really want for others around me—to feel cared for. As I thought about it when I was leaving, my eyes welled up with tears. I love giving to others and making them feel cared for, loved and wonderful. I love this and want this so much. I realize that this has been a problem for me because sometimes I people please and I get caught up in one-sided relationships. But other times, like this, I know that something I've done has really touched or helped someone else and that I was instrumental in creating a space for healing and community. Amalia also said something that struck me—that this event was a ceremony, and that such events were a ceremony. There is a spirit or energy that carries the event and gives it a life of its own. She's right, there was an energy that allowed certain miraculous things to happen and for people to receive the healing that they were meant to receive. I'm moved and blessed by this whole experience and find it a fitting punctuation to my time in New Mexico. I realize I've grown a lot here.¹⁹⁷

Conclusion

¹⁹⁶ Since this time, Hien has returned and volunteered in the kitchen every year.

¹⁹⁷ Field notes 07/17/2012.

The experiences of these women point to the ways in which resistance and decolonization are about both one's inner spiritual journey and healing as well as an action-oriented mobilization among peoples that recognize shared values. Ultimately, self-determination is the tethering of the two. Although many of these women are estranged from their home communities, they have found creative ways to either connect with or foster their Native identities and perspectives. They theorize social justice, empowerment and resistance in broad terms, recognizing that it must be undertaken for all. Amalia uses her charisma and deep spiritual insight to rally people together. She acts as a beacon of light to a community that is frustrated over injustice and needs direction on where to go next. Caro uses her honed spiritual sense to nurture sacred spaces, medicine and healing in various areas of her life, seeking to eradicate injustice and the superficial barriers between peoples. Given the logic of interdependence acting for the welfare of others is a rational choice. One is not only co-constitutive of others but one's thoughts, words and actions are understood to be co-constitutive of the wellbeing of all persons, human and non-human. 'Justice' extends from one's own care and sense of responsibility to others—as all others are an extension of oneself. Present action is understood to ameliorate conditions of violence, injustice and exploitation in the future.

(un)Occupy integrates spiritual practice in ways their actions in order to dissolved discord as well as to receive direction for future works. They recognize the need guidance through the spirit world. Caro and others pursue “decolonial” healing by regenerating lost or compromised relationships to the land and the spirit world. They do this for themselves but also for others. They recognize that their healing enables them to help others in the community to heal or “step in to their own power.” In this way, (un)Occupy extends the

Native sacred world to non-Native spaces and asserts its efficacy to heal and transform individuals and spaces. (un)Occupy's Indigenist agenda broadens the discourse around anti-oppression politics to reconsider the ways that people are not just working in solidarity as allies but are actually co-extensive and thus, in need of support and care. Again a responsibilities discourse is set forth, wherein the discourse around social justice is shifted from that of one's individual rights and protections to collective rights—including those of the land—and collective accountability. This shift enables members of (un)Occupy and the multiple social justice task forces they work with to reevaluate what it means to live in the world in a just way. In essence, it forces them to consider how their own attitudes and actions are either supporting the just power relations or not. Like the work of La Plazita, (un)Occupy's pursuit of spiritual practice and an indigenous metaphysic acts as a pedagogy of possibility, where not only Native people but all people are invited to step into their own power and live life in a productive way. They are provided an opportunity to become "balanced" with the processes of the universe once again and connected to the land, which provides them with spiritual guidance, personal strength and the faith to act with integrity in their communities.

Chapter 6: The Tibetan Religious Landscape: Politics and Religion in Exile

When you have cultivated an altruistic mind, it doesn't matter what you do, it doesn't matter what you say, it becomes a benefit to others; that's why it becomes Dharma. So if some self-grasping, some ego-centered mind is involved then no matter what one does, no matter what one says outside, it's not dharmic, [but] political. –Lama Jampa, Albuquerque, NM, February 2, 2012.¹⁹⁸

A core focus of many decolonization movements is resisting culture erasure through religious regeneration—the logic being religion constitutes the core values and traditions of a given community. When cultural identity is strengthened these communities are better able to resist colonial advances as well as practices of extermination. For Tibetans in Santa Fe, religious practice has taken on a new political dimension. Religion has historically played an integral role in Tibetan governance, what Tibetans referred to as *chos srid gnyis ldan* or “religion and politics combined.” The Dalai Lama served as both the spiritual and political leader of Tibetans, overseeing both their spiritual and material welfare.¹⁹⁹ Tibet never existed as a unified polity as we understand nation-states today. The unifying thread among regional and sectarian differences was Buddhism. In most cases, to be Tibetan was to be Buddhist. After Chinese invasion a new ‘national’ in-group identity emerged, one united by Dharma in defense of Tibetans’ spiritual homeland. In exile, Tibetans make strategic use of this new pan-Tibetan identity, rallying non-Tibetans to join their cause. Thus, Tibetans consciously regenerate their culture, centrally their religious identity, as a form of resistance and decolonization. In this chapter, I argue that this movement of cultural regeneration and resistance articulates a new form of *chos srid gnyis ldan* or “religion and politics combined” wherein religious praxis undergirds the pursuit of Tibetan liberation.

While it may be assumed that immigration to the U.S. necessitates an investment in assimilating to U.S. life and values, transnational Tibetans are invested in retaining their

¹⁹⁸ Lama Jampa is a pseudonym to protect this person’s privacy.

¹⁹⁹ Bina Burman, *Religion and Politics in Tibet* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1979), 45.

culture even as they adapt to life in the United States. Julia Hess' ethnography, *Immigrant Ambassadors*, argues that Tibetans living in exile are overwhelmingly invested in working for the liberation of Tibet. Tibetans developed a "diaspora consciousness" in exile through the nationalistic discourses of the Tibetan government in exile as well as through the memories and longing for Tibet among those in their exile communities.²⁰⁰ In this way, Tibetans in exile construct 'cultural citizenship,' although many have never been to Tibet. Through this "diaspora consciousness," Tibetans are motivated to act as "immigrant ambassadors" of Tibet, agitating for the cause internationally while being stateless in India or citizens of Western countries.

Renya Ramirez argues that transnational identity is a two-way process wherein in-group identity continues to be shaped in a dialectical discourse between transnational and 'home' communities. Transnational peoples form "hubs" (like hubcaps) of community with others in their perceived cultural in-group that help retain and celebrate their cultural or ethnic identities but also stay connected to the social and political life back "home." These hubs work as a circle connecting transnational peoples to a local 'pan-ethnic' community, while its 'spokes' branch out to wider circles connecting them to home nations, distinct tribal affiliations or even hemispheric conceptualizations of identity.²⁰¹ Due to changes in Tibetan culture after Chinese invasion, Tibetans have been criticized as fomenting a contrived national identity in diaspora.²⁰² What these criticisms fail to recognize is that culture is not

²⁰⁰ Hess, *Immigrant Ambassadors*. See also Amy Lavine, "The Politics of Nostalgia: Social Memory and National Identity Among Diaspora Tibetans in New York City," PhD dissertation, The University of Chicago, December 2001, 63.

²⁰¹ Ramirez, *Native Hubs*, 200-201.

²⁰² Jamyang Norbu has characterized Tibetan identity in exile as essentially a product of the Tibetan government in exile's propaganda that assimilates the West's "Shangri-La fantasy" of a purely spiritual, non-violent people. See, Jamyang Norbu, "Behind the Lost Horizon: Demystifying Tibet," in *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections and Fantasies*. Editors Thierry Dodin and Heinz R  ther.

static; culture along with its ‘traditions’ continually changes, particularly when confronted with threats of erasure. I use Renya Ramirez’s theory of the “hub,” to illustrate how transnational Tibetan communities negotiate cultural continuity in exile through “hubs” or shared spaces, enabling them to access “Tibetan-ness” locally. Among my consultants, most have friends and extended family in India, Bhutan or Nepal; a few have familial connections in Tibet. One lama in Santa Fe emigrated directly from Tibet about ten years and continues to travel back and forth on occasion. Thus, this hub also nurtures a ‘two-way’ dialectical connection to friends and family living elsewhere in exile or in Tibet.

Like Native American nations, Tibet’s status as a sovereign nation is contested. This contestation has catalyzed a nationalist movement to secure Tibetan independence and preserve cultural identity. For transnational peoples, cultural identity does not stop at national lines, particularly for those living under settler colonial conditions of forced diaspora; citizenship often involves multiple sites of allegiance. Ramirez complicates the definition of citizenship for transnational Native peoples experiencing displacement, saying:

My focus on Native Americans’ experience as transnationals also highlights the paradoxical relationship between landless Native Americans and dominant notions of citizenship. Citizenship usually refers to peoples’ relationship to a *singular* nation-

(Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2001). Toni Huber makes a similar claim arguing that Tibetan diaspora identity has appropriated ‘modern’ Western discourses, such as environmentalism, pacifism, human rights, and feminism to appear “peaceful” and “ecological” and appeal to the sensibilities of Westerners, see Toni Huber, “Shangri-La in Exile: Representations of Tibetan Identity and Transnational Culture,” in *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections and Fantasies*, eds. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther. (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2001). While there are certainly elements of truth to these claims, both are grossly reductionistic and dismissive of Tibetan agency. Neither makes a coherent connection between the religious dimensions of Tibetan culture and how these frameworks would logically lead to the discursive identities they cynically describe. Conversely, I read the deliberate reconstitution of ‘traditional’ Tibetan identity in exile as a form of ‘differential consciousness,’ an idea theorized by Chela Sandoval that frames particular actions and attitudes by marginalized peoples as oppositional and intended to subvert the relations of power that constrain them. See, Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

state. This ethnographic study, in contrast, discussed Indigenous peoples' connection to multiple social and political communities."²⁰³

Tibetan people, like Native people, are currently negotiating multiple sites of allegiance, to Tibet as their homeland, to exile communities in India, Bhutan or Nepal and even to new home countries, such as the U.S. or Canada. As Hess' work notes, transnational Tibetan identity is strengthened by a common goal of survival and resistance. Thus, Tibetans work for Tibet's liberation from sites of diaspora all over the world.

The "hub" Tibetans have cultivated in New Mexico acts as a religious landscape, nurturing both religious practice and cultural regeneration. I explore the religious and social significance of this religious landscape through three sites: Tibetan Buddhist Dharma Centers in Albuquerque and Santa Fe, a Tibetan community center in Santa Fe, and Tibetan homes in Santa Fe. These vignettes demonstrate the ways in which religious praxis among Tibetans in New Mexico acts as foundation for cultural continuity but also for the Tibet movement. In fact, these processes reinforce one another. Religion reinforces culture, cultural continuity acts as resistance, spurring the movement that continues to return to religion for strength and identity. While the framework of this chapter revolves around Tibetan spaces, these sites contextualize the dynamic community exchange fundamental to the cultural survival of Tibetans in exile. This chapter includes the religious perspectives and experiences of Tibetan peoples living in exile—from lamas, who are religious virtuosos, to lay people, who vary in their degree of Buddhist knowledge and practice.

Transnational Tibetan Identity, Politics and Religion

People of Tibetan descent refer to themselves as the people from 'the land of snows,' their epithet for Tibet. The land and its features factor heavily in Tibetan identity. In fact,

²⁰³ Ibid.

framing Tibetans as a people of ‘place’ would not be an overstatement. Martin Mills’ ethnography of Tibetan Buddhist village life in Ladakh frames Tibetan identity as primarily negotiated through relationships with the land, the local ‘chthonic world’ of deities and ‘places of life essence’ (*la gnas*), constructing an embodied personhood that is mediated by Buddhist ritual and cosmology.²⁰⁴ In fact, Mills argues that political authority is granted to reincarnated lamas (*tulkus*) because of their supramundane abilities to subdue chthonic powers. A Buddhist sociopolitical framework structured the last several centuries of Tibetan life. Enlightened religious leaders governed along with a bureaucratic body of religious and aristocratic officials.²⁰⁵ This created a system where *chos srid gnyis ldan* or “religion and politics combined.” Buddhist ethics not only shaped Tibetan values but also everyday lifeways. While Tibet has been described as a theocracy, implying a political institution like that of Vatican reign, it does not recognize a *theos* but instead is steeped in a shared Buddhist vision of the world.²⁰⁶

Before colonization, Tibetan identity was somewhat heterogeneous, one might identify more closely with one’s region, such as Kham, Amdo or Ü-Tsang, which comprise the northeastern, southeastern and central/western regions of Tibet, and/or with sectarian religious affiliation.²⁰⁷ Dawa Norbu explains that regional and sectarian identities differed

²⁰⁴ See Mills, *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism* and for a discussion of *gnas* as a driving feature of pilgrimage and Tibetan religious practice see Toni Huber’s *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*.

²⁰⁵ See, Melvyn Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet: 1913-1951*.

²⁰⁶ Franz Michael, *Rule by Incarnation: Tibetan Buddhism and its Role in Society and State* (Boulder, CO: Praeger, 1982) 1.

²⁰⁷ Lavine, “The Politics of Nostalgia,” 63. Lavine argues that Tibetan identity in diaspora, particularly in the U.S., is heterogeneous, “If similarities in religious practices, cultural events, dress, and food preferences suggest a commonality of tradition, it would be wrong to assume a concomitant similarity of experience. Thus, developing a fluid view of Tibetan culture requires the observer to recognize the nuances of diversity within a seemingly homogenous culture.” Despite these differences they commonalities helped them negotiate a balanced between communal and individual identity.

due to social position “Regionally, Tibetans identified themselves as Khampa, Topa, Tsangpa and Amdo-wa of Kham, Toi, Tsang (Shigatse) and Amdo regions. Sectarian identity is rooted in the different traditions of Tibetan Buddhism and is particularly powerful among the lamas. Regional identities and attachments to homelands (phayul) are more popular among the laity.”²⁰⁸ Tsering Shakya frames Tibetan identity as a complex intersection of region, shared cultural traits and religion:

The term 'Tibetan,' as used by Western academics, may be employed to denote populations, which have common history and tradition, and share the worldviews and myths about their origins. Tibetan Buddhism and the shared myths provide the bases for social relationships and ideology. Although there is obvious diversity from region to region, there is a strong family resemblance in language, lifestyle and culture. There is no indigenous term, which encompasses the population denoted by the Western usage.

The emphasis is on plurality of identity, which of course is not unique to the Tibetan world. The singular marker of identity emerges only in opposition to 'the other.' Despite the diversity, the element, which defines the Tibetan-speakers is their shared belief that Buddhism unifies them. They see themselves as 'Nangpa', which means 'insider'. The sense of being Nangpa is shared almost universally by Tibetan-speakers, for whom the very sense of being Tibetan is fused with the Buddhist identity. The non-Tibetan is called 'Chyipa,' the 'outsider', providing the marker for 'us' and 'them.' The collective identity of the Tibetan-speakers, as opposed to the rest, can be witnessed best during the Dalai Lama's Kalachakra teachings, when people from all parts of the Tibetan world converge to take part in shared group rituals. Regional differences are smoothed out and a common identity is manifested.²⁰⁹

After the reign of the great “Dharma kings,” post ninth century, Tibet was never a unified polity. The attempts at centralized political power by the Dalai Lamas only extended throughout U-Tsang (central Tibet) and even then were contested. Regional identities were so pervasive that even a shared culture and language “never transcended into the idea among Tibetan-speakers that they constitute a single people, nor into a sense of political unity.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Dawa Norbu. 'Otherness and the Modern Tibetan Identity.' in *Himal*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1992): 10.

²⁰⁹ Shakya Tsering, 'Wither the Tsampa Eaters?' in *Himal* Vol. 6. No. 5. (1993), accessed September 9, 2014, <http://old.himalmag.com/himal-feed/53/3118-whither-the-tsampa.html>.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

Religion remained the chief unifying feature of Tibetan peoples until the Chinese invasion. Chinese attempts to categorize Tibetans as an 'ethnic minority' within a 'diverse yet united' Chinese nation only strengthened their in-group identity.

Although a pan-Tibetan identity has emerged in exile, sectarian and regional differences still influence Tibetan life. According to Dawa Norbu, their goals are more directed at protecting their homeland, way of life and religion than a Tibetan 'nation:'

The newfound unity in exile has not supplanted the traditional sectarian and regional loyalties. Among Tibetans, the primary loyalty had always been to the regional leaders and, more importantly, to the Tsaway Lama (Root Guru). The Tibetans never achieved a sense of loyalty to a country or a nation. It is evident that the people did not think in terms of their country being attacked, but of their way of life and religion being under threat.

In the past, the commonality of faith has proved to be the strongest element in unifying ethnic Tibetans. At the height of the opposition to Chinese rule, the Tibetans were mobilized not in the name of their nation but in the defense of their faith. The 'other' was identified as *Tendra*, 'enemy of the faith', and the resistance fighters were *Tenzhung tnang mi*, 'defenders of the faith.'²¹¹

Like Shakya, Norbu explains that it was the long-standing cultural differences between Tibetans and Chinese that came to demarcate a post-invasion pan-Tibetan identity: "the defining characteristic and the core of Tibetan identity appears to be the lamaist culture, which is so radically different from the culture of the 'dominant generalized other'—the Chinese."²¹² While religion had acted as a unifying thread of connection among pre-invasion Tibetan peoples, it now serves as a potent symbol of difference in relation to Han Chinese settlers. In fact, religious expression has now become a form of resistance:

Because the post-1959 generation was totally deprived of religious upbringing and socialization, its religious behavior must be interpreted in terms of affirmation of identity. Tibetan youth exhibit religious behavior not because they are pious, like their parents, but because they believe that is the authentic way of being "Tibetan" and being different from the Chinese. In this regard, the leading role played by monks and

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Norbu "Otherness," 10.

nuns in the 1987 and 1988 pro-independence demonstrations in Lhasa is also noteworthy.²¹³

For Norbu, religion's role within Tibet has shifted from piety to protest. While the pursuit of Buddhist traditions may be genuine, they have gained a political dimension.

The logics of colonialism rely on structures of dispossession, marginalization and coercive assimilation in order to maintain control over peoples, land and resources. These structures have only translated into a heightened investment in a united ethnic identity:

The otherness of the Han in Tibet is accentuated by their domination of Tibet's political, economic and cultural life. The Han monopolize the state power structure behind the scene, have greater access to education and job opportunities within Tibet, control the country's natural resources, and so on. The new city of Lhasa is occupied by Chinese, while Tibetans are confined to the old quarter. A Western teacher at Tibet University recalls how in her classroom Tibetan students used to sit in one row and Chinese students in the "other" row. That there is ethnic polarization is clear. Beijing's policy of national integration and assimilation has engendered polarization against the Chinese and the politicization of Tibetan ethnicity. In particular, during radical phases such as the Cultural Revolution, Chinese policy sought not only to communize, but Han-ise Tibetans through force-feeding of Chinese language, education and culture.²¹⁴

Tibetans have been displaced from center of political power, have less access to material wealth and are treated like second-class citizens in their own lands. There is a mutual distancing between the Tibetans and the Han Chinese, equating to racialization and bias on the part of the Chinese to a sense of resentment and distrust on the part of Tibetans. Retaining and even asserting Tibetan identity amounts to resistance against the "dominant other."

The pan-Tibetan identity developed in diaspora birthed contemporary articulations of Tibetan nationhood. It is characterized by a decidedly political articulation of Tibetan culture and tradition, engineered by the exile community itself in response to their common diaspora:

Today, if the Tibetan emigre community in the Subcontinent has achieved some measure of uniform identity, it has been founded more on anti-Chinese ideology than

²¹³ Ibid., 11.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

on faith. The unity has also been fostered in exile through the manipulation of symbols and the deliberate invention of tradition. The prerequisite paraphernalia of nationalism, such as the flag and the national anthem, have been introduced. Most Tibetans in exile are now socialized into thinking of themselves as a homogeneous group, through schooling and group rituals such as the celebration of the 10 March Uprising and the Dalai Lama's birthday in July. Both rituals are recent devices, primarily designed to raise political consciousness. The 10th of March helps separate 'us' Tibetans from the Chinese. The birthday celebrations provide an opportunity to focus on a single leader.²¹⁵

While the regional and sectarian differences among Tibetans may remain to varying degrees, the collective experience of this diaspora and its cause—Chinese occupation—have become more salient. Tibetans are now united under the shared condition of diaspora and a shared cause, Tibet's liberation. These new circumstances catalyze new traditions, holidays and markers of in-group identity, such as the celebration of March 10th and the Dalai Lama's birthday. They are enacted to celebrate 'Tibetan-ness' and also raise awareness of Tibet's colonization.

Eve Mullen's ethnographic work in the U.S. offers additional insight on Tibetan identity formation in exile. She argues that Tibetans in diaspora forged a national identity out of necessity because they are without a "nation." This identity is decidedly religious. In diaspora, Tibetans must "maintain a national identity while existing without a nation. In doing so, the Tibetan people forge an innovative Tibetan Buddhist identity, one that can operate within the new parameters of their religious lay and monastic relationship in exile and within the politically charged fight for Tibetan national freedoms and human rights in Tibet."²¹⁶ In the United States, non-Tibetan students monopolize the time of monks and other Tibetan teachers. While Tibetans do their best to maintain relationships with these religious

²¹⁵ Tsering, 'Wither the Tsampa Eaters?'

²¹⁶ Eve Mullen, "Tibetan Religious Expression and Identity: Transformations in Exile," in *Materializing Religion: Expression, Performance and Ritual*, edited by Elizabeth Anweck, William J.F. Keenan (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 176.

teachers they have had to improvise and fashion what it means to be ‘Buddhist’ amongst themselves. In the U.S. especially, it is the intersection of religion and politics that draws Tibetans together:

[I]n combining the religious with the political, the Tibetans in America forge a new Tibetan identity in which what is deemed Tibetan is Buddhist and what is Buddhist is actively patriotic. Perhaps this does not seem new: connecting religion with politics characterized Tibetan culture for centuries. However, what is Buddhist for Tibetans in exile is indeed new. Tibetan Buddhist lay people in America have only themselves to depend on.... The new melding of the religious and the political becomes the very definition of ‘Tibetan’ in exile in America... Tibetans are finding empowerment in their new enclave in America and maintaining a cohesive identity through innovation in lay activism. Their new national identity is grounded in a Buddhist identity in which being Tibetan Buddhist means being compassionately active in the Tibetan political struggle.²¹⁷

Tibetans in exile are united through religion and activism. Mullen describes their expressions of Buddhist identity and goals for the Tibet movement as quite uniform, as if they are reciting previously learned talking points. However, it is this uniformity of expression that enables ‘Tibetan-ness’ to persist. Religion—the historically common factor among Tibetans—becomes a common marker of in-group identity in exile. Cultural continuity acts as political statement of survival and resistance. While monasteries and the Tibetan *kashag* or cabinet formerly dominated the realm of politics in Tibet, the exile lay community in the U.S. is organizing activism directed at Tibetan liberation. This populist movement works in conversation with the discourse and action coming from the Tibetan government in exile.

The uniformity of expression described by Mullen is likely rooted in the discourse on Tibetan identity produced and disseminated by the Tibetan government in exile. However, this conscious articulation of collective identity need not be perceived as trite or inauthentic. I read these parallel responses as an expression of identity forged from shared experiences of dispossession, dislocation and the weighty realization of colonialism’s effects in Tibet. While

²¹⁷ Ibid., 186.

some of my consultants have friends or family in Tibet, many others no longer have these direct ties, yet the knowledge and degree of oppression in Tibet is enough to rally them in a shared effort for its liberation. All of my consultants have emphasized the responsibility of Tibetan people to work for the freedom of Tibet, reflecting Hess' argument that they are 'immigrant ambassadors' on Tibet's behalf. They agitate, write letters, sign petitions and carry out marches but mostly they practice Dharma. They regularly gather at one another's homes to pray and make offerings on behalf of those suffering in Tibet. Religious practice helps them assuage the pain and frustration they feel over Tibetan oppression. It is also intended to create merit. In essence, practice creates positive karma that will procure the causes and conditions for Tibet's liberation. Because all phenomena are related, one's words thoughts and actions are thought to have material effects. Thus, Buddhist practices done with the right intent are understood to be an efficacious tool for social change. In the following chapter, I will explore how religious practice facilitates decolonization more explicitly.

Tibetan Regeneration

Regardless of how or why a pan-Tibetan identity has emerged, it is currently a vital force for social change. Shakya notes that the exile phenomenon of nationhood has influenced those within Tibet as well, manifesting in a populist articulation of secular nationhood:

There is strong evidence that the symbols invented in exile are being adopted by the people inside Tibet as well, and that they have the power to move people into action. The demonstrations in Lhasa are marked ceremoniously by the unveiling of the Tibetan national flag. If in the past the Tibetan masses were called to defend their faith from the faithless Red Chinese, today a very different message is expounded and the masses are called to defend the flag. This shift of focus from the faith to the flag is meaningful, as it shows the changing nature of the core of Tibetan identity. The move

from the purely religious-based identification to a more secular notion of Tibetan-ness is clear.²¹⁸

These assertions of nationhood equate a collective resistance to dispossession, exploitation and marginalization. I read this ‘secularization’ of the Tibet resistance movement as also a collective assertion of strength—one that asserts sovereignty in the face of colonization but also strength in the face of dehumanization. This articulation of nationhood within Tibet has not displaced religion. For some Tibetans it has strengthened it. While there are a few high-profile figures in the exile community critical of religion’s role,²¹⁹ the overwhelming majority continues to identify as Buddhists and to equate Tibetan identity with the Dharma. As Mullen notes above, for Tibetans in exile, to be Buddhist is to be Tibetan.

Mohawk scholar, Taiaiake Alfred, a leading theorist on decolonization and Native self-government, explains that power is negotiated from the bottom up in Indigenous communities as opposed to enforced from the top down. Native nations seeking sovereignty in relation to settler nations are working towards independence by *regenerating* the sacred relationships that give them strength: relationships to land, the spirit world and one another. *Regeneration* is a form of “conscious re-traditionalism,” where one looks to the past and to the sacred religious lifeways of their peoples, and chooses to embody them in the present—as both a spiritual and political praxis.²²⁰ This process empowers the people by strengthening their religious connections to the land and one another, which in turn fosters the creation of

²¹⁸ Tsering, 'Wither the Tsampa Eaters?' Accessed September 9, 2014.

<http://old.himalmag.com/himal-feed/53/3118-whither-the-tsampa.html>

²¹⁹ Jamyang Norbu, a writer and activist living in exile, is one of the most outspoken critics of religious discourse in Tibet’s liberation movement. See, Jamyang Norbu, blog, <http://www.jamyangnorbu.com/>.

²²⁰ For Alfred this is really a religious vision and is rooted in a complex discourse on Native American self-determination. More recently Indigenous scholars all over the world have called for spiritual revitalization as a critical first step in sovereignty and then independence. See, Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse*.

self-governance that reflects their ways of life. Tibetan scholar, Yosay Wangdi argues that we can understand new articulation of Tibetan identity, described above by Mullen, such as claims to a pan-Tibetan identity or even claims to a unified Buddhist front, as a “strategic essentialism” used to secure Tibetan independence.²²¹ In other words, expressions of cultural regeneration strategically seek liberation for Tibet. In this way, I frame the liberation movement among transnational Tibetan communities as a form of “conscious re-traditionalism” that seeks decolonization from the bottom up—in a populist movement that works in tandem with discourses extended by the Dalai Lama. While this theme is woven into all of my Tibetan chapters, in this chapter Tibetan regeneration is explored through spaces.

This chapter demonstrates the complex relationship between politics and religion in exile. I argue that the religious landscape cultivated in Santa Fe not only sustains cultural continuity but also acts as a populist site of resistance wherein practicing Dharma is both a religious and political tool for liberation. In addition, I argue that Tibetans are actively “Tibetanizing” spaces in diaspora in order to empower and regenerate their communities, both spiritually and structurally. I now turn to the settings in which this is taking place.

Tibetan Dharma Centers and Stupas

Pema Khandro Ling is tucked away on a side street, not far from one of Santa Fe’s busiest thoroughfares. The former office space has been cleverly converted to a Dharma center. I arrive a little before 7:00pm. My friend Charlene Reader greets me. She is one of the first people I met on my initial visit to New Mexico. She is a tall thin woman about sixty years old, with a light brown bob and clear blue eyes. She has studied Tibetan Buddhism for

²²¹ Yosay Wangdi, “Echoes of an Agonized Nation: Transformations of Tibetan Identity in Diaspora,” PhD dissertation, University of Nevada, Reno, 2003.

over twenty years and has been a student of Tulku Sang-ngag since his arrival in Santa Fe in 1999. She is standing out front, bending over a bunch of juniper leaves, which she attempts to light for the night's event. Inside, there are rows of shoes and jackets in the entryway. Adjacent to a small kitchen is a room that acts as a mini-library, filled with Dharma books, and snack bar. A table is set up here with tea, crackers and fruit. Inside the main shrine room, people are standing around chatting in their socks or bare feet. The furthest wall is filled with statues of deities and Buddhist texts. There is an altar that runs the length of the wall, covered in flowers, incense and sacred objects.

Tulku Sang-ngag is generally referred to as Rinpoche by his students, which is an honorific term meaning 'precious jewel.' When Rinpoche enters the room to take his seat, those who were sitting stand to face him and bow, moving their bodies continuously to face him as he passes, their hands pressed together at their heart, an ancient symbol of respect. It is considered disrespectful to turn your back to an esteemed lama. Others, generally his most advanced students, prostrate three times as they face him. As Rinpoche speaks, he peppers the ritual and teaching with personal stories related to the topics under discussion, occasionally smiling widely and giggling at his own jokes. Many of his students giggled in response, clearly quite enamored with him. There were about thirty-five people at this event. With the exception of one older Tibetan couple and an elderly Tibetan woman, who sat off to the left of Rinpoche, perpendicular to him, all participants were white. Most were middle aged, although a few students were younger—mid-twenties to early-thirties. Two women, Rinpoche's western wife and another, were dressed in Tibetan style clothes. Rinpoche's seat was raised about two feet off the ground. He had a table in front of him filled with ritual objects and long rectangular Buddhist texts. The rest of us sit on small round cushions atop

larger square cushions, which would help support our legs as we sat cross legged for the two or three hours of the teaching.

After the teaching, around 10:00 pm, I was introduced to Tulku Sang-ngag. Although I was a bit apprehensive to make small talk with this esteemed Tulku, he was quite friendly, asking if I was a Dharma practitioner and familiar with *sādhana* practice. I said that I was. He looked me over curiously and pointed to my hair, which is long and dark brown, asking if I was from Nepal, which is where he lived for many years before coming to the U.S. I explained that I was Native-American and Mexican-American. He nodded in approval. I went on to say that I came from California to do research. In fact, I wanted to interview him at some point. He paused and looked at me curiously then nodded again, as if to say, “we’ll see.” Although his English was limited, he generally taught through a translator, we managed to exchange a few words. His welcoming demeanor assured me I would enjoy returning to his center. Before I left, I greeted the elderly Tibetan woman, who sat off to the side during the empowerment, saying, “*tashi delek, ama la,*” which roughly translates to “hello, grandmother.” She smiles and nods in response, saying, “*tashi delek, tashi delek,*” putting her hands together at her heart and bowing slightly. I smile and do the same in response.

On February 17th, 2011, I would return to Pema Khando Ling for a Dakini Day Tsog Offering ritual. During the ritual, Tulku Sang Ngag and a couple of other Tibetan men in attendance expressed their sadness at what is happening in Tibet. They were somber and appeared shaken. A wave of self-immolations, mostly by young Tibetan monks, some in their teens, had begun the previous year and had continued. Rinpoche commented that right now Tibetans are prisoners of the Chinese in their own country. The man that I had noticed during my previous visit, who I learn is named Rigdzin Latoe, responded that there had been

twenty-four or twenty-five self-immolations in the last year. Many of the non-Tibetan people expressed sadness and grief over these events; others were silent yet appeared concerned.

While there had been two self-immolations before this recent wave, it had been somewhat rare. In 2009, a young Tibetan monk from Kirti Monastery, named Tapey, set himself on fire to protest the Chinese occupation of Tibet in Ngawa City in the ethnic Tibetan portion of the province of Sichuan, in eastern Tibetan.²²² On March 16th, 2011 a sixteen-year-old monk at Kirti monastery, named Phuntsok, self-immolated in Ngawa County (Sichuan province) to protest the crackdown on Tibetan protesters following the March 16th, 2008 uprising in Lhasa.²²³ After his death, Chinese authorities raided Kirti monastery and took 300 monks in for detention, despite that fact that lay people had been gathering at the entrance to the monastery to protect the monks from arrest. A thousand local monks took to the streets to protest. In September 2011, two more young monks from Kirti would self-immolate. It was noted by witnesses that these young men shouted, “Long live the Dalai Lama!” before they set themselves on fire.²²⁴ Given these contexts, it is clear that the self-immolations are politically motivated but also evince a clear religious dimension—immolators communicate a wish for liberation but also a return of the religious order embodied in the Dalai Lama.²²⁵ In October 2011, a three-day protest by the exile community in India was characterized by

²²² Edward Wong, “In Occupied Tibetan Monastery, a Reason for Fiery Deaths,” accessed September 12, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/03/world/asia/wave-of-tibet-self-immolations-challenges-chinese-rule.html>.

²²³ Edward Wong, “Two Tibetan Monks Set Themselves on Fire in Protest,” accessed September 12, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/27/world/asia/two-tibetan-monks-set-themselves-on-fire-in-protest.html>.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ José Cabezón, “On the Ethics of the Tibetan Self-Immolations,” *Religion Dispatches*, June 18, 2013, accessed September 12, 2014. <http://religiondispatches.org/on-the-ethics-of-the-tibetan-self-immolations/>.

prayers and fasting.²²⁶ By March 2012, there were thirty self-immolations. The local Tibetan community in Santa Fe was devastated by these deaths. As of March 16th, 2011, there have been over 130 self-immolations.²²⁷ Most were young men; however, twenty-one were women. Twenty-four were 18-years old and under and at least one hundred have resulted in death.



Map showing the number and location of Tibetan self-immolations since 2011.

After the tsog ritual, my friend Charlene introduced me to Rinpoche’s wife, Melong, and we chatted a bit about my project. Melong was friendly and listened attentively to a summary of my research. She is about my age, mid-thirties, and had been married to Rinpoche for about fifteen years. She is European-American, with blond hair and blue eyes, yet grew up in a Dharma community. She was fluent in Tibetan and occasionally served as a

²²⁶ Tender Tsering, “The Press On and Off 3-Day Protest in Delhi Went in Vain,” accessed September 12, 2014. <http://www.tibettelegraph.com/2011/10/press-on-and-off-3-day-protest-in-delhi.html>.

²²⁷ “Self-immolations by Tibetans,” accessed August 26th, 2014. <http://www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans>.

translator for Rinpoche. I asked if I could set up a time to speak to Rinpoche She explained that he was leaving shortly for Nepal but would be back the following month. I learned from his website, ewam.org, that he ran a non-profit organization named EWAM International. This organization has several Dharma centers in the U.S.—including Pema Khandro Ling in Santa Fe, NM and the Garden of One Thousand Buddhas in Arlee, MT—and EWAM centers in Nepal, India, Taiwan and Hong Kong.²²⁸ At EWAM in Nepal there are two associated nunneries. Sang-ngag Rinpoche raises funds internationally to support the nuns in Nepal and returns occasionally to attend to administrative matters. While nuns were not unheard of before the opening of Tibet, they were not socially supported in the way they are beginning to be in exile. Still, nuns are in the minority and very few Tibetan nuns hold high-ranking positions in their lineages. On the EWAM website, a short history of these nunneries explains that Rinpoche opened them in order to “help alleviate the terrible conditions and poor treatment of nuns, a gender inequity which Rinpoche says should be changed.”²²⁹

As I was exiting, Rinpoche introduced himself again to me and I mentioned that I hoped to be interviewing him soon. Rigdzin, the man I had noticed on my last visit, overheard this and asked if I was a journalist. I explained that I was a doctoral student studying Tibetan Buddhism and Native American religious traditions and that I was Native American/Mexican American. I asked if he was interested in being interviewed. Rigdzin looked me over with curiosity. I was standing in my socks, wearing jeans and a bulky sweater, holding my parka and boots in one arm and my bag in the other. He was skeptical. He said “not about the Dharma.” He would like to “talk about Tibet.” “I would love to hear your perspective on Tibet,” I replied. He rummaged around in his wallet, looking for a card

²²⁸ “EWAM International Centers,” Accessed August 26, 2014. <http://www.ewam.org/centers>.

²²⁹ “EWAM International Centers,” Accessed August 26, 2014. <http://www.ewam.org/centers>.

saying, “Tibetans and Native American have a lot in common... taste in food.” According to him, they don’t like too many spices; just plain meat is better to them than spicy meat. I laughed because I had never heard such a thing before. He hands me a business card and says I may contact him. Soon after, I bundle back up, get in my truck and drive the dimly lit 65 mi. stretch back to my place in Albuquerque.

In January 2012, I also began attending RigDzin Dharma Foundation, a small Tibetan Buddhist meditation center located near my home in Albuquerque. RigDzin sits in a quiet, industrial looking strip mall, on the outskirts of Nob Hill, the arts and dining district to the east of University of New Mexico. Like Pema Khandro Ling, it is a business space converted into a Dharma center. It’s founder and spiritual director is Venerable Traga Rinpoche. They count a host of lamas from the Drikung Kagya lineage as their teachers. The most high profile of these is Garchen Rinpoche, who was their resident teacher years ago but now, due to great demand, travels internationally to teach when he is not in residence at the massive Garchen Institute in Arizona. Although they no longer have a resident lama, these lamas are hosted regularly for weeklong or weekend teachings, some of which last the whole day. In between these visits, the Dharma community itself runs the center.

I visit RigDzin Dharma Foundation on February 7th, 2012 in the late morning order to meet with a visiting Tibetan teacher, Lama Jampa.²³⁰ The sun was streaming through the large windows. Even in winter, it’s sunny almost every day in New Mexico. At the start of his visit, earlier that week, the center staff explained that he would take appointments with students in order to answer their questions. Lama Jampa and his translator, a European woman in her mid to late twenties named Jennifer Cooper, sat in the small kitchen

²³⁰ Lama Jampa is a pseudonym to protect this person’s privacy.

entertaining queries by the local Dharma community, who were instructed to keep their questions Dharma related.²³¹ Soon it was my turn and I was ushered inside the kitchen that was positioned to the right of the entryway. Lama Jampa sat quietly at the kitchen table in his monk's robes. He spoke no English and so only bowed his head to acknowledge me when I sat down and said hello. His translator, Jennifer, sat opposite him and smiled awaiting my questions.

I used this opportunity to ask Lama Jampa about the relationship between Dharma and political action, particularly Tibetan resistance. Via translator, Lama Jampa explained that Dharma may lead one to actions in the world that could be construed as political but if the motivation is Dharmic then the action itself becomes Dharma. If one's motivation is self-promoting or selfish, then it is 'political' and not Dharma:

From a pure Dharma perspective.... it would actually become faulty if we mix the Dharma practice with politics... The Dharma is a method to sever our afflictive emotions... Sometimes people get a little bit confused or mix up actual Dharma concerns with mundane activity. For example, people have good intention, intention to benefit [others] and then with that intention engage in all kinds of activities, very vast activities. And sometimes people perceive this to be a political activity even though it may come from a place of altruism. There are four ways of gathering disciples or benefitting beings and one of them is to reach out to them in certain ways. And [when] one engages in vastly different activities to reach out to different beings, then it may seem to some that this is a political activity when actually it is a vast Bodhisattva activity. So the one who's doing this activity, the one who is actually engaging in this vast activity is [doing so] with skillful means and wisdom. And so from his mind and from his intention, there actually is no political intention at all.

Also, it is very faulty to use the Dharma to engage in political activities. One also can seem to be a true Dharma practitioner but really one is doing that for political reasons or in order to fulfill one's own purpose. And actually that is very faulty... Then there is an actual practitioner who first studies the Buddhadharma and then they put it into practice and all their experiences and practices that they do, they remain hidden... That is one kind [of person] but there is another kind who first studies the Buddhadharma and then practices the Buddhadharma and then with very good intention engages in vast activities, those four activities for gathering disciplines, and then they are more apparent [and not hidden] so there's also that kind of practitioner.

²³¹ Jennifer Cooper is a pseudonym to protect this person's privacy.

Both of these types, the hidden yogi and also the one who practices vast activities are then genuine Dharma practitioners.²³²

From his explanation I got the sense that Lama Jampa maintained a fairly radical dualism between the religious and political spheres. The two, he claimed, should not be mixed. Being ‘political’ was not a good thing. It was essentially self-serving activity. Being religious was other-centered and altruistic and therefore, of necessity, good.

I asked his advice on how one can use the Dharma for social justice. Again he emphasized one’s motivations; it is Dharma if it’s motivated by the wish to help others. He explained that people (the Chinese authorities) have accused the HHDL of being ‘political.’ They do not understand that The Dalai Lama’s actions are Dharma oriented. As I outlined above, Tibetans have historically linked religion and politics, describing their system of governance as *chos srid gnyis ldan* or ‘religion and politics combined.’ However, ‘politics’ has taken on a new negative stigma post-invasion. For example, the Chinese government frames the work pursued by the Dalai Lama to benefit Tibetans as ultimately self-serving, and thus ‘political’ in intent, in order to discredit his efforts to support Tibetan independence. Lama Jampa’s radical dualism is clearly influenced by these accusations, which he believes are misconstrued. This dualism is also rooted in a Buddhist framework wherein intention renders one’s actions as positive, negative or neutral and thus, the resulting karma as positive, negative or neutral. Intention clearly determines whether an activity is positive (virtuous) or negative (nonvirtuous). Activities intended to help others are positive, while activities that are self-serving are negative, even if they appear to be the same activity by outsiders:

It comes down to the intention, if the intention comes from an altruistic place of compassion that is concerned about others, not one’s self, then even when one

²³² Lama Jampa, interview with author, Albuquerque, NM, February, 7, 2012.

engages in activities to protect the rights of others, actually it does not become political activity. For example, in Tibet communists have suppressed some of the people in the country and they have lost their rights and feel very oppressed and they suffer great difficulties. And then some people escape from this place, try to become free from that. They then engage in activities to protect them, to help them, but that's not for one's own sake but [out of] real compassion, thinking, "How can we free those beings?" [This is a religious action] So when it comes from a place of self-concern, that it is political, but if it really comes from an altruistic mind then those activities that actually protect the rights of others are actually not political [but religious].

For example, there are people who accuse His Holiness the Dalai Lama. They accuse him of engaging in political activities and they say he is just political and he's just out for some manipulation but actually His Holiness is really just concerned with the suffering and the wellbeing that Tibetans go through. That is why he is working so hard for them; it really has nothing to do with his own political position actually. Those people, who accuse him of that, are probably the ones who are political. That is because they actually don't know the whole situation, how it really is, and they just turn things... start rumors and say all kinds of things, then it becomes political. If you want to discern [the difference] between politics and Dharma, then it comes down to whether or not one has cultivated an altruistic mind or not. And so when you have cultivated an altruistic mind, it doesn't matter what you do, it doesn't matter what you say, it becomes a benefit to others, so that's why it becomes Dharma. If some self-grasping, some ego-centered mind is involved then no matter what one does, no matter what one says outside, it's not Dharmic, it's political. Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate between them.²³³

Being 'political' involves misrepresentation, personal or selfish aims and manipulation. In other words, Chinese officials dismiss the Dalai Lama's as the spiritual leader of Tibet who seeks the welfare and protection of his people. To frame him as political is a form of slander that implies he is manipulating the political arena for his own benefit. Lama Jampa believes that the proper response to this charge is to cast the Dalai Lama as being *wholly* religious and not at all political, by which he means wholly motivated by other's welfare and not at all by selfish goals. Note that this is not the only possible way of considering the Dalai Lama's role. Since very early times, the Dalai Lama's government was seen as uniting the Dharma (religion) and the temporal or political realms—the so-called "union of Dharma and politics"

²³³ Ibid.

(*chos srid zung 'brel*). However, in this context to be political is not to ‘govern’ but to misuse power for one’s own benefit.

I asked if he was motivated to teach the Dharma internationally by both Dharma and the wish to help the situation in Tibet. He said that he has never spoken about Tibet publicly and so no, he hasn’t make a public assertion like this but, if asked his personal opinion, naturally as a Tibetan he is concerned with the welfare and freedom of the Tibetan people. I then asked what advice he would give to me as someone who is looking to help their own people. He said to recognize where there is oppression and try to rectify it. If one’s motivation is Dharma, it is good. He suggested not to get ‘political’ or stir up trouble over situations that need no rectification. For instance, if Native American people are content, don’t try and create a cause to fight for where there isn’t any:

If they are oppressed, for example, or have no rights and you find that they actually have those difficulties and you would actually want them to be free of these difficulties, then it would be really good to make an effort do something that would bring freedom from these difficulties. That is Dharmic because it comes from an altruistic intention... Ultimately, whether or not you are successful, whether or not you are able to change something, it doesn’t make a difference from the perspective of the Dharma because you have cultivated an altruistic intention so it has become a Bodhisattva activity.

For Lama Jampa, the distinction between actions motivated by Dharma versus those that could be construed as political is quite clear. Social justice motivated by altruism is Dharma and not politics. If we consider a Buddhist framework of karma, then Dharma activities—done with a Bodhisattva intention to help others—may actually be more effective at creating positive social change than ‘political’ activities.

Although Lama Jampa’s radical dualism may appear extreme, his articulation of politics is clearly influenced by its use among Chinese authorities. In fact, he acknowledges that work that appears “political”—when motivated by the intention to alleviate the suffering

of others—can actually be classified as Dharmic activity. Thus, there are instances where religion and politics necessarily intersect. The radical dualism he offers only differentiates the quality of the activities. The historical "union of Dharma and politics" and its 'strategic' use tell us that religion and politics can be and are still combined for Tibetan peoples. As noted above, religion and politics have become enmeshed in articulations of resistance and nationalism after the colonization of Tibet. Steven Venturino troubles the criticisms made of Tibetans in exile who position themselves as religious actors in the world, working for the liberation of Tibet as well as for the benefit of all, arguing that the logics of Tibetan culture, such as a genuine spiritual connection to homeland complicate this diaspora movement. He says:

Clearly cultures and nations are historical phenomena, but should *place* be everywhere denied on this basis? History certainly may *produce* belonging, but in the Tibetan diaspora this belonging is deployed as essentially Tibetan. Consider the following statement from a talk given by the Chairman of the Tibetan parliament-in-exile:

Our struggle is not primarily an ethnic or political struggle. Rather, all people born in the spiritual land of Tibet have a universal responsibility to all beings, and the fulfillment of that responsibility is a duty that we must all incur simply by the fact of our births (Rinpoche 1975)

Here again are the dual claims being often heard in the Tibetan diaspora: the claim to the essential connection to the physical land of Tibet, and the appeal to a spiritual mission directed toward any number of communities and nations. . . . Even unequivocal appeals to an essential Tibetan identity based on Buddhism are integrally linked to the historical and political justification for Tibetan self-determination.²³⁴

For Venturino, the repeated use of these two claims—a spiritual connection to Tibet and a spiritual mission to benefit all others—may appear cliché, but these claims still comprise the core motivation for Tibetan self-determination. The Rinpoche just quoted—Samdong Rinpoche, the then Chairman of the Tibetan Parliament in exile—frames the Tibetan

²³⁴ Steven Venturino, "Reading Negotiations in the Tibetan Diaspora," in *Constructing Tibetan Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Frank J. Korom (Quebec: World Heritage Press, 1997), 109.

liberation movement as driven primarily by religious motives. It is the spiritual quality of Tibet itself and Tibetans' connection to this quality that compels Tibetans to work for Tibet's protection and liberation. He positions the movement as having two overlapping goals: to be reunited with (and reclaim) a spiritual homeland and to work towards the spiritual benefit of all peoples due to a spiritual destiny born to Tibetans through the land or ethnicity. Thus, any 'nationalist' rhetoric of Tibetan liberation will likely include a complex religious discourse of Tibet as a "spiritual land" and Tibetans as a religious people with a common responsibility to help others because their discourses of identity and governing have been enmeshed with religion for centuries. This religious-political discourse is not contrived for purely 'political' purposes by the Tibetan government in exile but instead reflects the way these governing figures actually view the tasks and goals of Tibetan liberation. While lay Tibetans may be heavily influenced by these discourses, there is no reason to believe that diaspora has not left them with the same affective responses to the loss of their homeland and a perceived duty to help others.

Later that day, I would attend Lama Jampa's Dharma talk at RigDzin. His talk was focused on Mahamudra, which is a form of meditation that catalyzes deep insight, even enlightenment. At one point, he explained that with just one adjustment in our thinking, one realization, we completely change our world. It dawned on me that this form of spontaneous insight factors into Tibetan liberation... a minor adjustment in our metaphysical perspective can transform the way we live, leading us to an inner revolution and different way of life.²³⁵ In my conversations with Tibetans, they explained that their feelings of anger and anxiety about the situation in Tibet were assuaged by religious practice and silent contemplation. They were provided with insights in their practice that allowed them to remain focused and

²³⁵ Field notes, 02/10/2012.

calm in their everyday lives. This calm was strengthening and helped them better organize and work for Tibet's cause.

After the teaching, I spoke to a woman named Taj Ali about my research. She offered to connect me with two Tibetan women in Santa Fe, one of whom was the current President of the Tibetan Association of Santa Fe. This association was administered out of a building communally owned by the Tibetan community in Santa Fe. It served as a multi-purpose community center. When I contacted Kalkyi Dundrup and Pema Norbu, Taj Ali's contacts, a few days later, they were both very friendly.²³⁶ Pema invited me to the prayer offering they were doing at the KSK Buddhist Center and Bodhi Stupa in Santa Fe that would take place the following week. The Tibetan community would do this prayer offering instead of the usual festive Losar celebration, the Tibetan New Year, in acknowledgement of the violent events (including the self-immolations) that were seizing Tibet at that time. Kalkyi also told me about the prayer offering and graciously agreed to answer any questions I had.

I drove up to Santa Fe early on the morning of February 22, 2012 for the Losar (New Year) tsog ritual, which began at 9:00 am. It was a chilly 30° and overcast, which was somewhat unusual. A tsog is a series of prayers wherein one offers food or gifts to the Buddhas thereby gaining merit and blessings. This particular tsog would be held at KSK Buddhist Center and Bodhi Stupa, a Tibetan Buddhist meditation center of the Kagyu lineage located in a somewhat industrial part of southeast Santa Fe that had been seeing a boom in growth. This is the area many Tibetans have settled and made their home. I noticed the stupa's towering peak half a block away. KSK is situated on a large lot. There was a small dirt lot to the right of its walled entrance. Down a dirt road was a medium size dirt lot with space for about 20 cars. At 9:00 am it was already packed. At the rear of the property are two

²³⁶ Kalkyi Dundrup and Pema Norbu are pseudonyms to protect these people's privacy.

buildings, the smaller serves as the residence for the lamas, and the larger one houses visiting teachers or practitioners on retreat. Through the gate is an enormous white-walled stupa and beyond that a medium sized building, which served as the meditation center. I passed around the back of the stupa in order to make my way to the center, where I noticed several people gathered. Stupas are sacred sites, often containing relics, or other sacred objects, so they are treated with respect. Practitioners will often circumambulate around these stupas in a clockwise fashion as a merit-making activity.



View of the Bodhi stupa at KSK from the parking lot (from KSK website)

Kalu Rinpoche, one of the first Tibetan Buddhist lamas to teach widely in the West, founded Kagyu Shenpen Kunchab (KSK) in 1975.²³⁷ The Boddhi stupa project began in 1982, under the guidance of Ven. Lama Karma Dorje, who brought a sacred text on stupa proportions from Sikkim to ensure its proper construction. Jewel vases, consecrated by Ven. Deshung Rinpoche, were buried inside the stupa and brightly colored murals were painted on the walls inside, depicting an assortment of Buddhist luminaries from all lineages. Before its final consecration, a “pearl-like crystal, which had been recovered from the cremation of Buddha Shakyamuni” was brought by Kalu Rinpoche in 1986 and placed inside the tip of its spire.²³⁸ The symbolic significance of a stupa is complex. According to some works it represents the Buddha's mind. Because of the relics it contains, it is understood to radiate blessings and to aid in the quest for enlightenment. In fact, one may even gain enlightenment from the sight of a stupa:

The Stupa is a symbol of Dharmakaya, the universal principle of all consciousness, and has the mystical power of liberation through seeing. When one sees the stupa, a deep imprint in the viewer's mind arouses Bodhicitta and this ripens to full enlightenment. This applies even to insects.²³⁹

Thus, the stupa's role in the Tibetan community is great. It is a spiritual sanctuary where people can go for refuge and gain spiritual insight. The stupa is understood to benefit all beings on earth, and acts as a beacon on earth for Buddha activity to manifest:

The stupa is a center of tremendous Buddha activity, drawing the Buddhas to earth, speeding the rebirth of lamas, promoting longevity, creating harmony in the Sangha, manifesting wealth, turning back invading armies, pacifying pestilence and disease, and actualizing enlightenment. With the building of this Stupa, the world is offered a powerful blessing for Peace and Happiness.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ “History of the Kagyu Shenpen Kunchab Center,” Accessed August 27, 2014.

<http://www.nobletruth.org/History.html>.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ “The Boddhi Stupa,” accessed August 27, 2014. <http://www.nobletruth.org/Stupa.html>.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

Tibetan lamas sought to establish stupas in the West not only to benefit their students or Tibetan people but to benefit all beings.



Front view of stupa during the Losar tsog, February 2012 (picture by author)

As I approached the small crowd of about 40 people milling around the courtyard between the stupa and the center, I noticed that people were holding cups. I hoped it was butter tea, a traditional Tibetan tea with a salty flavor. Although butter tea is an acquired taste, I was desperate for something to warm me up so I made my way to the center doorway where Tibetan women were handing out Styrofoam cups full of tea. As I sipped on my tea and gazed at the stupa, I realized that I had no idea what Kalkyi or Pema looked like. I scanned the face of a dozen middle-aged Tibetan women. They could be any one of them. As I stood around looking confounded, a smartly dressed Tibetan man noticed me and walked

over. “Are you here for the offering?” he asked. “Yes,” I replied. “Well you should go inside, it’s started already.” I looked closer at the stupa. There were over a dozen shoes to the right of its entrance on a small shelf. I hadn’t realized that most of the crowd was huddled inside it. This was where the tsog was actually taking place. I thanked him, guzzled my butter tea and walked back over to the stupa. After removing my boots, I popped my head inside. It was packed. There were about thirty people sitting cross legged on the floor, facing an incredibly ornate altar, where a couple of the resident lamas were leading the prayer. There was a single person-sized space just on the other side of the entrance, so I sat down. Several people looked over at me and nodded or smiled. Most people were following along reading mantras from a paper booklet. Someone passed one to me. I nodded, smiled and said, “thuk je che” (thank you). I flipped through it; it was all in Tibetan. While I can read Tibetan, it was almost impossible to figure out where they were reading from in the text unless I knew the passages quite well. Many people clearly did. I held it out in front of me anyway and listened. Everyone inside was Tibetan, except for Melong, whose blond ponytail declared her presence several rows in front of me. I looked around the stupa. It was like nothing I’ve ever seen. The murals were impeccably detailed and bright, covering each wall and even the domed ceiling.



Inside the Bodhi Stupa at KSK (picture from their website)

After the tsog ritual ended, everyone filed out of the stupa and milled around the courtyard, talking in small groups. There was a table set up with butter tea and some food, which had been part of the initial offerings made to the Buddhas. I said hello to Melong and asked if she knew Pema or Kalkyi. She pointed out Pema, who was one of the women who was dispensing butter tea earlier. I went over and said hello. She seemed a bit busy but smiled and said, “hi.” Kalkyi came up just as we greeted each other saying, “You must be Natalie.” I said, “yes,” and we shook hands. She was a very petite woman who was about 45 years old. She had a very spirited presence, as if she had a lot of energy, and spoke very quickly. Pema was much more quiet and reserved. It was clear Kalkyi was one of the organizers of this event, given she was the president of the Tibetan Association at that time. She explained that she had some things to attend to but would speak with me afterward. I scanned the courtyard. It seemed to get more crowded than it was earlier; about 100 people were there, talking amongst themselves. All were Tibetan except for Melong and a few other European-Americans, who I assumed were associated with the center in some way or were possibly friends of the Tibetan community. Many Tibetans wore traditional dress. A few held

Tibetan flags. Many of the younger people, early twenties and teens were dressed in Western style clothing, jeans, hoodies or jackets. A few of the young women wore nice dresses and heels.

Losar is the most important Tibetan holiday. Tibetans follow a lunar calendar, so the “new year” falls on a different day every year. While the start of this gathering was clearly more somber, the prayer offering being dedicated to those who had self-immolated in Tibet, the mood quickly changed. Everyone began lining up in a huge circle and a woman walked around with a bag of flour, offering it to those lined up. People grabbed a handful of the flour and held it in their right hand. I lined up with the others and grabbed some flour as well, having little idea why. One of the elder men, wearing traditional dress announced that we would say a prayer for Tibet, for its freedom and for the safety of the Tibetan people. He began reciting the prayer in Tibetan, everyone around me recited it along with him. After the prayer, a man holding a Tibetan flag began singing the Tibetan national anthem. People were smiling and singing along with him. After this, people were instructed to hold their right hands up in the air. One of the men signaled and everyone tossed the flour back in the air behind them. Everyone cheered. Because the young man next to me was a step in front of me, I received a cloud of flour in the face. He turned to me, giggling and said, “sorry!” I laughed too and said, “It’s ok!” Many people laughed and brushed at the sprinklings of flour, which the wind soon carried away.

After this, I made my way back to Kalkyi, hoping to schedule a time to talk to her further. We chatted for a few minutes and I explained that I was looking to interview some people in the Tibetan community in a bit more detail. She nodded attentively and said “I can introduce you to some Tibetan people.” She then looked around and pointed out some

people, “him, him and her. You should talk to them.” She pulled a man over to speak with us, “Here talk to him,” she said. I shook the man’s hand and smiled, a little surprised to have such quick connections. His name was Lama Thubten. He had been at Pema Khandro Ling for the puja the previous week.²⁴¹ He was very nice and gave me his card. The second man was named Jamyang. He was also very friendly and seemed to be very involved with the Losar puja. He was carrying the Tibetan flag and was one of the people that led the prayers for Tibet. I introduced myself and explained my research. Jamyang gave me his number and agreed to talk to me that week. Kalkyi walked over to a young woman standing nearby and brought her over as well. She was named Tenzin and appeared to be about twenty-two years old. She was very shy and soft spoken but seemed curious about me and my research. She also agreed to meet with me. I was pleased and overwhelmed to meet so many friendly people who were willing to share their experiences as Tibetans living in exile. I thanked them all, especially Kalkyi, who was instrumental in connecting me with this group.

As I prepared to leave I saw Rigdzin, the man I spoke to briefly at Pema Khandro Ling, so I went over to say hello. He remembered me and said hello but he seemed uninterested in talking further so I decided against asking for an interview. I introduced myself to the man who directed me to the stupa when I first arrived. His name was Nima Sherpa. I told him that I was interested to know more about Tibetan life in exile and he mentioned that he was also on the committee for the Tibetan Association. He was about thirty-six years old and dressed very sleek, in expensive jeans and a stylish parka. He seemed reluctant at first; he didn’t think he would be a good candidate for an interview “I don’t know if I’m the best person to talk to...” I would later learn that he is from Nepal and identifies as a Sherpa. Sherpa people are of Tibetan descent, however, aspects of their culture are

²⁴¹ Lama Thubten is a pseudonym to protect this person’s privacy.

somewhat distinct, serving as mountain guides for instance. While they are Buddhist, many have lived on the outskirts of Tibet for generations on its southeastern most edge and speak a distinctive dialect of the Tibeto-Burman language. When I chatted with him more about it, he agreed.

The significance of KSK's stupa and the many other Dharma centers that dot Albuquerque and Santa Fe becomes clearer when contextualized with Tibetan relationships to land. Tibetan people historically had a very spiritual relationship with the land. They believed that there were deities in the waters, in the soil and in the mountains that were associated with their clans or village. The health and wellbeing of these spirits (*tсен, lha*, etc.) were tethered to their own and so daily offerings were made to these deities. Some described the land as a relative, for instance a mountain was likened to their mother, a lake was also seen as part of the society. All of my Tibetan consultants, with the exception of two, Lama Thubten and Rigdzin Latoe, were born outside of Tibet. They do not retain these daily rituals and do not associate them with Buddhism. However, all say that their parents do have a very spiritual sense of the land and speak of it with longing. Jamyang and I discuss this special relationship to the land. He tells me about a Tibetan artist who was able to bring some Tibetan soil back to a Tibetan refugee community in India.

Recently a Tibetan artist—I don't know how he managed to go to Tibet—was able to bring a hundred kilograms of the soil of Tibet to India. I think the movie was on YouTube. And people were crying, old people were crying, they have so much attachment to their land. And some are just smiling, "Oh it's really soil from Tibet!" Yeah, Tibetans have a strong relation to Tibet and their mountains. He managed to bring tons of soil from Tibet and the older people were crying saying "I thought I was going to die without seeing my soil from Tibet." And they are crying. And it is strong. But I've never been to Tibet, so my relation to it is a little bit different from those people from Tibet.

While my Tibetan consultants have not developed a sacred relationship to the land, their parents had. This was one of the underpinnings of their traditional lifeways. They respected the land and protected it from harm.

The generation of my parents, the older generation, they have absolutely [such a relationship]. They have a strong relation to soil. [Tibetans] say that when they were first in the modern world, [they noted that] we take lots of gold and silver out from the ground. In Tibet we did not do that. It would cause the soil to lose fertility or the uniqueness of the soil. If you take [precious metals] then the food or whatever you're growing, the barley, will lose its taste, so they will never take anything from the soil, they leave it as is.

Tibetans sought to honor the integrity of the land and did not want to damage or alter its nature. I include this passage to demonstrate that Tibetans had a sacred and even spiritual connection to the land. Some claim to enjoy living in New Mexico because it reminds them of Tibet. The Dalai Lama and other Tibetan religious leaders have stressed the importance of land and even Tibetans' historically sacred connection to it. While the generation born in exile does not retain the same visceral longing, they recognize the land's significance. Although the relationship to the physical land of Tibet has been severed, causing grief for the first generation in exile—grief to the point of tears—when they were actually seeing and touching Tibetan soil again, Tibetans are able to forge new relationships with land in diaspora.

The creation of Dharma centers and stupas extends the sacred Tibetan Buddhist landscape into exile life. Although some Dharma centers, like KSK, were initially established by visiting Tibetan lamas for their Western students, they currently play an important role in transnational Tibetan life, serving as a meeting place or a place to connect with Buddhist lamas. When a center like KSK builds a stupa, it provides Tibetans with a place to create merit, make offerings and practice Dharma individually or in a group. It also allows them to

connect with the land in a spiritual way. The land and the spiritual, or chthonic, powers within it played a complex yet fundamental role in Tibetan life. The religious and political authority of tulkus (recognized reincarnates) in Tibetan communities is ascribed to their ability to subdue the chthonic world through their own transmudane spiritual powers.²⁴² Tibetan religious life does not consist of a perfect syncretism of folk traditions and Buddhism, but instead carefully negotiates both. Stupas are a powerful reminder that Buddhism in Tibet, and now even in diaspora, assume a pre-existing ‘chthonic world’ that Buddhist ritual must either ‘convert’ or ‘subdue.’ One of the most common means of ‘supplicating’ and ‘converting’ the land was to build a stupa. This stupa plants a ‘seed’ of Buddhism in a given place, making it possible for Buddhism to flourish there. Given this perspective, it is clear that renegotiating sacred relationships to place, *né (gnas)*—in essence creating ‘Tibet,’ or a simulation of Tibet, wherever Tibetans reside—through the use of Buddhist ritual *power* contributes to Tibetan transnational identity. These sacred places also serve as a platform for Tibetans to reflect on political matters and respond to them through religious practice.

The Tibetan Association of Santa Fe

In 2002, the Tibetan Association purchased their current property, which was named "Phende Rigzod Khang" (House of Knowledge and Well-Being) by The Dalai Lama. In their mission statement, they explain their role in the greater community of Santa Fe, “We, the Tibetan members of Santa Fe serve as ambassadors for His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration in promoting peace, understanding, and conveying the

²⁴² See Toni Huber’s *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, Stan Mumford’s *Himalayan Dialogue*, Geoffrey Samuel’s *Civilized Shamans* and Martin Mills’s *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism*.

situation of Tibet to the local community.”²⁴³ The purpose of the Association for Tibetans is cultural continuity “the Tibetans living in Santa Fe feel a profound obligation to keep language, culture, and traditions alive because they know that many living in Tibet are denied their rights to do this.” Thus, the community center holds Tibetan language classes on Saturday morning, taught by Jamyang Tenzin and Lama Thubten; traditional dance arts classes, taught by a man named Sonam Tsering; and regular prayer meetings, where the community will gather to recite mantras for those suffering in Tibet. It is additionally described as a place to keep these traditions alive, a place for Tibetans “to continue our cultural and religious traditions.” Although their numbers have grown to nearly 300, this center has helped them remain a tight-knit community.

During my fieldwork, I began regularly attending the children’s Tibetan language class on Saturday mornings at the Tibet center in Santa Fe. Both Lama Thubten and Jamyang Tenzin welcomed me. I noticed that Jamyang, who was educated in Dharamsala and has an advanced degree in Buddhist philosophy, integrates Buddhist themes and elements into the language and grammar lessons. Lama Thubten was a monk for many years in Tibet and was trained as a thangka artist. He reserved a portion of his language lesson for the younger children (ages 6-10), and during this time he taught them how to replicate one of his drawings, which they appeared to enjoy. I spoke to many parents of the children during my visits, many of who were curious as to why I was there. They were generally very supportive and open to discussing their experiences as Tibetan refugees. For them, Tibetan language served as the fundamental base of Tibetan culture along with religion (Buddhism), behavior and custom. Jamyang echoed these sentiments but also emphasized why Buddhist practice

²⁴³ “About us,” accessed August 28, 2014. <http://www.taosf.org/about-us.html>.

and lifeways were not only integral to living well but necessary for Tibet's liberation. This is explored more in the following chapter.

The Tibetan community in Santa Fe meets regularly, several times a month, to pray and recite mantras at the Tibetan Association of Santa Fe. They recite mantras and pray for those who have self-immolated. The chosen prayer cycles—those of Avalokiteshvara or Padmasambhava for instance—correspond to various auspicious days or events on the Tibetan calendar. I was told that honoring this ritual calendar is important because once routinized, the young generation can continue this practice after the older generation is gone. These gatherings are not only fundamental to Tibetan culture as they address all the critical aspects of Tibetan identity—Buddhism, nationalism, community, language, food—but they also aim at bringing about the liberation of Tibet. It is understood that these group recitations are dedicated to those who have self-immolated in Tibet as well as to the Panchen Lama and the health and long life of the Dalai Lama. However, Lama Thubten explained that the merit created by these prayers is dedicated to all peoples, not just Tibetans. The Tibetan community takes this event seriously because these prayer cycles are believed to purify negative karma and to generate merit. The Buddhist view of interdependence implies that one's words, thoughts and actions have material effects. Thus, these ritual prayer cycles were understood to create the material conditions of Tibet's liberation.

While Tibetans may understand the truths and implications of Buddhism differently—through more modern or traditional lenses—most Tibetans were participating to varying degrees in events like these for the sake of fostering a cohesive sense of community, religious and ethnic. These events sought to support 'Tibet' and Tibetans who were suffering in Chinese occupied Tibet but were also opportunities to assert Tibetan identity and

consolidate the Tibetan community. Many Tibetans expressed a profound sense of grief over what was happening in Tibet. These events helped ameliorate some of that grief and loss. Participants were working for the good and wellbeing of their people and through this for the good and wellbeing of their own local community.

For Tibetans in Santa Fe (and those that join them from Albuquerque), the Tibetan Association serves as a place where they can ‘consciously re-traditionalize’—eat Tibetan food, speak in Tibet, participate in communal prayers and mantra recitations and even organize for the liberation of Tibet. This space provides a collective ‘home’ for Tibetans that may have a range of affective responses to dislocation and diaspora. They can choose to participate in one or all of the many activities that take place there: communal prayers, the organization of marches, or language classes. They host traveling government officials and discuss the latest issues and strategies on the agenda of the Tibetan government in exile. While some aspects of Tibetan cultural continuity may appear contrived, these innovations on the part of Tibetans illustrate the way they look to their ‘traditional’ past for culturally relevant solutions to the present. The very presence of the Tibetan Association center is political; it signifies Tibetan survival and cultural continuity. Its existence and activity is demarcated by the complex discourses of religion and politics that has come to characterize the Tibetan diaspora. Because it houses so many diverse forms of resistance it is a particularly empowering site in the Tibetan religious landscape of Santa Fe.

Tibetan Homes

Another important site in the religious landscape of Tibetan peoples in exile is their homes. In the U.S., one’s home is valued as one’s private domain. In villages in Tibet, India or Nepal much of one’s religious life takes place outside the home among others. One might

visit temples to recite prayers or mantras, circumambulate stupas or make juniper offerings at sacred sites. Many Tibetans made a pilgrimage to a sacred mountain or even to Lhasa at least once in their lives. Americans are invested in privacy and home life. In response, Tibetans have brought some the religious activity—such as the recitations of mantras—that might have previously taken place at the local temples, stupas or other sacred sites inside. It is typical for Tibetan families to have an entire room dedicated to Dharma practice, called a shrine room. Some may use a den or portion of their living room but there will generally be at least one entire wall dedicated to an altar. It will be decorated with elaborately painted *thankas* (paintings of deities), photographs of the Dalai Lama and other high-ranking *tulkus*, such as the Panchen Lama, exquisite statues of the Buddha and other holy beings such as *dakinis* or White Tara. There will be incense holders, rows of brass or bronze bowls for water offerings and Dharma texts, wrapped in silk cloth.

According to my Tibetan consultants, the bulk of their practice individually and together took place in their homes. While individual practice is something that many Tibetans generally performed daily in private or with their families, group practice is an innovation in exile. A large group of Tibetans in Santa Fe, and even some from Albuquerque, made a point to practice together in one another's home on auspicious days. They pursued group practice in order to provide a particular kind of religious environment for their families, one in which their children became familiar with the many prayers and rituals associated with Buddhism, such as offering incense and water in bowls for the Buddhas, reciting particular mantras using a *mala* (rosary) and even the proper care of Buddhist texts. Group practice also served to bring people together regularly, on a monthly or even bi-monthly basis. These ostensibly religious gatherings also served more general cultural and

social goals, enabling families to enact elements of cultural identity by eating traditional foods, speaking Tibetan and discussing matters important to their community. Practice is understood to create merit for one's self but also for others, particularly those suffering in Tibet. I did not attend any of these home gatherings because I was not invited and I did not feel comfortable inviting myself. But I felt they were important to at least mention in this exploration of Tibetan religious life in exile. In the following section, I demonstrate the ways that Tibetan homes act as an integral site in the Tibetan religious landscape in exile. I also explore how political discourses of liberation, sovereignty and resistance interpolate these spaces.

In response to how religious life is different here in the U.S. compared to life in Nepal or India, Kalkyi, who is about forty-five years old and has lived in the U.S. about twenty years, says:

[I]n Nepal or India there are tons of temples, all sorts of temples. Over here people's lives are busy, going to work and stuff so you don't have that kind of stuff, going to temple all the time, every full moon go to temple. In Santa Fe, we in Santa Fe, the Tibetan community we have a full moon gathering and we get together and all the kids do prayer, so that's good, you know. Some other kids they don't do anything! So I think that's why it's kind of changing a little bit. But when we lived in Nepal and India we all put on Tibetan clothes, my Mom used to tell me "oh when you see a lama, you have to dress [in] Tibetan clothes." We did those things; but over here we're sort of busy working so we don't mind [if people are more lax]. Like not eating meat on full moon and... going to temple—stuff like that. I mean over here we're so busy going to work, but in Indian and Nepal you go to temple every morning, especially during the full moon, people don't eat meat [on those holy days] and stuff like that.²⁴⁴

The cost of living is much higher in the U.S. compared to India or Nepal, contributing to more demanding work schedules. In this busy environment one has less time to visit temples or other sites of worship. The Tibetan exile community is making a point of carrying on a tradition of religious practice on the full moon by gathering in one another's homes on this

²⁴⁴ Interview with Kalkyi Dundrup, 03/01/2012.

day instead of visiting a temple. Since Dharma centers generally cater to Western students and more advanced forms of religious practice, they are not a good resource for celebrating these more frequent auspicious days. While these gatherings used to take place in Buddhist temples, they are more rooted in Tibetan folk tradition than a Buddhist one. For Tibetans in Santa Fe, it is especially important that children recite these prayers in order to learn their religious traditions. Although there are temples to visit locally—such as KSK—that are more amenable to these sorts of traditions, the act of coming together in homes allows the Tibetan community the privacy to be ‘Tibetan’ amongst themselves. In their homes, they do not have to share space with non-Tibetans and are free to speak Tibetan, eat Tibetan foods and even pursue customs such as abstaining from meat on certain days. While living in India or Nepal made daily practice and the retention of customs easier, the Tibetan community in the U.S. still makes an effort to follow the religious traditions they were raised with.

Living in exile in the U.S. is radically different from living in exile in India or Nepal. I asked Kalkyi about these differences—whether, for example, she is concerned that the busier lifestyle will contribute to the community losing the culture? She says:

If we don't keep up all those things, it could. Yeah, like over here on full moons, we get together and all they kids they do prayer so that's kind of good, learning those things. And older people we do our prayers on different days and we get together and do those. But Santa Fe is kind of small so it's easy to do those things. But when you look at bigger communities, they might not retain those things; so slowly it might get lost, you know.²⁴⁵

Kalkyi directly relates continued religious practice to cultural retention, mentioning the communal practice done in Tibetan homes. While it is important for the children to learn prayers, it's also important the older people, the adults, to continue to do this, so additional meetings are held for them to practice together on auspicious days. The Tibetan community

²⁴⁵ Interview with Kalkyi Dundrup, 03/01/2012.

of Santa Fe is relatively small, as is Santa Fe itself, so Tibetans can coordinate amongst themselves to continue this practice with relative ease. For larger communities, particularly in larger cities, such as Los Angeles or New York, this may not be as practical.

But even smaller communities are at risk because they have fewer members to reinforce cultural values and traditions. Regarding the size of the Tibetan community in Albuquerque, Kalkyi says:

[T]hey don't have that many people down there, maybe like 50, maybe 30, 40. But they all get together and do those things when they're spread out, all the kids speak English, so that's why I'm thinking like as a kid growing up in this country it's very important to start everything from your house. Like myself, I don't let my daughter speak any English in the house, even though she does; it's easy to come out from your mouth. But I tell her "Try and speak... and then she tries to talk to me in Tibetan." And she's like looking at the words; you know, stuff like that. That's why I think if we don't do it as individual then... that culture might disappear. If I don't teach my daughter, she might not learn from me and she can't teach her kid. I always tell her, "if you don't learn from me how are you going to teach your kids ...about out culture?"²⁴⁶

A smaller community may be less tightly knit if they are more spread out. While regularly gathering communally in homes is critical, so is the level of cultural continuity taking place within the family. Cultural integrity starts in the home. For Kalkyi, Tibetan language fluency is fundamental, so she asks her daughter to speak only Tibetan at home. She asks her daughter to help cook Tibetan food during the group gatherings as well. She reiterates that if it is not learned now through her mother, how will it be passed on? Community events to foster cultural continuity are strengthened by individual decisions to retain language, custom and religious practice. Thus, Tibetan homes are the most critical space of cultural and religious retention in exile.

Another consultant, Jamyang who is about forty-five years old and has been in the U.S. about 10 years, explains that cultural retention becomes meaningful for his children

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

when they understand what is happening in Tibet. In fact, it is the suffering in Tibet that strengthens his sense of Tibetan identity:

When [Tibetans in Tibet] suffer, when there's no religious freedom, when they are not allowed to study the scripture [or] practice and they are not allowed to visit the Dalai Lama [in India], and the Chinese government is taking all the natural resources; that makes me so sad. That makes me [have] an even stronger feeling of being a Tibetan. If they were happy [and not suffering], I [would] think "It's okay. Wherever we [migrate to] we are all the same, we're all human beings and [Tibetans] are happy." But the Chinese oppression of Tibetan people makes [me identify with my identity] stronger and feel [even more] for my country and countrymen.

Jamyang explains that he and his wife moved to the U.S. to ultimately help their fellow Tibetans. He makes a point to remind his children of the need to remain Tibetan but also of their responsibility to help advocate for Tibet's freedom:

I moved to this country... for my kids [to] get a better education in United States. So that was my main objective—to get a better education in U.S. And I'm everyday, at dinnertime tell them "I work very hard. We come from India not to have a better car but all because of you guys. Your main thing is not to hang out with the people in your school... Your thing is to study very hard. And once you become a professional, whatever you want, [you] each go to Tibet and help them. Even if you don't want to go to Tibet, you can help financially. You can lead them. If you did that and I die, I [would] have no regrets. And if you don't study and I'm working hard [to] pay your fees and if you're not doing your responsibility and if you don't do that and then if I die, I'll regret it a lot. A lot." And I advise them everyday. I have a big responsibility; I have two kids so they need to study hard to become very level headed. We lost our country because of [our lack of] modernizations, so they need to study hard [to participate in the modern world].

While living in the U.S. has its advantages, such as more access to material goods, Jamyang is quite clear with his family that they are there to serve a particular purpose—to contribute to the freedom and wellbeing of the Tibetan people.

His home provides a space to educate his children on Tibet and why it is meaningful to be invested in their freedom. He does this mostly through conversation and media:

I have a son. He's eight years old. I think he has a strong feeling [about being Tibetan], but this depends on the parents, if parents don't have [a strong Tibetan identity], [if] they think they are American. [Tibetans parents] are in a country where

there is freedom; if they don't care about freedom in Tibet, the kids [learn this] same kind of thinking. Whenever I get tired, I show them a Tibetan movie from youtube or [video clips] about what is happening in Tibet. I try to show them and their feelings grow; they think more about [what is happening in Tibet]. Recently, my son went to a small school. At that time he was four or five years old, and [the] teacher was reading a Chinese story. She almost started it and he put his hand up and said "teacher, I'm sorry, I can't listen to that story. The Chinese took my country and my people are suffering and I'm not going to listen to that story. If I may take like five minutes, I'm going to sit outside of class." And he went to a separate room and he stayed there for five minutes [after which he] asked, "Are you guys done?"²⁴⁷

Jamyang is more invested in retaining Tibetan identity because of the existing oppression of the Tibetan peoples. When he contextualizes this need for cultural retention along with the injustice that Tibetans are experiencing, his children gain insight on its value.

Religious practice is a fundamental part of Tibetan culture and community life and has generally revolved around religious activities, such as observing auspicious days, visiting temples to pray and circumambulating stupas. However, Kalkyi explains that these spaces also support other aspects of traditional Tibetan life:

We live outside Tibet, so I think if we don't know the culture, we're going to get lost... You might have heard that they're trying to take Tibetan writing [instruction out of Tibetan] schools [in China]. When [Tibetans] go to school, they have to learn Chinese, so if *we* don't preserve [our culture], it might get lost. In Santa Fe, all the kids in the summer have like three months vacation. We try to hire Tibetan a dance teacher so they learn Tibetan music, dance and instruments and everything during the summer.²⁴⁸

Like Jamyang, Kalkyi is more invested in retaining Tibetan culture because it is facing repression and possible extinction in Tibet. Tibetans in exile recognize their opportunity to freely express and practice their religious and cultural traditions. They cherish these freedoms but they also believe that with these freedoms comes a moral commitment to preserving their religion and culture, something that their compatriots in Tibet are prohibited from doing.

²⁴⁷ Interview with Jamyang Tenzin, 03/01/2012.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Kalkyi Dundrup, 03/01/2012.

Jamyang echoes Kalkyi's observations that cultural retention starts in the home and must be reinforced in shared community spaces. In fact, this is one of the primary goals of the Tibetan community center. Jamyang teaches Tibetan language along with Lama Thubten on Saturday mornings. He emphasizes the importance of remaining 'Tibetan' and knowing the language and traditions to his children:

Yeah, I think [my kids] are smart. They are getting it. If at some time they are losing it, I am [reminding them] "You are Tibetan. You can't change [what identity] you're born, you're born with. You're born a Tibetan. You have to die as a Tibetan. So you have a responsibility. The people, [your] same people, are suffering in Tibet; they need help; they have no opportunities. You have opportunities. So if you lose this opportunity, it's a big loss." I teach Tibetan every Saturday for the younger Tibetans. I always tell them, "Please study hard. We moved—your parents and I—moved to this country not just to make money but also to get you a good education. You are the ambassador of Tibet."²⁴⁹

Jamyang and other Tibetans in Santa Fe feel a sense of responsibility to retain their religion, language and customs. They pool their resources to hire language instructors and traditional dance teachers for the children in the community. Instructors are paid through the Tibetan Association of Santa Fe so classes are free for the children in the community. While these activities may take place at the Tibetan Association center year round, the summer programs are more robust. All Tibetan children are encouraged to participate.

For Jamyang, retaining cultural identity was a duty—to honor the struggle of Tibetans facing cultural erasure in Tibet. In this way, retaining and even celebrating Tibetan identity is a political act:

If we keep [our cultural identity] like that, it will keep the Tibetan fight for freedom; the Tibetan fight, it will keep it alive. If you lose your identity—Tibetan culture, language and all those things—then you're dead, you might as well be caught in the same [circumstances] in Tibet. The Tibetan language, religion, and culture—that gives you identity, your identity. So that's why the Chinese government tries to demonize the Tibetan culture, language and everything. When the language and culture are gone, they're gone.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Jamyang Tenzin 03/01/2012.

As he says this, Jamyang is grave, a shadow cast over his face. For a man who is exceptionally cheerful and generally smiling, he is uncharacteristically sober. For good reason, the degree of cultural erasure in Tibet has devastated the refugee community. Many Tibetans fear that this erasure is beyond repair and that their homeland has transformed into something they would no longer recognize. The awareness of the devastating losses their community faces impels the refugee community to agitate for its cause. It also fuels their determination to retain their traditions.

Cultural continuity is about surviving as Tibetan people in exile but more importantly it is about preserving the culture for those in Tibet—for those who are presently contending with cultural genocide and for future generations. For many Tibetans, living in the U.S. is a means to an end. It allows them to get their children an excellent education, but the end-goal is to gain the social and cultural capital to better serve Tibet's cause. Through seemingly stark lessons about their role in Tibetan liberation, this emerging generation understands that they are “ambassadors” of Tibet and must be accountable to Tibetan people. It is in the home that they first come to know and understand what this responsibility may entail. In Tibetan homes, the Santa Fe community can observe traditions, such as the ritual and prayer associated with the full moon. These seemingly insignificant gestures are actually quite impressive when you consider the effort it takes to coordinate. These gatherings demonstrate a form of “conscious re-traditionalizing” wherein the Tibetan community is choosing to retain a particular Tibetan tradition and practice it consistently. This strategic move to retain and even revitalize prayer cycles and practice among them nurtures the intimacy of this community and reinforces their roles as “ambassadors,” pursuing dharma for the ultimate

benefit of the Tibetan people. These gathering motivate the members of the community to maintain beautiful shrine rooms and practice their shared religious heritage enthusiastically. Jamyang, Kalkyi and other Tibetans I spoke with were clear that parents had a special responsibility to reinforce Tibetan culture, religious practice and traditions to their children. For Kalkyi, language fluency was key—how can you understand Tibetan culture or participate in Tibetan life in exile without knowing the language? For Jamyang, explaining the details of Tibet’s occupation to his two sons was paramount. From a young age, he has shared media, such as movies and YouTube clips about Tibet’s struggle. It is these stark realities that not only build an affective connection to Tibet but also motivate young Tibetans to participate in Tibet’s cause in their adult life.

Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed several shared spaces in a Tibetan community in exile that together form a kind of religious landscape. Tibetan temples, Buddhist centers and sacred sites, like stupas, create a “hub” of sacred space wherein the community itself can continue its religious traditions in exile. This religious landscape sustains religious continuity but also provides a place for Tibetan culture to be consciously regenerated. Tibetans who were formerly from different parts of Tibet and even different sites of the diaspora (India, Bhutan or Nepal) have formed a Tibetan community in exile that is united for joint aims. Together they are consciously reconstructing what it means to be ‘Tibetan’ in the U.S. for the benefit of their people. They focus on what they perceive as the essential features of their culture: language, traditional food, dance and clothing, religion and values. Their goal is to pass these cultural forms to their children. In this way, they are defining what it means to be Tibetan in exile. This cultural preservation serves the emotional needs of Tibetans in diaspora that seek

out a sense of familiarity and community. It also serves to preserve ‘Tibetan-ness.’ This preservation of Tibetan identity is often said to be necessary because of the cultural losses being experienced in Tibet. The culture is seen as being preserved for those in Tibet who have less freedom to openly practice their traditions. These multiple sites of community connection create “Tibetan” spaces in an otherwise foreign place, where Tibetans are free to express themselves as Tibetan peoples. This religious landscape provides a space for communal religious practice, which acknowledges and cares for those who may be suffering in Tibet; thus, those in exile see themselves as connecting to all other Tibetans through their minds, hearts and actions.

My consultants’ responses illustrate the degree to which Tibetan religious life is interwoven with social life, but also how religion and politics combine in the transnational pursuit of Tibet’s liberation. In fact, these processes of religion as social life and of religion as politics reinforce one another in a dialectical relationship. While Lama Jampa may appear to be more objective and less passionate about the cause—he does not advocate political agitation for the sake of agitation—he acknowledges that working towards the alleviation of the suffering of others is a critical component of practice, framing work to these ends as Dharma not politics. A religious framework that is both Buddhist but also spiritually tied to the land drives Tibetan liberation. Thus, we can read the ‘politics’ pursued for the cause as the pursuit of justice. Tibetans do not seek to be political players involved in intrigue on the international stage. The “strategic essentialisms” they utilize to rally those in support of the cause are targeted at Tibet’s sovereignty. They are rooted in a religious-political discourse that understands governing—as the negotiation of power—to be historically tethered to religion. In exile, Tibetans see themselves as receiving this form of enlightened leadership

through to the Dalai Lama; the Tibetan government in exile still answers to him. However, this leadership has called upon lay Tibetans to act on behalf of Tibet. Tibetans in exile are now fomenting a populist movement that responds dialectically to the struggle of Tibetans within Tibet. When actions, such as efforts to educate outsiders on the situation of Tibet or reciting mantras in order to benefit others, are rooted in the right intention—the motivation to help alleviate the suffering of others—they express activity that combines Dharma and particular kind of politics, a politics that seek justice and liberation not a politics that manipulates power for one’s own sake. Thus, while it may appear as if the Tibetan community is orchestrating a secular political agenda for the liberation of Tibet in these shared spaces—by agitating for awareness and organizing marches, rallies, etc.—this chapter demonstrates that Dharma is continually present and generally motivates one to pursue these tasks. Prayers and offerings are made before marches, prayers dot rallies and other cultural events; communal practice sustains efforts for cultural continuity. If we define ‘political’ activities in the same way as Lama Jampa—activity that is self-serving—then the Tibetans are not doing ‘political’ work; they are working for Dharma related ends. The establishment of Buddhist religious landscape in Santa Fe extends the Buddhist world. The prayers and practice pursued here are seen to be efficacious in the Buddhist spiritual realm but also in the world at large.

The movement for resistance and liberation negotiated by the Santa Fe Tibetan community is infused with a religious discourse where justice for Tibet may lead to justice for others. The Buddhist framework that grounds this movement is rooted in calls for all Tibetans (as Buddhists) to seek out justice and liberation for Tibet but also for all others who are experiencing injustice. The contemporary articulation of this Buddhist framework in the

movement is a populist iteration of “Dharma and politics combined” wherein the struggle is inspired by and interpolated with religious activity. In the next chapter, I explore this iteration in more detail. The narratives I provide there illustrate how this complex movement is pursued with an altruistic mind resulting in ‘Dharmic activities’ and how this new iteration of in “Dharma and politics combined” among the Tibetan Santa Fe community ultimately contributes to decolonization for Tibetans inside of Tibet and in diaspora.

Chapter 7: Tibetan Decolonization: Cultivating Liberation through Religious Praxis

The struggle to assert and claim humanity has been a consistent thread of anti-colonial discourses on colonialism and oppression. This struggle for humanity has generally been framed within the wider discourse of humanism, the appeal to human ‘rights’, the notion of a universal human subject, and the connections between being human and being capable of creating history, knowledge and society. The focus on asserting humanity has to be seen within the anti-colonial analysis of imperialism and what were seen as imperialism’s dehumanizing imperatives which were structured into language, the economy, social relations and the cultural life of colonial societies. From the nineteenth century onwards the process of dehumanization were often hidden behind justifications for imperialism and colonialism which were clothed within an ideology of humanism and liberalism and the assertion of moral claims which related to a concept of ‘civilized’ man. –Linda Tuhiwai Smith²⁵⁰

[The] Chinese are saying Tibetans are poor and backward.... The Chinese say Tibet is really poor. It is not. It is their thinking that is poor. Tibetans are totally satisfied. –Rigdzin Latoe, Santa Fe, NM, June 2, 2013.

Chapter six addressed the contemporary struggle for transnational Tibetan peoples to survive as a people in diaspora, arguing that Tibetans in exile practice a new iteration of the “union of Dharma and politics” carried out from the “bottom-up.” This chapter explores the intersections between the discourses of settler colonialism in Tibet, its effects and a Buddhist praxis and view in diaspora. It analyzes the relationship between a religious view and practice and acts aimed at social and political change. I argue that Tibetans resist settler colonialism and empire—particularly racialization and cultural erasure—through their everyday religious lifeways. In other circumstances these practices might be seen as leading only to personal transformations. For Tibetans, however, a religious outlook and practice is productive in multiple ways. They help assuage the grief and suffering Tibetans feel due to dispossession, marginalization and persecution. They provide a roadmap for social change, nurture Tibetan agency, and provide a platform for collective ritual action that is understood to have material results. Although Tibetans’ understanding of Dharma (doctrine) is diverse, it is grounded in a shared metaphysic—more so for those who are well educated in Buddhism

²⁵⁰*Decolonizing Methodologies*, 26.

and less so among those who are not. Better access to Tibetan teachers and more robust practice has enabled Tibetans in exile to have a better understanding of a Buddhist doctrines and practice.

My Tibetan consultants consistently referenced Buddhist frameworks in order to make sense of their lives in diaspora but also as they discussed the ways Tibet can be liberated. For example, many cited efforts to help others, be selfless and compassionate, etc., not just because they are nice people but because they explicitly understand that this is what it means to be Buddhist. Interestingly, Tibetan consultants cited these very same actions and attitudes when asked what it means to be Tibetan. In other words, to be Buddhist is also to be Tibetan. Tibetans believe that these actions are purifying and create merit—merit that can ultimately contribute to the causes and conditions that may liberate Tibet. A Buddhist metaphysic that understands other beings as just as important as one’s self inspires compassion and diffuses negative emotions but also provides a counter narrative to PRC discourses of racialization that have served to justify Tibetan dispossession. Thus, these regenerated forms of practice and view enable the Tibetan community to refuse the dehumanizing affects of colonialism but also empower their community by treating others with compassion and care. In this way, practice heals negative emotions and becomes “liberatory” on several levels. In addition, Buddhist frameworks provide an ethical platform for discussions on legitimate governance and forms of power. In this way, Tibetans use their religious traditions to both facilitate the personal forms of decolonization but also to theorize its structural possibilities.

Chinese Colonialism

A new iteration of Tibetanness has been cultivated by the PRC, one that Tibetans continue to reject yet endures all the same, as they have little choice but to comply or face the violence of the state. Anthropologist Carole McGranahan describes this tight-rope walk as follows:

From its inception Chinese socialism was a didactic project, involving educating the masses on their deficiencies and providing instruction for remedying these faults.... Through a combination of disciplinary and discursive projects, agents of the state—mostly Han Chinese but also some Tibetan—sought to reeducate Tibetan peasants and nomads and re-order Tibetan society. This required disavowals of Tibetan political history, religious practice, and cultural sensibilities.... The predominant message was blunt and intended to be clear to all Tibetans: Tibetan society was backward and oppressive, but Chinese style socialism was modern and liberating. Tibetan identity was not to be entirely eliminated, just aligned with Chinese socialist principles. Propaganda thus forged a Tibetan ethnic identity while forging a PRC citizen identity, and denigrated upper-class identities while celebrating lower-class identities.²⁵¹

Despite the PRC's best efforts the authentic transformation of Tibetan identity has not come to pass. In fact, the primary means of political protest inside and outside of Tibet are through religious symbols and expression—carrying the Dalai Lama's picture or circumambulating a temple.²⁵² These forms of protest often tether 'universal' discourses on freedom, such as human rights, to Buddhist concepts, such as non-violence. In this way, we can understand a Buddhist epistemological framework at work in these forms of resistance. I will explain this further below.

To complicate matters further, the PRC is often not perceived to be a colonial power in Tibet by the world at large. The contemporary discourse on empire as deterritorialized and operating through a web of multi-national corporations elides the existing forms of imperial

²⁵¹ Carole McGranahan, "Empire Out of Bounds: Tibet in the Era of Decolonization," in *Imperial Formations* (School for Advanced Research Seminar Series), eds. Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007): 188-189.

²⁵² Kolås, "Modernising Tibet: Contemporary Discourses and Practices of 'Modernity,'" *Inner Asia*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2003) and Schwartz, *Circle of Protest*.

and colonial control (including that of the U.S. as a nation occupying Native American land).²⁵³ Lokyitsang, a Tibetan refugee living in the U.S., explains that viewing Tibet as existing colonial rule has been erased from the public consciousness through definitions of colonialism that situate it as a purely European phenomena:

The other night, I was talking to a friend from outside my discipline. He asked me what I was working on, and I replied “something on colonialism.” Puzzled, he retorted, “but I thought colonialism was over a long time back.” When I questioned him further on what he meant, he pointed to how former European colonies were no longer under colonization. I point to this example because colonization is often generally assumed to be specific to Europe and, therefore, **over**. The problem with this reductive logic, however, is that it fails to acknowledge past existing forms of empires with colonies that were not exclusively European (i.e. Japanese, Chinese, Mongolian, African, Egyptian, etc.). This is also problematic because it centers the *history* of the world, even about empires, on Europe.²⁵⁴

China uses a discourse that distances itself from imperialism, positioning itself as potential victim of Western direct or indirect domination, in order to erase it’s own overt colonial actions in Tibet. When the actual exploitation of Tibetan peoples, their territory, and resources is not acknowledged, these very acts of colonization as well as the experiences of Tibetan people as ‘colonized’ are erased. When China’s occupation of Tibet becomes naturalized, discourses that offer solutions or analysis of this struggle are limited to a false binary between Chinese nationalism versus a Tibetan fight for human rights.

The denial of China as a colonial power in Tibet on both sides of the camp (pro and anti-China) directly and indirectly supports China’s narrative attempts to cover up its relationship to Tibet as colonial.... **Not recognizing China’s ongoing physical colonization in Tibet, as argued, is part of the reason why the conversations on Tibet gets (sometimes strategically) locked into a narrative about China’s right to National growth by pro-China narrators or Tibetan’s right to *human rights* by pro-Tibet narrators, rather than a narrative that includes Tibet’s right to sovereignty.** Both sides of the conversation directly and indirectly help to cover-up the existing realities of what colonization has done and continues to do in Tibet. It is part of the reason why Tibet, according to the world map, no longer exists. Though

²⁵³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

²⁵⁴ Dawa Lokyitsang, Lhakar Diaries blog, 12/19/2012. <http://lhakardiaries.com/2012/12/19/the-art-of-chinas-colonialism-constructing-invisibilities-in-tibetan-history-and-geography/>

the subjectivities of Tibetans inside and outside are different, my own personal narrative as a Tibetan exile reflects this erasure, this silence, on Tibet's colonization. This erasure affects all Tibetans regardless of background.

The alienation of Tibetans living in diaspora, like Lokyitsang, is compounded by the erasure of Chinese colonialism. If the true breadth of Chinese political control of Tibet is never quite understood at large, the degree of damage done to Tibetans through settler colonialism—loss of lands and livelihood, dispossession, Sinicization of Tibetan spaces—cannot truly be understood. This strategic control of discourses by the PRC manages to render Tibetan discourses on sovereignty moot.²⁵⁵

Tibet's experience of settler colonialism and empire doesn't fit the mold. Colonialism as a project of imperialism is typically conceived of as European overtures in Asia, the Pacific, Middle East and the Americas. In an era of decolonization, Asian imperial ventures appeared less like these grand expeditions, partly because of their geographic proximity. China, although newly inspired by Marxist and social-cultural evolutionary theory, did not pursue Tibetan conquest only for economic gain but also for national security.²⁵⁶ However, the claims to Tibetan territory by the Qing dynasty and later by the People's Republic of China (PRC) follow the same logics of empire that had preceded it. It made use of the same rhetoric of 'saving' the Other by framing the occupation of Tibet as a nationalist endeavor to help its less 'civilized' neighbor to the West. Anthropologist, Carole McGranahan, explains how these economic rubrics can disguise Chinese imperialism:

Economic exploitation for imperial gain is certainly a key feature of all empires over the last centuries—it is not solely a feature of capitalism or capitalist empires. Yet the fact that all empires involve economic gain does not cancel out other facets of empire, namely that economic forms of exploitation are not the sole determinant of empire, or

²⁵⁵ The Dalai Lama's "middle way" policy can also be perceived as a framework that renders Tibetan sovereignty moot, since it accepts that Tibet is (in many respects) a part of China, which has become a major point of dispute among Tibetans.

²⁵⁶ Dawa Norbu, *China's Tibet Policy* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001) 95.

more controversially perhaps, that not all empires operate solely within a capitalist political-economic system. Indeed, the historical trajectory of the People's Republic of China directly challenges this interpretation. From the perspective of Tibet, the PRC can and should be understood as an imperial power.²⁵⁷

One of the fundamental ways that the PRC has exercised imperial power over Tibet, besides its obvious usurping of political autonomy, is through the restriction of Tibetan culture and self-expression. Tibetan culture is unilaterally suppressed in Tibet. Tibetans are compelled to act as 'ethnic minorities' within their own homeland. As Lokyitsang explained above, this imperial project is erased through China's own claims to national security. While the world at large may not view China as a 'colonial' power due to strategies that have distanced it from imperial projects, the PRC's use of the same tactics of colonialism—racialization, annexation of land, control of knowledge production, cultural erasure, paternalism—expose its true agenda: power and exploitation. Cultural genocide may not be the PRC's explicit aim, but the result of more than fifty years of structural violence has produced not only deep resentment but also a commitment by Tibetans to retain Tibetan lifeways.²⁵⁸

Legitimate Tibetan Governance

We now explore the religious views and discourses that have traditionally served to legitimate the Tibetan government. Martin Mills and others have argued that Tibetan political authority has historically rested on ritual authority.²⁵⁹ Phuntsong Wangyal has argued that the Tibetan government was formulated on two significant concepts. The first is, *chö gyäl* (*chos rgyal*), which combines *chö* (Buddhism or Dharma) and *gyäl* (king) to convey a divine leadership. The second is *chö-si nyi-dan* (*chos srid gnyis ldan*), a term dating back to the great fifth Dalai Lama in the seventeenth century, meaning 'religion and politics combined.'

²⁵⁷ Carole McGranahan, "Empire Out of Bounds," 181.

²⁵⁸ See José Cabezón, "State Control of Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism."

²⁵⁹ Martin Mills, *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism*.

The Dalai Lama, as the *chö gyäl*, is understood to be an emanation of Chenrezig, “the patron god of Tibet” and thus “the legal authority of *chö-si nyi-dan*” is rooted in this spiritual authority.²⁶⁰ In this way, the Tibetan government had a dual purpose:

The role of *chö-si nyi-dan* is dual in nature not in the sense that there are two parallel and separate governments functioning simultaneously, but in the sense that the government has a double personality.... It exists for a dual cause: for temporal happiness in the world and spiritual happiness in the hereafter. Thus worldly welfare is not its only object; there is also the ultimate happiness of sentient beings to be considered.²⁶¹

Given the way that religion and politics have co-existed for centuries in Tibet, we must understand them as complementary. In essence, political power by definition had to consider the ultimate, spiritual wellbeing of the Tibetan peoples, and not only their worldly happiness.

This spiritual authority explains why when the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959, thousands of Tibetans left with him. Despite its dubious status as a legal government, the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGiE) acts as the de facto government to the Tibetan community and is perceived as the legitimate government by most Tibetans both in exile and within Tibet. Geopolitical scholar, Fiona McConnell explains this phenomenon as inspired by “moral authority”:

Shifting to the ‘subjects’ of governance, TGiE is looked upon by the Tibetan people as their only legitimate government and the majority of Tibetans in exile do comply with TGiE policies. The early refugees moved thousands of miles to the unfamiliar environment of South India because their government told them to. Tibetans in exile continue to pay voluntary taxes, and TGiE acts as a legitimate arbiter of conflicts within the community. Therefore, distinguishing between legitimacy and legality, whilst TGiE’s authority cannot be based on legal powers, TGiE achieves compliance to its rules through its management of societal pressure and cultivation of moral authority.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Phuntsog Wangyal, “The Influence of Religion on Tibetan Politics,” *The Tibet Journal*, No. 1 (1975): 79.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

²⁶² Fiona McConnell, “De facto, displaced, tacit: Sovereign Articulations of the Tibetan Government in Exile,” *Political Geography* 28 (2009): 346.

While morality certainly constitutes an integral dimension of *chö-si nyi-dan*, it is the complex Tibetan Buddhist worldview that is at work here. Like Wangyal, McConnell recognizes there is a spiritual dimension to Tibetans' allegiance to the Dalai Lama and the TGiE:

The Dalai Lama is a key 'source' of legitimacy within the Tibetan community. From a traditional Tibetan perspective, the Dalai Lama's political and moral authority stems from his status as a reincarnation of Chenresdzig, the patron deity of Tibet who epitomises the community of Tibetans itself. In addition to their leader's charismatic authority, a key claim to legitimacy articulated by government officials is that TGiE is not a new institution but rather the continuation of the Tibetan Government that existed in Lhasa prior to 1959.²⁶³

Thus, PRC attempts to achieve legitimacy in the eyes of Tibetans will continue to fail. Tibetans' spiritual worldview sees the Dalai Lama as their rightful religious-political leader and the TGiE as their true and legitimate government. Despite the democratization of the TGiE, Tibet's religious leaders are seen as continuing to act for both the political and spiritual welfare of Tibetan peoples. Although state power is no longer contingent on ritual authority and practice, the charismatic power of the Dalai Lama persists and serves a social function for Tibetans.

As "enlightened leaders" the Dalai Lamas were perceived as having Tibetans' spiritual and mundane welfare in mind, thus they exercised ritual power for the ultimate benefit of Tibetan people. Now that Tibetan religious leaders are living outside of their homeland, Tibetans see them as negotiating peace not just for their own peoples but also for all peoples. The Dalai Lama stepped down as head of the TGiE in 2011. This shift in Tibetan government policy does not prevent the spiritual work of its religious leaders from continuing—for the benefit for the Tibetan cause and people but also to promote the wellbeing of the people. In this way, the Dalai Lama and other high-ranking lamas will continue to act as the 'legitimate' form of authority for Tibetans in diaspora.

²⁶³ Ibid.

Thus, we must understand Tibetans operate under a specifically Tibetan Buddhist worldview. Cabezón describes this worldview in more detail in his discussion of monastic revitalization:

The version of Buddhism *densa* monks seek to reestablish is a form of conservative, scholastic Buddhism that is concerned with the keeping of the vows, the study of classical texts, and the enactment of prayer and ritual cycles that increase spiritual capital (i.e., merit) and establish a proper relationship between the world of men and that of the gods. This worldview presumes the existence of deities and other planes of existence, the efficacy of magic, the existence of past and future lives, and the possibility of human perfection.²⁶⁴

In this worldview one's words, thoughts and actions create "good" karma, make merit, and can facilitate radical personal transformations, such as enlightenment. I explore this further in the next section.

A Buddhist Worldview

A Buddhist worldview rests on a few critical concepts. One is dependent origination or dependent arising (*rten 'brel*)—meaning that all phenomena are contingent on prior phenomena and so on back in time. Nothing arises independently. In this way, phenomena are “empty” of inherent existence. Buddhists understand phenomena to arise out of a confluence of causes and conditions. Every cause has an effect—an idea that undergirds the concept of karma. However, causality is not linear but rather “more web like” wherein “everything affects everything else in some way because everything is interconnected.”²⁶⁵ Rita Gross explains how this concept of interdependence shapes conceptualizations of personhood and influences human action:

Given interdependence, our very identity as isolated, separate entities is called into serious question, and we are invited to forge a more inclusive and extensive identity.

²⁶⁴ José Cabezón, “State Control of Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism,” 265-266.

²⁶⁵ Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling: Buddhist Perspectives on Contemporary Social and Religious Issues* (NY, NY: Continuum, 1998) 79.

We do not simply stop at the borders of our skin if we are truly interdependent with our world. When we know ourselves to be fundamentally interdependent with everything else, rather than independent entities existing in our own right, our self-centered behaviors will be altered in very basic ways. Nothing that we do in irrelevant, without impact on the rest of the matrix.²⁶⁶

A logic of interdependence asserts that all persons and even phenomena are co-related—we are dividual. This view implies that words, thoughts and actions have results—karma shapes the future. Buddhist doctrine urges us to understand this metaphysical truth in order to free ourselves from the suffering of cyclic existence—or the suffering that we experience living life after life permeated with both the negative and positive effects of our deeds.²⁶⁷ In fact, the root cause of human suffering is attributed to our misapprehension of reality—referred to as ignorance (*ma rig pa*). The essential aim of Buddhist practice is to transform one’s ignorance into awareness, in order for our suffering (and continued cyclic existence) to cease:

One of the most important of the Buddhas insights was the fact that neither suffering nor its most fundamental cause, ignorance, is an adventitious thing. Instead, the tradition has consistently maintained that both suffering and its cause could be overcome by the application of an antidote. That antidote is called *wisdom* and it refers to the understanding of reality, the ultimate nature of all phenomena.... The understanding of the true and final nature of our selves and of the world around us is said to be the force that brings an end to suffering, liberating the person to lead the life of an awakened one, a buddha.²⁶⁸

Thus, when one can understand the nature of reality as “empty” or devoid of inherent existence one understands one’s experiences in the world—good or bad—as a result of causes and conditions (karma) as opposed to permanent and unchanging attributes of the individual. It is this framework for thinking about reality that Buddhists call *view*.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ See José Ignacio Cabezón, *A Dose of Emptiness: An Annotated Translation of the sTong thun chen mo of mKhas grub dGe legs dpal bzang* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992).

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 2.

Thus, one's view or understanding of reality is critical to how one responds to life's challenges and, in turn, acts in the world. Mahayana Buddhism stresses that one should consider the suffering of others instead of focusing solely on enlightenment for one's self. When one chooses to act for the benefit of others, one creates merit, or a type of karma that prevents suffering and continual rebirths, or continued cyclic existence, and that creates positive effects in the world. In this way, we can understand the creation of merit as a form of "purification," where one's karma or the karma of another is eliminated, thus potentially eliminating future obstacles, harm or even rebirths. In the Buddhist worldview intention is crucial. One acts ethically, and thus accumulates merit, because one recognizes that actions done with the right intention, brings positive outcomes. By contrast, if one acts with negative intention, without spite or in a mean-spirited manner, then one incurs negative karma. When one chooses to act out of compassion for others and to benefit others through prayer, ritual or meditation, then one creates merit. Again, a Buddhist *view* motivates practitioners to develop compassion for others. Buddhist doctrine argues that due to our interdependent nature, all other beings are tethered to us in some way—for instance, all have potentially been our mothers in past lives, and thus we should show them compassion and act for their benefit.

The Traumatic Affects of Tibetan Colonization

One of the central dangers of empire's 'civilizing' missions and its ensuing racialization is the assumption that a given people's culture needs to be altered or even eradicated and replaced for their own good. In essence, it creates an environment that supports cultural genocide. Cultural genocide has been defined by the UN Ad Hoc Genocide Committee as:

[A]ny deliberate act committed with the intent to destroy the language, religion or culture of a national, racial or religious group on grounds of national or racial origin or religious belief such as:

1. prohibiting the use of the language of the group in daily intercourse or in schools, or the printing and circulation of publications in the language of the group;
 2. destroying, or preventing the use of, libraries, museums, schools, historical monuments, places of worship or other cultural institutions and objects of the group.
- Another amendment was soon proposed: “The addition of a third paragraph worded as follows: ‘Subjecting members of a group to such conditions as would cause them to renounce their language, religion or culture.’²⁶⁹

Although it has been argued that cultural genocide is not taking place in Tibet because there is no specific plan in place by the PRC specifically intending cultural genocide of Tibetans²⁷⁰ this does not preclude the existence of cultural erasure and destruction. While the overt intention may not be to destroy Tibetan culture, decades of first-person narratives attesting to the degradation, marginalization and outright abuse of Tibetan peoples testifies to this as an effect of PRC policy.²⁷¹

In fact, it is the very circumstances described above—systematic dismantling of monastic systems, marginalization of language/ religion/ customs, racialization, less opportunities for economic well-being compared to settler society—that comprises the crux of cultural genocide. Historian, Lawrence Davidson frames the occupation of Tibet as follows: “the CCP is in the process of remaking Tibet in its own image. Tibetan culture means what the party says it means. In the process, the indigenous Tibetans are slowly but

²⁶⁹Barry Sautman. “Cultural Genocide and Tibet.” *Texas International Law Journal*, Vol. 38, (2003): 182.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ See Mary Craig, *Tears of Blood: A Cry for Tibet* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1999) and Arjia Rinpoche, *Surviving the Dragon* (New York: Rodale, 2010) for a nuanced discussion of cultural genocide as defined by the PRC and the Tibetan Government in Exile as well as a discussion of Tibetan cultural re-construction, which implies some degree of destruction, see Åshild Kolås and Monika P. Thowsen, *On the Margins of Tibet: Cultural Survival on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005).

surely going through a transformation that is equivalent to cultural genocide.”²⁷² He provides a brief example of the Tibetan writer, Woesser, who was forced into exile in 2003 after publishing a text that essentially portrayed the Dalai Lama and Tibetan religion in a positive light. “As if the case sought to emulate that in reverse of Galileo, Woesser (who defended religion) was required to submit to a period of ‘self-criticism’ entailing repeated interrogations that would lead to a forced confession.” In essence, Woesser was forced to disavow her views on the Dalai Lama and religion in order to prevent further harassment and even the possibility of imprisonment by PRC forces. This example serves as a reminder for Tibetans in Tibet that the State has the power to determine what ‘Tibetaness’ can and should be. In this way, we can understand the claims of cultural genocide by the Dalai Lama and exile community, not as a misplaced or mistaken, but quite accurately describing an environment where expressing support for traditional Tibetan culture (in the form of religion and support for the Dalai Lama) is essentially against state policy.

Research on the effects of racialization and marginalization demonstrates that it contributes to PTSD and other detrimental health problems, such as hypertension and diabetes.²⁷³ There is a growing body of work exploring the effects of historical trauma on indigenous Americans, as discussed in Chapter four. This form of trauma is a more aggrieved form of PTSD that is passed down through generations and results from centuries of traumatic events, such as genocide, forced assimilation, forced migration, etc. Some recent

²⁷² Lawrence Davidson, *Cultural Genocide* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012) 104.

²⁷³ See the work of Robert T. Carter & Jessica M. Forsyth, “A Guide to the Forensic Assessment of Race-Based Traumatic Stress Reactions.” *Journal of American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 37, (2009): 28–40; Tina Chou, Anu Asnaani and Stefan G. Hofmann, “Perception of Racial Discrimination and Psychopathology Across Three U.S. Ethnic Minority Groups,” *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 18(1), ((2012): 74-81; and Nnamdi Pole, Joseph Gone, and Madhur Kulkarni, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder among Ethnoracial Minorities in the United States,” *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 15(1), (2008): 35-61.

insights on historical trauma note that historical trauma persists among Native Americans because of ongoing structural violence, meaning the systematic ways that social structures work to dispossess and marginalize individuals or communities, such as racial profiling or compulsory education in a foreign tongue (and value system).²⁷⁴ In a Tibetan context, we can cite the destruction of the existing power structure, repression of religious practice, resource extraction, poverty, racialization and compulsory education in a foreign tongue as structural forms of violence that affect Tibetan peoples.

A contemporary study on the mental health of Tibetans compares the mental health of those who have recently escaped Tibet with those who were born in exile; it shows that those who had escaped had a higher rate of depression and anxiety:²⁷⁵

In contrast to relatively stable living conditions in these exile communities, repeated political upheavals and consequent Chinese reprisals in Tibet have produced a steady stream of refugees escaping Tibet. It is estimated that approximately 2,500 refugees per year cross the Himalayas into Nepal, seeking asylum there or in India. In 1998, 33% of these refugees were children, 90% of whom were unaccompanied by their parents. These recent arrivals have typically been raised in an environment in which human rights were curtailed and have come to India for religious freedom and for educational opportunities. Many of these refugees report that either they or their family members have suffered detainment and various degrees of torture in Tibet. In addition to these adversities, the journey across the Himalayas is long and perilous, with frequent reports of refugees perishing en route and a significantly larger number suffering affliction such as frostbite. Moreover, reports of mistreatment along the way are common. Thus the escape to India is itself a significant risk for traumatic exposure.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Lawrence J. Kirmeyer, Joseph P. Gone, and Joshua Moses, "Rethinking Historical Trauma," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 2014, Vol. 51(3) 299–319. Structural violence has been defined as "injustice and exploitation built into a social system that generates wealth for the few and poverty for the many, stunting everyone's ability to develop their full humanity. By privileging some classes, ethnicities, genders, and nationalities over others, it institutionalizes unequal opportunities for education, resources, and respect." See <https://www.transcend.org/tms/2013/10/varieties-of-violence-structural-cultural-and-direct/>

²⁷⁵ See Evans, Dabney, et al. "Shattered Shangri-la: Differences in Depressive and Anxiety Symptoms in Students Born in Tibet Compared to Tibetan Students Born in Exile." *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology* Vol. 43, No. 6 (June 2008): 429-436.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 430.

Those fleeing Tibet experience many of the same conditions that produce historical trauma, such as violence, torture (or family members tortured), dislocation and forced assimilation. However, the parents or grandparents of those born in exile have experienced these same criteria and thus, historical trauma, as an affliction that is cumulative across generations, may still be present. The results of the study state that the rates of anxiety and depression are high for both populations though higher for recent refugees:

[R]esults from this study strongly suggest that the experience of being born in Tibet and escaping to India is a risk factor for the development of depressive and anxiety symptoms when compared to the experience of being born and raised in an exile community in northern India or Nepal. This finding highlights the cost in human emotional suffering of the ongoing human rights crisis occurring within Tibetan cultural regions of the People's Republic of China. Moreover, an implication of the finding that depressive/anxiety symptoms in Tibetan-born students differed by school site in India is that Tibetan-born students may be especially sensitive to “on the ground” conditions in exile and that, conversely, the provision of material and social support to these young people may have a disproportionately large effect in improving their emotional functioning. Although being born and raised in India or Nepal appeared to be protective in comparison to being born in—and escaping from—Tibet, it is nonetheless of concern that ethnic Tibetan students born in exile also endorsed significant depressive and anxiety symptoms. If replicated, this finding may provide an indication of the high emotional cost of prolonged exile, even in a group so widely admired for its perseverance, poise and resiliency.²⁷⁷

In other words, this study and others like it²⁷⁸ indicate that Tibetan refugees are suffering from the physical and psychological effects of settler colonialism in Tibet, and thus, have to negotiate these effects as part of their survival.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 434-435.

²⁷⁸ See D. Servan-Schreiber, B. Le Lin, and B. Birmaher, “Prevalence of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Major Depressive Disorder in Tibetan Refugee Children,” *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 37 (1998): 874–879; Timothy H. Holtz, “Refugee Trauma Versus Torture Trauma: a Retrospective Controlled Cohort Study of Tibetan Refugees,” *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disorders* 186, 1 (1998): 24–34; Antonelli Crescenzi, Eva Ketzer, Mark Van Ommeren, Kalsang Phuntsok, Ivan Komproe, and Joop de Jong, “Effect of Political Imprisonment and Trauma History on Recent Tibetan Refugees in India,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* Vol. 15 (2002): 369–375; and Edward J. Mills, Sonal Singh, Timothy H. Holtz, Robert M. Chase, Sonam Dolma, Joanna Santa Barbara, James J. Orbinski, “Prevalence of Mental Disorders and Torture among Tibetan Refugees: a Systematic Review,” *BMC International Health and Human*

Interestingly, another study of Tibetan refugees that have recently emigrated from Tibet indicates that while there is generally evidence of trauma, Tibetans have been quite good at coping with it on their own, generally through religious practice. According to this study, 71% of the participants reported direct persecution from PRC authorities that resulted in some form of trauma, psychological, physical or both²⁷⁹ while 74% reported religious persecution of some kind, and most ranked religious persecution and imprisonment as most upsetting. However, only 6.1% showed signs of clinical anxiety or depression. Over 90% of the sample reported that religious methods, specifically “meditation, seeking divinations from lamas/performing special prayers/visiting temples, and considering the trauma a result of karma,” were used to cope with the affects of their persecution.²⁸⁰ While the team of researchers acknowledges that these low self-reports of trauma may reflect the elation felt by many Tibetans by their recent safe arrival and meeting with the Dalai Lama, they noted that their coping mechanisms still appeared quite effective in diminishing symptoms of PTSD. A more recent study explicitly links Buddhist practice to Tibetan resilience in the face of traumatic incidence, arguing that Tibetans rely on *lojong*, or “mind training” methods—that emphasize putting others before oneself—to help alleviate any effects of suffering they may experience as a result of trauma:

Many Tibetan refugees argue that even with catastrophic events such as territorial displacement, torture, and imprisonment, ultimately it is the way one interprets negative events that causes one to suffer. In other words, suffering comes from one’s own mind (not external events). It is in transforming one’s view or relationship to suffering where successful coping and a bolstering of resilience transpire.²⁸¹

Rights 5:7 (2005): 1–8.

²⁷⁹ Emily Sachs, Barry Rosenfeld, Dechen Lhewa, Andrew Rasmussen, and Allen Keller, “Entering Exile: Trauma, Mental Health, and Coping Among Tibetan Refugees Arriving in Dharamsala, India,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (April 2008): 199–208.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 201.

²⁸¹ Sara E. Lewis, “Trauma and the Making of Flexible Minds in the Tibetan Exile Community,” *ETHOS*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (2013): 313–336.

This ethnographic study found that while a discussion of torture was instrumental to supporting Tibetan human rights campaigns, torture survivors rarely spoke about their experiences to others and were quick to seek out ways to ameliorate its effects. This is due in part to cultural norms that do not wish to burden others with one's suffering as well as the recognition that the suffering of others is also likely great. Instead Tibetan trauma survivors have learned to be resilient to suffering over time through a Buddhist worldview and practices such as *lojong*, which recognizes that one's own suffering must be evaluated in relation to the myriad forms of suffering that exist in the world. When one can gain a broadened perspective and recognize the ways karma contributed to one's suffering, it is abated to a great degree.

Ironically, Buddhism is uniquely suited to addressing the role of suffering, as suffering is considered a fundamental aspect of life. Buddhist teachers that discuss healing typically raise these latter points—that suffering is a result of one's view. When one is able to shift one's view and recognize that circumstances will likely change soon anyway, one becomes more resilient and happy. In fact, these practices are the core of Buddhist teachings:

By transforming our problems into happiness, we use them to benefit ourselves and all living beings. In other words, we use our problems to develop our mind and to bring happiness to others. If we can transform our problems into happiness, especially into the path of enlightenment, experiencing a disease can become medicine. This is the real medicine, because it does not just stop our suffering but removes the causes of the disease and of all other suffering—the negative karma, delusions, and negative imprints in our mind. The psychology of thought transformation is essential in healing, because it enables us to use our disease not only to end all suffering but to achieve enlightenment.²⁸²

²⁸² Lama Zopa Rinpoche, *Ultimate Healing: The Power of Compassion* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2001) 95.

Suffering is framed as an opportunity to not only purify one's negative karma but also to bring happiness to others. According to Lama Zopa Rinpoche, when one suffers, one can better relate to the suffering of others and thus, become more compassionate. Living with more compassion ultimately benefits self and others because one may choose to pursue good works that benefit others, which may then create positive karma for oneself. This shift in perception is empowering for Tibetans because it allows them to view their own suffering in a larger metaphysical framework. It also allows them to recognize the role that their own views play in experiencing suffering, and thus in alleviating it. In essence, a Buddhist view and practice provide Tibetans with a coping mechanism that provides an opportunity to exercise agency in the face of hardship. We cannot of course assume that these coping techniques are available to all Tibetans, but these practices were widely known.

My research illustrates how this worldview, and specifically the law of interdependence, facilitates decolonization for Tibetans in diaspora as well shape conceptions of sovereignty in exile. In this chapter, I argue that Tibetans in exile use Buddhist practice to assuage both the suffering they experience due to the occupation of Tibet as well as the suffering of all others; practice—for example, a group recitation of mantras and prayers on Tibetan Uprising Day—is also a means to create the causes and conditions for the liberation of Tibet. Practice is significant as a response to Tibetans' contemporary context—a form of colonialism that explicitly seeks to eradicate or marginalize Tibetan religious lifeways. Indigenous peoples the world over are keenly aware that their religious lifeways serve as the primary site of violence in imperial encounters because they are the traditional sites of power (personal and political). Thus, reclaiming religion is a way of reclaiming agency and empowering the community. For Tibetans, a religious view empowers individually and

communally but it also allows for the theorization of ethical approaches to power. If we understand decolonization to be a set of practices that actively resists colonization as a structure and ameliorate its effects, we must consider Tibetans' religious lifeways as a direct form of resistance to contemporary forms of colonialism and control by the PRC. Tibetans are invested in embodying a legitimate 'Tibetanness,' which is often conflated with being Buddhists. In addition, they continue to be invested in the "enlightened" leadership embodied by the Dalai Lama along with the legitimate leadership of the TGiE, which they believe has their best interests in mind. While Tibetans do not seek to return to pre-occupation forms of governance, it appears they are exploring what equitable forms of power look like in exile—particularly as it intersects discourses of liberation, empire, democracy, and justice. The continued support for this de facto government and "enlightened" leadership rejects the imperial occupation of Tibet by the PRC not only because it is are Tibet's legitimate ruler, but also because it is devoid of the religious authority to rule. In this way, Tibetans reject PRC governance on both ethical and epistemological terms.

While Tibetans are invested in a nationalist discourse that advocates for the sovereignty of Tibet, they also recognize that that liberation entails much more than right to land and power, but also with freedom from karma and ego. Through a Buddhist view, Tibetans discern the occupation of Tibet as a struggle for sovereignty but also for legitimate forms of power—power that is used in an ethical way. They discern that to be 'Buddhist' and take this practice seriously is a direct form of resistance to a civilizing mission that has framed religion as a backward relic of the past. They pursue political action but also ritual action in order to effect change. Thus, they are pursuing decolonization not solely as a political project, but also as a spiritual one that works upon person's hearts and minds.

Practice enables multiple layers of liberation—freedom from illegitimate and unjust rule and also freedom from metaphysical ignorance. In the sections that follow, I illustrate how Tibetan investments in traditional religion are not only empower them but also a serve as a direct challenge to PRC claims to power over Tibetans. My consultants explain how Buddhist practice has helped them transform personally, transform their suffering and re-direct their energies towards benefitting others.

Transforming Oneself and Others through Buddhist Practice

Jamyang's home is situated in a quiet neighborhood in Santa Fe. He greeted me warmly when I arrived and led me to a colorful yet simply decorated sitting room. Tibetan magazines sat on the coffee table as well as Tibetan style cookies. In this, our first interview, I wanted to know what Buddhist viewpoints or perspectives really impacted his life or shaped it the most. He explained that it was developing an awareness around selfishness—how to remove his selfish impulses:

In Buddhism the main focus is to remove selfish[ness]. Then all the problems that come from selfish[ness will disappear and one experiences] more contentment, more taking care of other beings—it will bring less misery. And so Buddhism has changed my life. As I'm getting older, I'm changing more. And I become less selfish—totally non-selfish is really difficult you know—so to become less selfish and take more care [of] other human beings [is my goal]. Buddhism urges us to care for all the beings, even the insects, [to] care [for] everybody. So that really changed my life.²⁸³

This deceptively simple aim: to be less selfish, represents a critical insight into Buddhist teachings. We do not exist independently but dependently; we are interconnected with all others, not just other human but also other beings, such as animals and insects. Thus, part of our human responsibility is to care for others instead of focusing solely on our own wellbeing. Why? Because caring for others, as Jamyang notes, will bring us more

²⁸³ Interview with Jamyang Tenzin, 03/01/2012.

contentment. When we understand human nature, why we suffer and act selfishly, then we can better empathize with the behavior of others and not take their shortcomings to heart:

Somebody may say something bad and I don't care much about it; it's not him; it's his anger; it's inside. So if Natalie says something bad to me, it's not Natalie; it's delusions, the bad qualities that everybody has. If that [anger] decreases, you become better and I become better, so I try myself not to say bad words or be mean to other people and be less selfish. That really changed my life. And I really have faith in life after death so Buddhism believes that what I [experience] in this life is from my past life, so whatever you want in next life depends on this life. If you do bad things in this life, pretty soon it'll come in next life; same thing. So I'm careful to do good things and not to follow bad things. Those are all mentioned in the Buddhist scripture. That's really changed my life.

Buddhist doctrine tells us that humans are generally acting out of our delusions; the primary one being that we are more important than others. When one comes to understand selfish behavior as a result of these delusions, then one can develop more insight and understanding into the behavior of others and not react in a harmful way, which would only create more negative karma. In this way, we have more peace. When one sees the root cause of others' misbehaviors, instead of reacting negatively, it helps one gain insight and lessen negative emotions. It is important to practice this compassion and take it to heart because our actions have consequences. The law of karma dictates that every action has a result. We experience the results of past actions past lives and we'll experience the results of this life's actions in the next.

As I noted in chapter six, for the vast majority of Tibetan refugees being 'Tibetan' is also being Buddhist. Most of my consultants described Tibetan-ness as a set of behaviors—a set of behaviors that are determined to a great degree by Buddhist doctrines. When I asked Kalkyi Dundrop about Tibetan identity she explained it in the following way: “[Proper]

behavior is to be kind of shy [or humble]²⁸⁴... If something happens at work or whatever, we normally try and have more patience than fight right away. Think and then act... I like to listen to His Holiness' teachings a lot. I try and practice them in my life: being compassionate to other people and being at peace with nature."²⁸⁵ I ask her, 'is Buddhism a way of life?'

Yes, in true Buddhism. His Holiness says that. Lots of religions affect how you live your daily life. If you think about this, it kind of helps you to deal with different things in your life. If you get sick, some people say 'Oh my god, I'm getting sick, and start to freak out. [Instead] I think of all the people in this world who have suffering worse than me, so if you think of people worse than yourself, then your situation is not a big deal. So stuff like that, it helps.

For Kalkyi, being a Tibetan is to be humble, patient and less reactive to stressful events—essentially, traits that are cultivated by Buddhist practice. She remarks that “true” Buddhism is one that is integrated in your life, where your responses to life's events are tempered by your practice. She cites the authority for this view as the Dalai Lama. The example she offers considers that the suffering of others is likely much worse than one's own. In other words, it puts one's own suffering in perspective so that one does not overreact and possibly create more suffering for one's self or others.

Buddhist ethics had ordered the world of Tibetans for centuries. In diaspora, these ethics are revitalized in a new way when applied to circumstances faced in diaspora. The essential conceptualization of who Tibetans are as a people has been fundamentally shaped by Buddhist worldviews. Even for those who have not studied Buddhism explicitly, Buddhist lifeways have been a part of their collective identity and now are integral to identity formation in diaspora. We discussed what Kalkyi believed were the most important aspects

²⁸⁴ Kalkyi probably has in mind here the Tibetan notion of being *nyams chung*, which has the sense of shyness but also of humility.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Kalkyi Dundrup, 03/01/2012.

of Buddhism—those that have most shaped her life. She says to “be compassionate, be patient. [Have] compassion, not just for human beings, but for all, even for small animals. As a Tibetan kid, I remember when growing up our parents always told us ‘don’t kill this and that.’ So we don’t even kill like small insects.” I asked “So, being a Buddhist means protecting other beings?”

All beings, uh huh. I was also reading one of His Holiness’ messages about recycling. He said as Tibetan Buddhists, we have to recycle, we have to save this world for our kids, but it’s not just for our kids. Because Tibetans, we believe in reincarnation, so I might come back next time, I will be reborn, so I have to think for myself too that way. And [think about] other people too, that they will be reborn in this world so that’s why you have to protect this planet.

Kalkyi’s response echoes Jamyang’s above. Being a Buddhist means having compassion for others, protecting them from harm. It means protecting all beings, not just humans. While Kalkyi noted His Holiness as an authority, she clearly understands Buddhist logics of interdependence through her life experiences. Her parents admonished her to never kill other beings, even small insects because in a Buddhist worldview all life is precious. All actions also have results. Killing amounts to great harm and can bring great suffering in one’s next life. Again, this sense of care and protection extends out to the land itself. The land must be cared for so that future generations, of which Kalkyi’s rebirth will be one, can have a place to live. Some scholars have accused Tibetans of appropriating ‘green’ or environmentally friendly discourse in order to promote their cause,²⁸⁶ yet my research clearly shows that land (and its inhabitants) are sacred to Tibetans for historically complex reasons and for contemporary reasons like forced diaspora. While these discourses of ‘environmental protection’ may have been modernized to make them congruent with contemporary notions of being ‘green,’ this does not preclude a genuine respect and care for the land—a land filled

²⁸⁶ See Toni Huber, “Green Tibetans: A Brief Social History,” in *Tibetan Culture in Exile: Proceeding of the Seventh of the IATS, Graz, 1995*, ed. Frank Korom (Vienna, 1997), 103-19.

with deities and other chthonic powers that has been a part of Tibetan life for centuries, even pre-dating Buddhism.

One morning after a teaching at Pema Khandro Ling, a Buddhist center in Santa Fe, Rigdzin and I met for lunch at the nearby Whole Foods. Rigdzin is about sixty years old and was born in Tibet and raised in India. Every time I attended a teaching or ritual at Pema Khandro Ling he was there. He was one of Tulku Sang Ngag's most dedicated students. We initially discussed the ways that Buddhist practice was different for him here versus in India.

[Tibetans in Tibet] don't have many facilities like here in America. There are some individuals who really feel the need to practice, and then you leave your home and go to the monastery or something like that, then you practice. So that is the difference, because over there, even in India, His Holiness teaches, and we hear it and instantly we feel like, "Ah." [A sound of awe and inspiration, even relief] And then that's gone. But here, now, we have a Buddhist class. Lama Gyaltsen [another local Lama] got a few of us together and wanted to do something. And we have our own prayers sessions and stuff with Tulku Sang ngag. So that makes us learn what we are praying, why we are praying. That change is the spiritual part, yeah.... Before it was like all just prayer and a little bit there about the compassion, about the refuge and stuff, but not much. But now, I can understand more.²⁸⁷

In India, if you want to devote time to practice, your only option was to leave home and join the monastery. There are more opportunities for lay people to practice and learn Dharma in the U.S. because there are more Buddhist centers. In India, Tibetans were fed spiritually through talks given by the Dalai Lama. But once this talk was over, they didn't have anything else to support their practice. In the U.S., there are more Tibetan Buddhist lamas with established Dharma centers. A few Tibetans in Santa Fe began practicing together and soon a group of practitioners was formed, which ultimately provided Rigdzin with a unique opportunity to practice closely with learned lamas and in community. In this more intimate context, he can better understand the meaning of prayers and other forms of practice. He is gaining a deeper understanding of the tradition overall. A greater grounding in Buddhist

²⁸⁷ Interview with Rigdzin Latoe 06/02/2013.

doctrine and practice is therefore one of the characteristics of the Tibetan diaspora religious experience.

This approach to lay Buddhist practice is somewhat unusual. Traditionally in Tibet, those who studied with a yogi or lama would generally dedicate their life to the religion; they usually did not have the responsibilities of a family. Lay practice typically focused on rituals and not on the study of texts and their analysis. As a result many lay Tibetans did not have a very deep understanding of their own daily prayers and practices. The way that Buddhism is practiced in the West is quite different. Westerners insist on learning the meaning of the practices; they also attend retreats.

Tibet is mostly farming and pastoral living. That is their livelihood. Which is a difficult livelihood because if there is bad weather, if there is no rain, then the drought affects the farmers, drought affects the animals. If it is a very severe winter, which is most of the time, then the animals die. And because of that, they have to strive. That's why they have this faith in the religion. So they send one of their kids to the monastery. The rest have to work. So it is not our job to practice, but we have to do this.

While Buddhism is an important part of Tibetan culture, life in Tibet was hard. People were generally living off the land, as farmers or nomads. They did not have the luxury to practice and learn Dharma in the way that Westerners do. Their faith in Buddhism compelled them to send off one of their children to the monastery to get educated, but the rest of the family had to work hard to make a living. Few lay persons were dedicated to elite goals like personal transformation. Rigdzin explains that this meant that you were not going to “really change yourself,” because there were few facilities for sustaining lay practice. Even seeing the Dalai Lama was rare. “In Tibet, even going to Lhasa was very difficult. It's like a life achievement.” However, life here is quite different and Tibetans have the opportunity to practice. “Now, you can see Dalai Lama pretty much every day. You can now ... if you

want, 24 hours, you can be with Dalai Lama on the Internet.” *[Laughs]* Practice was habitual but not expected to be transformative. Rigdzin’s point is that developing a Dharma practice in Tibet and India is relatively difficult due to the dearth of opportunities. It is quite rare for Tibetan people to even go to Lhasa, the sacred capital city, much less to see the Dalai Lama.

In chapter six, I noted that Tibetan identity pre-colonization had been demarcated by a shared religious tradition—not just Buddhism but local indigenous land-based practices as well. In exile, Tibetans have had to carve out a new pan-Tibetan identity in order to retain their culture and lifeways. Again, retention of religious identity and practice factors heavily in expressing ‘Tibetanness.’ While the ethnographic work of Eve Mullen found that Tibetans in exile are not following the forms of practice established in the West and practiced by Western practitioners, my research illustrates that a small percentage actually are able to do this but in an altered way. Rigdzin and the small group of Tibetans that study closely with Tulku Sang gnag do attend teachings regularly at Pema Khando Ling along with his western students, however, they set aside time to study together and with Rinpoche, separate from his Western students. As Rigdzin notes, the pursuit of practice is no longer just about following form but also really invested in content. This appears to be inspired by the TGiE discourse (and that of other high-ranking lamas) that encourages Tibetans to take practice seriously, almost as a personal directive of the Dalai Lama. But it is also an outcome of having a bit more access to leisure time, or the kinds of schedules that are more amenable to the pursuit of study. While the community that Mullen worked with in New York did not have much leisure time or regular access to a Tibetan lama to study with, several Tibetans in Santa Fe and Albuquerque do and appear to take advantage of it. Interestingly, as I noted in chapter six, the majority of Tibetans choose to practice as a community—either reciting prayers and

mantras at the Tibet center or in one another's homes because it affords them the time and space to explore and celebrate Tibetanness. One critical reason they do this is because they are following a ritual calendar that Dharma centers do not always abide by or incorporate. Another is because their numbers are large and the Tibet center actually accommodates a group of one hundred or so. While none of my consultants verified this, it is also possible that they practice together outside of "Western" style centers because it affords them more privacy and a respite from their new but still foreign homeland.

Nima Sherpa is a member of the Tibetan community of Santa Fe and owns a small business there. He is about thirty-five years old, identifies as a Sherpa of Tibetan descent and grew up in Nepal. He is a committed Buddhist but he is pragmatic about the situation in Tibet. While he appears pessimistic he is firm that practice helps him and that it will contribute to social change over time.

The bottom line is, I think I am following a Buddhist way—be kind, don't hurt other people. Those are the basic, basic things. Human life is very precious; don't kill and be kind and love other people, so those are the five things I think Buddha says and I think most of the other religions [believe]—bottom line its the same thing.²⁸⁸

Nima is following a Buddhist lifeway. This lifeway emphasizes view and action rooted in this view.

Buddhism is more really open, like be really open to everything. And that's what I feel would be better as a Buddhist. Again it's individual... Buddhist religion is supposed to be really clear, you know. There is no like greedy and... "It's only my religion," kind of stuff. It should be really open to everybody. And that goes for other people too. I think that kind of mentality would be helpful, better, you know.

In Nima's view, Buddhism does not promote orthodoxy or exclusion; it's about accepting others while you follow your individual path. The Dalai Lama's vision of "secular ethics," has influenced practitioners. They perceive Buddhism as addressing our common existential

²⁸⁸ Interview with Nima Sherpa 03/03/2012.

needs. It therefore precludes any religious chauvinism. For Nima, being a Buddhist means giving as well as receiving so he has recommended to the board that they open up weekend kid's programs to non-Tibetans who are interested in Tibetans language classes or learning about Buddhism. They have since agreed to do this and some non-Tibetan members of their community attended a few times, asking questions about Buddhism—this made him happy. Nima believes that if they are always asking the people of Santa Fe for help and support, they should offer the city something in return. In this way, his Buddhist view tells him that he should not just take but give out of gratitude for others. This act in itself would be a form of practice.

Nima is naturally inclined to help others but this drive is also rooted in his Buddhist view that aims to be a better person—less angry or less selfish. He recognizes this practice is up to him; it begins in his mind and determines his actions. As a business owner, Nima has been forced to deal with the consequences of his attitude and actions:

When you're growing up, you think in different ways about how to be a better person and how to be helpful to other people or the community. And it's all up to you, you know. It's all in your mind, how I want to be. Sometimes work is stressful. And you get into a little argument or something with the workers, then I go to home and I think about tomorrow, 'Ok, we had this happen, do a little bit better tomorrow and maybe [some better] communicating, or maybe if my guys [make] some mistake or maybe I'll be much calmer and then teach them how not to do the error.' So I think daily, I think we are just changing. When I first had my business, I wasn't like that. It was stressful work and I was kind of angry, maybe my tone of voice was [angry] talking to the guys... And it wasn't helping at all and it was making more messes, so that's how I started learning, slowly, slowly, slowly. And now I'm really good with my guys. And if they do [make a] mistake, people make mistake[s] every day, so I teach them, I talk to them really calmly before I say... I might get a little bit hot but I tell myself, I have to be calm before I talk to my guys. So I do my own little bit of deep breathing you know, so I think it's a daily thing that we learn, I think part of it had to do with [being a] Buddhist also, because I am a Buddhist and come from that culture.

Buddhism has helped Nima change his tone and lessen his anger. He explains his practice in terms of self-improvement. He makes an effort to be more understanding with his workers, to

empathize with their position and have less anger in his interactions with them. He recognized that his anger was a problem and learned to not indulge his negative emotions. He found that when he addressed his employees in a calm and understanding way, it was more effective for all parties. Now he is mindful about checking his emotions before he talks to them about a problem. It has taken him years, he says, but he continues to strive for more patience. It is a practice undertaken with and through others. The relationships he forms help him to develop behavior that is more amenable to supporting others so that others support him (and his business). This is a reciprocal process.

His Buddhist practice has also helped him deal with the anger he feels about the mistreatment of Tibetans in Tibet. He struggles with this anger because he knows it does not help him and recognizes that if he continues to react to life with extreme anger, he is only training his mind to be primed for more anger. He continues to turn to Buddhist teachings to help him assuage and transmute this anger.

I'm upset about it, but I'm also thinking, 'we are Buddhist. Buddha says anger is not good.' So it's really complicated. We are Buddhist and what should we do then? People are being treated so poorly and badly over there. The only thing we have left is prayer, to pray for them. Because anger is taking you in [the] wrong direction. I get angry and we human beings [our] minds [are] going in so many different directions, you know. And you think 'oh, what am I doing? I can't be like getting angry all the time.' I am trying to leave that anger from my mind and then what the Chinese government is doing and in Nepal the police are beating the Tibetan people and it makes you angry. So I think it's challenging for the mind. Really listening to Buddhist teachings like 'don't be angry, don't be hateful or don't be judgmental.' All those things are... the things we have to deal with in daily life, that's practice, I think.

Nima struggles with his reactions. He and other Tibetans I spoke with feel powerless to make some sort of difference not only in Tibet but in places like Nepal where Tibetans are also experiencing persecution. His response is to turn to his practice. He understands that prayer is

purifying and can create some positive merit. It contributes to some good in the universe and thus is the best course of action when he feels the need to do something to help.

Tibetans in diaspora make efforts to structurally support newly emigrated Tibetans and those living stateless in India. The Tibetan association board committee collects money monthly and annually from the Tibetan community in Santa Fe to send to Dharamsala. That money is used to help nuns and monks, to provide education for children, and to provide financial support for new Tibetan refugees. Tibetan refugees all over the world are doing this. The new Tibetan refugees need support. They face dangers during their escape and are now facing violence and oppression in places like Nepal that use to house them safely. "I am not a Tibetan," Nima says, "but I still give my annual fee as a board member, as a community [for this cause]. And all that money goes to the Dharamsala, to the head office." Nima feels a sense of solidarity with other Tibetans. Even though he identifies as a Sherpa he feels a sense of responsibility to contribute in a direct way that he knows will benefit Tibetan people. These acts of giving out of compassion and a genuine investment in benefitting others also create merit.

Buddhism and Social Change

All of my consultants stressed the ways that Buddhism transforms persons and thus, as a growing practice among non-Tibetans can contribute to large-scale social change. While many Tibetans, such as Jamyang, believed that Buddhist ethics compelled one naturally to work for the benefit of others, they also noted, like Nima, that working for Tibet's liberation was also a responsibility they all shared. In this way, Buddhist ethics are deeply entwined with cultural integrity and pursuits of sovereignty. For Kalkyi, being a Buddhist means that

you speak out against the oppression of others and work for their protection. But more importantly you work for the freedom of Tibet. She says:

In Tibet, a lot of people [are] self-immolating. So I've learned to sign petitions. That's what I can do and let other people know. Sign petitions and send to all the governors, all the mayors, so I try and do that. Those are the small things I can do as... I feel like all the Tibetans have duty and so for myself I try and do that kind of thing. Also I donate money to Students for a Free Tibet; they do so many things. I try and do those things and I send the letters to the governor and the mayors, senators... letting other people know. And sometimes I call the papers, like New Mexican reporters, so I kind of try and do those things.

This kind of grassroots political work makes up a good portion of what Tibetan refugees actually do for the Tibet movement. They write, sign and distribute petitions. They donate money to pro-Tibet organization, like Students for a Free Tibet. They meet with local government official and lobby on Tibet's behalf. Kalkyi is committed to raising awareness around Tibet's occupation. She explains that it is the duty of Tibetan people to work for the Tibet movement. Many consultants expressed feelings of frustration because they were so far away from Tibet. Yet they found ways to work for its cause, even in the U.S.:

I feel like you know, even if I can't go over there and fight or be there or whatever, I am in favor of Tibetans in Tibet because their lives right now, they are suffering a lot. Then at least I can do that because they don't have any voice over there, so I can be their voice that the people hear about it. Also I know that in this world [they're] not the only one, not only Tibetan [are] having problems. There's lot of other countries that are having problems too. But like, even other people, other countries, they're having problems but the world knows, they show [them] on the news. And the media knows about it, that's how we know, you know. But Tibetan people, nobody knows, they don't show anything in the news. There's nothing in the news so people don't know.

Tibetan refugees are not in a position to take up arms and literally fight for Tibet's freedom. They are acutely aware of the suffering taking place in their homeland and seek to help in any way they can. Tibetan refugees become a 'voice' for Tibetans to the greater world. Kalkyi acknowledges that suffering is not unique to Tibetans—it is ubiquitous. She points

out, however, that the suffering of other nations is generally given mainstream media coverage. Tibetan refugees must fight to raise awareness around the Tibet's oppression because it is overlooked by the mainstream Western media and thus conveniently absent from the Western popular consciousness.

The lack of media coverage on Tibet is conspicuous and likely has many roots—one of which is that Western mainstream media is notorious for running news stories that support U.S. foreign policy. Kalkyi believes there is a related yet also quite likely reason—it would strain U.S. relationships with China, “I think it’s because China is such a strong country and then America relies on them with business, so maybe that’s why. Plus [the U.S.] owes so much money to them, right?” Kalkyi attributes the lack of mainstream media coverage of Tibet to U.S. indebtedness to China, which is quite plausible. But more insidious and just as plausible is Tibet's status as a poor and powerless nation. Tibet does not have the same visibility because it does not have the material capital to gain the attention and respect of the global community, particularly of other nation-states.

Kalkyi and I discussed the ways that Buddhism may impact social change in Western culture but also global culture. She explains that the Dalai Lama has become really influential. His significant presence on the world's stage provides a good deal of social capital to counter balance Tibet's lack of material wealth. “[N]owadays, His Holiness, he goes to a bunch of schools and he talks to them, so slowly people might change. [They’re] having more compassion for one another and having a peaceful family. [When] we talk about peaceful family it gets bigger and bigger and creates a peaceful world... It gets bigger. It grows.” Kalkyi believes that the exposure to Buddhism through the Dalai Lama has already changed the lives of people all over the world. They are learning to be more compassionate

and ultimately peaceful. Again the logic of interdependence plays a role here. People become more compassionate when they recognize that everyone is dependent on one another. This realization tempers their negative emotions in such a way that they live more peaceful lives. As his teachings change the lives of a few, they bring this transformation to their families. One family may change, and then others, and so on. The possibility for social transformation is exponential. It can ripple out indefinitely. I ask her if religion and politics can be reconciled—will religion impact politics?

If you change the way people think... it might change. A lot of lamas nowadays have a lot of students, so I think it'll grow. It might change something. Hopefully it's going to benefit your family too. Plus I have a friend, she used to live here in New Mexico, she's a Buddhist but she's American. She got into a car accident. She broke like seven of her ribs and she's in rehab. But when you're a Buddhist, the way you think is so different. You think it's going to benefit you. She said, 'sometimes things are meant to happen. Right?' She's in rehab and there's so many old people and nobody is coming to visit them. And she's in pain, broken ribs and stuff, but she's trying to help other people. She goes and talks to them. She reads them a story, so she says 'I feel like I'm helping those people.' That's what she told me. She said 'I'm so glad that I'm practicing Buddhism.' You might think 'Oh my suffering is nothing; there are other people who are suffering too.'

Kalkyi notes that religion can create social change by changing the way that people think. One critical factor is the growing number of Western Buddhists who are serious practitioners, studying with Tibetan lamas. The example she provides of her American friend is telling. This woman began spending time with fellow patients at her rehab facility, many of whom were lonely and isolated. As a Buddhist she knew that focusing on her own suffering would only create more suffering, so she chose to help others and ended up feeling joyful through these acts of kindness. She chose not to focus on her own wellbeing but instead to benefit others. Her compassion is rooted in a logic of interdependence, which recognizes one is dependent on others so must make efforts to benefit them. When one acts with compassion, others are also benefitted. They are creating merit and connecting with others.

While this shift in view may appear insignificant it testifies to the forms of transformations necessary to deconstruct the fundamental violence of imperial projects—the profound objectification of others. If we consider Fanon’s theorization of decolonization as being both a structural and psychic double bind, in which the ‘colonized’ are objectified through racialization as essentially inferior in order to justify their dispossession, then we must recognize the humanization of others as a counter movement—in essence, a decolonial *move*, which restores humanness to others but also acknowledges a human need to rely on others. Thus, changing one’s mind, one’s view of the world can be life changing, even world changing when it radically re-frames connections between one’s self and others. A Buddhist framework of dependent arising radically challenges the objectification and subjugation of others, revealing political processes that rely on these logics as not only morally but also metaphysically flawed. The Dalai Lama explains that understanding life’s events through this *view* helps one better understand all the complex factors that contributed to a given situation:

The theory of dependent-arising can be applied everywhere. One benefit of applying this theory is that viewing a situation this way gives you a more holistic picture, since whatever the situation is—good or bad—it depends on causes and conditions. An event is not under its own power but depends on many present causes and conditions. Otherwise, it could not come into being. When you think from this viewpoint, you can see much more of the whole picture, and from this wider perspective, you can see the reality of the situation, its interdependence. With the help of this relational outlook, the action that you take will be realistic. In international politics, for example, without such an outlook a leader might see a problem as created by a single person, who then becomes an easy target. But this is not realistic: the problem is much wider. Violence produces a chain reaction. Without a broader perspective, even if the motivation is sincere, any attempt to handle the situation becomes unrealistic; the actions taken will not be well founded because of the lack of holistic picture, of understanding the web of causes and conditions involved.²⁸⁹

When one considers a relational view, the objectification of others not only becomes clearly immoral but the relations of power that have contributed to this objectification also become

²⁸⁹ Tenzin Gyatso, *How to See Yourself as You Really Are*, translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins (New York: Atria Book, 2006), 51-52.

quite clear. This larger picture and the myriad motivations involved in colonial projects fosters compassion for the players involved but also assuages feelings of victimization and grief. One can better understand the complexity of occupation, the suffering of those who may perpetuate it, and work towards forgiveness and healing within their own hearts.

I often asked my consultants about the effects of religion—can it have political power, or can it help the Tibetan people? Can Buddhism help the Tibetan people politically? Nima recognizes that Buddhism is a major influence in the lives of Tibetans. They will never stop practicing, no matter what kind of marginalization they face. While Buddhism has gained influence in the world, it does not have much of an impact on the real politik dynamics of Chinese colonialism. China's economic power has given it much more political power. Tibetans make appeals to UNICEF, the UN, and other world leaders to no avail. Many Tibetans hope the U.S. will intervene, given its history of doing just that for most of the twentieth century; however, its debt to China seriously impedes their political clout.

And people think, 'oh the U.S. is a very powerful country. Go over there and scare them and bomb them and let go of the country,' which it has been really, really doing in different countries, in other places. And do we as Buddhists, want to have that, have America bomb them and then scare them away and kill so many innocent people and then get Tibet back? Or will time change things? The Chinese people inside of China are also changing. So prayer and time, I think that's the only thing left in my possibilities because, I mean most of the people are kind of waiting like 'the American government should help us.' I don't know how they're going to do that.

There are complex political factors at work between the U.S. and the PRC. Do Tibetans want the U.S. to start a war with China? As Buddhists, this strategy is problematic. Nima suggests another option, one that may take more time but may be more practical: wait for the people of China to change. Social change in China may result in political change—a political change that could spell freedom for Tibet. In this way, he frames Buddhist practice as one solution to frustration and worry—waiting it out and praying in the mean time.

The Dalai Lama is a staunch advocate of nonviolence. However, he has resigned from political leadership, meaning that the political strategy of the TGiE is no longer under his direct influence. The Tibetan community is unsure of what the Dalai Lama's decision really means for the future of Tibetan nationhood. Nima believes that the Dalai Lama's influence is contributing to social change. There are more Buddhists around the world who support Tibet's cause even if they have no direct political influence. Popular support can translate to social change. Nima is confident that another political trend can actually impact the occupation of Tibet. He cites the growing awareness among oppressed peoples around global operations of exploitation and greed.

It's changing all time slowly, slowly it is changing. Look at so many regimes that are being destroyed by the people because they are changing, you know. And only thing is, hope for the best, you know. My thing is that eventually the world's going to see it, you know. What we're really doing. Capitalism is basically about money, everybody is just going after the money, and that money—where that money is coming from—is destroying the whole environment, the whole earth and everything. So they are paying a little bit more attention. I mean eventually but it's not going to happen soon.

Nima perceives the cultural shifts around the world, such the Arab Spring and even the Occupy Movement, as a move away from exploitive regimes. Those who rise up against empire and coercive forces of capitalism recognize that they are not only exploitative and harmful to peoples they are also destructive to the environment. The valorization of money over other human values is problematic, especially if you are destroying your own resources for survival. He believes that this same spirit of change will eventually have an impact on the situation in Tibet.

These religious practitioners acknowledge that there is another order, a spiritual order that transcends the political and mundane order of things, but they are also theorizing a new way of understanding liberty and freedom, as individuals and communities, through a logic

of interdependence and a practice of being mutually responsible wherein individuals seek the benefit of others, who are seen as being more important than the self. This view inspires compassion for others, motivating Tibetans to work for social change but also transmutes anger they feel about occupation. While they are still aggrieved, they understand this scenario as one born out of complex karma: a myriad of causes and conditions. A Buddhist view and simple lifeway actually resists and runs counter to consumerism and the objectification of others, the respective driving force and logic of empire.

Rigdzin explains that China's occupation of Tibet has brought the Dalai Lama to the world in a way that wasn't possible before, creating an opportunity for Tibetans to practice in a new way. He says, "So that's why in religion your enemy is your teacher," meaning that negative circumstances or events can provide personal insight or even unanticipated positive outcomes. Rigdzin's observation is rooted in a Buddhist idea that claims every experience is an opportunity to deepen one's awareness. The occupation of Tibet by China provided an opportunity for Dharma to flourish around the world, even among the Tibetan laity. In this way, the occupation of Tibet catalyzed events that have served a greater good and in essence can be perceived as a victory for both Tibetan people and those who have begun to follow Dharma as a result. However, this boon is bittersweet. "We are in a dilemma. Like all the people in the world, we have basic rights to our freedom, to our country, to our nation, to our culture, to our life, and to our dignity but ... China took everything." China has essentially stripped Tibet of its sovereignty, freedom, country, nation, culture, right to life, and dignity. Like Nima, Rigdzin recognizes the complex political tensions involved in Tibet's occupation by China. Tibetans do not have the means to fight the Chinese and sparking a stronger nation like the U.S. to intervene could create a world war with even more far reaching negative

consequences. He wonders if complete independence from China is possible. The Dalai Lama has framed independence as freedom to live as one chooses, including the right to practice any religion you like. It doesn't necessarily mean an independent nation. This proposed solution to the 'Tibetan question'—the one put forward by the Dalai Lama—has sometimes been called "the middle way." It is a willingness to abandon full independence from China in return for guarantees such as basic human rights, local autonomy within of Tibetan ethnic areas within the Chinese state, freedom to practice religion, and so forth. Rigdzin, however, doubts that Tibetans would really have freedom of cultural expression if they remain under Chinese rule. The most pressing problem at hand is that Tibetans want freedom to live as Tibetans and express their cultural identity. Rigdzin recognizes that Tibetans will not easily gain this kind of autonomy and freedom. He raises an interest quandary—what would China lose by giving Tibetans this kind of freedom?

My Tibetan consultants consistently framed the plight of Tibetans as one where China had an enormous amount of social and political power and has continued to exploit Tibet without being challenged by other nations. Thus, its imperial position had become naturalized. Rigdzin frames China's power over the world's nations as a "spell" of sorts: "And now the world is dependent on the Chinese. That is the lure of what the Christians call Satan—a lure over all the western countries, if they don't obey the Chinese. If you talk to Chinese and [point out] whatever they're doing wrong, then you will lose business, and you will lose this and that. That's totally wrong." Interestingly, Rigdzin frames this problem with China in Christian terms, comparing the PRC's abuse of power and economic privilege over the rest of the world as a lure akin to Satan's. He does not appear to be saying that China is actually evil but instead that they wield power in a way that is evil. Evil is seductive because

it manipulates power in a way that is difficult for others to resist. The PRC acts in ways that are like Satan because it abuses its power and holds it over others, who must submit to its will or face the economic repercussions. In essence, he is acknowledging the contemporary forces of empire that work in collusion to allow human rights abuses to continue in Tibet because they are constrained by economic forces preventing the alternative.

So, it's their magic, that black spell kind of thing that [makes] the whole world dependent on the Chinese. Now, China will be the technological [future]. The American state depends on the Chinese. So that is their lure, and it's the western countries'... the developed countries' fault. Not standing up to them. That affects the Tibetans. America has chosen China as a most favored nation to do business with. America benefits and [China] benefits. Why would [the U.S.] do this? That [withholding most favored nation status] was the best weapon or best policy, best instrument to bring world peace, not only in America, but all over the world. In order to achieve most favored nation status in business relations, you should have a good human rights record. [The U.S.] said [China] is doing that. That's the worst thing America has done for the world.

The U.S. needs China economically and is now beholden to its power. The way that Western nations have catered to China is problematic because it's forced them to ignore its unethical structures of oppression. The U.S. granted China "most favored nation trading status," and in so doing lost the opportunity to stand up to China and stop its human rights abuses. Rigdzin argues that the U.S. should only extend most favored nation status to nations that observe human rights norms. By not heeding this critical principle, the U.S. has set a precedent for the rest of the world to ignore China's human rights abuses. Rigdzin sees this as an essentially a failure of U.S. policy.

Despite his observations, Rigdzin does not feel a sense of frustration with the U.S. government: "If you feel frustrated by what one president does or you're frustrated with the Americans, that is not Tibetan nature because Tibetans believe in karma and causes. But it's bad for the world that America had to choose that." He isn't mad at the U.S. or its people,

realizing this political problem is born out of karma and wrought with complexity. The U.S. has little choice but to conform, given they have become so dependent on trade with China. Tibetans realize that this situation has arisen out of causes and conditions—karma. Tibetans diffuse their anger by understanding this situation through a Buddhist view:

There's hardly any Tibetan who wanted to go and kill Chinese. There's hardly any. Maybe a few. That's why the self-immolations, the burning monks—they don't want to harm. They want to follow the Dalai Lama. And they want to state that China is destroying our [culture]. They took our country and now they are destroying it. They destroy our culture and everything. And now, [the self-immolators] want to fight this. But there's no other way ... we can't fight with them. Tibetans have no weapons. And there's no country in the world that has the guts to tell the Chinese [that they are misguided]. The U.S. can tell for example, Saddam Hussein, 'we will give you shock and awe.' But nobody dares [to do this with China]. And now, even Tibetans, no Tibetans want America to bomb the Chinese.

Rigdzin isn't angry or frustrated because he views this situation from a Buddhist perspective, which frames these negative events as a result of karma. Like Tulku Sang Ngag, it is karma that created the situation; it will be karma that will change it. Tibetans do not have the resources or military to fight the Chinese state and no other nation is willing to stand up to it. Thus, he has accepted this devastating reality as beyond his control. Even those who are self-immolating have not taken up arms against China; they are refusing violence against China and choosing violence directed at themselves in order to educate the world about what is happening in Tibet.

Rigdzin frames the self-immolations as a result of cultural genocide. They are a desperate plea for the world to understand just how painful it is to live under these conditions of structural violence:

In 1959, after the occupation, they destroyed [Tibet] physically. Now they are destroying it mentally. Physical destruction is nothing. But mental destruction ... that's why the self-immolations [happen]. How can you bear that pain? You can't. Those [self-immolators] have to be very strong-minded. And they, at the time of burning, they pray for His Holiness to come back to Tibet so that peace and freedom

may prevail in Tibet. They're not saying 'Death to the Chinese' and burning [themselves]. No, no, the self-immolator may have said, 'Death to the Chinese, down with the Chinese,' or whatever in 1959, [but not now].

Tibetans experienced the physical destruction of Tibet after the 1959 occupation. But the present and more violent form of destruction is mental. They are destroying the Tibetans mentally through their policies of cultural erasure and oppression. The self-immolators ask that the Dalai Lama return. In essence, they seek religious freedom but also the revalorization of the religious lifeways the Dalai Lama symbolizes. Despite the extremely painful forms of suffering Tibetans in Tibet are experiencing, they are not calling for the downfall of China or its destruction; they are just seeking liberation, freedom to live their traditional lifeways.

Cultural erasure and the compromise of human rights are not just endemic to the PRC; they are logics of empire. These structures of coercion and dispossession serve a specific purpose—to exploit others for economic gain. Thus, nations like the U.S. that continue to be invested in empire may act to help relieve the suffering of some peoples while simultaneously ignoring the human rights violations of others:

Now the world is ruled by the economy, the corporations. For example, Bono, when he was collecting money for AIDS to the African world, President Bush agreed he will do this, this, this, this, and he pledged billions of dollars. But the president [isn't supported] by Congress, which is nothing but representatives funded by the corporations.

Rigdzin astutely notes that the world is ruled by empire in the form of corporations that negotiate and even supersede the power of individual nations. Human rights are ignored because corporations are not invested in protecting them. In fact, exploiting persons and resources is a central logic of capitalism and empire. While the U.S. may appear to be invested in democracy, Rigdzin argues that Congress is really representing corporate interests as opposed to the public's.

[T]he rich Republicans, Democrats, they are pretty much the same. I don't consider Republicans bad or Democrats good. But it is dangerous that even Republicans and Democrats are more benefited by the power of misusing people's funds. They are taking benefits instead of wanting the people to benefit. When the people realize that, then there will be change.

When people decide that they will stand up against these abuses of power, then we can transform this money driven form of empire and the petty exploitations it wages on the populace.

I asked Rigdzin if Dharma could effect social change in this way—if it can effect political change? He believes it can:

Yes. For example, Dharma changes individuals. And then the group of individuals love each other, don't want to harm one another. Tibetans don't want to harm the Chinese and then Chinese [will] realize they don't want to harm the Tibetans. And then [the Chinese people will] realize what their government was doing to the Tibetans is wrong. Then the whole thing will change. Same thing with the Americans. More democracy... that is [inspired by] Christianity, Buddhism or whatever, the essence is the same, to bring change in your heart, which means that whatever you want to eat, the same food must be given to the other people, for poor people. And whatever house you want to live, the same must be given to other people that can't afford it. When you realize the relationship, then the people will have faith. Then, in order to benefit all, people won't want to [hurt others] but then they can change. In fact, Obama said 'I can bring the change.' But it is the people who have to change. I can't do it myself. People have to rise up but nobody is rising up, including me.

Dharma changes persons, which then changes communities, because people begin to love and respect one another. They don't want to harm others. Once the Chinese people recognize that they are harming the Tibetans through settler colonialism, then it could shift the whole dynamic of power in Tibet. The change needed in the U.S. revolves around being truly democratic, but this has to come, according to Rigdzin, through personal religious transformations where people change in their hearts, whether through practicing Buddhist or even Christian values. The tradition is not what's important; it is the change itself and the ability to recognize that others have the same needs as you. Others should be provided with

equal access to the same food, housing and wellbeing as you. This kind of change will not come from the government but will come from the people. It is a populist change rooted in religious transformations. Again, Rigdzin reiterates that major social transformation will come from greater awareness of our connectedness—the love and compassion that is born out of recognizing that the divisions that separate us are an illusion. When this view becomes clear, we will love others enough to share our resources equally with them. When people “realize the relationship” between one another, the logic of interdependence that connects us all, we will “have faith” and be inspired to act differently in the world.

A few consultants raised the issue of racialization of Tibetans, how they have been derided by Chinese propaganda as in need of “civilizing.” Rigdzin, in particular, had strong views on the subject. He believes that Tibetans were unfairly judged and questions the criteria for this appraisal by the PRC, saying:

[The] Chinese are saying Tibetans are poor and backward. And now, when you realize, even the poorest of poor beggars—Tibetan beggars—can live without anything, without food, without nothing, no nothing, can live for one month. Isn't he rich? There are Tibetan families, rich Tibetan families, they don't have a car, they don't have a computer, they don't have nothing. But what they have is enough food to last three years. That is rich. But here, the billionaires they can't live even one day—maybe that's too much, but—they rely on others to supply them with food and brings them new clothes, and without that they can't live. They have to go to a restaurant. And if their chef doesn't come, there's nobody to cook for them. That is poor. That is our thinking. The Chinese say Tibet is really poor. It is not. It is their thinking that is poor. But Tibetans are totally satisfied.

Chinese claims that Tibetans are uncivilized and poverty stricken are unsound because Tibetans know how to survive off the land; they know how to save food and live in harsh conditions. Knowing how to survive is more valuable than knowing how to consume, so they are rich in comparison to those who are wealthy but totally dependent on modern conveniences. Rigdzin makes an astute observation that while Tibetans are perceived to be

poor (and uncivilized), they are actually rich because they are self-reliant—they need not rely on others to meet their daily needs. They do not demand more than they need and they are able to take care of their needs fairly well. China should acknowledge their self-sufficiency and ingenuity instead of treating them as second-class citizens.

These unfair judgments of the “poor” extend beyond the experience of Tibetans. He recognizes the way that a capitalist economy depends on hyper consumerism—a hyper consumerism that is ultimately manipulative and destructive to our personal agency and wellbeing. He goes on to discuss the poverty of spirit that consumerism has fostered in popular Western culture:

Suppose tomorrow everybody takes cars away. There’s not a single car. Then you will learn how to live without a car. Then the happiness begins. [Our need for cars] is corporations creating an ideology. For example, in India, I lived in India... There’s not much sickness. If you’re really sick, then you go to a doctor and he or she finds some sickness [and treats it]. But in America, you’re in your living room and you get sick! The television advertisements develop [a sense] that you really feel you need that medication. You really need that service. That is [corporations] changing our needs and we are victimized because of that. Otherwise you don’t need ten earrings or whatever. Just one or two is good enough, unless you want 100 husbands. Then you would change your earrings every day. [*laughs*]

Rigdzin explains that we will only learn to be happy, to be satisfied, through our ability to survive without modern conveniences. When we know we can survive without them, then we will feel fulfilled. Corporations instill our habit of consuming more material goods than we actually need. Our needs and wants are cultivated through advertising. In India, medication wasn’t marketed to you. Whereas in the U.S. you are told that you need medication for any little discomfort you have. These material goods are not necessary—they are only pushed on the public to support corporate interests, and ultimately, empire. When we can recognize or challenge this manipulation to the degree that it no longer dictates or controls our behavior then real social change will come.

Buddhism as Political Philosophy

While some of my Tibetan consultants drew a distinct line between Buddhism and politics, many others recognized that a Buddhist worldview and its related ethics address issues of power and social rule. For Jamyang, Buddhist concepts shape social mores, ideals and also relations of power. He positions Buddhism as being ‘democratic’ in its insistence that we care for and acknowledge the needs, and rights, of all others, even the land itself:

Buddhists consider the majority more important than the individual. If you have to sacrifice your right, your life, for the other people for the majority, you do it. So democracy existed a long time ago in Buddhism. It’s there already. I don’t like dictatorships or Communism. I like democracy—they care for the majority of people and human rights and animal rights and environmental rights. Oh, absolutely. That is very related to the Buddhism.

Jamyang frames ideals that seek the wellbeing of the polity over the wellbeing of the individual as being both “democratic” and Buddhist. Sacrifices made to benefit others, in the case of your rights or even life for the good of the group—as in the case of serving in the military for instance, resonate with Buddhist values that instruct one to act for the good of others. Thus, when one makes sacrifices for others that it is intended for the common good, it is Dharmic activity. He argues that this “democratic” ideal had already been a part of Buddhist lifeways in Tibet before its occupation. Unlike dictatorships or Communism the rights of individuals are also acknowledged and valued. Although democracy as we know it did not exist in Tibet historically, I interpret him as saying that Buddhism is invested in the general welfare of the entire community, not to benefit one or a few but to benefit all. While the PRC’s form of Communism may position itself rhetorically as being invested in the welfare of all, in practice the sacrifices of the many continue to benefit the few. Before the PRC occupation Tibetan governance was not ideal. However, it certainly benefitted Tibetans more than current PRC policy, or so most Tibetans believe. In contradistinction, a Buddhist

view can better care for both society and the environment because it understands their interdependent relationship:

For example, the environment is not the house for human beings but for everybody, so we have to take care of it. I'm against not taking care of the environment, polluting the water and everything, for personal interests or big corporate production. It's totally against the Buddhist view. You can use the resources as you need but not too much. If you use too much for your needs, then there's not enough resources [for others].

The law of interdependence extends out to the natural world, which must be treated with consideration and respect, as we all share it. It is not just the 'house' or habitat for humans but for all living creatures, so we must be considerate of it and care for it collectively. When persons or corporations exploit natural resources for their own gain, they are not respecting this principle of interdependence, which asks us to honor the collective needs of the earth's inhabitants.

In the process of thinking about what constitutes "democracy," Jamyang is also theorizing what constitutes good governance generally. An ethic that honors collective needs, while still recognizing individual rights, is at the heart of ideal Buddhist governance. This issue is salient for Tibetan refugees, who are invested in bringing attention not only to human rights violations, but also to colonial oppression in the larger world.

Regarding the people in Tibet, the government is unfair to them and there is no way to go and get help. Being in the United States, I happened to see the governor (Bill) Richardson.²⁹⁰ I went to his house, to his office and talked to him. I was so grateful; I'm just an ordinary man. I told him what's happening in Tibet. In the United States, I think this is very different from what would happen in China. I can express myself and what I'm feeling. If you don't like your president you can express it. If you don't like your senator, if he's doing something wrong, you can express it. It's good; you have the right. But in Tibet, you can't. All the Tibetans, they like the Dalai Lama. He is the most revered person in their mind and they want to see him and keep his photo; they get in trouble. So that's not good.

²⁹⁰ Bill Richardson was the governor of New Mexico from 2003-2011.

As an ordinary citizen who is a refugee in the U.S., Jamyang was given the opportunity to have a private meeting with the then governor of New Mexico to discuss his concerns over Tibet. Jamyang sees this as speaking volumes about our relative freedoms compared to those in Tibet. PRC policies that essentially outlaw keeping personal images of the Dalai Lama exemplify not only the lack of freedom—of religion and Tibetan identity—but also the degree to which Tibetans live under duress in an imperial regime. There are no illusions about the possibility of ‘liberation’ for people that live in these circumstances.

When the Dalai Lama decided to step down from head of the TGiE in 2012, it shocked the Tibetan community. For people in Jamyang’s generation, born in exile, they understood the Dalai Lama’s strategy—he sought to shift the TGiE’s perception as a theocracy to one that was democratic and ‘modern.’ Those in his parent’s generation who had been born in Tibet and fled to follow the Dalai Lama were less understanding. They felt abandoned. And soon a letter was penned by the refugee community to the Dalai Lama saying “You are the hope of the Tibetan people. If you do that, there is no hope.”²⁹¹ He responded by saying that he would always work on the behalf of the Tibetan community and since that time he has. He has dedicated even more time to public speaking and teaching Buddhism around the world. A book he released around this period, *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* argued that a secular approach to ethics could benefit the world. Jamyang and I discussed the possible outcomes of growing numbers of Buddhists around the world and others who are interested in the Dalai Lama’s vision of universal secular ethics around the world:

If the Dalai Lama teaches only about Buddhism, he reaches only the Buddhists. But if he speaks about secularism, he can reach all the people. That’s one thing. The second thing, his mind is so curious and from his childhood he likes science. Every year he

²⁹¹ Interview with Jamyang Tenzin 04/25/2013.

has a meeting and a dialogue with scientists—the Mind and Life dialogues. And that affects the younger generation. Young scientists [think] ‘Oh my goodness, he is a religious man, what is he doing?’ But he has so many things to share from a Buddhist perspective or point of view. Buddhists care a lot about the inner science, so they have so many things to say, whenever the science has something they don’t understand, [Buddhists] have something to say, they can solve it. And the scientists say ‘please, what is this?’ [Buddhists] have all the answers. The world these days is connected through the Internet and media so it is making some flash to the younger generation, there is no blind faith.

It appears that Jamyang is downplaying Buddhism as a religion or creed, and stressing its philosophical or analytical character—that it is as a set of practices that help one understand the world—the nature of reality. I asked, ‘So you’re saying Buddhism offers more than faith, it is more than just a religion—it tells us facts about the world? He replies:

Yeah, it’s fact. Yeah, the Buddha said, ‘don’t believe me; don’t believe my teaching with blind faith. If you are looking for the pure gold, you have to scratch the surface and check. Just as you check the gold to see if it’s pure or not, you should check my teaching. If it’s good then you follow. If not, it’s not forced.’ The Buddha himself taught like that.

While the Dalai Lama’s definition of secular is really more akin to ‘religious tolerance’ than non-religion, Jamyang raises an interesting point. When the Dalai Lama frames his talks as forms of secular and universal ethics, it will draw a larger audience instead of just Buddhists. This is a clever strategy to cull a worldwide discussion on the existence of ‘universal’ ethics—do they exist? But also it is an interesting way to redefine the category of secularism allowing him to discuss ethics as an essential part of human existence that is not necessarily ‘religious.’ It is an interesting way to pose universal human questions—such as ‘What are my responsibilities to others?’ Since 1987 the Dalai Lama has been holding annual dialogues with a scientists and scholars on the nature of reality, called the Mind and Life Dialogues.²⁹² For Jamyang, these dialogues validate Buddhism as a “science,” an “inner science” that can help scientists understand their own data. Younger generations are realizing that Buddhism is

²⁹² See <http://www.mindandlife.org/dialogues-dalai-lama/>

not just a religion of “blind faith” but a tested strategy for understanding the mind—for understanding the nature of reality. He reiterates that the Buddha positioned his teachings as necessitating experiential verification. These teachings were considered valuable because they passed the practical litmus test of allowing people to live well. In this way, Buddhism is not just a superstition, a religion of faith, but an “inner science” that is tested through practice.

Jamyang’s interpretation of this universal set of values led him to discuss a concept that was unique to Buddhism—emptiness. For Jamyang, the dialogues between the Dalai Lama and scientists are significant because they help the greater world understand the nature of mind. Jamyang and other Tibetans view Buddhism as a spiritual path that helps one understand the nature of reality. The Dalai Lama’s dialogues with scientists reflect a critical discourse among Tibetan lamas and Buddhist practitioners that Buddhist metaphysics may actually correlate with the true nature of reality—an idea that resists the characterization of religiosity in the West as just faith or even superstition. By presenting Buddhist metaphysics as informative beyond the constraints of religion the Dalai Lama and other high profile Lamas offer an alternative to Western metaphysical models. Tibetan refugees, like Jamyang who have a more refined grasp of emptiness and dependent arising, are supportive of Buddhist conversations with Western science because they believe they will lead to a better understanding (and appreciation) of Buddhist metaphysics. There are several important points here. The first is the desire on the part of Tibetan peoples to have their own worldviews validated by “science” as the fields of science monopolize contemporary discourses of rationality as power/knowledge. The second is the related desire to invalidate PRC characterizations of Tibetans as backward and uncivilized. In addition, if Buddhist

metaphysics accurately describes the nature of reality, then the spiritual work that Tibetans are doing on Tibet's behalf—practice directed at creating the causes and conditions for Tibet's liberation—is in fact efficacious.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored Buddhist view and practice among Tibetan refugees living in Santa Fe in conversation with Tibetan's experience of imperialism/colonialism, racialization, and cultural erasure. I argue that these diverse negotiations of Tibetan Buddhist view and practice result in a lifeway that essentially resists the structures of colonialism: racialization, cultural erasure and objectification of others. Tibetan Buddhism also provides a theoretical framework for deconstructing the logics of empire: abuses of power, conspicuous over-consumption and the exploitation of peoples and resources. These narratives illustrate a matrix of motivations, view, practice and results that are pervasive within the greater Tibetan community. For example, Nima and Kalkyi discuss how their practice motivates them to be especially mindful of how their day-to-day actions and attitudes affect others. Jamyang, Nima and Kalkyi are quite invested in helping others because of both a cultural and religious impetus to work tirelessly for their people or communities. Rigdzin and Jamyang are quite invested in spiritual practice and in speaking out about justice for Tibetan. This movement has also contributed to broader notions of identity and citizenship. For instance, Nima is no longer only a 'Sherpa' but is now a Sherpa in relationship to a larger community of pan-Tibetan peoples. A shared religiosity and similarities in culture brings him and other Sherpa people together in community and solidarity against the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

Tibetans in exile are bringing their experiences of diaspora to their religious path. Practice provides Tibetan people with the tools to assuage their grief and fear, which is

healing, but it also leads to greater awareness of how their behavior affects others. Dispossession and diaspora when brought into ‘the path’ become opportunities—for growth, for healing, for deeper awareness and righteous action. Hardships are understood as the result of one’s karma and so can be responded to with equanimity and even gratitude. Anger is transformed into compassion, fear into understanding. These minor actions express an embodied religiosity and serve as examples for others to follow. “Minor” personal transformations lead to incalculable transformations and changes in the greater world, ideally to ameliorate the suffering of others. Tibetans emphasize the ways that our connectedness critically facilitates shifts in perspective—one’s “view” can radically transform enemies into brothers and create merit to benefit others. Some claim that these truths are not matters of ‘faith’ or dogma but are based on verified experience. The experiential nature of practice allows Tibetans to testify to their significant results. The dialogue between practice, awareness and then compassionate action propels practitioners to further refine their practice as it further refines their clarity around ‘right action’ and conduct in the movement for resistance. These Tibetans understand Tibet’s occupation through this broader metaphysical frame and so practice is not an isolated activity, it is undertaken with thousands of others who have the same goal, creating a critical mass that is efficacious in a Buddhist metaphysical realm.

A law of interdependence critically challenges the logics of colonialism such as racialization and cultural erasure. It highlights the ways colonialism has objectified and dehumanized Tibetan peoples. From a Buddhist view of interdependence, this objectification reflects the very root of ignorance—the failure to see our true nature as contingent on others. The continuity of Tibetan culture in exile not only resists cultural erasure but it calls PRC

claims to Tibet into question. Dispossession, religious persecution and racialization is disempowering. However, Tibetans are resisting these attacks through practice and a Buddhist metaphysic that helps them make sense of these events. As they lose their fear and transform it into love and compassion, they become empowered and revitalize their agency. The trauma they experienced allows them a new insight and deeper understanding of life. They live with more compassion and awareness. And love. They become more whole as they learn how to connect to others. Tibetans also recognize that their experiences are part of a larger cycle of karma that transcends just them as individuals. With this insight on suffering they are better able to imagine and even create more loving and equitable communities. In this way, religious praxis among transnational Tibetans acts as an efficacious tool of resistance and decolonization. The regeneration of practice allows Tibetans to existentially explore their displacement and find themselves again in the process. Despite being far flung and physically estranged from one another, Tibetans become symbolically united in practice, a shared framework for understanding the world and a shared struggle for liberation.

Chapter 8: Tibetan Resistance in Exile: The Lhakar Movement

This chapter explores the multiple modes of resistance pursued among diaspora Tibetans in New Mexico, many of which fall under the rubric and correlate with the newer Lhakar (*lhag dkar*) movement. Chapter 7 demonstrated how Tibetans use their religious sensibilities to resist cultural erasure but also heal from the structural violences created by the Chinese occupation of Tibet. While many Tibetan religious leaders have theorized the Tibet movement as one component of a much larger processes of karma,²⁹³ individual struggles to transmute negative emotions and shift one's focus to benefit others can be understood as contributing to the success of the movement as well, like individual cogs that once properly aligned help the larger machine better function. The Tibet movement has been operating steadily for decades through multiple organizations and networks, such as The Tibetan Youth Congress, which has served as one of the more radical organization invested in the liberation of Tibet, and Students for a Free Tibet, which has grown to be one of the largest and most influential organizations in the Tibet movement. The Lhakar movement, which translates to "White Wednesdays," began in Tibet as a means to revitalize Tibetan social and political power through the re-appropriation of Tibetan culture and space. It is the most recent iteration of the Tibetan movement notable for its use of traditional Tibetan culture as a form of non-violent resistance. Although the Lhakar movement began in Tibet, it is relevant for Tibetans in diaspora for similar yet slightly different reasons. Both communities, those in Tibet and those in diaspora, are struggling to prevent cultural loss. While Tibetans in diaspora need not worry about religious and cultural persecution, as do Tibetans in Tibet, they are facing cultural losses due to assimilation and cultural change. It appears that the Lhakar movement is the confluence of multiple expressions of resistance that have existed

²⁹³ Interview with Tulku Sang Ngag 04/28/2013.

for decades in Tibet, such as the public expression of religious practice, but are assembling now in a new way under one rubric. The Lhakar movement unites Tibetans in their quest for liberation through cultural regeneration and strategic, non-violent resistance. I argue that its conscious re-traditionalizing of culture ultimately envisions a path to Tibetan liberation through a united Tibetan “peoplehood” and serves as a form of Tibetan decolonization.

The Tibetan Youth Congress and the Birth of Lhakar

The Tibetan Youth Congress was born out of a meeting for Tibetan youth in exile in Dharamsala in 1970.²⁹⁴ This meeting sought to set an agenda for the first generation truly raised and educated in exile to explore their collective futures. The Dalai Lama spoke several times at this meeting about Buddhism as well as their collective responsibilities to the Tibetan people, exhorting those present to evaluate their “most essential task” and declaring that it was “service to the people.”²⁹⁵ The TYC describes itself as a “worldwide Organisation of Tibetans united in our common struggle for the restoration of complete independence for the whole of Tibet.”²⁹⁶ As a fledgling organization their focus was on service the way the Dalai Lama has exhorted—assisting the Tibetan community through adult literacy programs, acting as interpreters, hygiene education, etc. However, their larger mission evolved to a concern with the liberation for Tibet. To fulfill this latter goal they publish the periodical *Rangzen* or *Independence* and they organize protests and festivals that celebrate Tibetan culture. They frame Tibetan independence in relation to Chinese colonization, citing the population transfer of Chinese to Tibet, environmental destruction and increasingly militarization as evidence of settler colonial presence in Tibet. Margaret Nowak argues that

²⁹⁴ “About TYC,” accessed May 23, 2015. <http://www.tibetanyouthcongress.org/about-tyc/>.

²⁹⁵ *Tibetan Review*, 1970:7, quoted in Margaret Nowak, *Tibetan Refugees: Youth and the New Generation of Meaning* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984) 143.

²⁹⁶ “About TYC,” accessed May 23, 2015. <http://www.tibetanyouthcongress.org/about-tyc/>.

this new exile generation was explicitly educated to take two symbols to heart, the Dalai Lama as the embodiment of Tibetan religious ideals and legitimate political authority and *rangzen* (*rang bstan*)—Tibetan sovereignty, not just political autonomy, but also the possibility of independent statehood—as their goals.²⁹⁷ Given Deloria’s definition of sovereignty as the reformation of *peoplehood*, I would interpret *rangzen* as the outcome of a continued and consolidated peoplehood. In short, the continued calls for *rangzen* as the guiding goal for the TYC—a position they have remained committed to even though the Dalai Lama’s own position has shifted from independence to autonomy—reveal this new exile generation’s investment in complete independence.

As a primarily exile organization, TYC has flourished and there are currently eighty-seven regional chapters dotting Asian and Western countries. In conversations with one consultant, Sonam Tsering, the fifty year old head of the Tibetan Youth Congress in Santa Fe and a TYC member since his youth in India, explained that although the Dalai Lama has taken the ‘middle way’ approach he continues to support TYC, acknowledging privately to TYC members that their work for independence is still necessary.²⁹⁸ In other words, while the Dalai Lama has invested in the diplomacy of what the ‘middle way’ may offer Tibetans, autonomy and ultimately more cultural freedom for Tibetans in Tibet; he is still ultimately invested in Tibet’s liberation from Chinese control. The Tibetan Youth Congress in Santa Fe is a relatively small group made up of young Tibetans in their teens and early twenties. Most are students and have been born in exile. Despite their small size, they have put on many events, such as participating in cultural festivals showcasing Tibetan traditional dance or

²⁹⁷ Nowak, *Tibetan Refugees*, 32.

²⁹⁸ Interview with Sonam Tsering 03/16/2013.

even larger scale public protests, such as the March 10 Tibetan Uprising Day march and rally.

In Santa Fe, as throughout the Tibetan world, one of the most important events to show solidarity for the liberation of Tibet is the March 10 Tibetan Uprising Day commemorations, which consists of both a march and rally, generally organized by the TYC or Students for a Free Tibet. Tibetan Uprising Day is layered with symbolic significance for Tibetans:

[T]he events that took place in Tibet in March 1959 have become for refugees, the *illud tempus*, or archetype, that sustains a recurrent but deeply meaningful new secular ritual. Many of the activities repeated annually by Tibetans on March 10 can be seen as a reenactment or reaffirmation of key elements of the original dram that took place in Lhasa in March 1959: the mass rally outside the Dalai Lama's palace; the converging of monks and villagers from the surrounding monasteries and countryside; the threat, or actual outbreak of violence (in addition to the impending attack by the Chinese, a collaborator was toned to death); the citywide protest march and shouting of slogans; public meetings; and finally two nonrepeatable events: the formal proclamation of a provisional Tibetan government (March 28, 1959) and the arrival of the Dalai Lama in India (March 31, 1959).²⁹⁹

Contemporary March 10 commemorations integrate the same elements: a rallying of Tibetans, a march where Tibetans hold signs and shout slogans, a public meeting or rally where a series of speeches are made “marked by conspicuous wearing of national dress, singing of the national anthem, ubiquitous display of the Tibetan flag, pictures of the Dalai Lama” and so on. Nowak notes that both the *rangzen* metaphor and March 10 commemoration are new expressions that serve to rally Tibetans in solidarity against Chinese occupation. It is in the March 10 event that *rangzen* is in fact “performed” and thus, demonstrated:

With such a repertoire of symbolic elements, the March 10 commemoration can indeed be seen as a key scenario, that is, as a ritual that publicly dramatizes both an ideal goal (proudly affirmed national identity) and the strategy for achieving it (self-

²⁹⁹ Nowak, *Tibetan Refugees*, 33-34.

conscious proclamation of “Tibetanness” to and in the midst of others who are not Tibetan).³⁰⁰

The drama of March 10—from the wearing of traditional clothes to the vocal assertions of Tibetan independence—is the highpoint of the annual ritual protest cycle in exile.

In contrast, Lhakar is a grassroots movement starting within Tibet and rooted in the cultural re-assertion of the 1980’s and 1990’s. In 1987 a series of protests broke out in Tibet. It sparked by two events: a shift in PRC policy that eased the bans on cultural expression and a visit by the Dalai Lama to the Human Rights Caucus of the U.S. Congress. The change in PRC policy sparked a cultural renaissance in Tibet that led to vocal assertions of Tibetan nationalism—something that had been vehemently oppressed in the years since 1959:

The relaxation of religious and cultural policy was also well received. On the level of daily life many of the distinctive markers of Tibetan cultural identity gradually reappeared. Tibetans once again wore traditional clothes, men grew their hair long and wore it in braids—fashions which had been banned and severely punished during the Cultural Revolution. Tibetans were no longer made to feel ashamed of their culture. Religious observances also reappeared in daily life. Tibetans set up altars in their homes, and could be seen once again praying and making offerings to deities, turning prayer wheels, and visiting holy places on pilgrimage. The customary personal ritual of Tibetans Buddhism, for which Tibetans has received harsh punishments during the Cultural Revolution, could be practiced without interference from authorities.³⁰¹

These regenerations of traditional culture also led to the “spontaneous rebuilding of temples and monasteries,” which symbolized pre-1959 civil society and thus acted as an expression of Tibetan sovereignty. The protests themselves were symbolically rich and laden with religious significance. Protestors would gather in the Barkhor, Lhasa’s main square, and circumambulate the Jokhang temple, Lhasa’s holiest site. Circumambulation, or *khorra* (*bskor ba*) is a common Buddhist practice, wherein a practitioner circles a sacred site, such as stupa or temple, reciting prayers—counted off with their malas—in order to accumulate

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 35.

³⁰¹ Schwartz, *Circle of Protest*, 16.

merit. It is an obvious form of public religious expression. At first it was monks, then nuns, who would circumambulate the Jokhang, “carrying the Tibetan flag as they shout independence slogans” but lay Tibetans eventually joined them and a movement was born. Schwartz frames this style of protest as expressly religious, he argues that it is grounded in the ethical and doctrinal Buddhist tradition, although just the ‘rational’ ones. After two years of protests, many turning into bloody confrontations with PRC military, martial law was imposed for one year and another period of brutal repression began. However, these protests would continue until 1992 and the work they accomplished could never be undone. They planted a seed of national unity among Tibetans in Tibet who recognized that cultural and religious expression was the key to Tibetan regeneration as a people and as a nation.

In addition, the slight opening to the outside world during this period, as well as the visit by the Dalai Lama’s representative, consolidated ties to Tibetans in exile. In the years since, Tibetans in Tibet continued to look to the community in exile for political leadership and to agitate on their behalf. In turn, the community in exile has sought to publicize the cultural genocide taking place within Tibet and strategize for structural change.

[T]here has been a considerable “feedback effect” between protest inside and international endeavors on behalf of Tibet, with each reinforcing the other. The exile government has been quick to capitalize on expressions of discontent by Tibetans inside Tibet. It has also been forced to accommodate a new influx of refugees from the unrest in Tibet, and has begun a process of political and administrative reorganization to present itself more effectively to the world as the legitimate representative of Tibetan interests.... Tibetans inside Tibet, in turn, have increasingly looked to the exile government—and the Dalai Lama in particular—to represent their interests on the international stage.³⁰²

Thus, we can understand the Lhakar movement as a natural extension of the protests and cultural regeneration in the 1980’s and 1990’s as well as those in 2008. While this new

³⁰² Schwartz, *Circle of Protest*, 9.

movement spans generations, it is mostly undertaken by the young, who were born into colonization and have no recollection of what Tibetan life was like before occupation, but may have a memory of the later cultural revolts. The exile community has responded to Lhakar by responding in kind—catalyzing a conversation of praxis and action with Tibetans in Tibet. The dialectic Lhakar poses between Tibetans in exile and those in Tibet can be understood as a continued expression of this “feedback effect.”

Lhakar Movement

The Lhakar movement began in 2008 in the midst of the largest uprising against occupation in Tibet since the 1990’s. On March 10, 2008, in honor of the 49th anniversary of Tibetan Uprising Day, three to five hundred monks attempted to march to Lhasa demanding the freedom of several Tibetans who had been imprisoned while celebrating the Dalai Lama’s receipt of the U.S. Congressional Medal of Honor.³⁰³ These protests would go on for months and involve hundreds of protesters from monks and nuns to lay Tibetan. They would take place in Lhasa but also throughout Tibet, significantly in its easternmost region, where the traditional boundary between Tibet and China lay. While the usual repression by PRC police and military ensued, it was too late—another massive movement of Tibetan resistance was born.

The Lhakar movement is unique in that it is not a structured organization with a hierarchy of leadership but instead acts as a ‘grassroots’ peoples’ movement uniting Tibetans in Tibet and in diaspora via social media and praxis. On Wednesdays (*gza’ lhag pa*), an auspicious (*dkar po*) day for Tibetans because it is the Dalai Lama’s ‘soul day’ and the day of his birth, Tibetans in Tibet assert their independence by wearing traditional clothing,

³⁰³ Warren W. Smith, *Tibet’s Last Stand: the Tibetan Uprising of 2008 and China’s Response* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010) 11.

eating traditional food, and supporting Tibetan owned businesses. This movement can be likened to the civil rights movement in the Jim Crow south and India's fight for independence for its use of civil disobedience—insurgent strategies that are most effective in occupied and highly surveilled territories. Lhakar.org describes the movement as follows:

[A] homegrown, Tibetan self-reliance movement that started in the aftermath of the 2008 uprising. In spite of China's intensified crackdown, Tibetans have embraced the power of strategic nonviolent resistance. Every Wednesday, a growing number of Tibetans are making special effort[s] to wear traditional clothes, speak Tibetan, eat in Tibetan restaurants and buy from Tibetan-owned businesses. They channel their spirit of resistance into social, cultural and economic activities that are self-constructive (promoting Tibetan language, culture and identity) and non-cooperative (refusing to support Chinese institutions and businesses)... Through these pledges and actions, Tibetans are coming together in the greatest noncooperation movement Tibet has ever seen.³⁰⁴

Interestingly, the movement operates through personal pledges to pursue a set of 'Tibet-oriented' activities. The brilliance of this form of resistance lies in its overt legality. Tibetans in Tibet are able to subvert settler colonial ideology by essentially re-Tibetan-izing their persons and in numbers, whole spaces. In addition, Tibetans in exile are able to act in solidarity with Tibetans in Tibet, strengthening their sense of 'peoplehood.'

Tenzin Dorjee, the current leader for Students for a Free Tibet, frames the Lhakar movement as a direct response to China's tightening grip on public forms of protest. He describes one of its first major actions of solidarity—the no Losar movement. In 2009, Tibetans in Tibet were expected to celebrate Losar, Tibetan New Year, for the benefit of state media. Instead, Tibetans stayed indoors, ignoring the state sponsored fireworks. This massive act of civil disobedience was coordinated through word of mouth, texts and social media. Of the movement, Dorjee says:

³⁰⁴ "About Lhakar," Lhakar: The Tibetan People's Grassroots Revolution, accessed May 21, 2015. <http://lhakar.org/about/>.

In the fight for human rights and independence, Tibetans have routinely used the most visible form of resistance: street demonstrations. But since Beijing put the streets under lockdown, the resistance has moved indoors into private space. Lhakar participants practice Tibetan tradition in their homes, exercising whatever limited rights they have in their daily lives to strengthen their political, cultural and social identity. These individual actions, taken collectively in such bastions of resistance as Kardze and Ngaba in eastern Tibet, have compromised Chinese businesses and prompted more than a few Chinese settlers to leave Tibet. In one particular town, all Chinese shops are said to have closed except for one that sells CDs of Dalai Lama teachings. Though humble in scale, these noncooperation tactics evoke Gandhi's boycott of British textile and are inspiring thousands to action.³⁰⁵

This movement optimizes the very few forms of expression available to Tibetans within the bounds of PRC hegemony—their agency as regards cultural expression and economic choices. Given the example provided by Dorjee, these tactics are contributing to structural changes in Tibet. These kinds of structural changes—where Chinese settlers have been forced to vacate Tibetan lands as result of these boycotts—could be understood as a project of decolonization. In fact, the claims to other such movements and outcomes are made explicit:

Tibetans from Lhasa and Lithang to Markham and Ngaba have been engaging in experimental forms of nonviolent resistance in the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Though China's intensified repression has created the illusion of normalcy, Tibetans are ushering in a grassroots revolution — one that strengthens Tibetan nationhood and undermines the structure of Chinese colonialism.³⁰⁶

While it may appear unfair to target Chinese owned businesses, these businesses act as an extension of PRC's settler colonial project, wherein Tibetan lands become "Sinicized" and Tibetan businesses and means to livelihood are marginalized, reducing them to "ethnic minorities" within their own homelands.

This movement is notable because it also reflects Tibetan values of nonviolence. This ethic reflects the primary Buddhist ethic of "do no harm" and thus also appeals to Tibetan

³⁰⁵ Tenzin Dorjee, "Tibetans Make Gandhi Proud," *Global Post*, May 30, 2010. Accessed May 21, 2015. <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/worldview/100207/tibet-passive-resistance>.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

who are seeking refuge in cultural revitalization. Tibetans have also begun to use civil disobedience to protest resource extraction and the exploitation of land by Chinese industries. In May 2009, 500 Tibetans “linked arms” and sat down in protest, blocking the main road to a mine that had become an ecological disaster for the community:

Like many other Tibetan towns, Markham became a target of China’s resource extraction industry in 2007. The pollution from Zhongkai Co.’s mining operation poisoned the local water, and yaks and sheep began losing their hooves. By May 2009, 26 humans and 2,460 cattle had died in Markham as a result of Zhongkai.³⁰⁷

The townspeople had initially protested against Zhongkai through petition, but to no avail. However, their act of civil disobedience left the Chinese police in disbelief. At first they pointed their guns at the townspeople, but soon recognized that shooting them all would create a public relations scandal. The following month, the Chinese company agreed to cease operations, constituting to a major victory for these Tibetan villagers and a major lesson in the power of grassroots activism. Their tangible outcomes mark a real boon for Tibetans’ goal of greater agency but also as a concrete step towards liberation.

Lhakar’s power lies in its ability to unite Tibetans that are now living all over the globe. While the above examples convey the kinds of social and structural changes that are taking place in Tibet, Lhakar has become quite influential among Tibetan refugees, particularly youth. “Lhakar Diaries,” a blog dedicated to Lhakar related activity, is one place that Tibetan refugees discuss the meaning and practice of Lhakar. Described as:

[A] space for us Tibetans to come together to talk about what we think it means to be Tibetan in the diaspora context, for young Tibetans to explore our own thoughts, ideas and questions about our identities as Tibetans. We encourage young Tibetans to join us to post stories, thoughts, art, music, and videos of any sort that you think feel contributes to exploration and empowerment of the Tibetan identity.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ “What is Lhakar,” *Lhakar Diaries*, blog, accessed May 23, 2015. <http://lhakardiaries.com/about/>.

“Lhakar Diaries” is sustained by young Tibetans living in exile in the U.S., Canada or Europe, many of them well educated and in leadership positions with Students for a Free Tibet. Blog posts range from testimonials describing exile from Tibet and life in diaspora to an exegesis of non-violent revolution through the work of political scientist, Dr. Gene Sharp—a figure influential in the Arab Spring and now in Lhakar.³⁰⁹ The Lhakar pledge is referred to on the Lhakar.org site but the content of this pledge are not listed. However, I did find this pledge posted on “Lhakar Diaries.” Interestingly, the pledge describes the Lhakar movement as “remedial medicine for hundreds of diseases.” While there is no additional text to explain its meaning, the administrator noted that this particular pledge was posted by a Tibetan blogger on a website called “Tibet123.org” on June 9, 2010 and has since been removed by Chinese censors, I interpret it to mean that the movement seeks to bring healing to Tibetan “brothers and sisters” who have been dispossessed and thus, “made ill” by the Chinese occupation of Tibet.³¹⁰

“The Lhakar Pledge”:

1. The Nature of the Movement

This modest movement called Lhakar comes from the fact that I am Tibetan, and it is like a note reminding us that we are Tibetan in our daily life. Through this movement, we restore, renovate and keep our language, culture, identity and tradition.

Through this technique we can keep the people of the Snowland’s soul language till the end of humankind. This technique helps us retain Tibetan culture, Tibetan good morals and the traditions which are born from our soul language. This technique is easy and it is meaningful.

2. Anticipation

³⁰⁹ Mairi Mackey, “Gene Sharp: A Dictator’s Worst Nightmare,” *CNN*, June 25, 2012. Accessed May 23, 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/06/23/world/gene-sharp-revolutionary/index.html>.

³¹⁰ “What is Lhakar,” *Lhakar Diaries*, blog, accessed May 23, 2015. <http://lhakardiaries.com/about/>.

This Lhakar movement began in anticipation as remedial medicine for hundreds of diseases for Tibetan brothers and sisters who live in every region. I hope that many Tibetan brothers and sisters will participate in this movement without any invitation and follow the eight promises or keep even one of them, and practice it. I am requesting all Tibetans to keep this pledge as I kneel down on my knees and humbly fold my hands on my chest, and make this request innumerable times.

Lhakar:

- *I am Tibetan, from today I will speak pure Tibetan in my family.*
- *I am Tibetan, from today I will speak pure Tibetan whenever I meet a Tibetan.*
- *I am Tibetan, from today I will remind myself every day that I am a Tibetan till I die.*
- *I am Tibetan, from today I will wear only Tibetan traditional dress, chuba, every Wednesday.*
- *I am Tibetan, from today I will speak only Tibetan every Wednesday.*
- *I am Tibetan, from today I will learn Tibetan language.*
- *I am Tibetan, from today I will stop eating meat and only eat a vegetarian diet and gain more merit every Wednesday.*
- *I am Tibetan, from today I will only use Tibetan and speak Tibetan when I call or send a message to Tibetans*

The affective power transmitted in this pledge is startling. It parallels other commitments familiar to Tibetans, such as taking refuge with a teacher and taking a particular set of vows, such as the Five Precepts.³¹¹ Yet, the Lhakar pledge, solemn and dutiful in its air, appears as sacred as these religious commitments. Its explicit presence on the “Lhakar Diaries” blog site demonstrates sacred commitment to reclaiming Tibetan identity among Tibetan youth in exile.

One of the most brilliant aspects of Lhakar is that anyone can participate in its forms of resistance. Tibetans can “actively” resist for an entire “White Wednesday” by dressing in traditional clothing or speaking only Tibetan and still attend to their necessary daily activities. They need not “break the law” in order to express solidarity with others seeking independence. Protest has become “de-collectivized”—in essence, it is not reliant on a large group organizing a march or waving banners. One can protest by one’s self every day if one

³¹¹ The Five Precepts are the essential code of ethics for Buddhists and ask that one abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication

wishes through one's everyday choices. Dorjee describes Lhakar as a "paradigm shift" in how Tibetans conceptualize resistance that is "transforming the landscape of Tibetan activism."³¹² He explains that another critical factor in making this movement successful is its "weaponization of culture," meaning that Tibetans are using their own culture as a tool of resistance. Despite the fears over the 'inevitable' loss of Tibetan culture and identity through cultural genocide in Tibet and cultural assimilation in exile, Tibetans began to realize they had the power to retain and regenerate their cultural forms in order to celebrate Tibetan identity:

Lhakar is reversing this disempowering perception of culture. Since the rise of Lhakar, a growing number of Tibetans have begun reclaiming culture as a tool to fight for greater political rights. They are using Tibetan art, literature, poetry and music as vehicles for expressing their faith in the Dalai Lama, love of their homeland, and desire for freedom. Songs with politically charged lyrics or music videos with images of the Dalai Lama become instant hits, selling tens of thousands of copies. This upsurge in the public consumption of Tibetan music and poetry has spawned a modern renaissance in art and literature across the plateau. For the first time in decades, perhaps centuries, Tibetans are rediscovering how culture can save politics, instead of waiting for politics to save culture.³¹³

A third component of this movement that makes it successful is strategic noncooperation, where Tibetans choose to boycott Chinese businesses and support Tibetan businesses in order to boost the economic position of Tibetans. This kind of strategic activism is subversive and powerful yet will likely not get you killed or imprisoned like other forms of more visible protest.

Since 2008 many Tibetans have started eating only in Tibetan restaurants and buying only from Tibetan shops, prompting Chinese businesses to close down in several towns. This 'undeclared boycott' of Chinese-owned businesses, a poetic answer to China's 'undeclared martial law' in Tibet, invokes the principles of Gandhian-style economic noncooperation. For many years Tibetans in Nangchen (Chinese: Nangqen)

³¹² Tenzin Dorjee, "Why Lhakar Matters: The Elements of Tibetan Freedom," *Tibetan Political Review*, Jan 10, 1013, Accessed May 21, 2015.

<http://www.tibetanpoliticalreview.org/articles/whylhakarmatterstheelementsoftibetanfreedom>.

³¹³ Ibid.

had been buying vegetables at astronomical prices from Chinese grocers, whose monopoly over the vegetable market went unchallenged. But in early 2011, a group of Tibetans started boycotting the Chinese vegetable shops. Their power as consumers multiplied when others followed their example. Barely two months had passed when many of the Chinese groceries closed down for lack of business; in their place, new Tibetan vegetable vendors popped up.

These three elements work together to create a passive form of resistance that has become formidable. However, the most important outcome of the Lhakar movement is the way it has inspired Tibetan people to envision a liberated future:

For the first time in recent memory, Tibetans are seeing how their individual actions can change their collective future. The discourse of resistance is changing from one of victimhood to one that emphasizes agency, creativity and strategy. Until recently, most conversations started and ended with Tibetan helplessness in the face of Chinese ruthlessness. Today the underground salons and teahouses are brewing with discussions about resistance, strategy, and action.³¹⁴

Like African-Americans in the Jim Crow south and Native Americans participating in the American Indian movement, Tibetans are recognizing their own individual and collective power. In this way, they are already deeply entrenched in a decolonial project that involves Fanon's creative agency.

While resistance strategies among Tibetans will likely transform the face of occupied Tibet, it is the transformations taking place in the hearts and minds of Tibetans that is truly revolutionary. "The real Lhakar is a movement of the mind, and therefore invisible and untouchable to any number of troops, tanks, or bullets."³¹⁵ Tsepa Bayul, Communications Director for Students for a Free Tibet, notes that Lhakar is more than just cultural preservation, it is merging of two important components: agency and unity.³¹⁶ The "de-

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Tenzin Dorjee, "Why Lhakar Matters: The Elements of Tibetan Freedom," *Tibetan Political Review*, website, Jan 10, 2013, Accessed May 21, 2015. <http://www.tibetanpoliticalreview.org/articles/whylhakarmatterstheelementsoftibetanfreedom>.

³¹⁶ Tsepa Bayul, "How Lhakar is Transforming Tibetan Resistance," TEDx talk at Emory University, YouTube, May 27, 2014. <https://youtu.be/pAOjG1TohWI>. Bayul explains that this form of non-

collectivization” of activism allows all Tibetans to actively participate in the struggle for Tibet’s liberation, empowering them to live this truth in their everyday lives. The transnational nature of Lhakar as both a movement on the ground and present on social media connects Tibetans in exile with those in Tibet. Each group, both exile Tibetans and those living in Tibet, are able to not only be inspired by the political work done by the other, but also by hearing one another’s stories and struggles for a shared goal. In this way, they become united as a ‘people’ once again.

In the next section, I will demonstrate how the decolonization work done in the Tibetan Youth Congress, Students for a Free Tibet and the Lhakar movement all converge in exile through the political performance of the March 10 Tibetan Uprising Day march and rally. Through this march and rally, Tibetans express their solidarity with one another by wearing traditional Tibetan clothes, enumerating the many grievances they have against occupation and pursue Dharmic activity for the liberation for Tibet. This event tethers the many discourses of sovereignty, such as confirming the legitimate leadership of the TGiE and the Dalai Lama but also explicitly critiques settler colonialism by demonstrating how PRC claims to Tibet are not only illegitimate but also ecologically destructive. It was at this event that I first learned of Lhakar. Through the discourses presented at the March 10 event it became clear that Lhakar’s aim has been quickly assimilated among Tibetan refugees, who noted that they too have begun participating in “White Wednesday” by wearing traditional dress, eating traditional Tibetan food and speaking the Tibetan language on that day. In this way, Tibetans in New Mexico not only assert their “Tibetanness” but also their nationhood.

Tibetan Uprising Day March and Rally

violent protest confounded Chinese authorities because it did not quite break any laws, however, it successfully provides a means of expressing ‘Tibetanness,’ self-reliance and autonomy.

The first time I visited the Tibetan Association in Santa Fe was for the Tibetan Uprising Day march and rally. Tibetan Uprising Day is celebrated on March 10, which is the anniversary of the 1959 uprising of Tibetans against Chinese occupation. Luckily, in 2012 March 10 fell on a Saturday, making it easier for more people to attend. On this day, the local Tibetan community in Santa Fe marches from the Tibetan Association building to the historic plaza downtown and holds a rally commemorating the uprising and raising awareness in the local community about the continued occupation of Tibet. This ritual has been happening for years. Charlene, a long-time student of Tulku Sang Ngag's, described attending many of the March 10 marches over the years as well as the vigils in 2008 that would last for weeks. These vigils were expressions of solidarity with the violent protests that ravaged Tibet that year for the first time since the massive protest movements of the late 1980's and early 1990's.

It was a particularly chilly morning, overcast and about 23 degrees with bits of slushy snow on the ground. I arrived a little after 9:00 am, which is when the march was slated to start. The center is situated on a corner lot in a residential neighborhood of Santa Fe, 1.5 miles from the historic plaza. As I walked up, there were just a few people out front, mostly Westerners. Among them was my friend Charlene, who explained that things usually start a little late, "on Tibetan time." I smiled. I was familiar with a similar sense of time in my own community. "Everyone is still inside for the prayers," she said. I peeked my head inside and saw people packed into a hallway, the overflow from the large main room. Most of the Tibetan community was in this main room reciting prayers and mantras for those who had self-immolated as well as for the safety and wellbeing of the Tibetan people, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and the Panchen Lama, whose reincarnation had been kidnapped by Chinese

authorities many years before. Although Tibetans do not frame this event explicitly as “Dharmic activity,” it is clear that starting this event with prayers seeking to purify actions and create merit is an act that gives the event an air of sacrality.

Soon the Tibetan community in attendance began to line up in the center courtyard. There was a mix of excitement and solemnity in the air. It was a sacred event that reminded all present of the horrors of Tibetan occupation and their own statelessness. Several held flags; a few held banners, and one man held a large photo of The Dalai Lama and another of the Panchen Lama. Many others held signs or wore them assembled like an A-frame, so a message was visible on each side. Some held signs that demanded human rights in Tibet; others held signs with pictures of those who had self-immolated with the words “SELF-IMMOLATED FOR FREEDOM” written in block letters around them. I noticed that many of the people wearing these A-frame signs were elderly Tibetan women. Since there is little to no media attention given to these self-immolations in the U.S., this event sought to honor those who had given their lives to protest the cultural genocide in Tibet and raise awareness around the repercussions of cultural genocide. My eyes filled with tears. I thought about the horrors they must have faced in their own lifetimes and how saddening these events must be for them. The young generation presently residing in Tibet is fighting back with desperate measures against the violently repressive environment they live in.

Most Tibetans were wearing traditional dress, chubas, which are long elegant looking robe-like dresses and tunics. Married women wore a brightly colored apron over them. Men wore a similar woolen robe-like tunics over their trousers. Some wore wide yellow headbands with the Tibetan flag emblazoned on the front, or scarves that said “Free Tibet.”

Some of the young women wore traditional dress but if they did not, they wore some marker of “Tibetanness,” such as a scarf or hat with the Tibetan flag, as did the young men.



The vanguard of the Tibetan Uprising Day march in Santa Fe, 2012 (photo by author)



A sign with photos of Tibetans who had recently self-immolated in Tibet (photo by author)

As the march began, two people with loudspeakers, one towards the front and another towards the rear began chanting “What do we want? Free Tibet!” “When do we want it? Now.” “Religious Freedom. In Tibet.” “China. Out of Tibet!” “Human Rights. In Tibet”

“Long live, Dalai Lama!” “Release, release, Panchen Lama.” “China, China, China—Out, Out, Out!” The crowd repeated these slogans with conviction. As we walked along, I noticed Kalkyi with a large stack of papers, handing them out to passersby. I ran over to her and asked if I could help. They were flyers providing a brief history of the occupation of Tibet as well as a list of websites for more information. Kalkyi handed me the stack “pass these out to people watching the march.” “Okay!” I said and trotted along the march in my heavy boots, darting out to stopped cars or passers by to hand them a flyer. There appeared to be a lot of support for the march as it went along. Many non-Tibetan Santa Fe residents honked or waved, some gave the thumbs up. Santa Fe is a fairly progressive community. Although it is much more European-American than it used to be, it still remains quite diverse with large populations of Native and/or Hispano peoples, and politically liberal. As I trotted up to the front of the march to take pictures, I realized the procession was much bigger than I initially thought. There were over 100 persons marching, mostly Tibetan but also many non-Tibetans who were friends of the Tibetan community. Some of these people were Dharma practitioners; others were neighbors, friends from work or even families whose children had become friends in school. I noticed several signs expressing support in Spanish, reading “Libre Tibet,” or “Free Tibet” and “Los Derechos Humanos in El Tibet,” translating to “Human Rights in Tibet,” and even a couple in Chinese, which I couldn’t read.



Tibetan Uprising Day march to Santa Fe historic plaza, March 10, 2012. (picture by author)

The historic plaza of Santa Fe is often packed with tourists in the spring, summer and fall. Spring weather doesn't appear till late April, so the plaza was nearly empty. I felt a twinge of disappointment that few outside people would witness this rally. Native American crafts peoples usually set up shop to sell pottery, jewelry or other art forms, along the federal building, which faces the plaza. Because of the cold, there were far fewer there than usual, maybe twenty-five. Another twenty-five tourists or locals strolled around the central plaza, looking on curiously at the gathering crowd of marchers. The marchers who headed the procession tied their largest banners to the rails of the gazebo, which would serve as the platform for speakers. Others draped a large Tibetan flag as a backdrop behind where the speakers would stand in the gazebo, transforming this shared public space into a place of Tibetan commemoration and protest. Two large black signs flanked the gazebo stage; one

read “53 YEARS OF BRUTALITY, TYRANNY, RESISTANCE,” the other read “53 YEARS OF GENOCIDE, TORTURE, RESISTANCE.” Another sign read, “53rd TIBETAN NATIONAL UPRISING AGAINST THE CHINESE OCCUPATION OF TIBET (FREE TIBET).”



As the crowd huddled together, facing the stage, more people from around the plaza wandered over to check out what was happening. I noticed a couple of Native American men walk out to the street from their positions as vendors, craning their necks to look over the signs. As we stood there, the crowd grew denser, more supporters of the Tibetan community showed up to participate in the rally.



During the rally members of the Tibetan community provided the crowd with context for their presence. There were short speeches on the state of Tibet—the length of its occupation, the injustices that the Tibetans face. One of the grievances focused on the environmental destruction orchestrated by the Chinese in the name of “development.” The first speaker, Tashi, cited the irony of this label versus the reality wherein Tibetan lands are being used to store toxic nuclear waste, which is dangerous to those who rely on the rivers that flow from Tibet. If Tibet is really being “developed,” he asks rhetorically, then why is the foreign press not allowed in Tibet? The recent spate of self-immolations alone reveals how desperate Tibetans are for freedom. Tashi went on to implore the crowd to support freedom in Tibet “I request all the people here to support the Tibetan people... We need your

help by writing to your representative and congressman.”³¹⁷ Many people cheered and clapped after his impassioned plea.

Kathy, a European American woman in her mid-thirties, from Students for a Free Tibet, discussed the global support for Tibetan resistance. SFT is one of the largest international organizations working on behalf of Tibetan liberation, with 35 chapters around the world. She said that Tibetans in Tibet are “unequivocally calling for their freedom and were demonstrating that they would no longer be controlled by Beijing.” She goes on to explain that much of this resistance is non-violent, which reflects the central tactic of the resistance since the occupation.³¹⁸ These non-violent protests include nuns smuggling out freedom songs from prison, students taking to the streets demanding that Tibetan (and not Chinese) be the main language used in their curriculum and a group of villagers successfully stopping a mining project at a sacred mountain. She speaks expressly about the Lhakar (*lhag dkar*) movement where Tibetans intentionally wear Tibetan clothes, speak the Tibetan language, support Tibetan businesses and boycott Chinese shops on Wednesdays as a form of “non-cooperation” that directly challenges “the very infrastructure of China’s power.”³¹⁹ While there is little popular awareness of the Lhakar movement in the U.S., it has continued to gain momentum in Tibet and is now practiced in exile communities. This expression of non-violent resistance is exercised on Wednesdays because it is an auspicious day for the

³¹⁷ Audio recording of Tibetan Uprising Day march and rally, Santa Fe, NM, March 10, 2012.

³¹⁸ The claim that Tibetan resistance has always been overwhelmingly non-violent is contested. Many scholars claim that violent resistance has been ignored by Western scholars and press because it contradicts the Orientalist characterizations of Tibetans by the West as a wholly peaceful, religious people who have transcended their will for violence. While the religious discourse of Tibetan Buddhism aims to transcend negative emotions, such as anger that would lead to violence, violence as a means of resistance has a long history in Tibet, even before Chinese occupation. See Jane Ardley, *The Tibetan Independence Movement: Political, Religious and Gandhian Perspectives* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

³¹⁹ Audio recording of Tibetan Uprising Day march and rally, Santa Fe, NM, March 10, 2012.

Dalai Lama. She ends her speech by proposing that the “Tibetan struggle is a human struggle” and “when Tibet is free it will ripple through every social justice struggle just the like we’ve seen from the recent Arab Spring.” This draws a huge reaction of applause from the crowd. Kathy’s speech tethered the movement for Tibetan liberation facilitated by Students for a Free Tibet and *Lhakar* to social justice beyond Tibet’s cause. I interpret this to mean that the contemporary Tibet movement was invested in multiple movements for social justice beyond its own. The subtext of this speech was that success in Tibet’s movement would catalyze social change for others, just as the Arab Spring catalyzed uprisings in other parts of the world. In other words, freedom for Tibetans can be a catalyst for freedom among other oppressed people.

After Kathy’s speech, Kalkyi, who acted as the MC for this event, asked the crowd to observe a moment of silence for those in Tibet as well as those who were suffering similar injustices all over the world, echoing Kathy’s frame of solidarity with other oppressed peoples. After this period of silence, a prayer was sung collectively called ‘Words of Truth,’ led by Lama Thubten. The Dalai Lama composed this prayer in September 1960 in order to restore peace and self-determination to the Tibetan people.³²⁰ It reads in part as follows:

May this heartfelt wish of total freedom for all Tibet,
Which has been awaited for a long time,
be spontaneously fulfilled;
Please grant soon the good fortune to enjoy
The happy celebration of spiritual with temporal rule.

O protector Chenrezig, compassionately care for
Those who have undergone myriad hardships,
Completely sacrificing their most cherished lives,
bodies, and wealth,
For the sake of the teachings, practitioners,
people, and nation.

³²⁰ <http://www.dalailama.com/teachings/words-of-truth>, Accessed August 28, 2014.

Thus, the protector Chenrezig made vast prayers
Before the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
To fully embrace the Land of Snows;
May the good results of these prayers now quickly appear.
By the profound interdependence of emptiness
and relative forms,
Together with the force of great compassion
in the Three Jewels and their Words of Truth,
And through the power
of the infallible law of actions and their fruits,
May this truthful prayer be unhindered
and quickly fulfilled.³²¹

I recognized this song as one sung earlier at the Losar event at the KSK stupa just prior. This prayer implores the Buddhas and other spiritual beings to act on behalf of the “heartfelt wish” of peoples who seek liberation from suffering, particularly Tibetans, the people of “the Land of Snows.” This song indicates that Tibet’s liberation can be partially facilitated through the Buddhist metaphysical world—through “the force of great compassion in the Three Jewels and their Words of Truth” and “through the power of the infallible law of actions and their fruits.” The recitation of this prayer at the March 10th rally conveys that liberation for Tibet is negotiated on multiple fronts—through the spiritual and mundane worlds, which in a Buddhist framework are one and the same. In other words, spiritual action is understood to have material results.

A Westerner named Harmon Houghton, who is a longtime supporter of the Tibetan cause, was invited to read the proclamation in support of Tibet written by the then mayor of Santa Fe, David Cross. He discussed the kinds of strides made by the exile community, by recalling one of the first March 10th demonstration in New York City in 1982. At that time, there were only fifty Tibetans living in New York, they, along with “a handful of sympathizers” protested at a plaza two blocks from the UN. After what appeared might be a

³²¹ <http://www.dalailama.com/teachings/words-of-truth>, Accessed August 28, 2014.

lonely morning of chipping away ice from the area to clear it for the event, two busloads of Mongolians from Jackson, NJ arrived to stand in solidarity with the protestors, warming the event. He notes that crowds have since become larger, developing into a global movement in support of Tibet. He ends with a quote from Gandhi, “civil disobedience only works in civil societies” explaining that the government of China is “not a civil society, their stated goal is world dominance and conquest, whether it’s [in the] political, economic or spiritual domains” and must be stopped.³²² Harmon’s statement, like Kathie’s from Students for a Free Tibet, attests to the ways the ‘Tibet movement’ has become an international struggle that includes both among Tibetans and non-Tibetans.

Sonam, a young Tibetan woman in her late teens, read a statement by the elected head of the Tibetan government in exile, Lobsang Sangay. The statement notes the difficulty many Tibetans had with the transition to a democratic government by the Tibetan government in exile. This transition has been undertaken for several reasons, some would say to please the “democratic” systems favored in the West. Others describe it as means to split politics and religion, reflecting the ‘separation of church and state’ also valued in the West. The statement acknowledged Tibetan people were initially reluctant to make a change to an elected government. Even the Chinese government warned it would weaken the Tibetan cause for liberation, but the statement claims otherwise. The newer democratic government in exile, along with the coming generation of educated Tibetans, will sustain the movement until “freedom is restored in Tibet.”³²³ Although China claims that Tibetans are free, the statement describes the lack of democratic transparency in China. Tibetans are a minority among “elected” officials and those who own businesses in their own nation. In an even more

³²² Audio recording of Tibetan Uprising Day march and rally, Santa Fe, NM, March 10, 2012.

³²³ Ibid.

scathing indictment of colonialism, Sonam notes that Tibetans also suffer from 40% unemployment. Tibet's oppression is not isolated, only affecting six million Tibetans, but actually harms the entire planet, particularly ecologically. Tibet's glaciers are the source of water for 1.5 billion people. In addition, decades of resource extraction by the Chinese to benefit its own economy have razed half of Tibet's forests. In essence, the statement was a critical assessment of the effects of PRC colonialism.

The statement went on to discuss the hypocrisy of Tibetan freedom espoused by the Chinese government's party line. Tibetans have never experienced the "socialist paradise" that was promised to them when China invaded in 1949. Instead, they are treated as "second-class citizens," are "arrested and fired upon and killed" when they gather peacefully to demand the basic human rights outlined in the constitution and live in a state of "undeclared Marshall law." It is under these extreme conditions of oppression that Tibetans have resorted to extreme measures, such as self-immolation. The statement asks that the PRC accept the Tibetan government in exile's 'middle way' policy, which would ensure autonomy for Tibet, even though Tibet has historically been an independent nation. Sonam was hopeful that the new leadership in China would recognize that a "hard line path" in Tibet has been unsuccessful. The statement urges dialogue and a peaceful resolution. It ends with an appeal to the UN to investigate human rights abuses in Tibet and to send a special rapporteur and asks that the international community also send a fact-finding committee into Tibet. The Kashag, the Tibetan cabinet, requests that prayers be recited for those in Tibet every Wednesday. In addition, it asks that young Tibetans wear traditional clothing, speak Tibetan and eat traditional foods on these days as well, in essence, asking Tibetans in exile to honor the Lhakar movement waged in Tibet. It invites all to generate debate on Tibet, arrange

activities to create awareness of Tibet's cause and to contact all political officials in one's exile community to agitate for Tibet.

It is these kinds of statements by the Tibetan government in exile that have been framed by some scholars as fomenting a contrived nationalism among Tibetans. These statements have a nationalist slant, but this form of essentialism is strategic and distills Tibet's cause for Tibetans in exile as well as for non-Tibetans who may wish to participate in some way. Tibetan scholar Yosay Wangdi frames Tibetan identity in diaspora as a discursive product of the exile community "invested heavily in such representations for its own tactical purpose."³²⁴ This "strategic essentialism" is invested in a common "goal of reclaiming a homeland" as well as "supporting the belief that Tibet was once an independent country."³²⁵ This newly fashioned nationalism works to assert Tibet's position as historically independent. Wangdi explains that this new articulation of nationalism in exile is motivated by the horrors of settler colonialism "The cultural genocide and ethnic cleansing in Tibet have driven the diaspora community to nurture a 'national' identity, to uphold their political rights and boost the morale of the people. The quest to rescue traditional meaning and to create new meanings embodies the Tibetan search for meaningful self and group identity."³²⁶ In other words, the pan-Tibetan identity that has emerged in exile serves as the means for cultural survival in the face of cultural erasure.

The next speaker, Steven Fox, who had worked on behalf of political prisoners in Tibet since 1996, described a dire situation wherein there are 15%-20% more political prisoners in 2012 than in 2000. He explains that these political prisoners are not just imprisoned; they are living in conditions like the Jews were in Auschwitz. To call it prison is

³²⁴ Wangdi, "Echoes of an Agonized Nation," 8.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

not quite accurate; it is genocide. He explains that until we can convince Americans that this level of genocide, comparable to the holocaust, is what is really happening there, the world will not truly understand the extent of Chinese violence against Tibetans. In 2003, U.S. Senator Tom Udall wrote a resolution condemning the actions of China in its use of force against Tibetans. Fox says it was initially stalled because it was “too critical of China,” but, after Fox sent out thousands of letters to the Republican constituents of these reluctant Senators, the bill passed unanimously.³²⁷ He believed that U.S. senators and representatives can and will do more to help the Tibetan cause. He called for people to contact them and ask that they form a committee to visit Tibet, visit their regional prisons there and “face down this monstrous abuse of human rights.”³²⁸ There were cheers and applause at his suggestions. Steven raised a critical point. Western states generally agree that the Jewish holocaust was worthy of intervention—why does it ignore the Tibetan one? He implies that if international powers understood the degree of violence and punitive conditions Tibetans live under, they would intervene. Clearly U.S. political leaders, at least on the local level, have made efforts to acknowledge the oppression and violence faced by Tibetans. Although there has been little effort by the U.S. government, via its foreign policy, to actually intervene on behalf of Tibetans, several of my consultants believed that this might happen. Others, as we have seen, doubted this possibility because the U.S. economy was so dependent on China. Many agreed that a public condemnation by the U.S. and other powerful governments around the world might be a catalyst for some forms of intervention.

The rally ended with the Tibetan Uprising Day song and the Tibetan national anthem. The procession lined up again and headed back to the Tibetan Association where the

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

community would share food and butter tea. After the return march, Charlene and I crowded into the main room of the Tibetan Association center and chatted with other Tibetans and Tibetan supporters. Everyone sat cross-legged on the floor. Small children played in the hallway and in the courtyard. Although the morning had been somber, there was a joyous feeling after a successful march and rally. The community center buzzed with activity for most of the mid-day. People sat joking, gossiping and visiting with friends and family. Once food was served, the cooks called all the non-Tibetans to serve themselves first, since they were guests. As we were eating, I greeted some of the consultants I had recently met. I began speaking with the man next to me, named Sonam. He explained that the local chapter of the Tibetan Youth Congress, of which he was the head, organized this March 10 event. He pulled a t-shirt out of his bag that had “FREE TIBET” written on the front and their logo emblazed on the back. He said that there were about fifteen members of the Tibetan Youth Congress in Santa Fe, mostly young people in their late teens and twenties. As explained earlier in this chapter, Tibetans in Dharamsala living in exile started the Tibetan Youth Congress in October 1970. Their aim was and still is “complete independence of Tibet.”³²⁹ They do not want compromise; they want independence. This is also Sonam's view and the view of many of the young people who sat around him—all members of the TYC. While I had heard mixed expressions of support for the ‘middle way’ policy among the exile community in New Mexico, the fact that the TYC had organized the March 10 event and the discourses expressed at this event clearly support independence tells me that many people in the Tibetan exile community are also invested in complete independence—at least on some level, even if

³²⁹ The Tibetan Youth Congress is a non-governmental organization with 30,000 members worldwide and chapters all over the world. They agitate on behalf of Tibet. Their goal is not autonomy but the independence of Tibet. Although it espouses a different position from that of the Tibetan government in exile, it has the support of His Holiness. Accessed August 28, 2014. <http://tibetanyouthcongress.org/about-tyc>.

they do not think it is entirely realistic given China's power. If anything, there is an ambivalence expressed about both positions.



Tibetan Youth Congress t-shirt and logo for the New Mexico chapter, located in Santa Fe. It depicts the NM flag logo, a stylized Zuni Pueblo symbol of life, over the silhouette of Tibet. (photo by author)

For instance, I visited the Tibetan Association a month after the March event, on April 15, 2012 for a talk by Chitue Tashi Namgyal. Chitue is a member of the parliament of the Tibetan government in exile. He lives in Seattle and was traveling the country to speak with Tibetan communities and rally them to write to their representatives and congresspersons about the situation in Tibet. There were about twenty-five people in attendance all Tibetan except for myself, my friend Charlene and Kathie from Students for a Free Tibet. More than half were over thirty-five years old. There were a few elderly people and about a dozen young people. Again, Kalkyi acted as the MC. She introduced Mr. Namgyal and he spoke for about twenty-five minutes on the current plan among Tibetans in exile to rally for Tibet's cause, suggesting statist approaches, such as continuing to lobby

their congressman and circulate petitions. The floor was then opened for questions. I asked a question about the ‘middle way’ approach. How would autonomy be negotiated with an uncooperative settler nation like China? I contextualized my concern by explaining that I was Native-American/Mexican-American. My life and the lives of my peoples were still shaped by the settler state of the U.S. We continued to live with various forms of dispossession, while simultaneously being told that we are citizens with equal rights. He explained that international support was key. Tibetans needed the support of world governments and the UN. Many people in the crowd nodded and appeared to support Mr. Namgyal. Others were silent and appeared unconvinced. One woman expressed her frustration at these methods. She wondered if the U.S. could really intervene on their behalf if they have such a delicate relationship with China. He finished the talk by urging the community to retain its language and culture. He and others present, such as Kalkyi, emphasized that it might be the most important thing they could do for Tibet. In other words, while the ‘middle way’ plan may not be ideal, Tibetans need not think it perfect in order to support its structures. In the meantime, they could focus on retaining their ‘Tibetanness’ for the sake of their survival.

Still another dimension to this debate between the ‘middle way’ and complete independence, is one of forgiveness and reconciliation, expressed most articulately by my consultant, Rigdzin, in the previous chapter. This position acknowledges the larger karmic forces at work in the occupation of Tibet by China and understands that the only way out of this karmic debt is through inner transformation and continued practice, which would create merit and purify negative karma. Relatedly, simply having more compassion and understanding for others as being just as important as one’s self can also contribute to wider social and political changes, as evidenced by the civil rights and even suffragette movements.

At the core of these movements lay an assertion of humanity—that woman or African American are just as human as white men and thus deserving of the same rights. Following Fanon’s theorization of decolonization as ultimately acts in which one asserts one’s full humanity as a counter movement to structures that objectify and dehumanize, we can understand discourses or action that serve to humanize Tibetans to the Chinese can productively work towards Tibetan independence. This scenario of recognition (and humanization) was expressed to some degree at the March 10 event as well. After speaking to Sonam and members of the TYC, I spoke to a Chinese American woman visiting from out of town. She explained that as a person of Chinese descent she was horrified by the Chinese occupation of Tibet and so made an effort to attend March 10 events in order to show her solidarity and support for Tibetans. The group of Tibetans she sat with listened to her words with patience and gratitude. They thanked her and hugged her goodbye when she left. The profound feelings of peace and understanding that were shared between this woman and the group of Tibetans she sat with palpable. On some level, many Tibetans recognize that any hope for Tibet’s occupation to end lay in epiphanies such as these, wherein the Chinese people choose to resist and work to dismantle continued Tibetan occupation.

Conclusion

While Tibetan resistance is varied, it consists of both structural (marches, rallies, petitions) and personal or subjective processes (asserting Tibetan identity, making merit). Although the Tibetan community in exile is physically estranged from their homeland of Tibet, they have successfully organized a complex global network of institutions that propel the Tibet movement. The continued dialectic between Tibetans in exile and those in Tibet is exemplified best in the Lhakar movement, which began in Tibet but is also now observed

among Tibetans in exile. These two spheres of the movement are mutually reinforcing and an excellent example of the populist dimension of the Tibet movement. The Tibetan community in exile is invested in the TGiE's position and strategies for liberation, exemplified by the March 10 statement read at their rally, lay Tibetans understand themselves as the innovative 'foot soldiers' of the exile government's vision. Their government has a particular kind of fight for liberation, one negotiated through diplomacy and other political strategies. However, the lives of Tibetan lay people have become politicized in a way that was not necessary before pre-Chinese invasion. Lay Tibetans are now in a position where they are not only internalizing the TGiE's strategy for liberation, they are offering their own visions of resistance and liberation. The Lhakar movement is one such strategy. When Tibetans in exile wear Tibetan clothes, speak Tibetan and consciously observe "Tibetan-ness," they not only nurture Tibetan cultural retention, but also practice a shared resistance with their countrymen in Tibet. When the Tibetan community of New Mexico listens collectively to the stories of dispossession and unjust conditions in Tibet—as they did during the March 10 rally—they act as witnesses to these events. If the powerful nations of the world cannot or will not intervene in the Chinese occupation of Tibet, Tibetans in Tibet know that their people in exile are holding marches and rallies and even observing Lhakar in solidarity with their fight for liberation. These acts of solidarity, both the March 10 event and Lhakar serve as a binding thread—above religious expression—that ties these communities together and ultimately strengthens their resolve as they fight for freedom.

Lhakar, in particular, has become a cultural signifier, a short hand for cultural regeneration and assertion. Its mention brings the whole context of colonization, dispossession and cultural erasure to mind—Tibetans immediately recognize its value and

why it matters to reclaim their identities in this way. Lhakar names an ongoing and cumulative effort to retain ‘Tibetanness’ for those in exile and within Tibet. Lhakar serves as a platform for performance and shared cultural expression for these two groups, who have had appeared to be drifting further apart. Through online discourse, such as blogs and YouTube clips, along with discourse exchanged at Tibetan in exile events, we see that they are in fact returning to one another, acting in solidarity, sharing stories of courage and triumph. The mutual support inspires and nurtures, affirming a nation that exists beyond a bounded territory, a nation that has—like structures of empire—also become de-territorialized. While scholars have debated whether Lhakar is a political project or a cultural one, we can understand these spheres as mutually constitutive. Lhakar embodies the logic that the personal is political—that what we choose to wear, eat and act in the world speaks to one’s positionality and allegiances. These choices can either affirm or refuse the objectification of racialization and also transform spaces—Tibetanizing them. When Tibetans in Tibet practice Lhakar, they are expressing their peoplehood and wish for Tibetan liberation as well as reclaiming Tibet as their own. When Tibetans in exile practice Lhakar and the myriad other pursuits that fall under the rubric of the Tibet movement, they are expressing these same aims, often within spaces that they have consciously ‘Tibetanized’ to strengthen their claims. Both moves to ‘Tibetanize’ spaces assert Tibetan sovereignty.

Lhakar mends a once fraying thread between Tibetans exiles and those in Tibet. The movement as praxis and performance contributes to a dynamic exchange between these two groups, connecting them across territories to exist as a people once again. When Tibetans participate in Lhakar, they convey that they are still ‘Tibetan’ and will remain Tibetan indefinitely despite the increasingly surreal and desperate attempts to control their behavior.

Through Lhakar Tibetans in Tibet are enabled to assert a powerful agency that expertly refuses control by working within the narrow confines of what has been deemed permissible. Tibetans in exile are honoring the struggle in Tibet through the Lhakar movement and multiple forms of agitation on its behalf. They recognize that this newly strengthened thread between them serves as the basis for a new Tibetan nation that exists beyond territorial borders.

Conclusion

Summary

This study sought to understand the religious dimensions of Native American and Tibetan projects of decolonization in diaspora. I utilized situated ethnographic field research to explore the relationship between religious practice and *view* in diaspora and modes of resistance to settler colonialism. These two communities are quite different, hailing from different geographic spaces, different cultural frameworks, yet they share some interesting parallels. My work highlights their parallel struggles for sovereignty and demonstrates that religious ideas and practices not only shape the personal restoration necessary for sovereignty but also contribute to community regeneration. The challenges that these two communities face as peoples altered by empire are daunting yet religious continuity and regeneration appears critical to how they survive. Using Alfred's theory of cultural *regeneration*—wherein Indigenous communities can best support their efforts for sovereignty through “conscious re-traditionalizing,”—my research illustrates the ways that cultural regeneration strengthens and affirms these communities as people rooted in their traditional lifeways. Cultural *regeneration* also serves as a form of survival, solidarity and resistance. By actively regenerating as a people through multiple forms of cultural revitalization—chiefly religious practice and *view*—Native and Tibetan peoples living in diaspora reaffirm their peoplehood and thus, sovereignty.

In addition, cultural and religious regeneration supports the transformation of spaces, wherein Tibetan and Native people's reterritorialization of diaspora spaces. Tibetan lamas supplicate the land through Buddhist ritual and the building of stupas and Dharma centers, in order to “plant the seed of Buddhism” in the U.S., providing sacred spaces for Tibetans to

convene and practice Dharma. Native people continue or revitalize sacred relationships to the land and recognize it as a source of *spiritual power* and guidance. By “Indigenizing” or “Tibetanizing” diaspora spaces, Native and Tibetan peoples reinforce the religious needs of the community as well as reaffirm their respective cultural and metaphysical frameworks. As they build new ‘spaces’ that reflect their own values and lifeways, these two communities envision alternatives to consumer driven statist systems that value individualism and the objectification of the earth. In contradistinction, Native peoples recognize the earth as a living being that must be treated with care and thus act as its stewards. Tibetans create multiple ‘Tibetan’ spaces, in their homes, Dharma centers and a community center because they recognize that this nurtures ‘Tibetan’ identity and ultimately ensures their survival as a people.

Native peoples are revitalizing Native lifeways in diverse ways. The many narratives I collected demonstrate that healing historical trauma and severed relationships to the spirit world are understood as acts of decolonization. Others recognize that spiritual maturity necessitates a transformative process wherein one’s suffering is transmuted into insight and greater awareness of the spiritual responsibilities one has in this life. In turn, these insights are empowering and inspire new forms of agency directed at helping others. This transformative process is described as decolonization by some consultants. Consultants noted that they can “plant themselves in the land” by reconnecting to Spirit wherever they are, arguing that the whole earth is sacred and thus that a sacred connection to the spirit world can be made wherever one lives. Despite estrangement from home communities, urban Natives forge new ‘tribes’ and ‘Indian way’ family that reinforce their Native identities but also assert their relationship to the land. In this way, they ‘re-indigenize’ the land as a source of

sacred *spiritual power* and affirm their position as its stewards. Concerted efforts for structural decolonization are generally pursued from an Indigenist agenda, which prioritizes the lived experiences and needs of Native peoples. Living in urban spaces engenders a greater audience for these forms of resistance, nurturing intersectional struggles rooted in anti-oppression politics. My study demonstrates that Native religious practice is alive and well outside of bounded Native nations but still tethered to the land.

Several consultants who had lost touch with their traditional religious knowledge for one or more generations noted the importance of an ancestral memory, which allowed them to revitalize their sacred relationship to the spirit world intuitively. They observed that this form of embodied spirituality not only transforms spaces but also diffused the illusion that individuals are discrete. The consultants that testified to healing from historical trauma attributed this healing to a regenerated relationship to the spirit world and its guidance but also to the recognition that they are co-extensive with the unfolding process of all life in the universe and thus, they feel deeply connected and invested in the welfare of others. In this ways, they recognize the potential power of spiritual practice to create social change and transform the greater world. For instance, the cultural regeneration explored by La Plazita has shifted the discourse for many Native and Chicano youth from street life as inevitable to making a positive impact in one's community. The indigenist agenda of (un)Occupy, emphasizes that health and wellbeing are deeply tethered to economic injustice and so actively educate the Albuquerque community on the history of colonialism while carrying out protests, teach-ins and events like Medicine for the People by the People. They see themselves as actively exploring what shared power looks like, and thus, envisioning new forms of community that are not reliant on coercive forms of governance.

Tibetans in diaspora are evaluating their traditional approach to ‘religion and politics combined’ through new articulations of resistance that recognize religious activity as a form of resistance. Among the diaspora community, a spate of self-immolations among monks, nuns, and lay peoples in Tibet along with other forms of religious protest are recognized as Dharma activities—Dharma activities that have social and political consequences. In essence, these actions are intended to benefit others and thus, act as a religious response to colonialism that is understood to create merit and thus purify negative karma. Most of my Tibetan consultants viewed the occupation of Tibet as a result of negative karma—karma accrued by the Tibetan people as a group— and so pursued Buddhist practice in order to purify past negative deeds, create merit, and create auspicious connections to Tibetans who may be suffering in Tibet. While some of these tactics, such as petitions and marches, appear overtly political they are primarily rooted in the intention to help others, inspired by Dharma, and so become Dharma activities. Buddhist practice also ameliorates the grief and fear caused by dispossession and diaspora, thus facilitating the personal process of decolonization.

Tibetans recognize that their suffering provides them with an opportunity for a greater sense of compassion and deep spiritual insights, which makes them better able to help others and, in turn, transform their communities. Like their Native brothers and sisters, they state that their personal transformation is dynamic and exponential, rippling out to transform others and even the transformation of spaces. These transformations are understood to redress the essential ignorance of wrong view and support a compassionate recognition of one’s interdependent nature. In addition, Tibetan resistance movements are supporting cultural regeneration in a more pointed way. The Lhakar movement, in particular, is a

grassroots non-cooperative movement in Tibet that uses the reassertion of Tibetan dress, language and customs as a form of nonviolent protest. It has catalyzed both the subjective and structural components of decolonization in Tibet. Tibetan refugees also participate in Lhakar, known as “white Wednesday,” in order to assert their solidarity and support of occupied Tibet. They also celebrate Tibetan Uprising Day with a demonstration like march and rally, which commemorates Tibetan resistance. My research demonstrates that the solidarity created by the dialectic performance of the Lhakar movement and the March 10 Uprising Day event works to solidify Tibetan peoplehood and thus, sovereignty. In this way, Tibetans envision a sovereign nation that exceeds the bounded territory of ‘Tibet.’

While this study focuses on the similarities between transnational Native American and Tibetan struggles for decolonization, there are certainly critical differences. Contemporary discourse on Native self-determination emphasizes the need to integrate the two dimensions of decolonization, a la Fanon, which understand ‘liberation’ to be won through both structural and personal (even spiritual) means. ‘Decolonization’ as a discourse has gained so much traction within Native American it is nearly ubiquitous. Conversely, discourse on decolonization as a ‘personal’ phenomenon—as opposed to solely a structural project—is essentially non-existent among Tibetans. Native Americans are engaged in a struggle for self-determination in a land that was formerly theirs. One of the complicating factors of Native decolonization movements are the increasing number of Native people who live off reservation and in urban areas—about two-thirds of the current U.S. Native population. As ‘transnationals,’ urban Indians have begun to explore what decolonization looks like within their own diaspora spaces, often by recognizing that their ancestral connections to these land bases pre-date the current colonial era. Transnational Tibetans,

conversely, live in foreign lands and thus must negotiate their own struggle for self-determination through networks of resistance that fall under the rubric of the ‘Tibet movement.’ While Tibetans living in the U.S. are far from their homeland and the most acute forms of colonization, they have found creative ways—social media, YouTube, blogs, cell phones—to connect and work in solidarity with Tibetans in Tibet.

In addition to these differences, there were fascinating and sometimes curious discussions among Tibetan and Native people about their common plight. Among my Tibetan consultants, several remarked that Native American people appeared to have similar “beliefs,” generally religious, such as regarding the land as sacred but also honoring unseen spiritual phenomena as they did. One man believed that Native American people were actually related to Tibetans, that they had common ancestors, which accounted for their occasional phenotypic similarities. While many of my Native American consultants also expressed a curiosity about Tibetan people and even sympathy for their own struggle of colonization, they appeared reluctant to support them when I suggested they may want to attend their March 10 Tibetan Uprising Day event. Similarly, Tibetan people rarely acknowledged the irony or even complexity around their presence as refugees on Native lands; however, I attributed this to the fact that colonization in the U.S. has become so naturalized that discourses around Native sovereignty are relegated to mostly Native circles.

Implications

We can better understand these two decolonization projects as responding to the core logic of violence that exist at the heart of any colonial project—the creation of the racialized Other, which serves to objectify in order to justify dispossession. This study explores how Tibetan and Native people living in diaspora resist this kind of racialized objectification and

relatedly its cultural erasure but also speaks to the ways religious retention and revitalization shift these discourses to empower colonized communities. White privilege is the idea that settler culture in the U.S. is normative and that non-white ideas and knowledge are non-normative. There are parallels to this in China, where we see Han Chinese privilege playing out in occupied Tibet in such a way that Chinese culture and language have become normative, marginalizing Tibetan lifeways. Both Tibetan and Native peoples refuse racialization, marginalization and cultural erasure. They seek liberation and sovereignty from the settler state but are also ultimately seeking decolonization, where they are ontologically liberated and empowered to act for their own benefit. This refusal to be settled, fully assimilated, or invested in a neocolonial model of living suggests the inevitable failure of imperial projects.

This study also makes clear that decolonization is a dynamic process, wherein one's views and perceptions of self shift to accommodate a new relationship to power—one's own power and that of the state. Colonization disempowers and so decolonization necessitates counter actions, such as cultural resurgence, that re-empowers and nurtures personal agency. These actions are iterative and over time refine one's ability to survive and thrive under occupation and in diaspora. My research indicates that revitalizing one's traditional worldview can critically contribute to a radical re-envisioning of one's agency. The research on Tibetan responses to religious persecution and trauma indicate that that their religious worldview prevents them from internalizing colonial violence. Their reliance on religious practice helps them assuage their grief and fear. The recognition that suffering is the result of karma helps prevent them from personalizing these events and enables them to feel compassion for others who may have suffered in similar ways. My Native consultants testify

that they feel healing from historical trauma and unburdened from the past by reconnecting with a loving and accepting Native community and revitalizing one's relationship to the land and spirit world. These results indicate that trauma itself is not permanent or fixed but can be radically altered and even eliminated through a shift in one's perception of self in relation to others and through renewed relationships that are reinforcing of one's agency.

Another critical feature of both Native and Tibetan peoples is the recognition of a metaphysical world that is interrelated. While the details of these worldviews differ, they produce similar results: wherein Native and Tibetan peoples carefully guard their attitudes and actions in the world since they recognize they will produce material results. These worldviews also serve as an opportunity to exercise agency directed at liberation, wherein religious practice is understood to either "purify" negative karma or catalyze guiding spiritual power that works to shift material conditions. Returning to the issue of power, by recognizing a world in which all phenomena are related, Native communities are enabled to explore what shared power looks like in response to unequal power dynamics and injustice. Similarly, a developed Buddhist practice enables Tibetan people to re-evaluate their own relationships to power and critically re-assess how their attitudes and actions affect others as well as change their attitudes and actions to create more just and loving relationships. Interactions with others—relating, giving, receiving—propels this cycle. Native American views of interrelatedness are somewhat diverse yet share some essential themes with other Indigenous communities around the world. While scholars have argued that Indigenous people are not seeking equality but collective rights,³³⁰ this research illustrates that many Indigenous and colonized peoples seek autonomy through processes of decolonization but also seek to live in

³³⁰ Ronald Niezen, *Origins of Indigenism*.

a more just world that reflects essential values rooted in a law of interdependence. In addition, thinking about one's self as interdependent, or coextensive, with others resists the banality of imperialism and structural violence. It forces the world community to recognize that one's actions are not discrete but instead intimately connected.

More specifically, we can understand the decolonization work of urban Native peoples as transforming the settler state from the inside out. Their regeneration as Indigenous peoples, united in their struggle to survive amidst a violent settler state, only strengthens their resolve to coalesce as Indigenous "nations" in diaspora. They do not look to the settler state as a source of political or moral authority but have instead developed multiple points of social and political leadership, based on sacred relationships to land and one another, that resonate with a larger movement for Indigenous nationhood hemispherically and defies the settler state. Similarly, Tibetans in exile recognize a de facto government in exile that work on their behalf. Tibetans in Tibet also look to this de facto government as their legitimate leadership. In this way, both communities refuse to be "settled" by settler colonialism but also offer up creative alternatives to settler governance that reflect their needs and values as peoples.

In this way, this study can help us understand the way that localized forms of resistance to settler colonialism as specific and local phenomena can also resonate with larger processes of resistance to empire as de-territorialization. Nation-states are now marginalized in relation to global forces such as multinational corporations and thus, contemporary forms of 'empire' are not necessarily territorially bounded. Nation-states are still clearly enacting settler colonial violence on occupied peoples, but even nation-states are constrained and controlled by transnational forces of empire wherein the forms of power that are more

diffuse. The grassroots forms of activism employed by both Tibetan and Native peoples in diaspora speak to hemispheric and even global processes of empire. While they may play out in localized contexts, these actions and modes of resistance are shared via social media and responded to dialectically in other parts of the world, by countrymen and others who are allies and stand in solidarity, thus, contributing to a more diffuse yet cumulative resistance movement that seeks to dismantle imperialism, empire and even all forms of oppression. In addition, these resistance movements theorize a global citizenship invested in justice for all peoples—potentially rendering the nation-state obsolete.

This research also sheds light on the failings of liberal subjectivity that have become a naturalized discourse in human rights struggles. Unfortunately, liberalism sustains and protects white privilege and colonizing discourses in the U.S. and elsewhere because it is built on a social evolutionary schema, which assumes that less ‘civilized’ nations and people are seeking ‘development’ and industrialization in order to participate in a global economy and ‘democratic’ governance:

“While we can make corrections to “ideal” liberal theory, these corrections are at base additive. They don’t fundamentally restructure the foundation of liberal society — namely the promise of universal and equal protections alongside a systematic impulse to violence in the name of “civilizing” the heathens, or for the purposes of maintaining “law and order.” At base, this is what the killing of Michael Brown, and the ensuing encounters between the police and protesters in Ferguson, Mo., have exposed: peace, safety, recognition of one’s humanity, law, order, rights will be doled out — or withheld — only in terms that allow those in authority, those with wealth, to remain comfortable.”³³¹

These same liberal logics, based on principles such as ‘freedom’ and ‘development’ are used by the PRC to unevenly protect and even legally exploit Tibetans. Liberalism essentially victimizes those who do not fall into its category of those deemed ‘desirable’ and thus,

³³¹ Falguni A. Sheth, “How Liberalism and Racism are Wed,” *New York Times*, Opinionator Blog, 02/27/15. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/02/27/how-liberalism-and-racism-are-wed/>.

worthy of citizenship and rights—white males in the U.S. and cadres of the CCP in China. Neoliberal subjectivity emphasizes one’s own wellbeing, the pursuit of self help and the reliance on the market economy to accomplish this goal, while ignoring the structural causes of suffering, such as structural racism. In contradistinction, the co-extensive subjectivities of Native and Tibetan peoples theorize a quite different approach to governance—one that recognizes the relationships between peoples and causes and conditions. Using discourses that emphasize one’s responsibility versus one’s rights, these two communities pursue healing and personal transformation while simultaneously seeking to benefit others. In this way, we can understand interdependent lifeways as a socio-political framework that de-centers hegemony based on racial supremacy and continued neoliberal structures of power. While a human rights discourse focuses on individual rights, a responsibilities discourse rooted in the law of interdependence recognizes that one’s health and wellbeing is contingent on others and thus seeks the welfare of the collective instead of the individual.

This new responsibilities discourse can potentially transform movements for social justice that are currently focused on human rights by demanding that we evaluate this human-centered project and instead explore an earth-centered project of social justice. For instance, there is already a movement in Bolivia led by Indigenous leaders, like Evo Morales, that have extended ‘human rights’ to mother earth. While this strategy uses a ‘human rights’ discourse to act responsibly to the earth and its inhabitants, it troubles the notion that rights are reserved for humans only. A responsibilities discourse improves upon this logic by acknowledging that people and natural phenomena are co-extensive and thus transforms the impetus to protect ‘individuals’ and their rights to a need to protect the network of relations that constitute the world.

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