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Rightful Relations: Toward Decolonial Methodologies in Community-Based Art-Making Practices

Author

Aguilar, Lili Flores

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Rightful Relations: Toward Decolonial Methodologies in Community-Based Art-Making Practices

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in

Culture and Performance

by

Lili Flores Aguilar

2024

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Rightful Relations: Toward Decolonial Methodologies in Community-Based Art-Making Practices

by

Lili Flores Aguilar

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor Allen Fraleigh Roberts, Committee Co-Chair

Professor Alexander James Flynn, Committee Co-Chair

This dissertation takes an emic approach to understanding collaborative processes between Native and Indigenous peoples and neoliberal institutions such as universities, design-studios, and museums using arts-based research and production methods and modalities of expression. Qualitative analysis of four auto-ethnographic examples represents an emergent interdisciplinary phenomenon that can be considered art (Clifford 1986: 3-4). Each chapter includes stories embedded within the auto-ethnographic account which reflects attributes of *decolonial de-linking* (Mignolo 2007) that Indigenous aesthetics perform through *axiological innovations* (Bang et al 2015). I analyze the embedded ethnographic data in which I am a participant, collaborator, ally, and interviewer, utilizing a decolonial framework to understand how aesthetics are expressed, understood and transgressed by Indigenous peoples to proclaim

past, present and emerging worldviews (Topa & Narvaez 2022). As a critical and reflexive ethnographic methodology, I begin with a feminist standpoint theoretical analysis to account for my position as a Xicana Indígena (Zepeda 2022).

Thus, I propose an embodied and distributed ethos for collaborating with Native and Indigenous people that I term *rightful relations*. Building on the framework defined as *rightful presence* (Calabrese Barton & Tan 2020) that is a justice-oriented political project, focusing on the processes of reauthoring rights towards making present the lives of those made missing. I emphasize the "rights," that people have to assert themselves as Native and Indigenous peoples through the pursuit of aesthetic sovereignty. It is this pursuit of aesthetic sovereignty and self-determination that bears the potential to be transformative–it is this transformative power that *rightful relations* illustrate a dynamic within aesthetic systems that is integral to Indigenous peoples' kinship-based worldviews and embodiments.

The dissertation of Lili Flores Aguilar is approved.

David H. Gere

Peter M. Sellars

Allen Fraleigh Roberts, Committee Co-Chair

Alexander James Flynn, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2024

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAP – Academic Advancement Program

ADU - Accessory Dwelling Unit

AEDI - Anti-Racist, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

AFK - Away from the Keyboard

AMNH - American Museum of Natural History

BIPOC - Black Indigenous People of Color

BREIT - Blackstone Real Estate Income Trust, Inc.

CCW - Community Cultural Wealth

CEO - Chief Executive Officer

CF - Counterforce Lab

COVID-19 - Coronavirus Disease 2019

CRT - Critical Race Theory

DMA - Design Media Arts

DTP - Decolonize This Place

FAHA - Federal-Aid Highway Act

I-40 - Interstate 40

I-515 - Interstate 515

IRB - Internal Review Board

MA - Morrill Act

SMS - Short Message Service

SoAA - UCLA's School of Arts and Architecture

SUV - Sports Utility Vehicle

TEK - Traditional Ecological Knowledge

UC - University of California

UCLA - University of California Los Angeles

WACD - World Arts and Cultures/Dance

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relationships. Additionally, I am grateful to visiting Fulbright Scholar Meena Pillai for broadening my critical understanding of transnational feminist movements. Muchas gracias to Marjorie Faulstich Orellana and Ananda Marin for mentoring me during my time as a research assistant at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies.

My gratitude extends to UCLA's School of Arts and Architecture Dean's Office, members of the Dean's Student Council, the Anti-Racism, Equity, and Diversity Commission, and to the friendships and camaraderie that emerged from this work. To Alex Bravo, Lloyd Molina IV and Ariella Gaughan, thank you for your openness and willingness to engage in dialogues on the meaning of decolonization.

VITA/BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Education

- University of California, Los Angeles, School of Arts and Architecture, M.A. Culture and Performance, March 2022
- University of California, Los Angeles, College of Letters and Science, B.A. Anthropology, *Graduated with College Honors*, June 2017
- Santa Monica College, Associate of Arts - Liberal Studies, Graduated June 2015
- The Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising, Associate of Arts - Digital Media Graduated June 2012
- Certificates: Urban Humanities Initiative, Graduate Certificate, UCLA, (June 2020): Learning by Game Creation- Cities, Cultural Heritage and Digital Humanities Certificate, Politecnico di Torino, Turin, Italy, (September 2019)

Languages: English, Spanish, Nahuatl (1 year)

Leadership: UCLA Arts, Dean's Council, Graduate Student Representative and Co-Chair (2019-2022): UCLA Arts, Dean's Anti-Racism, Equity, and Diversity Commission, Graduate Student Representative (2020): Santa Monica College, Art Club, President (2015): Santa Monica College, Global Citizenship Club, President, (2015)

Employment

- Project Manager-Markings Oral History Project, cityLAB, Architecture & Urban Design Department, UCLA (2024)
- Teaching Fellow, Teaching Assistant Lead, World Arts and Culture/Dance Department, UCLA (2024)
- Teaching Fellow, World Arts and Culture/Dance Department, UCLA (2023)
- Teaching Associate Consultant, Design Media Arts Department, UCLA (2022)

- Graduate Student Researcher, Design Media Arts Department, UCLA (2022)
- Teaching Associate, Design Media Arts Department, UCLA (2022)
- Graduate Student Assistant, Fowler Museum, UCLA (2021)
- Graduate Student Assistant, World Arts and Culture/Dance Department, UCLA (2019-2020)
- Graduate Student Research, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, UCLA (2018-2020)
- Virtual Exhibition and Remote Instruction Consultant, Connecting Cultures Mobile Museum
- Assistant Curator, Will Rogers Historic Ranch House, California State Parks (2019-2020)

Scholarly Presentations:

- Q-Graduate Student Conference Organizer, and Panel moderator UCLA (2024): (De)colonial Corporealities: Extended Reality (XR) and Poetics of Internal Physiological Processes Associated with Acts of Resistance to Racism."European Association of Social Anthropologists 2022 Conference: Transformation, Hope and the Commons (2022): Decolonial Theory & Practice Speaker Series Organizer (2021): Phantasmagoria: Game Play as an Inclusive Tool for Museums in the Context of Urban and Architectural History, International Conference on the Inclusive Museum (2020)

Awards: UCLA Arts Racial Equity Fund Award– Fall 2022 Spring 2023: University Fellowship – UCLA, Fall 2021-Fall 2022: Eugene V. Cota-Robles Fellowship – UCLA, Fall 2018-Spring 2022: Actos de Confianza Grant – National Association of Latino Arts and Culture, Fall 2020.

CHAPTER 0: Introduction to *Rightful Relations*

Before I describe the crux of this dissertation, I explain how I arrived at an inquiry and subsequent theorizations regarding arts-based collaborations between Indigenous peoples and university-affiliated institutions by tracing my journey as an artist and scholar. Throughout my studies, as someone trained in the arts and anthropology, I have worked with various communities expressing themselves in museum and exhibition spaces, and in that work arose questions which motivate my inquiries: Why do people express themselves creatively through art? How has creativity shaped language and vice versa? How and why do people tell stories through material culture? What biological mechanisms have shaped peoples' behavioral and cultural patterns?

Working on both archaeological museum projects and sociocultural linguistics research, I adopted a synergistic approach to qualitative research. This approach comes in part from my undergraduate training in American anthropology's *four-field* approach, which emphasizes connections between 1. archaeology, 2. biological anthropology, 3. cultural anthropology and 4. linguistic anthropology. In doing so, I learned how mass communication organizations like universities, museums, and popular-media publishing companies impact multimodal language expression and cognition which in turn reflect and shape worldviews.

In my experiences with public education, I often found a lack of Indigenous histories as told from a decolonial perspective. With support from the UCLA Academic Advancement Program's (AAP) Arts Initiative (ArtsIn), and the mentorship of Lisa Snyder, director of UCLA's Institute for Digital Research & Education (IDRE), I connected my personal art practice, which explored questions of decolonial cultural heritage through multimedia art

production, with ethnographic fieldwork through a research project I presented at UCLA's Undergraduate Research Conference. Collaborating with Xian Wen Kuan, a colleague from UCLA's Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) (formerly known as VRCG), we developed a first-person virtual-reality (VR) cultural heritage game on the Unity Game Engine.[1] With Kuan on programming, I focused on building layered digital 3D-environments and interactivity mechanics based on ethnoarchaeological data I collected at an archaeological site in Chapala, Mexico, the region of my patrilineal heritage. While working on the VR project, I tested the limits of immersive digital technologies as relevant to the application of decolonial methodologies.

With these ethnographic methods and my exposure to decolonial methodologies, I grappled with my position as a researcher and how this informed the questions and methodologies I implemented. In a way, the VR project was an attempt to reconnect with the land my father was forced to leave at an early age to pursue a better quality of life in the United States as my grandmother, Abuela Sabina, desired for him and his siblings. I soon learned of the detrimental impact separation of my family, land, and water through immigration had on our ability to continue our traditional ways of life as Coca-descendants. As a junior scholar, I realized I created an experience that operated from a post-colonial framework, rather than a decolonial practice that I had originally intended.

According to postcolonial theorist, Homi Bhabha (1994), the postcolonial condition lies in an awareness of epistemological limits of ethnocentrisms, that challenge boundaries as separations, but rather sees boundaries as a place "from which *something begins its presencing*" (ibid 5). Decolonial, on the other hand has various definitions and approaches based on plural

[1] Unity is a cross-platform game engine developed by Unity Technologies (https://unity3ds-software.com/).

tactics to formally recognize Indigenous sovereignty, or the contributions of Indigenous intellectuals and activists to theories and frameworks of decolonization (Tuck & Yang 2012: 2-3). I still had much to learn about histories and practices of decolonial methodologies in relation to the arts.

I continued to gain hands-on experience as an undergraduate student worker at the UCLA Fowler Museum archaeological facility. With the supervision of Wendy Teeter, Allison Fischer-Olson, and Stevy Acevedo, I acquired knowledge about best practices associated with the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) while digitizing artifacts and archival documents from the Rainbow-Bridge Monument Valley Expedition collection, which are associated with Diné (Navajo), Hopi, and Paiute communities. Working in the archaeological facility, I pondered questions new to me: How were the artifacts in museum collections acquired? What ancestral remains do museums continue to hold? How do museums work with Indigenous peoples to return human remains and artifacts?

After receiving my Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology, during a gap year before beginning graduate school I continued work at the Fowler Museum's archaeological facility, began contributing to the Onward Project, and interned at the Will Rogers Historic Ranch House Museum through the J. Paul Getty Multicultural Undergraduate Internship (MUI) program (now called the Getty Marrow Internship Program). Through each of these experiences, I refined my museological knowledge pertaining to the ethics of working with Indigenous peoples and their associated cultural heritage. In doing so, I continued to explore how representations of Indigenous peoples in museum archives, documentary films, photography, and curatorial projects enact ethics. I evaluated these ethics based on my experiences with the Internal Review

Board and NAGPRA, and my evaluations helped me to traverse boundaries via curricular and extra-curricular research projects in graduate school.

Thanks to my home department, World Arts & Cultures/Dance (WACD) and through the Culture and Performance PhD degree curriculum, I had the opportunity to enroll in classes across UCLA, including the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies (GSE&IS), Architecture & Urban Design (AUD), History, and the Urban Humanities Initiative Program. Additionally, I had the privilege of receiving the Eugene V. Cota-Robles Fellowship which funded four years of my PhD studies through full-tuition coverage, teaching assistant appointments, and research assistant positions. The Cota-Robles fellowship ensured that someone like me, a first-generation Xicanx Indígena, would gain equitable access to the professional development opportunities and financial support necessary to succeed as a doctoral student.

Given this privilege and WACD's ethos of social justice, I was compelled to enact methodologies associated with critical ethnography and performance studies through my research in conjunction with professional leadership development. On my way to a PhD, I earned a Master's degree which demonstrated my commitment to arts-based research, digital media technologies, and social justice through my thesis titled *Vital Virtuality: A Framework for Polymodal Community-Based Projects.* In this work, I analyze media through the praxis of *thick mapping,*[2] circulated on the internet pertaining to the Black Lives Matter Uprisings during the COVID-19 pandemic and the role of multimedia through a website circulated on the Internet in a similar dissenting fashion. Additionally, I participated in the UCLA's School of Arts and Architecture (SoAA) Dean's Student Council where I advocated for equitable access to

[2] *Thick mapping* is a praxis developed by Presner et al (2014) that builds upon Geertz's ethnographic method of *thick description* (Geertz 1973).

educational, financial, and material resources for my peers. I later served as the only graduate student on SoAA's Anti-Racism Equity and Diversity Commission on the Curriculum Subcommittee which arose in response to the Black Lives Matter Uprisings during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Rightful Relations: A Framework for Decolonial Engagement

The concept of *rightful relations* serves as a central theme in this dissertation, offering a lens to explore the intersections of Indigenous knowledge, cultural patrimony, and decolonial methodologies. I retell a story of how the framework of *rightful relations emerged* from a collaborative relationship with Dr. Jim Enote, by visiting his homeland and how this visit taught me *rightful relations* might transform social dynamics in academic spaces. I also draw on the Maya K'iche' ceremonial blessing of masks at UCLA's Fowler Museum, this framework challenges architectural and institutional logics through ritual purification and survivance—a resistance to the reductive trope of the "noble savage." Survivance, as an aesthetic and epistemic approach, foregrounds Indigenous embodiments, agency and resilience within museums and other memory institutions. This perspective shifts beyond positivist paradigms, advocating for relationality and reciprocity.

Museums, often described as sites of cultural containment and evidence of historical genocide, embody the imperialist logic of elimination. Scholars such as Lloyd Molina IV critique these "practices of containment," highlighting the unjust seizure of cultural artifacts and the necessity for their return to rightful origins. Through collaborative co-creation with Indigenous communities, principles of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility emerge as counterforces to colonial narratives, fostering decolonial shifts and the re-establishment of

rightful relations. Vincent Louis and other collaborators underscore this point, reframing memory institutions as spaces for justice, not erasure.

The mentorship and co-creation processes explored here, including engagements with East Bay Ohlone and Rumsen Ohlone peoples, exemplify decolonial praxis. These efforts build on epistemic shifts proposed by Quijano and Mignolo, moving beyond anthropocentric postcolonial pursuits to foreground Indigenous sovereignty and autonomy. Collaborations with scholars such as Jessica, an East Bay Ohlone undergraduate, further highlight the importance of aesthetic sovereignty and transnational coalitions among Indigenous peoples.

Finally, this work interrogates the limits of postcolonial frameworks and the potential of decolonial delinking. Through the lens of mentorship and institutional critique, this dissertation examines the pathways for transforming museums and academic spaces into sites of collaborative decolonial futures, honoring Indigenous knowledge systems, embodiment and performance while challenging complicity in settler colonial projects.

Once again, I returned to decolonial frameworks in the context of art, this time to advocate for pedagogical approaches to arts and design. I engaged in conversations with faculty about the origins of the SoAA's departments and museum institutions' disciplinary histories and practices. My work for the Dean's Office led me to realize how pluralistic decolonial methodologies are in their form and function depending on the art discipline, course content, and professors' pedagogical approaches and areas of research. Seeing the wide scope of approaches to the arts in this manner allowed me to collaborate with faculty on developing curricular policies that would shape the future of each SoAA department's curriculum standards. In turn, this also helped me to refine the research questions that guide this dissertation:

How do contemporary art-making processes reflect cross-cultural exchanges and *axiological innovations*?

Axiological[3] innovations are defined as "theories, practices, and structures of values, ethics, and aesthetics—that is, what is good, right, true, and beautiful—that shape current and possible meaning, meaning-making, positioning, and relations in cultural ecologies" (Bang et al. 2015: 28-29). This dissertation takes an emic approach to understanding collaborative processes between Native and Indigenous peoples and institutions such as universities, design-studios, and museums using arts-based research and production methods and modalities of expression. Through four auto-ethnographic examples, I utilize a decolonial framework to understand how aesthetics are expressed, understood and transgressed by Native and Indigenous people to proclaim their past, present and emerging worldviews (Topa 2022). I address this question through multiple perspectives, beginning with an analysis of my own practice in working with Native and Indigenous communities within neoliberal institutions. By situating UCLA within the broader University of California (UC) system as a neoliberal institution through which I operate, I emphasize UCLA's role in the historical and ongoing dispossession of land from Indigenous peoples.[4] As a result, I propose an embodied and distributed ethos for collaborating with Native and Indigenous people that I term *rightful relations*. Through this proposition I write a

[3] Axiology refers to the branch of philosophy that studies the nature, types, and criteria of values and value judgments, particularly in the context of ethics. It examines questions about what is valuable or worthwhile, how values are established, and the principles guiding judgments of good and bad, right and wrong. "Definition of AXIOLOGICAL." Accessed November 5, 2024. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/axiological.

[4] Although universities have contributed to many advancements that have benefited people globally, a decolonial analysis of how UCLA's origins of capital was acquired allows me to be critical of my own work and its institutional limitations and the ongoing work the UC perpetuates which often times continues to detrimentally impact Indigenous people. Signed by President Abraham Lincoln, the Morrill Act of 1862 distributed nearly 11 million acres of expropriated land from Indigenous Tribal Nations in order to raise funds and generate capital for institutions of higher education. Although the UC was not the largest land-grant beneficiary, UC capitalized on 150,000 acres through a real estate operation (Lee 2020).

dissertation that moves fluidly across academic disciplines, ethnographic methods, and decolonial praxis to compose a creative document meant to guide future *performances*. I use the word performances in the broadest sense here and will elaborate in a later section, *Indigenous aesthetic ethos as performance*.

Building on the framework by Calabrese, Barton, and Tan (2020) defined as *rightful presence* suggesting a justice-oriented political project focusing on the processes of reauthoring rights towards making present the lives of those made missing, I emphasize the "rights" that people have to assert themselves as Native and Indigenous peoples[5] through the pursuit of *sovereignty*. It is this pursuit of sovereignty and self-determination that bears the potential to be transformative through dynamic *rightful relations*. In using the word *relations*, I emphasize the Native and Indigenous worldviews of kinship and understanding how all entities are connected in multiple and transcendental ways, and that a relationship must be built and is processual. The framework of *rightful relations* calls into question our embedded political, historical and sociocultural contexts that are highlighted through Native and Indigenous peoples' capacity to remember morals and values that have existed before the centering of Western European worldviews. This dissertation is an act of writing about Native and Indigenous peoples work against totalitarian[6] worldviews often perpetuated by institutions associated with the state.

[5] I use 'Native' and 'Indigenous' interchangeably, although Indigenous is often typically more broadly applied to the original inhabitants of a particular land (United Nations 2007), while 'Native' can refer specifically to people who are born in a particular place or have deep ancestral roots in a given region. It may also carry local, more cultural meanings, particularly in North American contexts where "Native" often refers to Indigenous peoples of North America (Weaver 2001).

[6] My use of the term *totalitarian* is inspired by Emmanuel Levinas' book *Totality and Infinity* (1961). He delves into the experience of perceiving someone through the senses prior to inherited socially derived ideals and values that emerge from a linguistic repertoire and objective stances. Levinas's main argument is that totalitarian cognition is contingent on the prioritization and reliance on visual stimuli rather than language. Totalitarian reliance on visual stimuli creates an all-encompassing neutral and impersonal inclusion and "panoramic vision" of the other as it works towards a total system of "harmony and order."

In order to extend my considerations of persisting Native and Indigenous worldviews that challenge totalitarian hegemonic Western European worldviews, I draw from performance studies to engage with diverse knowledge production processes. According to theorist Diana Taylor, performance is "a system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge" (Taylor 2003: 16). Through a performance theory lens, an opportunity is created to engage with plural aesthetics from a hemispheric approach that takes into account transnational and historical connections from North America to South America. Given my aforementioned approach, I engage two critical questions Nancy Mithlo, scholar of Native arts, poses: What are the benefits and hazards of this [hemispheric] approach? Who is utilizing this hemispheric frame, and to what ends? (Mithlo 2020: 40). Firstly, I incorporate a holistic consideration of the interconnected histories[7] embedded in each context. Secondly, as someone who identifies as a Xicana Indígena, and as my own corporeality traverses national borders, I aim to make visible transnational connections that Indigenous peoples have created since time immemorial, to sustain communities of cultural wealth, despite oppressive circumstances perpetuated by Western European imperialism and settler capitalism.

Engaging a holistic perspective of aesthetics means acknowledging philosophical foundations from which Western European institutions of art operate. With roots in the revival of Platonism and Aristotelian philosophy during the Italian Renaissance, aesthetic theory was developed in Europe during the eighteenth century as a theory of taste which judged the value of

[7] A curatorial example of a hemispheric approach is the Getty Museum's, *Golden Kingdoms* (2017-2018) exhibition, organized by the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute and the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA), that featured luxury arts by Indigenous peoples of North, Central, and South America. Although this exhibition successfully implemented a globalized perspective from a hemispheric approach, this exhibition is an example of an outlier in mainstream art museums and academic institutions that separate Latin American and Native American topics and issues (Mithlo 2020; 40-41).

beauty based on the *immediacy thesis*.[8] Following the Renaissance, it is important to note that the rise of the natural sciences as separate from the arts in the seventeenth century and the visual rhetoric of the eighteenth century were in part manufactured by Church and state-run institutions throughout Europe. Natural sciences thus became persuasive tools of empire that generated economic profit, and though they were universally imposed they perpetuated culturally specific perspectives and categorizations about beauty and art at the expense of Indigenous peoples and lands. Despite European imperialism their espoused persuasions, and subsequent *epistemicide* (De Sousa 2015) – or attempted murder of Indigenous knowledges – Indigenous peoples continue to practice their own aesthetic epistemologies in transcultural and transnational contexts.

Furthermore, developments of aesthetic theory in the fields of anthropology and sociology through a systems perspective creates space for what Mithlo describes as an impetus for "the development for theorizing an Indigenous pedagogy for educating others via the arts (2020: 40). My initial engagement with an *aesthetic systems* approach arose from an expansion of Geertz's "Art as A Cultural System" (1976: 1478), and Becker's classification of aesthetics (2008: 134) as sociologically based systems. As a result, a systemic consideration of aesthetic phenomenon situated in social activity and patterned life-ways gives insight into values and cultural significance or semiotic meaning-making processes.

[8] According to the Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics (2014) and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2022), the *immediacy thesis* arises as a response against forms of rationalism; thus, beauty is evaluated by the immediacy of sensory judgements. I argue that in order to ethically evaluate Indigenous aesthetics, one must integrate both sensory judgements with Indigenous philosophical principles and concepts.

The Role of (De)colonial Methodologies

For the purposes of creating an artistic intervention that works to subvert totalizing epistemic practices, I analyze multimodal expressions of collectivity by Native and Indigenous peoples through performance theory. But first, I engage with the concept of (de)coloniality and arrive at critical race theory as a means of delinking with a universality of a particular ethnicity. De-linking is a way to challenge the rhetoric of modernity makes a path *towards* epistemic shifts possible by encouraging a pluralistic way of analyzing performance.

As Walter D. Mignolo wrote in his 2007 article, *The rhetoric of modernity,* the concept of (de)-coloniality is a movement to de-link which contrasts with post-colonial criticism and theory which is a project of scholarly transformation in the academy (Mignolo 2007: 452). The fact that Western epistemological processes depend heavily on textual interpretation already privileges the idea that those represented through semiotic processes will always be based on imagination. Therefore, writing this dissertation is an act of representing Native and Indigenous peoples while also writing against neoliberal institutions in the tradition of ethnographic methods as an interdisciplinary and multimodal phenomenon that can be considered art (Clifford 1986: 3-4). Additionally, traditions of auto-ethnographic methods that I situate myself in the dissertation, challenges knowledge production from a privileged position and aims to make the ethnographer (myself, as a Xicana Indígena researcher) more visible through a reflexive approach to writing about my standpoint that is embedded in the relations with peoples and their respective cultures. Throughout each ethnology, I offer insight into how I have discussed my standpoint with interlocutors and our resulting conversations about identity, heritage, and resisting settler capitalism in our lives and collaborative art-making processes.

As a researcher and artist, I ask, "what role does (de)coloniality have in my own methodological approaches to aesthetic systems analysis?" In order to answer this question, I remain critical of the role of representation, specifically, Native and Indigenous representations or lack thereof in museum exhibitions and other media. Oftentimes, Native and Indigenous people are rendered "extinct," or on the brink of "extinction," such as in the writings by Theodora Kroeber, titled "Ishi The Last Yahi," published by the UC Press in 1961, which described the life of a Native man residing in what is referred to as the San Francisco Bay area, more accurately known as Ohlone territory. TallBear describes this centuries-old narrative as the "vanishing American," or "disappearing Indian," as being widely represented in the late 20th century (TallBear 2013: 517). As an extension of this "disappearing Indian" narrative, those organizing museum exhibitions often write about Native and Indigenous peoples in the past-tense–rendering them invisible in the present, therefore denying an opportunity for future resurgence and survivance. Within library and museum cataloging systems, Western intellectual biases persist due to classification practices that are informed by colonial values of nationhood and conquest (Mithlo 2020: 15). All of this contributes to denial of the role that colonialism has in the formation of American identities (Raheja 2011:146), meaning that legacies of settler colonialism are wrongfully absolved from playing a primary role in the oppression and erasure of Native and Indigenous peoples. That is why it is imperative to work with Native peoples to assert their own agency through three important concepts: offering power to the powerless, raising political awareness among Native and Indigenous peoples themselves, and gaining visibility in places such as museums and arts institutions (Raheja 2018: 7).

Inclusion of variable aesthetic systems within institutions of cultural production affords the opportunity to analyze the ways Native maintain aesthetic sovereignty during collaborative

processes while facing oppressive political power and how it operates during collaborative processes. Focusing on loss as a feature of asymmetrical socio-political power imbalances reinforces a deficit model. As a form of oppositional scholarship that exposes contradictions and critiques legal structures focusing on race and racism, critical race theory (CRT) brings to the fore forms of subordination based on gender and class (Brayboy 2006: 428). Through a CRT lens, I challenge deficit models by focusing on the cultural wealth, knowledge, and strengths sustaining *community cultural wealth* (Yosso 2005). Such a framework opposes the narrow view of traditional Bordieuan cultural capital theory as defined by white middle-class values, and instead works towards achieving a larger purpose of struggling towards racial and social justice (ibid. 77: 82). Racial and social justice within the context of the Americas is broad, and has motivated coalition-building. Because I am concerned specifically with how Indigenous peoples navigate collaborations within the field of the arts, I mobilize *rightful relations* as a way to understand and put into practice an ethos and logos of incommensurability that emerges through art-making.

"Incommensurable" – indicates that social justice projects themselves differ in their objectives. According to decolonial theorists and scholars Tuck and Yang (2018), an ethic of incommensurability "acknowledges that we can collaborate for a time together even while anticipating that our pathways toward enacting liberation will diverge" and thus will help reduce the frustration of attempts at solidarity (ibid. 2, 4). Within the survey of projects in this dissertation, CRT, and more specifically, Tribal Critical Race Theory or "TribalCrit" (Brayboy 2006) are mobilized to identify inconsistencies that Indigenous people experience in institutions participating in the surveyed art projects, to understand the immediate and future needs of Indigenous communities.

Furthermore, through an ethic of incommensurability, *rightful relations* can be transformative through the unsettling project of decolonization. In Tuck and Yang's essay, "Decolonization Is Not Metaphor" (2018), the authors state that incommensurability unsettles assumptions of settler innocence, and contrasts with aims of reconciliation; rather, decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity (ibid: 35). Through the aforementioned decolonial accountability, I am able to discern how Indigenous people assert themselves in collaborative situations by destabilizing Western European aesthetics. When I use the word "aesthetic," I draw from developments of aesthetic theory in the fields of anthropology and sociology through a systems perspective. This creates space for what Mithlo describes as an impetus for "the development for theorizing an Indigenous pedagogy for educating others via the arts (2020: 40).

My initial engagement with an *aesthetic systems* approach arose from an expansion of Geertz's "Art as a cultural system" (1976: 1478), and Becker's classification of aesthetics (2008: 134) as sociologically based systems. In this manner, there is an emphasis on what Vizenor describes as *aesthetics of survivance*. As Vizenor states, "survivance is unmistakable in native songs, stories, natural reason, remembrance, traditions, customs, and clearly observable in narrative sentiments of resistance, and in personal attributes such as the native humanistic tease, vital irony, spirit, cast of mind, and moral courage. The character of survivance creates a sense of native presence and actuality over absence, nihility, and victimry" (2009: 87). An Indigenous worldview precept, "the capacity to remember" (Topa & Narváez 2022: 4), serves as a core guide to theorize and practice *rightful relations*. I seek to underscore how Native and Indigenous aesthetic systems encourage the use of memory in the face of inequality and injustice associated within the negotiation of politics associated with Indigeneity.

Therefore, aesthetic systems are considered where subversion or destabilization of Western European aesthetic values and practices are performed through social justice-oriented projects, thus creating opportunities for Native and Indigenous futurity and *survivance*–a combination of survival and resistance for community growth (Vizenor 2008).

Throughout my analysis, I posit a set of two main questions: 1.) *How do TribalCrit and decolonial frameworks apply to each auto-ethnographic account;* 2.) *How do TribalCrit and decolonial praxis shed light on epistemological processes resulting from interacting aesthetic systems?*" Identifying aesthetic systems as discrete foci within collaborative artistic production processes, I analyze how each person situated within distinct Native and Indigenous communities and tribal nations subverts, challenges, creates, and defines contemporary art, artifacts and aesthetic systems. From there, I develop a framework informed by Indigenous philosophies pertaining to *stewardship*, *kinship, preservation* and *artistic representation* in what Bourdieu (1983) refers to as the *space of literary or artistic position-takings* (1983: 312). I argue that being in *rightful relations* throughout creative collaborative processes with Native and Indigenous peoples challenges dominant Western European and colonial worldviews and lineages of museum-based practices and their resulting epistemologies.

As a way to answer my research questions, I engage in an anthropological analysis of data analyzed to identify discursive and embodied practices associated with encounters and collaborative processes. In each ethnology, I include TribalCrit and decolonial readings of relationship-making and interaction with what are commonly referred to as "artifacts," or resulting "proxies" as evidence; as such, a TribalCrit lens highlights the idea that cooperation is integral to building knowledge and collective power (Brayboy 2006: 436). Additionally, sociocultural contexts facilitate affective and corporeal experiences associated with aesthetics

and thus reflect a system of knowledge. According to TribalCrit, knowledge amongst Indigenous peoples is co-constructed and allows for transformation towards self-determination. Indigenous conception of power is defined as "an energetic force that circulates throughout the universe–it lies both within and outside of individuals" (ibid. 436). Therefore, an analysis of Indigenous aesthetic systems includes individuals and collectivities as having efficacy.

Such a systemic approach scaffolds upon previous anthropological analysis of aesthetic systems by Alfred Gell (1992), who considers art as a technical system, meaning, art as a category is an outcome of technical processes performed by skilled artists. Gell's consideration deems art essential to the reproduction of human societies, which Gell calls a technology of enchantment (Gell 1992: 43). Therefore, aesthetic systems encompass the practices of collectivities of individual people and their communities throughout collaborative art-making processes. It is through these practices that a defensible and coherent aesthetic system stabilizes values that can be repeated or translated. Playing close attention to the values expressed by Indigenous peoples will give insight into the ways in which power is negotiated between incommensurable aesthetic systems.

Auto-Ethnography as Incommensurability

For three reasons, I classify this dissertation as an auto-ethnography in which I analyze data collected across six collaborate relationships. My goal is to utilize cross-cultural comparisons of Indigenous peoples while reassessing comparative methodologies and their histories in the field of anthropology. First, this dissertation challenges ethnology's 18th century when evolutionist generalizations – also known as 'evolutionism'– were made through

comparative methodologies for historical inquiry.[9] Second, unlike those authors in Anthropology who aim to make universal statements about the "nature of humanity," this auto-ethnography aims to nuance knowledge of aesthetic systems that Indigenous peoples create as a way to highlight convergences and divergences with contemporary Western European aesthetic systems. Third, I challenge the positivist origins of ethnography and its intention to cross-culturally compare non-European populations who allegedly lacked 'written records' of their history and cultural heritage by centering auto-ethnography as a way of producing knowledge through the presence of my own body interacting with peoples in differing contexts. Expanding on the curatorial and academic work of Roberts et al. through the exhibition *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art*,[10] which looks the ways in which image-texts (Mitchell 1994) conjoin the visual and the verbal, challenging conventional notions of the written word as something static on paper. My thesis on *rightful relations* invites us to consider how making space for the embodied repertoires and contingent aesthetic systems of Indigenous peoples can inform the ways in which arts institutions collaborate with them.

This auto-ethnography draws on information studies theorist Michael Buckland's distinctions between information as knowledge and information as process. Buckland's framework, which categorizes "intangibles (knowledge and information-as-knowledge and information-as-process) and tangibles (information-as-thing and information processing)" (Buckland, 1991), is used here to evaluate, through Indigenous aesthetic systems, the value of

[9] According to the *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2001), "evolutionism" and "comparativism" in anthropology have been critiqued for their tendency to lose contextual meanings and culturally specific relations. Additionally, cross-cultural comparisons tend to privilege the shaping of hierarchical relations between observer and observed or between comparer and compared.

[10] Although this exhibition is focused on African arts, I cite this as a way of opening up possibilities for transnational and hemispheric solidarities. Kreamer, Christine Mullen, Mary Nooter Roberts, Elizabeth Harney, and Allyson Purpura. "Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art." African Arts 40, no. 3 (September 2007): 78–91. https://doi.org/10.1162/afar.2007.40.3.78.

cultural inheritances and the multifaceted ways they generate knowledge. In other words, intangible and tangible knowledge will be defined by Indigenous peoples and their respective aesthetic systems. Since meaning is temporal, site-specific, and embodied by people within plural worldviews in post-colonial contexts, I attempt to locate varying cultural repertoires within these contexts with a mind towards the future. In doing so, Indigenous aesthetic systems are seen to be fixing meaning within timeframes as well as opening meaning up for future interpretations. Here is perhaps the dissertation's animating thesis: a collection of documented ephemera that straddles the tension between the temporary and permanent via a rightful relations framework. *Rightful relations* thus utilize the socio-political embeddedness of intangible and tangible information as a way of transforming understandings of agency towards decolonial possibilities.

For example, Aymar Ccopacatty, a descendent of the Indigenous Ayamara people with origins in the Wari people of the Andes region in Peru, and who served as a project leader at Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian, shared with me the communicate logic of Khipus as Andean textiles made of twisted and knotted animal fibers. The Quechua word Khipu means "knot" or "to tie," and is an example of recording information through repetition of patterns.[11] When considering such a cultural inheritance through the framework of *rightful relations*, I am able to inquire about the silences in museum archival collections by engaging with the multiple ways Khipu are related to material and immaterial matters encompassed in a decolonial reading which prioritizes Indigenous worldviews.

Each ethnography presented in these pages is an auto-ethnographic account in which I begin with standpoint theory and reflexivity as a way to critically analyze where assets and limits

[11] Ccopacatty 2023, Salomon 2004.

of my own perspectives are as someone who self-identifies as a queer Xicana Indígena, guided by an ethos of social justice. I assert my ability to challenge hegemonic Western European worldviews – resisting imposed erasure via colonial processes which all too often results in "de-Indigenization" (Zepeda 2022: 29-31). According to Xicanx Indígena philosophy (ibid., 30), the act of intentionally remembering one's Indigenous lineage disrupts hegemonic worldviews that attempt to sever connections to the Earth, ancestral knowledge, and complex lineages shaped by colonial processes. Lineages are often understood as fixed and "true," deserving careful remembrance; however, closer examination reveals that these lineages vary situationally depending on the narrator, among members of a self-defined community, and even more so when one community's lineage is interpreted or represented by members of a different community.

Ultimately, my research works to center Indigeneity via plural decolonial methodologies and associated epistemological processes apparent in community-engaged, arts-based production. By "Indigeneity," I draw from TallBear's (2013), who describes Indigenous articulations of Indigeneity as emphasizing political status and biological and cultural kinship constituted in dynamic, long-standing relations with each other and with living landscapes. Furthermore, de la Cadena and Starn's (2007) reconceptualization of the term "Indigeneity" rely on identification that is defined within a larger field of social differences and sameness.

Indigeneity's plural trajectories challenge the term's positivist historical origins in binary structures of knowledge that differentiate expatriates from Indigenous peoples.[12] Indigeneity, in this dissertation, is a point from which I engage Indigenous peoples' relationships to historical processes to understand how specific contexts have shaped affiliations and their shifts. In doing

[12] The term Indigeneity is related to the term *Indigenous* that is derived from the French word, *indigene* and Latin *indigene*. Historically, use of the term *Indigenous* delineated an oppositional relationship to Europeans and non-Europeans, and the term became synonymous with "pagan," or heathens as a means to justify salvation through Christianity (de la Cadena and Starn 2007: 4).

so, I espouse and build upon what de la Cadena (2007) refers to as "onto-epistemic openings" as a way to rethink categorizations inherited from the logos of modernity to foreground how Indigenous people exist through and beyond such imposed categorizations. Diverse practices of memory and associated knowledge production practices are vital moments throughout this dissertation. An Indigenous worldview precept, "the capacity to remember" (Topa & Narváez 2022: 4), serves as a core guide to theorize and practice *rightful relations*.

The capacity to remember is informed by the idea that memory is not passive; rather, cultural inheritances act as mnemonic devices that, together with meaning-making performances, generate memory for historical documentation (Roberts & Roberts 1996: 17). Examples of active performances that generate memory include the arts activism and community-engaged curatorial work of the Through Positive Eyes (TPE) exhibition, led by my doctoral committee member, David Gere.[13] TPE tells the story of a particular moment of the HIV/AIDS epidemic by working with HIV positive people to tell their own story through photography. This serves as a way of engaging in historical documentation and while combatting stigma and empowering themselves.

The capacity to remember and to tell one's own story through aesthetics is also framed by relational aesthetics, with its theoretical focus on intersubjectivity in ethnographic study to explore ways of creating micro-utopias with social implications (Flynn, 2022). I aim to highlight how Native and Indigenous aesthetic systems employ memory to confront inequality and injustice within the political negotiation of Indigeneity. In this way, an emphasis on embodied actions, examined through auto-ethnographic analysis in the following chapters, shapes our understanding of how we might reimagine and transform social contexts within and beyond arts

[13] Through Positive Eyes is a collaborative photo-storytelling project by 200 people living with HIV and AIDS in cities around the world. Through Positive Eyes. "About." Accessed August 6, 2024. https://throughpositiveeyes.org/about.

institutions in collaboration with Indigenous peoples. Such efforts contribute to the pursuit of moments — and, ideally, sustained practices — of Indigenous sovereignty and survivance.

Embodied and discursive practices informed by stewardship and reciprocity will be framed as essential to building what I theorize as *rightful relations*. *Rightful relations* are an intentional framework moving towards the realization of survivance of Native and Indigenous peoples where information is transferred, translated, and produced in perpetuity. As a writing praxis of *rightful relations*, I use metaphor and surrealism in my stories as a strategy to honor and obscure information presented through auto-ethnographic accounts which detail community-based art projects that are collaborative in form and that feature content pertaining to Native and Indigenous worldviews. Analysis will engage with how interacting aesthetic systems are negotiated and expressed in each phase of community-based art projects. The data present in each auto-ethnographic account includes ethnographic field notes, correspondence, audio field recordings, and interviews, sketches, maps; archival historical information, music, and photography.

Articulations Between Cognition and Worldviews

In order to understand relationships among language, thought, and culture within contexts of Native and Indigenous worldviews, I draw from cognitive science, as anthropologists have done to analyze cognition in cultural contexts, to identify discrete foci through the lens of distributed cognition. According to Edwin Hutchins (2000), distributed cognition is situated activity in a social and material world in which cognitive processes are mediated by technology. Through this framework, I am able to analyze the organization of collaborative tasks and their sociocultural, political, and historical dimensions intrinsic to any particular aesthetic system.

Furthermore, taking into account embodied practices beyond an individual person means foregrounding divergent collectivities informed by Native or Indigenous worldviews. Although practitioners of cognitive science consider the mind as material as understood through theories of computation, my approach serves more as an initial point of analysis to find where ruptures occur between Western European worldviews and Native and Indigenous worldviews occur. The goal is to expand our understanding of embodiment as it pertains to aesthetics. After all, an Indigenous worldview, as Topa and Narváez (2022) describe, "is not a matter of perception or conception alone, but of *experiencing* and *being*. It is more of a 'world-sense' because it involves dozens of senses and a coordinated way of moving through the world" (2022: 2). It is this particular "coordinated way" that I am interested in looking at *in situ* as a way to theorize *rightful relations* as a transformative ethos for collaborating with Native and Indigenous peoples.

Aesthetic systems as axiological transformations in fields of struggle

For the purposes of this dissertation project, I classify aesthetic systems emergent from collaborative social tasks based on self-identified affinities and memberships to organizations, associations, tribes, corporations, cultural groups, institutions of knowledge, and/or art. In my analysis, I identify each collectivity's values and their contingent worldviews based on engagement with their respective discourses and, hence, aesthetic sensibilities. Here, I use the word "contingent" to draw from sociocultural and architectural studies and discuss the historical, political, and sociocultural conditions on which worldviews depend. Additionally, philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler (1996: 9) explains that through "contingent foundations," we may call into question "universality" by deeming it permanently open, permanently contested,

and permanently contingent "in order not to foreclose in advance any future claims for inclusion." Through contingency, feminist narratives in my dissertation question the parameters of political struggle and in turn challenge social inequalities and erasure of Native and Indigenous worldviews. In the field of architecture, for example, a core aspect of architectonic projection called the "contingency plan" accounts for indeterminate and open conditions afforded by everchanging political, economic, and environmental conditions (Cuff & Davis 2019). Contingency reinforces the fact that *rightful relations* are open to various conditions that must be taken into account when producing discourse about sociocultural and political struggle. Therefore, rightful relations mobilize contingency to create transformative potentialities which foreground the sovereignty of Native and Indigenous peoples through art-making.

As a means to understand how aesthetic systems interact and operate, I utilize a Bordieuan framework to discuss how power is negotiated within a *field of forces* that simultaneously functions as a *field of struggle* as a transformative cultural production. By identifying aesthetic systems and their teleology, we gain an understanding of the social conditions of collaborative processes among social agents. Attention to embodied and discursive practices—or what Bourdieu famously calls *habitus* (Bourdieu 1993: 312)—within the *field of forces* explicates how struggle takes place due to incongruent worldviews. These conclusions, in turn, call into question the rejection of polemics. As mentioned above, critical race theory suggests that *community cultural wealth* is often overlooked within the narrow view of Bordieuan cultural capital theory. By identifying *fields of forces*, one can analyze community cultural wealth to consider how knowledge is produced by Native and Indigenous peoples despite the attempts to erase and oppress through historically motivated settler capitalism.

As a point of critique, the two-worldview binary is an important strategy to identify complementarity, incommensurability and at a metaphysical level, contingency. In doing so, I counter hegemony by incorporating contingent analysis, similar to situational analysis (Clarke & Charmaz 2014, Clarke 2005), while addressing issues of social inequality amidst community-based art production processes. Structures and practices of cultural production differ depending on "overall autonomy possessed in a field" (Bourdieu 1993). Meaning, how each social agent contests power by imposing definitions and requirements defines degrees of autonomy and legitimacy within social situations. Through this dissertation, Native and Indigenous peoples will be seen to challenge Western European aesthetic systems by explicating the interconnected social, historical, and political determinisms of collaboration and art.

To engage political and socioeconomic dynamics of art-making, a leaf may be taken from the Frankfurt School to evaluate artistic principles and their places in conflicts between Western and Indigenous worldviews. When describing settler colonialism, Gender Studies and American Indian Studies scholar Dr. Shannon Speed reflects on colonial relationships engendered by "settler capitalism" (Speed 2017) to analyze ways that race and gender are articulated in the United States.14 She describes liberalism as a form of capitalism in which the state employs policies of economic deregulation. In other words, neoliberalism is informed by a philosophical view that society's political and economic institutions should be liberal and capitalist, enforced by a limited democracy and moderate welfare state (cf. Vallier 2022).

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14 *Shannon Speed Talks About the Relationship Between Settler Colonialism, Capitalism & Neoliberalism*, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9_ZeHRXL38.

Incorporating both critical race theory and decolonial methodologies, I call into question how neoliberalism creates hierarchies by prioritizing value systems founded upon racism and interrelated classism. Daniel Solórzano's (1997, 1998) five principles of critical race studies inform theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum and policy (ibid. 73):1.) The intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination; 2.) Challenges to dominant ideology; 3.) Commitment to social justice; 4.) Centrality of experiential knowledge; and 5.) Transdisciplinary perspectives. As an expansion of Bourdieu's analysis of cultural production, CRT frames purposeful epistemes as potentially transformational in challenging the limits of deficit thinking by valuing forms of capital wealth that have been excluded from Western European colonial epistemes. Within the field of museums, movements to de-link from Western European notions of modernity and associated epistemes began to take shape in the 1980s through the framing of postcolonial, critical race theory, ethnic studies, transnational feminisms, and queer discourse that have been applied to curatorial practices (Roberts 2008, Tlostanova 2017).

Each chapter of this dissertation includes of coming to be in *rightful relations*, and what such processes mean while coming to be in community. Story as methodology is building upon the methodology of Indigenous storywork (Archibald et al 2019) of scholars that aim towards understanding and learning culture in the service of social transformation and improving the well-being of communities (Bang et al 2015). In doing so, the stories I share aim to recognize how historical processes make imprints in the present and how axiological innovations contribute to understandings and theorization of *rightful* relations with Indigenous peoples. Each embedded story will highlight features of unfolding activities in *fields of struggle* and illustrate what it means to fail, arrive, and embody *rightful relations* in different contexts.

Through qualitative analysis, I analyze distributed and embodied processes based on collaborative actions taking place in *fields of struggle* as indicated by language and artifacts such as media, audio recordings, and correspondence otherwise known as *mediascapes*. Notions of Arjun Appadurai (1990) may be expanded from his understanding that a global cultural economy requires consideration of disjuncture between economy, culture, and politics. Appadurai proposes five dimensions of global cultural flow as foci to analyze cultural, economic, and political differences: *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, *technoscapes*, *finanscapes*, and *ideoscapes*. Each of these "*scapes"* is constructed through subjective relations among actors that are contingent upon historical, linguistic, and political contexts. Categories of "Native and Indigenous" and "Western European" will be used to organize aesthetic systems expressed through *mediascapes* and what Roberts and Roberts describe as *spiritscapes* pertaining to relevant devotional practices of Indigenous peoples (2016).

Within the Native and Indigenous category are languages such as East Bay Ohlone, Maya K'iche, and descriptions of intangible heritage practices including but not limited to, speech, music, singing, and prayer. The Western European category will include English, Spanish, and their philosophical implications based on tropological analysis of aesthetics. Furthermore, to differentiate Western European worldviews and Native and Indigenous worldviews *in situ*, I use the Common Indigenous Worldviews Manifestation chart by Wahinkpe Topa a.k.a Four Arrows (2022) (see figure 1). Following this analysis, creative writing will be used to interpret and produce *tropes*. As an aside, in classical Greek, the root of "trope" is *tropos* meaning "turn," which came into modern Indo-European as *tropus*, that in Classical Latin meant "metaphor" or "figure of speech" or in late Latin within music theory as "mood" or "measure" (Butler 1997: 29, 201). Throughout my dissertation, I utilize tropological analysis of data, representation, and

creation to generate understandings of ways Native and Indigenous worldviews operate and perform *axiological innovations* in *fields of struggle*.

According to Four Arrows and Narvaez (2022), worldviews of Native and Indigenous peoples comprise a full cross-sensory scope they call an *existencescape*. Such -scapes will be analyzed to identify Native and Indigenous worldviews contrasting with or challenging Western European and neoliberal logics and morals. In doing so, priority will be given to Indigenous knowledge systems defined as "oral, communal, aesthetic, kinesthetic, and emergent from living landscapes" (Mithlo 2020: 15). Logics and morals of aesthetics are then engaged in a discourse that discusses the production of culture as fluidly moving across or between worldviews and modalities that constitute meaning-making processes. Through consideration of *existencescapes* political and social injustices will be contrasted with affective stances that challenge dominant historical paradigms often reinscribed by museum exhibition design, art-making, or cultural practices.

Common Dominant Worldview Manifestations[15]	Common Indigenous Worldview Manifestations
1. Rigid hierarchy	Nonhierarchical
2. Fear-based thoughts and behaviors	Courage and fearless trust in the universe
3. Living without strong social purpose	Socially purposeful life
4. Focus on self and personal gain	Emphasis on community welfare
5. Rigid and discriminatory gender stereotypes	Respect for various gender roles and fluidity
6. Materialistic	Nonmaterialistic
7. Earth as an an unloving "it"	Earth and all systems as living and loving
8. More head than heart	Emphasis on heart over head
9. Competition to feel superior	Competition to develop positive potential
	duality
23. Acceptance of injustice	Intolerance of injustice
24. Emphasis on rights	Emphasis on responsibility
25. Aggression as highest expression of courage	Generosity as highest expression of courage
26. Ceremony as rote formality	Ceremony as life-sustaining
27. Learning as didactic	Learning as experiential and collaborative
28. Trance as dangerous or stemming from evil	Trance-based learning as helpful and natural
29. Human nature as corrupt or evil	Human nature as good but malleable
30. Humor used infrequently for coping	Humor as essential tool for coping
31. Conflict resolution with revenge, punishment	Conflict resolution as return to community
32. Learning is fragmented and theoretical	Learning is holistic and place based
33. Minimal emphasis on personal vitality	Personal vitality is essential
34. Social laws of society are primary	Laws of Nature are primary
35. Self-knowledge not highest priority	Holistic self-knowledge is most important

10. Minimal empathy, humility, and gratitude	Strong emphasis on empathy, humility, and gratitude
11. Anthropocentric	Animistic and biocentric
12. Words used to deceive self or others	Words as sacred, truthfulness as essential
13. Truth claims as absolute	Truth seen as multifaceted, accepting the mysterious
14. Rigid boundaries and fragmented systems	Flexible boundaries and interconnected systems
15. Unfamiliarity with alternative consciousness	Regular use of alternative consciousness
16. Disbelief in spiritual energies	Recognition of spiritual energies
17. Disregard for holistic interconnectedness	Emphasis on holistic interconnectedness
18. Minimal contact with others	High interpersonal engagement, touching
19. Emphasis on theory and rhetoric	Inseparability of knowledge and action
20. Acceptance of authoritarianism	Resistance to authoritarianism
21. Time as linear	Time as cyclical
22. Dualistic thinking	Seeking complementary

36. Autonomy sought in behalf of self	Autonomy sought to better serve others
37. Nature as dangerous or utilitarian only	Nature as benevolent and relational
38. Other-than-human beings are not sentient	All life-forms are sentient
39. Low respect for women	High respect for women
40. Ignorance of importance of diversity	Aware of vital importance of diversity

Figure 1. Common Indigenous Worldviews Manifestation chart by Wahinkpe Topa a.k.a Four Arrows (2022).

Additionally, according to Gerald McMaster, there are several frameworks to consider when exploring and understanding Native perspectives, which he defines in seven ways through the “INDIGENA” project (1992) which took place on the traditional lands of Mohawk, Iroquois, and Anishinabewaki peoples at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec.

> First, given the continuing existence of the Indian and Inuit (Eskimo) people in the Americas, by default we should be recognized as the "two founding nations." Second, we must acknowledge our mutually exclusive history, or histories, Native North American and European. Third, we must recognize the variety of social, cultural, and historical perspectives within an Indigenous North America. Fourth, Native languages, both written

and oral, must be seen as keys to understanding differing aesthetic perspectives. Fifth, we must accept that our histories, Native and non-Native, have often crisscrossed over five hundred years, and in many cases influenced one another (for example, new materials for Natives; new visual ideas for non-Native artists). Sixth, we must admit that notions of "quality" must be broadened to include Native sensibilities and points of view. Seventh, we must understand that Native art history to date is as distinct as mainstream Western art history (69).

In this dissertation, I to translate[15] McMaster's framework as a means of understanding and exploring Indigenous aesthetic systems in a field of struggle. The following are my own translations as they apply to Indigenous worldviews and thus aesthetics:

1. The continuing existence of First Nations, Indian, Native and Indigenous peoples in North and South America should be recognized as their own founding nations.[16]

2. We must acknowledge disjuncture in history and histories North America, Central and South America through

[15] As a form of translation, a la Walter Benjamin, in his 1921 essay *The Task of the Translator*, he argues: "No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience" (Benjamin 1921: 253). He goes on to speak to the role of a translator, one who is not the poet or conductor of the symphony, and their duty to "ultimately serve the purpose of expressing the innermost relationship of languages to one another" (ibid. 255).

[16] In doing so, this first framework is one that is guided by the a decolonial sensibility that works towards Native and Indigenous sovereignty.

3. Recognizing plural social, cultural, and historical perspectives amongst Indigenous peoples.

4. Native languages, as written, oral, and embodied,[17] must be seen as keys to understanding differing aesthetic perspectives.

5. We must accept that our histories, Native and non-Native, have often crisscrossed over five hundred years, and in many cases, these influenced one another, resulting in cultural syncretism which is layered with political dimensions and thus power.[18]

6. We must admit that notions aesthetic "quality" and "values" must be broadened to include Native sensibilities and points of view.

7. We must understand that Native art history to date is as distinct as mainstream Western art history.[19]

Indigenous aesthetic systems are ascertained from data I collected in the form of multimedia fieldnotes (text, sound, photos, drawings, illustrations, and diagrams), images from archival sources, and interview transcripts. Chapter One begins as a description of my positionality as I understand it through a recounting of my journey to Zuni, New Mexico and

[17] I emphasize embodied to account for multimodal sequences that can be ephemeral or documented and its role in understanding Indigenous worldviews as it pertains to ideas of corporeality, land and pedagogy (Simpson Betasamosake 2014).
[18] For example, the use of quinine bark to treat malaria which was used in development of modern medicine which was adapted from Indigenous Peruvian knowledge (H., W. P. 1875) (Hasegawa 2007).
[19] I left this framework identical to McMaster's original since it is formerly specific to the field of the arts.

how this illuminates my complicated relationship to my own Indigeneity informed by Xicano/a/x theories. I explain how this dynamic propels me to work with Native and Indigenous peoples. I describe a process of radical genealogy and engagement with trans-temporality to understand how my own corporeality. As a specific anecdote, I employ *thick-description* in recounting my story of arrival in Zuni, New Mexico, to visit and develop a mentorship under Jim Enote, PhD – Zuni tribal member – and how this encounter proved an expression of my positionality in action and its sociocultural and political implications and limitations.

In the second half of this chapter, I recount how Dr. Enote and I collaborated on a seminar and workshop as an emergent process of coming to be in *rightful relations*. I explain how my positionality informs my approach to knowledge production through a social justice praxis which moves among research, pedagogy, and socially engaged art-making, navigating within and beyond limits of higher institutions of education while simultaneously leveraging my positions to enact *rightful relations*. This latter expands upon what educational scholars Calabrese et al. (2020: 435-436) define as *rightful presence*: "a justice-oriented political project, focusing on the processes of reauthoring rights towards making present the lives of those made missing by the systemic injustices inherent in schooling and the disciplines… with the goal of making both injustice and social change in the here-and-now visible in classroom practice." Considerations of education are offered beyond Western articulations of learning environments, including vital sites of everyday knowledge production as well as quotidian placemaking practices and performances. *Rightful relations* frame a collaboration with Dr. Enote for a Counter-Mapping seminar hosted at UCLA in collaboration with WACD Professor Alex Ungprateeb Flynn and MFA Rashaida Hill, UCLA's American Indian Studies Center (AISC),

the UCLA SoAA Dean's Student Council, and a UCLA research group for a Decolonial Theory and Practice speaker series in Spring 2022.

Chapter Two begins with the words of Nana Alicia, member of the Maya K'iche Indigenous diasporic community and is contextualized through auto-ethnographic account about a collaborative community-based curatorial art exhibition project that emerged from a graduate seminar taught by WACD Distinguished Professor Peter Sellars during Spring 2019-Winter 2020. Specifically, I focus on Nana Alicia's role in blessing a collection of masks contained at the Fowler Museum, from Central America for the installation of the *"Inside the Mask"* (2020) exhibition at the Hammer Museum. In particular, the masks in the Hammer exhibition are understood from a feminist perspective to initiate questions around how axiological innovations are expressed by Indigenous peoples in museum spaces and how this affords opportunities to expand *rightful relations* with museum collections I include excerpts of an interview with a Nana Alicia who is an elder and spiritual leader in her community. The interview anchors this chapter in a Maya K'iche worldview that expands the definition of *rightful relations* to the specific collaborative process and ways of engaging in ceremonial performances for cultural inheritances and entities housed within museums.

In Chapter Three, I describe a project I completed as a graduate research assistant where I served as a liaison between a design studio and members of the East Bay Ohlone Native community for a public art project. The project engaged members of the Ohlone community in a public art project as a feature of a public transportation station developed on the traditional lands referred to as xučyun of the East Bay Ohlone peoples,[20] also referred to as the East Bay Area in

[20] In the Chochenyo language, "xučyun" (pronounced HOOCH-yoon) is the name of the region within the ancestral and unceded homeland of the East Bay Ohlone people that includes Albany and Berkeley. Kell, Gretchen. "New UC Berkeley Housing Complex to Be Called Xučyun Ruwway, Honoring Ohlone People." Berkeley News, April 22,

Northern California. Through the collaborative processes described, I highlight ways in which epistemic shifts occur and how this can work towards axiological innovations within academic and public transportation institutions, and for public arts projects.

In chapter four, I explore my role and responsibilities in a mentor-mentee relationship that emerged from my work with the Ohlone community described in the previous chapter. Here my mentee and I sought to come to terms with museum practices of preserving Indigenous collections as taught in a Getty Museum course through UCLA Extension.[21] Discursive practices, conversations, and an interview between the Ohlone member and myself concerned tribal sovereignty in museum preservation, policies, and curation, as well as implications these have regarding realization of *rightful relations*.

In chapter five, I conclude my findings based on analysis and synthesis of each auto-ethnography with critical consideration of my standpoint and interpretation. I arrive at an analysis of variable ethical frameworks embedded in each interacting aesthetic system and discuss disjuncture between Indigeneity and neoliberalism. Thereafter, I propose future directions based on an aesthetic ideal facilitated by symbiotic processes fostered by *rightful relations*. Where are disjuncture and limits to my own position as a collaborator? Embedded in this dissertation process are questions around what it means to be a researcher and artist engaging in coalition-building via inherited colonial histories amongst systemically marginalized people.

2024. https://news.berkeley.edu/2024/04/22/new-uc-berkeley-housing-complex-to-be-called-xucyun-ruwway-honoring-ohlone-people/.

[21] J. Paul Getty Museum offered a course through UCLA's curriculum, which is a professional and continuing studies provider.

Standpoint Theory

As a scholar, artist and activist, I incorporate *standpoint theory* (Harding 2004) as a means to align with the idea that feminist research is a method to analyze transnational social relations and practices of power as they relate to anti-racist and decolonial methodological approaches. *Standpoint theory* instigates meta-analysis of my own decolonial and anti-racist methodological approaches to assess my analytical methods and, ultimately, creation of a community-engaged dissertation project. My standpoint is as a transdisciplinary researcher traversing academic fields including Anthropology, Art and Art History, Information Studies, and Performance Studies and who aligns herself with feminist and Xicanx political movements. Disrupting Western or Eurocentric modes of collectivity through scholarship while simultaneously a student within a neo-liberal institution provides fraught contradictions embodied through what Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldua (1987) terms as *nepantlism* – a liminal consciousness comprised of culturally plural processes including Indigenous and Spanish-colonial ontologies present in Mexican and more broadly encompassing Latin American peoples.

Drawing from Anzaldua, movement amidst cultural repertoires is an embodied practice for myself. Whether through linguistic or corporeal modalities, *nepantlism* is a sensibility that informs my analytical approach as I poetically interpret and translate affective responses that permeate individual corporeal boundaries and transnational borders. Ultimately, my dissertation aims to echo a sense of collectivities that resist settler capitalism's hold on epistemic processes known as *epistemicide*. As Souza Santos (2015) explains, *epistemicide*, or the destruction of knowledge by through European expansion and modernity, makes apparent the history of relations among plural knowledges and is central to the ecology of knowledges. Resisting

epistemicide, Native and Indigenous people concentrate their efforts to adapt in order to continue their longstanding worldviews. Additionally, with my Xicanx political affinities with immigrant communities who have historically faced and continue to face marginalization and *epistemicide* within the U.S., I aspire to be an ally and accomplice to co-create anti-colonial projects and work towards subverting Western/European racialized cultural practices via anti-racist and decolonial methodologies of research for the purpose of analyzing particular performance events.

The desire to unlearn assumptions is informed by the decolonial theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith and her ideas on "*Coming to Know the Past*" (2021) when she writes, "the pedagogical implication to hold alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things." In other words, through implementing decolonial frameworks one can understand affect, attention, for, ultimately, space and temporality depend upon one's standpoint. Due to my interest in working with Native and Indigenous peoples within the macro-region of what is referred to as Los Angeles, I have chosen feminist and decolonial methodologies to move beyond earlier senses of reflexivity into ways of conducting research that challenge unilinear knowledge production through reciprocity as an "ethnodramaturg" (Turner 1982).

To move towards reciprocity, illusions of permanence offered by systemic racial theories are challenged by describing histories that state and mass media institutions produce in order to understand how power and oftentimes embodied knowledges offer conflicting points of view. I turn to Bakhtin's theorization of the novel as a way to understand how all genres of literature undergo a process of "becoming," (1981: 5) or as Black feminist theorist and healer adrienne maree brown might describe as a process of "emerging" (brown 2017). Through "emerging," I utilize the writing process of the dissertation to analyze the ethics that Native peoples implement when collaborating with people associated with neoliberal and capitalist institutions. Native and

Indigenous morality then become the foundation of an aesthetic system that can inform various creative outputs, and in this case, a document for potential performances.

Indigenous aesthetic ethos as performance

A query posed by Dylan Robinson (2020: 8) inspires the expansive possibilities that consideration of Native and Indigenous worldviews has on an aesthetic systems analysis:

> What if we were to consider the potential of concert music to serve one of the many functions that Indigenous songs do: as law, medicine, or primary historical documentation? The idea that concert music might be reassessed as a form that may serve other functions – that is, that it might be used to explore functional ontologies that operate through much Indigenous song – remains unrealized. Indigenous logics, as structures rather than content are generally not considered in everyday operations of music performance, compositional practice, and listening.

Although Robinson's focus is on Indigenous sound studies, their holistic approach to Indigenous logics and structures encourage consideration of what the functions of Indigenous arts are and what such arts *perform*? How do performances of arts play vital roles in Indigenous worldviews? In order to understand Native and Indigenous worldviews fostered through community cultural wealth cultivated during collaborative processes, I take into consideration theorizations by contemporary Native American playwright and theater director, Hanay Geiogamah and Native American poet and literary critic, Paula Gunn Allen, who have called on literary critics to evaluate Native cultural arts according to Native criteria. According to Geiogomah and Gunn Allen, "Native theater dynamically draws from tradition and makes medicine to those who witness and participate" (as cited in Darby et al 2020: 9). Why theater, you may ask? In his

celebrated Theatre of the Oppressed (1974), Augusto Boal states that through a reformulation of formal conventions, theater can function as a liberatory practice that may serve as a rehearsal for positive social change and even revolution. Such rehearsal becomes accessible to people working with Native and Indigenous aesthetic systems and offering the potential to mobilize people such as curators, artists, or designers to acts of *rightful relations* through understandings of Native and Indigenous worldviews. Engaging in *rightful relations* allows one to move beyond a spectator's role to what Boal terms as "spectactor" thus emphasizing an actor's roles in instituting social change as someone with agency to transform social contexts and who asserts their own aesthetic system through decolonial processes. Such mandates account for multimodality and an aesthetic consciousness that Mithlo describes as looking "beyond text-based knowledge systems alone, opening up possibilities for imagining epistemic knowledge as a component of broader cultural revitalization projects" (2020: 15).

Through my dissertation, I explain that for aesthetic systems to nurture the praxis of *rightful relations*, programming of performances can be implemented from a blueprint of performances that reinvigorate the archive with ongoing possibilities of reclamation of Indigenous peoples' own narratives. As James Clifford reminds ethnographers, no longer do we rely on predominant anthropological research metaphors of the participant-observer, or objectifying interlocutors, but rather, culture is to be understood as constantly emerging. Through research and writing, one should aspire to remain enmeshed in local practices and institutional constraints (Clifford 1986: 11). Thus, the liminality performance studies afford, in concert with analysis with and about Native and Indigenous worldviews and Western European worldviews, bridges segregated and differently valued knowledges, so drawing together legitimated as well as subjugated modes of inquiry (Conquergood 2002: 152). As Mithlo (2020:

14) highlights, the purposes of Native and Indigenous arts are to be grasped by making sense of the various components operating in the marginalization of Indigenous aesthetic systems within the larger field of the arts.

The Politics of Institutional Constraints

The important compendium *Aesthetics and Politics* (Adorno et al. 2020) makes apparent the relationships among economy, politics, history, and cultural-production practices within and beyond a Bordieuan *field of forces*. To approach such matters, I utilize abstraction, metaphor, and surrealism. Surrealism as a form stands at odds with Lukács' evaluation of literature, specifically stating that Surrealism and Naturalism's "main trend is its growing distance from, and progressive dissolution of, realism" (Adorno, Lukács et al 2020: 29). It is important to note that Lukács utilized a Marxist theory of literature to understand if the totality of the capitalist system and its unity of economics and ideology formed an objective whole, independent of consciousness (Adorno et al. 2020: 31). For the purposes of my dissertation, the aforementioned query provides a critical attunement for my writing process as I represent material from my fieldwork in order to "uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated not immediately perceptible network of relationships that make up society" (ibid. 39). I aim to make more transparent the way laws and policies have affected and continue to affect Native and Indigenous sovereignty. Through metaphor and allegories represented in writing and in future performances of this document, I create an immediacy that is often made intangible through state-sanctioned verbosity, crises, and disintegration.

As a point of departure, I draw from the work of contemporary political theorist, Raymond Orr (2017), who discusses the role of what is referred to as *The Great Transformation*,

as factionalism capitalism contributed to the Potawatomi Tribe via communal and reciprocal social organization as a shift to a market-based organization. Although this analysis is based on large-scale social changes experienced by the Potawatomi Tribe, Orr's pain and profit framework (see figure 2) provides a starting point to analyze how political economy has a direct relationship to affective states and therefore contributes to plural ways of struggling and contesting in the face of settler capitalism within transnational contexts.

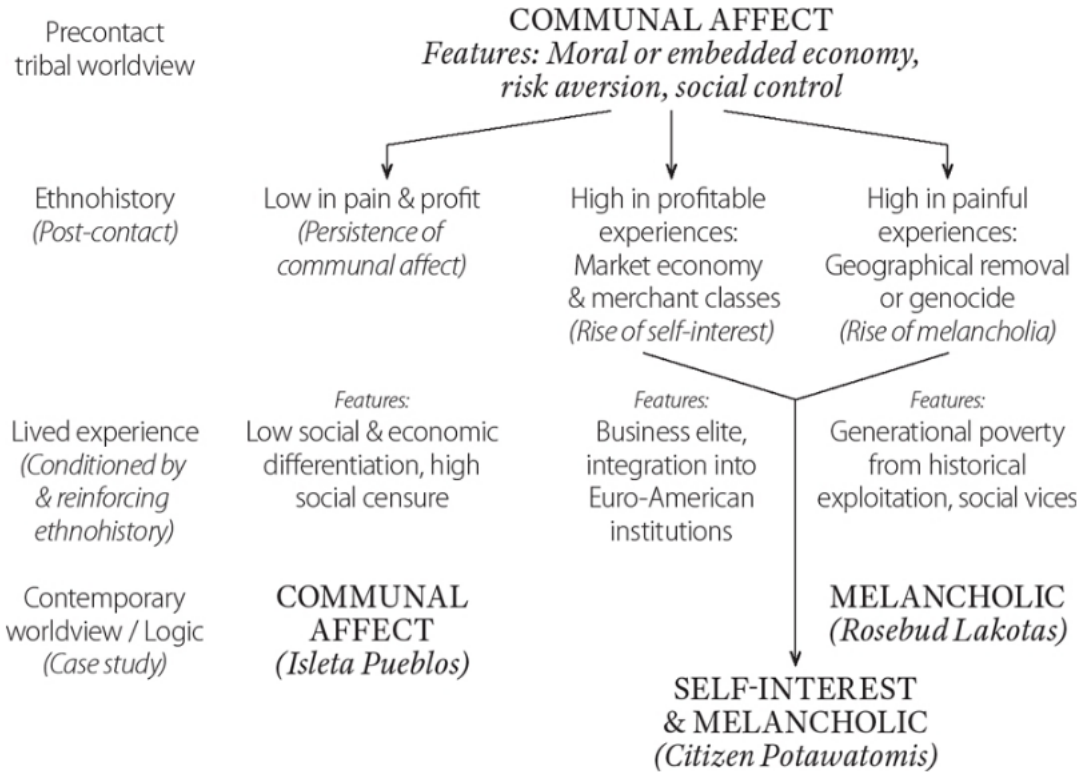

Figure 2 Visualization of pain and profit framework, starting with communal affect in traditional or moral economies (Orr 2017: 75).

When I use the word reclamation, I also allude to Native and Indigenous people's efforts towards achieving sovereignty. Another way of engaging with Lukács and his argument for the use of realism in literature, will be to mobilize the term *visual sovereignty* (Sonza 2018) throughout my analysis. *Visual sovereignty* is a decolonial tool for and by Indigenous people in self-making,

self-determination, and sovereignty. Due to the totality of capitalism, aesthetics produced with the methodology of visual sovereignty still circulate amongst a system which relies on Western ideologies. It is for this reason that decolonial methodologies are implemented in my political analysis in order to make tangible and "penetrate the laws governing objective reality and to uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated, not immediately perceptible network of relationships that make up society (Lukács 2020: 39);" and in doing so, I write this dissertation to do justice to such complexities associated with transnational political, sociocultural and historical contexts.

Ultimately, *rightful relations*, as both a praxis and an analytical framework, seeks to foreground Indigenous aesthetics as a lens through which we can understand how discursive practices may transform the daily operations and policies of arts and academic institutions. This approach provides insight into the motivation behind transforming institutional practices and personnel composition, framing it as part of a broader journey toward establishing rightful relations — an endeavor shaped by the diverse perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds of those involved. Each auto-ethnographic example underscores unique intersections with Euro-American aesthetics, revealing various tactics for articulating aesthetics of survivance through multiple media, modalities, and embodied expressions. My objective is to honor the diverse worldviews of Indigenous peoples, thereby expanding the ways in which we, as allies, can support Indigenous communities while considering the economic, historical, and current political contexts that impact and inform future possibilities for collaboration.

CHAPTER 1: Arrival to Zuni

Preamble

This chapter is an example of what Gerald Vizenor terms *postindian art* that aims to disrupt the dialectical loop of the voyeuristic gaze that attempts to capture what it means to be a "real" American Indian in the twenty-first century. In this chapter, I tell the story of my arrival to Zuni Pueblo (Zuni), and what this indicates for me in my positionality, identity and allyship. All of this reflects how I have come to form my own practice of *rightful relations* when building a relationship with Native Americans from an expanded Xicanx Indígena (Zepeda 2022) perspective. This story is considered to be an extended ethnographic opening that will be composed of three sections. First, I describe my journey driving to Zuni, New Mexico in July 2021, arriving as an invited guest and getting lost on a road in Zuni. Second, I recount a collaborative counter-mapping presentation performed May 2022, at the UCLA that emerged from dialogue while tending to Zuni farm-land. Lastly, the third section will be a conclusion with emergent future directions of theoretical and practice-oriented implications for continuing movements towards and for *rightful relations*.

Part I: Journey to Zuni

Departure

On the evening of the July 4th, in 2021, I drove in my white crossover SUV–my spaceship–from my mother's house in West Los Angeles to start my journey to Zuni, New Mexico. I take the usual on-ramp to enter the Interstate-10 highway that features official green signs on the side of the highway naming it the "Christopher Columbus Transcontinental Highway," which cuts across eight states from California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas,

Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. Seeing the Downtown Los Angeles skyline for what it truly is–a symbol of empire– I can't help but think about the history of displacement associated with the Federal-Aid Highway Act (FAHA) of 1956.[22] I first learned the intricacies of the social inequities associated with FAHA in an architecture culture theory class taught by Professor Dana Cuff in the department of Architecture and Urban Design, and as a result encountered the work by Eric Avila, *Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (2014). FAHA resulted in the development of 42,800 miles of the interstate system, was constructed creating a pattern of community development centered around the automobile.

The interstate highway program united the nation through infrastructure while simultaneously dividing cities into parcels based on race and class which fueled social tensions in the 1960s (ibid 2014: 1). City planners throughout the United States sought paths of least resistance by targeting African American communities, Mexican barrios, sacred Indigenous lands, and Chinatowns through private redevelopment plans, and public policies such as redlining, urban renewal, and slum clearance (Avila 2014; 3). The construction of this highway functions as both a conduit for the flow of people and goods across the United States of America, as well a border that segments the urban environment. From a perspective of *rightful relations*– meaning bringing to the fore those histories that are made invisible through hegemonic and oppressive power structures– my attention moves towards distressed inner-city communities that I am a part of. We resist infrastructural development through expressions of identity, language and place to redefine and use highway and boulevard infrastructure as a means to resist and revolt against state power–creating community through art, music, movement and uprisings

[22] Introduced in 1956 by President Dwight Eisenhower, the Federal Highway Act resulted from Eisenhower's observation of the German autobahn highway network, and the mobility of military operations on the same highways during World War II (Avila 2014).

against social inequities. Before Los Angeles County (LA) Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) completed the construction of the Expo Line in 2018, the remnants of an old railroad lined an edge of my childhood neighborhood.[23] This edge, a strip of a somewhat earthen part of land, lined with trees and magueys featured a makeshift skatepark on the western end of my neighborhood, constructed by my neighbor that was frequented by skateboarders and artists painting the brick wall on one of the ramps. Unhoused neighbors would sleep in the bushes. My brother, my neighbors and friends would play on the tracks, a temporarily reclaimed green space lined with magueys. Eventually, after many community meetings, LA Metro, in close dialogue with our neighborhood council, transformed the segment of the Expo Line that now runs through our neighborhood into both an active public transitory path by electric train and a path for pedestrians and those moving through rolling (wheel chairs, bicyclists, skateboarders, scooters, etc.).

As I exit the greater Los Angeles region, I see fireworks begin to combust on either side of the highway–then a cacophony of lights and booming reverberations. So many fireworks lit by local neighborhoods as a way to momentarily be in a collective and public setting amidst an isolating year under the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Clouds of suffocating smoke begin to accumulate and I think about this yearly celebration of Independence of the United States from England also connotes the genocide of Native American peoples and forced enslavement of African peoples through the Trans-Atlantic Crossing. And even during this federal nation-state holiday, fireworks cause harm to the environment, harming birds who are susceptible to loud noises that can cause death due to their sensitive hearing capabilities, triggering war-veterans living with post-traumatic stress disorder.

[23] Hymon, Steve. "E (Expo Line) Celebrates 10th Anniversary of First Segment Opening!" *The Source* (blog), April 28, 2022. https://thesource.metro.net/2022/04/28/133961/.

I continued my exodus from Los Angeles, then Southern California that is a part of a macro-frontier[24] that is the borderlands of the US-Mexico border, I cannot help but think about these mega infrastructures and grappling their oppressive histories as control channels that serve the objectives of the nation-state. What are their objectives? According to Nail's (2019) philosophical perspective, (1) borders are in motion; (2) the main function of borders is not to stop movement but rather to circulate it; and (3) borders are tools of primitive accumulation (195). Within the context of this chapter's story, from an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1991, powell 2007) I think about ways that borders have attempted to control and order aspects of my identity through gender, racial, and ethnic identifiers operating within hierarchies effecting everyday interactions.

Prior to being invited to Zuni, I had been in conversation with Dr. Jim Enote beginning in 2018. I met Dr. Enote at a talk he gave through the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. At the time, I worked at the Fowler Museum's archaeological facility. My supervisor at the time, Dr. Wendy Teeter encouraged me to attend the talk. Dr. Enote's application of the framework of counter-mapping was a method that tangibly elucidated stories and histories of Native peoples and their long-standing relationship to the lands from which they come from and maintain their livelihoods. I expressed to Dr. Enote over the next couple of years how I wished to learn first-hand about what it means to steward the land and how that informed Dr. Enote's work as Founder and CEO of the Colorado Plateau Foundation and collaborator on various projects with the objective of protecting Native lands, waters and cultures for future

[24] The term macro-frontier is cited from course work I completed during enrollment in UCLA's Urban Humanities Initiative (UHI) (2019-2020) where we defined seven-ecologies of Los Angeles inspired by Reyner Banham's book, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971). Macro-frontier as a theoretical framework stem from macro-theories that have expanded an understanding of Los Angeles' dynamic urbanism as operating in variable ways at the nexus of emplaced foci: the physical and environmental; social and cultural; and the representational and imaginary (Leclerc & Cuff 2019).

generations. I also was particularly interested in the role that art had in supporting the protection of Native ways. Dr. Enote often describes himself as an interrupted artist, farmer and storyteller. I wanted to learn directly from Dr. Enote, and he kindly extended an invitation to visit his farm to lend a helping hand in Zuni, New Mexico, in July 2021.

I told Dr. Enote that I hoped to get some dirt on my hands, gain tips on surviving dissertation writing, practicing diplomacy and finding time for deeper contemplation–away from the constant sonic rumble of the urban environment where I live. Dr. Enote suggested we create land art too given our mutual interest in the arts. He also reminded me it would be dusty and hot, with Zuni sitting at 6,400 to 8,000 feet on the Colorado Plateau, where the sun is intense.

Since I agreed to help with irrigation and repairing the barbed-wire fence, Dr. Enote also mentioned that I should expect to get dirt on my hands. He suggested I bring durable clothes and offered to lend me gloves if need be. He also offered reassurance, by stating over email, "I'm not trying to scare you! I don't want you to feel bad if you're favorite shirt or pants get trashed. Also, because Zuni is high with 7% to 15% humidity, nights can get cold. It can be 96 degrees Fahrenheit in the afternoon and 45 degrees Fahrenheit late at night." I recall the dry climate of my abuela's pueblo, Mesillas in Zacatecas, Mexico.

"By the way, From Albuquerque, take I-40 to Grants and then state highway 53 from Grants to Zuni," Dr. Enote said in a closing remark in an email. As I made my way eastward on the I-10, I exit on Base Line to spend the evening with my abuela. In the morning, I told her about my intentions to learn about Zuni and how it would help me think through my own research. To share my academic questions with my Abuela[25] was a blessing–being the first in my

[25] The word abuela is a Spanish word meaning grandmother and abuelo meaning grandfather. I capitalize the "a" in abuela to connote it as an honorific term and will also add the suffix -ita or -ito to connote it as a term of endearment.

family to enroll in a doctoral program reminds me of the sacrifices she has made leaving her pueblo in Mexico to be able to provide equitable access to education for her eight children. My Abuelo initially migrated by himself to the U.S. through the Brasero Program. Being isolated from his family caused him to experience a deep depression. My Abuela decided to move with my Abuelo along with their eight children.

As I prepared to leave on my next phase of my journey, I asked my Abuelita if she would give me her blessing. She asked me to kneel before her and she said a familiar Catholic prayer. I always had a contentious relationship with my Catholic upbringing and have come to understand its syncretic form and the violent processes that have subsumed the spiritual practices of my Indigenous family. I long to peel back the layers to allow for an embodied ancestral memory to emerge. I heard an echo in the way my Abuelita talks about her relationship to the land and the plants of Mesillas.

Driving eastward, I diverge from the I-10 to the I-15 northward towards Las Vegas. I figured since I happen to be heading in this direction I would make quick pit-stop in Las Vegas– a place of simulacra, upheld with facades and bright lights illuminating hotel and resort names emulating far-off destinations. I asked my friend, who lived there where Las Vegas gets their water from. Amidst the sound of the slot machines, I heard her utter, “I do not know.” I notice that many people are not wearing the medical procedure masks now that things have slowly started to open up after a year of the COVID-19 pandemic. I thought about the disconnect between my friend and I, our divergent paths and ways of relating to the environment.

Before driving, I cued up music from a streaming application on my smartphone to guide my tempo on the long road trip, the Google Maps application on my smartphone indicates it will take about seven hours. I filled up my tank with gasoline as I exited Las Vegas and I started to

feel the scorching summer heat. I entered the gas station mini-mart to buy some snacks and bottles of water. As I approached the counter to make my purchase, I felt a group of men staring at me. I thought to myself–is it the fact that I am wearing a facial mask to prevent the spread of disease that is drawing attention? Or is it my California license plates? Or is it the color of my brown skin? Do they read me as being a woman? Non-binary?

As I exited the gas station mini-mart, I felt excitement knowing that I had approximately 300 hours of music to shuffle through during my trek across Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico. Leaving Las Vegas, I noticed the extremely tall light fixtures above the highway–as if to offset the vastness of the surrounding landscape. I drove on I-515 to U.S. Highway 93 south toward Zuni. This was the first time I traveled since the COVID-19 lockdown and the Black Lives Matter Global Uprising. I felt a sense of peace on my solo drive with nothing but my favorite music to listen to without the rumble of the city. Within the comfort of my air-conditioned car cabin–powered by the fossil fuels I have come to detest, yet rely on to traverse my home urban environment and now a long road trip to Zuni–I noticed that the temperature outside reached close to 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.38 degrees Celsius). I began to think about the tires of my spaceship. Will they withstand the rest of the trip?

After about an hour of driving in the heat, I decided to pull over at Last Stop. I sat in my car for a moment with the air conditioning on while checking in via short message service (SMS) on my smartphone with family and friends, letting them know where I am. I explained to them that Last Stop is just that–a last road-side travel-stop before a long expanse of highway that people take to get to the Grand Canyon from Las Vegas. As I exited my vehicle, I noticed other people sitting in their cars with the engines on, parked. As I walked towards the door to the Last Stop Travel Center, a man politely holds open the door for me. I bowed my head slightly and

verbally express thanks and he smiled back. I entered the air-conditioned building which contains various souvenirs. What stood out immediately is what I recognize as a fortune telling machine, similar to one I had seen on Venice Beach back home–except this one at Last Stop featured former U.S. President Donald Trump as a robotic fortune teller wearing a red cap with his 2016 presidential slogan, "Make American Great Again," a statement that alienated many minoritized people given Trump's far-right ideologies and policies.[26]

As I looked around for sustenance, I repeatedly saw images of creatures with big eyes–aliens on coffee cups, pillows, plush dolls, keychains, apparel–in various colors, sizes and anatomies. Why? Did these serve as a means of distancing oneself from the land here? I could not help but think of the land and how it has been appropriated as a backdrop for various films to depict foreign lands, alienating its original context, meaning and vitality from itself. I left Last Stop and drove for about three hours.

After a short pause in Flagstaff, I drove along the I-40 and reached Holbrook, Arizona on Route 66. I saw a strange roadside attraction–Wigwam Motel. This motel is made up of a row of structures imitating the traditional tipi dwellings of the Plains Native Americans including the Arapaho, Assiniboine, Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Comanche, Crow, Kiowa, Lakota, Lipan, Kiowa Apache, Cree, Ojibwe, Sarsi, Nakoda and Tonkawa. The Great Plains region is approximately 1,000 miles away from Holbrook Arizona. These misplaced and appropriated forms are a testament to the imposed imaginary that old western films overlaid onto the land of the American Southwest.

[26] During Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, he attacked immigrants, centralized government, and during his presidential tenure he used foul language about women. The day after Trump's inauguration in 2017, 500,000 people participated in the Women's March in Washington DC advocating for women's rights and LGBTQIA+ rights. #MoveMe. "#MAGA, Make America Great Again and Social Media." Accessed August 5, 2024. https://moveme.studentorg.berkeley.edu/project/maga/.

I took I-40 to Grants and then state highway 53 from Grants to Zuni. Along the way I marveled at the way the highway had been engineered and built to scale large mountains. At this point there were not many other cars on the road. I began to see signs for Zuni about an hour before sunset. I pulled over on the side of the road to stretch out my legs and feel the sun. No other cars in sight with short grasses on either side of the road as far as the eye could see in all directions. Piercingly quiet with the sound of a bird chirping gently sliced through the stillness.

I take a moment to send a message to my mother and post on social media to let my friends and family know that I am well on my way. As I get closer to Zuni, the sun sets, I begin to see signs stating that there is no camera recording allowed of cultural events. I make sure to keep this in mind and make a conscious decision not to capture images of people without their informed consent.

Arrival

As I drove towards the center of Zuni, I saw a deep red earthen mesa in the distance beyond the two-lane road I drove on. At this point, I had little to no cellular service, resulting in no music being streamed and played through my car's audio stereo system for the past hour or so. I lowered the windows to breathe in the air and slow down my vehicle. I see horses to the left of the road, in the northern direction. As I slowly drove by, a horse neighs at me and I say hello in response. I kept my eye on the mesa and as I approached that direction, I felt perceived by the land–at the time, I felt judged in a way by the land. I thought to myself, am I arriving in a good way? My body reverberated with the atmosphere's silence.

As I entered a small shop called Halona Plaza, I noticed a basketball court outside and it reminded me of the handball court in my mother's rural pueblo, Mesillas, Zacatecas. At around

8pm, I arrived at the Halona Inn parking lot where there was a light drizzle of rain. I took a moment in the parking lot, looking around for the entrance of the inn. Slight panic set in and I thought to myself that perhaps they are closed and I have to sleep in my car. Eventually, I found the back entrance and entered a store selling souvenirs, food and beverages. I spoke to a woman at the check-out counter and I gave my reservation number. The woman called over a man who then proceeded to process my billing information.

I let him know that it began to rain when I arrived and he leans and cranks his neck in a way that slightly startled me and he said,

"Ah yes, very curious that it would start to rain!" I asked him if it is monsoon season and he scoffed,

"Monsoon season sees hardly any rain here. Come this way, I show you your room."

He comes around the counter and motioned with his hand to follow him. As we walked past the dining hall, the floor seemed to warp and I felt a slight disorientation. We exited the building and walked across a small courtyard of the inn and up a wooden staircase where I entered a dimly lit room with two twin beds. It looked identical to the room I saw pictured on the internet where I made my reservation. I felt a tickle in my nose and eyes. I sneezed.

"Is there a cat that lives in here? I am extremely allergic."

The man pauses and replies, "Yes there is. Let me see if I can find you another room." We returned back to the inn's store and dining hall through a different back door and across the warping floor. He went behind the counter to check his records.

"Hm, this is curious." He mumbles to himself. I imagined him coordinating his reservations to accommodate me must be cumbersome. I felt a bit nervous and hoped that I get a room that will not trigger my allergies. He shuffled around his keys and asked me to follow him

once more through the back door by walking across the warped floor which for some reason in my mind seemed to be warping more and more every time, we walked across it. This time, when we exited the building, we crossed a short path to an adjacent house-like structure with a wooden patio deck. As we entered the interior of the building, to the left he pointed out a common kitchen and then directly in front of us, a door. We turned immediately to the right and he pointed out that this will be my room. On the door, the number two and a figure of a person bent over with long locks of hair, playing a wind instrument–Kokopelli.

He handed over my keys to me and I proceeded to walk towards my car. I parked my car closer to the entrance of my accommodations so that it would be more convenient for me to unload my belongings. As I exited my vehicle to get my belongings from the trunk of my car, I noticed a cat staring at me. I closed the trunk of my vehicle and turn back around to see the cat which had disappeared. Tired, I felt my mind playing tricks on me. As I approached the entrance of the courtyard to enter my accommodations, I notice the car parked next to mine had a windshield sun shade with an image of four characters: Han Solo, Obi Wan Kenobi, Luke Skywalker and Chewbacca. I recalled that many of the Star Wars films have also appropriated the landscapes of the American Southwest, along with other landscapes in Tunisia, to create a sense of a distant and faraway place. I thought about how Native lands have been used to create a sense of an "exotic" place through the creation of fantasy or science fiction worlds in films. I also thought about most recent ways that Indigenous pop culture has reclaimed such media, specifically with the character Grogu (also referred to as Baby Yoda) as being depicted in memes wearing a robe with Indigenous patterns. Because Grogu is one of the last members of his species who is constantly evading exploitation of his knowledge and power, Natives feel a kinship with Grogu. Grogu's struggles are seen as parallel to the struggles of Native

communities from the traumatic and often fatal separation of Native children from their families and cultural practices through the colonial institutions of boarding schools, and Christian missionaries who attempted to force assimilation and conversion of Native children into mainstream American culture (Aguilar 2021, Jennings 2022, National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, Smith 2004). Another parallel struggle that Indigenous people on social media express through remixing images of Grogu include the targeted trafficking of Native children by for-profit adoption industries which disrupt the traditional family structures of Native peoples (Alexander 2022).

The next morning, I woke up around 7am to eat breakfast and received a message from Dr. Enote that we would be meeting around 10am. When I entered the dining hall, I walked to the counter to order the huevos rancheros with beans and flour tortilla. I asked if I may eat outside due to the fact that I had come from a populous region and that I did not want to risk infecting people if I had contracted the COVID-19 virus.

I heard a tray hit the surface of a table behind me and felt tension in the air. The Zuni community had been hit particularly hard by the pandemic due to their rural location and lack of access to healthcare resources. I felt in this moment that my presence was a nuisance and that I was not welcome. They politely agreed that they would bring my food to the patio outside my accomodations.

After breakfast I spent time writing before Dr. Enote's arrival. I was nervous especially after the morning's interaction in the dining hall. I decided to wait outside and sit on a red boulder outside of the inn near the parking lot. I saw a truck pull into the parking lot. Dr. Enote parks his white truck, and I nervously stand up as he walks over in my direction.

"Where were you?"

I felt awkward, unable to make eye contact with Dr. Enote, gazing at the red earth near my feet. I told him about the long drive from Los Angeles and that I stopped in the Inland Empire to get my Abuela's blessing, then stayed overnight in Las Vegas. Dr. Enote expresses that he does not know where the Inland Empire is located. I explained the specific place-name of where I visited is Highland.[27] He asked me why I stopped in Las Vegas and I tell him I had a friend there I had not seen in years that I wanted to say hello to. He looked at me with skepticism. I told him people there aren't wearing masks and he expressed a lack of surprise.

"You know we're kind of afraid of the COVID-19 Delta variants, so you need to be wearing your mask."

At this point, I felt a great sense of anxiety and dread. Was my presence a fatal burden similar to the import of pathogens and subsequent epidemics by early European contact during the 15th-20th centuries? (Collen et al. 2022). Dr. Enote told me that he had various meetings to attend to throughout the next couple of days while I am here and that he would be happy to have my helping hand on his farm. I expressed my enthusiasm and let him know I brought work clothes. Dr. Enote said he would take me for a short drive around Zuni so I can understand the history, economy and culture. He pointed out the church, a clinic, and some abandoned buildings. As he drove around, he explained the intergenereational structure of households and how they expand the architecture based on the growing family unit. A tangible tinge of irony enters my thoughts as I recall learning about the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) or Backyard Homes law that addressed the housing crisis in Los Angeles. Native people are already designing beautiful things– Indigenous design is "the embodiment of practices and principles that are

[27] Highland, California are the traditional lands of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, who are part of the Serrano Native peoples who are Indigenous to the so-called San Bernardino Mountains and high desert regions of California "Hamiinat Magazine Issue 07 | Smbmi." https://sanmanuel-nsn.gov/hamiinat-magazine-issue-07

informed by the culture of the community." The housing design tenets of Zuni intergenerational family living spaces is an example of Indigenous design (Smith 2017).

Dr. Enote also pointed out external ovens of the homes and I immediately recalled the oven my Abuelita had on the side of her home in Mesillas. Many of the buildings featured deep red adobe brick and sandstone just like the surrounding land. Dr. Enote pointed out some solar panels on some buildings and mentions how organizations come to Zuni to install sustainable technology but the problem is that these organizations left and did not come back. I made a mental note that a long-term sustained relationship with Indigenous communities is important in order to ensure knowledge transfer and building trust. Dr. Enote's stories and the experiences he shared informs the praxis of *rightful relations*– ethical collaborative relationships with Indigenous peoples need sustained clear communication and mutual terms of satisfaction.

We returned to the inn and he says he will come back around 4pm to pick me up so we can work on the farm. Later that day he comes around 4pm and we make our way to his farm on the earthen road. On the road while he drives us to his farm, I share with Dr. Enote aspects of my own identity and how growing up in an urban environment influenced who I am and what my values are. Growing up near the Japanese-American neighborhood in West Los Angeles known as the Sawtelle Neighborhood, expanded my perspective on history and creative expression given the presence of the Giant Robot Gallery, or nearby Japanese bookstores where I would purchase fashion magazines featuring street fashion from Tokyo, or mangas. I mentioned my ancestral lineage and showed him an art piece by Jamie Muñoz, titled, *LA Commute*, which has been printed on a blanket. Muñoz's piece features an image of a pick-up truck, a Jalisco decal pictured on its rear, and the Mexica diety Tonatiuh or the Tlatlecuhtli.[28] I asked Dr. Enote if he

[28] Often referred to as the "Aztec Calendar Stone," or *Piedra del Sol*, is a Mexica monumental art piece which had been buried in the main Zocalo, where the Templo Mayor is after the early Spanish colonial era in Teotihuacan,

had seen this diety's image before and he shares that he had seen it before at the local flea market.

On the second day, I helped Dr. Enote with pulling weeds out on the farm. We discuss the sounds of Black Lives Matter Uprisings of 2020, and touch on the vital role that rebellion has in social justice. Dr. Enote mentions the sound of the conch shell as a call to battle within the context of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680.[29] As I continued to pull out the weeds, I share the advocacy and curriculum development work I am doing with the Anti-Racist, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (AEDI) Commission for UCLA's School of Arts and Architecture (SoAA). We discuss the Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) identifier and the limitations it has on accounting for unique socio-economic struggles within racialized groups. I also bring up the point that the BIPOC term can inadvertently separate people by race when there are people with intertwined identities due to histories of migration, settler colonialism and contact. Although I was not fully aware of these details during my visit to Zuni, my own lineage reflects that with my descendence from Moorish peoples who would be racialized as Black, and my Indigenous descendence from my Coca family on my father's side. Furthermore, although it is important to highlight the distinct struggles of specific racialized groups, the common denominator is racism, and as Professor of law, powell points out, coalition building is important and has played an

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which is now commonly referred to as Mexico City. This monumental art piece which is currently housed in the Museo Nacional de Antropología has become a symbol incorporated into Chicano art embodying a reclaiming of Indigenous heritage and ancestral roots. Unfortunately, with this widespread symbol, there is an inadvertent homogenization of Indigenous diversity within the region of Mexico. The Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was concerned with socio-economic and cultural matters and became popularized through the publication *Plan Espiritual de Aztlan* (1969) which relied on a Mexica historical narrative concept known as Aztlán. Since then, the use of the concept of Aztlán has been debated, with one example being the 2018 conference, "Beyond Aztlán: Situating Chicanx Struggle on Stolen Indigenous Land" (Andouard-Labarthe 1990, Cruz 2018, Hidalgo 2019).

[29] The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 was a revolution against Spanish religious, economic, and political institutions imposed upon the Pueblos. It is one of a number of successful Native uprising against a colonizing power in North America. Indian Pueblo Cultural Center. "A Brief History of the Pueblo Revolt," August 6, 2020. https://indianpueblo.org/a-brief-history-of-the-pueblo-revolt/.

important role in the civil rights movement through multiracial and multiethnic leadership (powell 2007, 409-410).

Additionally, my lineage on my mother's side, descends from Indigenous people who were forced to work on the nearby hacienda. I had driven by the local hacienda's ruins many times at the place called La Parada, just outside of my mother's pueblo. According to an official ordinance from the Royal Spanish Crown dated to 1773 (see figure 3.) housed at the Archivo Histórico Municipal Sombrerete, Zacatecas, ordered that the haciendas avoid grave physical and moral abuse towards Indigenous people working on the hacienda, along with putting into law the right to rest during the workday. The archivist helping me stated that this ordinance was not a reflection of the Royal Spanish Crown's high morals, but rather response to rebellions happening on haciendas at the time. Revolt and rebellion as tactics for advocacy is something I see in my own lineage and the lineages and histories of BIPOC peoples advocating for their rights. Honoring rebellion and revolt as vital proceses of survivance shapes the values of *rightful relations* as a practice of advocacy–making space for dissent and disagreement, to avoid coercion or oppressive relational dynamics.

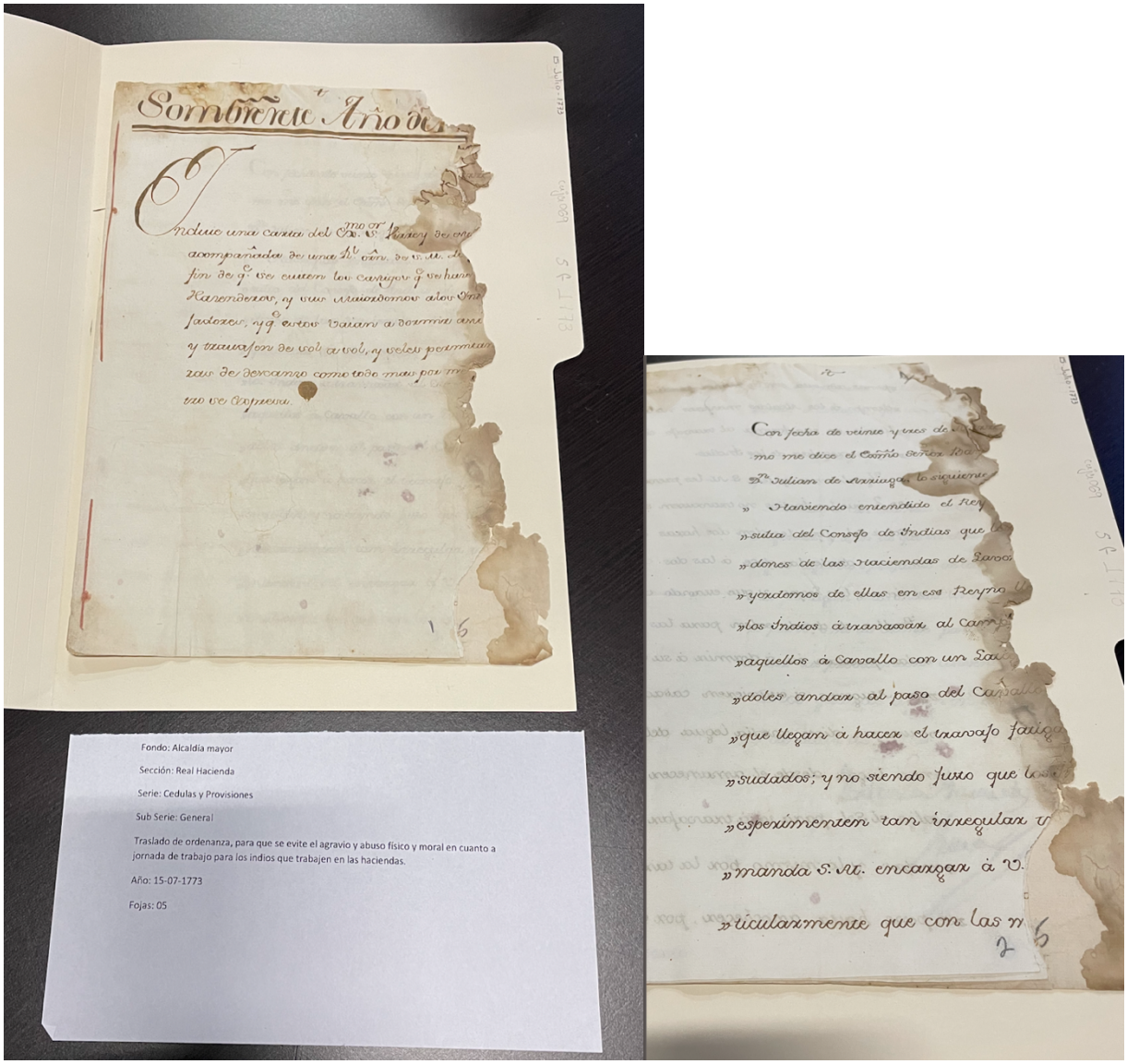

Figure 3. Two photos of page one (left) and page two (right) of an official ordinance from the municipal government of Sobrerete, Zacatecas, dated July 15, 1773. Courtesy of the Archivo Histórico Municipal de Sombrerete, MX32042AHMS administered by Alcaldía Mayor, from a series of royal decrees, provisions and proclamations, box 10/15, volume 34. Photograph taken by Lili Flores Aguilar, September 28, 2023

After a day in the sun working on the farm, Dr. Enote drove me back to the inn and I rested.

The third day, driving on the road to Dr. Enote's plot of land in Zuni, New Mexico, I took a wrong turn on my way driving to Dr. Enote's farm, but I thought I was on the right track given

the map that Dr. Enote had drawn for me. I drove along a road that's obviously not as well traveled as the other one that I was just on. As I listened to Gorillaz's track "Tomorrow Comes Today" from their 2001 self-titled album while driving on the bumpy red earth, I felt relieved that my car had a pretty good suspension system.

After I drove for 10 minutes on the bumpy road, I realize this road doesn't lead to where I was supposed to go. I stopped in what seemed like a semi-wide clearing in the road, although in this part of the land the plants are low to the ground, just sustaining themselves, keeping away from the hot sun, yet being nourished and borrowing vitality from photons for a temporary moment.

I got out of the car to take a closer look at the earth. 10 meters in front of my car, with a plateau in the distance, I saw a leafless tree. The tree, its blackened bark imprinted in my mind.

I looked around; I heard a sound.

It sounds like a sheep, or is it a goat?

But I can't see it, I only heard it in the distance.

I yelled, hello!

My voice across the land.

The sheep answered back. I say, hello!

Again, I heard the sheep respond.

Then, just on the horizon to what I believed is the south, I saw a dog running towards me, or a figure. It's a black figure, contrasting with the red earth, running, running towards me. Is this the sheep? No, in fact, it is a dog. A dog with curious eyes, the eyes seem like they're electric blue. The dog sniffed around my car, and then takes a moment to mark its territory. Well received, I guess, I optimistically thought to myself.

And then I approached the dog and give it a pat on its head. I then saw another figure running towards me in the distance. This one seems to be a person running, and they seem to be wearing a straw hat. As the person came closer, I guessed they were probably a man, and I hesitated a moment internally and thought, well, I'm here by myself on an unmarked road, should I be worried? I remembered that there's a baseball bat that I had in the car, just in case, and I only felt these moments of temporary vulnerability due to the fact that I'm a woman, and I travelled alone with no cellular phone reception, lost in a place that I had never been before. I thought to myself, well, I can ask this man for directions. As the man approached, I saw his straw hat clearly, a plaid button up long sleeve shirt with a white t-shirt beneath, his skin is brown and he has black hair – he is probably the sheepherder, I guessed to myself.

As he stepped closer, I said, hello, and he responds,

“Oh, I heard you calling.”

“Yes, I think I'm lost. I'm looking for Dr. Enote and the land he's working on.”

“I'm not sure who that is,” he replied.

“Dr. Enote grows corn.”

“Oh, yes, then it's that way,” he points back towards the main dirt road.

And then I slowly bring out my sketchbook, and I said, “You know, I really like this tree. Is it all right with you if I draw it?” I ask.

He replies, “sure.”

I said, “yeah, I just want to be mindful. I know there are signs around Zuni that say we can't take photographs.” So, I open my sketchbook and I draw the tree with my calligraphy pen in my sketchbook.

“Are you native?” he asks me.

"I'm mixed," I reply. In retrospect, my reply speaks to a post-colonial context, and me struggling to come to terms with the complex history of my Indigeneity. According to TallBear (2013) Indigenous articulations of Indigeneity emphasize political status and biological and cultural kinship constituted in dynamic, long-standing relations with each other and with living landscapes. At the time, I was unaware of the exact details of the Indigenous peoples in my family and ancestral lineage. Fast forward three years, I was able to trace my family's history on my mother's side and while spending time in Archivo Histórico Municipal Sombrerete, Zacatecas, Mexico, which has allowed me to claim my Indigeneity proudly in a way that tells the nuanced complexities of what it means emerge in a post-colonial context.

As a means of decolonizing and undoing categories of "Indian" or "native," which are terms steeped in evolutionary viewpoints (de la Cadena & Starn 2007, 5-12), as a core practice of the ethos of *rightful relations*, identifying my lineage and ancestral lands is a way of embodying a decolonial understanding of myself that goes beyond nation-state politics and instead recovers "the historical distinctiveness of marginalized groups" (de la Cadena & Starn 2007, 11). Although postcolonial dimensions of my lineage are a truth–including my descendance from Sephardic Jewish and Moorish settlers from Spain during the Spanish inquisition– centering my Indigenous roots puts into practice *rightful relations* as a means of making that which is often unseen or marginalized–in this case, my Indigeneity–more visible. Furthermore, retracing my plural ancestral lineages works to unravel what scholar of Xicana/x Indigenous studies, Susy Zepeda describes as "'de-indigenization' and the imposed racial hierarchy of mestizaje that aims erase or dilute specific Indigenous and African lineages" while reinforcing logics of whiteness and colonial nation-state building and bordering practices (Zepeda 2022, 27).

This moment when I was asked if I was Native by the Zuni shepherd served as an important instance where I grappled with the social differentiation within embodiments of Indigeneity (Radcliffe 2018). Naming my Indigeneity also sits with the tension that Tuck & Yang (2012) point out in relation to *settler nativism*. Settler nativism, according to Tuck and Yang is a "habit of settler colonialism, which pushes humans into other human communities" ensuring "that settlers have Indigenous and chattel slave ancestors" (2012, 11). In naming the truth of my nuanced lineage, I also acknowledge that in my lineage are moments of violence inflicted by settlers, and, I have traced moments of resistance by my Indigenous Coca family on my father's side and Moorish and Sephardic Jewish settler ancestors on my mother's side. There are still remaining questions regarding my lineage on my mother's side due to a lack of archival documentation of my family lineage in the Archivo Histórico Municipal Sombrerete, Zacatecas.

What I did manage to find while in the archivos was evidence of the ways the *casta* system in colonial Mexico aimed to classify people by race with distinctions between Spaniards, Black people, and Indigenous people.[30] My mention of the *casta* system is not an endorsement, but rather a recognition of its imposition by Spanish colonial rule. The *casta* system classified a social hierarchy based on genealogy and evidence thereof within institutionalized archives and beyond– an archive that is my own ancestral lineage lives in my corporeal memory and repertoire (Taylor 2003).

On the topic of naming ancestral lineage, this is a decolonial process for researchers aiming to decolonize the academy by understanding where we are placed and how our ancestral lineages shape our interactions and ontologies. Furthermore, this allows for transparency and

[30] B. Escobar Zelaya, Susana. "The Remains of Castas in Latin America." *Global Insight: A Journal of Critical Human Science and Culture* 2, no. 1 (October 2021): 12–19. https://doi.org/10.32855/globalinsight.2021.002.

accountability to check biases, values, or assumptions that may be brought into collaborative work. Naming my worldview and position also challenges neutrality that performs as a way to reinforce power structures of colonization and patriarchy (Behrendt 2019: 240-241). Now, back to the story of my interaction with the shepherd whose name escaped me while I was lost in Zuni. I continued to translate the form of the tree nearby, it seemed charred as if marked by being previously set ablaze.

"Are you an artist?" he asks.

"Yes… yes, I am." And in my mind, I thought to myself, yes, I am an artist, even though I am reluctant to accept this descriptor. In the past I had always loved the arts but due to my lower middle-class socioeconomic background, I had limited access to the arts and found my empowerment in community-based organizing and arts activism. Being enrolled in a PhD program as a first-generation student at UCLA SoAA proved to be a challenging intellectual pursuit, and so while I was with the land and people in Zuni, I had the opportunity to exercise parts of my brain that I had not in a long time while sketching the tree out in the field. Sketching or doodling allowed me to tap into my multimedia skillset as an artist and an interdisciplinary scholar–facets of my identity I had come to terms with and integrated throughout my academic journey as encouraged by my home department and advisors of WACD.

Figure 4. Figure 4. Ink sketch of tree I saw in Zuni while lost, using a pentel black ink brush, by Lili Flores Aguilar.

As I doodled in my sketchbook, showing him my creative process by keeping the sketchbook open, with my ink pen, he went on to tell me,

“I heard a deer whistle just in that direction,” he pointed towards the nearby mesa.

“I never knew deer could whistle,” I admitted.

“Yeah, they also found a body, a skeleton, just a little further down in the ditch. If you keep driving down that way where your car is directed, you'd be able to see where that happened.”
I thought to myself, what a morbid detail. A stroke of fear and anxiety began to stir inside me. Trying to conceal my unease, I said,

“Oh, well, you know, it's a good thing that I have a weapon in my car.” I thought to myself. Maybe he was just telling me as a way to be careful, but why did he tell me such a detail? I felt a sense of vulnerability emerge again.

“Do you have any water?” he asked.

“Yeah, I have some alkaline water.”

“Alkaline?”

I filled his water bottle up with my jug of water.

“Thank you.”

I ask, “do you know the history of this land?”

“Yes, you know, just that way,” he pointed into the distance, “this area is known for being a site of conflict between the Apache and the Zuni.”

“Oh, well, do you think now they can get along?” I asked.

He pauses, “Yeah, I think so.” This made me think about the history of the land, conflict, and contested borders that have existed for hundreds if not thousands of years. Bordering is an action done through the use of language, cultural practices, and also colonially imposed nation-state borders. I thanked the shepherd for his directions, and then I told him that I would be on my way. He walks away, and I got in my car, and I turned my vehicle around, and then I headed back in the correct direction.

When I got to Dr. Enote’s farm, I tell Dr. Enote about my meandering on the wrong road and my encounter with the shepherd.

“I wonder who that was,” Dr. Enote replied after hearing my story. Dr. Enote handed me a shovel and instructed me on irrigation and told me about the water pump he engineered for his farm. I marveled at the sound the running water made amidst the crisp peace of the land. It was my last day in Zuni, and I asked Dr. Enote if I may have a moment alone with the land. He kindly obliged, and let me know to make sure to lock the gate behind me. As I stood there looking at the land tended by generations of Zuni peoples–Dr. Enote’s farm, the mesa in the

distance–I made a promise to give back in whatever way I could. I set an intention to remain in *rightful relations* by practicing long-term reciprocity that honors the lineages and persistent cultural practices of Zuni people, and more broadly, Indigenous people who continue to be autonomous and strive towards autonomy amidst neocolonial processes. The next morning, I leave Zuni and drive back towards Los Angeles.

Part II: Collaborative counter-mapping presentation

Upon returning to back to Los Angeles, COVID-19 regulations rendered most UCLA coursework during the fall quarter of 2021 in a remote modality, meaning, that most classes were held via the teleconferencing platform known as Zoom.[31] There was limited face-to-face interactions, and when classes did meet in-person we were required to wear masks to cover our faces to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Amidst the mixed modality of learning, Professor Ungprateeb Flynn reached out to me via email about a seminar series he initiated for our department World Arts and Cultures/Dance (WACD). At the beginning of the fall quarter, Dr. Ungprateeb Flynn invited me to work with him and Choreographic Inquiry graduate student, Rashaida Hill to assist in the coordination and programming for the series.

After agreeing to work on this together, we met via zoom to collaborate on locating financial support from various UCLA organizations including WACD, the American Indian Studies Center, the Design Media Arts (DMA) department, the Student Committee for the Arts, Counterforce (CF) Lab, and UCLA School of Arts and Architecture AEDI Commission. Once we identified potential sponsors for the seminar series, we began to do outreach to potential

[31] Zoom is a cloud-based video conferencing platform that allows users to connect online for meetings, webinars, and live chat. It's accessible on MacOS, Windows, iOS, and Android mobile devices, and can also be used with computer audio or phone lines. (https://www.zoom.com/en/about/)

speakers. After deciding on two to three speakers and locating possible funds with partner sponsors, we began to connect with potential speakers. I proposed inviting Dr. Enote to speak given his experience with repatriation efforts and counter-mapping.[32]

As an organizing team, we worked together during the fall quarter to propose with each administrative staff-person in each associated office the amount of pay for honoraria for each qualified speaker, transportation costs, and so on. We planned for the seminar series to take place in the Spring 2022 quarter which would give us ample time to organize our plans. During each step, we practiced full transparency with each sponsor and potential speaker to ensure there were clear terms of agreement for the expectation of the seminar. For the purpose of this chapter's section, I focus primarily on how I invited Dr. Enote to participate in the seminar series.

Dr. Enote is an uncommon and exceptional Native person. He is 67 years old, resides in his hometown, of Zuni, and is a lifelong farmer – a practitioner of a culture of land use, is an executive leading a major philanthropy, serves on national boards for various organizations and foundations, and is an interrupted artist. Some consider him a public figure, but he is content being identified as a farmer with an immense range of experiences. In December of 2021, which marked the end of the fall quarter, I corresponded with Dr. Enote's assistant and managerial team first asking if he would be interested in participating in the seminar series. Once Dr. Enote's managerial team confirmed Dr. Enote's interest in participating in the seminar series and shared his speaker fee, we began to move forward on sending over the information to the sponsors. Corresponding with fiscal sponsors about exact speaker fees in addition to travel and lodging

[32] According to Viola Arduini, counter-mapping "provides a link between land, science, and embodiment...the body becomes the center, bringing together land and histories" (2021). Furthermore, Dr. Enote describes counter-mapping in the follow manner, "As a philosophical practice, counter-mapping exalts liberation and artistic freedom, speaks for the revision of traditional mapping to bring about an imaginative and refreshed society, an ethos of truth, and arranges places and events as spirited parts of a cosmological process...counter mapping opens the door for agency and influence for different ways of knowing (2021).

fees allowed us to request an exact budget that would compensate and accommodate speakers adequately.

As the team secured the budget, we confirmed with Dr. Enote's team in January of 2022 and we began to discuss possible dates for Dr. Enote's seminar. We agreed to aim for May 2022 while allowing for flexibility as we collectively monitored the COVID-19 virus and its subvariant, Omicron.[33] Given that there were multiple fiscal sponsors for Dr. Enote's participation in the seminar series that included a seminar and workshop, there were additional requests for Dr. Enote to also partake in a DMA graduate student studio visit, and Counterforce (CF) lab visit.[34] Via email, I communicated with Dr. Enote's team the aforementioned additional requests for Dr. Enote's time and associated compensation. Throughout this process, the internal WACD seminar series organizing committee and me ensured our budget was balanced in order to ensure all potential speakers would be accommodated based on their respective speaker fees. In February 2022, I reached out to the SoAA Dean's Student Council and AEDI commission for additional funds the WACD organizing committee needed to cover all speaker fees. By March 2022, we secured all funds necessary to compensate all seminar speakers on the terms of agreement we came to a consensus on.

Thereafter, I sent the itinerary and schedule for Dr. Enote's seminar participation with the WACD funds managerial team and connected them with Dr. Enote's management team in order to make reservations for lodging and travel and coordinate methods of reimbursement. After

[33] The COVID-19 Omicron strain became the dominant SARS-CoV-2 strain in the United States in 2022 (Katella 2023).

[34] counterforce lab is a research studio at UCLA that harnesses the power of art and design to engage with the reality of the global ecological crisis and its ties to environmental injustice. "About - CounterForceLab." Accessed December 11, 2024. https://counterforcelab.org/about.

about five email threads figuring out travel details and Dr. Enote's schedule for his visit, and registration with UCLA through their Vendor Registration process to ensure a smooth reimbursement process.[35]

During this process, I was nervous about how bureaucratic the process would be and did not want to strain the collaborative dynamic I began to establish with Dr. Enote and his team. I was relieved to learn that coordination of Dr. Enote's participation was successful due to transparent communication of spreadsheets and shared tables, pertaining to budgetary items, travel and accommodations itinerary and seminar schedule. I also communicated with WACD's facilities management and stage management team to ensure we reserved adequate space equipped with a projection screen and enough seating for 20-40 audience members to attend Dr. Enote's presentation and workshop. Dr. Ungprateeb Flynn and I worked closely to design a digital flyer in Adobe Express[36] to promote Dr. Enote's seminar and lecture while CF lab designed their own flyer with their branding specifications to reflect their unique identity as an entity within the DMA department within SoAA. Being a part of these multiple organizations on campus through roles such as graduate student researcher for CF Lab, or leader within the SoAA Dean's Council allowed for me to advocate for Dr. Enote's participation and representation through this speaker series. Coordinating outreach materials also illuminated the importance of each collaborative entity's need to communicate and appeal directly to their audience through custom graphics and language.

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[35] UCLA's Vendor Registration process is a highly bureaucratic process and internet-mediated process in order for UCLA to provide monetary compensation and document all processes. Unfortunately, the reimbursement process can take anywhere between four to six months. This has proven to be a point of contention for community collaborators in other instances especially for those relying on these funds to pay for living costs.

[36] Adobe Express, formerly Adobe Spark and later Creative Cloud Express, is a content creation tool developed by Adobe. It is a cloud-based design platform where users can create videos, PDF documents, web pages, graphics and other digital assets. It is aimed at mainstream users, not professional graphic designers. "Adobe Express." In *Wikipedia*, June 21, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Adobe_Express&oldid=1230307788.

A month before the scheduled seminar talk by Dr. Enote, he and I met via zoom to discuss the content of the seminar and workshop he would be leading. We went over the schedule and I asked Dr. Enote to send images he would like to include in the presentation part of his talk. Leading up to Dr. Enote's visit, I put together a presentation that included his images. The day before Dr. Enote's lecture we met in person to go over the slides and discuss any technical support needed. Coordinating with the technical team at Kaufman Hall included sending over the presentation slides and checking in with Arsenio about the lighting setup. Attendees of Dr. Enote's talk and workshop included people from various academic ranges including arts, creative writing, film, environmental science, geography, and various regional studies. I also invited a member of the Tongva community to attend given their interest in the arts and traditional ecological knowledge. From these reflections, the intended goal of the series to engage in a broader audience succeeded despite the COVID restrictions we had to navigate.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has explored the nuances of community-building and allyship within the context of my own positionality as a Xicana Indígena and the relationships I've developed with Native peoples across various settings, particularly in Zuni. By tracing my personal journey to Zuni, a place of deep Indigeneity, the collaborative counter-mapping seminar, and the reflective dialogues with individuals like Dr. Enote, I have come to a deeper understanding of the complexities of solidarity and *rightful relations*.

Being in Zuni meant coming to briefly encounter a place of deep Indigeneity, where 85% of the Zuni people speak the Zuni language.[37] Dr. Enote says most people in Zuni live within two

[37] "Zuni Tribe of the Zuni Reservation, New Mexico | Native American Advancement, Initiatives, and Research." Accessed October 21, 2024. https://naair.arizona.edu/pueblo-zuni.

miles of every living relative – and dead relative. According to Dr. Enote, even other Natives see Zuni people secretive, and protective, but there is also tremendous cultural beauty wrapping around Zuni. These experiences highlight how positionality—rooted in my own Indigeneity and the historical experiences of my family and ancestors—shapes the ways I engage in cross-community collaborations, both within and beyond academic and artistic institutions.

This chapter underscores the importance of continually reflecting on and negotiating one's identity when working with Indigenous communities, especially in spaces that have historically been exclusionary, like universities. Beginning to internally claim my Indigeneity as a reflection of my Indigenous family and ancestry has led me to deeply consider my responsibility to my communities. Through this process, I've come to understand that allyship is not a static identity but an ongoing practice that requires active listening, humility, and a willingness to engage with discomfort. For me, my discomfort came from realizing to what degree colonialism contributed to the rupture with my Indigenous roots. Nevertheless, this discomfort also made me realize that Indigeneity is a spectrum, and is reflected in embodied and social positionings. Similarly, allyship is a practice of *rightful relations* is a process that is built over time, non-immediate and calls for the Four R's–respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt 1991)) – with specific attention to the way that reciprocity emphasizes a *respect* for Indigenous people in collaborative relations.

The insights shared by Dr. Enote, as well as the challenges he has overcome, have further illuminated the structural barriers Native peoples face and the importance of using one's own position of relative privilege to challenge these asymmetries of power. Mignolo's concept of decolonial de-linking necessitates "border thinking," highlighting the dual role of those who navigate both academic and spaces on the spectrum of Indigeneity. Within these spaces, the

myths of modernity and knowledge persist, presenting limitations and dangers (Mignolo, 2007, p. 455). This context underscores the need for ethical frameworks of collaboration that prioritize Indigenous worldviews, particularly through the concept of rightful relations. Moreover, I assert that border epistemology simultaneously operates within and against the colonial matrix of power. It seeks scholarly transformation through post-colonial critique and theory while also pursuing de-linking to highlight the diversity of Indigenous epistemologies and perspectives (Mignolo, 2007: 452-453).

Reflecting on my journey to Zuni, I developed a deeper understanding of the fluid nature of Indigeneity, helping me better map my own position on this spectrum. It became clear that becoming an ally to Native people is not an immediate achievement but rather a gradual process of mutual learning about each other's histories, backgrounds, and values.

During a visit to my abuela before arriving in Zuni, I was reminded of her stories about life in her pueblo in Zacatecas, Mexico. Her stories, shared within the cool walls of her adobe home, resonated with my experiences in learning and sharing knowledge, particularly with my younger brother. I realized that passing on knowledge doesn’t eliminate challenges; it equips us to ask meaningful questions. In middle school, through talking circles—an approach rooted in global Indigenous practices—I further understood that storytelling is a powerful mode of knowledge transmission.

While in Zuni, I became aware of my use of language, often described as code-switching, as something I actively performed. For instance, when interacting with a sheepherder, I identified myself as "mixed" rather than expressing, “I am coming to terms with the spectrum of Indigeneity and my place within it.” Conversations about Indigeneity are complex and unfold gradually through embodied semiotics of cultural wealth. I was able to reach this level of

dialogue with Dr. Enote while tending to his farm, where discussions about epistemology and knowledge production emerged naturally. In these moments, I found myself moving freely between linguistic codes, without needing to code-switch. This experience also highlighted the privileged positions we occupy as individuals with higher education, enabling us to engage in such dialogues with greater ease.

Dr. Enote's visit to UCLA exemplified the importance of fostering rightful relations. Faculty member Dr. Nancy Mithlo provided feedback, highlighting the effectiveness of the visual slides and sounds. However, Dr. Enote and I could have benefited from additional time to better synchronize the visual presentation cues with the sound for a more cohesive and synesthetic and performance experience. Furthermore, while the workshop component of Dr. Enote's seminar was compelling, it could have been enhanced by creating opportunities for sustained connections between UCLA students and the Zuni community. This would have helped expand the network of individuals working towards rightful relations over a longer-term period of time. I wonder how I could support Dr. Enote's artistic expression since he describes himself as an interrupted artist. What might that look like with an expanded ensemble of transdisciplinary Indigenous scholars and allies?

As I move forward, the lessons learned in this chapter will inform future work in building *rightful relations* grounded in respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. By expanding an inclusive Xicanx Indígena perspective, one where an Indigeneity is not just an ideology but something that must be lived, embodied, felt and materialized (Hunt in Radcliffe 2019: 436), I aim to continue fostering spaces of dialogue and collaboration that challenge dominant narratives and honor the diverse experiences of Indigenous peoples. In doing so, I remain committed to exploring how to

best leverage my positionality for the benefit of Native communities, and how to engage in solidarity work that is attentive to the nuances and complexities of cross-cultural allyship.

CHAPTER 2: Performance, Co-creation and coming into *Rightful Relations* through Maya K'iche Blessings

Hemos pedido permiso...	We have asked for permission...
Somos los privilegiados de que nos...	We are privileged to be...
fue el llamado.	called.
No lo pensábamos, tal vez nos hablaron los abuelos,	We did not fathom it; perhaps our ancestors spoke to us,
pero no lo divisábamos,	but we could not foresee it,
pero en este momento estamos aquí	yet at this moment, we are here
con mucho honor, con mucho respeto,	with much honor, with much respect,
con mucha humildad,	with much humility,
con mucho corazón para servirle a los abuelos	with much heart to serve the ancestors and you,
y a ustedes,	the young people who want to learn
a los jóvenes que quieren aprender	to carry our sacred spirituality
llevar nuestra sagrada espiritualidad	that is for everyone,
que es para todos,	it is not for one person,
no es para una persona,	it is not for two people,
no es para dos personas,	it is for the entire universe.
es para todo el universo.	The universe is the owner of the cosmos,
El universo es el dueño del cosmo	and the cosmos is everything that we are,
y el cosmo es todo lo que nosotros somos,	what we feel, and what we are going to do.
lo que sentimos y lo que vamos a hacer.	Especially the ancestors

Especialmente los abuelos	who have left us with teachings
que nos han dejado enseñado	of thousands and millions of years,
miles de millones de años	and today, that dimensional door opens
y hoy se abre esa puerta dimensional	to give them freedom
para darles libertad	to see, to give
para mirar, para dar	their sacred energy
su energía sagrada	through the Sacred Sun,
a través del Sagrado Sol,	through the Sacred Moon,
a través de la Sagrada Luna,	through the constellations,
a través de las constelaciones,	through everything that rules the universe.
a través de todo lo que reina el universo.	

–Nana Alicia (Maya K'iche), January 21, 2020, near the traditional Tongva village site of Kuruvungna.

I open this chapter with the words spoken by Nana Alicia,[38] in a room at the Fowler Museum, at the UCLA on January 21, 2020, in the morning around 10 am. Immediately following her lead, El Tata, and their son performed a formal blessing ceremony as a way of

[38] In the Maya K'iche language, *Nana* means *abuela* (grandmother). I capitalize this term as an honorific to show respect for matriarch and Maya K'iche leader, Alicia. Similarly, I refer to Nana Alicia's husband as *El Tata—tata* means *abuelo* (grandfather)—and I also capitalize this term to honor and respect his esteemed role. To maintain a sense of privacy and adhere to UCLA's IRB protocols, I refer to them only by their first names, or intentionally leave names out, as per Alicia's explicit request, creating an intentional sense of obscurity to respect their confidentiality. Additionally, this research was deemed exempt from the requirement of the IRB.

asking for permission to perform purification for a group of masks contained within the museum collection that were to be featured in the "Inside the Mask" exhibition at the Hammer Museum. What is the significance of performing a blessing ceremony that entails asking for permission from ancestral beings? To answer this question, I first describe the context, setting and process of the blessing ceremony for a collaborative exhibition titled "Inside the Mask", which emerged through a curatorial process in a class taught by Professor Peter Sellars in the World Arts and Cultures/Dance department at UCLA. Next, I discuss how I came to understand the cultural significance of the blessing ceremony through learning from Nana Alicia after the "Inside the Mask" exhibition, including our collaborative efforts in creating an interview outline to explore her work with museums and cultural inheritances. Finally, I examine the implications of these collective actions for the future of museums and best practices, as they relate to the concept of rightful relations discussed in this chapter. Throughout, I implement CRT in this chapter to analyze the data associated with collectively curating the "Inside the Mask" exhibition (2020), allowing me to shift from a deficit view of Communities of Color.

By adapting the term *rightful relations,* I signal my intentions to contextualize, re-animate, and embed so-called "objects" in narratives by those who have a deep and engaged understanding of their efficacy– and our desire to somehow mitigate the ruptures between people, place, purpose, and spirited beings associated with materials through performance and exhibition interventions. The linguistic intervention of referring to so-called objects as *spirited beings* will support ethically driven discussions about the interpretation, display, and collecting of material culture that museums contain.

Borrowing from investigations by art scholar, Jenn Joy (2014), who investigates choreography beyond artistic tactics and into theoretical and critical practices, I pivot off the

word choreographies as a way to open up possibilities of considering how to go beyond empty gestures and into learning with and from Native peoples through *rightful relations*. I ask, how does *rightful relations* as a critical theory and practice highlight Native and Indigenous peoples' creative refusals of settler capitalist logics within museum spaces? What does a choreography of *rightful relations* entail? As Joy articulates, the choreographic is an alternative model of aesthetics which in the case of this chapter, involves the Native peoples not just to be looked at but to look back.

For analysis of the embodied aspects of the purification ceremony, I engage in video analysis inspired by conventions of conversation analysis I learned directly from scholars of anthropology and communication, Dr. Marjorie Goodwin and her now deceased husband, Dr. Charles Goodwin.[39] In doing so, I situate the linguistic activities of Native peoples within their political context to understand how they mutually constitute each other. It is this analysis that allows for me to consider performance as a social action and thus collectively focus on the choreographies that emerged through the collaborative processes. Conversation analysis of multimodal embodied interactions are useful in understanding the daily embodied gender and power dynamics within Indigenous communities collaborating with UCLA. Investigating performance and their choreographies through this method, I analyze how temporality, gender and power are negotiated through forms of cooperation. As stated before, conversation analysis of multimodal interactions during performance will illuminate embodied negotiations of power and will provide a context of analysis that considers my own positionality while collaborating with the community.

[39] I learned from Dr. Marjorie Goodwin and Dr. Charles Goodwin during my undergraduate anthropology studies at UCLA.

Furthermore, as a decolonial move, I create a space for talking back to the archive and museum institutions through an interview with Nana Alicia who led the purification ceremony for the masks exhibited at the Hammer Museum. In developing the interview, I engaged in conversations with Nana Alicia over the phone and about the topic of my dissertation's thesis around the ethics of working with Indigenous peoples in museum space. I also shared the interview questions with her beforehand in Spanish to ensure she would be comfortable with the questions and interview process which was also conducted and recorded in Spanish.

All data collected including field notes, an interview, photographs, video, audio, artwork have been analyzed to address any unforeseen themes that are not expected within my hypothesis. This part of analysis is important as I address my own intersubjectivity and the limitations of my knowledge system while I learn more about plural Indigenous communities and their cosmovision. The limitations of my perspective are afforded by an understanding of my own position on the continuum of Indigeneity.

Where Nana Alicia Performed Blessings for the Masks

Let us consider, the specific region where the blessing of the masks was performed ritual by the Nana Alicia and her family at the Fowler Museum. According to Goffman, a *region* is "any place that is bound to some degree by barriers of perception" (Goffman 1959: 106). The Fowler Museum, especially the room where the ritual took place, can be described as a secluded space, almost hidden from the rest of the campus. Having worked at the Fowler as an undergraduate student, I recall many conversations about the challenges visitors faced locating the museum—its nondescript location, tucked into the earth on the northern part of campus, often made it hard for school children and educators from across Los Angeles to find it.

I remember the room where Nana Alicia's family performed the ritual, as enclosed within the red brick walls of the museum, shielded from the bustling foot traffic of UCLA students, staff, and faculty moving between classrooms, lecture halls, offices, and other facilities. This isolation dampens our senses, disconnecting us from the surrounding landscape and the more-than-human beings I frequently encountered there — hawks, squirrels, ants, bees, crows, cats, cedar trees, pine trees, snails, and hummingbirds.

I see the room's floor is covered in grey carpet, with tables arranged at the edge of the room. Two doorways, on the north-eastern corner, opening to an interior corridor, and the entry at the south-western corner opens to a corridor with arched windows opening out to a quad-courtyard with a water fountain. The semi-circular arched windows, a postmodern architectural gesture towards the 12th century Romanesque style that UCLA's first four original buildings, constructed in 1927 and completed in 1929, resemble.[40] Two of the four original buildings comprising the iconic quad are Powell Library and Royce Hall. Royce Hall's apex façade and porticos resembling the *Basilica romana minore collegiata abbaziale prepositurale di Sant'Ambrogio*, or more commonly referred to as *Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio*, located in Milan, Italy. Surely, a testament to the Euro-American value placed on Western European traditions and philosophies then consecrated through monumental architecture – elucidating an idealized image of an elite institution of higher learning.

At the time, during the late 1920s, urban development and architecture in Los Angeles was shaped by and with the film industry – images of architecture abroad in what were made to feel like very foreign places. This time period, as indicated by architectural historians, featured a

[40] "UCLA 100." Accessed April 30, 2023. https://100.ucla.edu/timeline?mode=time&nodeID=XL46dRAAAB4A9-Hd

revivalist movement. The images produced by the Hollywood film industry, in competition with a global film industry market and parallel history of automobile and film industry in Torino, Italy shaped the imaginations of people at the expense of rendering invisible the Native Tongva[41] people's history by making their land almost unrecognizable as it was developed to be a living and breathing film-set.

All this to say, the power of architecture is not dismissed as it frames our perceptions and everyday embodied behaviors. The presence of Nana Alicia's family and their performance of a ceremonial blessing of the masks subverts the architectural logics of the space through ritual ceremonial purification for the masks stewarded by the Fowler Museum. In my analysis, I aim to avoid any stereotypes which would reiterate the harmful impact of the trope of the "noble savage." The reason why I bring this up is a way to be reflexive as a writer and as for you as a reader when engaging with this chapter. Indigenous peoples throughout the historical record have been highly romanticized and idealized in the view of human nature. I.e., "noble savage." Thus, in order to exercise this reflexivity, and avoid a romanticized view of people who live close to nature as possessing noble qualities, I utilize an *aesthetic of survivance* framework to enrich an understanding of *rightful relations* within the context of museums and digitization methods. Before I dive into how to expand our understanding of *rightful relations* beyond positivist formulation within and beyond museums, I briefly discuss museums and their historical relationships with universities and Indigenous peoples.

[41] "The Tongva, a prosperous, sophisticated Uto-Aztecan speaking people were the original inhabitants of Los Angeles and the Channel Islands. Kuruvungna, which translates as "place where we are in the sun," was a significant village on what is now the campus of University High School in West Los Angeles. Recent archeological evidence suggests that the area surrounding the natural springs have been occupied for over 8,000 years." "About Us – Kuruvungna Village Springs." Accessed October 31, 2024. https://gabrielinosprings.com/?page_id=23.

Museums, Universities and Settler Capitalism

How can museums adapt to better accommodate Indigenous aesthetic systems that comprise performance of ceremonies? This question is not benevolent and I mobilize it to address the wrongdoings of museums historically and their ongoing complicity in oppressive and racist practices. Historically, how have museums and universities participated in the project of furthering racialization?

As Promey discusses (2017), the Enlightenment origin of museums with its secularization theory of modernity has shaped how Western museums approach religion. Therefore, faith and spirituality are transformed into relics of the past and described as being more alive in 'other' parts of the world (i.e., non-western). Material expressions of belief are removed from the realm of emotional understandings of the supernatural and divine, fastened to conversations about aesthetics and art history, and used to illustrate religious tenets. This chapter aims to reconnect aesthetics with the affective responses and embodied knowledge of Nana Alicia.

Furthermore, as curator of World Archaeology at Oxford University's, Pitt Rivers Museum, Dan Hicks writes, museums that "continue to display sacred and royal objects looted during colonial massacres, they will remain the very inverse of all this: hundreds of monuments to the violent propaganda of western superiority" (Hicks 2020: 3). Although Hicks describes museums as weaponizing cultural heritage artifacts through display practices which have failed to justly represent Indigenous peoples, failure has made apparent and visible ongoing processes of colonial violence endured and resisted by Indigenous peoples who continue to practice their culture against all odds (Hicks 2020: 9-10, Topa & Narvaez 2022).[42]

[42] Hicks, Dan. *The brutish museums: The Benin bronzes, colonial violence and cultural restitution*. London: Pluto Press, 2020, Topa, Wahinkpe, and Darcia Narvaez. *Restoring the kinship worldview: Indigenous voices introduce 28 precepts for rebalancing life on planet earth*. North Atlantic Books, 2022.

An example of resistance to museums and their legacies of imperialism and misrepresenting people through racialized taxonomies, is by the activism of Decolonize This Place (DTP). DTP is a grassroots organization that has gained recognition for its unapologetic activism aimed at challenging the historical legacies of colonization and white-supremacy in New York City. DTP was founded by MTL Collective,[43] who combine research, activism, and artistic practices in their analysis of sociopolitical issues.[44] The group has been particularly active (c. 2016-2019) in organizing protests within the city's museums–most notably the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), Whitney Museum, and Brooklyn Museum[45] – demanding a reckoning with the institutions' complicity in perpetuating oppressive narratives and by critically examining museum board membership and fiscal sponsorship. DTP's protests have drawn attention to the ways in which museums often exhibit and interpret cultural artifacts through a colonial lens, reinforcing narratives that racialize, marginalize and misrepresent Indigenous cultures and peoples. Through their actions, the organization seeks to foster a more inclusive and equitable dialogue surrounding art, history, and interconnected struggles towards unsettling colonial structures in museums.[46]

Just as DTP has brought to the fore the ways that cultural intuitions such as museums are key players in settler capitalism, I too aim to make accessible UCLA's role in ongoing settler colonial and capitalist logics. As esteemed Native studies scholar Dr. Shannon Speed points out, "there is a state of ongoing occupation, in Latin America as elsewhere in the hemisphere" that

[43] Natasha Dhillon (ND) and Amin Husain (AH), are MTL, a collaboration that joins research, aesthetics, organizing and action in practice. Arts Cabinet. "Interview: Nitasha Dhillon and Amin Husain - MTL Collective." Accessed December 12, 2024. https://www.artscabinet.org/interviews/interview-nitasha-dhillon-and-amin-husain-mtl-collective.
[44] "Frac centre," accessed May 1, 2023, https://www.frac-centre.fr/_en/art-and-architecture-collection/mtl-collective-316.html?authID=485.
[45] "DTP," DTP, accessed May 1, 2023, https://decolonizethisplace.org.
[46] "FAXXX," DTP, accessed May 1, 2023, https://decolonizethisplace.org/faxxx-1.

relies on the territorial dispossession and bodily exploitation (Speed 2017: 785-786). UCLA, is a land-grant institution located on the traditional unceded territory of the Gabrieliño-Tongva people. What does it mean to be a "land-grant institution"? I answer this question to contextualize the significance of Nana Alicia and her family's embodiment at UCLA as an action which counters colonial architectural logics and tensions, contributing to an expansion of class consciousness[47] for all readers, including my collaborators who read and approved all chapters they were featured in. In doing so, I engage in a task of translation for a wide audience by describing in detail the processes that contribute to class and racial segregation as a way to remind us that these circumstances are socially constituted and subject to change.

By translation, I mean what Walter Benjamin describes as making apparent a special kinship between languages that are "not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express" (Benjamin 1996: 255). In describing the processes of UCLA's continued occupation of Tongva land, I make apparent the antagonism resulting from class opposition and the ways that Nana Alicia and her family's embodiment at UCLA is a reflection of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) that has the capacity to transform social organization in museum and university spaces. CCW is built by nurturing six types of capital (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital) through dynamic processes (Yosso 2005).

[47] The term 'class consciousness' represents two different, but related, concepts. The first one refers to the awareness that the members of a social class, usually the working class, have of their common class interests (what is called the 'principle of class identity'). These shared interests are considered to be opposed to those of other classes, especially the bourgeois class (the 'principle of class opposition'). Awareness of this antagonism makes workers fight to end class conflict by transforming social organization. This final goal leads to identification of class consciousness with socialist (particularly Marxist) aspirations that provide a general vision of a classless society (the 'principle of totality'). "Class Consciousness - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics." Accessed December 12, 2024. https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/class-consciousness.

Distribution of almost 11 million acres of land under the Morrill Act (MA) of 1842 enabled the settler occupation of land by expropriating land from Native nations to fund the development of higher education in the U.S. UCLA is a part of the broader UC system which received all of its initial land-grants from the distribution of stolen lands (ibid). The process of theft is specifically articulated in UCLA's continued to occupation of the Gabrielino-Tongva lands known as *Tovangaar*. Tovangaar means *the world* in the Tongva language and geographically represents the Los Angeles Basin and the Southern Channel Islands. Through the seizure of land in California by the Spanish Crown, privatization of lands into ranchos under Mexican governance, to the sale of private property in the U.S., UC was able to generate capital through a combination of principal and interest payments by running a real-estate operation that sold plots (Stewart-Ambo & Leah Stewart 2023).

Although UCLA has sold almost all of its initial land-grant acquisitions by 1916 (ibid), The Office of the Chief Investment Officer of the Regents of the UC ("UC Investments") invested $4 billion (c. 2023) (out of their more than $150 billion portfolio) into Blackstone Real Estate Income Trust, Inc. ("BREIT").[48] Blackstone's real estate portfolio is worth $320 billion and thus ensures to "benefit the 600,000 students, faculty, staff, and pensioners from [UC] 10 campuses and six academic health centers" (Blackstone). During the 2007-08 financial crisis in the US, people were defaulting on their mortgages along with increasing interest rates, and soon after, in 2012, Blackstone capitalized on the subsidized price of properties.

It is important to note how 07-08 financial crisis is situated within the logics of settler and racial capitalism as the poverty-rate increased from 12.5% in 2007 to 15% in 2010 and as noted

[48] "UC Investments Creates Strategic Venture with Blackstone to Invest $4 Billion in BREIT Common Shares," Blackstone (blog), January 3, 2023, https://www.blackstone.com/news/press/uc-investments-creates-strategic-venture-with-blackstone-to-invest-4-billion-in-breit-common-shares/.

in the US Census Bureau's population survey, there is a disproportionate ratio representation of who the state continues to racialize as Black, Hispanic and Asian peoples (see figure 5. below). As I have stated before, I do not agree with the pseudo-science of racialization of peoples, but rather, as Professor john a. powell puts it, I aim to make apparent the way race operates. He said it best, "Although race is a scientific illusion, it remains a social reality that shapes our life chances and the way we experience both our internal and external worlds" (powell 2007: 357).

The exploitative and consumer-based economy of settler capitalism relies on the reiteration of racialization and racialization is place-based. How does the process of racialization occur? I turn to a quote by Ruth Wilson Gilmore on global capitalist dialectics; she states, "Capitalism requires inequality and racism ensures it" (Wilson 2020). In the context of Abya Yala (Latin America), racialization framed by Spanish settler-colonial logics began to blur the settler-settled divide through the racial construct of *mestizaje* (racial mixing) (Speed 2017: 786) and anti-Blackness. Although racialization has plural trajectories throughout the hemispheric region referred to as the Americas (US, Central and South), Speed points out that Indigenous peoples throughout this region have been racialized as "uncivilized and savage, unfit for modern life and thus doomed to fade into extinction" (ibid 786).

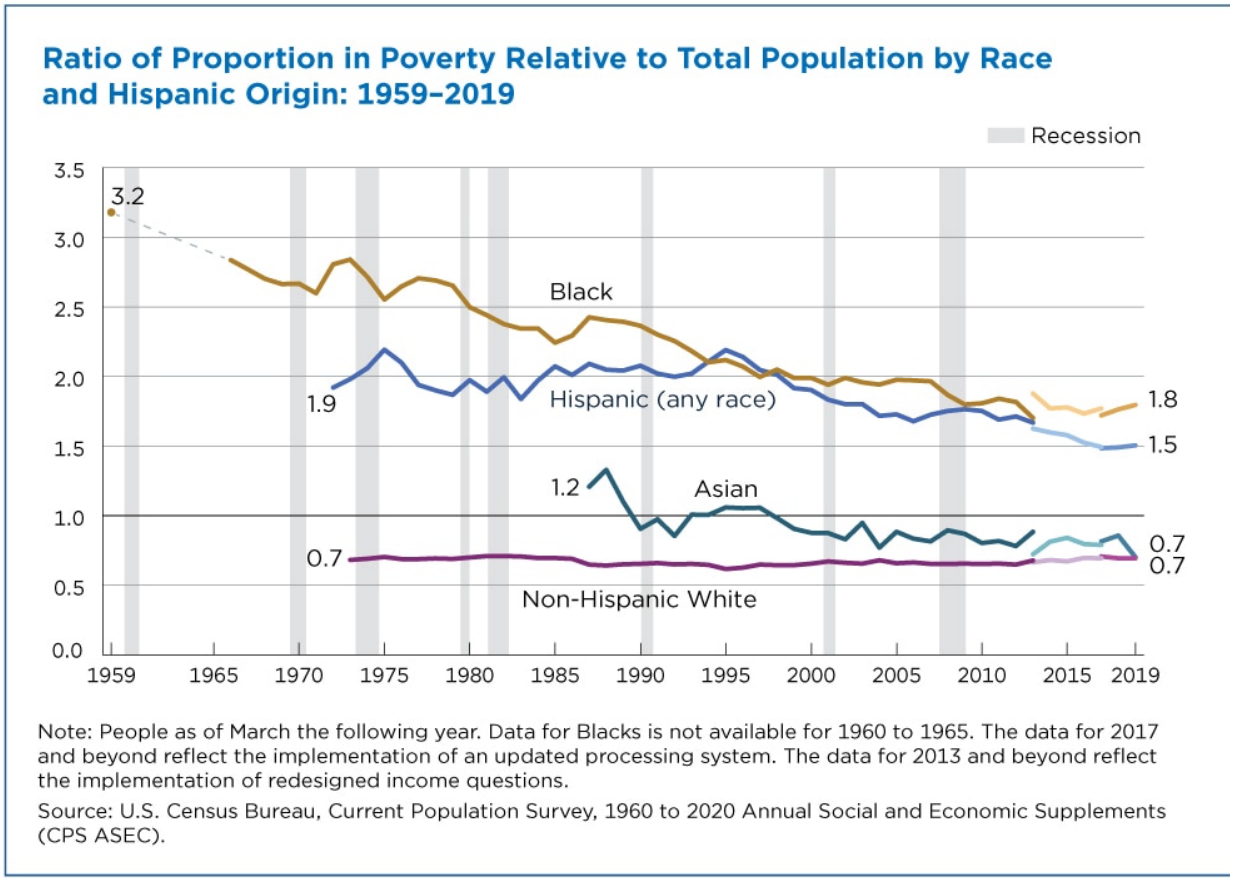


Figure 5. According to the US Census Bureau, this figure shows that over time, non-Hispanics Whites have consistently been under-represented among the population in poverty, while Blacks and Hispanics have consistently been over-represented. Asians have been under-represented in poverty for the last 20 years. US Census Bureau, "Inequalities Persist Despite Decline in Poverty For All Major Race and Hispanic Origin Groups," Census.gov, accessed May 1, 2023, https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/09/poverty-rates-for-blacks-and-hispanics-reached-historic-lows-in-2019.html.

Nevertheless, in the face of racialization, marginalized people continue to defy and resist reductive racialization that contributes to disproportionate rates poverty amongst racially marginalized people. Additionally, by implementing CRT in this chapter to analyze the data associated with collectively curating the "Inside the Mask" exhibition (2020), I shift from a deficit view of Communities of Color. In doing so, I focus on ways Native peoples and their collaborators build capital through Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). More specifically, as it pertains to Native and Indigenous people in the U.S. (not excluding those of the Abya Yala

diaspora), I mobilize Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) (Brayboy 2006) as a praxis, to identify inconsistencies in institutions participating in the surveyed art projects that Indigenous people experience in order to understand the immediate and future needs of Indigenous communities and subsequently, identify points of social transformation in museum spaces and practices.

Rightful relations with Space and Place

As I emphasize in my introduction chapter, taking a hemispheric perspective –including the interconnected region that is comprised of North and South America, and Pacific peoples – Indigenous worldviews and ways of relating are not meant to make generalizations, but rather to engage with the plural aesthetic modes of theorizing that are amongst and between Indigenous peoples and to identify similarities. As a Xicanx Indígena, this approach allows for me to be reflexive about my own standpoint as I analyze the interconnected and multiple aesthetic systems situated in a specific context. Foregrounding specificity is a practice of Indigenous epistemologies in action–as Lewis et al (2018) point out,

> "Relationality is rooted in context and the prime context is place.... Knowledge gets articulated as that which allows one to walk a good path through the territory. Language, cosmology, mythology, and ceremony are simultaneously relational and territorial: they are the means by which knowledge of the territory is shared in order to guide others along a good path."

More succinctly put, Topa cites Aboriginal selfhood as being encapsulated in this quote, "'I am emplaced, therefore I am"' (ibid 2022: 15). For example, WACD alumna, Sophiline Cheam Shapiro, performed an unsanctioned dance at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City

to honor Cambodia's stolen heritage.[49] Her performance gained international attention and engaged with the ongoing conversation around the repatriation of stolen artifacts that museums continue to hoard and gatekeep away from their original and rightful stewards.

Co-Creating, Curation and Choreographies?

What are the parameters of co-creation, and how do they enable us to consider "ethically reframing who creates, how, and why"? These questions have newfound relevance as we begin to explore the possibility of intelligence in some non-human entities. Indigenous scholar and new media artist Jason Lewis and his collaborators write that Indigenous epistemologies are "much better at respectfully accommodating the non-human" (Cizek & Uricchio 2022: 198). Lewis and his collaborators open up an opportunity to reframe sentient-like behaviors within the kinship network as a means of overcoming Enlightenment era inheritances of human-centered relations with nature. With this in mind, I discuss how decolonization processes center Indigenous epistemologies and embodiments, and are transformative to museum and university spaces.

Through the class taught by distinguished Professor, Peter Sellars, I came to work closely with classmates and doctoral candidates, Jose and Chase. It was through Jose's connection with Nana Alicia that co-creation with the Maya community was able to take place. In a sense, Chase, Jose and myself came to form our own network within the cohort and were able to be present at the Blessing Ceremony Nana Alicia would perform at the Fowler Museum. Jose, an expert in ethnomusicology and Maya knowledge systems, Chase with his environmental studies focus and experience with documentary filmmaking, and myself with a background in museums, repatriation, digitization created a dynamic ensemble. Together, we had the privilege to bear

[49] "Dancing at the Met for Cambodia's 'Blood Statues' | Dynamite Doug - YouTube." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3blxDos7P3U

witness and learn from Nana Alicia and her family while sitting with questions about what decolonial choreographies could look like.

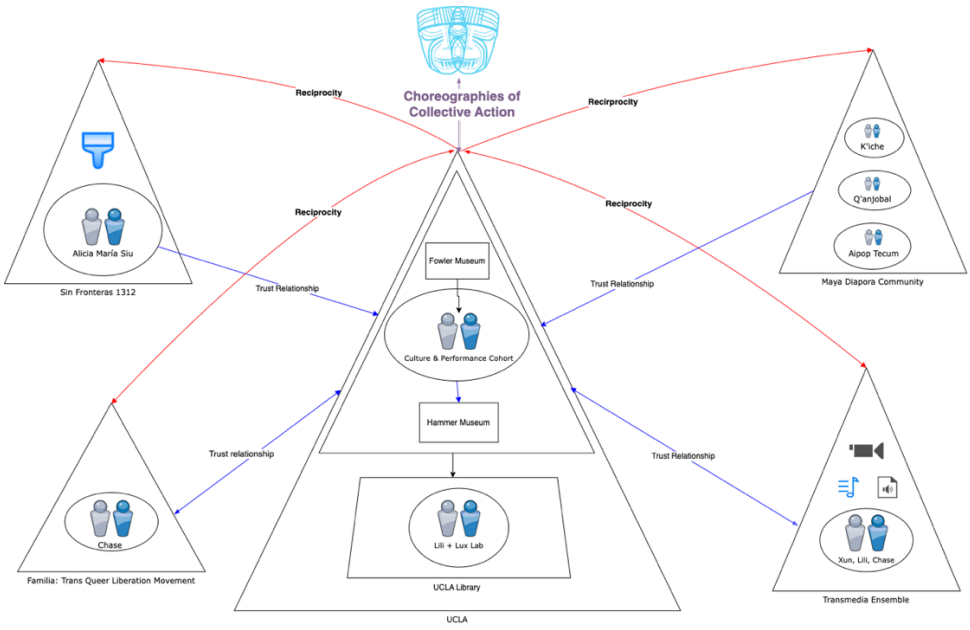


Figure 6. Inspired by Actor-Network (Latour 2003) within/as Field of Forces (Bourdieu 1983), and Solórzano's (1997, 1998) five principles of critical race studies, critical race theory frames information transfer or "epistemes" as potentially transformational in challenging the limits of deficit thinking by valuing forms of community cultural wealth (ibid) that have been excluded from Western Euro-American colonial and capitalist epistemes; by Lili Flores Aguilar, c. 2020.

Indigenous Maya Migrations, Political Choreographies

As discussed in my introduction, Tuck and Yang (2012) to situate transnational decolonization within what is termed as an "ethic of incommensurability" (ibid). In doing so, I aim to distinguish the politics around terms such as "settlers" and "immigrants," and what they connote through a decolonial lens. According to Tuck and Yang (2012), considering the United States as a settler colonial nation-state, it is important to situate the terms "settler" and

“immigrant” in as they constitute one another. According to Tuck and Yang (ibid), "Settlers are not immigrants. Immigrants are beholden to the Indigenous laws and epistemologies of the lands they migrate to. Settlers become the law, supplanting Indigenous laws and epistemologies. Therefore, settler nations are not immigrant nations” (2012: 6-7). With this distinction between settler and immigrant nations, I trace the delineations of migration between the so-called nation-states of Guatemala and the United States of America, and more specifically Tovangaar.

Tracing histories of migration between Guatemala and the U.S., one may analyze materials from “Inside the Mask” including a mural by Alicia María Siu, as well as part of the exhibition brochure, as means to enact *rightful relations*. In doing so, *rightful relations* engage aesthetics and ethics, emphasizing Indigenous Maya K’iche worldviews and subsequent transcendental understandings of migration. Embedded political, historical and sociocultural contexts are highlighted through Maya peoples’ capacity to remember morals and values associated with migration and movement that has existed before imposition of Eurocentric perspectives.

Here is an excerpt from the exhibition brochure that I use as a point of departure to open a discussion about topics and themes represented in the exhibition:

> Central American masks found new forms in the centuries after the Conquista in sacred festivals and ritual dances. These holy instruments of survival represent, conceal, and transfigure double identities and double lives, speaking to layered political and spiritual realities. Central Americans are fleeing rapacious US-backed governments, extortion from deported and exported gangs, the collapse of neoliberal economic policies, and some of the highest levels of gender-based violence in the world. Trapped and caged along the southern border or living precariously at constant risk of deportation in the

United States, new resistance fighters and new immigrants find existence “Inside the Mask” a daily reality.

“Inside the Mask” reimagines the museum as without walls, as a place of community, encounter, and exchange between musicians and activists, dancers and organizers. Artists, asylum seekers and advocates, friends and families are proposing new choreographies and improvisations of sanctuary and solidarity. Looking with our own eyes through the masks, we begin to see new histories, dreams, nightmares, and prayers.

The exhibition features Central American and Mexican masks from the collections of the Fowler Museum at UCLA and a newly commissioned mural by Nana Alicia María Siu (Nawat Pipil), *¡Ya no hay tiempo! Sin oro se vive. Sin agua se muere./There is no time! Without gold you live. Without water you die./Xan tesu kanah Iman! Oro in tê, a lapil. Wash in tê, a kanapil*.

“Inside the Mask” is presented by the Hammer Museum in partnership with the Fowler Museum at UCLA and curated by UCLA graduate students Juan Francisco Cristobal, Julie Gaynes, Laurel Hubert, Natalie Kamajian, Chase Niesner, Farrah O’Shea, Jeremy Peretz, Lili Flores [previous last name redacted], Ryan Rockmore, V. Santos, Sin Fronteras 1312, Brisa Smith Flores, and Kara Wade. The exhibition is organized by Peter Sellars, with Allegra Pesenti, associate director and senior curator, Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts.

This exhibition celebrates the UCLA Centennial.

Lead funding for “Inside the Mask” is provided by the Steinhauser Greenberg Exhibition Fund, with additional support from Jennifer Simchowitz.

Figure 7. Screenshot of “Inside the Mask”, installation view of Nana Alicia María Siu (Nawat Pipil) artwork, ¡Ya no hay tiempo! Sin oro se vive. Sin agua se muere./There is no time! Without gold you live. Without water you die./Xan tesu kanah Iman! Oro in tê, a lapil. Wash in tê, a kanapil., 2020. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, February 15–May 17, 2020. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer. https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/2020/inside-mask

Siu’s representations in her four-panel mural are informed by Mesoamerican ways of being and relating – specifically informed by the Indigenous diaspora residing on occupied Tovangaar. In Siu’s mural, we see representations of bees flying across compositional elements such as representation of a honeycomb structure with embedded images of resistance to

transnational state sanctioned violence with the support of the U.S. government against Indigenous activists and movements of resistance throughout Central America (Abrego 2019). Near the center of the mural's composition is a prominent image of a child behind a grid fence, visibly upset by the trauma of being separated from their family by U.S. migration policies and structures that forcibly detained and incarcerate migrants (Speed 2019: 2). This image alludes to the separation of families by discriminatory, dehumanizing laws that racially classify Indigenous peoples in the U.S. as Latina/os, using pejorative terms like "illegal" (Abrego 2014: xi). We see an image of Indigenous rights activist, and co-founder of the National Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), Berta Cáceres (Lenca).[50] Migration, with its political and economic dimensions are traced to U.S. and its heavy military investment in the 1980s in Central America including Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras to ensure the Soviet Union would not have influence in the region (Abrego 2019: 2017). the transfiguration of double lives and identities is a direct result of the aforementioned U.S. interference in Abya Yala[51] or including what is commonly referred to as the Central American region.

Siu's painting retraces persisting practices of Indigenous peoples' migration pathways, futurity, and their contingent Mesoamerican cosmologies and philosophies, delineating themes of *survivance*. For example, acts of walking or migration in Mesoamerican codices are often represented with symbols of footsteps, indicating paths of origin and movement or more broadly, journeys (Boone 2000). Furthermore, archaeological research in the Mesoamerican region indicates that mobility or migration is evidenced by demographic shifts or population movements

[50] Goldman Environmental Prize. "Berta Cáceres," March 18, 2022. https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/berta-caceres/.

[51] Abya Yala is a term in the language of the Kuna Indigenous peoples of Panamá for the Americas.

(Arnauld et al 2020: 5-6). Siu's mural transcends a human-centric narrative to encompass the journeys of more-than-human animals, plants, and spirits.

Transition to Ceremonial Choreographies

While preparing for the ritual of purification, Nana Alicia instructed her family, myself, Peter, and two classmates along with museum staff through her voice and her fully embodied presence – spoken words in Maya K'iche, Spanish and English. Some of her words were text she read from the *Popol Vuh*. She made sure to show the camera the *Popul Vuh*, I remember the book's paperback cover, and well weathered pages, evidence of its frequent role in reading whether for ceremony in public or more intimate settings. The *Popol Vuh* is the Maya K'iche book of creation which deals with the deeds of Mayan deities (Tarn 1986). For the duration of approximately 17 minutes of the part of the ceremony when Nana Alicia and El Tata ask for permission from the *abuelos*, Nana Alicia performed her power as matriarch by using a higher sound decibel (dB) averaging at around -6 db. while El Tata performed in a supporting role with his voice at a lower volume, averaging at about -33 dB (see figure 8. below).

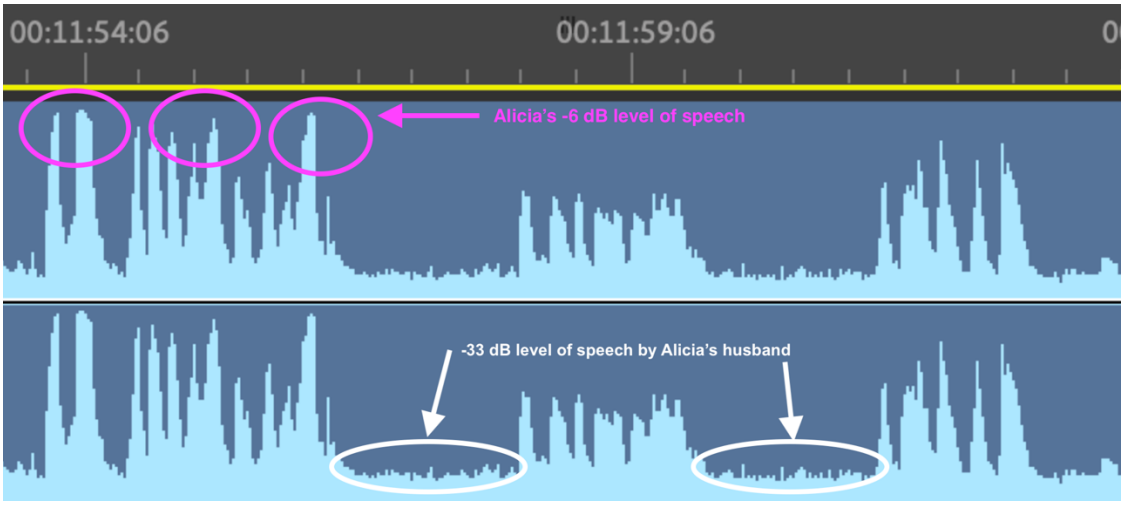


Figure 8. This image shows the stereo waveform which includes the voices of Nana Alicia and El Tata during the portion of the ceremony when they asked los abuelos for permission to engage in a purification ceremony with the collection of masks stewarded by the Fowler Museum. Screenshot of waveform captured from Adobe Premiere (a computer software program for editing digital video files) by Lili Flores Aguilar (2021).

Nana Alicia instructs with a gentle yet firmly pointed gesture and voice, about how to arrange one's body in a respectful manner, by saying, "este joven que no crucen sus manos ni sus pies, por favor, / *this young person should not cross his hands nor his legs, please*" referring to the cameraman's crossed legs. Later on, during the ceremony, she explains the reason why she announced that they should not cross their arms or legs as a reflection of Maya K'iche embodied values of humility and respect:

> En nuestras oraciones y invocaciones siempre no tenemos que estar cruzado de mano, cruzado de fiel, pero esa enseñanza, estamos aquí, entonces esto es parte de nuestra espiritualidad que temenos que tener firmes y tenemos que ser fuertes para que estamos alabando y invocando y adorando el gran nombre de nuestro padre, creador y solo él es el que tiene poder. Si no vamos a ser humildes y respetuosos, a quién le vamos a hacer la humildad, la adoración y la educación. Entonces en primer lugar tenemos que tener esa

humildad y el respeto a nuestro padre y enseñar, por eso aquí estamos como tata como anana, enseñar las cosas buenas, las cosas bonitas, porque no sólo para mí, ni sólo soy yo. Usted es yo y yo soy yo usted. Muchas gracias. Padre Ajaw, los bendiga. Lo voy a decir, muchas gracias.

English translation: *In our prayers and invocations, we should never have our hands or faith crossed, but we are here with this teaching. This is part of our spirituality that we must hold firm and remain strong, so we are praising, invoking, and worshiping the great name of our Father, the Creator, and only He has power. If we are not going to be humble and respectful, then to whom will we show humility, worship, and reverence? So, first of all, we must have that humility and respect for our Father and teach it; that's why we are here as elders, to teach good things, beautiful things, because it's not just for me, nor am I alone. You are me, and I am you. Thank you very much. May Father Ajaw bless you. I will say it again, thank you very much.*

After a 30-minute ceremony that included the lighting of candles and the presence of plants in Nana Alicia's hand, which she gently moved above the masks as a way of asking for permission and expressing deep gratitude to the elders, *los abuelos*, and *El Creador, Padre Ajaw*, the ceremony transitioned from the indoor space to the Fowler Museum courtyard, led by Nana Alicia and El Tata. Nana Alicia guided us as a collective, orchestrating the movement of both museum staff and our three-member class group. Together, she and El Tata, steadily hitting the drum, creating a rhythm to guide us led us in a procession through the halls that encircle the courtyard, creating a shared, embodied experience.

When I look back at the video recording of the ceremony, I see how potent Nana Alicia's leading movements are – what professor of dance, Shea Murphy describes as "resurge-instances"

(2022: 8) – and their ability to extend a counter to discourses around Indigeneity as being partial. This moment is fully rendered, these people, fully present, embodying their worldview. Nana Alicia and El Tata teach us what it looks like to fully embody *rightful relations*, by allowing us to bear witness to and support what may be seen as a part of a larger movement of Indigenous enactments functioning beyond settler-colonial structures (ibid). Their ensemble, is guided by their cosmovision and ways of relating to their ancestral lineages by communicating with them which is facilitated by the efficacy of the masks.

The giving of libations to the masks during the ceremony is an instance that stands out, not because of the ritual giving of libations itself – although this is very important. During the ceremony, I was paying close attention to the museum staff members at the periphery of the ceremony. I noted this moment in my fieldnotes because I stood behind Chase (the camera operator) and could see the scene from a different vantage point. One museum staff member looked clearly alarmed, his arms stiffening. He looks quickly to the museum conservator, exchanging a concerned gaze with widened eyes, and quickly looked back at Nana Alicia and El Tata then back again at the conservator as if debating whether to intervene and stop Nana Alicia and El Tata from giving the masks libations. Nana Alicia's son also notices the disgruntled museum staff and says, "Papa, no, no, no se puede. / *Papa, no, no, no, it cannot be done.*" Thereafter, El Tata minimizes contact with the masks by spraying only around them. Nana Alicia does not show hesitation and gives a blessing with flowers caressing the faces of the masks, foregrounding the importance of touch and physical contact.

From my own positionality, as a Xicanx Indígena who grew up in West Los Angeles, there were few places away from the keyboard (AFK)[52] where I felt welcome or at home. I found

[52] AFK is a way of emphasizing one's relationship to a computer keyboard and associated internet mediated communications, and life away from this connection.

home and liberation on the internet within and beyond the margins where I could freely listen to various genres of music and art from all over the world. As glitch feminist[53] Legacy Russell writes in the Glitch Feminist Manifesto, "The imaginative architecture of utopia remains ever present in glitch feminism. It gives us home and hope" (Russell 2020: 22). What I saw and continue to see in ceremonies performed by Nana Alicia and her family, is a Maya K'iche worldview that is fully embodied and challenges the logics of settler capitalism, that traces pathways and asserts transformative power of space and place. Nana Alicia's ceremonial placemaking practice creates a hopeful sanctuary for the masks, breaking away from taxonomical norms enforced by settler colonial logic. Recall the moment when Nana Alicia gently caressed the masks with flowers despite the visceral apprehension of museum staff, or the use of her strong voice with the support of her family and *los abuelos*, who she addresses in her prayer.

This moment of tension between museum staff and Nana Alicia's family is an example of the importance of decolonial analysis to understand how processes of colonial ordering maintain control of cultural inheritance through professionalized stewardship in museums. As Smith reminds us in her decolonial methodologies, "What makes ideas 'real' is the system of knowledge, the formations of culture, and the relations of power in which these concepts are located" (Smith 2012: 50). Therefore, *rightful relations* as an analytical framework and method aims to make these relations of power within museums less opaque by delving into the past, present and futures of interacting and interconnected entities associated with a ceremony

[53] Glitch feminism as defined by Russell, is constituted by understanding that a glitch is an error, a mistake, a failure to function. In glitch feminism, the notion of glitch-as-error with its genesis in the realm of the machinic and the digital, considers how it can be reapplied to inform the way we see the AFK world, shaping how we might participate in it toward greater agency for and by ourselves. The glitch acknowledges that gendered bodies are far from absolute but rather an imaginary, manufactured and commodified for capital. The glitch is an activist prayer, a call to action, as we work toward fantastic failure, breaking free of an understanding of gender as something stationary (Russell 2020: 14-15).

performed by Nana Alicia. As you make your way through this chapter, you will see various entities emerge in focus and unfold through a story shaped by my own consciousness and collaborative impetus of a Xicana Indígena – where I have had the complicated privilege of moving betwixt worlds due to my position on the spectrum of Indigeneity– and now I do so as a way to fulfill a responsibility of working toward social justice and the decolonial project of what I call *rightful relation*s. *Rightful relations* asks us to collectively unlearn assumptions about materiality and to relate to cultural inheritances through the epistemologies and embodiments of their respective communities of origin. One example of this is the practice of asking for permission from ancestral entities.

What is the significance of a blessing performance of asking for permission? I turn to the teachings of Topa and Narvaez, to answer this question:

> The many who have been on Earth longer than our species are our teachers. In addition to spirits of visible entities, invisible spiritual forces also exist. All spiritual energies inform or respond to intentionality, and we must treat them with reverence. The languages and ceremonies of traditional Indigenous cultures reflect ways to manifest appropriate understanding and respect. Visions, dreams, and stories also help us engage with the spirit world and remember our interconnectedness (Topa & Narvaez 2022: 16).

This excerpt is taken from the chapter, *Recognition of Spiritual Energies in Nature,* which addresses that by recognizing spiritual energies in nature, we as a collective global community can reclaim an Indigenous worldview. Before I address what it means to reclaim an Indigenous worldview, I briefly discuss the limits of the term "nature." Distinctions between nature and

society reflects an Enlightenment era, dualist paradigm that is a result of Western European and Euro-American philosophical traditions (Binde 2001). Furthermore, according to Descola (1992), there is a structural similarity between the treatment of nature and the way in which people treat each other.

From a Maya K'iche worldview, nature is not separate from us, but rather we are interconnected with nature, according to an Indigenous worldview. Our interconnectedness to nature is made obscure through Eurocentric philosophies which operate from a dualist paradigm, where nature is understood as separate from the spiritual. According to Roman Catholic views of nature, there are three points about nature that reinforce the dualist paradigm according to Binde (2001: 16): 1) nature is matter, as distinct from the spiritual; 2) nature as divine; and 3) nature as a realm of supernatural forces.

Reclaiming an Indigenous worldview allows people to learn about "living sustainably– durably– with all life" (Topa & Narvaez 2022: 15). This is what I theorize *rightful relations* can actualize as ethical ways of engaging with Indigenous peoples in collaborative environments within museums. My own theorization of *rightful relations* is based on the way I understand and interpret the blessing performed and led by Nana Alicia and the way she and her family make clear their intentionality to reflect appropriate understanding and respect for the ancestors as embodied by the masks.

Nana Alicia begins this ceremony by stating it is for *los abuelos*–the ancestors. She proclaims:

No lo pensábamos, tal vez nos hablaron los abuelos,
pero no lo divisábamos,
pero en este momento estamos aquí

con mucho honor, con mucho respeto,

con mucha humildad,

con mucho corazón para servirle a los abuelos…

English translation: *We did not fathom it; perhaps our ancestors spoke to us,*

but we could not foresee it, yet at this moment, we are here with much honor, with much respect, with much humility, with much heart to serve the ancestors…

Nana Alicia, commands the space and the people visibly present by naming who this is being performed for, *los abuelos* – the ancestors. In doing so, Nana Alicia connects the present unfolding moment to the past, bringing those who have passed on through death into our present lives. With honor, respect, humility and full-heartedness, Nana Alicia proclaims her presence to serve *los abuelos* at the beginning of the ceremony.

Who else is this for?

y a ustedes,

a los jóvenes que quieren aprender

llevar nuestra sagrada espiritualidad

que es para todos,

no es para una persona,

no es para dos personas,

es para todo el universo.

El universo es el dueño del cosmo

y el cosmo es todo lo que nosotros somos,

lo que sentimos y lo que vamos a hacer.

English translation: *And you all, the younger generations that want to learn and carry our (Maya K'iche) sacred spirituality that is for all. It is not for one person, it is not for two people, it is for all of the universe. The universe is el dueno of the cosmos and the cosmos are all that we are, what we feel and what we will do.*

Her opening words for this ceremony instructs us to move in this moment through an unexpected path with honor, respect, humility, with our hearts to serve our ancestors, with future action.

After the ceremony I was left with questions: How do Nana Alicia and her family's ceremonies reflect Indigenous epistemologies and how can they inform an ethic of *rightful relations*? How do Indigenous choreographies transform museum spaces? How do such considerations open up new possibilities for collaborative frameworks between museums and Indigenous communities?

On the day of the Danza del Venado, I recall being elated to invite friends and family to witness the offering of the Danza Maya Aipop Tecum. I made sure to bring the flowers from the blessing ceremony as instructed by Nana Alicia at the Fowler Museum. After the ceremony, as I reached to get the flowers, one of the Fowler personnel stood before me and said, "We'll be keeping those as a gift for the Director." In the moment I was taken aback, by this social interaction, which felt unprofessional. I had purchased the flowers specifically for the masks as Nana Alicia had instructed. At the time, I had no quick rebuttal, but in retrospect I would have said that this is against Indigenous protocols since Nana Alicia had said they we should bring the flowers to the exhibition space to be with the masks. Frantz Fanon put it so well, "The dialectic that introduces necessity as a support for my freedom expels me from myself" (Fanon 1952:

114). In that moment, the necessity to defend the instructions of Nana Alicia left me expelled from myself, unable to make choices without constraint to abide by the respectful thing to do according to Nana Alicia's Maya K'iche ceremonial practice.

In retrospect, I would have cited the United Nations (UN) Declaration On The Rights Of Indigenous Peoples.[54] As I write this, I hear the words of my mentor Dr. Enote, and how he shared with me his reservations about the UN given that such a declaration had no laws to back it up. Meaning, it is up to each nation-state and municipality to uphold such laws and at that scale, there lack mechanisms of accountability.

I thought I would never see the flowers again since after the blessing ceremony, I had intended to take the flowers home to take care of them until the exhibition opening at the Hammer Museum. One of the Hammer Museum curators who were present at the blessing ceremony at the Fowler Museum contacted me via phone and let me know that the flowers were waiting for me at the Hammer Museum's loading dock.

[54] "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)." Accessed May 2, 2023. https://social.desa.un.org/issues/Indigenous-peoples/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-Indigenous-peoples.

Figure 9. "Inside the Mask", installation view. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, February 15–May 17, 2020. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer. https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/2020/inside-mask

Figure 10. "Inside the Mask", installation view. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, February 15–May 17, 2020. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer. https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/2020/inside-mask

Finally, I reunited with the flowers – the flowers that remind me of my Abuela's responsibility to decorate the temple in honor of the Virgen de Atocha in her rural pueblo of San Jose de Mesillas, Zacatecas, Mexico – I made a promise to bring the flowers once more to the masks before returning them to the earth. The institution of the Hammer Museum returned them to me in a large plastic bag with a zip closure, like the ones I had grown accustomed to use when I worked at the Fowler's archaeological facility. This served as a reminder of museum practices' prioritization of conservation, isolating elements from one another.

Figure 11. They told me flowers weren't allowed, but I stayed anyway. Digital photograph of flowers offered to the masks during the ceremonial blessing performed by Nana Alicia after I retrieved them from the Hammer Museum on Valentine's Day, February 14, 2020 in the morning. Photo by Lili Flores Aguilar.

The following day, February 15th 2020, was exhibition's opening at the Hammer Museum where the Danza Del Venado would take place led once again by Nana Alicia and her family. When I entered the gallery with the dried flowers, one of the museum docents said that flowers weren't allowed, but I stayed anyway. Looking back at this moment, I am reminded of the work of artist and UCLA alumnus, rafa esparza, and the experiences he shared when working with adobe within museum spaces and how museums had expressed concerns over *adobe* dust contaminating the air vents that housed the institutions' collections.[55] From an Indigenous perspective, flowers and various natural materials hold deep significance within their aesthetic and cultural systems, as demonstrated by the enduring tradition of offering flowers at altars.

We stayed anyway, persisted, disrupting the logics of inherited museum protocols. Embodied presence is a disruption as an *aesthetic of survivance*. This micro-example of a disruption causes what Russell calls a technological anxiety indicating *something gone wrong* (ibid 2020: 7). Unfortunately, it is easy for a Eurocentric institution to overlook embodied and social aspects of *aesthetics of survivance* that reflect Indigenous knowledges of living systems that Indigenous worldviews foster.

My friend Ed, from the Zapotec community was present at the Danza del Venado. He came up to me after the danza and said, "this was great. Please do more of this." I ran into a classmate who worked on part of the exhibition, and I ask them what they thought about it and they replied,

"I sensed that the small room wasn't quite adequate." I began to consider how an exhibition like this could be reimagined or expanded to address these comments, which I

[55] Cadena, Laura. "Rafa Esparza's Latest Performance Uses Google Maps as a Time Machine." Hyperallergic, October 12, 2018. http://hyperallergic.com/465492/rafa-esparza-a-new-job-to-unwork-at-tezcatlipoca-memoirs-participant-inc/.

interpreted as both an appreciation for the ephemeral performance of the *Danza del Venado* and a call for this narrative of Indigenous *survivance* to occupy a larger, more prominent space.

After the exhibition in the following month of March, the world began to hide behind their own masks – inside the safe confines of their homes, and by wearing the now iconic N95 masks and medical masks to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. I remained in touch with Nana Alicia and we discussed the meaning of the masks and the blessing ceremony. After about two years of conversation, I formally asked her if she would be interested in participating in an interview to discuss the significance the blessing ceremony. In the next section, I present excerpts of my interview with Nana Alicia that pertain to theorization of *rightful relations* that is informed by her insights on the meaning of the ceremony and the and ethical implications for working with museums.

Interview with Nana Alicia

Before the interview with Nana Alicia, I asked if she would be interested in discussing the significance of the blessing ceremony she performed for the masks and how her experience is working with museums on such efforts. I made sure to explain how the topic of my dissertation's thesis was on the aesthetics and ethics of working with Indigenous peoples in museum spaces and that the interview would help to better understand the way she led the ceremony for the "Inside the Mask" exhibition. Based on our discussions, I created an outline in Spanish of questions about a week ahead of our scheduled interview in June 2023. I asked her where she would like to be interviewed and we discussed some options and I said we could go to UCLA in my home department. She agreed since I also mentioned there was a place where we could perform an offering before the interview. Nana Alicia mentioned that the offering and prayer

before the interview was the proper action to perform and so I was happy to oblige to ensure we would be entering the interview in a good way.

I took Nana Alicia to a place on campus where the water runs after the rains amidst the trees where we kneeled on the ground and Nana Alicia offered a prayer in each of the four cardinal directions for a long and respectful duration of time. Thereafter, I took Nana Alicia to the reading room of the WACD department where it was quiet enough for us to conduct the interview. I used both my smartphone device and my laptop to record the audio. We conducted the interview in Spanish.

Here is the first question I asked:

> ¿para qué es importante que se transmite esta entrevista? / Why is it important for you to participate in this interview?

Nana Alicia replied:

> Para mí, es muy importante educarnos, porque en nuestra vida no aprendemos si no vamos en busca del conocimiento, ya sea investigando, preguntando o leyendo. Por eso, a veces decimos palabras que no son correctas. Debemos informarnos primero antes de hablar, ya que existen cosas que nos imponen, nos controlan o nos dominan. La verdad es que hay palabras que duelen, que nos lastiman, o que nos ponen apodos que no son apropiados. Por ejemplo, durante mucho tiempo nos llamaron 'indios', y esa palabra, 'indios', no es buena, no está bien. Las personas que vinieron a imponernos esa palabra lo hicieron para controlarnos y cambiarnos. Pero nosotros no somos 'indios'; somos Mayas.
>
> English translation: *For me, educating ourselves is very important because in life, we don't learn unless we seek knowledge by researching, asking questions, or reading. That's why sometimes we use words that are not correct. We need to*

> *inform ourselves first before we speak, as there are things imposed on us, things that control or dominate us. The truth is, there are words that hurt us, words that wound us, or label us with names that are not right. For example, for a long time, we were called 'Indios,' and that word, 'Indios,' is not good; it's not right. The people who came and imposed that word on us did so to control and change us. But we are not 'Indios'; we are Mayas.*

Here Nana Alicia describes the importance of seeking knowledge, what I interpret as a way to challenge the rhetoric of modernity that makes a path *towards* epistemic shifts. Specifically, the epistemic shift Nana Alicia made a path towards is by critically understanding where the term "indio" comes from the misidentification of peoples Christopher Columbus first encountered when he was lost at sea and happened to come across Abya Yala, specifically the islands of Guanahani, Cuba and Ayti in 1492 (French & Heffes 2021: 17). Columbus mistakenly believed he had made land fall in the Indies (a term used to refer to South and Southeast Asia) (Restall 2004). Thereafter, Spanish colonizers imposed the misnomer, "indios," to Native peoples of Abya Yala through the *casta* system creating racialized geographies for the purpose of displacing and dispossessing lands from their rightful stewards (Mills 2002, Saldaña-Portillo 2016, Tinker 2008: 26)). Nana Alicia's emphasis on referring to herself and her people as Mayas (emphasis on plural) speaks to the necessity to be specific as a way of respecting people's sovereignty by formal recognition of identity, heritage, history, presence and futurity.

In fact, Maya Indigenous peoples comprise numerous distinct groups, each with unique languages, traditions, and cultural practices. The exact number of Maya groups can vary depending on the classification criteria and sources, but it is commonly recognized that there are over 20 Maya ethnic groups in total, primarily concentrated in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize,

Honduras, and El Salvador.[56] According to the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, there are an estimated 1.6 million Guatemalans in the U.S. (2008). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 15,000 - 19,000 indigenous speakers from Latin American reside in the United States.[57]

Nana Alicia further described her identity as part of a group of keepers and practitioners of sacred knowledge, cultural preservation leaders who identify as 'Misioneros Maya' rather than the externally imposed label of “chamanes,” or “shamans” in English.

Nana Alicia states:

> Entonces, en segundo lugar, para aquellos de nosotros que nos identificamos como Misioneros Mayas en español, muchos nos etiquetan como chamanes, pero no somos chamanes. Los chamanes son personas que han sido enseñadas a hacer maldad, y nosotros no hacemos maldad. Al contrario, somos agradecidos con la Creación, con el Creador, con las Grandes Divinidades que se manifestaron en aquellos tiempos cuando no existía la maldad, ni el pecado. Esa es la razón por la cual se manifestaron en persona, en espíritu, y dejaron instrucciones a nuestros grandes ancestros. Nos enseñaron que debemos ser humildes, sinceros, respetuosos y agradecidos. Esta es la base ética de ser Maya.
>
> English translation: *Then, secondly, for those of us who identify as Maya Missionaries in Spanish, many label us as shamans, but we are not shamans. Shamans are people who have been taught to do harm, and we do not do harm. Rather, we are grateful to the*

[56] “Maya | People, Language, & Civilization | Britannica.” Accessed November 4, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Maya-people.
[57] CIELO. “We Are Here: Indigenous Diaspora in Los Angeles,” November 19, 2024. https://mycielo.org/we-are-here-indigenous-diaspora-in-los-angeles/.

> *Creation, to the Creator, to the Great Divinities who appeared in those times when there was no evil, no sin. That is why they manifested themselves in person, in spirit, and left instructions to our great ancestors. They taught us that we must be humble, sincere, respectful, and grateful. This is the ethical foundation of being Maya.*

Furthermore, Nana Alicia's rejection of the identifier "shaman," speaks to the colonial history of the imposed term. In fact, the word shaman comes from Russian reports of the Evenk people of eastern Siberian region (Joralemon 2001: 14033). This 'shaman' was later exported globally to refer to complex beliefs and practices associated with Evenk shamanic heritage (ibid). Such terms tend to generalize Indigenous knowledge systems, aligning them with Western epistemologies and the constructed illusion of modernity (Alberts, 2015).

Nana Alicia's response regarding harm and sin highlights how the Christian theological concepts of depravity and sin were imposed on Native peoples as a tool of oppression (Tinker 2008: 95). By encouraging the internalization of the belief that humanity is inherently sinful, Christian colonizers created a division between Indigenous peoples and their ancient ceremonial structures, casting these practices as morally deficient and insufficient by Christian standards (ibid). This imposition served to undermine Native spiritual traditions and enforce a sense of inferiority aligned with colonial agendas.

In response to the imposed concept of sin, Nana Alicia articulates the ethical foundation of being Maya — an ontology and contingent ethics deeply rooted in the mythologies and philosophical tenets of Maya traditions. These traditions emphasize vital cycles of creation, transformation, and decay, all linked to Nana Alicia's expression of gratitude to *el Creador*. As conveyed in the oral traditions of Indigenous Mesoamerican peoples, and particularly in the culturally syncretic Maya K'iche' text *Popol Vuh*, creation and death are intrinsic to

cosmological processes and essential to life itself. Nana Alicia shares that the values instilled by *el Creador*—humility, sincerity, respect, and gratitude — form the core of Maya ethics as a path to attain happiness.

Nana Alicia described how the Maya K'iche ethos is written and performed:

En nuestro libro sagrado, *el Creador* y Formador nos dice que fuimos creados para ser agradecidos, para ser meditadores y para darle gracias. ¿Y cómo lo hacemos? Le damos gracias a través de nuestros cantos, nuestras danzas, nuestro arte, y también mediante nuestras oraciones y diálogos. Esa es la esencia de nuestra espiritualidad: pedir sus bendiciones, su protección, la buena vida, la salud para nuestros hijos. Así es como lo honramos, lo adoramos, y lo invocamos: al gran Creador y Formador, al Corazón del Cielo, al Corazón de la Tierra. Por eso vinieron nuestros primeros padres desde las Pléyades, para enseñarnos cómo debemos hacerlo. *Hongwinak* significa en nuestro idioma 'hombre de luz' o 'mujer de luz,' personas iluminadas, seres humanos dotados de sabiduría y amor para vivir bien en la vida.

English translation: *In our sacred book, the Creator and Shaper tells us that we were created to be grateful, to be meditative, and to give thanks. And how do we do it? We give thanks through our songs, our dances, our art, and also through our prayers and dialogues. This is the essence of our spirituality: to ask for blessings, protection, a good life, and health for our children. This is how we honor, worship, and invoke the great Creator and Shaper, the Heart of the Sky, the Heart of the Earth. That is why our first ancestors came from the Pleiades, to teach us how we should live. Hongwinak means in our language 'man of light' or 'woman of light,' enlightened people, human beings endowed with wisdom and love to live life well.*

As it is stated in the Popol Vuh, Nana Alicia reiterated the creation cycle and origins in the cosmos and the qualities *Honginak* have as enlightened people. They accounted for everything, the *Hongwinak*, with their enlightened words as it is said in the words of the K'iche (Tedlock 1996: 63). Nana Alicia also emphasized that the Maya K'iche people were created to be grateful and to be meditative.

When I think of practices of meditation, I am reminded of El Palacio de las Acanaladuras, also known as The Palace of the Grooves or the G Group palace residential complex at Tikal, Guatemala where I had the privilege of quietly meditating. Tour guide, and local philosopher, Pinky, shared with me that this complex would have been perfect for meditating and he pointed out the grooves. The grooves would be useful for sound resonance for chants during meditation practices.

During the interview, Nana Alicia reflected on the meaning of gratitude, sharing insights into how she learned to express thankfulness through the performance of ceremonies, and who influenced her understanding of this practice:

> Desde el momento en que somos concebidos en el vientre de nuestra madre, nuestro Creador y Formador nos da forma según la misión que venimos a cumplir en la faz de la tierra. Así es como surge mi raíz Maya K'iche. Procedo de mis ancestros, de generación en generación, llevando conmigo la misión de ser una misionera maya.
>
> No es algo que se aprende en estudios formales; aunque tomamos ciertos aprendizajes, es principalmente un proceso de vida, un desarrollo que comenzamos desde pequeños, primero con nuestros padres y luego con nuestros abuelos y abuelas, quienes forman parte de nuestro linaje. Absorbemos todo, como quien bebe agua o leche, en cada aspecto de la vida y del desarrollo que vivieron nuestros ancestros.

En mi caso, crecí bajo el cuidado de mi abuela materna, quien era una persona de gran sabiduría y respeto, y guardiana de nuestra cultura. Viví con ella hasta los 11 años, cuando falleció, y luego regresé con mis padres. No porque ellos me hubieran dejado, sino porque mi abuela vivía sola y tenía su negocio de leche. Ella me puso una nana, y así crecí con una cuidadora.

Con mi abuela aprendí el verdadero respeto, los valores y la importancia de dar gracias en la noche, en la mañana, al mediodía, al comer, y al salir. También aprendí sobre las ceremonias de agradecimiento, donde se reconoce que cada cosa tiene su día o su mes para honrar al Creador. Por ejemplo, cuando nace una vaca o tiene crías, se realiza una ceremonia para que crezca sana la vaquita, los cerditos, los pollos, los chompipes o los patos.

Es en este entorno donde mi sabiduría y conocimiento de la vida tomaron forma. También asistimos a ceremonias para encender velas en las milpas, y damos gracias por las frutas, como las grandes frutas de antaño, los chayotes, los guisquiles, y los hermosos y ricos manzanos y perales. Todo se agradece.

English translation: *From the moment we are conceived in our mother's womb, our Creator and Shaper forms us according to the mission we are meant to fulfill on the face of the earth. This is where my Maya K'iche roots originate. I come from my ancestors, from generation to generation, carrying with me the mission of being a Maya missionary.*

This is not something learned in formal studies; although we acquire certain knowledge, it's primarily a process of life, a development that begins early on, first with our parents and then with our grandparents, who are part of our lineage. We absorb everything, like drinking water or milk, in every aspect of life and the development that our ancestors experienced.

In my case, I grew up under the care of my maternal grandmother, who was a person of great wisdom and respect, and a guardian of our culture. I lived with her until I was 11 years old, when she passed away, and then I returned to live with my parents. It wasn't because they had left me, but because my grandmother lived alone and had her milk business. She arranged for a caretaker, and so I grew up with a nanny.

With my grandmother, I learned true respect, values, and the importance of giving thanks at night, in the morning, at noon, when eating, and when going out. I also learned about the ceremonies of gratitude, where we acknowledge that everything has its day or month to honor the Creator. For example, when a cow is born or has calves, a ceremony is held so that the calf grows healthy, as well as the piglets, chickens, turkeys, or ducks.

It was in this environment that my wisdom and knowledge of life took shape. We also attend ceremonies to light candles in the cornfields, and we give thanks for the fruits, like the large fruits of the past, the chayotes, the guisquiles, and the beautiful and delicious apples and pears. Everything is honored with gratitude.

Nana Alicia's tracing of her ancestral lineage underscores the importance of being aware of her origins, a key aspect of the Maya K'iche' worldview. She explained that this understanding was not acquired through formal studies but rather through everyday lived experiences. From a critical race theory perspective, this exemplifies familial and navigational

wealth (Yosso 2005). The emphasis on learning from her abuela and through daily practices represents an epistemic shift that challenges the valuation of knowledge solely documented in written text (Mignolo 2007: 452), instead centering Maya K'iche' knowledge transmitted intergenerationally.

In this context, I apply the concept of *rightful relations* as a framework to interpret and enact an ethos and logic of incommensurability, recognizing how academia often operates from a deficit model that undervalues the knowledge embedded within families. This approach aligns with an Indigenous worldview precept, "the capacity to remember" (Topa & Narváez 2022: 4), which serves as a foundational guide for theorizing and practicing *rightful relations*. I aim to highlight how Nana Alicia's ceremonial performances are integral to Maya K'iche' aesthetic systems, which emphasize the use of memory and further embody an epistemic shift.

Additionally, in using the framework of *rightful relations*, I emphasize the Native and Indigenous worldviews of kinship and understanding how all entities are connected in multiple and transcendental ways, and that a relationship must be built and is processual. We see this reflected in the way Nana Alicia describes the various more-than-human beings she expresses gratitude for through the lighting of candles. Additionally, as exemplified in the blessing ceremony for the masks, there was the presence of incense and flowers. The role of incense was emphasized by Nana Alicia in a follow-up phone call following our interview. Based on our ongoing conversation, the burning of incense is meant to call in *los abuelos* – they are in the air and water. In addition to the longstanding use of copal as an offering, the inclusion of flowers on altars has also been documented at Classic Period Maya sites. Pollen evidence suggests that flowers were used to evoke "paradisiacal places of creation, fecundity, and power imbued with the perfume of blossoms" (McNeil 2021). The multisensory and spatial-temporal-corporal

ceremonial embodiments performed by Nana Alicia reflect the complexity of Maya K'iche aesthetics and as Nana Alicia emphasized, these elements are meant to embody meditations and expressions of gratitude, humility, and respect.

Figure 12. El Palacio de las Acanaladuras (The Palace of the Grooves), Yax Mutal, Tikal, Guatemala. A film transparency capturing the ancient residential complex known as the G Group Palace at Tikal. This architectural marvel, known for its intricate grooves and carved details, stands as a testament to the advanced construction techniques of the Maya civilization. Photographed on February 22, 2024 by Lili Flores Aguilar.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has explored Nana Alicia's reflections on her ancestral lineage, spiritual practices, and the transmission of Maya K'iche' knowledge across generations. Her emphasis on learning through lived experience rather than formal education underscores a foundational element of the Maya K'iche' worldview: knowledge as embodied, relational, and deeply rooted

in intergenerational bonds. Nana Alicia's journey of self-knowledge, shaped by her experiences with her abuela, her ceremonial practices, and her awareness of the Creator and Shaper, serves as a vivid example of what Yosso (2005) describes as familial and navigational wealth. This wealth reflects a type of knowledge and resilience that counters deficit models often prevalent in academic and colonial frameworks, which have historically dismissed Indigenous epistemologies.

Nana Alicia's resistance to the externally imposed label of "shaman" and her choice to identify as a Misionera Maya signify a conscious reclaiming of Indigenous identities and spiritual authority. This choice not only rejects colonial and Christian influences that have often demonized Indigenous spirituality through terms like "sin" and "depravity," but also affirms a Maya ontology and ethics that values humility, sincerity, respect, and gratitude. Such values are inherently tied to a Maya cosmology that sees life, death, and transformation as cyclical and interconnected processes, as expressed in the Popol Vuh and other Maya cultural teachings. Nana Alicia's ceremonial practices, her songs, dances, and offerings, all serve as acts of reverence to the Creator and to the natural world, representing a spiritual continuity that resists colonial erasure.

From a decolonial perspective, Nana Alicia's approach to knowledge as a process of lived experience and ancestral memory represents an epistemic shift that Mignolo (2007) describes as "de-linking" from Eurocentric structures that prioritize written text and formal education. Instead, Nana Alicia's practices privilege knowledge passed down orally and through embodied traditions, asserting the validity of Maya K'iche' ways of knowing. This approach not only challenges the academy's reliance on documentation but also calls for an epistemological

transformation that acknowledges the value of non-written knowledge systems, particularly those found within Indigenous families and communities.

To understand Nana Alicia's practices through the concept of *rightful relations* offers a framework for appreciating the depth of Maya K'iche' epistemologies and their application in understanding contemporary Indigenous practices in museum spaces and beyond. *Rightful relations*, in this context, go beyond individual knowledge acquisition; they emphasize relational ethics—honoring ancestors, the earth, and all life forms within cosmos. Nana Alicia's performances and ceremonies thus act as an embodiment of memory, reinforcing an Indigenous precept of "the capacity to remember" (Topa & Narváez 2022), which sustains cultural continuity and upholds Maya ethical and cosmological values.

In conclusion, Nana Alicia's life, teachings, and practices offer profound insights into Maya K'iche' epistemology and ontology. Her emphasis on learning through familial and daily practices exemplifies a form of knowledge that transcends the boundaries of institutionalized education, instead honoring the lived experiences and memories of her ancestors. By valuing intergenerational transmission, Nana Alicia not only preserves Maya K'iche traditions but also asserts an Indigenous perspective that resists the epistemic violence of colonialism and the deficit-based views of Western academia.

This chapter illustrates how Nana Alicia's identity as a woman and her authority as a Misionera Maya, embodies an active rejection of imposed labels and a reclamation of Maya spiritual authority. Her approach to ceremonial practices highlights *aesthetics of survivance* (Vizenor 2009) and adaptability of Indigenous knowledge systems that continue to thrive despite centuries of oppression. Nana Alicia's experiences remind us of the importance of *rightful*

relations —relations grounded in respect, gratitude, and memory—as a means to sustain Indigenous worldviews within museum contexts.

Ultimately, Nana Alicia's story and her dedication to sharing Maya K'iche' aesthetics challenge us to reconsider the scope of knowledge in academic discourse and museum spaces. It calls for an expanded understanding and incorporation into museums vital oral traditions, embodied knowledge, and the relationally defined knowledge of familial and communal relationships. As academic and museums institutions grapple with decolonizing its frameworks, Nana Alicia's teachings stand as a testament to the resilience of Maya epistemologies and the importance of honoring the diverse ways of knowing that Indigenous communities have preserved and continue to share with the world.

CHAPTER 3: Coming to Know Native East Bay Ohlone Peoples Through Co-Creation Processes

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the process that led me to collaborate 2021-2022 as an assistant for a design studio associated with a university in Los Angeles, on a public project in collaboration with members of the Northern California Native American community: Vincent from the East Bay Ohlone community, and Louis from the Rumsen Ohlone community.[58] Motivating factors to enter into the design field came from my desire to put into action ideals of *rightful relations,* that foregrounds aesthetic sovereignty, to make visible social inequalities in order to move towards social justice. Aesthetic sovereignty in this chapter is informed by Vizenor's (2008) concept of an *aesthetic of survivance* which aims to reject an obtrusive capture and dominance over Native stories and cultural heritage. More specifically, this chapter to outlines the co-creation journey through *storywork*[59] that recounts experiences that led me to be in what I refer to as *rightful relations*.

As stated in the introduction of this dissertation, *rightful relations* as a practice includes identifying my lineage and ancestral lands as a way of embodying a decolonial understanding of myself that goes beyond nation-state politics and instead recovers "the historical distinctiveness

[58] In this chapter, I refer to collaborators by their first names as specified by them and as a means of protecting privacy.
[59] Storywork is a term coined by Professor Jo-ann Archibald that works with story making to elucidate cultural understandings specifically about Indigenous peoples and the stories we make (Smith 2019: x).

of marginalized groups" (de la Cadena & Starn 2007: 11). Overall, coming to be in *rightful relations* makes apparent histories and truths apparent that have been marginalized or erased by colonial processes, and I put this into practice by expanding upon the methodology of *Indigenous storywork*. *Indigenous storywork*, centers the power of traditional and life experience stories for educational purposes (Archibald 2008, Archibald 2019), and as an act of sovereignty, that reinforces Indigenous identities, values and perspective (Behrendt 2019: 239-240). In the stories of this chapter, the educational purpose is to make Indigenous peoples' ongoing presence and histories more visible through a place-based and site-specific public artwork.

As someone trained in anthropological, archaeological and sociocultural studies, I felt I could leverage my skills as a means of addressing underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples working in arts related fields. Additionally, my previous work experience in museums, digital media, arts activist practices and education informed my desire to work with people through community-based design research (CBDR) methods. CBDR is a "collaborative and local process that brings together young people, educators, administrators, caregivers, and experts to redesign learning."[60] Going beyond school improvement initiatives, CBDR researchers and practitioners account for everyday language use and embodied practices that facilitate co-creation of knowledge and place making through the lens of sociocultural theories of learning. CBDR in the context of this chapter informs the way I analyze how traditional knowledge was shared during co-creation of a public artwork.

Understanding co-creation described in this chapter through *Indigenous storywork* allows for a centering of Indigenous stories and embedded traditional knowledge. According to Cizek and Uricchio (2022), co-creation is everywhere and it is nothing new–examples span from

[60] https://transcendeducation.org/community-based-design/

paleolithic petroglyphs (artistic rock carvings) to the internet. Moreover, co-creation is cross-disciplinary in scholarship practices, collaborative across organizational entities, and more broadly, seeks collaborative paths rising from emerging processes towards justice (Cizek & Uricchio 2022).

The reasoning behind analyzing how knowledge is shared is to identify processes of co-creation done in order to transform design practices within arts institutions while drawing from the strengths of already established cultural practices amongst Indigenous peoples and their *storywork*. The chapter will be ordered in the following main sections: Methodologies; The art of memory; Coming to know Ohlone histories; Co-creation processes; and Discussion/Conclusion.

Methodologies:

In this chapter, I focus on the themes of relationship-building and co-creation, guided by Archibald's storywork principles: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald & Morgan, 2019). I discuss my practices of "rightful relations," how they emerged throughout the collaborative process, and the implications for theorizing these relations. I emphasize moments where storywork principles were actively performed, bringing to life what I term "rightful relations," which is a social justice approach to making visible what stories have often been mad invisible due to colonial and hegemonic processes.

Contrary to what one might expect, *rightful relations* are not necessarily aimed at specific outcomes. Instead, drawing on decolonial storywork methodology, I argue that *rightful relations* represent a dynamic. They emerge from ethical engagements rooted in Indigenous aesthetic

systems. While my role as a research assistant involved maintaining ethical and professional standards to achieve project goals, I emphasize the relational processes — trust-building, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration—as aesthetic experiences in their own right. These experiences are shaped by the contexts in which they occur—whether virtual or in-person—and encompass both tangible and intangible dimensions essential to decolonial knowledge creation and the process of de-linking. As Carcelén-Estrada states, "Indigenous communities reproduce life with its aesthetic complexities, as they connect to the land, and the land to the law. States come and go, expand, shrink, rise, and fall, but peoples' dreams of freedom and their ancestral memory remain" (Carcelén-Estrada 2017: 115). It is through storywork that I explain and weave the ways that coming to be in *rightful relations* appears through interactions and co-creation.

Throughout this chapter, I analyze specific moments throughout a professional collaborative relationship that posit processes of coming to arrive and continued dynamics of *rightful relations.* Specifically, I engage with stories that are a part of an auto-ethnographic account to contextualize co-creation frameworks that led to an eventual mentorship arrangement with a member the East Bay Ohlone Nation. In doing so, I reflect on the tenets of established decolonial scholarship as it pertains to museum and arts practices based on the values expressed through a collaborative relationship.

What is the art memory?

From the perspective of arts theorists Roberts & Roberts (1996), they emphasize a divergence from a positivist perspective of a "true" picture of the past and towards an understanding supported by research emphasizing that "memory is not discrete, biologically grounded, universally shared mental property and activity. Rather memory is a cultural

construction varying from one society to the next" (Roberts & Roberts 1996: 27). As proposed through the framework of *rightful relations,* it is vital to engage in an understanding of memory that spans transnationally across Indigenous lands and peoples through Turtle Island and Abya Yala. Accordingly, Tuhiwai Smith (2012) through her chapter on Indigenous Projects, brings up the role of memory. The examples are as follows: 1. testimonies (*testimonio*); and 2. Remembering. Tuhiwai Smith states that *testimonies* are a means through which oral evidence is presented to a particular type of audience as a way of speaking about painful events that can be related through feelings expressed (Tuhiwai Smith 2012: 145). Furthermore, *testimonies* are characterized as a formality to in which truth is being revealed "under oath." In Abya Yala, or Latin or South America, *testimonio* is understood from a transnational framework as a "narrative of collective memory" as a literary method for making sense of histories, voices of representation, and of the political narratives of oppression (ibid 145). Similarly, the project of *remembering* pertains to remembering of a painful past, "re-membering in terms of connecting bodies with place and experience, and importantly, people's responses to that pain" (ibid, 147). Additionally, Smith points out the absences or the "silences and intervals in the stories," where there was an organized "obliteration of memory" as a "deliberate strategy of oppression" (ibid), or *epistemicide* (De Sousa 2015: 149). As a result, healing and transformation following historical trauma or *epistemicide* are vital tactics in an approach that asks community to engage in re-membering what has been unconsciously or consciously forgotten.

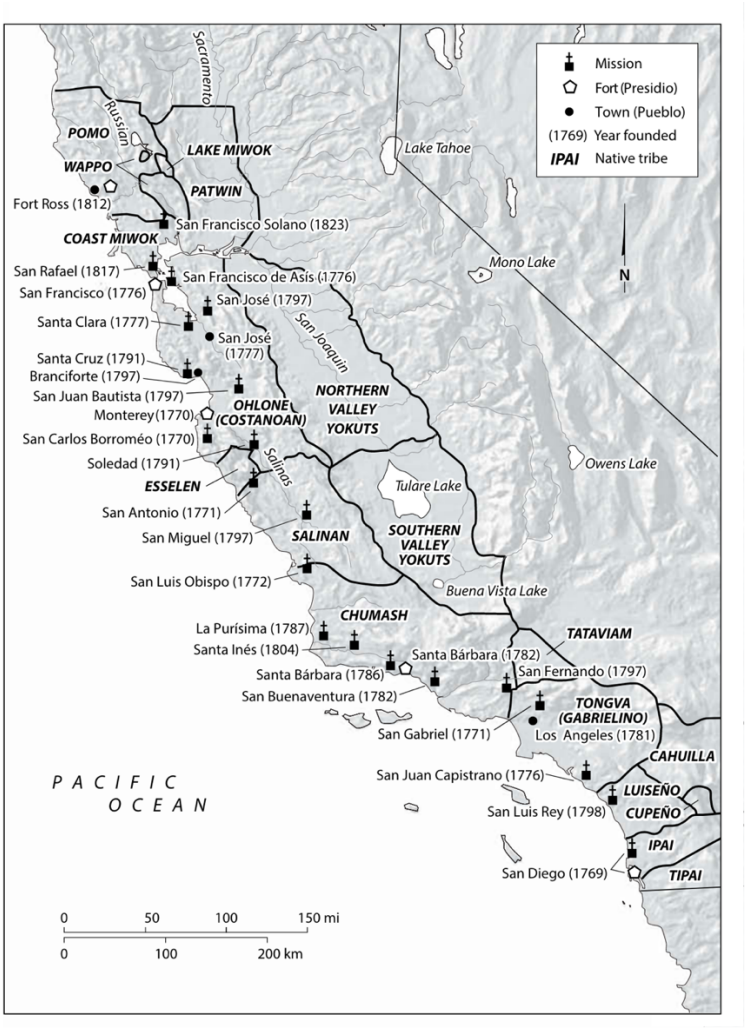
Similar to peoples across the world, Native and Indigenous peoples "reconfigure nationalist and local histories to meet emerging needs of political economy" (Roberts & Roberts 1996: 26). Amongst Eurocentric perspectives, there is a prioritization of reconfiguring memory through text and object relations, with less attention to oral histories (ibid, 26). It is for this

reason, that *rightful relations* encourages a centering of Indigenous stories that tell us of ways of being (ontologies), as an all-encompassing way of understanding how the world is experienced (phenomenology), what constitutes a body or an entity (corporeality) and subsequently how knowledge is transmitted (epistemology) and built through co-creation (collectivities) which expands understandings and shapes worldviews. It is through *rightful relations* that there is an opportunity to see how these processes move and are contingent upon each other and how these dynamics or connections embody an aesthetic ethos and logos that can inform the way arts institutions and museums collaborate with Native peoples to support their sovereignty in service of social justice.

According to Indigenous perspectives, "histories of colonialism are commemorated in the creative arts and memory institutions—archives and museums" (Mithlo & Chavez, 2022: 3). This understanding emphasizes the need for a social justice approach that collaborates with Native peoples to ensure accurate representation of Indigenous narratives. Instead of merely engaging in "celebratory appraisals of Indigenous survival," (ibid) as noted by Mithlo and Chavez, this approach addresses the collective experiences of Indigenous communities, including the impacts of imperialist extraction, exploitation, and genocide.

I deliberately use the term “genocide,” acknowledging its controversial nature but also its necessity. This choice aligns with scholars who assert it as an "accurate term to describe imperialism as documented through photographs, exhibits, archives, and art" (ibid: 3). Oral historian Lloyd Molina IV describes memory institutions as engaging in “practices of containment.” From an Indigenous viewpoint, this form of containment represents an unjust seizure of cultural patrimony, which should be restored to its rightful origins—a process I refer to as establishing *rightful relations*.

As Indigenous scholars argue, museums serve as evidence of genocide, exposing the complicity of imperialist and colonial powers in crimes against humanity. Naming the unjust containment of cultural patrimony enables the rejection of the "logic of elimination" that memory institutions often perpetuate (Chavez & Mithlo: 2002). By honoring the narratives shared by Louis and Vincent in the co-creation process, I demonstrate respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility—principles that counter the logic of elimination and support a dynamic of *rightful relations*.



California missions, forts, and towns, 1769–1823

Figure 13. Map of California missions, forts, and towns from 1769-1823 (Madley 2016: 28).

Coming to Know Ohlone Histories

Before sharing how I came to know Ohlone histories, it's essential to explain how I initially encountered misinformation about California[61] Native history through the colonial

[61] The state name "California," is a non-Native word with 16th century Islamic origins, and inspired by the word "Khalif" or "Khalifa" meaning "successor," when referring to a head of state or leader in Arabic. This Arabic influence can be attributed to Moorish presence and influence in Spain during the Umayyad Caliphate's reign in the

curriculum of the Los Angeles Unified School District, and then more recently engaged in a process of unlearning through encounters with stories shared by Louis and Vincent. As a child attending primary school—specifically in fourth grade at around nine years old—I, like many students across California, was assigned the "California Mission Project." This project involved creating a diorama of a chosen California Mission, portraying a romanticized version of the Spanish Catholic missionization period.

While working on the project, I asked my mother about this early Spanish colonial era and whether similar events occurred in her homeland. My inquiries, however, left many questions unanswered about our Indigenous roots and the ways in which they were suppressed or syncretized due to Spanish colonialism. It wasn't until I reached college that I fully understood how the Mission Project perpetuates colonial values of assimilation and misrepresents a violent chapter of history.

During my undergraduate and graduate studies, I continued to develop my multimedia art practices, which I see as an extension of storytelling traditions. I also co-organized community-based exhibitions, sparking my interest in the arts and curatorial studies. As a student worker at the Fowler Museum and Getty Multicultural Intern[62] at the Will Rogers Historic Ranch House and, I built upon my background in archaeology by honing my skills in conservation, curation, and archival work. This experience deepened my understanding of ethics, particularly in relation

region from 757-1492. PBS SoCal. "California, Calafia, Khalif: The Origin of the Name 'California,'" December 15, 2015. https://www.pbssocal.org/shows/departures/california-calafia-khalif-the-origin-of-the-name-california.

[62] The Getty Multicultural Undergraduate Internship, most currently known as the Getty Marrow Undergraduate Internship (Getty MUI), founded in 1993, is the "largest and longest-standing diversity internship program in the visual arts in the United States ("Getty Foundation Releases Impact Report on Decades of Diversity Internships." Accessed July 26, 2023. https://www.getty.edu/news/getty-foundation-releases-impact-report-on-decades-diversity-internships/).

to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA),[63] and expanded my involvement in educational departments.

With a Master of Arts in Culture and Performance, I sought further professional development to explore my hypothesis of *rightful relations* in the arts and design field. This concept is informed by observations pertaining to the lack of Indigenous representation among museum staff, particularly of cultural groups from which artifacts originate. It also involves confronting the colonial legacies of museums to foster socially and environmentally just curatorial practices. As a graduate student representative, I actively engaged in student advocacy through the Dean's Office on the Student Council and the AEDI Commission at UCLA SoAA. These experiences allowed me to collaborate with students, faculty, and staff across departments. During this time, I connected with an artist who invited me to join their projects as a graduate student worker. One of these projects, serves as the primary focus of analysis in this chapter centered on co-creation with Native people.

The artist, I assisted, Rebeca Mendez, was selected by a panel to integrate art into a Bay Area public transportation station, aiming to enrich the public experience. The panel included city representatives and members of the Bay Area art community. The principal artist, driven by the idea of "re-story-ation"[64] through public art, initiated outreach to a prominent East Bay Ohlone cultural institution via email, introducing themselves as a visual artist and UCLA faculty member. From there, I helped coordinate a date and time that worked best for everyone's

[63] The federally mandated Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 which arose from the Native American movement to recover and repatriate human remains and associated funerary objects stolen by non-Natives. Professor of Law at UCLA, Angela Riley states that all U.S. federally funded museums are mandated to correct hundreds of years of human rights abuses through mandatory reporting.

[64] The term "re-story-ation" has been used by Robin Kimmerer, Janice Greenwood (2020), ecologist Gary Nabhan, Steve Dunsky (2017) and Florencia Pech-Cárdenas (2023) which means "to heal a landscape, we must hear its stories," and "to heal a landscape, we must tell the right story" (Greenwood 2012).

schedule by contacting with a person of contact. From the email exchange, it seemed we would be meeting with Deidre who corresponded on behalf of Louis and Vincent the founders of the East Bay Ohlone cultural institution. Everyone confirmed via email and I went ahead and sent everyone an electronic calendar invitation. It took a couple of rounds of back and forth to find a date and time that worked for everyone. The design studio team of four people for the project consisted of the studio manager, principal designer, a designer, and myself, the research and community outreach assistant. My position was funded by SoAA's stipend as a Graduate Student Researcher. I was very excited and invested in this project from the start. On the day of the meeting — November 30th at 4 PM — we gathered in the Zoom room. After a brief wait, the participants appeared on the screen, confirming that our guests had joined the call.

We were pleasantly surprised to see and hear Louis and Vincent connecting to the zoom teleconference call. During this meeting, the principal designer of the studio explained her design principals and Vincent and Louis shared their histories and background information pertaining to their membership the East Bay Ohlone community and Rumsen Ohlone community. Throughout this collaboration, we learned about the diversity of Native peoples that are the original caretakers of what is now referred to as the greater Bay Area in Northern California. Many of these stories were prompted by public museum collections that were viewable online, such as that of the Autry Museum's Collections Online.[65] We explored the complexities surrounding repatriation and the politics of managing contested items among the diverse Ohlone peoples. Louis and Vincent shared that the need to reclaim cultural inheritances contained in museum collections is highly political due to the fact that reclamation is tied to the goal of reinstating

[65] "Autry's Collections Online – Basket." Accessed October 28, 2022. https://collections.theautry.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=M123449;type=101.

federal recognition of their tribal communities.[66] This marked the beginning of many listening sessions where I began to unlearn the misinformation about Native California history that I had absorbed through childhood education. Through these sessions, listening to Louis and Vincent's stories instilled in me a sense of responsibility to gain a deeper understanding of the Native peoples of the East Bay and surrounding regions. This deeper knowledge is essential to effectively advocate for the accurate representation of East Bay Ohlone histories, as well as their present and future legacies.

I learned that Ohlone peoples are a living community with a rich heritage and an enduring legacy. Through stories that Vincent and Louis shared, through the co-creation process, I learned that their ancestors, for centuries, thrived in the diverse ecosystems of the Bay Area. They lived in an intimate relationship with the land, utilizing its plant and more-than-human relatives sustainably while maintaining a profound connection to their environment through various cultured ways of life. Their intricate understanding of the local flora, fauna, and seasonal rhythms allowed them to flourish as skilled and sophisticated peoples within their communities and stewards of their home.

Since this chapter centers on establishing *rightful relations* with Vincent, a member of the East Bay Ohlone community, and Louis, a member of the Rumsen Ohlone community, it is crucial to identify the multiple imperial powers responsible for committing genocide and oppressing Native peoples in Northern California. By extending what I learned from Louis and Vincent, I seek to reveal the attempted erasure of Ohlone people by colonialism. In *An American Genocide* (2016), historian Madley describes the Russo-Hispanic Period (1769-1846) as

[66] For more on the topic of federal recognition of Native peoples in the San Francisco Bay Area, I suggest reading chapter 3 of the book Abalone Tales: Collaborative Explorations of Sovereignty and Identity in Native California, by Les W. Field (2008).

characterized by Spanish, Russian, and Mexican colonial occupations along the coastal regions, from Pomo lands (Fort Ross) to Kumeyaay lands (San Diego). This era saw the Native population in California decline from 310,000 to 150,000, with 62,600 of these deaths occurring in or near the Spanish Franciscan missions along the California coast (Madley 2016: 2-3).

The arrival of European settlers marked a turning point in the Ohlone peoples' history. The impacts of colonization, including the loss of land, forced assimilation, and the introduction of foreign diseases, had devastating effects on their population and way of life. Despite facing the challenges of demographic collapse due to missionization, and the Mexicanization period, (Field et al 2008: 35) the Ohlone peoples continue to persevere, maintaining their cultural practices and traditions through generations of struggle.

One of the key cultural characteristics of diverse Ohlone peoples is their languages, which fall under the Costanoan (Ohlone) language family (see Figure 15 for the language map). This family comprises six languages that are largely mutually intelligible, with the exception of the Karkin language (Golla 2011: 162). It's crucial to note that 'Costanoan' is not an Ohlone term; it originates from the Spanish word *costeños*, meaning 'coastal dwellers.' This was misheard by Anglo-settlers as 'costanos' and later transformed by anthropologists into the misnomer 'Costanoan' (Field et al. 2008: 34). This misnomer, reflecting outsider misconceptions about Ohlone ways of life, parallels the static maps presented in this chapter. As a reflexive methodology, I point out that these maps remind us to critically consider how territories are delineated, capturing only a single moment in time. Such delineations align with Molina's (2024) identification of detrimental containment practices — by people, systems of storage, architecture, and documentation — that ultimately contribute to processes of erasure tracing back to the

archival practices of the late 18th century Enlightenment era Spain (Hamann 2022). I merely present these maps to give an idea of the linguistic diversity of the Ohlone peoples.

The Ohlone languages are diverse and distinct, reflecting the various tribal groups within the region. Unfortunately, many of these languages are now considered endangered due to *epistemicide* faced by the Native communities. Efforts are underway to revitalize and reclaim these languages (Arellano et al 2021: 14, Field 2008), as they hold the essence of Ohlone peoples' worldview and longstanding connection to their homeland.

The Ohlone are Native American peoples comprised of approximately 50 distinct tribes with related languages, whose traditional lands encompass what is now most popularly referred to as the San Francisco Bay Area in California (see figure 14). Their history and cultures are deeply intertwined with the land, shaping their identity as the original inhabitants of this biodiverse region. In fact, there are numerous archaeological studies that include osteological analysis, spectrometric and radiometric analysis of *Olivella* shell-bead typology conducted in the San Francisco area (Arellano et al 2021, Bartelink et al 2019, Brink et al 2015, Groza et al 2011). These archaeological studies confirm the presence of established human societies from the Middle to Late Holocene era that further confirms what Ohlone peoples have stated through their oral histories as having ancestral lineages being present since time immemorial. Unfortunately, the work of early anthropologists did more damage than affirmation to the Ohlone peoples. One example is the work of Alfred Kroeber, who proclaimed that many Native Californians peoples were extinct (Field et al 2008). This deeply damaging anthropological narrative and the power of the state performed to render many Native peoples as invisible.

Before this anthropologically fueled rupture, the initial catastrophic disruption faced by the Native Californian Ohlone peoples was due to Hispano-European colonization (Arellano et al

2021: 17). This serves as an example of tension between disciplinary practices of knowledge production and their tendency to cause harm rather than foster regenerative pathways, as seen in the Spanish Empire's mission-presidio system and the production of archival material such as mission baptismal records (ibid 22).

Figure 14. Map of Ohlone territories (https://cejce.berkeley.edu/ohloneland).

Figure 15. Map of Ohlone languages and major attested dialects (Golla 2011: 163).

Today, the Ohlone peoples continue to work towards federal recognition, rights, and respect (Arellano 2021: ix, Field et al 2008: 43). They are dedicated to preserving their cultural heritage, advocating for the protection of sacred sites, and educating the public about their history and contributions (ibid). Land acknowledgment movements have gained momentum, encouraging people to recognize the original inhabitants of the land they now inhabit.[67] In recent years, the Ohlone peoples have been working to establish stronger ties with neighboring

[67] "Ohlone Land | Centers for Educational Justice & Community Engagement."

communities, government entities, and educational institutions. These efforts aim to foster a greater understanding of their heritage while promoting an inclusive narrative of the histories of the Bay Area.

Figure 16 Ohlone ear-ornament, created in the year 1837 that is currently held at The British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license. (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Am1972-Q-108).

Two Ohlone cultural artifacts from museum and archival collections, shared by Vincent and Louis during our meeting, illustrate how performativity can shed light on the complex processes of art creation, as well as their associated embodied practices and histories. The first example is an ear ornament (figure 16), currently housed at The British Museum, and the second

is a top knot depicted in a lithographic print. Vincent recounted how the ear-ornament contained at the British Museum, discovered at Mission San José, features glass beads imported from Venice, Italy, during the period of global diffusion and trade from the late 17th to the 18th century. Inspired by their stories, I conducted further research and learned that these beads, commonly called "mission-era" beads by archaeologists (Panich, Allen, & Galvan, 2018), are also known as Venetian or Murano Venetian glass beads. The production of these beads, rooted in the Late Middle Ages, was well-established by the 18th century on the Italian island of Murano. Their high demand during this period was tied to their export via the brutal Transatlantic Trade Route, which transported goods and enslaved people across the Atlantic Ocean (Niccolò, 2021).

Vincent shared that the Ohlone peoples proudly adopted these high-quality Murano beads and incorporated them in their designs, as evidenced by their presence at various Spanish Catholic mission sites (Panich et al 2018). The bare bone material incorporated in the design of the ear-ornament is also decorated with clam shell beads, an Ohlone traditional material shaped by their cultural knowledge. Vincent pointed out the dogbane fiber articulated to the abalone – dogbane, a plant used traditionally for weaving fibers together and abalone a Native mollusk to the California coast that is currently endangered. Louis explains he sees remnants of the quills of red woodpecker, and quail articulated to the large clam shaped basket-like form on the ear ornament. Louis also mentions the scalp of a mallard duck or woodpecker would have been incorporated into the design and there would have been blue and white contrast in quail top knots.

Figure 17. Photographic copy of photograph of Ohlone Indians from Mission San Jose dancing. Caption at bottom in German language "Ein Tanz der Indianer in der Mission in St. Jose in Neu-Californien." Attached text on verso, "Courtesy of Bancroft Library, No. 10." "Their bodies decorated for a dance, Indians at Mission San Jose posed for this painting by the German scientist Langsdorff in 1806. The photograph is from the original, owned by Warren Howell.

The second cultural artifact referenced by Louis and Vincent during one of our meetings is a necklace obtained by Dimitry Zavalishin,[68] during 19th-century Russian global expeditions, driven primarily by commercial interests such as the hunting of sea otters for their fur.[69] This

[68] To see an image the Ohlone abalone necklace currently housed in the Russian Museum Kunst Kamera, visit: http://collection.kunstkamera.ru/en/entity/OBJECT/62074?query=abalone&index=9.

[69] "Early California: Pre-1769–1840s: Russian Presence | Picture This." Accessed October 28, 2024. https://picturethis.museumca.org/timeline/early-california-pre-1769-1840s/russian-presence/info.

exploitation contributed to the near-extinction of sea otters by the early 20th century.[70] The presence of Russian expeditions were contested by the Spanish which spurred them to assert their presence through the establishment of the Spanish colonial mission system.

One of the many reasons this necklace is significant is how the necklace resembles one depicted in a painting produced by a Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff.[71] A photographic copy of the painting is currently held within the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley, that shows Ohlone doctors dancing in the vicinity of Mission San Jose and decorated with body paint and tattoos, with some of the body paint on their legs resembling the boots that the Spanish would wear. Based on the oral history told by Vincent, we can assume the dancers depicted are doctors given their holistic knowledge of medicine and the body markings. The use of the term "doctor" intentionally centers an East Bay Ohlone worldview and its inherent knowledge. This word choice challenges the common misrepresentation of Native and Indigenous doctors and healers, who are often inaccurately labeled as "medicine men," "shamans," or "priests." Such terms tend to generalize Indigenous knowledge systems, aligning them with Eurocentric epistemologies and the constructed illusion of modernity (Alberts, 2015). Vincent points out that the top knot on the right closely resembles the top knot that Linda Yamane created.[72]

Throughout this project, I also engaged with work associated with acquiring image rights. I found it ironic that we would have to ask for permission for images of cultural inheritances, even though these cultural inheritances rightfully belong to Native peoples. Vincent and Louis

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[70] California Department of Fish and Wildlife: Sea otter. "Status2001sea_otter.Pdf," n.d. https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=34343.

[71] Von Langsdorff was a German born naturalist who participated in a Russian expedition commanded by Ivan Krusenstern between 1803 and 1805 (https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/contributors/von-langsdorff).

[72] To see Image of Ohlone Feather Headdress by Linda Yamane, 2018, currently archived at the San Mateo County Historical Association visit: https://historysmc.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/73AD5163-C53C-45BB-8905-405823139850.

would share web-pages of various cultural inheritances held in international museum collections. When they shared this, it prompted me to explain my background working with collections associated with NAGPRA during my time working at the Fowler Museum's archaeological facility. The principal designer, Vincent and Louis decided to incorporate some of the images of these artifacts in the public artwork and so I was tasked with inquiring about acquiring image rights.[73] To acquire image rights, I contacted various institutions including UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library, British Museum, the Autry and also came upon online database collections that are based abroad that Vincent and Louis told us about. Domestic collections of online databases included the Oakland Museum of California while collections abroad that I encountered included Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) in Saint Petersburg Russia and Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

During our regular check-ins via teleconferencing, I provided updates on the status of some of the images. When progress was stalled on acquiring image rights, Vincent and Louis invited the design team to visit in the East Bay Area. There, they offered a tour of select museum collections that they had access to, thanks to a family member's role as a curator and archaeologist, as well as their own established relationships with local cultural institutions.

Face to Face at Coyote Hills

After some conversations about the limitations and advantages of NAGPRA, we then moved towards planning a site visit to Mission San Jose, on Friday, April 8, 2022. There, we would meet Vincent and Louis. in person and their Cousin Andy. The morning of April 8th, I

[73] Creative Commons licenses offer different levels of restriction, providing a standardized protocol for determining the permissions required when sharing creative work. For more information, see Creative Commons, "About CC Licenses," accessed October 28, 2024, https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/cclicenses/.

took a flight with the studio manager and primary artist of the design studio from the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) to Oakland International Airport (OIA) with a 7:40 am arrival time. Shortly following our arrival, we met two more members of the studio team, one a designer, the second photographer for the Irvington BART project. After the studio manager sorted through the business of acquiring the rental vehicle, we then squished into the car and made our way to meet Vincent and Louis at around 10am in Fremont's historic Niles neighborhood. We arrived around 9:15 am and decided to take a walk on Niles Boulevard as we waited for Louis and Vincent to meet us for breakfast at one of their favorite local restaurants. I noticed the vestiges of old wooden architecture with their facades and structures from the establishment of Niles in the 1850s as a junction point of the Southern Pacific Railroad lines from Oakland, to San Jose to southern coastal points.[74] Leading up to 1850, the 1848 discovery of gold along with the wave of Oregonian settlers led to rising and continued genocide associated with the Central Mines of California. In late 1849 and early 1850, there were regional mass murder campaigns by vigilantes and US Army soldiers (Madley 2016).

As the line for the restaurant began to build around 10 AM, the design team decided to secure a table for the group. I felt a bit anxious, wondering where I should sit. A team member then suggested I sit at the head of the table to facilitate conversations, with the design team on one side and Vincent and Louis on the other. When Vincent and Louis arrived, we greeted each other warmly and began our meal. We discussed the day's itinerary, which included visits to Coyote Hills Regional Park, Mission San José, and Sycamore Grove.

After breakfast, we divided into two cars and set off in a small caravan toward Coyote Hills. During the drive, I received a text from my mother, sharing a photo commemorating her

[74] "Things To Do In Niles — Niles Main Street Association." (https://www.niles.org/about-niles).

official acquisition of U.S. citizenship. I shared this news with the team, feeling a moment of vulnerability—a poignant reminder of my transnational family history and the challenges of growing up in an immigrant family.

We arrived at Coyote Hills, a landscape with rolling hills, marshlands with tall plants growing around the water's edge, a garden and trees.

Figure 18. Louis holds a top-knot in an upside-down position in the palm of his hand from the Mission San José museum collection on East Bay Ohlone history and land where Mission San Jose is located. Photo taken by me on April 8, 2022.

Before entering the visitor center, Louis and Vincent pointed out a *ruway*, in this specific instance, it was not made by Ohlone peoples, but served as an example of Ohlone architectural vernacular, a thatched structure made of tule (*Schoenoplectus* spp.), and they commented that

this was one of many traditional Ohlone structures in the East Bay area that serve as educational examples for the public. We toured the visitor center at Coyote Hills Regional Park, where I recognized my friend Carla featured in an educational video about the Ohlone Youth Summit and the construction of a Tule boat — it was heartening to see a familiar face and to see a friend doing important work around cultural continuity.

However, we also noticed the poorly placed metates on the floor. Vincent and Louis critiqued the exhibition's lack of sensitivity regarding the placement of these artifacts and the over-representation of metates. The thoughtful curation of cultural artifacts was a recurring topic of discussion. They emphasized that cultural inheritances should be accessible for respectful handling by descendants of their makers, while also acknowledging that some artifacts should not be touched by outsiders. After our time in the interior space of the visitor center, we walked on the land on Bayview Trail that wrapped around hills and over-looked the salt ponds. I walked alongside Louis and Vincent with notebook in hand. Whenever they shared their stories, I made it a point to ask for permission before taking notes, as a gesture of respect and reverence for the knowledge they were entrusting to me.

While walking along the Bayview Trail, Vincent and Louis spoke about the environmental challenges posed by industrial pollution and the complexities of sustainably harvesting food. Along the trail, I spotted California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*), a native flower of the Pacific slope of North America, ranging from Oregon to Baja California, and recognized as the state flower of California. I also saw two small turkeys running along a hillside and I pointed them out. Louis explained that this type of wild turkey is not native to the East Bay

region and in fact they were imported by the thousands in the 1950s by the California Fish and Game Commission.[75]

Figure 19. Photograph of California poppies overlooking the salt ponds at Coyote Hills. Photograph taken by Lili Flores Aguilar, April 8, 2022.

Louis and Vincent also discussed the culinary movements that seek to profit from Native Ohlone food traditions — yet another example of capitalism's extractive neoliberal logics at work. Vincent and Louis emphasized the importance of raising awareness about harvesting issues, which they address through their cultural revitalization efforts linked to Indigenous food

[75] "California's Wild Turkeys." Accessed October 29, 2024. https://www.wildcalifornia.org/post/california-s-wild-turkeys.

ways. They expressed their pride in empowering their community by using Indigenous ingredients. This approach allows people to engage with taste as a testament to their Ohlone lineage and persisting lifeways. Their practice of culinary revitalization, aimed at centering their creative cultural knowledge, exemplifies aesthetic sovereignty in action —demonstrating the strength and agency that Native peoples cultivate when they represent themselves. As we approached the parking lot, Vincent and Louis pointed out the overgrown tule along the water's edge, explaining that the overgrowth was a result of Ohlone people needing to seek permission to harvest these plants. This process is not only cumbersome but also unjust, given that has been homeland for their ancestors since time immemorial. We got into our caravan and made our way to Mission San José.

Figure 20. Photograph of Two turkeys, most likely of the Rio Grande subspecies, running hillside at Coyote Hills. Photograph taken by Lili Flores Aguilar on April 8, 2022.

Upon our arrival, we were welcomed by Vincent's Cousin, Andy, who immediately struck me as both knowledgeable and having a zany sense of humor. We met on the circular steps of the mission where there were children there on a school field trip. Cousin Andy explained that the mission was originally constructed from adobe bricks made of dirt, water, cow patties, tule, and straw and reconstructed by archaeological scans and architectural drawings of the structure since its collapse in the Great Earthquake of 1869. Vincent then pointed out a dedication stone that honored his direct ancestors who built the mission's original walls. He also

mentioned a rededication ceremony led by his great-grandmother at the cornerstone of the structure which was rebuilt.

Figure 21. Photograph of south facing wall of the Mission San Jose church with painted and exposed adobe brick. Photograph taken by Lili Flores Aguilar, April 8, 2022.

Vincent said, “Our people are the ones who built the original structures here. Unfortunately, there are always hard histories with these places. This place right here,” he pointed nearby, “is where the floggings would take place.”

Cousin Andy then pointed across the street to the site of an Ohlone village where East Bay Ohlone people who did not want to participate in the mission system would reside, and

where Catholic missionaries would try to pull people into the mission system. Cousin Andy recounted the story of an Ohlone man who was a neophyte to the Spanish Catholic religion. The man had a family member who refused to adopt Catholic practices and was consequently left to starve. Cousin Andy explained that only baptized individuals were allowed to participate in the mission's trade of livestock and food. In a desperate attempt to save his starving relative, the Ohlone neophyte took a pig from the mission, but he was publicly punished for stealing, as it was deemed "contrary to Christian virtues." Cousin Andy exclaimed,

"He was performing Christian virtues by feeding the poor and the hungry!" He then explained how the prevailing narrative of the San José Mission often praises Padre Narciso Durán's role from 1806 to 1833, particularly his development of the Great Indian Orchestra, also known as the Ohlone Orchestra. However, this narrative overlooks the fact that Durán simultaneously ordered public beatings and punishments after Sunday Mass. Cousin Andy emphasized the importance of telling the full truth and not hiding the painful parts of history. Cousin Andy led us into the interior of the church where he shared with us the story of his great-great-great grandmother being baptized in this place.

After sharing stories inside the church, Cousin Andy led us through the museum, where we saw examples of the California fourth-grade mission project alongside dioramas depicting quotidian scenes of Ohlone people prior to Spanish colonial contact. Vincent and Louis expressed their objections to the Spanish mission project being part of grade school curricula. They explained that one way they actively counter misinformation and overemphasis on the Spanish missionization period as the primary lens for understanding Native Ohlone peoples is by visiting classrooms as guest speakers. As guest speakers, Vincent and Louis share stories of their living cultural heritage and histories. They similarly criticized the dioramas for portraying

Ohlone people solely in the past, rather than acknowledging their presence today. They advocated for updated educational museum materials that represent Ohlone people in the present, alongside the display of their cultural inheritances. We then made our way to Cousin Andy's office, which housed various cultural artifacts—some original and others contemporary replicas of historical and archaeological Ohlone cultural inheritances.

Figure 22. A photograph of some of the East Bay Ohlone cultural inheritances within the Mission San José museum collection. Photograph taken by Lili Flores Aguilar, April 8, 2022.

When the design studio photographer started taking photographs of some of the cultural inheritances at Mission San José, I decided to step outside to get fresh air due to the dusty books. Louis joined me and brought out one of the top knots made of feathers and cordage made from plant fibers to tie them together. Louis explained that the feathers came from the mallard duck (*Anas platyrynchos*), and that usually each bird has about three blue colored feathers on each

wing. Vincent joined us soon after, and they both shared stories about their experiences visiting the Washington DC and how Vincent read a scripture in the Chochenyo language at a papal mass to serve as a reminder Ohlone people and culture, and the Chochenyo language, continue to be present. The reading's Chochenyo translation by Vince was approved by the Vatican. I related to our similar Catholic upbringings and the complexities of navigating that tension. I shared with them information about my ancestral lands and the circular plaza complexes in Jalisco, Mexico, just outside of Guadalajara where my father's side of the family is from. After the photographer captured images of all the cultural inheritances to incorporate into the public art project, we walked across the Mission San Jose site to Sycamore Grove, the site where the Ohlone doctors were depicted dancing in the painting referenced in our earlier conversations.

As we cleared the area of debris left behind by visitors, deer and turkeys wandered around the perimeter. The photographer from the design studio captured individual and group portraits of Vincent, Louis, and Cousin Andy. Vincent and Louis had requested formal portraits at this significant site, where Ohlone doctors performed their dances to drive away disease that was brought by European colonizers to the Ohlone people. These photos were also intended for incorporation into the public artwork, as envisioned by the principal designer. Once the photographer took a significant number of photographs, we packed up once again and caravanned to a local restaurant. I did not stay for dinner as I had to return back to Los Angeles to attend to other matters. I departed around sunset from the group, thanking Vincent, Louis and Cousin Andy for sharing their stories. I called for a driver from my smartphone to transport me to the Oakland Airport. I arrived back home around 11pm that same evening feeling grateful to have experienced listening to some of the stories of the East Bay Ohlone community first hand.

Discussion

After my work as an assistant concluded, I reached out to Vincent and Louis independently via email. This correspondence stemmed from lingering questions about Native representation in the arts as a means of preserving, fostering, and defining culture at cultural centers, heritage sites, and museums. I wondered what co-creation would look like if a project were led by Native people rather than an external person or entity.

Reflecting on my time with Louis and Vincent at Coyote Hills, where we shared stories about our family lineages, I saw these exchanges as acts of reciprocity. By being honest about our histories, I was able to come to terms with the spectrum of Indigeneity. At that time, I wasn't fully aware of where my own Indigeneity stood on this spectrum. However, by sharing my knowledge of archaeological architecture in Chapala, Jalisco, Mexico — my father's ancestral region — I began to understand my role as an ally supporting Ohlone cultural revitalization and practices. As Archibald & Morgan (2019) emphasize, researchers must listen to Indigenous stories with respect, develop relationships responsibly, and maintain reciprocity to strengthen the impact of these stories.

As Vincent and Louis shared stories at Mission San José, I felt compelled to disclose my complex relationship with Catholicism's colonial influence on my ancestors' lands in Jalisco and Zacatecas, Mexico. This dialogue underscored the diverse ways cultural syncretism shapes individual expressions of Indigeneity.

The painting of dancing Ohlone doctors, created by von Langsdorff in 1806, illustrates Ohlone dance performances. Produced during a Russian expedition through Ohlone territories, it

provides insight into historical interactions. Vincent explained that, contrary to Spanish records suggesting the dances were for the Russians, they actually followed a measles outbreak, meant to drive the sickness away. Understanding Mission San José's timeline, including the 1805 outbreak, clarifies the significance of body paint and regalia worn to honor the deceased and purify the land. Vincent noted that many trees depicted in the painting are still identifiable by the current Ohlone community, emphasizing continuity.

This resonates with Schechner's concept of *restored behavior* where past performances are re-enacted to facilitate healing within communities. Vincent, Louis, and Cousin Andy engage in a contemporary form of healing through survivance—honoring ancestors by preserving stories, cultural practices, food traditions, and the rebuilding of Ohlone architectural vernaculars. Performance theory is essential to rightful relations, fostering a practice-based, holistic approach to co-creation within the arts. Concepts like repair and mending within Indigenous aesthetics are embodied in the East Bay Ohlone's '*ottoy* initiative with UC Berkeley, led by Vincent and Louis. 'Ottoy, a Chochenyo term, describes a philosophy and intention of repair and mending, framing it as a performance of restoration.[76] By examining how Indigenous communities navigate collaborations with institutions, I aim to understand how practices of repair promote rightful relations and how these principles can transform institutional policies, protocols, and discursive practices to be responsive to Indigenous needs and aesthetic systems, ultimately supporting decolonization and Indigenous resurgence (Oyelude 2023).

While the public art project provided insights into integrating an aesthetic of survivance, it did not fully realize *rightful relations*, as theorized in my dissertation. *Rightful relations* refer

[76] "The 'ottoy Initiative." Accessed November 8, 2024. https://lawrencehallofscience.org/about/ottoy-initiative/.

to dynamics that emerge from ethical engagements rooted in Indigenous aesthetics, rather than specific outcomes. An Indigenous-led project would have embodied different practices, foregrounding place-based perspectives. More specifically, the lead designer's selection of a post-humanist framework, although well-intentioned, is not decolonial, but rather, can be described as being subsumed by social justice from a materialist perspective. If the project were to be in rightful relations, it would follow the lead of the Indigenous co-creators by designing with Indigenous philosophies as an initial point of departure, rather than trying to fit Indigenous epistemologies and embodiments into a framework such as post-humanism that focuses primarily on the representation of materials.

Foregrounding specificity in relation to place is an Indigenous epistemology in action. As Lewis et al. (2018) state:

> "Relationality is rooted in context and the prime context is place... Knowledge gets articulated as that which allows one to walk a good path through the territory. Language, cosmology, mythology, and ceremony are simultaneously relational and territorial: they are the means by which knowledge of the territory is shared in order to guide others along a good path."

Similarly, Topa encapsulates this idea with, "I am emplaced, therefore I am" (2022, p. 15). This understanding informed my role as an ally, advocating for the protection of Indigenous knowledge. I emphasized during co-creation meetings that Vincent and Louis could withdraw at any point and obtained explicit consent for all recordings, ensuring respect for cultural protocols.

East Bay Ohlone and Rumsen Ohlone people are central to California's cultural tapestry. Supporting their efforts is not only an act of historical justice but also a learning opportunity for sustainable practices and respectful relations with land and more-than-human kin.

I expressed interest in continued collaboration with Vincent and Louis, unmediated by the design studio's objectives, to better understand how I could support Native autonomy and aesthetic sovereignty. I shared information about a Getty Museum opportunity and reflected on my own complicated relationship with museums, where I often felt alienated but also grateful to encounter artifacts from my lineage. My correspondence was an attempt to initiate deeper collaborations aimed at decolonial shifts.

Supporting Indigenous futurity often involves mentorship, a familiar practice for me through my previous teaching roles with youth and undergraduates in Tokyo, Japan and UCLA. In my email, I attached details about the Getty course and a spreadsheet I created for organizing the project's metadata. This demonstrated transparency and respect for Vincent and Louis' contributions while showcasing my skills in museum studies.

My focus on working with Native Americans is driven by a desire to build transnational coalitions among Indigenous peoples. The next chapter will explore how the people and places I come from have shaped my perspective and motivations for working with an East Bay Ohlone undergraduate ethnic studies scholar named Jessica, who focuses on legal studies and Native American studies in service of her responsibility to her community. Performance theory, as it relates to *rightful relations*, fosters a co-creation approach grounded in holistic aesthetic systems—central to collaborating with Native peoples and engaging with their cultural inheritances. I continue to explore this theorization with Jessica in our work together as it pertains to memory within the context of museum studies and methods.

CHAPTER 4: Extending *Indigenous Embodiments* in mentorship within and beyond museum-based contexts.

Introduction

This chapter outlines the journey and experiences that led me to become a mentor for Jessica, a member of the East Bay Ohlone community, highlighting the significance of *rightful relations* in a mentoring relationship fostering personal and professional development as it pertains to museum methodologies. Motivating factors to enter into a direct mentorship came from my desire to put into action ideals of *rightful relations* which foreground aesthetic sovereignty and making visible social inequalities in order to move towards social justice. This chapter outlines the journey and experiences that led me to become a mentor for Jessica, highlighting the significance of *rightful relations* in a mentoring relationship fostering personal and professional development as it pertains to museum methodologies. Specifically, given my past experience as someone trained in anthropological, archaeological and sociocultural studies, I felt I could leverage my knowledge and skills as a means of addressing the systemic underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples working in museum and arts related fields. Additionally, my previous work experience in museums, digital media and most recent activist sensibilities informed my desire to work with people through collaborative based methods in order to transform practices while drawing from the strengths of already established cultural practices found amongst various Indigenous peoples.

The format of this chapter weaves tells a story through an auto-ethnographic account with excerpts from correspondence with Jessica, fieldnotes, and an interview that focuses on

museum-based methods for Native American cultural property.[77] Throughout this chapter, in order to articulate what I refer to as *rightful relations*, I draw from various decolonial theories and methodologies as an analytical framework to understand how respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity (Archibald 2019) are essential for working with Native people towards decolonial trajectories.

This mentorship emerged from a postcolonial context, where we enrolled in a university course on the topic of museum practices for stewarding and conserving Native American and Indigenous so-called artifacts. I was able to foster this connection by building upon an established working relationship with members, Vincent and Louis, of the Ohlone based in their traditional land known as xučyun,[78] located in what is now called the East Bay. Before tracing the decolonial trajectories of this mentorship, I describe how *rightful relations* can emerge from postcolonial structures.

As stated in the introduction to this dissertation, postcolonial pursuits do not strive to undo colonialism, whereas decolonial pursuits move beyond anthropocentric models to address what Indigenous sovereignty and rights entail in terms of material conditions and challenging equivocations about how minoritized people, people of color or colonized Others are complicit in settler colonial projects (Tuck & Yang 2012: 19). The collaborative effort of the mentorship central to this chapter formed as a response to a flyer circulated within the UCLA Extension and the J. Paul Getty Museum (Getty) network via electronic mail correspondence. Given the institutional context that this scholarly mentorship arose from, it is important to acknowledge the

[77] Federal statutes protect what is defined as cultural property belonging to Native Americans.
[78] In the Chochenyo language, "xučyun" (prounounced HOOCH-yoon) is the name of the region within the ancestral and unceded homeland of the East Bay Ohlone people that includes Albany and Berkeley. Kell, Gretchen. "New UC Berkeley Housing Complex to Be Called Xučyun Ruwway, Honoring Ohlone People." Berkeley News, April 22, 2024. https://news.berkeley.edu/2024/04/22/new-uc-berkeley-housing-complex-to-be-called-xucyun-ruwway-honoring-ohlone-people/.

postcolonial dimensions of this. Throughout this chapter, I parse through moments of our collaborative mentorship to see where the limits of postcolonial emergences and decolonial trajectories begin. In order to do so, I build from Quijano's idea of *delinking* (1992) and what Mignolo (2007, 453) terms, *decolonial de-linking*–an epistemic de-colonization that leads to de-colonial epistemic shifts that brings to the foreground other epistemologies, principles of knowledge, understanding and consequently, economies, politics and ethics.

How do rightful relations emerge amidst postcolonial contexts?

Engaging in this mentee-mentor relationship to produce knowledge puts into practice *rightful relations* by integrating *decolonial de-linking*–within museums and university institutions. From cabinets of curiosities that flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries to contemporary ethnographic and art museums– these institutions are monuments commemorating colonial conquests that institutions now inherit and often perpetuate through Western European epistemologies that impose their singular and moral orderings on cultural materials.79 To further make this point, it is important to note, that according to Tongva oral history, UCLA's main campus is built on a sacred burial site of their ancestors–a history that does not get articulated often which attempts to erase historical and collective memory. In this chapter, I also aim to make clear how a Western European episteme relies on and subsequently perpetuates *the myth of modernity* that "conceals a justification for genocidal violence" (Mignolo 2007, 454). Therefore, the myth of modernity extends into considerations of what is art, as well as determines whom is hired into the workforce within museum and art fields, in turn, contributing to an erasure via

79 Zytaruk, "Cabinets of Curiosities and the Organization of Knowledge."

undervaluing and underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples, their worldviews and knowledge.

Keeping in mind an ethos of *reciprocal relations*–meaning providing an opportunity for the collaborators of the East Bay Ohlone to exercise *responsibility* over their own lives (Kirkness & Barnhardt 1991)– I kept in touch with Vincent and Louis after the scope of our working relationship to see if there were ways I could support their efforts of cultural revitalization. When I saw a flyer (see figure 23) advertising for enrollment in a course about the preservation of tribal cultural materials in museums, I reached out to Vincent, who I had previously worked with as an assistant for a design studio on a public art project featuring images associated with their traditional East Bay Ohlone *cultural inheritances*.[80] I explained the course series and my intention to continue to work with them as a guest in their community to support any preservation or archival efforts being made with the collection, they shared for the public art project. I also explained how the work we completed together inspired me to think about how autonomy and sovereignty are a part of not just "materials" but also in efforts around community building.

[80] The term *cultural inheritance* is a term that I learned from Vincent and Louis from the East Bay Ohlone community, *Cultural inheritance* as a term has yet to be broadly applied in the museum field.

Figure 23. Informative flyer for the UCLA Extension course, Preservation of Indigenous Collections & Cultural Resources for Fall 2022.

Operating within structures from which we work illustrate tensions between the colonial foundations of university institutions and Native peoples' persisting movements toward autonomy and sovereignty. Another way to consider the ways Native people move towards autonomy and sovereignty includes layering Mignolo's *decolonial delinking* with Vizenor's theory of *survivance*–a term from native literary theory and practice that emphasizes an active sense of presence over absence and the continuation of stories as renunciations of dominance and the unbearable sentiments of tragedy (Vizenor 2008). Moving away from sentiments of tragedy seeks not to diminish the detrimental impacts colonialism continues to have on Native peoples, but rather, creates an opportunity to focus on specific instances of *survivance* as forms of *decolonial de-linking*, and therefore, opportunities to further support transformative actions that challenge the logics of colonial institutions and move beyond them to envision alternative ways of being.

Setting collaborative intentions

With the aforementioned sensibilities in mind and I discussed with Vincent my intention to mentor someone through museum practices, he connected me with someone they were proud to of, so that I may share skills I acquired while working in museums and more specifically, collections that were under the jurisdiction of the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990. NAGPRA arose from the Native American movement to recover and repatriate human remains and associated funerary objects stolen by non-Natives. Professor of Law at UCLA, Angela Riley (2005) states that all U.S. federally funded museums are mandated to correct hundreds of years of human rights abuses through mandatory reporting. During the collaborative working relationship with Vincent and Louis, we would discuss the history of anthropologists coming into their community and stealing cultural inheritances, or grave robbing that led to the vast unethical acquisition of many Native American collections confined in museums. We also spoke about the limitations of NAGPRA as only serving federally recognized tribes and the fact that most tribes in the Bay Area (including the East Bay), are not federally recognized meaning that they do not have access to resources to support the reburial of their people and to maintain tangible property.[81]

Another layer of reciprocity that I stated to Vincent via email correspondence is that my own pedagogical approach does not necessarily agree with the use of the term "junior" as stated in the flyer, because, the school of thought that I am trained in considers the mentor-mentee relation of knowledge to go both ways. This idea of reciprocity in a mentor-mentee relationship is guided by Kirkness & Barnhardt's (1991) Four R's–respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility– with specific attention to the way that reciprocity emphasizes a *respect* for Native

[81] "Unearthing UC Berkeley's Past: Scholar Sheds Light on Native Remains, Urges Moral Reckoning - Local News Matters."

students in higher education and their expertise. According to the Four R's, it is the teacher's *responsibility* to make an effort to understand and build upon the cultural background of the student, and the student to be able to gain access to the inner-workings of the culture and the institution to which they are being introduced (Kirkness & Barnhardt 1991: 13). Given that I worked with Vincent on the public art project and learned about the history of the East Bay Ohlone people and their traditional land, I felt I was well positioned to build upon this knowledge in a reciprocal manner.

Vincent introduced Jessica and myself via phone, and we discussed common interests based on our respective field of study. Jessica shared with me that her major area of study at the time was Indigenous, Race, and Ethnic Studies (IRES) at the University of Oregon (UO), during her undergraduate tenure. We spoke about our mutual interests in unpacking the problematic colonial histories of museums, Jessica's interest in learning more about NAGPRA and decolonial theory as a way of thinking about Native sovereignty. In Jessica's Letter of Commitment for the application to enroll in the UCLA Extension course she wrote the following:

> This course interested me because it would help expand my knowledge about Indigenous people in America. It will greatly support my field of study as it is exactly why I am majoring in IRES and what I want to do professionally after college. I want to work with tribes on how to ethically preserve their artifacts and learn more about Indigenous methodologies. I have always been interested in knowing more and becoming more involved with my tribe's culture. This collaboration will help serve my community greatly. Our tribe is a non-federally recognized tribe, which means a majority of our artifacts are in the hands of institutions such as universities, thus, I am passionate about helping my tribe gain access to those artifacts again. My grandmother is currently an

> elder in our tribe. Going back many years to my great great Grandmother [name redacted] they have been fighting to gain federal recognition for our small tribe. I would love to continue that fight. I believe a workshop co-led by Lili Flores would help me help my community in regaining artifacts currently held by UC Berkeley82 and San Jose State University. This course and internship would greatly contribute to our tribe's tribal sovereignty development. Our tribe right now is working to regain a connection with our tribe's culture and this course aligns with our goals. We continuously learn more about our ancestors and our culture through language revitalization and having a deeper connection with our past. This is due to the hard work and guidance from my cousin Vincent and his partner Louis.

I learned that Jessica also was a leader on her athletic team, and as the mentee-mentor relationship evolved, I got to hear stories of her community-oriented leadership and collegiality. In response to Jessica sharing her kinship with Vincent and the East Bay Ohlone community, I explained to Jessica that I wanted to foster a relationship of reciprocity with her as an extension of the work I did through a public art project I assisted on with members of her East Bay Ohlone community. I also explained my descendance from the Indigenous Coca people of Chapala, Jalisco,[83] on my father's side of my family. In explaining my Indigenous ancestry, I emphasize moving away from postcolonial notions of hybridity, or the Spanish colonial invention of mestizo but rather name my Indigeneity[84] as dynamic epistemological process embedded in transnational and migratory politics (de la Cadena & Starn 2007: 5-12).

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[83] Lake Chapala is the largest within the nation-state of Mexico.

[84] According to TallBear (2013) Indigenous articulations of Indigeneity emphasize political status and biological and cultural kinship constituted in dynamic, long-standing relations with each other and with living landscapes.

In addition to reciprocity, as a means of decolonizing and undoing categories of "Indian" or "native," which are terms steeped in evolutionary viewpoints (de la Cadena & Starn 2007: 5-12), as a core practice of the ethos of *rightful relations*, identifying my lineage and ancestral lands is a way of embodying a decolonial understanding of myself that goes beyond nation-state politics and instead recovers "the historical distinctiveness of marginalized groups" (de la Cadena & Starn 2007: 11). Although postcolonial dimensions of my lineage are a truth– including my descendance from Sephardic Jewish and Moorish settlers from Spain during the Spanish inquisition– centering my Indigenous roots puts into practice *rightful relations* as a means of making that which is often unseen or marginalized–in this case, my Indigeneity–more visible. Furthermore, retracing my plural ancestral lineages works to unravel what scholar of Xicana/x Indigenous studies, Susy Zepeda describes as "'de-indigenization' and the imposed racial hierarchy of mestizaje that aims erase or dilute specific Indigenous and African lineages" while reinforcing logics of whiteness and colonial nation-state building and bordering practices (Zepeda 2022: 27).

Naming my Indigeneity also sits with the tension that Tuck & Yang (2012) point out in relation to *settler nativism*. Settler nativism, according to Tuck and Yang is a "habit of settler colonialism, which pushes humans into other human communities" ensuring "that settlers have Indigenous and chattel slave ancestors" (2012: 11). In naming the truth of my nuanced lineage, I also acknowledge that in my lineage are moments of violence inflicted by settlers, and, I have traced moments of resistance by my Coca family and ancestors. It is resistance and continued persistence that highlight *survivance* as a practice and as a means I work towards *rightful relations* with a member of the East Bay Ohlone Native community. On the topic of naming ancestral lineage, this is a decolonial process for researchers aiming to decolonize the academy

by understanding where we are placed and how our ancestral lineages shape our placement and influence the way we see the world and so this allows for transparency and accountability to check biases, values, or assumptions that may be brought into the collaborative work. Naming my worldview and position also challenges neutrality that performs as a way to reinforce power structures of colonization and patriarchy (Behrendt 2019: 240-241).

Before official admission to the class UCLA extension course, Jessica and I began to work together by putting our application materials including a letter of interest, five slide of our collection and a letter of commitment from a junior colleague. In the introduction of this chapter, I included an excerpt from Jessica's letter of commitment. The letter of interest I submitted reflects my interest in continuing to nurture and share knowledge with Jessica about conservation and best practices for the preservation of tribal materials within Tribal Collections. As we discussed what images to include for the five slides, I shared image files from the previous public art project. We discussed the power of the watermark on the images of cultural inheritances such as a seed-beater made from sedge root and willow, a basket, a deer hoof rattle, a tule visor, or hair pins made from snow goose quills and willow fibers. The reason why we decided to include a watermark on each image of the collection of cultural inheritances in the application is that the watermark served as a mechanism to retain rights to the images to protect copyright by identifying the Native East Bay Ohlone community as rightful stewards and owners of the images, and to prevent unauthorized duplication. Additionally, watermarks assert intellectual property: this is an especially important point that Jessica and I discussed early on and throughout our engagement with the course material.

Following my duty to uphold my *responsibility* to make transparent the inner-workings of UCLA, I explained how intellectual property rights function within a university setting, and

provided anecdotes of professors who used their students' writing for their own publications without giving proper credit as a result of an asymmetrical power imbalance between a figure of authority–a degreed professor who is authorized to contribute to knowledge production with the support of a university institution versus a student who is in a vulnerable position, vying for a grade for their official transcript in a course, compared to an established and protected tenured professor. To further elaborate on the point of vulnerability as it pertains to students' rights for their intellectual property, according to the UC – Copyright Ownership Policy (2021), under section III, subsection A. Copyright Ownership by Category of Works, it states the following:

> 3. Student Works. As between the University and its students, copyright ownership of works prepared by University students (including graduate students) resides with such students, unless the work: (a) was created primarily in the course or scope of the student's University employment; (b) involved the use of Significant University Resources; (c) is a Sponsored Work, Contracted Facilities Work, or Commissioned Work; or (d) was created under a separate agreement that specifies a different copyright owner. For the purposes of this section, a student's financial aid is not considered Significant University Resources. Absent extraordinary circumstances, copyright ownership of theses or dissertations authored by University students resides with such students.

As stated in the Student Works subsection, any work created by the student retains copyright ownership of the work unless the work "(a) was created primarily in the course" which would include work created in the UCLA Extension course as specified by UCLA Extension's Policies and Principles of Governance which fall under the system-wide authority and regulations of the UC Office of the President and the UC Academic Senate and local UCLA

administrative and academic policies.[85] Given this policy, Jessica and myself would not take any chances and so the watermark was a first step in our collaborative effort towards practicing an *aesthetic of survivance* which aims to reject an obtrusive capture and dominance over Native stories and cultural heritage (Vizenor 2008) by the UC system, or otherwise. Furthermore, in the context of the nation-state of the United States, federal statutes fall short of offering protection to intangible cultural property of Native American peoples.[86] Given the transnational approach I take which is a direct reflection of my own embodied positionality and worldview, I also consider ways that U.S. laws do not protect the property of Indigenous peoples from outside the confines of The gesture of the watermark was foundational to our collaborative ethos and guided our way of being in *rightful relations* throughout the mentorship in the way we collectively accomplished tasks and cared for cultural inheritances in a "good way."

The phrase "good way," is a direct citation of the words spoken by Jessica when referring to how to properly care for cultural inheritances in during one of our weekly one-on-one course discussions. Although the phrase "good way," is widely used amongst Native American peoples of differing Indigenous lineages, the phrase is often attributed to being contextualized among the Anishinaabe people philosophy of *mino biimadisiwin* or "the good life." This informs the idea of "living the world in a good way with people, animals, medicines and the spiritual" (Mikraszewicz & Richmond 2019). Before describing how the collaboration began to unfold, I would will recall the use of the term contingency in the introduction for this dissertation that draws from sociocultural and architectural studies to discuss the historical, political, and

[85] "Policies | UCLA Extension."

[86] As Riley (2005) cites, at a meeting of World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), a U.S. representative stated that the U.S. "does not have intellectual property laws that provide protection specifically for 'traditional knowledge."' *See* also SURVEY ON EXISTING FORMS OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY PROTECTION FOR TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE (document WIPO/GRTKF/IC/2/5) https://www.wipo.int/export/sites/www/tk/en/igc/docs/replies.pdf (last visited Jun. 10, 2024).

sociocultural conditions on which worldviews depend. Additionally, philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler (1996: 9) explains through "contingent foundations," we may call into question "universality" by deeming it permanently open, permanently contested, and permanently contingent "in order not to foreclose in advance any future claims for inclusion." For the purposes of this chapter, I go through a decolonial analysis to understand how "property" as concept has been shaped historically and how it currently shapes laws, such as NAGPRA, and ways that use of the term cultural inheritance moves beyond European and Euro-American ideas of "ownership" and towards a practice of *rightful relations*.

Native Lands and the colonial import of European property laws

In the first paragraph of this chapter, I used the term "property" to refer to what rightfully belongs to Native American people. Terms of ownership and property are based on Euro-American law, meaning that the imprint of European worldviews imported during the colonial era shape our current understandings of what it means to own property. In order to trace how the meaning of ownership and property came to be, I give a brief overview of property law and the origin of these concepts. Thereafter, I discuss how this concept of ownership is intrinsic to settler colonialism which led to the theft of land, creation of racialized hierarchies for the institution of chattel slavery, and the dehumanizing rhetoric that led to genocide and theft of Native American peoples and cultural inheritances. Lastly, I go over how this connects to the development of laws such as NAGPRA as a way to address this longstanding history of injustice and oppression and the implications it has for cultural revitalization.

According to Cornell Law School's Legal Information Institute (LII), in the United States, property is "anything (items or attributes/tangible or intangible) that can be owned by a

person or entity. Property is the most complete right to something; the owner can possess, use, transfer or dispose of it."[87] As Miller (Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma) states, in his book on legal history of the United States, titled, Native America, Discovered and Conquered (2006), the American property system descends from the lineage of English law and its medieval roots (7). Through the application of the Doctrine of Discovery, a legal principle born out of European ideals justified by religious and ethnocentric views of superiority over other peoples and their ways of being, spiritual practices and racial delineations.

I deliberately name racial delineations to open up a brief discussion about the way race and class are used in American discourse, since the exploitation of people delineated into racialized bodies have been utilized as a strategy for settler colonialism. As early as the 17th century, the creation of citizen patrols came about from a supposed need to control a "dangerous racial other" which fomented structures of competition and racialized identities (powell 2007: 361-362). In colonial America, the labor force comprised of peoples designated as indentured servants and peoples forcibly removed from their lands to migrate from the continent of Africa across the Atlantic Ocean to be designated as chattel slaves in the so-called Americas. As Tiffany Lethabo King pointedly states, there is an agonizing texture and horrific choice "that often had to be (and have to be) made to survive under relations of conquest" (Lethabo King 2019). Therefore, through a racialized labor force, European settlers could

Thus, from this dissertation's main theoretical framework of *rightful relations,* that is, a justice-oriented political project, pursuing Native and Indigenous aesthetic sovereignty within aesthetic systems that are integral to Indigenous peoples' kinship-based worldviews, we can come to understand the imposition of European terms of discovery, occupancy, possession,

[87] "Property | Wex | US Law | LII / Legal Information Institute." Accessed June 18, 2024. https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/property.

Christianity, and legal titles and claims to land as disrupting processes of longstanding *rightful relations* Native peoples' had with their Native lands while also acknowledging ways that Native peoples continue to reclaim their sovereign rights to land and cultural heritage and memory.

The underlying rituals and legal procedures that enabled settler occupation, acquisition, and subsequent ownership of Native lands are associated with the international legal principle of the Doctrine of Discovery (Miller 2006: 1-2). The first element of the Doctrine of Discovery is predicated on the assumption that a first European "discovered" "new" lands unknown to other Europeans. In this so-called assumed discovery, there is an obvious ignorance and lack of ability to accurately express interpret the world of the Native peoples they encountered. Rather, European dualist paradigms distinguishing nature from society; self and other; body and environment; were imposed and thus the Doctrine of Discovery reflects features of European social organization (Binde 2001: 15). To further illustrate this point, from a legal perspective– which attempts to control behaviors associated with social organization– the phrase *terra nullius* literally means a land or earth that is null or void, implying an empty, vacant or unoccupied home or domicile (Miller 2006: 4). In the very liberal application of the definition of *terra nullius* on Native lands, Europeans assessed whether or not lands were being used in a way approved by European legal systems in order to make available Native lands for claims of Discovery (ibid).

Thereafter, to fully establish a "first discovery" claim, and to turn into a complete claim of title, a European country had to occupy and possess "newly" found lands. In the *Johnson v. M'Intosh* case of 1823 in the United States Supreme Court, the Court used the word "conquest" to describe the property rights Europeans acquired over Indian Nations after their first discovery

(Miller 2006: 5). Conquest then is used as an element of Discovery by defining the restricted property rights of Native peoples' and their governments.[88]

In a similar vein, Lethabo King renames settlers and conquistadors as "conquistador-settler" to highlight how racialized peoples, including Black and Indigenous peoples relations are mediated through the nation-state, press, academic discourse, and leftist politics and result in brutally violent processes (Lethabo King 2019: xii). Furthermore, American Indian studies scholar, Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes) cites legal historian Steve Newcomb who describes a "conqueror model," that is, a cognitive construct by the state to dominate Indigenous peoples based on religious justifications endorsed by the U.S. Supreme Court (Gilio-Whitaker 2019: 56-57). As a result, with the unjust claims to land through so-called Discovery, the ideology and tactics of American Manifest Destiny led to displacement, enslavement and genocide of Native peoples. The commodified practice of chattel slavery imported by European settlers created slave-based economies that depended on the legal enslavement of African peoples and an often-overlooked illegal enslavement of Indigenous peoples of the Americas due to a lack of legal documentation in the Euro-American tradition.

Although I name the conquistador-settler and conqueror-model as dominant relations imposed on Indigenous peoples and lands, it is important to note that through the framework of *rightful relations*, we can begin to peel back dominant historical narratives to understand how historical memories are present in varying ways and in records beyond Euro-American traditions that have been practiced by Indigenous peoples, since time immemorial. In addition, *rightful relations* as an analytical framework remind us to look for what is often overlooked, and in

[88] Capitalization of the word "Discovery" alludes to the word being used as a term of art– a word with a specialized meaning that is used to define a legal claim under the Doctrine of Discovery. Similarly, the "conquest" was used as a term of art that defined the effect of an actual military conquest had on the property rights of the inhabitants of the conquered country (Miller 2006: 5).

instance of dominant historical narratives, to consider how this came to be. For example, the fact that American literary trope of virgin wilderness which stems from the presupposition by Europeans that Indigenous peoples were "incapable of (or unwilling to) alter their environments" (Gilio-Whitaker 2019: 39). Moreover, this inability to read the landscape reflects European assumptions around how relationships with the environment should appear based on European laws that are steeped in Christian beliefs and agricultural customs. It is important to note that Indigenous peoples had developed their own industrial processes with the land to sustain their urban civilizations such as Cahokia (McNutt 2019) Chaco Canyon (Mathien 2005), and Yax Mutal– commonly referred to as Tikal (Rodríguez et al 2023). More relative to this chapter and working relationship with Jessica, a member of the East Bay Ohlone community, in the so-called state of California, Native civilizations, with their cultural, political and linguistic diversity, marked the land for at least 12,000 years prior to contact with Europeans through the careful and technical management, harvesting, processing and subsequent development of anthropogenic environments (Madley 2017: 18-19).

In addition to Euro-American settlers overlooking and misreading the lands stewarded and tended by Native Americans, often what also gets overlooked, is the legal document of the U.S. constitution—which is the foundation of the U.S. government—was largely influenced by forms of government found amongst the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy[89] and Chickasaw peoples.[90] Euro-Americans' processes of appropriation of long-standing Indigenous practices of governance into the foundations of governing practices of the United States are often

[89] According to the U.S. Library of Congress website and the U.S. Senate formally recognized the influence that the Haudenosaunee Confederacy's Great Law of Peace had on the construction of the U.S. Constitution and the democratic principles.

[90] Chickasaw.Tv | Tribal Councils: Benjamin Franklin's Framework for Democracy. Accessed July 17, 2024. https://www.chickasaw.tv/episodes/our-history-is-world-history-season-5-episode-1-tribal-councils-benjamin-franklin-s-framework-for-democracy.

subsumed by historical narratives taught in U.S. public-school systems teaching children that Athens was the first democracy and that the founders of the U.S. wrote the constitution based on Athenian ideas (Evans 2020), when in fact, there are clear Native American ideological influences on the formation of the United States. Euro-Americans' appropriation of existing Native American structures of governance and law, disrupted and interrupted long-distance trade between North and South America, and in doing so, the United States government forced Indigenous peoples' dependence on colonizers (Gilio-Whitaker 2019: 40-41). Additionally, settlers occupied land through institutions of slavery by legalized bondage (ibid 42), and in the case of California and the Southwest, missionization and forced labor were processes of displacement of Native peoples from their rightful relationship to their lands.

Following slavery and environmental disruption, came mass relocations and displacements of the what are referred to as the Five Civilized Tribes: the Cherokee, Creek, Chikasaw, Seminole, and Choctaw (Gilio-Whitaker 2019: 45). Thereafter, the more widely known Indian Removal Act of 1830 signed by Andrew Jackson, led to military orders of displacement of Cherokee peoples from their homelands to move west.[91] Race-based chattel slavery systems, and two-legal systems, forced labor servitude and violence against Indigenous Californians were imposed by the Spanish, Russians and Mexicans (Madley 2017: 26). As a result, the Anglo-American policies and practices imposed by the U.S. government would work with existing structures of oppression in California to create the conditions for genocide in California from 1846-1873 (ibid).

Before California and other states became a part of the United States through the Treaty of Guadalupe, in 1776, Spain sent soldiers and Franciscan missionaries to colonize the people

[91] Drexler, Ken. "Research Guides: Indian Removal Act: Primary Documents in American History: Introduction." Research guide. Accessed July 22, 2024. https://guides.loc.gov/indian-removal-act/introduction.

and land as a means of expanding and maintaining the state of so-called New Spain, what would later become the nation-state of Mexico in 1821 (Madley 2017: 26). Again, the imposition of a European worldview, shaped by Spanish Catholic Franciscan missionaries, would consider Native California peoples as "pagans" or "gente sin razón" meaning "people without reason" (ibid). Just as land was read through a European worldview, so were Native people read in a way that established "precedents on which Mexican and U.S. authorities" (ibid). Spanish missionaries robbed Native people of their rights and force them into religious conversion to Catholicism and indentured servitude to build and work on Franciscan missions. Nevertheless, despite these egregious and violently oppressive and unfree working conditions, Native peoples covertly continued some of their traditions during the missionization period between 1768-1853.

Following the missionization period, Spanish land grants which were deemed as *permisos*, meaning temporary permission given by the Spanish government to occupy the land. After Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, the land grants went from being designated as *permisos*, to full ownership of the property. One of the prerequisites to receive a land grant was the requirement providing a *diseños* that were created from approximately 1827-1846.[92] The official California State Archive has a digital exhibition featuring digitized versions of hand-drawn facsimiles of *diseños*, or hand-drawn maps designating areas of land ownership where ranchos were established and where Indigenous peoples worked the land for the profit of the ranchero families. One of the reasons the Mexican government was able to acquire land through land grants and delineations via the production of *diseños,* is due in part to the fact that during the missionization period, Native Californians were captured, contained and forced to perform labor that is described as slavery at Spanish missions (Madley 2017: 27).

[92] California State Archives. Accessed July 6, 2024. https://www.sos.ca.gov/archives/collections/disenos-collection.

Soon after the Mexican land-grants were established, the Mexican-American War started in 1846, and ended in 1848. California became a territory of the United States when the U.S. and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which included a directive to the U.S. government to "honor legitimate land claims of Mexican citizens in the territory" (California State Archives). In 1851, the Board of Land Commissioners was formed and used *diseños*, expedientes, and U.S. General surveys to review 813 grant claims, while only approving 553 (ibid). Fast forward to 1920, when cattle-ranching, the primary source of income for rancheros of land grants became less profitable. Many ranchers began to sell their land. One ranchera family, known as the Marquez heirs, decided to sell their land to the Santa Monica Land & Water Company, and a noted developer. Why do I bring up the Marquez family land-grant? Well, because in the 1920s, a Los Angeles attorney Claude I. Parker purchased a part of property from Perfecto Marquez, a descendent of the Marquez family who had acquired the land-grant.[93] Later, in 1945, Parker sold the property and ranch house that he built on the land to J. Paul Getty. By 1953, Getty established the Getty Museum and opened part of the ranch house to the public and established the Getty Museum.

Continuing to foster a relationship with the East Bay Ohlone community within and beyond the context and postcolonial structures of ownership and property while moving towards *rightful relations* is a methodological historical and material analysis which aims to challenge the *myth of modernity*. *Rightful relations* in practices makes present the often-overlooked processes of history and to foreground the Indigenous presences and ongoing tactics of *survivance*. Unfortunately, the European import of the concept of property and ownership is something that

[93] Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. "J. Paul Getty Museum, Ranch House, 17985 Pacific Coast Highway, Malibu, Los Angeles County, CA." Image. Accessed July 6, 2024. https://www.loc.gov/item/ca3096/.

effected and continues to effect relations to land and to people which illustrate the relationship between capitalism and colonialism. As Marx states, human labor is a commodity that sustains the entire system of capitalist accumulation (Lindquist 2024: 42). To be more precise, processes of displacement, exploitation, and genocide of Native peoples, led to the acquisition and purchasing of land that gave Getty the opportunity to purchase property. Similarly, land-grants helped establish university institutions through the Morrill Act, including the UC system through expropriated Indigenous lands.[94]

The aforementioned material processes associated with the import of concepts such as ownership and property forced many Native peoples to fit "the needs of an imposed capitalist system" (Gilio-Whitaker 2019: 45). Naming these material processes is an example of practicing *rightful relations* with histories of land and institutions in order to understand the context that frames the collaborative relationship with Jessica that this chapter focuses on and how it emerged from a mutual interest in restitution–or what is referred to as repatriation or rematriation–meaning the return of cultural heritage items to their communities of origin who have the right to access what is their inherited tangible property. In the case of NAGPRA, it provides systematic processes for museums returning Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony to lineal descendants, Indian Tribes, and Native Hawaiian Organizations (NHOs).

Revisions to the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act in December of 2023 have streamlined requirements for museums and federal agencies to inventory and identify Native American human remains and cultural items in their collections. Jessica and myself

[94] Signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862, the Morrill Act distributed public domain lands, resulting in a massive wealth transfer turning land expropriated from tribal nations into seed money for higher education (Lee et al 2020).

expressed a mutual interest and were in agreement in terms of advocating for the safe return of sacred objects to the communities from which they were stolen. With our mutual interest also came the shared public knowledge that although the UC Berkeley and UCLA have made strides to comply with NAGPRA, there is still much work to do. For example, in November 2023, it was reported that UC Berkeley "committed to repatriating 4,440 ancestral remains and nearly 25,000 items — including jewelry, shells, beads and baskets — that were excavated from burial sites across the San Francisco Bay Area."[95] Such excavations are a part of anthropology's objective to "preserve" the cultures of Native peoples as justified by the misrepresentative "vanishing Indian narrative in American society" that reflects an inability to "perceive Native people as survivors" (Gilio-Whitaker 2019: 59).

Furthermore, given that our collaborative relationship pertains to the field of museums, it is important to consider the professionalization that museums have and how capital continues to be extracted from museum collections and those employed to steward them. Engaging in this mentorship addresses the unequal access Native peoples have to museums. According to the Getty Impact Report (2020), people of color in LA County are underrepresented in the arts (see figure 24). Furthermore, the National Center for Arts Research released a report in 2019 illustrating through a taxonomy of ethnic composition of people employed in LA County within the field of the arts (see figure 25). Through a nation-wide analysis, there are various cities which have vibrant arts communities which include Los Angeles and San Francisco, California, making the list of top 20 Large Arts Communities (see figure 26).[96]

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[95] "UC Berkeley Moves Towards Its Largest Repatriation — ProPublica." Accessed November 10, 2023. https://www.propublica.org/article/berkeley-steps-to-largest-repatriation?utm_campaign=trueanthem&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&fbclid=PAAaY1CZYy1Cb4_XECr30EZTwU2OxVysV5pseq_npazNPQ5aBCpuPfBZzxKrA_aem_Aaydm9sUSPwLE9oEyZ-akEopNrd8S3fcYR9XQ-m6oLsakJMnKpwdY3LO0Mv0zR8Tn8w.

[96] DataArts. "The Top 40 Most Arts-Vibrant Communities of 2022. DataArts." Accessed July 26, 2023. https://culturaldata.org/arts-vibrancy-2022/the-top-40-list/.

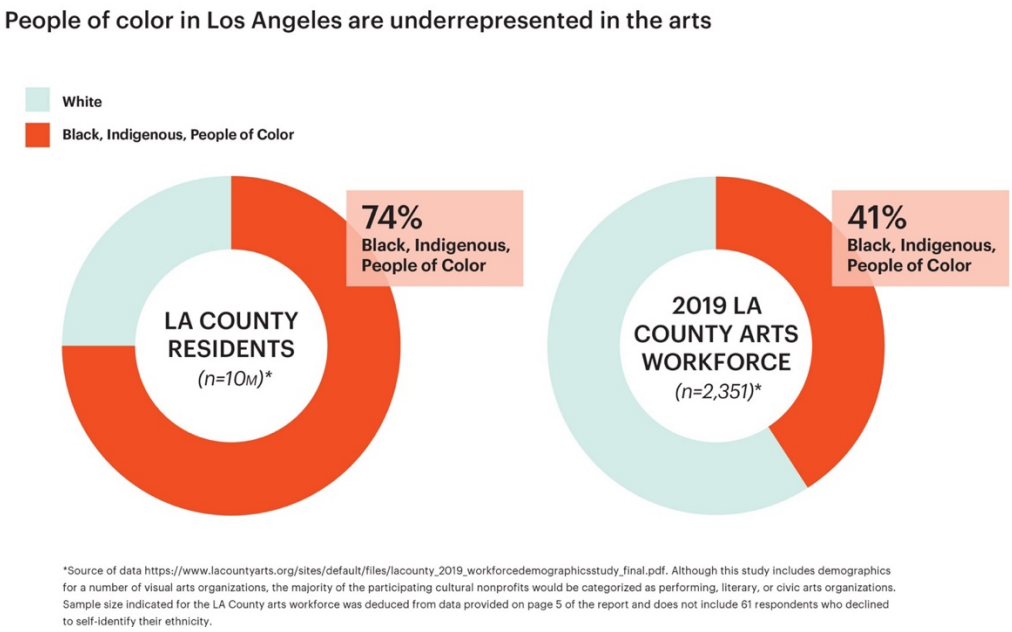

Figure 24. According to this figure, there is a disproportionate under-representation of Black, Indigenous and People of Color in the arts workforce (2020).

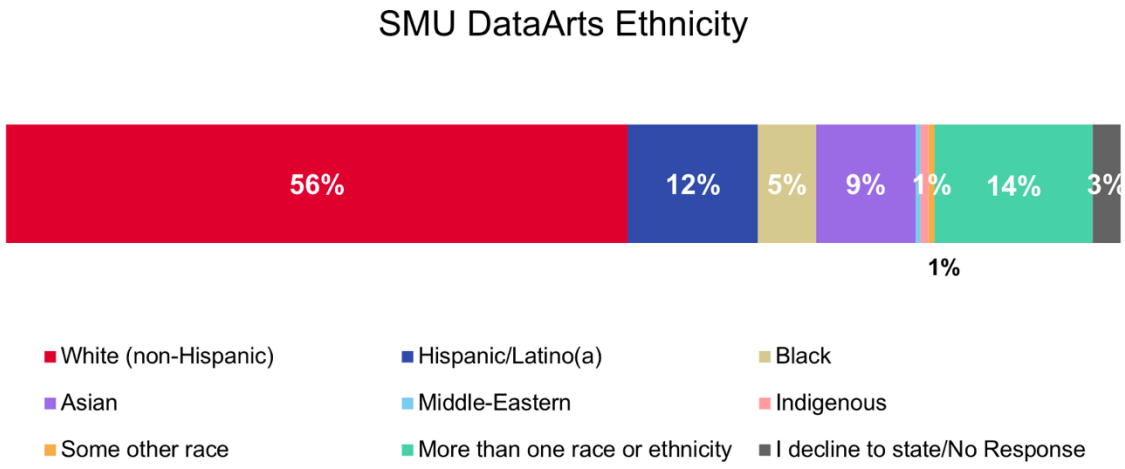

Figure 25. SMU DataArts and the National Center for Arts Research reports conducting research across other U.S. cities and they have identified similar patterns in the ethnic composition of workforce demographics of Arts and Culture professional sectors (2019).

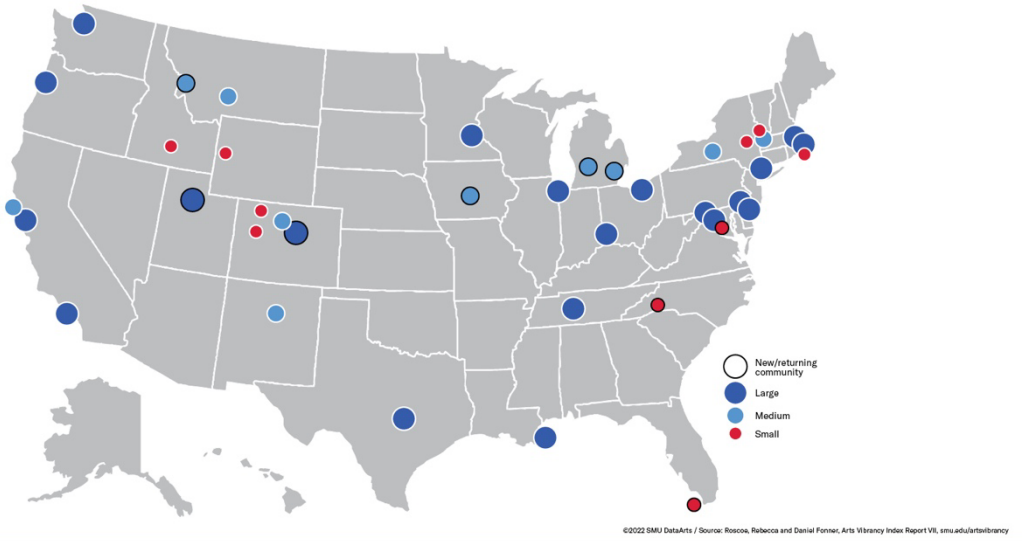

Figure 26. According to SMU DataArts, this map represents the Top 40 Most Arts-Vibrant Communities of 2022 (https://culturaldata.org/arts-vibrancy-2022/executive-summary/).

Given my prior experience mentoring people through teaching apprenticeships and past community-based education and arts-based projects done under the supervision of professors in the UCLA Graduate School of Education, UCLA Prison Education Program, UCLA World Arts and Cultures/Dance, and UCLA Design Media Arts, I felt I could leverage my transdisciplinary approach through mentoring someone interested in entering the field of the arts or museum-related fields. Additionally, having just completed working on a public artwork project through a design studio where I worked as a research assistant, I reached out to the community partners I helped facilitate a collaboration with.

Now that I have explained the context that frames our collaborative relationship, I want to return to Topa's identification of an *existencescape*–that is, a way of viewing the world from an Indigenous perspective and way of being, otherwise known as ontologies–can expand

understandings of how knowledge is transferred and grows. As a form of engaging in *rightful relations*, consideration of *existencescapes* and *survivance* includes individuals and collectivities as having efficacy apparent through Native stories, remembrance, traditions and customs. These ways of persistence for Native peoples exist through the ability to continue piece together collective memories through embodied practices, and collaborative efforts.

Making sure people speak for themselves, on their own terms with their own words, expressing their own values, is a form of sovereignty. With every mentor-mentee relationship, I always make sure to highlight this aspect and remind them that all these structures of collaborating are optional and then I explain my own experiences in brief to give context. I also always make sure to leave open a channel of communication, hence my inclusion of call, SMS or email modalities. That way, mentees also have agency in choosing modes of communication they feel most comfortable with. This is a practice I instilled by working with Jessica.

Additionally, prior to beginning the collaborative relationship with Jessica, I blind-carbon-copied her cousin Vincent as a way of being transparent of our communications and to reassure Jessica of our established connection. In my signature, I included a hyperlink to my graduate student profile and a link to the Carrying Our Ancestors Home (COAH)[97] project since I had mentioned my role as a videographer for the project and its impact on shaping my ethics, values and aspirations for future trajectories of museum work. In fact, I would bring up cases documented in COAH as an example of tactics of sovereignty amidst NAGPRA which initially limited the restitution process to only include federally recognized tribes. In the case of COAH, the project documents ways the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation (a non-federally recognized tribe) worked with the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians (a federally

[97] "Coah-Repat.Com." Accessed July 24, 2024. https://www.coah-repat.com/.

recognized tribe) to practice their sovereignty while navigating NAGPRA's unacceptably limited capacity to recognize Native tribes. It is the piecing together of collective memory through process of restation and the Land Back movement[98] that is an embodiment and praxis of what I refer to as *rightful relations*. The rest of the chapter I center instances where *rightful relations* are practiced and ways that knowledge is produced to disrupt narratives of containment through colonial and capitalist processes that often perpetuate the *myth of* modernity.

Beginning a collaborative dynamic in rightful relations

The modality of the weekly UCLA extension course was via zoom, allowing people from various locations in differing time zones and museum and academic institutions to synchronously participate in the course. Due to the fact that the class met on Saturday mornings for the duration of the quarter (10 weeks), which happened to be at the same time as Jessica's weekly athletic team practice, I would meet with Jessica via zoom to debrief the previous class lecture and readings. Upon the first meeting, we discussed the title of the assigned reading from the main textbook for the course, "Caring for American Indian Objects: A Practical and Cultural Guide" (Ogden 2004). Jessica called into question the use of the term, "American Indian," specifically stating that many Native peoples would not be okay or agree with the use of this term. This critical analysis by Jessica opened up a conversation about the misnomer's problematic and more

[98] The Land Back movement is born out of 500+ years of struggle for Native people to justly get their land back. The movement is led by activists and has gained considerable momentum in the last 50 years, with the U.S. federal government returning Blue Lake to Taos Pueblo. The return of Blue Lake to Taos Pueblo was followed by an organized occupation of Alcatraz Island in the traditional region of the Ohlone peoples. Moreover, in the year 2020, the NDN Collective launched *LandBack* Campaign and political framework working towards collective liberation for peoples including Black, Indigenous and People of Color. Accessed July 24, 2024. https://landback.org/. Oaster, B. 'Toastie.' "Questions about the LandBack Movement, Answered." High Country News, August 22, 2022. http://www.hcn.org/issues/54-9/Indigenous-affairs-social-justice-questions-about-the-landback-movement-answered/.

specifically, racist and colonial origins of the term (Barker 2022). We concluded that it is important to refer to peoples and individuals based on their preference and affiliation with Indigenous tribal affiliations and communities, emphasizing an understanding that Indigenous communities across and beyond borders, within specific land-based areas are unique and have their own terms and names they identify with. Furthermore, Debra K. S. Barker, scholar of decolonial studies, reminds us that the term "Indian" is a misnomer, and yet remains a legal term of art that had been institutionalized during the building of colonial America, and its persistence in use today by elders in Native communities while present and younger generations use "Native" or "Indigenous (Barker 2022: 4).

When I asked Jessica in an interview after the culmination of the course about how her experience was during her asynchronous course engagement with the weekly course and during our one-on-one mentorship discussions, her response was the following:

> Jessica: I felt like it helped me a lot because I was able to ask questions that I probably wouldn't have asked if I was just like in the class alone, without the mentor. And I felt it was able to help me have a better understanding of everything that that was going on in the class. I feel like you really pushed me to think more of my own thoughts instead of repeating what I've heard other people say that I also agree with. I think that really challenged me in a good way. And I feel like that has helped me more, in my class work that I do for my undergraduate studies and everything.

I foreground Jessica's response to open up a discussion about my own pedagogical approach which is informed by assets that often go overlooked in mainstream academia. In doing so, I reinforce a critical race theory (CRT) pedagogical approach. As scholar and professor of law john a. powell succinctly states, "Although race is a scientific illusion, it remains a social

reality that shapes our life chances and the way we experience both our external and internal world (2007). As discussed in the introduction of my dissertation, a CRT lens challenges deficit models by focusing on the cultural wealth, knowledge, and strengths sustaining *community cultural wealth* (Yosso 2005). More specific to the context of the mentorship with Jessica, a TribalCrit lens highlights the idea that cooperation is integral to building knowledge and collective power (Brayboy 2006: 436). Additionally, sociocultural contexts facilitate affective and corporeal experiences associated with aesthetics and thus reflect a system of knowledge. According to TribalCrit, knowledge amongst Indigenous peoples is co-constructed and allows for transformation towards self-determination. Indigenous conception of power is defined as "an energetic force that circulates throughout the universe–it lies both within and outside of individuals" (ibid. 436). Therefore, an analysis of *survivance* includes individuals and collectivities as having efficacy apparent through Native stories, remembrance, traditions and customs.

Throughout the mentorship I encouraged critical thinking that would build upon Jessica's power, knowledge, and academic background. In the first week of the course, the cohort was prompted to select an "object" as a case study to practice the preservation methods with. As instructed by the syllabus, "As part of the assignment, you must also share an image of the object with class instructors." I asked Jessica to reflect on her selection of cultural inheritance in our interview in order to further engage in an analysis of what Four Arrows (2022) describes as a Common Indigenous Worldview, which recognizes, "Words as sacred, truthfulness as essential" (ibid). During the interview, Jessica discussed her selection process for the course:

> Jessica: I selected these, these beads that I've had for quite a few years now. I found them in when I was in middle school sometime. Basically, I was at our Ohlone cemetery, in

> Fremont. And we were cleaning up the cemetery and I found these beads in the dirt. And my auntie told me that they were our people's traditional beads, there's a bunch of them scattered all over the Ohlone cemetery. And she had found some too before. And so, they were really important to me. Because, I found them, and knowing that a lot of our artifacts could still be lying around, is really was interesting to me and how they've lasted this long. And they're still there.

Following the first class, meeting, Jessica and I discussed her selection of the beads and how she would like to focus on them. Upon hearing the story, I realized the significance of Jessica's words and story. Jessica's East Bay Ohlone worldview is expressed by the way she carries and shares the words of her auntie and knowledge of traditional beads.

Another way of understanding this story is through the term *Indigenous storywork*, coined by Archibald that centers the power of traditional and life experience stories for educational purposes (Archibald 2008, Archibald 2019), and as an act of sovereignty that reinforces identity, values and perspective (Behrendt 2019: 239-240). Additionally, as an expansion of *Indigenous storywork*, I integrate into practice Archibald's (2019) addition of *reverence* to Kirkness and Barnhardt's The Four R's of Respect, Relevance and Reciprocity. In doing so, reverence allowed me to become what Archibald describes as "story-ready" and to be responsive to the meaning-making occurring through lived experience stories (Archibald 2019: 14). This interpretation is further supported by Jessica's answer to a follow-up question where I asked, "what does it mean to take good care of these beads?"

Jessica: For our tribe, you respect them, you treat them with respect.

Jessica's emphasis on respect here is an example of an embodied ethical approach in action through Jessica's relationship to the beads she found in the earth at her ancestral burial site which

informs the way we hold the story in reverence through our mentor-mentee collaborative relationship and by extension, the way it is written about here through the lens of Indigenous perspectives and ethical codes of conduct. Smith's "Decolonizing methodologies" (2012) reminds us:

> The term 'respect' is consistently used by Indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity. Through respect the place of everyone and everything in the universe is kept in balance and harmony. Respect is a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct (2012: 154).

In practice, respecting Jessica's story means honoring it as a form of survivance; and so, given that I would be directly interfacing with the class via zoom, I would submit a surrogate image of ceramic figures in place of the beads. This practice, as a gesture, performs as an *aesthetic of survivance* which aims to reject an obtrusive capture and dominance over Native stories and cultural heritage (Vizenor 2008) by the UC system. In doing so, this opens up possibilities for Jessica to continue to define what respect for her and her East Bay Ohlone community means as they continue to advocate for their sovereignty, and in turn, maintain control over their intellectual property associated with the codification of their codes of conducts and protocols. In the previous chapter, the process of repatriation was called into question when I contacted museums holding East Bay Ohlone cultural inheritances, which although an important and ethical process, has limitations due to the fact that only federally recognized tribes can claim official rights to the restitution such cultural inheritances associated with burial sites within the borders of the nation-state of the U.S. From the beginning, Jessica has expressed clarity and determination in her interest in law, and so I took this into consideration throughout the

mentorship and communications thereafter, by discussing my experience with NAGPRA and caring for cultural inheritances.

Throughout the remainder of the course, we engaged in topics ranging from: types of materials and object handling; collections cataloging, labeling, and photo-documentation; deterioration; conservation and conditions reports; paper archives and documents; storage; ethical considerations for collection care & repatriation; and creating collection protocols. As we discussed course material, we kept in-mind deep-time scales as a means of questioning the methodologies discussed in the course. By deep-time scales, I am integrating what Four Arrows points out as a Common Indigenous Worldview Manifestation understanding "time as cyclical" as well as an emphasis on "flexible boundaries and interconnected systems," and "emphasis on holistic interconnectedness" (2022). In doing so, we open up a transdisciplinary inquiry that includes archaeological data, oral historical considerations, and decolonial approaches to challenging colonial nation-state borders which often create "distance from knowing and working with ancestral lineages," traditions, complex historical narratives as ways of healing from colonial forms of harm (Zepeda 2022: 27-28). From a Xicanx Indígena perspective, this can be read as a recognition of a part of *spirit praxis* which includes a rootedness in the present that allows us to be aware of "the vastness of the past and at peace with the uncertainty of the future" (Zepeda 2022: 28).

For example, during week six of the course, in an email exchange, I followed upon a talking point "about long-distance trade prior to Spanish colonial contact in Western Turtle Island" 99 and sent over an article from the field of archeology describing long-distance trade through radiocarbon dates of *Olivella biplicata* shell beads in southern California. According to

99 Lili Aguilar, email message to Jessica. November 3, 2022.

this article, “These findings represent some of the earliest unequivocal evidence for long-distance trade in North America” (Fitzgerald et al 2005). The shell beads originated from the Pacific Coast, between 10,300–10,000 CAL BP100 and possibly as early as 11,200 CAL BP (Fitzgerald et al 2005: 2). Furthermore, knowledge of Native peoples’ presence and connections to vast trade networks have been recorded in oral historical records. Indigenous people use the phrase *since time immemorial* to describe the deep temporal connections with their ancestral lands.101

What exactly prompted Jessica and myself to return to the idea of trade? That week, the topic for the course was “Paper: Archives, Documents, and Works of Art on Paper; Material Considerations for Storage and Display.” During our meeting, Jessica and I reviewed the course material including reviewing the assigned readings, share our respective lecture notes and questions. In the book titled, Caring for American Indian Objects: A Practical and Cultural Guide (Ogden 2004), Jessica brought up a question around the following statement, “Paper was invented in China approximately two-thousand years ago. It is generally believed that it was introduced to the Arab world by the Chinese in the eighth century, carried to Europe by the twelfth century, and spread to other parts of the world, such as North America, a few hundred years after that” (ibid 178).

Jessica astutely pointed out the Eurocentric contextualization of the material of paper within the textbook for the course. Jessica’s critical query also calls into question the nineteenth- and twentieth-century heuristics which privileged what are referred to as “original sources” as

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100 Before Present (BP) is the number of years before the present. This abbreviation is used in the field of archaeology. BP is used as opposed to using the B.C.E. (before common era), C.E. (common era) and B.C. (before Christ) and A.D.(Anno Domini) to avoid reiterating a Eurocentric worldview (Smith 2021).
101John Belshaw, Sarah Nickel, and Chelsea Horton, “3. ‘since Time Immemorial.,’” *HistIndigenouspeoples.pressbooks.tru.ca*, 2016, https://histIndigenouspeoples.pressbooks.tru.ca/chapter/3-since-time-immemorial/#return-footnote-5-2.

being the "most authentic" form of historical construction (Kerpel 2014, ix). In privileging documentary source material as an authority on historical narrative production, there has been what Kerpel points out as *epistemic colonization*. What does this mean exactly? Well, it filters written documents or records through a Western European lens which does not take into account the "materiality and ritual status" of what was recorded via painted images, therefore demoting Indigenous epistemologies and ways of life. Implementing a hemispheric approach (Mithlo 2020, 40) to understanding plural aesthetic systems across Turtle Island and Abya Yala creates an opening to engage in the decolonial de-linking which is a central tenet of *rightful relations*.[102] Next, I go through a brief analysis of a codex known as the Codex Mendoza from the city-state of Tenochtitlan which is comprised of the Nahua people. This will contextualize the theoretical and methodological frameworks I incorporated throughout the mentor-mentee collaboration discussed throughout this chapter. As a response, I shared with her my knowledge about notation systems in Mesoamerica as expressed through architecture in the form of stela and the various *amoxtli*[103] in the form of codices created by *tlacuiloque.*[104]

Performativity in The Codex Mendoza

In highlighting the Codex Mendoza through the lens of performativity, I attempt to go beyond Western European conceptions of documents to engage with the Getty Extension course materials. It is also important to note that my engagement with the Codex Mendoza is informed

[102] More recently, New Area Studies Journal has also encouraged fresh approaches to studying space, place and community through interdisciplinary scholarship (https://newareastudies.com/).
[103] *Amoxtli* is the Nahuatl word for book, with paper pages made from tree bark. The word *amoxtli* is derived from the Nahuatl word for *amatl* (paper) and *oxtli* (glue), which literally translates to "glued sheets of paper" (Boone 2000: 23,).
[104] *Tlacuilo* (singular), or *tlacuiloque* (plural) is the Nahuatl word roughly translating to *scribe* with a focus on technical aspects such as writing with ink. Also considered an artist, user of charcoal, painter who creates colors from natural pigments (Boone 2000: 24).104

by my own positionality as a Xicana Indigená. Conducting research in my doctoral program through enrolling in a Nahuatl language class and enrolling in a Mesoamerican ethnohistory class taught by Professor Terraciano, afforded me the opportunity to connect with aspects of my own Indigenous lineage. Although I am not from the Nahua community, but rather descend from the Coca people of Chapala, Jalisco Mexico, I have found engagement with Indigenous Mesoamerican and post-colonial materials has afforded me a glimpse into worldviews that have been attempted to be systematically erased by colonial institutions. Elizabeth Boone, art historian of Mesoamerican arts, broadens definitions of writing that embraces nonverbal systems. The concept of writing has been used to distinguish literate people from preliterate–meaning defining people as those with history, and those without (Boone 2000: 29).

Incorporating a Boone's broader definition of writing from a framework of notational systems–including both verbal and nonverbal systems–that record musical notation, choreographic notation, scientific diagrams, and mathematical and physics notations, is a way of implementing a *rightful relations* approach to interpreting and reading Indigenous cultural inheritances. As a framework, in practice, *rightful relations* create opportunities for expanded understanding of cultural inheritances to emerge through interpretation and reading that goes beyond narrow practices of writing. Returning back to Mignolo's concept of (de)-coloniality, that is, a movement to de-link and make paths towards de-colonial epistemic shifts. De-colonial epistemic shifts also imply what Smith describes as the ability to hold alternative knowledges that can inform alternative ways of doing things– or in this case, understand the performativity of a cultural inheritance by inquiring about who created the cultural inheritance and through what processes does meaning-making emerge?

As scholars, researchers and allies to Indigenous peoples working within and beyond academic and museum institutions, we can provide multiple entry points for Indigenous communities to reconnect with or strengthen our individual and collective memory, leading to aesthetic sovereignty and thus expand spaces for Indigenous epistemic processes to re-emerge. As Polly Roberts and Allen Roberts remind us, "Memory is not passive, and the mind is not simply a repository from which memories can be retrieved. Rather, memory is a dynamic social process of recuperation, reconfiguration," and so museum collections offer yet another opportunity for Indigenous peoples to collectively piece together and be in *rightful relations* with their cultural inheritances.

One of the earliest remaining codices, the Codex Mendoza, produced circa 1540, provides an illustrated window into the Nahua's embodied practices that socially constructed their individual and collective identities. The document derives its name from the first viceroy of New Spain, Don Antonio de Mendoza, who remained in power during the document's production. The Codex Mendoza was produced in the Ciudad de México that was established by the Spanish in 1521 upon one of the largest cities at the time--the Nahua city-state capital of Tenochtitlan. Contact between the Spanish and the Nahua citizens of Tenochtitlan upon the Lake of Texcoco provided a clashing of cultures--a violent and traumatic process of colonization featuring the genocide of Indigenous Mesoamericans through war and disease. Destruction of Native architecture was superseded by construction of colonial Spanish buildings in the urban center, which contributed to the spread of plague.

The Codex Mendoza, produced 20 years after initial contact with the Spanish, is an example of narrative force composed of "the juxtaposition of languages, writing systems, and cultural traditions" (Terraciano 2019). Based on the pictorial glyphs found throughout the three

volumes of the codex, it is theorized that the document was produced by Nahua *tlacuilo* (scribe or painter) alongside Spanish translations inscribed in ink by a Spanish friar, both being of elite status. The Codex is comprised of three volumes: 1. Old Mexica Chronicle (*cexiuh tlacuilolli)*, 2. tribute paid by *altepetl* to Tenochtitlan, and 3. birth, life, and death of a citizen of Tenochtitlan.

Through the lens of performativity, I treat each page of the Codex Mendoza as a map, where performance as an embodied cultural knowledge system is choreographed by Nahua and Spanish worldviews. In considering this document as a state sanctioned map, I draw upon a methodology of analysis from the field of digital humanities which considers text as a heavily design centered medium that is subject to "critical interrogations and interpretations of the multiplicity, heterogeneity, and ambiguity of the cultural record of places" (Presner et al. 2014: 7). Interrogating the Codex Mendoza in this manner, I consider the ways everyday micro-interactions reflect macro-structure institutions. *How were individual gender roles co-constructed and negotiated at different levels of society?* Through analysis of the Codex Mendoza "as a stage upon which a performance takes place, one in which many voices and movements come together," (2014: 7) I may apply this performance framework by substantiating it with ethnohistorical, archival, and archaeological data. As a result, I consider how these complementary forms of evidence cumulate into holistic corporeal, spatial and temporal understandings of the culturally syncretic practices that are performed within the Codex Mendoza. This transdisciplinary approach towards reading the Codex Mendoza served as a pedagogical framework when discussing cultural inheritances housed in museum collections through the duration of the mentorship with Jessica.

In the next section, I discuss the histories, theoretical and practical implications and limitations of these document-based systems of organizing cultural inheritances from the

Western Euro-American perspective. It is also important to note that the museum field is rapidly changing post-Black Lives Matter uprisings of 2020 following the murder of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. Due to these movements, it is ever more important to highlight the vitality of coalition building and social justice movements and their specific and nuanced impacts and translations to ethnic and social groups. As Bang et al (2018) state, shifts in solidarities highlight the politics of knowledge production as being part contextually and historically situated processes, purposes and participants entailed in teaching in learning (2018: 85-86).

As you the reader have been brought to focus on how Native and Indigenous aesthetic sovereignty and survivance pertains to this collaborative mentorship, I ask that we bear in mind a couple of questions as we continue to move through this chapter: Given the specificity of this mentorship relationship and articulation to the field of museums, what can we learn from decolonial de-linking occurring amidst and beyond museum methodologies? What are their limits and vital potentialities? Before I address these questions, I explain the fields of museum studies and information studies and how they have led up to this moment in which I am able to collaborate and strive for decolonial epistemic approaches.

Documents and Collections

During week three of our course, we discussed *Collections Cataloging, Labeling, and Photo-documentation.* As stated earlier I this chapter, in the course syllabus from which the mentor-mentee engagement was based on, “A collection catalogue and item records is one of the primary documents in any institution" (Elder 2022). Usually, institutions such as universities or state-funded museums or archives feature a high-volume of what they refer to as artifacts. These so-called artifacts are then catalogued through paper documents or online databases. Due to a

dominant Western European episteme that prioritizes a document as a primary source of knowledge, the roots of museums being based in cabinet collections often replicated “books in other ways" and resembled encyclopedic textual forms (Zytaruk 2011: 6). A specific example of knowledge being produced by the forced imposition of modernity, is the institution of Archive of the Indies, where the archival space was designed to transform data into information, “a space generative of new historical knowledge” (Hamann 2022: 5). Thus, Spain controlled the production of knowledge with its Archive of the Indies located in Seville where “spatial colonial difference” (Mignolo 2007: 471) was constructed on the bases of what they classified as peoples within history. In contrast and as a challenge to the logics of modernity, *rightful relations* operates betwixt museum collections via de-colonial de-linking by grappling with the unavoidable historical foundations of modernity and their continued persistence and recognizing their limits and impositions.

For example, Jessica and myself engaged in a critical reflection about the *Object Examination Sheet* presented in the course and we questioned the philosophical implications that the rigid categorizations featured on the sheet presented. As decolonial scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith points out when discussing the processes of colonizing knowledges, “these systems for organizing, classifying and storing new knowledge, and for theorizing the meanings of such discoveries, constituted research” (Smith 2012: 63). The systems Smith calls into question are those associated with development of scientific thought through European colonial expansion of Indigenous peoples during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Again, returning to the modernist project, colonialism produced what we now refer to as Western knowledge through organizing knowledge and education for the *re*presentation of Indigenous peoples as discoveries.

Following this framework of decoloniality that Smith proposes, Jessica's critical reflections challenged these very notions of organizing knowledge.

Following Jessica's question, I then pointed out to Jessica that this query calls into question how cultures vary in their *ontologies*, *epistemologies* and *pedagogies*–I also made sure to point out that the terms are theory heavy and we would continue to engage with them and define them throughout our engagement with the course. During the interview with Jessica, I asked her about the other documentation forms we encountered throughout the Getty course and she said the following:

> Jessica: I remember the condition reporting and all that was very, western oriented and it didn't ask questions that would be, towards, Indigenous cultures and Indigenous, ways of knowing. And it was very, rigid, it could only be this or that is like what it basically seemed like to me. It can't be like its own individual consideration, I would say.

Jessica's points about cultural items being understood as "objects of research" organized in literal and metaphorical rigid boxes, and categorized as "this or that," opens up what is a critique through the lens of *rightful relations*–meaning that by challenging imposed classifications, that there is an opportunity to retrace holistic aesthetic systems which contribute to an understanding and relating to vitality of cultural inheritances. Jessica points out this idea of "individual consideration," has resonances with what Mignolo (2007) describes as the "struggle for changing Eurocentric categories of thought which carry both "the seed of emancipation and the seed of regulation and oppression" which have been forcibly imposed.

Jessica's description of the rigidity of European hierarchical organization also harkens back to what Smith (2012: 63-64) points out about the Western European tradition's regard for "objects of research" and from this perspective, "an object has no life force, no humanity, no

spirit of its own, so therefore 'it' cannot make an active contribution" to research or science. Rather, the Western European genealogy of the classification of cultural items as objects that began during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in due course regarded such objects of discovery to be commodified as property belonging to the cultural archive and corpus of knowledge of the West (ibid. 64). More recently, for example, in 2016, the French government had not supported the repatriation of Native American cultural inheritances since "this has been viewed in France as an attack on the sacred French Republican ideal of private property" (Meyer 2016). Although there are federal laws in the United States such as NAGPRA which criminalizes the trafficking of wrongfully acquired Native American property (Riley 2005: 85), there is a lack of international laws to uphold the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. [105] Additionally, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People has no juridical power due to the fact that they specifically state that, "States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms," which creates opportunities for nation-states as well as the cultural institutions they fund to abuse loopholes or gaps that prevent the unethical acquisition of Native American and Indigenous cultural items. How have these items come to be held in museums and private collections?

Returning back to the work of Smith (2012) who points out the violent genealogy in which Western knowledge positioned and in turn, established as "superior," happened through extraction from Indigenous peoples, their lands and waters. Again, this genealogy being rooted in

[105] According to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 11 states that: 1.) Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature; 2.) States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs. "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)."

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was constituted as "an era of highly competitive 'collecting'" (ibid. 2012: 64) or what Indigenous people more accurately describe as stealing. As a result, Western European modernity cultivated what Baudrillard (1994) terms as *cultures of collecting*, which is rooted in Western European religions that replicate ideas of "tiny arks and Edens, repositories and botanic gardens strove to reassemble the scattered products of Creation and thereby to recover lost Adamic knowledge," (Zytaruk 2011: 5) organized in hierarchical typologies (Smith 2012: 62). How then did we address current iterations of hierarchical ways of documentation and museum collecting throughout the course?

Through our meetings, we co-created space for dialogue that encouraged Jessica to offer her own critical reflections on course content. As the framework of *rightful relations* encourages, it is informed by my own pedagogical approaches to museum and curatorial practices that involves opening lines of analysis to question the very aesthetic qualities of every form we encounter to consider the histories that often go untold–from the material to the immaterial, and from individual to collective. From a Western European perspective, Baudrillard points out, to understand "...collecting, the passionate pursuit of possession finds fulfillment and the everyday prose of objects is transformed into poetry, into a triumphant unconscious discourse" (ibid 1996, 2). And to reiterate an earlier point I made, the discourse of collecting and museum display of Indigenous artifacts conceals a justification of genocidal violence. Thus, *rightful relations* as a critical analytical framework engages in what Mithlo describes as "a democratic call to making scientific knowledge (and by scientific knowledge I mean arts inquiry) more accessible" (ibid. 2020: 19). Analyzing the poetics and subsequent discourse of documents and museum collections allows for the framework of *rightful relations* ethics (or lack thereof) to be

understood in a manner that brings to the fore Indigenous ways of knowing, and therefore moving towards a decolonial de-linking.

Given that these institutions utilize a document-based system of archiving and organizing artifacts, I shared with Jessica knowledge beyond the curriculum from the field of information studies to define, expand, and posit our considerations of what a document is within a Western Euro-American lens. This served as an opportunity to question the limits of what we understand to be a document. I described Information studies scholar Buckland's from his essay, *What is a document?*:

> "What is a document? What could not be a document? Ordinarily information storage and retrieval systems have been concerned with text and text-like records (e.g., names, numbers, and alphanumeric codes). The present interest in "multimedia" reminds us that not all phenomena of interest in information science are textual or text like. We may need to deal with any phenomena that someone may wish to observe: events, processes, images, and objects as well as texts."

Using Buckland's definition and framing of a document, I then asked how an expanded understanding of a document could be considered when thinking about the complexity of cultural items within the East Bay Ohlone context. In a follow-up email, I summarized our conversation with this point, "We briefly talked about how baskets or even collective memory can be analyzed as a 'document' during our discussion."[106] Questioning material-based categorizations designated in the *Object Examination Sheet*, there was an option to designate if something is "organic" versus "inorganic." This is based on a material analysis of artifacts that we learned in our lecture on October 1, 2022. Furthermore, we were encouraged to think about how the

[106] Lili Aguilar, email to Jessica, Oct 14, 2022

material will react with the environment (temperature, rate of chemical reaction) and specific vulnerabilities due to material composition. Animal skins (collagen) were also included in the lecture which opened up discussion for Jessica and I around ways skins are processed. Specifically, Jessica asked about the method of *brain tanning*. In order to enrich our understanding of this method, during our usual weekly zoom meeting, I utilized my web browser to find an Indigenous account of this method. After about two minutes of skimming, I found one website, titled *Native Art in Canada: An Ojibwa Elder's Art and Stories*, by Nokomis the Artist.[107]

Nokomi's description of the brain tanning process within an Ojibwa context created a deeper understanding of what animal hides are best for particular uses through a step-by-step narrative arc with humor and direct address to the reader. Nokomi's story of brain tanning encouraged acquiring an animal hide through a hunt, working with trees, bodies of water, freezing, and the subsequent breakdown of the rawhide by an emulsified solution comprised of animal brain tissue and water. We agreed that the *Object Assessment Report* did not give contextual information to enrich an understanding of the materials in the way that an Indigenous way of knowing can–as exemplified by Nokomi's narrative. In engaging in our independent query that initially launched and critiqued museum documents, we prioritized Indigenous Knowledge (IK) systems and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)[108] that are defined as "oral, communal, aesthetic, kinesthetic, and emergent from living landscapes" (Duarte & Belarde-Lewis 2015: 685).

[107] Nokomis is an Ojibwa Elder and Storyteller. https://www.native-art-in-canada.com/nokomis.html
[108] According to Birkes TEK, also referred to as Native science, "is a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs, handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment." "Traditional Ecological Knowledge | Indian Affairs." Accessed July 25, 2024. https://www.bia.gov/service/fuels-management/traditional-knowledge.

For the purposes of my dissertation, *rightful relations* centers Indigenous knowledge systems and relationality as a means to engage in decolonial possibilities within and beyond museums. Next, I discuss how *rightful relations* within museums can make space for a restoration of a kinship worldview and what this means in terms of addressing and transforming spaces where there is a tension between the brutal histories of these institutions and Indigenous people who have survived.

I would like to briefly return to the idea of collective memory (referenced in my correspondence with Jessica) as being understood as a document. When I challenge the notion of a document, I encourage one to consider how Topa's identification of an *existencescape*–that is, a way of viewing the world from an Indigenous perspective and way of being, otherwise known as ontologies–can expand understandings of how knowledge is transferred and grows. For the purposes of this dissertation and more specifically this chapter, performance theory also brings into question how Indigenous aesthetic systems may function to communicate while being imbued with meanings and philosophies inextricable from their respective ontologies. The following question is meant to guide us through a deeper understanding of *Indigenous embodiments*[109] that museums stewarding Indigenous cultural inheritances are contingent upon. You may be asking, why use the term Indigenous embodiments? And why draw from the field of critical dance studies (CDS)? Jessica's next response reflects a holistic approach to aesthetics when thinking about decoloniality, materiality, and Indigenous *existencescapes* that can expand and inform museum practices through models of Indigenous embodiments.

[109] I borrow this phrase from Jacqueline O'shea Murphy's introductory chapter titled *Choreographing Relationality*, in her latest book, Dancing Indigenous Worlds: Choreographies of Relation (2022).

When I asked Jessica the follow-up question, "this is an opportunity for you to think creatively…what does good care look like? How would you imagine a decolonial format of cataloging these artifacts?"

She responded with the following:

> Jessica: I would propose to be a decolonial format is, go by what the tribe believes. So, for our conversation with Vincent and Louis, they talked about how they leave a vial of water next to the artifacts that they have because our tribe believed everything was living so you needed to, water the artifacts to make sure that they drank. And, I think, that should be considered more when putting these tribal artifacts in museums. Basically, going by what that certain tribe believes and how their traditional ways would have. [Museums] should have a lot more respect for each individual artifact instead of just grouping them together and like putting them in a box. Having more respect for the cultural inheritances and doing things as your tribe would have maybe preserved them.

Jessica's response calls into question the very aesthetics of museums–meaning the traditions of museum displays within ethnographic museums which tend to mis-represent Native American peoples through limiting pan-Indian classifications. Earlier in this chapter, I referenced the root of museum collection and archival practices which have often misclassified peoples through displaying cultural inheritances within buildings that have been constructed to impress its citizens and thus contribute to nation-state building (Hendry 2005, 7). As Mithlo succinctly states, "Indigenous knowledge systems in standardized research catalogs marginalizes Indigenous thought and social practice, including language and self-government. Even the term 'Native American' rather than specific tribal designations may misinform readers" (ibid. 2020: 15). Here, I draw a direct connection to museum archival practices and categorizations that

Jessica points out as being rigid aesthetic and that marginalizes Indigenous peoples through all-encompassing labels of Native American despite complex Indigenous aesthetics being present. The practice of feeding artifacts centers ways of being in which relationality centers vital exchanges of life sustaining practices through ensuring the cultural inheritances are stewarded by and for specific Native tribes. The aforementioned relationality is embedded in specific Native peoples, practices and ontologies–ways of being– and are an example of what I refer to as a process of *rightful relations.* By transforming museum and arts spaces through the practices of *rightful relations*, there is transformation that aims to create epistemic shifts through Indigenous embodiments.

On the note of collective memory as essential to sustaining Indigenous embodiments, this particular moment where Jessica's brings up putting a vile of water is directly informed by a memory of a conversation we had with Vincent and Louis. Why memory? From the perspective of arts theorists Roberts & Roberts (1996), they emphasize a divergence from a positivist of the past and towards an understanding supported by research emphasizing that "memory is not discrete, biologically grounded, universally shared mental property and activity. Rather memory is a cultural construction varying from one society to the next" (Roberts & Roberts 1996, 27). As proposed through the framework of *rightful relations*, it is vital to engage in an understanding of memory that spans through specific Native tribes, and in this case, the East Bay Ohlone community.

The concept of *cultural inheritances* is important as it serves as a reframing of an expanded consideration of *Indigenous embodiments* that are often excluded from museum archival documentary practices. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the early months of

2022, Vincent, Louis, and the design team I met via zoom to discuss specific cultural inheritances they would like to be represented in the public art project. Louis and Vincent had established that they wanted to have images of their basketry. As a reference, we took a look at the Autry Museum's online collection which features baskets from California Native tribes. While showing the image in figure 27 to Vincent and Louis, they shared that visibly remnant feathers were most likely from woodpeckers. Vincent and Louis talked about the red feathers came from the woodpecker how they are woven into the basket by grouping the feathers per stitch. They described the role of people who would hunt for the woodpeckers. Additionally, they described how someone would be responsible for gathering the Olivella shells which were then baked to make them white; the pattern of the white shells might look like a specific pattern that is contextually relevant to the basket weaver. This process of creating baskets is embedded in the life and philosophy of the Ohlone peoples, an Indigenous embodiment within an ecology of relations.

The short recounting of a memory I had with Vincent and Louis speaks to Jessica's response to the question, regarding everything as living, reflecting the interconnected relations that a cultural inheritance embodies. Instead of the rigid description of an object examination report, the retelling of stories about Indigenous embodiments can provide a decolonial way of preserving cultural inheritances that move beyond an object-oriented approach towards one that ties together TEK embedded in kinesthetic collective memory. It is through *rightful relations* that there is an opportunity to see how these processes move fluidly and are contingent upon each other. These dynamics or connections embody an aesthetic ethos and logos that can inform the way museums collaborate with Native peoples to support their sovereignty in service of social

justice. As Jessica points out, museums should take good care "making sure that traditional ways aren't forgotten either."

basket

Show details

Culture Ohlone (Costano)
Date early to mid-1800s
Materials
Sedge root coiled on a three-rod foundation, design in olivella shell discs beads, remnants of red woodpecker feathers on a body and quail plumes around the rim of the basket
Dimensions 6 1/2 in x 14 in (16.5 cm x 35.5 cm)
Credit Line Museum purchase
Object ID 2011.41.1

Figure 27. Image and description are incorporated from the Autry Museum's public facing Collections Online website (https://collections.theautry.org/)

Furthermore, Native curators and artists enact what are referred to as sovereign curatorial tactics as a way of countering Western European and Euro-American curatorial and display practices (Mithlo 2020: 128). These curatorial practices are a part of a dynamic web of relations afforded by Indigenous embodiments and their embeddedness in Native ontologies. Upon my own research, there are a range of tactics that are afforded by varying degrees of Indigenous autonomy depending on funding sources and institutional support. To name a few, there are exhibitions and institutions that embody sovereign curatorial tactics across Turtle Island and Abya Yala: Indian Theater: 1.) Native Performance, Art, and Self-Determination since 1969 at

Bard College in New York, curated by Candice Hopkins (2023: 2), Mud Kin: Mapping Adobe and Land-based Indigenous & Latinx Projects from Southern California to West Texas, curated by Tracy Fenix at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California (2023: 3), Counter-Mapping, curated by Viola Arduini & Dr. Enote at 516 Arts, Albuquerque, New Mexico (2022); Casa de Cultura, in Santa Ana del Valle, Oaxaca; Red Lake Nation Tribal Information Center (Hendry 2005). The varying degrees of aesthetic sovereignty have emerged despite histories of colonialism, industrialization and neoliberalism.

Building further on aesthetic sovereignty, when discussing an ethos of good care, I asked Jessica what this would look like as an architectural form for a museum space. I encouraged her to imagine this and what the design principles would be. The following is Jessica's response:

> I would hope that the building would be an environmentally friendly building and incorporate a bunch of native plants specific to the Bay Area around the building. It would blend into the environment sort of and make it blend into the environment.

As Jessica states in the dialogue during our time in the Getty course which enforced the questions in our interview guided discussion, museums should be environmentally friendly implying that future designs of institutions stewarding Indigenous cultural inheritances should be designed by Native people and Indigenous design principles that move away from the destructive industrial processes associated with settler capitalism. Jessica's responses and work completed throughout the Getty course can be interpreted as an expression of '*ottoy. 'ottoy* is a Chochenyo word describing a philosophy and intention of repair and mending that can come about from "good care and protocols."[110] Grounded in community and public engagement, Indigenous

[110] "The 'ottoy Initiative." Accessed November 8, 2024. https://lawrencehallofscience.org/about/ottoy-initiative/.

Design practitioners "adhere to social protocols and are aware of their place in the culture. They are attuned to the spirituality, language, and landscape of the places they represent" (Smith 2017). In addition, Indigenous design practitioners empower communities to design, plan and create culturally relevant "good buildings," (ibid), just as Jessica suggests creating "good care protocols" for cultural inheritances contained in museums. In doing so, there is a connection to the seven-generations model which varies per Native Nation, but for reference, I have included a model referenced in the article, THE PEOPLE ARE BEAUTIFUL ALREADY: INDIGENOUS DESIGN AND PLANNING (2017):

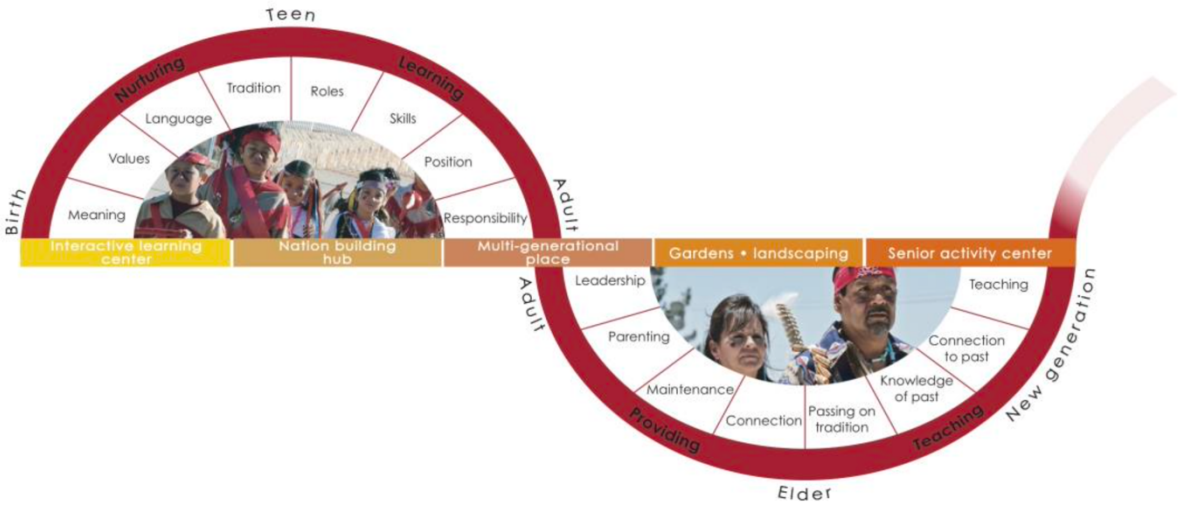

Figure 28: Seven Generations Model for Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo, Texas. The red line depicts the life cycle of an individual and the associated values they learn as they mature through adulthood. The horizontal timeline identifies the institutions in the Pueblo that support each stage of an individual's life. Ysleta Cultural Corridor Plan, iD+Pi, 2012.

Indigenous epistemologies occur in places where family, community, and relations (Betasamasoke Simpson 2014) and according to specifically East Bay Ohlone design principles,

"prioritizes quality of life in every facet of design." This includes museum and institutions that are willing to transform in order to meet the demands of people who are now following the lead of Indigenous peoples on ways to steward the land and live in reciprocity. This is important to consider, as the adverse effects of globalization are felt and impacting everyday processes due to climate change qualified as an era of human destruction. Therefore, it is mandatory that museums tell the full truth, and that means reckoning in a transparent manner while beginning and sustaining working-relationships with and for Native and Indigenous communities so that we do not continue to refuse the truth of the past not as "ghosts," of the past, but rather, to continue to support the emergence of ancestral memories and persisting Indigenous embodiments to transform through social justice and law. What does this mean in practical terms?

Conclusion: moving towards ecologies of rightful relations

Museums and arts institutions should fiscally support experimentation by Native peoples through sovereign curatorial tactics so that there are opportunities to perform, revive cultural heritage, languages, quotidian or everyday patterns. In doing so, practices of repair foster *rightful relations*, and these principles have the potential to transform policies, protocols, discursive practices to be responsive to the needs of Indigenous peoples and their aesthetic systems and towards decolonization and Indigenous resurgence (Oyelude 2023).

I provide questions to give ample space to imagine possibilities of entry for museums and memory institutions: How do you support "decolonial love"?; How can you make space and time for the dancing of Indigenous worlds?; How do you continue to sustain access to cultural inheritances for Indigenous peoples by upholding laws and affording for memories to emerge through Native cosmologies?; How do you create and maintain permanent professional

development opportunities such as internships and senior roles in your institutions for Native peoples to steward their cultural inheritances?

According to the framework of distributed cognition, "cognitive processes may be distributed across the members of a social group, cognitive processes may be distributed in the sense that the operation of the cognitive system involves coordination between internal and external (material or environmental) structure, and processes may be distributed through time in such a way that the products of earlier events can transform the nature of later events" (Hutchins 2000: 1-2). By extension, then institutions must foreground and operate from the fact that Indigenous peoples' kinship is inseparable from their local ecological systems and cultural and spiritual practices[111] if they would like to move to what I refer to as *rightful relations*.

The thesis of rightful relations emphasizes the necessity of making the often unseen or marginalized, such as Indigeneity and Indigenous *survivance* and *embodiments*, more visible. *Rightful relations* as an analytic framework reveals the minor but essential role I play in collaboration with Jessica to explore her values within the context of East Bay Ohlone cultural revitalization. This framework highlights how our partnership intersects with the fields of museums, preservation, and repatriation, demonstrating the importance of supporting the ongoing decolonial efforts of Jessica's community in language and cultural revitalization.

Our work together is a testament to the ecologies of rightful relations, where mutual respect, understanding, and support are foundational. By focusing on rightful relations, we ensure that the cultural narratives and practices of the East Bay Ohlone are acknowledged,

[111] First Nations Development Institute: Recognition and Support of Indigenous California Land Stewards, Practitioners of Kincentric Ecology Report (2020)
https://www.firstnations.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Indigenous-California-Land-Stewards- Practitioners-of-Kincentric-Ecology-Report-2020.pdf

preserved, and celebrated, reflecting a broader commitment to decolonial praxis and cultural sustainability. This chapter underscores the critical role of collaboration plays in creating cultural visibility and the preservation of Indigenous heritage, advocating for a future where Indigenous voices are central to the discourse on cultural heritage and revitalization.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have examined how Native and Indigenous aesthetic systems function within collaborative projects, particularly within cultural production institutions such as universities, design studios, and museums. Through the analysis of auto-ethnographic accounts, I critically engaged with my standpoint as a researcher and artist involved in coalition-building among systemically marginalized communities. This process has raised important questions about conducting research that is both collaborative and ethically rooted in *rightful relations*—a framework I propose to guide collaboration with Indigenous communities by making present the lives and aesthetics of those made missing due to colonial processes through respect, reciprocity, and responsibility.

Respectful listening and the integration of Indigenous knowledge embedded in stories shared during co-creation bring Kirkness & Barnhardt's (1991) Four R's—respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility—into practice, with a particular focus on how reciprocity fosters respect for Indigenous people within these collaborative relationships. Through the framework of *rightful relations*, I found, upon analyzing each chapter, that the Four R's serve as a starting point for discussions and reflections on the specific values and philosophies central to each Indigenous group as conveyed through culturally situated performances. Schechner's concept of "restored behavior," (Schechner 1985: 35) where past performances are re-enacted to support communal healing, provides a lens through which I interpreted survivance and the historical embeddedness of the present moment. These values and philosophies vary significantly based on factors such as cultural origin, linguistic repertoire, historical trajectories, political positions,

racialized contexts, and aspirations. I emphasize embodiment to account for multimodal sequences that can be ephemeral or documented and its role in understanding Indigenous worldviews as it pertains to ideas of corporeality, land and pedagogy (Simpson Betasamosake 2014). Additionally, when accounting for embodiment, I also integrate what Kimmerer (2013) describes as longstanding origins of "right relation between land and people" as a means to support more-than-human resurgent collectivities and ecosystems recovering from the "hubris of conquerors and corporations" (Tsing et al. 2017: 1).

An emic approach has allowed me to understand where in collaborative processes are expressions of aesthetic sovereignty, where Indigenous people assert their identities and rights through artistic and cultural practices. I analyzed four auto-ethnographic examples, illustrating how Indigenous aesthetics serve as sites for decolonial de-linking (Mignolo 2007), challenging neoliberal narratives within cultural institutions. These projects highlight the need to acknowledge and integrate Indigenous ontologies and their contingent ethical frameworks that counter Western European and Euro-American academic and aesthetic norms.

Building on Calabrese Barton & Tan's (2020) concept of "rightful presence," I frame *rightful relations* as an ethos for collaborative engagement that prioritizes Indigenous self-determination and aesthetic sovereignty. This approach opposes deficit models often perpetuated by institutions, emphasizing what critical race theory identifies as cultural wealth amongst minoritized and racialized communities (Yosso 2005, Solórzano 1997, Solórzano 1998). Cultural wealth encompasses knowledge, and strengths that Indigenous communities bring. By shifting the focus from a Bordieuan (1993) notion of cultural capital to a justice-oriented perspective,

rightful relations underscore the transformative potential of collaboration that respects Indigenous worldviews and values.

My approach to aesthetic systems is informed by anthropological and sociological frameworks, such as Geertz's concept of "art as a cultural system" (1976) and Becker's classification of aesthetics as sociological systems (2008). A systemic consideration of aesthetic phenomena situates Indigenous practices within social activities and patterned life-ways, revealing how Indigenous epistemologies engage with values and cultural significance through semiotic processes. Vizenor's concept of "survivance" further contextualizes these systems, highlighting how Indigenous narratives, customs, and traditions resist erasure and assert a continuous presence that transcends victimhood (2008).

Drawing on the concept of "the capacity to remember" (Topa & Narváez 2022), I emphasize how memory acts as a core guide within Indigenous aesthetic systems, fostering resilience against the inequalities and injustices associated with the politics of Indigeneity. Bhabha's (1994) notion of boundaries as spaces where something new can emerge aligns with Indigenous practices of negotiating identity and presence in spaces of interaction and conflict. This intersection of decolonial and critical race theories offers insights into how Indigenous collaborators navigate systems that have historically marginalized their knowledge and practices.

Rightful relations, as I conceptualize them, represent an ethical praxis that centers concern, care, and accountability in cross-cultural collaboration. By foregrounding stewardship and reciprocity, this approach seeks to build relational spaces that facilitate the survivance of Indigenous peoples and the transfer of knowledge across generations. Through this lens, I employ metaphor and surrealism in my storytelling, honoring the knowledge conveyed through

auto-ethnographic accounts of community-based art projects. These projects reveal how Indigenous aesthetic systems operate within collaborative frameworks, engaging various modes of expression and archival materials such as field notes, audio recordings, sketches, and interviews.

In analyzing embodied expressions of collectivity, I explore how Indigenous collaborators in these art projects challenge the universality of a singular cultural perspective or modality, advocating instead for a pluralistic approach that embraces epistemic shifts. Such collaborations offer insights into how Indigenous peoples maintain aesthetic sovereignty while confronting political power dynamics in cultural institutions. This analysis, drawing on critical race theory and TribalCrit (Brayboy 2006), challenges deficit models by highlighting the cultural wealth embodied in the cooperative efforts of Indigenous communities within these spaces, creating a platform for racial and social justice in art-making. However, given that I consider Indigenous co-creation in institutional settings, there are moments where friction between worldviews and ontologies are apparent.

Incommensurable signifies that social justice projects differ in their objectives. According to decolonial theorists Tuck and Yang (2018), an ethic of incommensurability "acknowledges that we can collaborate for a time together even while anticipating that our pathways toward enacting liberation will diverge," thus helping to reduce frustrations in attempts at solidarity (ibid. 2, 4). In this dissertation's survey of projects, CRT, and more specifically, Tribal Critical Race Theory or "TribalCrit" (Brayboy 2006), are utilized to identify inconsistencies faced by Indigenous people within institutions involved in the art projects surveyed, providing insight into the immediate and future needs of Indigenous communities.

Although I attempted to apply CRT to analyze social dynamics in each chapter, I am concerned that a cross-cultural approach may have inadvertently overlooked specific racial dynamics. This approach aimed to underscore how racism underpins social inequalities in each context, promoting transnational coalition-building and solidarity. However, as scholar Saldaña-Portillo (2016) notes, these dynamics are complex and contingent. She describes racism in both the United States and Mexico, stating:

> "These visualized geographies cross each other, they work at cross-purposes, conflicting and constituting each other. They are interactional and intermixed. They exist entre dos países—between two countries—and because of each other" (2016: 2).

Reflecting on my journey in chapter one as a Xicana Indígena researcher, I have gained a deeper understanding of where my Indigeneity lies on a broad spectrum. Through reflexive consideration of my positionality, I challenge the evaluation of identity performance beyond aesthetics and integrate this critique within the aesthetics of the public sphere (Román 1997: 283). Assessing the performance of my Indigeneity through my embodied practices in cooperative settings has enabled me to embrace the sublime elements of dissolution and formlessness as they relate to abjection and queerness (Alvarado 2018: 15). In doing so, I fully realize the possibilities of my cooperative actions as Indigeneity and Latinidad shape aspects of my identity.

My lineage encompasses descent from Moorish peoples, Sephardic Jewish ancestors, and Indigenous heritage through my Coca family. This background has shaped the performance of my identity – my experience of being perceived at times as dark brown-skinned and at other times as light tan-skinned, allowing me certain privileges to navigate multiple spaces. Building

meaningful alliances with Native communities has been a gradual process, informed by encounters with mentors like Dr. Enote in Zuni, New Mexico. These relationships have enriched my understanding of Indigenous epistemologies and the ethical implications of my own positionality and Indigeneity and Latinidad in collaborative projects. They have also strengthened my commitment to an inclusive, justice-oriented perspective that honors Indigenous ways of knowing and *existencescapes* (Four Arrows & Narvaez 2022).

Nana Alicia's teachings in chapter two, grounded in Maya K'iche' epistemology, offer a powerful reminder of the value of intergenerational transmission and the survivance of Indigenous knowledge systems in spaces like museums. Ultimately, Nana Alicia's leadership in ceremonial performance provides insight into how matriarchal discursive practices can challenge dominant patriarchal systems that seek to surveil and control. In an arts institution rooted in the colonial dispossession of Tovangaar,[112] Nana Alicia leads with her voice, engaging with the space through the tactile interaction with masks and plants, redefining the relationship between herself and the institution. Her ceremonial practices underscore the importance of memory, gratitude, and respect in sustaining Indigenous worldviews within institutions shaped by colonial legacies. Her life and practices challenge us to expand our understanding of knowledge beyond written text, to include oral traditions, embodied knowledge, and the familial bonds that anchor cultural continuity.

In the future, I am interested in exploring transnational feminisms to further understand the ceremonial practices of the Maya K'iche' diaspora and their teleological meanings.

[112] Stewart-Ambo, Theresa, and Kelly Leah Stewart. "From Tovaangar to the University of California, Los Angeles." American Indian Culture and Research Journal 46, no. 2 (July 14, 2023). https://doi.org/10.17953/A3.1528.

Additionally, I plan to investigate how Indigenous philosophy has influenced Western teleology, as well as how diaspora communities like the Maya K'iche' steward cultural practices such as the role of *ajq'ij*,[113] or daykeepers, in maintaining a relationship with astronomical knowledge. Another assertion of aesthetic sovereignty was the refusal to accept the misidentification and generalized term "shaman."' This rejection is linked to the refusal of commodification and consumption of Native American spirituality, often represented by the term "shaman" and the associated New Age movement (Aldred 2000). We observe a similar rejection by Vincent in the next chapter when they identify their ancestors in a painting by Langsdorff. Addressing topics such as racial geographies, plant migration histories, and food practices will also be essential for exploring Indigenous ecologies of well-being, both within and beyond the framework of settler capitalism (Speed 2017).

As an extension, I aim to deepen my understanding of concepts such as repair and mending within Indigenous aesthetics, as exemplified by Vincent and Louis' East Bay Ohlone's *'ottoy* initiative with UC Berkeley. '*ottoy* is a Chochenyo word describing a philosophy and intention of repair and mending.[114] Examining how Indigenous communities navigate collaborations within institutions, I seek to understand how practices of repair foster *rightful relations*, and how these principles could transform policies, protocols, discursive practices to be responsive to the needs of Indigenous peoples and their aesthetic systems and towards decolonization and Indigenous resurgence (Oyelude 2023).

[113] Maya K'iche word for *daykeepers* (Tedlock 1992).
[114] "The 'ottoy Initiative." Accessed November 8, 2024. https://lawrencehallofscience.org/about/ottoy-initiative/.

I would like to explore how the *'ottoy* philosophy shapes the discursive practices employed by leaders of the initiative as they work toward achieving their objectives:

- Promote a clearer understanding of the lived experiences of the Ohlone people throughout history
- Encourage a healthy relationship between the university and the East Bay Ohlone people
- Enable the campus community to engage with specific cultural wisdom, history, culinary practices, and aesthetics
- Support the university's efforts to establish a just and respectful relationship with the local Indigenous community and provide a true sense of belonging for Indigenous members of the campus community

In this context, I am left with questions regarding the institutional structures they found challenging to transform. What tactics were necessary to cultivate such *rightful relations* with UC Berkeley? How are they utilizing immersive technologies in museum spaces to prioritize Ohlone experiences, and how are these initiatives being evaluated? Additionally, I would like to investigate the impact of revitalizing the Chochenyo language with and for the Ohlone people and other communities within xučyun.[115] Furthermore, I am curious to learn from Jessica how the *'ottoy* philosophy informs her understanding of the role of law in addressing the philosophical principles of repair and mending for the Ohlone people and their pathways towards sovereignty.

[115] In the Chochenyo language, "xučyun" (prounounced HOOCH-yoon) is the name of the region within the ancestral and unceded homeland of the East Bay Ohlone people that includes Albany and Berkeley. Kell, Gretchen. "New UC Berkeley Housing Complex to Be Called Xučyun Ruwway, Honoring Ohlone People." Berkeley News, April 22, 2024. https://news.berkeley.edu/2024/04/22/new-uc-berkeley-housing-complex-to-be-called-xucyun-ruwway-honoring-ohlone-people/.

An exploration of Indigenous ecologies of well-being—encompassing topics such as the geographies of racial capitalism (Wilson Gilmore 2020), more-than-human and plant migration histories, and food practices—is essential for understanding resilience and continuity within and beyond the constraints of the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo 2005). Guided by the framework of rightful relations, I argue that supporting ecologies of well-being, mending, and healing requires language revitalization, enabling Indigenous *existencescapes* to flourish from worldviews that challenge colonial matrices and their reinforcement of hierarchical taxonomies, such as race, that seek to universalize humanity. Revitalizing linguistic diversity allows us to move away from the "violence of 'universal humanity'" sustained through the marginalization of "the African" and thus other racialized peoples (Jackson 2020: 29). Therefore, I conclude that educational and arts institutions have a responsibility to form long-term relationships with Indigenous peoples, moving beyond project-based timelines to foster true autonomy. This includes empowering Indigenous leadership to transform institutional policies in ways that go beyond superficial representation and fundamentally shift discursive practices as they pertain to cooperative structures and environmental impacts.

Future Directions

In future research, my aim is to expand beyond a human-centered perspective, embracing narratives and oral histories that include the interconnected journeys of animals, plants, and spiritual entities. Artistic co-creation with Indigenous communities offers a pathway to explore how material choices, forms, and gestures can evoke collective experiences of displacement and resilience, shaped by the legacies of colonialism and empire. By engaging with adaptive tactics

that various beings have employed over time, I hope to examine shared struggles to sustain connections across political, physical, and psychological boundaries.

Grounded in Indigenous cosmologies, this approach draws inspiration from the cyclical principles of creation, transformation, and decay that are intrinsic to many Indigenous knowledge systems, such as those of the Maya. Through both oral traditions and culturally syncretic texts, such as the *Popol Vuh*, I aim to explore how creation and death are framed as essential, interconnected processes that sustain life and cosmological balance. Future collaborations may seek to incorporate symbols, motifs, and spatial orientations that connect ancestral knowledge with contemporary migration stories, and architectures in ethno-archaeology, illuminating pathways that traverse both visible and invisible realms.

The potential for artworks to serve as mnemonic devices (Roberts & Roberts 1996) — repositories of memory and relationality—offers a powerful means to communicate these ideas. Natural materials like soil, water, shell, and plants not only embody ecological connections but also reflect the cultural landscapes and histories from which they arise. In foregrounding these materials, art-making can manifest an aesthetic vocabulary that honors Indigenous cosmologies and their layered connections to the land, water, and sky.

Through an exploration of themes such as fissures and renewal, I seek to consider how ruptures — whether environmental or social — become sites of potential regeneration, mending and repair. These ruptures can invite reflections on survivance and regeneration, showing how damaged ecosystems or disrupted communities might find ways to heal and re-form. Rather than viewing borders as static divides, I aim to reconceptualize them as spaces of collaborative

growth, where reimagining boundaries can foster Indigenous futurity and reinforce collective memory.

Ultimately, my vision for future research is to create spaces, both physical and conceptual, that foster a deeper understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Through co-creation with Indigenous artists and community members, I aspire to support narratives of *survivance* and transformation that underscore a vision of shared futures, rooted in Indigenous knowledge and resource management (Anderson 2005) and driven by a commitment to mutual respect and self-determination. This approach encourages us to reimagine borderlands as generative spaces for collaboration and collective growth, fostering a world where Indigenous knowledge systems are not only preserved but actively influence the potential for regeneration and relationality amid ongoing change. Building on the work of Kimmerer (Anishinabekwe), who offers stories as medicine for our fractured relationship with the earth, I challenge us to collectively consider how Indigenous aesthetics function as law, medicine, and primary historical documentation, with a profound capacity to heal (Robinson 2020: 8).

The lessons learned in through the framework of *rightful relations* grounded in respect, reciprocity, and responsibility teach researchers about the possibility of making present that which is often pushed to the margins – our messy intergenerational histories and how they are embodied in the present. By expanding an inclusive Xicanx Indígena perspective, one where an Indigeneity is not just an ideology but something that must be lived, embodied, felt and materialized (Hunt in Radcliffe 2019: 436), I aim to continue fostering spaces of dialogue and collaboration that challenge dominant narratives and honor the diverse experiences of Indigenous peoples. In doing so, I remain committed to exploring how to best leverage my positionality for

the benefit of Native communities, and how to engage in solidarity work that is attentive to the nuances and complexities of cross-cultural allyship and the racial and historical geographies they shape and exist in. Furthermore, I aim to continue a performance methodology that integrates conversation analysis, archival research, interviews and hopefully scoring future performances for public education and arts initiatives.

As discussed in Chapter Four, there are numerous Native curators and allies across Turtle Island and Abya Yala who embody sovereign curatorial and artistic tactics through impactful interventions. Recent examples include exhibitions such as the Minneapolis Institute of Art's *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists*, Museu de Arte de São Paulo's *Indigenous Histories*, Oxy Arts' *The Iridescence of Knowing*, and Metzli Projects' *Refractions: Contemporary Indigenous Arts*, among others. These are just a few of the many inspiring initiatives taking place. Institutions can play a greater role in supporting these artistic and design interventions by establishing long-term, place-based and site-specific, reciprocal partnerships and providing artists and community stewards with the resources needed to grow professionally, publish, and ethically retain rights to their work.

This dissertation concludes with an affirmation of Indigenous aesthetic systems as frameworks for decolonial and social justice-oriented projects that envision Native and Indigenous futurity and survivance. By subverting dominant aesthetic values, these systems create opportunities for Indigenous communities to assert their agency and continue their cultural practices despite historical and ongoing challenges. Moving forward, I remain committed to the framework of *rightful relations* in fostering spaces of dialogue, collaboration, and mutual

learning that honor the plural experiences of Indigenous peoples and contribute to a collective decolonial vision of survivance, regeneration, and solidarity supporting Indigenous sovereignty.

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