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nineteen sixty nine: an ethnic studies journal

Title

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Journal

nineteen sixty nine: an ethnic studies journal, 1(1)

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Publication Date

2012

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The Future(s) of Ethnic Studies is in its Past(s)... and in the Surrounding Possibilities

Xamuel Bañales

Abstract: *According to Walter D. Mignolo, unlike the speakers of modern European languages where the future is “in front” of the person, for the Quichua or Aymara people of Ecuador the future is “behind” as it cannot be seen. That is, because the past can be remembered and therefore “seen,” it is for this reason that it is “in front” of you. From this perspective, it’s imperative—if we are to consider the future(s) of Ethnic Studies—to look, carefully examine, and reflect on the field’s past(s).*

Introduction

According to Walter D. Mignolo, unlike the speakers of modern European languages where the future is “in front” of the person, for the Quichua or Aymara people of Ecuador the future is “behind” as it cannot be seen. That is, because the past can be remembered and therefore “seen,” it is for this reason that it is “in front” of you.¹ From this perspective, it’s imperative—if we are to consider the future(s) of Ethnic Studies—to look, carefully examine, and reflect on the field’s past(s). Moreover, if the past can be remembered and therefore “seen in front” of you, then it should follow that the “present” is always already a portal of infinite possibilities and opportunities. By fusing these perspectives, this article has two goals. The first one is to call attention to the activist origins of Ethnic Studies. Having its foundation in a decolonizing praxis, I argue that activism and community orga-

nizing always should be central to the field. From the perspective that Ethnic Studies should be attuned to the openings that the current context of activism is providing, the second goal is to highlight my participation in recent campus and community centered organizing in the San Francisco Bay Area. The reason for this is that, if Ethnic Studies intends to remain relevant to the current historical contours and communities, the field and its activist underpinnings must be aligned with current social change happening on the ground.

The Decolonizing Activist Foundation of Ethnic Studies

Although providing a comprehensive account (and transformations) of the history of Ethnic Studies as well as its numerous contributions is beyond the scope of this essay, I revisit the field's origin(s) to highlight the imperative that often gets overlooked or dismissed in academia: that knowledge production and community organizing are not mutually exclusive endeavors. In doing so, my point is not to romanticize the past or to revisit it for the sake of nostalgia but rather, as Otis L. Scott underscores, to remind us to refocus on the normative ideals shaping the formation of Ethnic Studies and to address the fundamental conditions the field currently faces.² This is important given that the history of the struggle for Ethnic Studies for space and place in predominantly white institutions is not commonly known, but is often taken for granted or commonly assumed. As someone who has taken countless formal Ethnic Studies courses in at least three colleges in California, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, more often than not, the activist past(s) of the field—let alone the imperative connection between community organizing and ensuing knowledge production—is not central or seriously talked about. As former TWLF activist and current Asian-American Studies professor at UC Berkeley (UCB) Harvey Dong states, “I think there is also a need for the new professors to actually learn about the history of the TWLF and to learn about the history of student engagement in terms of the formation of the department[s] and how students and professors could actually work together.”³

Ethnic Studies emerged as an academic discipline during an intensified socio-political context that included urban violence, anti-Vietnam War protests, Civil Rights activism, and the radical black, brown, red, yellow, feminist, and gay power movements.⁴ Particular to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1968-69, a majority of students from African American, Chicano, Asian American, Native American backgrounds organized campus coalitions known as the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). Along with informational picketing, blocking of campus entrances, mass rallies, and teach-ins, The TWLF led the longest student strike in the US at the time. Hundreds of students were arrested and the National Guard were eventually stationed at UCB. The TWLF demanded the establishment of Third World Colleges that would be comprised of departments of Asian American, African American, Chicano, and Native American Studies. Particular to San Francisco State University, the demands included having a School of Ethnic Studies that not only would appoint 50 faculty positions but would have the authority and control of the hiring and retention of any faculty member, director, and administrator, as well as the curriculum in a specific area of study.⁵ At UCB, the proposal for a college of Third World College was not met, the term “ethnic” studies was eventually adopted. As Jack D. Forbes explains, “ethnic” was used, “in part because university administrators found it more acceptable, perhaps more manageable politically,

than the Third World concept."⁶

Other Ethnic Studies (and related) university programs or departments, though established decades after those of the San Francisco Bay Area, have their own particular histories, many also based on activist struggle. The department of Ethnic Studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder is one example. In 1988, the Center for Studies of Ethnicity and Race in America (CSERA) was established, which incorporated the Black Studies and Chicano Studies programs that had been constituted in the late 1960s and early 1970s and added American Indian and Asian American programs as areas of concentration. In August of 1993, CSERA submitted to Arts and Sciences a proposal to create an Ethnic Studies major and a department. On March 31, 1994, the Student Coalition for the Advancement of Ethnic Plurality (SCAEP) issued their demands for the creation of an Ethnic Studies major and minor and Masters and PhD programs. Student groups including SCAEP, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, and United Mexican American Students formed an alliance to address these and other diversity issues. They addressed them in many forms, including holding a student rally, mass student protest, and a hunger strike that lasted six days. These actions resulted in the signing of the "Declaration of Diversity" on April 25, 1994 by the President of the University of Colorado system.⁷ As Otis L. Scott points out, the "protest dynamic was the context and the catalyst for the formation of ethnic studies programs.... These programs were carved out of the dreams and aspirations of countless activists influenced by the spirit of social change emanating from the people movements of the 1960s."⁸

However, not all Ethnic Studies programs and departments have been established due to activist demands that connect to the late 1960s-early 1970s. Others have been created in recent times with different purposes, such as responding to particular (most likely demographic) needs of the respective universities.⁹ Because not all Ethnic Studies programs have similar histories of activist struggle, it does not mean they do not face many challenges. Despite the origins of each particular Ethnic Studies program or department, they generally face various difficulties in being part of the academy that relate to structural and environmental factors. It is common that institutionalized practices and attitudes that range from patronizing to overtly hostile shape the context that Ethnic Studies has had to operate. Although there are exceptions to the rule, other common challenges that Ethnic Studies departments and programs generally face includes—but certainly not limited to—reduced budget allocations, lack of autonomy, reactionary politics, public policy measures and laws, and prevailing racist ideologies.¹⁰ These unwelcoming conditionings that include not only attacks from many sides but sometimes even from within generally place the field under constant siege. This dynamic, along with the activism and/or constant struggle that are a commonly an endemic part of the existence of Ethnic Studies, lends to an ongoing commitment to social change that is consequently inseparable from the field.

Despite the unfinished project of establishing a Third World College (at UCB), the disparate histories and formations of Ethnic Studies programs and departments, and the varying challenges and struggles they face, one principal goal of the creation of the field was to decolonize knowledge and power. This has included challenging institutions of higher education, opposing racist practices/epistemologies within traditional disciplines, expanding the curriculum to incorporate diverse perspective and historical experiences, and contending the meaning and purpose of research itself. As Otis L. Scott underscores, "the institu-

tional context within which people of color existed simply had to be changed from being discriminatory, alienation, and de-humanizing to one based on principles and practices recognizing the dignity and worth of human beings."¹¹ Moreover, there are several characteristics that distinguish Ethnic Studies research from traditional disciplines. One is the focus on the community that broke down the artificial barrier between researchers and the public. Another hallmark is the reinterpretation of highly problematic and stereotypic—often harmful—research agendas. Ethnic Studies research has also been generative by contrasting positivist social science research approaches by questioning objectivity and neutrality. Last but not least, by challenging the academic power structure and colonizing prevailing approaches to knowledge at the time, one of the most important distinguishing characteristics of Ethnic Studies research is its intention for contributing to broader social change.¹² Without the struggles for Ethnic Studies, “we would not have the interdisciplinary sites that we do have—as restricted and small as they are—they would not have existed at all.”¹³ As Johnella E. Butler argues, Ethnic Studies “pioneered interdisciplinarity in the mainstream disciplines of the academy” and that it is a catalyst to not only the Humanities and the Social Sciences but also the “common good.”¹⁴ Furthermore, what makes the field of Ethnic Studies particularly unique is that it is out of result of decolonizing activism coming from below.

Thus, decolonizing community organizing and knowledge production was and should always be central to the field. If this is not, it may point to how administrators, faculty, or students have drifted away, wittingly or unwittingly, from this imperative, signaling how they have lost sight of the future(s) Ethnic Studies—in other words, of its past(s). Not forgetting the past of Ethnic Studies, but reflecting upon it and “seeing” it, can therefore place us “in front” to where the field should be. Accordingly, if the “present” is always already a surrounding threshold of possibilities and opportunities, where is Ethnic Studies now? For an answer, along with the passing of Arizona’s recent anti-immigration law SB1070, one can look to the same state’s HB 2281 law (commonly referred to as a measure to ban Ethnic Studies programs in Tucson’s Unified District High Schools) that passed by the conservative state legislature at the request of then-School Superintendent (and now Attorney General-elect) Tom Horne that took effect in January 1, 2011. Similar to the origin(s) of Ethnic Studies, community youth activists and students have organized and held a series of decolonizing demonstrations in response to their epistemological racism and oppression.¹⁵ Like the intensified socio-political racist context that gave birth to Ethnic Studies, the activism in response to its banning in Arizona high schools is operating in a similarly (albeit different) dramatic global context of struggle that includes social movements in places like Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Palestine, and elsewhere in the US. The situation of Arizona is not only an opportunity to “save Ethnic Studies”—that is, return to the status quo—but to go beyond this and demand for more.

For the remainder of this essay, rather than looking at the Arizona struggle, I focus on the “Occupy”/“Decolonize” movements locally in the San Francisco Bay Area since, this is not only the same geographical place where Ethnic Studies was created, but it is where I am in the “present,” surrounded by infinite possibilities. To elaborate, the “Occupy”/“Decolonize” movement of the San Francisco Bay Area is the environment where I and other Ethnic Studies scholars literally do our work. It is in this social and political climate, as Otis L. Scott notes, “wherein we teach our students to be critical observers of society and urge them to

become involved on some level, giving back to the communities from which they come or that they identify with.”¹⁶ Arguing that a coloniality of organizing—that is, activism that reflects a colonizing logic—is currently (and again) taking place, I call attention to the larger global context of activism that is providing current openings to Ethnic Studies practitioners—meaning scholars, activists, and artists alike. In highlighting this, my point is to stress that, if the field intends to remain relevant to current struggles—whether it’s through scholarly, activist, or creative efforts—and if it intends to go beyond the status quo, the activist foundations of Ethnic Studies must be aligned with current decolonizing social change happening all around in order to continue to produce work that is derived from the political coalitions, labor, and organizing happening on the ground.

The Coloniality of Organizing: A Challenge and/or Opening?

On November 2nd, 2009, I helped organize the event entitled “Activism from Below” which took place at the Multicultural Community Center (MCC), UCB. Along with commemorating the Mexican indigenous-based holiday *El Día de los Muertos* with a spiritual blessing, the event included spoken word performances and a multi-ethnic/gender/sexuality, inter-generational panel. This panel featured scholar-activists representing the 1968-69 Third World Liberation Front, the anti-apartheid student movement of the mid 1980s, the post-affirmative action activism at UCB that included the hunger strike of 1999 in favor of Ethnic Studies, and current organizing efforts at UCB known as the “Save the University” (SU) movement which had formed in Summer of 2009 in response to the many layoffs, university fee hikes, budget cuts and overall de-investment of public education across California colleges. Representing the latter, I gave a controversial speech entitled “The coloniality of organizing” which, among many things, provided a racial assessment of the student organizing of the SU movement that was generally comprised by a majority of privileged people.¹⁷

Based on my initial participation in the SU movement, I spoke about the countless frustrating moments of opposition I and others experienced as we pushed for a racial/race-consciousness politics to be central to the organizing. In the speech, I also advocated for creating a movement around public education that would have people of color and a decolonizing politic central to the organizing. In particular, I argued that the SU movement comprised of a majority of white middle-class folks that, whether conscious or unconscious, embodied colonizing politics in their organizing efforts. I claimed that the colonizing politics of the SU movement revealed themselves in many ways through the organizing. Examples of this included the general dismissal/erasure of current and past movements/activist efforts of people of color at UCB and beyond, the refusal to address questions of race/racism within current organizing efforts, the appropriation of spaces like the MCC, and the overwhelming wave of problematic discourse that was produced around the movement that, among many things, bled with white middle class privilege. Several people from the SU movement disagreed with my critiques while the concerns of others—particularly students of color that were part of long-term/sustained organizing efforts at UCB—were validated as my speech reflected a growing frustration that many campus activists felt. In fact, the speech and the event, in part, were created as a direct response to the “Save the University” movement—as a way of highlighting and making visible the histories of racism in society/the university

and of people of color social movements/activist efforts. Beyond this, however, one of the purposes of the speech and event was to also remind people that—as long-term/sustained politicized activist of colors—we did not need to seek inclusion into the problematic SU movement but could continue organizing on our terms with decolonizing politics instead. Onward from this event, I concentrated my energy in shaping the decolonizing activism at UCB and decided to only participate in the SU movement in a role of solidarity—often biting my tongue when confronted with many ideological problems of the movement.

What followed after November 2nd until the end of the spring of 2010 was a series of SU protests and decolonizing forms of activism that generally happened simultaneously but separately, with some people participating in both. In the former, the primary concerns were with defending/saving the university and with “the crisis” of the university. One example of activism from the SU movement includes the “Occupation of Wheeler Hall”—which was in protest of the UC Regents vote to increase student fees by 32 percent (from \$7,788 to \$10,302 the following fall). The “occupation” happened on November 20, 2009, was around eleven hours long, and resulted in 40 protesters in being arrested.¹⁸ Another example of SU activism was the March 4, 2010 “strike and day of action to defend public education.” At UCB, this day included a noon rally on Sproul Plaza that eventually turned into a march down Telegraph Avenue. The march ended in downtown Oakland at the Frank Ogawa plaza where a series of speeches and spoken word performances followed. In turn, the activism based on decolonizing politics focused on transforming/decolonizing the university and on the problem(s) of colonization/modernity itself. From this perspective, burning questions were asked: why should we “save” the university when it has always been, among many things, a racist institution that historically was not made for marginalized people? “Crisis” for whom and since when? One example of decolonizing activism at UCB included the February 27-28, 2010 conference commemorating the 40th anniversary of the campus’ Ethnic Studies Department entitled “Decolonizing the University: Fulfilling the Dream of the Third World College.”¹⁹ For this conference, hundreds of people across California—including former TWLF activists and current students of color from UC San Diego that had recently experienced “racial terror” at their campus²⁰—gathered at UCB to participate in cross-generational, multi-ethnic/gender/sexuality dialogues, panels, and workshops that related to art, activism, spirituality, and/or scholarship. Another example of decolonizing activism was the hunger strike in May, 2011 at UCB by primarily Xican@/Latin@ students.²¹ The ten day strike of almost 20 students resulted in many gains, including the chancellor publicly denouncing Arizona’s anti-immigrant SB1070 bill and eventually granting the Center for Latino Policy Research a quarter of a million dollars.²²

Because of my experience with “Save the University,” when I heard about the “Occupy Wall Street” (OWS) protest movement that began on September 17, 2011 in Zuccotti Park (located in New York City’s Wall Street financial district), I had my doubts. From the beginning of OWS (and since the “Occupation of Wheeler Hall”), I found the use of the word “occupy” problematic. Although the word “occupy” had been used in people of color movements and protests before—such as in the occupation of Alcatraz Island by the American Indian Movement in 1969 and in the occupation of UCB’s campanile clock tower by Xicana students in 1996—the term was used with decolonizing intentions, including raising awareness on the structural, racist conditions in the community and the university.²³

Given the current context of “the War on Terror” and the several US violent and militaristic occupations abroad, like in Iraq, I was suspicious of the use of the word “occupy” in OWS. Based on news articles (including alternative press), and livestream videos that circulated on the internet, and speaking with contacts I had in the area, OWS seemed to operate on an organizing logic with colonizing undertones similar to what I experienced in the SU movement. Although OWS was generative for protesting against social and economic inequality, political corruption, and corporate greed, it seemed that the movement had a narrow view of capitalism as it did not address other forms of colonizing power. Moreover, while the slogan “we are the 99%” was strategic as it addressed the growing income inequality and wealth distribution between the 1% and the rest of the population, I was suspicious that the motto was more of a homogenizing and colonizing move from a majority white middle class that, deliberately or unknowingly, erased/dismissed those from below rather than build meaningful solidarity with them. When “Occupy Oakland” (OO) was initiated on October 10, 2012—along with the many other demonstrations and occupations that started all over the country—my doubts and suspicions were confirmed.

After OO began, I was amazed by the potential of community organizing that I witnessed at the Frank H. Ogawa plaza.²⁴ A protest encampment was created that included, among many things, feeding, housing, and providing other resources to the community, such as many homeless folks. It was great to see people come together and have people engage in important conversations on a large scale, such as discussing the problems of capitalism and the political system of the US. It was as if many had collectively “come out” of a political closet of repression and were raising long-overdue critical questions and conversations in public. On October 25, the encampment was cleared out by several law enforcement agencies and the night eventually resulted in various injuries and around 100 people being arrested.²⁵ This happened because protesters tried to reclaim the encampment site, and I was present when police tear-gassed the public multiple times. The smell of violence penetrated my clothes and nostrils as the multiple grenades exploded around us. The poisonous gas produced a sensation of asphyxiation that invaded my throat and lungs, and it seemed like the contaminated air would swallow me whole in an instant. Additionally, as an act of biological resistance to the toxic clouds, my body forced me to shed uncontrollable tears that failed to alleviate the thousand-like invisible stings that burned my eyes. As I stumbled away from the smoke-covered downtown, I fortunately ran into some strangers at a near-by corner that had liquid antacid and water with them of which they poured into my eyes, relieving me of the pain. Despite this, I was participating in the OO because—like many in the movement—I was tired of the many oppressive conditions produced by capitalism. However, because the general analysis and understanding of oppression in OO focused on the problems of capitalism in a narrow way—as disconnected from other systems of power, like racism and hetero-patriarchy—I knew that my participation in the movement would be partial.

From the beginning of my involvement with OO, one of the main problems I found was that—like the SU movement—it was also operating under a colonizing logic of organizing. For example, although the encampment and protests were relatively diverse in comparison to others across the country, the majority of the people seemed to be nevertheless white and middle class, not from Oakland, and were often blinded by their privilege(s). As a result,

several articulations of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism and other forms of bigotry—some that were blatant others more inconspicuous—were often left unchecked in OO, such as the constant denial that racism and sexism, etc., are non-existent in the movement.

Another example of the coloniality of organizing was the use of the voting structure of outdoor “General Assemblies” (GA)—where those present make decisions based on consensus. Along with seeing familiar faces from the SU movement at OO, I was not surprised that the GA system (familiar to the SU movement) was also used in OO. Many praised the GA model for (supposedly) allowing the public to “truly” represent themselves in “authentic” democratic fashion. Decisions like the Oakland general strike of November 2nd and the shutdown of the port of Oakland on December 12 were made through the GA format.²⁶ Although these actions were productive on several levels, few questioned how the GA was problematic in numerous ways, such as how many that did not have the privilege (like time, money, and health) to spend hours in the cold of the evening/night were excluded from the process to eventually vote, or that making decisions by reaching consensus with a majority of white middle class non-Oakland folks (in a city where the majority of the population consists of African-Americans and Latin@s, many which are disenfranchised) did not reflect democracy as much as the colonization of space and time (again).

Decolonizing Possibilities

The coloniality of organizing was not particular to OWS or OO but to the Occupy movement in general. This was evident in the critiques from members of marginalized communities that emerged after several occupy encampments sprouted across the country, including Seattle, Albuquerque, Portland, and Sedona.²⁷ Critiques of heteronormative male privilege surfaced, formal anti-racist statements were made, and proposals to change the name from “occupy” to “de-occupy” or “decolonize” materialized.²⁸ Particular to OO, one example was the Queer/People of Color affinity group that was immediately formed when a Transgendered African-American publicly disclosed the lack of safety in the encampment—this person had been threatened with a knife and called racial slurs by an aggressive (intoxicated) white male the night before. Another example is the collaboration of indigenous and local activist-scholars that drafted a memorandum of solidarity with indigenous people and presented it to the GA of OO on October 28.²⁹ Among many things, this memorandum proposed that those participating in OO would seek the genuine and respectful involvement of indigenous peoples in the rebuilding of a new society on their ancestral lands, and to declare (in light of colonialist language of occupation) that OO “aspires to ‘Decolonize Oakland’—to ‘Decolonize Wall Street.’” Although I did not participate in drafting the memorandum, I participated in presenting it publicly at the GA. Foreseeing that questions and concerns would arise regarding the word “decolonize,” one of my friends that was part of the collaboration asked me to be present. Given that I have familiarity and experience with theories and actions surrounding the concept, I agreed. Indeed, the concept of “decolonize” raised concerns as some expressed apprehension to the term, especially when some mistakenly understood the memorandum as a proposal to change the name from OO to “Decolonize Oakland.” Although the memorandum passed after several clarifications and conversations, having to explain “decolonize” as well as justification for it to a majority of

white middle class folks felt like *déjà vu* of being in the SU movement all over again.

There were some efforts to work through the tensions that haunted the organizing and ideological foundations of OO. However, the majority in the movement, including those in leadership position—even though the movement claimed to not have any—were generally dismissive of the concerns coming from below, instead of seriously addressing the issues. Like in the SU movement, many in OO expressed indifference, impatience, and frustration with proposals and discussions that attempted to work through the problems that were important to members of marginalized communities. Eventually the tensions culminated on the chilly evening of December 4 at the Frank H. Ogawa plaza when the proposal was brought to the GA to formally change the name from Occupy to Decolonize. In the many hours of the heated debate, I heard a range of perspectives—from those wanting to use “decolonize” as a way to open the movement to greater participation of marginalized people to those wishing to keep “occupy” as this would “prevent divisiveness” in the movement. In the end, over 300 people were present and the proposal only received 68 per cent of approval and not the 90 per cent that it needed to pass.³⁰ Like the Nov. 2nd event and speech that marked the formal “decolonizing” separation from the SU movement at UCB, the refusal of the OO’s GA to pass the name change served as a similar catalyst for those that were in favor of a decolonizing politic and perspective. As a result, Decolonize Oakland now functions as its own entity and separately from OO.³¹

But the coloniality of organizing not only surfaced in OO but also at UCB once again when “Occupy CAL” (OC) took place on November 9, 2011. Allied with OWS and OO, OC brought attention to many issues concerning students, including recent and continuing exaggerated fee increases and budget cuts. That day, along with community members, students, staff, and professors at UCB participated in a series of “teach-outs” on campus that followed with a rally and march at noon. Over 1,000 demonstrators attended the days’ events and tents were eventually set-up in front of Sproul Hall. By late afternoon, law enforcement officials, including UCB Police and Alameda County Sheriffs, arrived in riot gear to remove the tents. Protestors formed a human chain in front of the tents as a way to prevent officers from undoing the encampment, but police used violent force as they jabbed many with their riot batons and dragged some by the hair before being arrested.³² A week later on November 18, Occupy UC Davis (OD) gained international attention after a video on YouTube showed university police pepper-spraying a group of demonstrators as they were seated on a paved path in the campus quad.³³ Both OC and OD caused much scandal at the respective universities and beyond as many could not believe that police would be “so violent” with “innocent,” “non-threatening,” “peaceful” students. Soon thereafter, race-class-gendered critiques and analysis emerged, such as pointing to how police violence is something historical and common to communities of color that are systemically criminalized, how the concern for police violence at the protest was connected to how the majority in the movement were of white and middle class backgrounds, and how these movements privileged class at the expense of eclipsing other, interrelated set of social problems.³⁴ In other words, like with the SU movement, many from underrepresented backgrounds—although they did not diminish the overall importance of the movement—saw how colonizing politics, wittingly or unwittingly, played out in the OC and OD movements.

Although several activists were ignited through the OC, the protests also created a lot

of confusion for many, particularly sustained, long-term underrepresented organizers. Many were unclear as to how they could be part of a movement that was problematic in numerous ways. Some opposed involvement while others felt an urge to nevertheless be supportive somehow. Having already faced similar dilemmas with the SU movement, three UCB radical Latino/Xicana student groups MECHxA, ¡YQUÉ!, and Xinaxtli (MechxYQUEnaxtli)—representing decolonizing politics that challenge the inherited colonial hierarchies, such as those of race, class, gender, and sexuality—came together as a coalition before the first protest to decide on how to proceed.³⁵ When OC took place on November 9, 2011, we decided to have a “teach out” for the larger Raza community at UCB. The purpose was to provide a space to talk about the significance of the occupy phenomena, to highlight the contradictions within the movement, and to discuss the imperative of decolonization. Although we respected the OC efforts and participated in solidarity, we took advantage of the momentum and aperture to galvanize the Latin@ students on campus and have important discussions from a decolonizing perspective.

What does all of this have to do with Ethnic Studies? Everything. The current social change dynamic I write about frames the “present” and this should compel Ethnic Studies to not only respond to the challenges facing communities of color and those at the margins but also to face the activist history of the project—in other words, its future(s). The subjection of Ethnic Studies, as is happening in Arizona, is likely to continue—if not increase—and attempts to marginalize the project as well as those that practice its vision remain. However, if the socio-political-economic colonizing context of the “present” is understood as an opportunity, Ethnic Studies, then, is surrounded with many possibilities. For example, Ethnic Studies can strengthen its commitment to activism by moving away from seeing social change thinkable only through research and by liberating itself from the conducts of traditional disciplines and institutionalizations. The field can continue doing this by strengthening the commitment to being involved in the current issues affecting marginalized people and society, building and serving as a bridge to the community, and shaping and contributing the conceptual work necessary for decolonization. Although it may be easier said than done, I believe that fear should never determine the limits of Ethnic Studies praxis, knowledge, and ideology. On the contrary, the “present” is always already perfect with potential to further finish the project of decolonization—this and much more.

Conclusion

As part of the 27th Annual Empowering Women of Color Conference at UCB on March 2nd, 2012, revolutionary activist-scholars Angela Y. Davis and Grace Lee Boggs spoke and shared their thoughts on many topics, including activism and the Occupy phenomena.³⁶ Angela Y. Davis stated that the latter is important but not a solution; rather, that it serves as an opening. Boggs followed with the question, “how do we take advantage of the opening?” Although MechxYQUEnaxtli took advantage of the opening by working beside OC, our decolonizing efforts also stand before this and also go beyond as our collaboration began years ago and continues until now. Moreover, while taking advantage of openings is useful, one must also work to be the opening itself, just like the Third World Liberation Front was in 1968-69 when it led the longest student strike in the US at the time. Their de-

colonizing activism challenged epistemological and institutional racism, eventually paving the way for Ethnic Studies Departments across the world. As Boggs advocates, there must be a balance between theory (philosophy) and practice (activism), that we must imagine new ways of creating society, and, perhaps most importantly, that we must change the way we see change and revolution itself. Along this line, we must also change the way we see the future(s) of Ethnic Studies as something yet to come but as something that has already been set in motion and must be completed—like the unfinished project of decolonization that, among many needs, includes fulfilling the dream of creating a Third World College at UCB (and elsewhere). In other words, as decolonizing activism and subsequent knowledge production are the foundation of Ethnic Studies so too is its future—and right now is always already the perfect opportunity to continue building upon this. Although this is an ongoing project, along with imagination, change, and determination, I hope that decolonizing love is central to the process.

Notes

1. Walter D. Mignolo, "Globalization and the Geopolitics of Knowledge: The Role of the Humanities in the Corporate University," *Nepantla: Views from the South*, 4.1, (2003), 114.
2. See Otis L. Scott, "Ethnic Studies: Preparing for the Future," in *Ethnic Studies Research: Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. by Timothy P. Fong (New York: Altamira Press, 2008), 17.
3. Harvey Dong, *Decolonizing the University: Fulfilling the Dream of the Third World College* [Web video], Mattie Harper (producer) and John Hamilton (Video Camera and Post-production), (2010), <http://vimeo.com/15729523> (accessed May 15, 2012).
4. For a detailed account of the separations of these movements, see Trinity A. Ordonez, "Coming Out Together: An Ethnohistory of the Asian and Pacific Islander Queer Women's and Transgendered People's Movement of San Francisco" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 2000).
5. See Asian Community Center Archive Group, *Stand Up: An Archive Collection of the Bay Area Asian American Movement 1968-1974* (Berkeley: East Wind Books, 2009), 43-45.
6. See Jack D. Forbes, "Ethnic or World Studies: A Historian's Path of Discovery," in *Ethnic Studies Research: Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. by Timothy P. Fong (New York: Altamira Press, 2008), 87.
7. University of Colorado at Boulder's Ethnic Studies Department Website, <http://ethnicstudies.colorado.edu/history> (accessed March 21, 2012). The César E. Chávez Chicana/o Studies Department at the University of California at Los Angeles is another example. See <http://www.chavez.ucla.edu/history> (accessed March 21, 2012).
8. Scott, 18 & 20.
9. Two recent examples include the Ethnic Studies Departments at the University of California at San Diego and at Riverside.
10. For more on this, see Scott, 22-25.
11. *Ibid.*, 20.
12. See Timothy P. Fong, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Studies Research: Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. by same author (New York: Altamira Press, 2008), 1-5.
13. Paola Bacchetta, *Decolonizing the University: Fulfilling the Dream of the Third World College* [Web video], Mattie Harper (producer) and John Hamilton (Video Camera and Post-production), (2010), <http://vimeo.com/15729523> (accessed May 15, 2012).
14. See Johnella E. Butler, "Ethnic Studies and Interdisciplinarity," in *Ethnic Studies Research: Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. by Timothy P. Fong (New York: Altamira Press, 2008), 253, and

- "Ethnic Studies as a Matrix for the Humanities, the Social Sciences, and the Common Good," in *Color-Line to Borderlands: The Matrix of American Ethnic Studies*, ed. by same author, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).
15. For an account of anti-HB 2281 youth protests, see Lydia R. Otero and Julio Cammarota, "Notes from the Ethnic Studies home front: student protests, texting, and subtexts of oppression," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol. 24, No. 5 (September-October 2011), 639-648; "Voices from the AZ Struggle," *Pan Left Productions*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xW63q_qgsRc, and "Fight Back – the Battle to Save Ethnic Studies," <http://www.pan-left.net/vlog/fight-back-the-battle-to-save-ethnic-studies/> (both accessed March 21, 2012).
 16. Scott, 25.
 17. "The Coloniality of Organizing: November 2nd Speech" was published in *La Voz* (UC Berkeley, Spring 2010) and in *Impaction*, No. 173, (Fall 2010). For more on the idea of coloniality, see Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," in *Cultural Studies*, Vol 21, Nos. 2-3, March/May 2007; Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" in *Nepantla: Views from South*, vol. 1, no. 3, 533-80.
 18. Justin Berton, Joe Garofoli, and Nanette Asimov, "Occupation of Wheeler Hall nears an end," *SFGate*, November 21, 2009.
 19. See *Decolonizing the University: Fulfilling the Dream of the Third World College*, [Web video], Mattie Harper (producer) and John Hamilton (Video Camera and Post-production), 2010, <http://vimeo.com/15729523> (accessed May 15, 2012).
 20. Racially charged incidents at the University of California at San Diego escalated during February 2010. These included the party described as a "Compton Cookout" that was held off-campus by a fraternity that relied upon and promoted racist/misogynist stereotypes and the hanging of a rope noose from a campus library bookcase that served as a symbol of lynching for African Americans. For more on this, see Larry Gordon, "Noose ignites more protests at UC San Diego," *The Los Angeles Times* (February 27, 2010). UCSD's Ethnic Studies Professor Yen L. Espiritu wrote an open letter asking the chancellor to declare a state of emergency and close down the campus. To see this letter and videos of student activism in response to the racism, see <http://stopracismucsd.wordpress.com/2010/02/26/racial-intimidation-at-ucsd-escalates-noose-found-at-geisel-library/> (accessed May 15, 2012). Other hate crimes included homophobic and other racially charged incidents in other campus including at the University of California at Davis. See David Greenwald, "Swastika Carved into Jewish Student's Door Among Two Incidents Investigated as Hate Crimes," *The People's Vanguard of Davis* (February 28, 2010).
 21. No author, "Cal Hunger Strike Ends After Ten Days," *KTVU.COM* (May 12, 2012).
 22. The center had received no funding the year before. For more on the hunger strike, see "Chancellor Birgeneau denounces Arizona immigration bill," *UC Berkeley News Center* (May 7, 2010).
 23. See Troy Johnson, "the Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Roots of American Indian Activism," *Wicazo Sa Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Autumn, 1994), 63-79; Jennie Marie Luna, "U.C. Berkeley Students Protest Vote to End Affirmative Action," *Z Magazine* (March 1997).
 24. This was renamed by the OO as the Oscar Grant plaza in memory of the young African-American male from the San Francisco Bay Area that was unarmed and shot in the back by a Bay Area Rapid Transit police officer in 2009. For more on the shooting, see Matthew B. Stannard and Demian Bulwa, "BART shooting captured on video," *SFGate* (January 7, 2009).
 25. Ali Winston, "The Police Raid on Occupy Oakland Was Nothing New For This City," *Colorlines: News for Action* (October 28, 2011).
 26. For more on the strike, see Lisa Leff, (November 02, 2011), "Occupy Oakland General Strike: City Prepares to be Movement's Epicenter," retrieved from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com>.
 27. See Queena Kim, "Campaign to Decolonize Oakland: Native Americans Say 'Occupy' Terminology is Offensive," *Truthout*, December 28, 2011. As recent as April 2, 2012, a statement and principles on decolonization passes at the general assembly of "Occupy Toronto." See <http://occupyto.org/2012/04/statement-and-principles-on-decolonization-passes-at-new-ga/> (accessed

- April 6th, 2012).
28. For a Feminist Queer of color critique of Occupy Oakland, see Andreana Clay, "Solidarity, White (Male) Privilege and Occupation," *Blog* (November 29, 2011), <http://queerblackfeminist.blogspot.com/2011/11/solidarity-white-male-privilege-and.html> (accessed May 21, 2012).
 29. For a copy of the memorandum, see Joanne Barker, "The memorandum of Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples," <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2011/10/29/18695950.php> (accessed March 22, 2012).
 30. See Davey D., "To Occupy or Decolonize? That is the Question...Is there an Easy Answer?" (December 8th, 2011), <http://hiphopandpolitics.com/2011/12/08/to-occupy-or-decolonize-that-is-the-question-is-there-an-easy-answer/> (accessed March 22, 2012); Also see, "Open Letter to The 'Occupy' Movement: The Decolonization Proposal," (video) http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=r_s3X0uW9Ec (accessed March 22, 2012).
 31. See <http://decolonizeoakland.org> (accessed March 22, 2012).
 32. For more on this, see Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "The Crisis of the Public University," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (December 19, 2011).
 33. For more on this, see "UC Davis Student Describes Pepper Spray Attack on Occupy Campus Protesters," *Democracy Now!* (November 21, 2011).
 34. See Breeze Harper, "UC Davis and Racialized Politics of Sentimentality," (video), http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=x0qTJH55y1o (accessed March 22, 2010).
 35. Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/Xicana de Aztlán (MEChxA) is a student group which seeks to create a space for Xicana/Latino students at UCB that promotes higher education, culture, and history that was founded on the principles of self-determination for the liberation of people. Young Queers United for Empowerment (¡YQUÉ!) is a UCB student group for those who identify as jotería (Queer Latin@). This group primarily focuses on providing a safe space to dialogue about the simultaneous oppression relating to race and sexuality, on creating a social environment to build community, and on being politically active on campus and beyond. Xinaxtli is a student group at UCB that is grounded in various indigenous, feminist, and social justice political and philosophies. Xinaxtli's goals include providing a safe space for the empowerment of Xican@/Latin@ communities, to be politically active, to strengthen spirituality, and to engage with the campus and larger community.
 36. For more information on this event, see <https://ewocc.wordpress.com> (accessed March 22, 2012).