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**#ABOLISHICE: AN ANTI-CAPITALIST AND ANTI-COLONIAL APPROACH TO
BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND MIGRANT SOLIDARITY BUILDING**

By

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B.A. GLOBAL STUDIES AND POLITICS, THE NEW SCHOOL UNIVERSITY, 2015

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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**B.A., Global Studies and Politics, The New School University, 2015
M.A., American Studies, University of New Mexico, 2020**

ABSTRACT

This thesis project interrogates possible sites of alignment and solidarity building between the migrant justice movement, Black liberation and Indigenous decolonization. By first looking at the use of tear gas in Ferguson, Standing Rock and at the U.S.-Mexico border, I argue that a solidarity between Black, Indigenous and migrant communities rooted in an anti-capitalist and anti-colonial desire is absolutely necessary. Moreover, by focusing primarily on the migrant justice movement, I argue that the current iterations centered on inclusion and recognition reinforce the State’s dominion over bodies of color and exacerbate Black death and Indigenous genocide. As such, this thesis proposes the use of the hashtag #AbolishICE as a useful point of departure that can bring Black liberation, Indigenous decolonization and migrant justice into conversation with one another.

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Introduction:

On November 24, 2014, Ferguson police fired tear gas at demonstrators who were protesting the jury's decision to not indict Darren Wilson, the white police officer who murdered eighteen-year old Michael Brown. On November 20, 2016, police deployed water cannons and tear gas against Indigenous water protectors who were protesting the building of the North Dakota Access Pipeline. On November 26, 2018, US border patrol officers fired tear gas against migrants seeking asylum at the US-Mexico border. Although distinct in their geographical and temporal locations, each incident takes place within the context of white settler colonialism, capitalist expansion and U.S. imperialism. This context is an important point of convergence that reveals the conditions that animate the violence that marks Black, Indigenous and migrant living.

In placing Ferguson, Standing Rock and the U.S.-Mexico border in conversation with one another, I suggest that these moments are not fixed or static, rather they are fluid and as such, interconnected with one another.¹ In order to make this argument, I adopt a relational comparative approach, which centers “difference, contradictions, and heterogeneities” to forge “a language that captures ‘what cannot be known, what escapes articulation.’”² In this, I am interested in the ways Black, Indigenous and migrant struggles intersect to articulate shared visions for the future and create the necessary grammars for anti-capitalist and anti-colonial solidarities. Further, I utilize a critical juxtaposition methodology to deliberately pair “seemingly different historical events...in an effort to reveal what would otherwise remain invisible.”³ In this case, a critical juxtaposition uncovers how capitalism and colonialism create a similar

¹ Espiritu, YẾN Lê, and Diane Wolf. “The Appropriation of American War Memories: a Critical Juxtaposition of the Holocaust and the Vietnam War.” *Social Identities*, vol. 19, no. Pg. 1

² Jr., Antonio T. Tiongson. “Afro-Asian Inquiry and the Problematics of Comparative Critique.” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2015, pg. 41

³ Espiritu, YẾN Lê, and Diane Wolf. Pg. 2

environment of toxicity and unbreathability for Black, Indigenous and migrant bodies. In short, in engaging in this critical juxtaposition, I aim to articulate how the migrant justice movement can build and sustain solidarities with Black liberation and Indigenous decolonization rooted in anti-capitalist and anti-colonial desires.

To arrive at this point of convergence, I ask the following: *What does the teargassing at Ferguson, Standing Rock and at the U.S.-Mexico border reveal about the relationalities between Black, Indigenous and migrant communities? and further, how might abolition, as a political project and analytical lens, provide an avenue towards building solidarities that privilege anti-colonial and anti-capitalist visions for the future?*

In asking these questions, I gesture towards encounters with tear-gas to highlight how bodies of color exist in a perpetual proximity to violence. In the article, *Simultaneity and Solidarity in the Time of Permanent War*, Marie Lo diligently explores this permanence and regularity of violence. She expresses how the U.S. has historically invoked plenary—exclusive, unlimited or absolute—power when “national security and sovereignty” are threatened. This plenary power, which can take the shape of executive orders and policies that have little to no congressional oversight, allows for the State to “protect its borders, and regulate entry without need for judicial review.”⁴ While plenary power derives particularly from immigration laws, it is far-reaching and has been historically “invoked to undermine and overrule Indigenous sovereignty as well as justify the colonization of territories.”⁵ In the context of settler colonialism, plenary power consistently situates Indigenous peoples, immigrants, colonized

⁴ Lo, Marie. “Simultaneity and Solidarity in the Time of Permanent War.” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, 2019, pp. 39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pg 39

peoples, and people of color as the object of its routine exceptionality.⁶ Although Lo asserts that this is reflective of what she terms a “permanent race war,” I would expand on her argument to stress that this permanent race war is a necessary component of the continued project of conquest. The permanent race war does not exist in an isolated vacuum. Rather it is a tool used to facilitate the dispossession of Black, Indigenous and migrant life.

Challenges

As I take on this project, I am aware that there are still challenges and limitations to understanding the entanglements between Indigenous, Black and migrant living. The first challenge is one that is currently preoccupying a variety of scholars in the field (such as K. Wayne Yang, Ayko Day, Jodi Byrd, Tiffany Lethabo King, amongst others cited here), which is namely on how to critically engage with anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity without privileging one over the other or falling into the causal-effect trap that seeks a linear/neat understanding of dispossession. The challenge of working through affirmations for Black life in the context of stolen land, and asserting claims to land in the context of the afterlives of slavery is indeed one that is important to confront head on. Hence, in resisting the urge to present anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity as a binary, I borrow from scholar Tiffany Lethabo King’s use of the term *conquest* as one that can help negotiate the relationship between the two. King, author of *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, asserts that linguistically, the use of conquest “speaks directly to and addresses the gratuitous violence that discourses of ‘settlement’ often evade.”⁷ In King’s words, “a distinguishing aspect of the colonization of the

⁶ Ibid., pg 41

⁷ King, Tiffany Lethabo. *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*. Duke University Press, 2019. Pg.51

Americas and other settler states is genocide, not settlement or settlers.”⁸ Conquest, then, corrects the idea of colonization as strictly a settlement project and signals towards the “ongoing violence of genocide and captivity” that continue to define it. Further, conquest is a useful term to bring forth a critique towards the construction of the ‘human’ vis a vis the ‘conquistador’ (European man). Here, both Black and Indigenous are “ontologically rendered nonhuman” and while they are not ontological equivalents, they “do share the urgent concerns of the flesh.”⁹ In bringing Indigeneity and Blackness in conversation with one another, conquest is a useful analytic and term because it describes the ongoing set of relations that “structure Black and Indigenous life,”¹⁰ such as capitalism and settler colonialism. Further, as King notes, conquest is “not an event, not even a structure, but a milieu of active set of relations that we can push on, move around in, and redo from moment to moment.”¹¹As such, I use *project of conquest* throughout this thesis to describe the ongoing set of relations that give meaning to anti-blackness and anti-indigeneity, not as fixed relations but as relations that have the capacity to transform and be transformed.

A second challenge that emerges in this project is the risk to assume a uniformity of experiences. Meaning, the challenge is bringing these moments into conversation with one another without suggesting they are rooted in the same form of dispossession. It is easy to fall into that trap especially when all three instances feature the same technology of violence; tear gas. However, it is important to note that there are fundamental ontological differences that need

⁸ Ibid., pg. 57.

⁹ Ibid., pg. 55.

¹⁰ Ibid., pg. 59.

¹¹ Ibid., pg. 40.

to be accounted for, namely Black fungibility and Indigenous genocide.¹² That said, these ontological differences still allow for a comprehensive engagement between Blackness and Indigeneity and in fact, they call to a deeper engagement between the two. In her article, *Weather With You: Settler Colonialism, Antiracism, and the Grounded Relationalities of Resistance*, Jodi Byrd calls attention to this as she suggests that “Indigeneity can often be lost, or incompletely apprehended, even within the emphases on structures over events that capture all subject positions within empire. At the same time, Blackness, too, is lost, and as Jared Sexton reminds us, ‘Slavery as the conversion of person into property would simply be an extreme form of colonization. Or, vice versa, colonization would be an attenuated form of slavery.’”¹³ Thus, it is important to note that in placing Blackness in conversation with Indigeneity, I am working against the notion that their shared suffering is reducible simply to either colonization or capitalism. In fact, I take King’s assertion that “genocide and slavery do not have an edge” and “while the force of their haunt has distinct feelings at the stress points and instantiations of Black fungibility and Native genocide, the violence moves as one.”¹⁴ In this case, violence is produced through the project of conquest and while it is unique and specific to each, violence as a whole exists to dispossess of land and life.

Further, in working against the challenge of assuming a uniformity of experiences, I confront the messiness of conquest and the messy relationships it produces. In theorizing the concept of messiness, I place it along the same lines as Audre Lorde’s use of chaos. In

¹² King, Tiffany Lethabo. “Labor’s Aphasia: Toward Antiracism as Constitutive to Settler Colonialism.” *Decolonization, Education, Indigeneity and Society*, 19 June 2014

¹³ Byrd, Jodi. “Weather With You: Settler Colonialism, Antiracism, and the Grounded Relationalities of Resistance.” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, Vol 5, no. 1-2.2019. Pg 207

¹⁴ King, Tiffany. Pg. X

referencing Lorde, King mentions, “erotic power can lead one into chaos and into the act of sharing in the either persons journey through darkness and chaos to another side.”¹⁵ King further states, “while chaos can represent a dark and scary space, perhaps the reality of Indigenous genocide or Black suffering that the other has to become aware of and confront, it has the potential to move us close to knowledge and transformation.”¹⁶ In a similar fashion, my use of messiness adopts the notion of chaos as a space of transformation and as a space of unknowing and becoming at once. In this ‘messy’ space, our relationships to each other and to the structures of violence are not linear and predictable. Messy relationalities are not static, they are fluid and in constant state of flux. This allows for endless possibilities and for imagining new ways of existing individually and collectively. In these messy spaces, emotions are bountiful, and anger, joy and fear coexist to develop something new, something better.

All of this being said, my project asserts what many other scholars, including Jodi Byrd, Glen Coulthard, Audra Simpson, Tiffany Lethabo King and Christina Sharpe, have expressed, which is namely that violence (in the forms of anti-black racism and Indigenous dispossession) are fixed features of the project of conquest. This violence, I contest, informs that violence that migrants encounter. As such, struggles in the migrant justice movement that seek inclusion and recognition will only reinforce and legitimize the State’s dominion over bodies of color. This prompts us to seek other access points for building solidarities and new frameworks for imagining futurities that resist neoliberal logics of inclusion. For this, I propose solidarities rooted in what Audre Lorde presents as *erotic power*. As Lorde defines it, erotic power is a “measure between the beginning of our sense of our self and the chaos of our strongest

¹⁵ King, Tiffany. Pg. 145

¹⁶ Ibid. Pg. 145

feelings...an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire.”¹⁷ Put briefly, erotic power digs into our deepest emotions (pleasure, joy, desire, anger) and allows for new ways of theorizing Black, Indigenous and migrant living in line with these emotions. In centering the erotic, we are forced to confront all of our emotions and ask ourselves, what would it mean to imagine a thriving future for Black and migrant living within Indigenous land? And how might migrant and Indigenous communities assert their livelihood without reproducing anti-blackness and Western concepts of the human?

In asking these questions, I am also pushing forth the idea that there are better ways of existing with each other. In order to arrive at this space, I propose abolition as an analytical framework and political position that can help move our visions into anti-capitalist and anti-colonial futurities. In so doing, I place abolition not as a separate project from decolonization, but rather as a project that is rooted in decolonial praxis. In understanding the limitations of this thesis, I privilege abolition as a means to anchor migrant justice, and specifically the abolition of ICE and detention centers, within the contours of Black liberation and Indigenous decolonization. Respectively, I interrogate the use of the hashtag #AbolishICE as a project that is rooted both within the Black radical tradition and Indigenous decolonization. Here, I am attending to author Harsha Walia’s suggestion that ‘the politics of decolonization and abolition must be foundational to all our movements in a way that centers, rather than erases, the historic and ongoing legacies of struggle emerging from these communities.’¹⁸ Bearing this in mind, I

¹⁷Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984. Pg. 88

¹⁸ Walia, Harsha, and Andrew Dilts . “Dismantle & Transform: On Abolition, Decolonization, & Insurgent Politics.” *Abolition Journal* , 10 Aug. 2016

use abolition throughout this project with the understanding that while it is deeply connected with decolonization, it holds its own historical specificities. Moreover, in this dialogic between abolition and decolonization, I am engaging in conversations that are currently preoccupying the field of American Studies. Indeed, in the 2019 issue of the *Critical Ethnic Studies* journal titled *Solidarities of Nonalignment: Abolition, Decolonization and Anti-capitalism*, editors Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang bring together several scholars in order to sustain conversations on the “incommensurate yet companion projects of abolition and decolonization.”¹⁹ In bringing abolition, decolonization and anti-capitalism in conversation with each other, scholars engage in urgent intellectual interventions that “seek to delegitimize the multiple and interlocking hierarchies of domination that have impeded the potentialities of human life.”²⁰ In speaking specifically about their use of the term abolition, the contributing scholars suggest that they seek to “engage the history of slavery as foundational to regimes of empire and capitalist accumulation, contouring racial, colonial, and economic violence while remaining irreducible or collapsible to intersecting structures.”²¹ Similarly, in taking on abolition as not only an important key term to this project, but political praxis and analytical lens—I am attempting to bridge Black, Indigenous and migrant struggles in the context of an ongoing project of conquest. I adopt abolition echoing Black feminist scholar and activist, Angela Davis’ assertion that just as “prison is considered an inevitable and permanent feature of our social lives,”²² so too are capitalism and colonialism. Abolition works to undo not only the institutional structures, but the very way social relations and ideologies are shaped. I adopt abolition in this project understanding it both as an

¹⁹Tuck, Eve, and Wayne Yang. “Introduction by the Journal Coeditors.” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, 2019, pg. 1

²⁰ Viola, Michael J., et al. “Introduction to *Solidarities of Nonalignment: Abolition, Decolonization, and Anticapitalism*.” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, 2019, pg. 6

²¹ Ibid. pg 10.

²² Davis, Angela. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Pg. 9

analytical lens to see beyond what is and also as a praxis for our struggles that can move collective imaginaries beyond the seemingly permanent and fixed structures of capitalism and colonialism.

Thesis/Roadmap:

This project is concerned with two main matters. First, with making sense of the environment where Black, Indigenous and migrant living and breathing take place. And second, with building abolitionist-based solidarity efforts grounded on a desire to create new environments and futurities. In order to tackle these two matters, I break this project into a series of sections. In the first section, I discuss the relationship between colonialism and capitalism to express how Black, Indigenous and migrant struggles are connected with one another. I use the framework of *economies of dispossession* to make these connections clear. I then move on to section two, where I interrogate the history of solidarity and express my rationale for why I privilege erotic solidarities as an avenue towards new imaginaries. Here, I explicate how the *erotics* serve as a guiding framework for solidarity efforts centered on collective desire for something better. For section three, I focus on the use of tear gas as a necessary tool of control. Here, I also analyze how the three instances of violence outlined above are a part of the ongoing project of conquest that seeks to sever Black, Indigenous and migrant relationships to each other, to land and to life. I pay special attention to the tear gassing that occurs during these moments to situate Black, Indigenous and migrant suffering within what author Kristen Simmons terms as settler atmospheric, or “the normative and necessary violence found in settlement--accruing, adapting and constricting Indigenous and Black life in the U.S. settler state.”²³ I also borrow from Christina Sharpe’s theorization of the Weather to discuss how anti-

²³ Simmons, Kristen. “Settler Atmospherics.” *Society for Cultural Anthropology*. 2017

Blackness is pervasive in the atmosphere. I follow section four with a lengthy discussion on prison abolition and its utility within anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movements. I discuss how abolition fits into Indigenous decolonization and Black liberation and make the argument for abolition as a necessary component for erotic solidarities to endure. Lastly, in section five, I conduct a visual and textual analysis of the hashtag #AbolishICE to demonstrate how it fits into building solidarities based on anti-capitalist and anti-colonial desires. I conclude my thesis with three main arguments: one; tear gassing in Ferguson, Standing Rock and at the U.S.-Mexico border demonstrates violence (and the creation of toxic environments) as a fixed feature of the state-making project, two; migrant struggles rooted in inclusion and recognition will only reinforce the state's legitimacy and will exacerbate Black death and Indigenous genocide, and three; solidarities between Black, Indigenous and migrant communities are not only necessary, but they must be rooted in a deep commitment and desire towards futurities that are anti-capitalist and anti-colonial.

Literature review:

In engaging the role of migrant justice within Black liberation and Indigenous decolonization, I am working alongside other scholars who have raised similar questions. Notably, in 2014 scholar and activist Harsha Walia wrote the foundational text, *Undoing Border Imperialism* where she interrogates the construction of borders and situates them within a larger imperialist project. Walia uses this context to examine how the migrant justice movement in Canada supports ongoing decolonizing efforts. Through a case-study of the organization *No One is Illegal*, she demonstrates how the fight for migrant justice can be effectively carried out without reproducing or reinforcing the white settler project. Similarly, author Krista Johnston

uses her dissertation, *Unsettling Citizenship: Movements for Indigenous Sovereignty and Migrant Justice in a Settler City*, to argue that policies of immigration and citizenship are not only integral to the settler project in Canada, but they also carry implications for alliances between Indigenous sovereignty and migrant justice. Both authors engage in difficult conversations and put forth a strong argument for why (and how) the migrant justice movement must support Indigenous decolonization efforts. This is a departure from a migrant justice movement centered on inclusion and recognition. In fact, this goes entirely against the principles of inclusion, especially ones that are rooted in labor politics and productivity. For example, King mentions that under neoliberal frameworks, labor is used as a “discourse that allows immigrants and migrants to narrate the terms of their belonging and citizenship within White settler colonial states.”²⁴ Migrant justice movements that adopt a language of productivity and labor (i.e. “hard-workers” “doing the jobs no one else wants”), are inadvertently seeking inclusion into the same systems that dispossess Black and Indigenous communities. As such, my project attempts to reconstitute the tenets of migrant justice so that these are in line with Black and Indigenous struggles. In this manner, I propose a migrant justice movement that rejects inclusion into the settler regime vis-a-vis citizenship and belonging, and instead follows Black liberation and Indigenous decolonization towards an abolition of borders, the state, colonialism and capitalism.

Furthermore, while both Johnston and Walia lay the groundwork for understanding migrant justice within the context of settler colonialism, both projects are situated in Canada and thus are limited in their applicability in the context of the U.S. Understanding this setting is important because Canada and the U.S. have different histories with Indigenous communities

²⁴ King, Tiffany. 2014

that are important to consider. Bonita Lawrence speaks to this in her article *Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview*. She mentions,

“in Canada, for the most part, the imposition of Indian status as a method of controlling Indianness has to a certain extent obscured the fact that the status system, while promoting gender domination, also control, in a rough way, blood quantum. On the other hand, in the United States, Native identity has been regulated openly through a system of blood quantum. Comparing the ‘choices’ offered by colonial regulation of Indianness—the highly patriarchal system of the Indian Act with its covert regulation of blood quantum, versus the apparently gender-neutral system of blood quantum that is overtly race-based—we see that one system generates high levels of sexism (along with racism), while the other generates high levels of racism.”²⁵

I point to this to this to illustrate how settler colonialism has distinct standards of government regulation, which results in different racialized formations in both Canada and the U.S. These racialized formations are important to bear in mind because they guide the ongoing conversations on Indigenous sovereignty, decolonization and migrant justice. Indeed, conversations have to be rooted to their historical specificity and in thinking about this project as centered within the contours of Black liberation and Indigenous decolonization, geographical location matters to the extent that it shapes anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity, and ultimately informs state-sanctioned violence against migrants. Additionally, missing from both authors work is any mention of Blackness. This glaring omission is a dangerous one as it does not take into account how Black liberation plays within migrant justice and Indigenous decolonization. Thus, my project draws from and expands on both Johnston and Walia’s work by situating migrant justice both within Indigenous decolonization efforts and Black liberation.

I do want to pause briefly to clarify that even though I speak of Black, Indigenous and migrant struggles as if the three exist in isolation--I understand that they are intimately connected and through this project I hope to render visible the connections that the project of conquest

²⁵ Lawrence, Bonita. “Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview.” *Hypatia*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2003, pg.20

actively works to conceal. Recent projects, such as Tiffany Lethabo King's, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* and Shannon Speed's *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Woman Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State*, reveal the intimacies between Black, Indigenous and migrant communities. In King's long-awaited project, she presents the shoal, a shallow area in the sea that is neither of land or ocean, as "as an interstitial and emerging space of becoming."²⁶ King theorizes the shoal as a moment of slowing down and pausing to consider Black thought and life in relation to Indigenous living. The shoal is a metaphor to foreground Black and Native relationalities. King's work regards Black and Indigenous livingness as intimately connected and as requiring similarly connected visions for the future. She argues that Black abolition and Native decolonization "frustrate liberal (and other) modes of humanism" and "offer new forms of sociality and futurity."²⁷ In bringing Black thought in conversation with Indigeneity, King effectively demonstrates the need for engaged dialogue between the two. Although Speed's work is of a different scope, she also offers important insight into the connection between migrant and Indigenous living. In speaking of Indigenous women who cross the border, Speed argues, "from the time they cross the border, they are engaged by the state only as 'Mexican nationals' or 'Guatemalan nationals,' which effectively erases their Indigenous identity...however, Indigenous identity is not something that vanishes when moving through space."²⁸ Speed's work is an important intervention to scholarship that privileges a U.S.-exceptionalism and that does not take into account how the America's (North, Central and South) have all been colonized by European powers. Shannon's work forces us to pause and slow down to consider how the "structures of settler capitalist

²⁶ King, Tiffany. Pg. 3

²⁷ Ibid., XV

²⁸ Speed, Shannon. *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2019. Pg. 12-13

power” are distributed across the America’s. Indeed, this realization forces us to rethink of Indigeneity beyond U.S.-based notions of recognition.

Although their projects are of different scope, both King and Speed present the relationships between communities that are often theorized separately, highlighting how this separation not only limits scholarship, but also visions for the future. At this juncture, and especially as scholarship on relationality between Blackness and Indigeneity emerges, it is crucial to sustain conversations with the role that migrants fit within this triage. In effect, this sustained engagement will bridge Black studies, migrant studies and Indigenous studies as fields that deal with similar structures of power. It also helps place these in conversation with one another while maintaining the historical specificities of each. At stake, is a continued disavowal of the multiple ways bodies of color are dispossessed, from land, life and from each other.

Section 1: Colonialism and Capitalism

In recognizing the need for theorizing Black, Indigenous and migrant relationalities together, I use the *economies of dispossession* to situate migrant justice within the context of Indigenous dispossession and Black death. This lens grounds the context under which Black, Indigenous and migrant living and breathing takes place. Here, the contributors to the journal, *Social Text: Economies of Dispossession: Indigeneity, Race, Capitalism*, Jodi A. Byrd, Alyosha Goldstein, Jodi Melamed and Chandan Reddy, provide the very generative framework of *economies of dispossession* to help make sense of these relationships. *Economies of dispossession*, according the authors, refers to the “multiple and intertwined genealogies of racialized property, subjection and expropriation through which capitalism and colonialism take

shape historically and change over time.”²⁹ Byrd et al suggest that “colonialism—like other modes of “so-called original accumulation”—is frequently treated as merely a historical precursor to the subsequent depredations of racism rather than an ongoing relation of theft, displacement, foreclosure and violence that cannot be reduced to one determinate relation to racialization.”³⁰ Colonialism is not only the moment through which capitalism is made possible, rather it is foundational to its emergence and it is an ongoing project. Here, colonialism is not reduced to the past, but rather it is a present condition under which capitalism has continued to prosper. It is important to draw on this point especially in recognizing how “Indigenous peoples in the Americas have been disarticulated from a materialist paradigm of labor in particular and capitalism in general.”³¹ This has reinforced and reproduced the idea of the Indigenous figure as existing outside of the purview of capitalism, and at times, reduced to a history/past that is no longer relevant. This is detrimental for many reasons, but within the limits of this project, it removes the possibility of anti-capitalist solidarities to emerge. Recent scholarship emerging from the field of Indigenous studies, including that of scholars Glen Coulthard, Sherene Razack, Melanie Yazzie, and Jodi Byrd amongst others, have suggested anti-capitalism as a core tenet for decolonization and Indigenous resurgence. In Coulthard’s words, “for [Indigenous] nations to live, Capitalism must die.”³² Accordingly, colonialism and capitalism must be placed in conversation with one another so that in their encounters, erotic solidarities can emerge.

²⁹ Byrd, Jodi A., Alyosha Goldstein, Jodi Melamed, and Chandan Reddy. Pg. 1

³⁰ Byrd, et al. Pg 6

³¹ Viola, Michael J., et al. “Introduction to Solidarities of Nonalignment: Abolition, Decolonization, and Anticapitalism.” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, pg. 13

³² Coulthard, Glen. *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*” University of Minnesota Press. 2014. Pg 2

Racialization (and subsequent racism) is also an important feature of capitalism. In his article, *On Race, Violence, and So-Called Primitive Accumulation*, author Nikhil Pal Singh writes a detailed account on the links between slavery, capitalist abstraction “and the subsequent constitution of racial differentiation within capitalism.”³³ Through his work, Singh demonstrates how capitalism and racialization are not a causal-effect relationship. Rather, racialization is a foundational and permanent marker of capitalism. Singh asserts that “the production of racial stigma that arises in support of chattel slavery makes a specific and enduring contribution to developing what might be termed the material, ideological and affective infrastructures of appropriation and dispossession that are indispensable to capitalism as a set of distinctive productive relationships.”³⁴ Here, the term racial capitalism is useful in highlighting how racialization is not a by-product or unintended consequence of capitalism. Instead, as Byrd et al. frame it, “capitalism is racial capitalism from its inception and its various instantiations.”³⁵ Not only that, but “racialization and racism further colonial dispossession just as the colonization of Indigenous peoples and those subjected to colonial rule contribute to the specific conditions and practices through which racialized subordination are enacted”³⁶ Racial capitalism relies on the dispossession of Indigenous people’s land and life, but through its racialization, it also ensures the continued dispossession of other bodies of color as well. It is precisely a racial capitalism within the context of settler colonialism that sets forth the stage for the violence that Black, migrant and Indigenous communities systematically encounter. In fact, colonialism and capitalism create asymmetrical social “relations of power predicated upon race, class, gender,

³³ Singh, Nikhil Pal. Pg 28

³⁴ Singh, Nikhil Pal. Pg 27

³⁵ Byrd. Et al. Pg 5.

³⁶ Ibid., pg. 1

sexuality, spirituality, pedagogy, ecology, interstate politico-military organizations and other global hierarchies of domination.”³⁷ As such, it is necessary to place them in dialogue with one another in order to generate alternative visions that can counter those relations.

For the purpose of this project, I am interested in spectacular forms of violence (such as teargassing) but I am cognizant that violence manifests itself in very quotidian manners as well. In her seminal text, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, slavery and Self-Making In the Nineteenth Century*, Saidiya Hartman interrogates how violence and terror are constitutive to Blackness by looking at the “scenes in which terror can hardly be discerned—slaves dancing in the quarters, the outrageous darky antics of the minstrel stage, the constitution of humanity in slave law, and the fashioning of self-possessed individuals.”³⁸ In focusing on these moments, Hartman illuminates “the terror of the mundane and quotidian rather than exploit the shocking spectacle.”³⁹ Hartman presents these scenes of subjection to illustrate the spectrum of violence that is co-constitutive to Blackness. As such, I chose the three particular vignettes of violence displayed through the use of tear gas, mindful that they are not exceptional and are only a small portion of the range of violence that Black bodies are subjected to—informing the violence that Indigenous and other racialized bodies encounter. In fact, I chose these particular vignettes to express how violence is always present for bodies of color, but also as a means to call attention to what this violence reveals about the relationship between Black, Indigenous and migrant communities. The three vignettes I interrogate are the same ones I opened up my project with. Namely, the 2018 teargassing of migrants at the US-Mexico border, the 2016 teargassing against

³⁷ Viola, Michael J., et al. “Introduction to Solidarities of Nonalignment: Abolition, Decolonization, and Anticapitalism.” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 5, pg 7.

³⁸ Hartman, Saidiya. “Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in the Nineteenth Century America.” Oxford University Press. 1997. Pg 4

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4

Indigenous communities in North Dakota, and the 2014 teargassing against Black bodies in Ferguson. Again, in juxtaposing these moments, I am not trying to make an argument on the similarity between them to suggest that all are the same. Instead, I point to these moments as examples of the toxic environments that the project of conquest creates and to place these moments as a part of the chaotic and messy spaces of possibility, spaces where bodies of color “descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions for [the] future.”⁴⁰ In this, I am working through chaos as the convergence of struggles and emotions. Emotions such as joy and happiness, but also pain and suffering and pain, as these are emotions readily present in the project of conquest. As such, I use tear gas and the cloud of smoke it creates as a metaphor for the chaos that capitalism and colonialism form. To this end, I argue that it is precisely within that chaos (spaced of unknowing, of friction and tension, of rupture, of becoming) that we can move towards a solidarity building that is grounded on anti-capitalist and anti-colonial imaginings.

Understanding the relationship between colonialism and capitalism is very important in considering how solidarity efforts must move forward. Colonialism and capitalism work in tandem with one another, and any gesture towards anti-capitalist futures must necessarily include anti-colonial critiques. Thus, Black liberation and migrant justice must be rooted in a critique against the settler state. Similarly, indigenous decolonization has to be directed by an inherent anti-capitalist stance. In the article titled, *Decolonizing Development in Diné Bikeyah*, Diné scholar, Melanie Yazzie points out that “inequality is a structural feature of capitalism, which requires the reproduction of violent relations of domination and exploitation in order to facilitate

⁴⁰ Lorde, Audre. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. Pg 112

the accumulation and concentration of profit in the hands of a small ruling class at the expense of a mass class of racialized and colonized poor.”⁴¹ As Yazzie asserts, violence is a core tenet of capitalism, which is directed through resource extraction and ‘development’ under the colonial context. Yazzie provides an important analysis on the relationship between colonialism and capitalism. Here, colonialism is not the precursor to capital/wealth accumulation. Instead, colonialism and capitalism operate concurrently to generate the conditions of violence and dispossession of land and life. Jodi Byrd makes a similar argument in suggesting that colonialism is the “precise ground of an ongoing U.S. occupation of Indigenous territoriality.”⁴² Both Yazzie and Byrd point us towards recognizing that colonialism is not a project of the past, nor is it a project entirely separated from capitalism. Byrd asserts, “U.S. modernity was created through the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the seizure of Indigenous lands, and U.S. modernity was created through chattel slavery.”⁴³ The legacies of colonialism and capitalism, and their continuations, are integral to the State formation and the shaping of Black and Indigenous existence. Thus, our solidarities and imaginaries for the future must converge at the point of desiring ways of existing beyond capitalist and colonial formations.

Section 2: Solidarity

Solidarity

⁴¹ Yazzie, Melanie K. “Decolonizing Development in Diné Bideyah.” *Environment and Society*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2018, pg. 27

⁴² Byrd, Jodi. “Weather With You: Settler Colonialism, Antiracism, and the Grounded Relationalities of Resistance.” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, Vol 5, no. 1-2.2019. Pg 207

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 209

My project positions solidarity between Black, Indigenous and migrant communities as a necessary component towards building anti-capitalist and anti-colonial visions for the future. However, as Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang remind us, we often “take solidarity for granted as a necessary political constant.”⁴⁴ In doing so, we fail to critically engage with solidarity as a term and political project that is in a constant state of flux. For this project, I privilege the term *solidarity* as it emerged out of the labor movement, well aware of how it evolves and adapts to temporal necessities while also recognizing its utility in developing shared visions for the future.

The term solidarity has a long and complicated history. It originated from Roman law and later found its use within the Catholic church, in both instances its usage was nested within conservative impulses.⁴⁵ During the latter half of the nineteenth century, solidarity gained association to a Marxist and communist ideology. In a Marxist understanding, “the relation of solidarity contrasts with *competition* between workers, which is the *natural condition of the labour market*.”⁴⁶ Solidarity is the condition towards building an anti-capitalist movement. As neoliberal logics have absorbed the term and it has been taken up by popular culture, it is often positioned as synonym for diversity and multiculturalism. The 2019 Women’s March in Washington, D.C. serves as a perfect example of how solidarity has been adopted by mainstream culture. The march, which took place in both 2019 and 2020, is revered as a moment when “millions of women came together in solidarity.”⁴⁷ However, solidarity for what or towards what is not really elaborated or made clear. In fact, in an online article detailing the march, author Allegra Panetto writes, “regardless of political ideology, [the march] symbolized an

⁴⁴ Tuck, Eve, and Wayne Yang. “Introduction by the Journal Coeditors.” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, 2019, pg. 1

⁴⁵ Roediger, David. (2016). Making Solidarity Uneasy: Cautions on a Keyword from Black Lives Matter to the Past. *American Quarterly*.

⁴⁶ Unknown. “MIA: Encyclopedia of Marxism: Glossary of Terms.” *Marxists.org*, 2018, www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/s/o.html

⁴⁷ Panetto, Allegra. “Herstory: Millions of Women March Together in Solidarity.” 2019

unprecedented grassroots movement with a message of solidarity and acceptance.”⁴⁸ Panetto signals to a moment where coming together as women, regardless of background and political affiliation is the ultimate goal. Panetto writes of solidarity as a simple moment that is rooted on a unification vis-à-vis ‘womanhood.’ Not only does this take ‘womanhood’ as a given—and universally shared concept—but it also sees unification as the ultimate expression of solidarity (and posits it as an end-goal in and of itself). My use of solidarity in this project works against this simplified understanding of solidarity.

In his article, *Making Solidarity Uneasy: Cautions on a Keyword from Black Lives Matter to the Past*, historian David Roediger calls on scholars to engage more critically with solidarity and maintain a “sober and uneasy reflection on the difficulties of thinking through its promises and difficulties.”⁴⁹ He suggests that solidarity is anything but simple and its magnificence “can hardly be realized if tethered to impossible expectations that leave us coming up forever short of an unexamined ideal.”⁵⁰ Roediger offers an important intervention that troubles how solidarity is absorbed by neoliberal logics that often posit it within multicultural and identity-based unities. Roediger offers a critique that is not only useful for scholars but also for activists to think through how and when solidarity is invoked. In the example of the Women’s March, solidarity expresses nothing more than a unity based on identity. It does not trouble those identities themselves nor does it seek to imagine alternatives to the structures that are in place. Here, solidarity is oversimplified and its rendered as a simple descriptive word for coming together as one.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 2019

⁴⁹ Roediger, David. Pg. 224

⁵⁰ Ibid., Pg 224

For this project, I privilege solidarity over other terms not as a means to suggest that Black, Indigenous and migrant communities are inherently connected via their experiences nor that their unity is a simple and easy process or even that it is the end goal. Rather, I use it as hopeful vision for how relationships can be built with one another outside of capitalist and colonial values. I choose the term solidarity understanding that any term I use will always come with its own set of problems precisely because capitalism does not offer us with the necessary grammars to move beyond itself. I also want to address that in my use of solidarity I am aware of the tensions within a Marxist understanding of solidarity and Indigenous decolonization. For example, in the article *Grounded Normativity/Placed-Based Solidarity*, Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson remind us that a lot of Marxist traditions have subsumed Indigenous struggles, resulting “in not only a very shallow solidarity with respect to Indigenous claims and struggles (when it can even be said to exist) but more often than not a call on Indigenous peoples to forcefully align their interests and identities in ways that contribute to our dispossession and erasure.”⁵¹ Some Marxist traditions and anti-capitalist movements, such as Occupy Wall Street, have disregarded and at points, completely erased Indigenous struggles. Correspondingly, the solidarity that I am calling for is unquestionably predicated on anti-capitalist and anti-colonial visions. I am grounding my use of solidarity within the dimensions of Indigenous decolonization and Black liberation. They are a part of the same axis and desires towards building futurities that affirm Black and Indigenous life and that take into account the structures that force migration and displacement of people across the globe. I am not invoking the term *solidarity* as a political project of unification based on a shared identity or multicultural

⁵¹ Coulthard, Glen, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. “Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity.” 2016, pg. 252

coherence. Instead, I call on solidarity as a space that affirms Black and Indigenous living, while rejecting capitalist and colonial based values (of humanity and otherwise).

Erotic Power:

Further, I draw on Audre Lorde's use of the erotic and on Indigenous kinship to situate solidarity as a necessary condition towards developing shared visions for the future that are rooted in accountability to one another, to land, ancestors and future generations.⁵² Solidarity in this sense is an intimate desire for asserting relationships that work towards dismantling capitalism and colonialism. Solidarity is also an understanding that we cannot achieve these visions individually and that we must work collectively. In her article, *The uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, Lorde contends that the erotic provides "the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens their threat of difference."⁵³ In thinking specifically of Black, Indigenous and migrant solidarities, I am adapting the erotics as a way to build on the affective and to root emotions like anger and hope as conditions of possibility. As Diné scholar, Melanie Yazzie suggests, an anti-colonial and anti-capitalist future must accept "nothing less than conditions of vibrant futurity in which life in its entirety is able to thrive free from the violence of empire."⁵⁴ As decolonial praxis, our futurities must be grounded on an explicit anti-capitalist and anti-colonial stance. This must also take into account lives that have past and those that are yet to come. In this, we can see the environment and the land as a

⁵² Yazzie, Melanie K. Pg. 34

⁵³ Lorde, Audre. Pg. 87

⁵⁴ Yazzie, Melanie K. Pg. 31

part of the kinship that we must consider when building relationships to one another. Our existence and our joy are not separate from that of our ancestors and from that of our future generations. The erotic is “not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing.”⁵⁵ In this sense, the erotic tugs at the inner depths of our emotions to build and sustain a space that brings together not only our differences but also our visions, desires and pursuits towards new ways of existing with one another.

Further, the erotic is a space that emerges precisely from within the chaos and mess created through capitalism and colonialism. In fact, Tiffany Lethabo King expresses that “Lorde’s form of erotic power can lead one into chaos and into the act of sharing in the other person’s journey through darkness and chaos to another side.”⁵⁶ In the chaos ensued within moments of tear-gassing, there is a disruption that takes place. A disruption that allows for Black, Indigenous and migrant living and breathing to exist within a same environment of toxicity and a space of possibilities. Here, these communities are not linked on the terms of the similar violence they encounter, but instead are linked through their hopes and desires for alternative ways of existing, individually but also collectively. Further, Lorde’s erotic power suggests chaos not as a negative form, but rather as a productive force that moves our imagination into new spaces. These new spaces long for a transformative shift in our relationships to another, and in our accountability towards each other. Erotic power, in its unruliness, defies a linear thinking about relationalities and “forces new vantage points on people, as well as different perspectives and desires that make space for other people’s desires and pleasure.”⁵⁷ In this, there is an attentiveness to “each other’s suffering” as a means to

⁵⁵ Lorde, Audre. Pg. 88

⁵⁶ King, Tiffany. Pg. 144

⁵⁷ King, Tiffany. Pg. 145

reorient that suffering to pleasure. Pleasure in imagining new worlds where we can breathe free of the toxicity that marks the current landscape. A space where we don't shy away from pain and suffering, but instead we take it on in order to transform it into a space of joy and happiness.

Erotic Solidarities:

I take solidarity not as the end goal, but rather as an important first step towards a disruption of what is, imagining what can be and building what will be. I use *erotic solidarity* to express a form of solidarity that emerges from moments of chaos. In a sense, it is the urgency for alternatives that drives this solidarity. In linking it to erotic power, I am also thinking of solidarity as rooted in emotions such as joy and pleasure, without dismissing other necessary emotions such as anger, pain and rage. An erotic solidarity recognizes the chaos not only as an external happening, but also as a condition that occurs within our very beings (emotions/affect). In confronting the chaos of moments and feelings, erotic solidarities move us towards a space of action beyond one-time gestures. Roediger suggests that solidarity has been 'fast' in some cases while in others it has been 'slow.' I would argue against this notion of solidarity to say that it is neither fast nor slow, because it operates within its own temporalities, urgencies and desires. In the current context of colonialism and capitalism, there is an urgency to foster relationships/movements that can counter those regimes. Lorde suggests that within the erotic we "become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native...such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression and self-denial."⁵⁸ Erotic counters those very regimes that produce those feelings. It rejects suffering as a natural condition, and it takes it on as a catapult for imagining alternative ways of existing. In imagining

⁵⁸ Lorde, Audre. Pg. 90

new forms of existing, erotic solidarity works to build futures that are deliberately anti-capitalist and anti-colonial.

Section 3: Tear Gas

In order to arrive at spaces where an erotic solidarity can emerge, I stage three moments where teargas was used against bodies of color. This tear gas demonstrates the constant toxicity that marks the environment where Black, Indigenous and migrant living takes place. I argue that within the chaos that emerges in these environments, the possibility for solidarities and new imaginaries are endless.

Tear gas was banned for use in warfare by the Geneva Convention of 1993. However, because the Geneva convention does not cover its domestic use, tear gas continues to be heavily employed by police as "domestic riot control." The most common type of tear gas used is o-chlorobenzylidene malononitrile or simply CS. CS was developed in 1928 when American chemists, Ben Corson and Roger Stoughton synthesized its active component to create what is now known as tear gas.⁵⁹ Tear gas, contrary to its name is actually not a gas. It is a powder substance that is activated when it interacts with moisture. Its symptoms include severe burning of the eyes, mouth, throat and skin followed by an often-uncontrollable coughing and choking, with tears and mucous streaming from eyes and nose. In response to the pain, victims' eyelids snap shut, sometimes resulting in temporary blindness. Tear gas chokes and asphyxiates. It suspends time as it forms a white cloud that rapidly spreads and consumes its surroundings. It travels and seeps into the smallest crevices and reacts only when combined with a liquid

⁵⁹ Gander, Kashmira. Independent Digital News and Media, 25 Nov. 2014.

substance--such as the mucous membranes in the eyes, nose and mouth. It is the porosity of the human body that sets in motion the agonizing effects.

Scholar Stuart Schrader points to how tear gas has been historically used “for purposes beyond riot control,” including during the U.S. war with Vietnam. Schrader discusses how prior to Vietnam, tear gas was used twice, once in Mississippi in 1962 and a second time in 1964 in Maryland.⁶⁰ One of the first instances when tear gas was used in U.S. soil was during the ‘Ole Miss Riot’ of 1962 where protests ensued after Black student, James Meredith, enrolled at the University of Mississippi.⁶¹ The second time tear gas was used also took place during the civil rights era. Police teargassed protestors in Maryland in 1964 when the former governor of Alabama, George Wallace, held a rally urging the audience to vote for him in the Maryland presidential primaries and stand against the civil rights bill.⁶² In both instances, tear gas emerged from a deeply rooted hatred against Black bodies. In 1962, the antiblackness and outright racism and discrimination against James Meredith erupted in violence that resulted on the use of tear gas. In 1964, the racism spewed by George Wallace rippled across the Black community that was already in the midst of a struggle against centuries of racism and violence. The civil rights era set forth the stage for the recurring use of tear gas against bodies of color.

It is also important to note that tear gas is a specific mechanism of violence meant to protect property and capitalist interests. In the 1964 riots and in the U.S.-Vietnam war, tear gas was used to disperse and “command territory.” Schrader suggests that new formulations of CS came after the Vietnam war in order to control access to terrain. He mentions that in order to

⁶⁰ Schrader, Stuart. “*Tear Gas and the U.S. Border.*” Process. 6 Dec. 2018.

⁶¹ Claude, Sitton. *The New York Times*, Oct. 1962

⁶² “Cambridge, Md., Negroes Routed By Tear Gas After Wallace Talk.” *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 12 May 1964.

keep people away from a given location “CS would be used to create a barrier.”⁶³In a sense, CS serves as an agent that defines the space in terms of property. Meaning, the State employs tear gas in moments such as the Vietnam war and the 1964 to assert ownership and both military and police control over the territory. Given that tear gas only activates when it comes into contact with the human body...the physical space itself is not damaged or threatened. Unlike other war weapons, such as bombs and Napalm, tear gas does not have any effect on surrounding physical structures. Thus, as the bodies it comes into contact with tear gas experiencing pain and agony, the buildings, land, and territory are all preserved. As such, the U.S. deploys teargas on bodies of color in an effort to define that space and practice control and ownership over it. In the context of the ongoing project of conquest, the use of tear gas continues to define Indigenous land as U.S. property, which allows for a continued assertion of ownership and control over that land. Additionally, in asserting control and ownership via the use of tear gas, the atmosphere itself is characterized through a violence and genocide, especially for bodies of color.

In effect, tear gas is a metaphor for the toxic particles that make up capitalism and colonialism, as well as the literal manifestation of the toxicity of these structures. These regimes create an atmosphere and landscape of violence and un-breathability that is felt across the land and airspace, exacerbating the already present atmosphere of violence and genocide. Indeed, the very atmosphere where Black, Indigenous and migrant breathing takes place, is an atmosphere of violence, pain and often, death. On this, Christina Sharpe, author of *In the Wake: on Blackness and Being*, suggests that “there is too a connection between the lungs and the weather; the supposedly transformative properties of breathing free air—that which throws off the mantle of slavery—and the transformative properties of being ‘free’ to breathe fresh air.” Fresh air, as a

⁶³ Schrader, Stuart. 2018

part of an unattainable atmosphere, represents a vision for the future. A vision that is not marked by the toxic particles that currently occupy the environment. In speaking specifically about Black bodies, Sharpe expresses that the weather “registers and produces the conventions of antiblackness in the present and into the future.”⁶⁴ Sharpe’s theorization of the weather and the atmosphere stages how tear gas is not a meaningless act. It is an act of producing environments that are unbreathable and unlivable.

U.S. Mexico Border

I start my analysis at the U.S.-Mexico border in order to ground the toxicity that marks the landscapes of the settler state. Here, the theft of Indigenous lands and the establishing of territoriality is necessarily a part of the state making project and of the continued dispossession of land and life. As Byrd suggests, “it is the actual ground itself that is the ground through which Indigenous peoples know our pasts, presents, and futures as relational and pedagogical.”⁶⁵ I begin my analysis rooted to that idea of ground and landscape. The physical land where tear gas gets used, is first and always Indigenous land. Tear gas intoxicates the body as much as the physical landscape and atmosphere. It is in these sites that the pasts, presents and futures converge. Just as well, it is where Black, Indigenous and migrant erotic desires intersect to imagine and build futurities where a different breathing and living can take place.

On November 2018, migrants who were coming from Central America to seek asylum at the border, were met with the force and violence that is symptomatic of the settler state. U.S.

⁶⁴ Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: on Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press, 2016. Pg. 21

⁶⁵ Byrd, Jodi. Pg. 209

customs and border patrol agents fired tear gas against the migrant exodus to dissuade them from crossing over. Images from that day show clouds of white smoke engulfing the atmosphere surrounding the border and consuming anything that came in its path, including the various children present, some of whom were still in diapers. Here, the State enacted its violence on migrant bodies to cause pain and deter, but also to establish its ownership of territory. As Walia mentions, Indigenous lands are the “battle ground for settler states’ escalating policies of border militarization.”⁶⁶ As is made evident through this instantiation of violence, the State’s continued project of conquest is as much about dispossessing indigenous communities of land, as it is of constantly performing a militarized ownership of that land.

Further, the tear gassing of the border cannot be fully understood without also tying it back to the border imperialism that forces migration in the first place. Walia eloquently states that “capitalism and imperialism have undermined the stability of communities and compelled people to move in search of work and survival.”⁶⁷ The Men, women and children fleeing from their countries of origin were fleeing from the conditions that have been largely created by U.S. foreign policies. At the time of the tear gassing, the governor of California, Gavin Newsom, condemned these acts stating that “Women and children who left their lives behind — seeking peace and asylum — were met with violence and fear. That’s not my America. We’re a land of refuge. Of hope. Of freedom. And we will not stand for this.”⁶⁸ The irony cannot be missed here as violence and fear are necessary conditions for borders to be erected in the first place, and violence and fear are permanent features of the project of conquest since the very beginning. Moreover, violence experienced in an ongoing project of conquest consists of both

⁶⁶ Walia, Harsha. Pg. 7

⁶⁷ Ibid. Pg 9.

⁶⁸ Newsom, Gavin. Twitter post. November 25, 2018.

the very quotidian forms as well as those spectacular moments that are meant to reinforce the role of borders. As Schrader expresses, “in a situation where there was no riot, a civilian agency mimicked U.S. military practice of prior decades to control terrain and enforce a border.”⁶⁹ There was no riot at the border and seemingly no need for ‘riot control.’ Present at the border was a crowd of refugees trying to seek asylum. However, this was indeed a threat to the State because their presence challenged the role of borders in the first place. The crowd was unarmed, yet border patrol used tear gas as a means to protect their role as agents of the state, and also to protect the idea of the ‘nation’ and the role that borders are supposed to play within the creation of that nation.

Tear gassing at the border sets forth the stage for the toxic atmosphere that constitutes a State formed through dispossession and death. The lingering ghosts of Black and Indigenous genocide and enslavement mark this space as unbreathable. As the white clouds of smoke consume the area all along the border, a chaotic space is created. This chaos presents itself as a moment of unpredictability and perhaps even of fear. Yet, this is precisely the space where erotic solidarities can emerge and visions for the future are endless in their possibilities. Just like the smoke emerging from the tear gas, migrants are uncontainable in their visions and in the relationships they are capable of fostering with others. Migrants are not bound to one specific geography. In fact, they travel in ways that challenge the settler state’s legitimacy and that force a re-reading of space and land. This rereading of a chaotic space requires creativity to imagine mobility and borderlessness as necessary conditions for anti-colonial movements. Here, I mean borderlessness in both that the movements should be rooted in the abolition of borders, as well as

⁶⁹ Schrader, Stuart. 2018

the movements themselves should not be bound by borders, but rather by desires for pleasure, joy and happiness.

Ferguson:

Almost exactly four years prior to the tear gassing of migrants at the border, protests took place in Ferguson, Missouri where Michael Brown was murdered by white police officer, Darren Wilson. On the night of November 24, 2014, crowds gathered on the streets of Ferguson to protest the grand Jury's decision to not indict Wilson. The crowd was met by a heavily armed police force, who despite having orders to limit their use of tear-gas, quickly shot canisters towards the crowd.⁷⁰ Of course, it can be said that those initial orders to limit their use of tear-gas had nothing to do with attentiveness towards Black suffering, but rather with the State's own attempt at concealing its violent and reactionary nature. As various images from that night emerged, visible clouds of smoke can be seen looming over the protestors, hiding their faces and leaving behind only black silhouettes. The same silhouettes that are left behind after a Black body has been traced on the ground. The veils of smoke lifted only to reveal the silhouettes of violence and death that mark Black bodies.

As Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor eloquently writes in her book, from *#BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Black communities face “deeply ingrained stereotypes...as particularly dangerous, impervious to pain and suffering, careless and carefree, and exempt from empathy, solidarity or basic humanity.”⁷¹ Here, Yamahtta-Taylor is in conversation with Black scholars like Weheliye and Wynters who speak of Blackness as inconstitutive to humanity, Blackness as

⁷⁰ Altman, Alex. Time, 12 Dec. 2014.

⁷¹ Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. Pg. 3

mere silhouettes on the ground. It is this understanding of Blackness that allows for the death of Michael Brown to be justifiable. It is this same justification and understanding of Blackness that allows for tear gas to be shot at protestors. Protestors are seen primarily as Black/nonhuman/flesh. In Sharpe's words, antiblackness is the total climate that "produces and facilitates Black social and physical death."⁷² However, tear gas is only a small contributor to that climate and pervasive antiblack weather. In fact, during World War II, the U.S. government used African American, Japanese American, and Puerto Rican soldiers "as tests subjects, serving as proxies for the enemy so scientists could explore how mustard gas and other chemicals"⁷³ would affect the enemy combatant. Thus, tear gas, along with mustard gas and other chemical weapons, have been historically used on bodies of color because these bodies are seen as mere flesh, and as existing outside of the State's idea of the nation. In this, Black and Brown bodies are correlated with the 'enemy' because they exist outside of the purview of humanity and outside of the purview of 'citizens' and 'right-bearing.' As such, antiblackness informs the idea of the 'other' and reinforces the notion of migrants as threats to a cohesive (White) idea of the nation.

In this weather, the uncontainable cloud of smoke creates minimal visibility; a scene of chaos, shadows and silhouettes. As a tool of capitalism and settler colonialism, tear gas is employed to shut down and incapacitate Black bodies. It is not enough that Michael Brown was killed at the hands of a police officer. For a State that is predicated on genocidal practices, the death of Michael Brown has to be accompanied by more deaths including those that came before

⁷² Sharpe, Christina. Pg. 22

⁷³ Dickerson, Caitlin. "Secret World War II Chemical Experiments Tested Troops By Race." *NPR*, NPR, 22 June 2015.

and those that are yet to come. The teargassing in Ferguson reveals the atmosphere of pain, violence and death that surrounds Black life. Yet, much like weather patterns are unpredictable and can shift in an instance, these moments of chaos are moments of transformation and reorientation. There is a chaotic encounter between what is and what can be, brewing the perfect storm for imagining new alternatives. Alternatives where living is not predicated on suffering and death and where our relationships to each other are only informed by our shared suffering to the extent that this shared suffering forces us to imagine and build new alternatives.

Standing Rock

Two years after Ferguson, on November of 2016, police in riot gear and national guard officers shot tear gas at water protectors in Standing Rock. Indigenous nations from across the globe joined the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in their demands to stop the building of the underground oil pipeline, otherwise known as the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). On the night of November 20, a group of protestors gathered at Backwater bridge in attempts to remove burnt military vehicles that blocked traffic (and access for emergency services into the camps) of Highway 1806. Law enforcement greeted protestors with tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannons at below freezing degrees.⁷⁴ Images of the night show a chaotic encounter. Hundreds of protestors were treated that night for contamination by tear gas, along with symptoms of hypothermia and blunt trauma as a result of the rubber bullets.⁷⁵ The Indigenous bodies at Standing Rock were seen as a threat to the expansion of settler colonialism and capitalism. Their presence revealed the perpetual and always existing obstacle in the expansion of empire. As Nick

⁷⁴ Allard, Ladonna. 21 Nov. 2016

⁷⁵ Ibid. 2016

Estes and Jaskiron Dhillon eloquently write, “the Indian problem is out of control precisely when Indians stand between capitalists and their money.”⁷⁶ In Standing Rock, the water protectors were a physical manifestation of Indigeneity standing in the way of capitalism and continued projects of conquest. The shadow of the indigenous figure that simply will not go away, was physically manifested and symbolized the perpetual threat to the project of conquest. On that has to always be met with violence, suffering and death.

The building of the DAPL was meant to choke Indigenous communities out of life by threatening the water sources. The tear gas in the protests was also meant to choke Indigenous communities by making their literal breathing and living, impossible. Indigenous communities continue to be seen as uncivil/savage/non-human. This perception of Indigeneity coupled with a longing desire of elimination and genocide, gives way to violent tactics such as the use of tear gas. As much as these tactics are meant to disperse and dissuade, they are also meant to exacerbate the toxic atmosphere that chokes indigenous communities from water, land, relations and life itself. Here, the toxic landscapes are twofold. In one instance, the tear gas itself creates a toxicity within the atmosphere that incapacitates Indigenous bodies and makes breathing and living impossible. In the second instance, the construction of the pipeline itself marks the physical landscape as a toxic one, one where the land and water underground is threatened. The toxicity of the pipeline is both a literal manifestation of capitalism as well as a metaphor for the choking of land and water sources that work towards the continued elimination and genocide of Indigenous communities. These moments are reflective of the cyclical conditions of violence that conquest sets forth. The dispossession is not only of land, it is also of life and of visions for the

⁷⁶ Estes, N., and J. Dhillon. 2019. Pg. 5

future. Capitalist endeavors and settler colonialism constrict Indigenous futurities and suffocate any visions for alternative ways of existing. The markings of the land in capitalist State start at the border, but as are rendered visible through projects like the pipeline, they continue throughout and within the entirety of the landscape including within the land, water and air.

The tear gassing at Ferguson in 2014, the tear gassing in Standing Rock in 2016 and the tear gassing in the U.S-Mexico border in 2018 all reveal the inherent violence that characterizes the project of conquest. While these three moments are not unique or exceptional, they offer important vignettes to how the project of conquest materializes itself. The tear gassing in each of these instances is both the literal manifestation of the State's violence as well as a metaphor to the toxicity that surrounds Black, indigenous and migrant living. In these moments where smoke emerges and creates a veil that is meant to conceal relationships and visions for the future, spaces of chaos and messiness are created. Black, Indigenous and Migrant lives are all connected in these moments and thus, so too must their visions for the future. This requires thinking of new ways to breathe collectively and freely. Here, I mean breathing in the most literal sense but also in the sense of sharing life with one another. This is a space where erotic solidarities can emerge. As Lorde suggests, "our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives."⁷⁷ In short, erotic power forces us to question those tasks we take for granted—such as breathing—and it asks what it would mean to breathe collectively. In this case, breathing as an integral component of our existence, not only bridges our lives to one another, but it also helps us share our desires for joy and happiness in the present and in the future.

⁷⁷ Lorde, Audre. 90

Section 4: Prison Abolition

Mass Incarceration

The U.S. currently boasts the largest prison population in the world. There are over 1,700 state prisons, 109 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 80 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories and in the United States. Close to 2.3 million people are detained in those facilities.⁷⁸ These staggering numbers highlight the U.S. dependency on incarceration. This dependency is driven almost entirely, if not exclusively, by capitalist interests. In fact, the prison system as we know it, emerged as a continuation and different legalization of slavery. In her poignant book, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* scholar and activist Angela Davis writes “in the immediate aftermath of slavery, the southern states hastened to develop a criminal justice system that could legally restrict the possibilities of freedom for newly released slaves. Black people became the prime targets of a developing convict lease system, referred to by many as a reincarnation of slavery.”⁷⁹ The emergence of prisons served two purposes; keeping black people under a form of social control, and a continued profiting off Black labor. This is to say that as much as prisons are about

⁷⁸Dickerson, Caitlin. “Secret World War II Chemical Experiments Tested Troops By Race.” *NPR*, NPR, 22 June 2015.

⁷⁹ Davis, Angela. Pg. 29

profit, they are also about social control and framing Blackness as constitutive to deviancy/criminality/inhumanity. After slavery ended, the U.S. needed a system that could maintain racial hierarchies and White supremacy. Prisons became that exact system. Prisons reimaged slavery. Sharpe argues that the prison, the camp, and the school are all “reappearances of the slave ship.”⁸⁰ As such, prisons are rooted in an antiblackness that contains, regulates, punishes and creates less-than-human beings. Abolishing prisons is thus a critique against the afterlives of slavery and the pervasive antiblackness that consumes the atmosphere and determines livability and disposability.

Prisons are inherently racist, antiblack, institutions. As Davis puts it, “race has always played a central role in constructing presumptions of criminality.”⁸¹ Prisons require criminals to exist, and criminality in the U.S. is fundamentally racist and follows the direct line of slave-master relationship. It is a condition created through the legacies of slavery, and a condition maintained by capitalism. As suggested earlier, capitalism is always a racial capitalism where racialization sets the conditions for how wealth accumulation takes place. In this case, anti-blackness and capitalism are two in the same. They exist and depend on each other. Capitalism cannot exist without anti-blackness. This has resulted in a carceral state with multiple and intersecting state agencies and institutions that have punishing functions and regulate poor communities of color such as immigration, welfare and public services, healthcare, workforce, public school systems, etc.⁸² Thus, Black liberation cannot exist without prison abolition. Black feminist and Indigenous critiques of anti-capitalist movements “reveal that it is not simply about constructing an additive framework that is more ‘inclusionary’ but rather rethinking the very

⁸⁰ Sharpe, Christina. Pg. 21

⁸¹ Davis, Angela. Pg. 28

⁸² Lawston, Meiners. Feminist Formations. Pg 13

terms of what constitutes value, accumulation, and wealth in the context of settler colonial racial capitalism.”⁸³ Therefore, if the migrant justice and Indigenous decolonization movement want to sustain a solidarity with Black liberation, then they must commit to prison abolition.

Prison Abolition

Angela Davis contends that prison abolition has very little to do with the actual physical structures and more to do with unsettling the “rapidly expanding prison system, prison architecture, prison surveillance, and prison system corporatization” that make up a punitive landscape for bodies of color.⁸⁴ Prison abolition is about eradicating imprisonment as a main mode of punishment, as much as it is about disrupting the social conditions that make Black and Brown bodies imprisonable in the first place. As directed by Black feminist thought and Indigenous critiques, abolition is a political project and analytical framework that frustrates “liberal (and other) modes of humanism” and “offers new forms of sociality and futurity.”⁸⁵ In these new forms of sociality, the normalcy of these structures of violence is disrupted in order to imagine “different social landscapes.”⁸⁶ Moreover, prison abolition is not just a project about destroying current systems, but it is primarily a project about imaging alternative ways of existing. Feminist scholars, Jodie M. Lawston and Erica Meiners speak to this as they point out that prison abolition requires creativity and a hopeful vision for the future. They suggest, “many activists who are working from a feminist and queer abolitionist lens engage with questions of how to build the communities that are not centered on punishment and policing.”⁸⁷ Indeed, prison abolition generates a creative force to imagine “a world that does not rely upon

⁸³ Viola, Michael J., et al. Pg. 8

⁸⁴ Davis, Angela and Rodriguez, Dylan. Pg. 215

⁸⁵ Lethabo King, Tiffany. Pg. XV

⁸⁶ Davis, Angela and Rodriguez, Dylan. Pg. 212

⁸⁷ Lawston, Jodie M., and Erica R. Meiners. Pg. 13

incarceration” and rather “requires communities to address violence and actively participate in building alternatives to punishment and imprisonment.”⁸⁸ In so doing, prison abolition is a project about creating alternative modes of accountability to each other. Modes that ultimately shape our relationalities with one another as well as the solidarities we are able to build together.

Furthermore, contributors to the article *Introduction to Solidarities of Nonalignment: Abolition, Decolonization, and Anti-capitalism*, Viola Michael J. et al. also assert that “an abolitionist focus is necessary to dismantle current carceral dimensions of racialized violence not possible within rights-based appeals to the state or liberal reforms.”⁸⁹ Here, the contributors suggest that a rights-based approach towards reform simply cannot address the dispossession of Black bodies, precisely because Blackness exists outside of the purview of humanity. In thinking specifically about the migrant justice movement, adopting an abolitionist stance (against ICE and other forms of incarceration) allows for migrants to reject neoliberal logics of inclusion rooted in a ‘rights’ language that continues to dispossess Black communities and instead, promotes alternative ways of existing. Indeed, Davis suggests that “rather than try to imagine one single alternative to the existing system of incarceration, we might envision an array of alternatives that will require radical transformations of many aspects of our society.”⁹⁰ Projects like the call towards abolishing ICE contributes a very important critique towards abolishing borders and the current structures the criminalize the movement of people. Davis mentions that “current campaigns that call for the decriminalization of undocumented immigrants are making important contributions to the overall struggle against the prison industrial complex and are challenging the expansive reach of racism and male dominance.”⁹¹ I would further expand on this to say that

⁸⁸Ibid.,

⁸⁹ Viola, Michael J., et al. Pg 10

⁹⁰ Davis, Pg. 108

⁹¹ Ibid.

these campaigns are also shedding light on the way colonial and capitalist structures dictate the forms of movement allowed and disrupt the entire concept of ‘nation’ itself. A migrant justice movement rooted in the abolition of ICE and borders, is in line with Indigenous decolonization because it is challenging the idea that borders are natural. It also challenges the idea that the current governance of borders is legitimate. In this, #AbolishICE is not a simple request towards ending on particular agency. Instead, it is a call towards ending the current structures that animate this agency, namely capitalism and colonialism.

Section 5: #AbolishICE

Hashtags

As tear gas is uncontainable and travels across different geographies and temporalities, so too are hashtags. Hashtags, which are the pound sign followed by a slogan or statement, are a part of online social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Hashtags are not bound by borders and are expansive in that anyone who has access to social media accounts can join the conversation by simply typing the hashtag along with a statement or picture. As explained by Gregory Saxton et al., hashtags “are used on social media platforms to brand advocacy movements, archive messages for the movement, and allow those not personally connected to a user to see and comment on messages that use the hashtag.”⁹² Hashtags are searchable and thus can uncover a lot of the articles, people, posts, messages, campaigns, pictures, etc. that use that specific statement and thus also serve as an archival tool. In a sense, hashtags emerge alongside different social movements and demands, or simple assertions that

⁹² Gregory D. Saxton, Jerome N. Niyirora, Chao Guo, and Richard D. Waters. Pg 154.

communities are trying to make and can also give a sense of the social concerns of the time. For this project, I am particularly interested in the hashtag #AbolishICE as an abolitionist project that can bring migrant justice in conversation with Black liberation and Indigenous decolonization.

The hashtag #AbolishICE is both a very specific demand as well as a vision for the future. The demand to ‘abolish ICE’ essentially calls for a dismantling of the Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) agency, which is the government agency responsible for the enforcement of immigration laws. According to its website, ICE’s mission is to identify, apprehend, detain, and remove ‘criminal aliens and other removable individuals located in the U.S.’⁹³ Under the Obama administration, ICE conducted the largest number of detentions and deportations, which quickly prompted calls to #AbolishICE. For example, one tweet sent out by username @LamontLilly reads: “deporter-in- chief Obama targets families, not felons #AbolishICE.”⁹⁴ The hashtag above is amongst one of the first tweets to emerge using the hashtag #AbolishICE. This twitter post is interesting in that it highlights how ICE is not an agency with particular loyalties to a certain political party. Rather, it is an agency that is meant to maintain the white supremacist project and aid a capitalist expansion on stolen land. It is important to highlight this because in conversations that point to a specific political figure as the one behind the deportations and detentions, a larger critique against the settler State is lost. In a sense, pointing to a specific political party erases centuries of struggles for Indigenous decolonization not against a specific party, but against the entire state-making project. In this case, by calling out Obama as deporter in chief, the user makes visible the ways in which former president Barack Obama was responsible for the detention and deportations of millions of

⁹³ "Who We Are." ICE. Accessed November 2018. <https://www.ice.gov/about>.

⁹⁴ Lilly, Lamont. Twitter post. 27, Sept 2016.

undocumented migrants and highlights how deportation and detention are necessary conditions for the state-making project itself and for a continued project of conquest. In revealing these conditions, the hashtag pushes visions for the future as moving beyond neoliberal-based notions of inclusion and recognition. It requires not only abolishing ICE as an agency, but also abolishing the borders that allow for ICE to exist in the first place and the illegitimate government structures (the U.S.) that put these policies in place.

During the summer of 2018, the hashtag re-emerged with full force after Trump announced his zero-tolerance policy which has resulted in the detention and separation of thousands of immigrant families. Interestingly enough, during this same summer, the hashtag was hijacked by liberal democrats who utilized it as a part of their running platform. For example, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez who won New York's 14th congressional district position ran her campaign on a platform for 'abolishing ICE.' Yet in August of 2018 she tweeted: "#AbolishICE means NOT having an agency that incarcerates children and assaults women with impunity. It does not mean abolish deportation."⁹⁵ To Ocasio-Cortez and many other liberal democrats who took up the hashtag, it served as more of a political strategy than a radical demand. I point to this in efforts to recognize how hashtags can be taken up by different actors and thus it is important to contextualize the hashtags within larger demands and critiques against colonialism and capitalism. In looking at political actors like Ocasio-Cortez, it is evident that the conversation around #AbolishICE has to be centered in line with the abolition project—so that its roots in the Black radical tradition do not get co-opted.

⁹⁵ Ocasio-Cortez, Alexandria. Twitter post. August 21, 2018.

Moreover, while it is true that the hashtag has been taken up by various political figures as mere symbolic gesture, #AbolishICE has generated very important conversations, critiques and solidarities within the migrant justice movement. In fact, on November 26, 2018, a private autopsy revealed that Roxsana Hernandez, a transgender asylum seeker who died in ICE custody, had been physically assaulted prior to her death. This prompted the hashtag #AbolishICE to circulate across different social media sites. The autopsy concluded that Roxsana died of severe untreated dehydration, shortly after being physically assaulted. While the autopsy revealed the ‘official’ cause of her death, it also revealed the realities of the toxic environment that produces the death of non-normative bodies. Here, the use of the hashtag #AbolishICE generates conversations about why abolition of ICE and borders is a necessary component in our visions for the future. Not only that, but in speaking of Roxsana’s transgender identity, the conversation also called attention to how colonial logics inform the gendered violence that takes place through border and immigration governance. For example, a tweet sent out by the Transgender Law Center (@Translawcenter) on November 26, 2018 reads: “The U.S. govt is responsible for Roxsana Hernandez’s death. We are putting them on notice—and, with @familiatqlm & @officialBLMP, demanding an end to detention and deportation of LGBT migrants & Criminalization of Black people. #AbolishICE #Justice4Roxsana.”⁹⁶ In this tweet, the Transgender Law Center signals towards the State’s responsibility in Roxsana’s death and draws the connections between detention, deportation and the criminalization of Black communities. This gestures towards how the criminalization of LGBTQ communities, as non-normative bodies, is informed through the same criminalization of Black, Indigenous and

⁹⁶ Transgender law center. Twitter post. November 26, 2018.

migrant communities. The three, are illegible to the state in their non-normativity and they become targets of violence, dispossession and death. In thinking specifically about the relationship between ‘trans’ and ‘Black,’ the book *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* written by author C. Riley Snorton, calls attention to this relationship by suggesting that “although the perception that “race” and “gender” are fixed and knowable terms in the dominant logic of identity,” trans is more of “a movement with no clear origin and no point of arrival, and ‘blackness’ signifies upon an enveloping environment and condition of possibility.” Further, Snorton argues that ‘trans’ and ‘blackness’ “overlap in referentiality—inasmuch as blackness is a condition of possibility for the modern world and insofar as blackness articulates the paradox of nonbeing, as expressed in its deployment as oppositional flesh.”⁹⁷ As such, Black and trans are legible only under certain conditions (gender and race), but they actually escape and exceed such articulations. It is within these conditions, however, that Blackness and trans are understood as non-normative and therefore become threats to the state. Threats that need to be imprisoned, and in the case of Roxsana, murdered. As such, the critique presented by the Transgender Law Center speaks to the violent relationship between the State and non-normative/legible bodies, particularly Black and trans. In making this critique, the Transgender Law Center calls attention to ICE and its violent modalities, but also to the structures (colonialism and capitalism) that inform this violence.

Further, the call to #AbolishICE directly connects to a larger abolition project—precisely one that is informed by Black liberation. As Davis asserts in her book *Freedom is A Constant Struggle*, Black liberation is “a response to what were the perceived limitations of the civil rights movement: we not only needed to claim legal rights within the existing society...but also

⁹⁷ Snorton, Riley. *Black on Both Sides*. Pg. 2

challenge the very structure of society.”⁹⁸ The Black liberation movement challenges the racial capitalist logics that dominate society. It is an anti-capitalist project at its core. As such, Black liberation understands that rights and calls for inclusion into that system are not going to change the conditions of violence, because these very conditions of violence are foundational to the capitalist regime. Implicated within these logics are Indigenous and migrant communities as well. Capitalism requires the continued theft of Indigenous land and the constant reiteration of land as property (borders, migration management). Therefore, in imagining alternatives, #AbolishICE gestures towards the similar processes that racialize, criminalize, detain, dispossesses and eliminate. It helps makes sense of these connections and places these different struggles in conversation with one another. In this, #AbolishICE becomes an archival tool that indexes Black, Indigenous and migrant living within alternative ways of existing. Meaning, #AbolishICE (as a hashtag) is an archive that stores images, commentary, movements, ideas and visions for a future that are anti-colonial and anti-capitalist.

Visual Analysis:

In reading the selected images in this project, I do so drawing specifically from Black visual studies and the use of cultural production in shaping landscapes/atmospheres/environments. For example, in her book *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*, author Nicole Fleetwood expresses how there is a heavy weight that is “placed on black cultural production to produce results, to do something to alter

⁹⁸ Davis, Angela. *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*. Pg. 2

history and a system of racial inequality that is in part constituted through visual discourse.”⁹⁹ In conducting a visual analysis of different images that have emerged alongside the hashtag #AbolishICE, I am similarly interested in how the images produced can alter the social landscapes and provide different visualities for Black, Indigenous and migrant living. As Fleetwood mentions, images “play an increasingly important role in the formation of contemporary cultural imaginaries.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, I am interested in using visual imagery precisely with a desire to understand how visual discourse, especially one that is disseminated through online platforms, informs/shapes/transforms the ongoing conversations and solidarities between Black, Indigenous and migrant communities.

That being said, I analyze two images that were hash-tagged with #AbolishICE in the social media network, Instagram. Instagram is a social media site that is entirely composed of images and videos uploaded by its over one billion users. As an avid Instagram user, I spend countless hours sifting through photos and videos uploaded by the various accounts I follow—including many friends, celebrities and social/political groups. Instagram not only allows for users to ‘follow’ other users, but also to ‘follow’ hashtags. This means that when a user with a public profile uploads a picture with a specific hashtag, that image will appear on the follower’s timeline. Thus, at any given point, images that have that specific hashtag will be visible to anyone who is following the hashtag—regardless of whether they are following the user or not. In the article, “*The Image and the Witness Trauma Memory*”, authors Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas mention that “with the demands of capital, there is no time to discover, to reflect, to learn

⁹⁹ Fleetwood, Nicole R. *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*. The University of Chicago Press, 2011. Pg 3

¹⁰⁰ Guerin, Frances, and Roger Hallas. Pg. 5

or to imagine in the presence of the image.”¹⁰¹ However, in these images rooted in the erotic power, they force the audience exactly for that necessary pause. For that moment of reflexivity and a moment where the image can teach, speak and evoke emotions such pain, agony and anger, but also joy and happiness. Further, they suggest that “within the context of bearing witness, material images do not merely depict the historical world, they participate in its transformation.”¹⁰² In this sense, the image is not static, and neither is the witnessing that takes place. According to the authors, “the encounter with an other is central to any conception of bearing witness. For a witness to perform an act of bearing witness, she must address an other, a listener who consequently functions as a witness to the original witness. The act of bearing witness thus constitutes a specific form of address to an other.”¹⁰³ This act of bearing witness can only exist under a framework of relationality “it is not a constative act, which would merely depict or report an event that takes place in the historical world. It is an address to another” where “the performative act of bearing witness affirms the reality of the event witnessed.” In the case of the images presented through the hashtag #AbolishICE, there is a witnessing that takes place in terms of what the audience (society at large) sees when images emerge. But it is also with what those images speak to the audience. In the archive that I chose, the images do not necessarily represent traumatic events through photographic memory. Instead, I chose images that portray visions for the future. This is an effort to create different forms of seeing that are not rooted in the constant saturation of pain and violence that already dictate Black, migrant and Indigenous existence and portrayals.

¹⁰¹ Guerin, Frances, and Roger Hallas. Pg. 2

¹⁰² Ibid., Pg. 4

¹⁰³ Ibid., Pg. 10

Further, I also take on what Christen A. Smith describes as a form of witnessing project, which configures the audience, stage and actor as fluid and where “each member of society simultaneously acts as audience and player.”¹⁰⁴ In her book, *Afro-Paradise: Blackness, Violence and Performance in Brazil*, Smith discusses the “political consequences of state violence against Black people” precisely, the “erasure of the black body as subject, the invisibilization of black suffering and the reinscription of the black body as the object as state repression.” Smith argues that the theater “creates a counterspace to this erasure...where residents in the midst of the situation can gain perspective while acknowledging their central position amid turmoil and danger.”¹⁰⁵ Moreover, she states that “witnessing is watching, placing oneself in solidarity with the struggle of the people, peeling back the layers of hidden social meaning that are embedded in the practice of racialized, colonial violence and politically investing oneself in the active pursuit of the demise of the colonial system.”¹⁰⁶ In the case of #AbolishICE, there is a form of witnessing that takes place. On the one hand, the witnessing that occurs in making #AbolishICE as a necessary demand, the witnessing of the caging of children, the witnessing of mass incarceration in the United States and the witnessing of colonial violence that continues to take hold of racialized bodies of color. On the other hand, the witnessing is on behalf of Black, Indigenous and migrant communities that can visualize (witness) their struggles as a part of a similar thread of violence fueled by the project of conquest. In this sense, witnessing is an act of naming and making sense of the violence that takes hold of these communities, while also setting alternative visions for the future. Witnessing is then both about naming, and also about resisting and building new futurities. In short, #AbolishICE as a witnessing project serves to name the

¹⁰⁴ Smith, Christen. Pg. 25

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Pg. 182

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

various forms violence enacted on bodies of color, while also creating different ways of seeing and existing with each other.

The Erotic in Scholarship

As I was conducting this research, I decided to follow the hashtag #AbolishICE so I could see all of the images that were uploaded using the hashtag. There were thousands of images uploaded since I started following it back in October of 2019. However, in order to fit the scope of this project, I decided to focus on two images I came across. I chose these particular images based on two criteria: first, the image accompanied by the hashtag #AbolishICE and second, in reading through an erotic lens, the image provoked a series of emotions in me. I decided to incorporate the second criteria based on the notion of chaos (both as an external and internal happening) that roots erotic solidarities within our deepest emotions. I also used feminist situated knowledges to ground this analysis within my positionality as a formerly undocumented scholar and activist. In looking at these images, I am analyzing them from a very specific position, and I want to allow those emotions to be a part of my analysis. Perhaps this is a bit of an unconventional approach, yet I see it as necessary in order to situate my theorizations within actual lived experiences. This, I suggest, is exactly a praxis of erotic solidarities; taking our lived experiences, our emotions, and grounding them as important components into building solidarities with each other and imagining new futurities. Through this, I am also suggesting that this project is driven by my own lived experiences and desires to imagine something different and something better, not only for myself but also for other communities whom I see myself closely in relation with, namely Black and Indigenous. I take Lorde's expression that "the erotic

is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledges”¹⁰⁷ to mean that scholarship can and should be rooted in the affective/emotional. Therefore, I ground my analysis within emotions that are deep within me, and emotions that sustain a desire to generate scholarship that can ultimately counter colonial and capitalist values.

It is important to note that there are many challenges in this approach, perhaps most obvious is that in choosing the images I did, there are many other images I am not incorporating. However, I was careful in choosing the images that were rooted within my understanding of an erotic desire, and a deep emotional connection/response. This bridging between unconventional existences (scholar, activist, undocumented) and figuring out what makes most sense at the moment, is an important component of erotic solidarity. That chaos and messiness that exists both internally and externally is exactly what forces us to be creative and to think through our scholarship and our existence in different terms. As Black, Indigenous and migrant bodies, we are constantly pushed into spaces where our emotions and scholarship cannot intersect. In efforts to resist those rigid notions of knowledge production that removes the scholar from their scholarship, I am confronting my positionality and emotions head on. In this, I hope to build new ways of existing and resisting as a scholar of color within the context of a project of conquest.

¹⁰⁷ Lorde, Audre. Pg. 89



I. (Image: @QueerAntifa. Instagram. 2, October 2019.)

The first image I analyze was uploaded to Instagram by user @QueerAntifa on October 2, 2019. The picture was uploaded alongside the caption “No one is free until everyone is free. #Prisonabolition #AbolishPrisons #AbolishICE #AbolishBorders.” The background is a dull gray color mixed with an ivory hue. As audience, the eye gazes from the very top of the image where six vertical lines modeling prison bars cut horizontally. Spread right across the center are the words “No Prisons, No Cages, NO Pipelines. NO walls,” all written in bold black lettering. The

bold lettering is a testament to the bold desires that Black, Indigenous and migrant communities hold. These bold desires include the abolition of prisons, cages, pipelines and borders, all of which are rooted in a desire to image alternative ways of existing. The words “No Prisons” are written at the very top of the image and the eye is drawn to them first. These words set the context of mass incarceration and imprisonment that Black and Brown bodies confront in the U.S. As mentioned earlier in this text, the U.S. currently boasts the highest number of incarcerated people in the world. The majority of those incarcerated is made up by Black bodies. It is important to ground this context because it helps make sense of how migrant detention, borders and other forms of containment are informed by a pervasive antiblackness that has made prisons as the preferred method of punishment. As Davis asserts, the “prison reveals the congealed forms of antiblack racism that operate in clandestine ways.”¹⁰⁸ As such, the migrant justice movement has to address antiblackness not only in terms of imprisonment but also within the movement itself and ensuring that language such as “we are humans, not criminals” is rejected as this continues to proliferate the idea of criminality and imprisonment. Moreover, in placing “No Prisons” at the very top, the image calls attention to how Prison abolition must be front and center within an #AbolishICE movement, and how in order for an abolition of ICE to exist, the movement must first adopt prison abolition. In this, the migrant justice movement can work alongside Black liberation to create a world where the caging and containment (through borders as well) are abolished.

Below the words “No Prisons” are written, “NO CAGES” and “NO PIPELINES.” These words force the audience to confront how the caging of children at the border has a historical

¹⁰⁸ Davis, Angela. Pg. 25

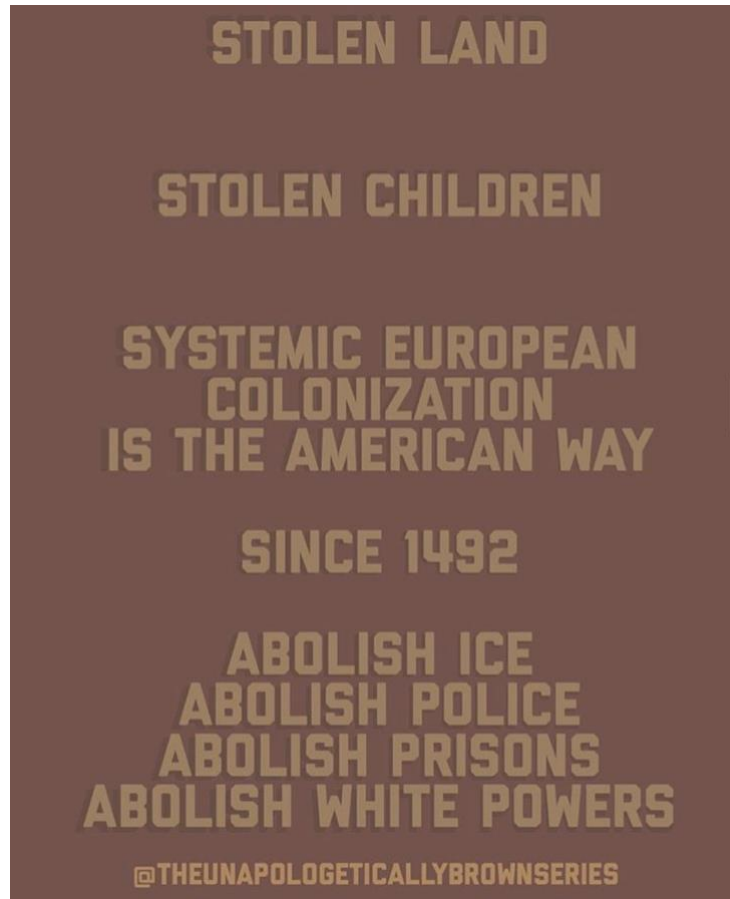
resonance to the boarding schools that caged Indigenous children.¹⁰⁹ The current caging of migrant children is a reiteration of the State's attempt to assert ownership over the land and over the future. Here, the children who represent the future of migrant communities are separated from their parents and taken as property of the State. The caging that takes place is an iteration of violence that seeks to destroy the futurities that might challenge it, by cutting off the imagination/desires/futures of children. Further, the words "NO CAGES" presents a call against the State's desire to control and limit possible visions for the future. It is a call against the conditions of containment that capitalism and colonialism set forth. In a similar fashion, "NO PIPELINES" is a critique against the capitalist logics that dominate the landscape. It is a call against the toxicity of land and atmosphere that capitalism and colonialism have created. "NO PIPELINES" asks for a stop to the greed and resource extraction that leaves communities in a state of deficit. Further, "NO PIPELINES" is a desire to exist in a world that is not driven by profit. It calls to attention to how caging in all forms (prisons and detention centers) all occur within stolen Indigenous land. In effect, "NO PIPELINES" forces the audience to pause, slow down and consider how the critique against caging and prisons is connected to a larger critique against colonization.

Lastly, "NO WALLS" is written across a brick wall surrounded by barbed wire and surveillance equipment. This statement is a call against the walls and borders that mark the physical landscape. It is a call against the racialization of bodies that creates and 'us' vs 'them,' where racialized bodies of color are perpetually an other/enemy/them. This statement forces us

¹⁰⁹ Heinsius, Ryan. "Migrant Family Separations Evoke Memories of BIA Boarding School for Some Native Americans." *KNAU Arizona Public Radio*, July 2018,

to imagine what a world without borders might look like. It also forces us to imagine a world where walls between each other (and the relationships we are able to build) are eliminated, and where we can build sustainable solidarities with one another rooted in our desire to imagine alternatives. “NO WALLS” is as much a call to action against borders, as it is a call against the colonial project that fosters the need for these walls in the first place. In so doing, “NO WALLS” rejects the normalization of walls, borders and the Western concepts of nation.

At first glance, the image evokes a sense of disorder and chaos, yet in conducting a close reading, it is discernable that these components and critiques are intricately connected. The image is composed of various repeated lines and lettering to create a cohesive composition in what otherwise might appear as a disjointed mess. It signifies the chaotic and messy relationship between these various structures—yet offers a visual representation of how these mechanisms of violence and control are also very much linked to one another. The statements uncover how prisons, cages, pipelines and walls are all a part of the same structures of violence in the project of conquest. The image presented through the hashtag #AbolishICE calls for a form of solidarity, where the abolition of ICE is a part of a struggle against abolishing all forms of imprisonment and containment. In this, migrant justice is intimately connected to Black liberation and Indigenous decolonization. Therefore, through this image it is visible how #AbolishICE brings Black, migrant and Indigenous living and visions for the future into dialogue with one another and into spaces for building solidarities rooted in a desire to imagine different futurities.



II. (Image: @unapologeticallyBrownSeries, Instagram. 14, October 2019.)

The second image I analyze was posted by the Instagram user @unapologeticallyBrownSeries on October 14, 2019. The image features a coffee brown background. Written at the very top in capitalized bold lettering is the phrase “STOLEN LAND.” These first words set the context for the rest of the statements that are to follow. In placing these words at the very top of the image, it is clear to the audience that whatever the critique is to come takes place within the context of stolen land. Right below, also written in bold capitalized letters is the statement, “SYSTEMIC EUROPEAN COLONIZATION IS THE AMERICAN WAY” followed by “SINCE 1492.” The separation between the two sentences draws forth the importance of the date, 1492. In this break, the viewer can take in the first phrase and process it before arriving at the date 1492, which is largely understood as the beginning of colonization in

the Americas. The date further contextualizes and historicizes the image within the colonial structures that creates these conditions of dispossession. Indeed, right below 1492 the image reads, “ABOLISH ICE. ABOLISH POLICE. ABOLISH PRISONS. ABOLISH WHITE POWERS.” In more ways than one, colonialism sets forth the stage for ICE, police, Prisons and white powers to exist. As such, the image unravels the relationship between anti-colonial struggles and Black liberation. It also places the modes of caging and imprisonment in conversation with a larger colonial history. In short, the image situates #AbolishICE as a project that is in line with Black liberation and decolonization efforts.

Further, the word “STOLEN CHILDREN” connects the detention (caging/boarding schools) of Indigenous children to the caging of immigrant children. In making this connection, the artist signals towards the techniques of violence that have been historically implemented by the State. In this image, as much as in the first one, children are the targets towards a foreclosing of visions for the future. The State takes children as the space to end any futurities for Brown and Black bodies and continues creating new generations of trauma.¹¹⁰ In calling attention to ‘STOLEN CHILDREN’ the urgency of this moment is grounded to a historical violence of the settler state. Further, in asking for an abolition of ICE, this is necessarily connected to a larger abolitionist project. This is important in considering the connections between ICE as an agency, and ICE as a part of a “systemic European colonization”—or a project of conquest. The artist evokes the necessary emotions and connections to understand how the caging of children at the border has very little to do with their (or their parents) legal status, and more to do with a

¹¹⁰ Chatterjee, Rhitu. “Lengthy Detention Of Migrant Children May Create Lasting Trauma, Say Researchers.” *NPR*, NPR, 23 Aug. 2019.

colonial violence that is symptomatic of settler colonialism. Further, the words “STOLEN LAND” as the first words in the image set the context for the critique against ICE and Prisons as in line with decolonization efforts that seek to abolish colonial structures and their continued legacies.

Similar to the first, the second image produces a visualization of the chaos generated through the ongoing project of conquest. That chaos presented takes shape in the form of prisons, ICE, police and white powers in general. In making these connections, the image is also working to produce a range of emotions in the viewers. The audience can experience anger at making this realization, but also possibly a relief in accepting that these struggles are intimately connected and that solidarity efforts are absolutely necessary. The image helps weave the past with the present in order to make sense of how colonial violence informs the current modes and techniques of violence produced by the settler state.

In the reading the two images above, I am interested in the critiques they provide and also in the emotions that they draw from the audience/witness. The images are very simple in terms of their actual composition. They have limited colors and limited figures. What is most prominent in both are the actual words that are written within them. These words are meant to provide a sense of urgency, while also making connections between various struggles, both present and past. In the first image, Black liberation, Indigenous decolonization and migrant justice are presented as necessarily connected to one another. Without directly spelling it out, the image ensures that the audience can trace the relationship between the three, and thus the need for solidarity work. For the second image, it also does similar work while providing a contextual grounding to the violence that people of color encounter. In the second image, the relationship

between ongoing struggles is tied to an ongoing Indigenous resistance against colonialism. Further, in reading these images through an erotic lens, they also generate very strong emotions. These emotions such as anger and frustration can catapult movements into a space of solidarity because there is a shared desire to imagine something different, something better. Here, anger and pain are met with a need for joy and happiness. These feelings coexist in a way that informs each other and that allows for different visions to emerge. Visions that are clear on their need for anti-colonial and anti-capitalist desires.

Conclusion:

In returning to my guiding questions, *what does the teargassing at Ferguson, Standing Rock and at the U.S.-Mexico border reveal about the relationalities between Black, Indigenous and migrant communities? and further, how might abolition, as a political project and analytical lens, provide an avenue towards building solidarities that privilege anti-colonial and anti-capitalist visions for the future?* I conclude that the teargassing at Ferguson, Standing Rock and at the U.S.-Mexico border reveals how the project of conquest marks Black, migrant and Indigenous bodies for death. Most importantly, I suggest that these moments demonstrate how violence is a fixed feature of the state-making project. Not only that, but the act of teargassing also exemplifies how the project of conquest creates a toxic environment where Black, Indigenous and migrant communities are literally struggling to breathe. As such, these moments signal towards the need to develop new forms of breathing and living, individually and collectively. In recognizing the need for solidarity-building, I offer the view that these solidarities must be rooted within an erotic desire to imagine and build alternative futures. Erotic desires are important because these allow for feelings such as anger and frustration to propel us

into spaces that give us joy and happiness. In a sense, this is not a departure from rooting our pain and suffering within struggles, but it does see pain and suffering only as a point of departure and not as a permanent condition of existence. Erotic desires allow for imagining futures that are accountable to our pasts and presents. In this, Black liberation, Indigenous decolonization and migrant justice intersect to create movements that are united in their desires for anti-capitalist and anti-colonial futures.

Imagining new futures requires a great deal of imagination to critique current structures while simultaneously building for better alternatives. Throughout this project, I argue that an abolitionist lens and political project should be adopted across different struggles because it is rooted in a critique against capitalism and also in line with decolonial praxis. In this, abolition has to be a central component of Indigenous decolonization, Black liberation and migrant justice as it roots the three within a similar critique against the project of conquest. More specifically in placing this project in line with migrant justice studies, I propose #AbolishICE as an important point of departure for solidarity building because it shifts migrant struggles from inclusion and recognition to abolition and decolonization. King asserts that “conquest, as well as resistance to conquest, is a living quotidian, and ever-present moment that actors can interact with and interrupt.”¹¹¹ #AbolishICE provides a space for that interruption and the images and hashtags that emerge using through its use disrupt to the normalization of violence and borders, as well as of imprisonment and genocide. Ultimately, generating new ways of visualizing Black, Indigenous and migrant living, breathing and resisting.

¹¹¹ King, Tiffany. Pg. 40

As I finish this paper, most countries, including the U.S. are currently under quarantine due to the virus, Covid-19, which by now has caused thousands of fatalities. In this moment, most of us are pushed to stay home and can only connect with each other through social media and other online platforms. Perhaps in the midst of this uncertainty and an atmosphere of general anxiety, we can be intentional and move our struggles into deeper conversations with each other. As I look at the possibilities of hashtags and specifically of #AbolishICE, this is a moment of rupture to our entire systems and understandings of life. In saturating our online spaces with critiques against the failing economic system (capitalism), we must continue to force our language back into Black liberation, Indigenous decolonization and migrant justice. At the root of our critiques against the government's response to this crisis, we have an opportunity to center anti-capitalist and anti-colonial imaginings. The landscape, the atmosphere and the very way we interact with each other is transforming. This is a moment of rupture. A moment where we must ground our deepest emotions and desires to build new futurities. Not only for us, but for those who are yet to come.

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