

**(Re)Imagining Solidarity in Anticolonial Resistances:  
The Standing Rock Movement and Unsettling the Logics of White Settler  
Colonialism in the Politics of Allyship**

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## Abstract

From April 2016 to February 2017 thousands of Indigenous peoples, representing more than three hundred Indigenous tribes and nations, and non-Indigenous allies from diverse backgrounds and movements opposed the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) by living in encampments on the unceded treaty-protected land of the Oceti Sakowin (the Sioux Nation). The naturalization and diffused nature of settler colonialism in North America meant that many of the white settler allies came to the encampments with a lack of understanding of how the struggle against DAPL is situated within centuries of anticolonial resistances against settler colonialism. As a result, the aims of this thesis are twofold. On the one hand, I explore the ways the Standing Rock movement creates alternative politics, solidarities, and communities rooted in Indigenous land-based knowledges through its resistance against the ongoing forms of settler colonial expropriation and industrial extraction. On the other hand, I examine how the logics of white settler colonialism were reproduced and interrupted in the intimate geographies of solidarity at the Standing Rock encampments. Through an anticolonial feminist activist ethnography consisting of twenty-one in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals who participated in the encampments, this thesis contributes to anticolonial scholarship on resistance and solidarities by unpacking the multivocalities in the grassroots Standing Rock movement, and exploring the tensions and opportunities they create, in order to interrogate white settler coloniality as it intersects with processes of allyship. Ultimately, I demonstrate how solidarities between white settlers, people of color, and Indigenous peoples in the Standing Rock movement produce ruptures in the settler colonial social order, and reimagine settler decolonization by generating possibilities for decolonial subjectivities, relationships, and futurities.

**KEY WORDS:** Standing Rock movement, solidarity, settler colonialism, whiteness, anticolonial resistance, feminist ethnography, decolonization, social movements

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices etc.): 29,990 words

Entire manuscript: 36,451 words

Signed BREANNA RIBEIRO

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AIM – The American Indian Movement

DAPL – The Dakota Access Pipeline

ETP – Energy Transfer Partners LP, a Texas-based fossil fuels company

MNC – Multinational Corporation

U.S. – United States of America



## Introduction

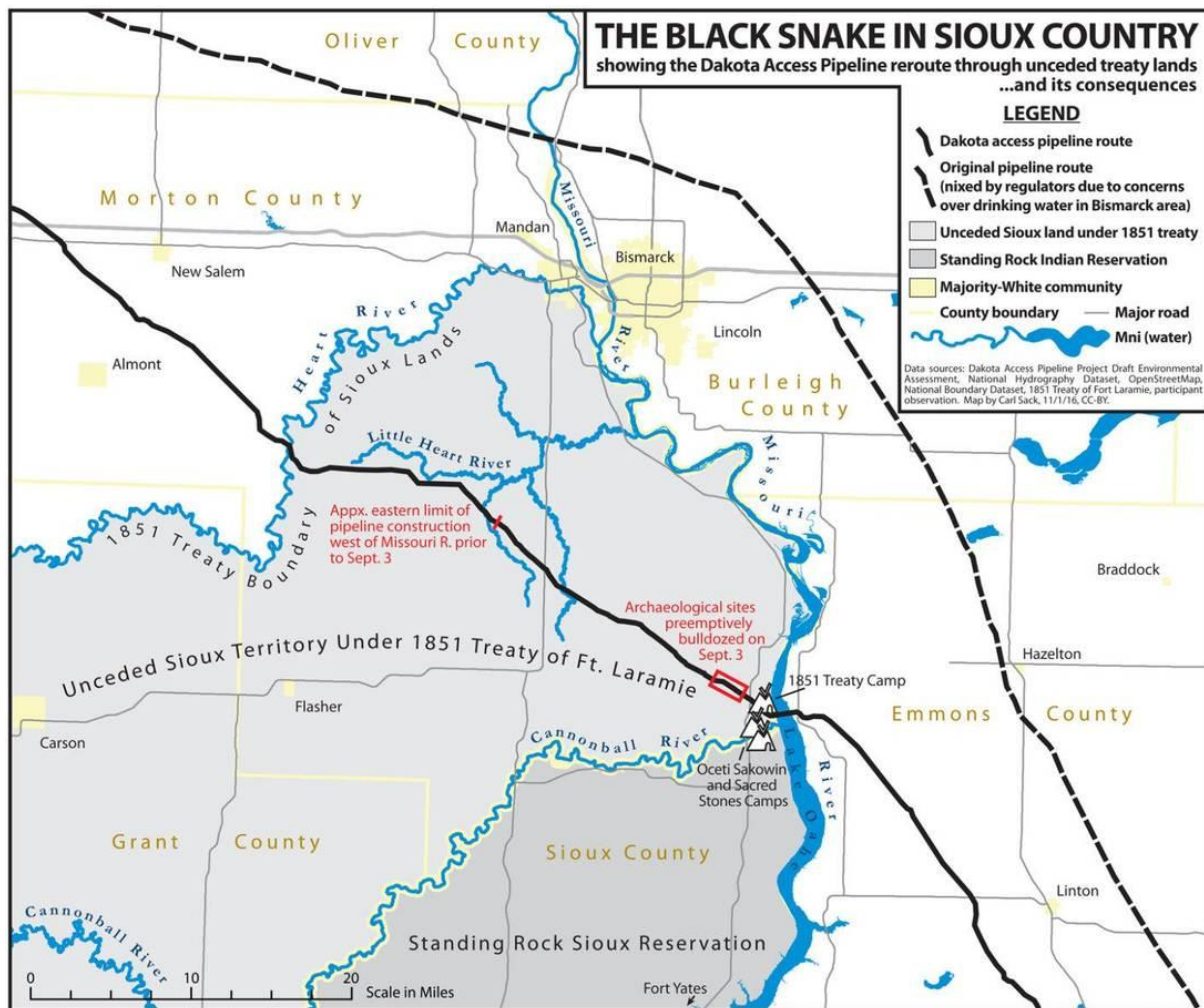


Figure 1: Map made by University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate student Carl Sack, published in *The Independent* (Buncombe, 2016).

From April 2016 to February 2017, thousands of Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous allies opposed the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline<sup>1</sup> (DAPL) by living in encampments on the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's unceded treaty-protected land<sup>2</sup>. Allies ranging from diverse backgrounds and social movements<sup>3</sup> collaborated in solidarity with

<sup>1</sup> As figure 1 indicates, DAPL was originally planned to be constructed north of Bismarck—a predominantly white settler community—but after complaints that it could negatively impact the community, the pipeline was rerouted nearby the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in what anti-DAPL water protectors say is an example of blatant environmental racism (Whyte, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> See explanations of the Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868 in the background subheading below. These treaties were negotiated between the Ojéti Sakowin confederacy (commonly known by settlers as the Great Sioux Nation) and the U.S. military (on behalf of the federal government) in response to settlers building settlements for “fur trading, gold mining, [and] farming” in the “so-called frontier”, but what was actually Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota land (Whyte, 2017, 159).

<sup>3</sup> Including environmentalists (Sierra Club and Green Peace), religious groups from diverse faith backgrounds (including Quakers, Episcopalians, Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Unitarians, Muslims in the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative and MPower Change, and Jews in Jewish Voice for Peace), anti-militarism organizations (CODEPINK), racial justice coalitions

Indigenous peoples representing more than three hundred Indigenous tribes and nations at the Standing Rock encampments in North Dakota (Dhillon & Estes, 2016). According to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and their supporters, the construction of DAPL—a 1,172-mile oil pipeline (USACE, 2017)—violates the Fort Laramie Treaties, threatens Indigenous cultural and spiritual heritage and burial sites, and risks poisoning the Mni Sose, which is the water supply for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and millions of other individuals who draw their drinking water from the Missouri River (Schlecht, 2016; Whyte, 2017). What started as an Indigenous encampment on contested land near the Standing Rock Reservation became a broad-based, diverse social movement with 1,000 to 10,000 self-proclaimed water protectors living at the multiple encampments<sup>4</sup> at any given time (Bradley et. al., 2016, 27).

As an Indigenous-led anticolonial movement consisting of diverse individuals with multiple, and sometimes, conflicting interests, politics, and positionalities, the Standing Rock movement and the encampments were not without conflict. The naturalization and diffused nature of settler colonialism in North America meant that many white settler allies showed up to the Standing Rock encampments with a lack of understanding of how 1) the fight against DAPL is a continuation of hundreds of years of settler colonialism, and 2) many grassroots Indigenous movements are rooted within wider decolonization resistances. As a result, many white allies in the anticolonial resistance reified colonial asymmetries within the spaces of solidarity.

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(Black Lives Matter regional groups), U.S. military veterans, university student groups, legal collectives (Water Protector Legal Collective & Freshet Collective), and Indigenous organizations many of which focused on the environment (Honor the Earth, Indigenous Environmental Network, Idle No More, The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, International Indigenous Youth Council, Owe Aku) (Bradley et al., 2016; Green Peace, 2016; Kuruvilla, 2016; Re'Shel and Heley, 2016; Roewe, 2016; Two Bulls, 2016; Suliman, 2016; Windigo, 2016; Maxwell, 2017; WPLC, n.d.; Freshet Collective, n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> The three main camps in the Standing Rock encampments included the Sacred Stone camp, Rosebud Camp, and the Oceti Sakowin camp. The Sacred Stone camp, which was within the boundaries of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, was established by LaDonna Allard in April of 2016. Rosebud camp was closer to the front lines than Sacred Stone, but still on the opposite side of the river from the frontline direct actions where security forces and law enforcement resided, thus this camp was a bit more protected than Oceti Sakowin camp. Finally, the Oceti Sakowin camp was the closest main camp to the front lines, and often the biggest camp out of the Standing Rock encampments. Within these camps, especially Oceti Sakowin camp, there were multiple ever-shifting internal camps organized based on a number of reasons including tribal affiliation, social movement identification, and most obvious common identity to mobilize a camp around (i.e. Michigan camp and other camps that organized people based on what state they were from) (Erin, 2017, interview, June 21; Jeremy, 2017, interview, July 26).

At the Standing Rock encampments, tensions arose around white settler allies centering their desires and expertise rather than following the outlined Lakota values<sup>5</sup> (O’Conner, 2016; Richardson, 2016). Meanwhile, some movement supporters of #NoDAPL<sup>6</sup> have been criticized for reducing the movement to environmental concerns, thus obscuring the historical context of settler colonialism and its ongoing injustices against Indigenous peoples (Hayes, 2016). As such, the aims of this thesis are twofold. On the one hand, I explore the ways the Standing Rock movement creates alternative politics, resistances, and communities rooted in Indigenous land-based knowledges through its resistance against the ongoing forms of settler colonial expropriation and industrial extraction. On the other hand, I examine how the logics of white settler colonialism were reproduced in the intimate geographies of solidarity at the Standing Rock encampments. In order to achieve this, I engaged in an anticolonial feminist activist ethnography consisting of participatory observation and in-depth, semi-structured interviews through convenience, snowball and chain referral sampling methods.

Following the literature review and methodology in chapter one, in chapter two I investigate how Indigenous place-based ontologies disrupt the processes of global capitalist-colonialism, and provide a framework for generating worlds beyond coloniality. By examining how non-indigenous and Indigenous alliances in an anticolonial social movement produce ruptures in the settler colonial state and capitalist inequalities, chapter two considers how capitalist-colonial conceptualizations of human/nonhuman relationships come to be reshaped through anticolonial resistances that center Indigenous land-based knowledges and Lakota spiritual-ecological practices at the Standing Rock encampments and in the transnational Standing Rock divestment activism.

<sup>5</sup> See Iron Eyes Sr., E. & Abern, J. (2016) for Oceti Sakowin Camp Lakota Values.

<sup>6</sup> The #NoDAPL hashtag has become a central slogan for the movement to position itself against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) in particular, but it has been expanded to indicate support for other land-based Indigenous struggles against the infringement of their sovereignty, the degradation of the earth, and government-backed corporate drilling more broadly. The Standing Rock movement has used the hashtag #NoDAPL to raise awareness through social media, but has also been taken up by supporters to show solidarity.

In chapter three, I examine how ostensibly well-meaning white settler allies (re)inscribe settler colonialist narratives and power relations within the geographies of allyship, and in what ways Indigenous peoples interrupt recolonizing forms of solidarity within an active resistance movement. In particular, I interrogate the ways Indigenous peoples were essentialized, and their spiritualities and culture appropriated, through allyship processes that fetishized Native American traditions “as alternative sources of knowledge and spirituality” (Donaldson, 2001, 237) in the Standing Rock movement. Overall, this chapter complicates romanticized notions of settler allyship, arguing that anticolonial solidarities requires unsettling internalized and relational forms of coloniality that manifest within allyship practices.

On the one hand, chapter four explores how solidarity that fails to integrate Indigenous land-based knowledges, and contest the ways that allies reorient spaces around whiteness and settler logics, reiterates the spatial privileging of whiteness and settlement within the spaces of the Standing Rock encampments. On the other hand, this chapter examines how the corporeal vulnerability of Indigenous and non-indigenous solidarities in the blockade encampment disrupted the logics of white settler colonialism and produced decolonial knowledges and praxis by resisting the appropriation of Indigenous land with their bodies. In this final chapter, I illustrate how the embodied co-resistances of white settler activists, people of color, and Indigenous peoples in anticolonial struggles can unsettle the power relations of white settler coloniality, and forge potentialities for subject-formations and relationships that exceed colonial conditions.

Overall, this thesis contributes to anticolonial scholarship on resistance and solidarities by unpacking the multivocalities in the grassroots Standing Rock movement, and exploring the frictions and relationships they produce, in order to interrogate white settler colonial logics as they intersect with processes of solidarity in anticolonial resistances. I

expand on notions of social change by illustrating how anticolonial social movements generate decolonial knowledges and praxis that are embodied within, and diffused by, water protectors beyond direct action resistances. Ultimately, I demonstrate how solidarities between white settlers, people of color, and Indigenous peoples in the Standing Rock movement produces ruptures in the settler colonial social order that enable new “imaginings of settler decolonization”, generate alternative forms of relating to land, and cultivates possibilities for decolonial relationships, worlds, and futurities (Veracini, 2007, 17).

## Background

The Indigenous-led movement against DAPL is embedded in a long history of colonial and imperial violence against Indigenous peoples in North America broadly, and the Oceti Sakowin<sup>7</sup> peoples of the Great Plains in particular. This history of colonial abuse is accompanied by a centuries-old legacy of anticolonial Native American resistance from which the Standing Rock movement emanates from and builds upon (Donnella, 2016).

In 1851, growing settlement in the Great Plains created tensions between white settlers and the Sioux and Arapaho peoples, resulting in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. In an attempt to establish peaceful relations, this treaty defined territories that were protected for the Oceti Sakowin and others that were open to white settlement (Whyte, 2017). Significantly, the land that ETP is attempting to construct DAPL on goes through treaty-protected Sioux land as defined in the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty (see figure 1).

Settler expansionism continued to threaten the Oceti Sakowin peoples in the 1860s causing violent clashes as Indigenous peoples defended their self-determination. This resulted in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, which importantly recognized the sacred *He Sapa* (Black

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<sup>7</sup> Oceti Sakowin refers to the Seven Council Fires, which encompasses the Sioux nation made up seven tribes and three dialects: the Lakota dialect (Oglala, Hunkpapa, Itazipcola, Hohwoju/Mnikowoju, Sihasapa, Oohenunpa and Sicangu tribes), the Dakota dialect (Sissetonwan, Wapekute, Wapeton and Mniwakantunwan/Bdewakantunwan tribes), and the Nakota dialect (Iyakktonwan and the Iyanktonwanna) (Soldier et al., 2012, 41).

Hills) as the exclusive territory of the Great Sioux Nation (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). While the treaty limited the Oceti Sakowin lands-bases, it also enabled the Sioux to continue hunting in territory marked ‘unceded’ as long as they did not live there. In return for a smaller land-base<sup>8</sup>, the federal government removed a number of agreed upon military forts and promised to prevent white settlement in the Sioux’s territory. Not long after the second Fort Laramie treaty, the U.S. government established agencies throughout the Great Sioux Nation in order to enhance their control over the Dakota and Lakota peoples (ND Gov., 2018).

In the 1870s, the U.S. government attempted to contain the Oceti Sakowin peoples within reservations in order to eliminate nomadic ways of life in exchange for sedentary farming lifestyles (ND Gov., 2018). To reduce nomadism, federal agencies distributed rations of food to Native American reservations. Simultaneously, Christian-led, government-funded boarding schools removed Indigenous children from their Indigenous communities and subjected them to Euro-American assimilation through coercive and violent methods (Wilkins and Stark, 2011). Both the reservation system and Christian influences attempted to ‘civilize’ the Oceti Sakowin peoples by eradicating their spiritual relationships with their land-bases.

Then in 1874, General Custer discovered gold in the Black Hills causing a gold-rush and the violation of the most recent Fort Laramie Treaty as miners sought U.S. military protection as they extracted the Sioux’s resources (Bredhoff, 2001). At the same time, the federal government established military forts allowing settlement and the construction of the Northern Pacific Railway in unceded Sioux territory. By 1876, all Lakota and Dakota Native Americans are forced onto reservations and the Oceti Sakowin peoples are now considered “prisoners of war” (ND Gov., 2018, n.p.). In addition, the United States Congress passes a ‘Starve or Sell Act’, which cuts off food rations to the Oceti Sakowin peoples until they sign

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<sup>8</sup> Following this second Fort Laramie Treaty, the territory of the Great Sioux Nation totaled over 25 million acres (ND Gov., 2018).

their gold-filled Black Hills to the U.S. The Black Hills are finally appropriated by the U.S. government in 1877, and the Dawes Allotment Act officially dissolves unceded treaty-protected Oceti Sakowin territory into six reservations without Indigenous consent (Bredhoff, 2001). This history is demonstrative of how nation-to-nation treaties between the U.S. and Indigenous nations have been dependent on, and easily disregarded for, the economic desires of settlers to profit from access to Indigenous land-bases. The material interests of settlers and the settler state has historically resulted in the dispossession of, and bodily violence against, Indigenous peoples in the United States.

In 1889, the Ghost Dance movement—born from a vision by Paiute spiritual leader Wovoka—spreads to diverse U.S.-based tribes as Native Americans engage in ghost dances as “a sustained vision of how to resist colonization” that contained ecological knowledges and provided glimpses of life without settler colonialism (Youngblood Henderson, 2000, 57). Although Indigenous dances, ceremonies and prayers were outlawed in 1883, Native American land-based spiritualities continue to be practiced in covert ways to resist Euro-American assimilatory policies (Champagne, 2008, 1679-1680). Fearing he will support the burgeoning Ghost Dance movement, Indian agents assassinate Sitting Bull<sup>9</sup>—a Lakota leader—on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in 1890. A few weeks later, 300 to 350 Native American Sioux—including women, children, men and elderly—are massacred by the U.S. military at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota (Brown, 1970). Many of the slaughtered Native Americans had allegedly participated in ghost dancing prior to being murdered thus illustrating how Indigenous spiritual-ecological practices constitute a threat to settler colonial domination.

Once again, unceded Oceti Sakowin territory is appropriated to construct the Lake Oahe Dam in 1940 in North and South Dakota. The consequences of this dam include the

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<sup>9</sup> Sitting Bull was a Hunkpapa Lakota whose Lakota name was Tatanka Iyotanka.

flooding of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's farms, timberlands, and means of sustenance resulting in the tribe's increased dependency on settler-owned stores for their basic needs (Whyte, 2017). In 1953, the U.S. government passes a resolution to begin the era of tribal termination, thus eliminating the reservation system and relocating the Oceti Sakowin peoples, and all Indigenous peoples in the U.S., to urban areas. This shift in federal Indian policy attempted to further the process of eradicating Indigenous spiritualities and place-based relationships by displacing Indigenous tribes from their traditional land-bases in order to enhance the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into dominant Euro-American society.

Influenced by the broader context of growing minority activism in the U.S., intra and intertribal Indigenous resistances are organized predominantly through the Red Power and the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the 1960s and 1970s. In rural areas in the Pacific Northwest, the United States' violation of nation-to-nation treaties with Indigenous nations resulted in 'fish-ins' where Native Americans exercised their fishing rights in the face of increasing federal regulations (Wilkes, 2006). Drawing on tactics and lessons learned from the Black Power resistance, AIM and Red Power raised awareness of the major issues facing Indian Country<sup>10</sup>—including treaty rights, self-determination, and cultural revitalization—through highly visible direct action occupations such as at Alcatraz Island in 1969, the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in Washington D.C. in 1972, and the Wounded Knee armed standoff with the BIA in South Dakota in 1973 (Johnson et al, 1997; Josephy et al., 1999). These occupations were characterized by a masculinist militancy and almost exclusively consisted of Indigenous peoples; however, this activism did seek resources and monetary support from non-indigenous allies (Johnson, 1994; Langston, 2003). These Indigenous resistances reflected the growing activism of Indigenous peoples transnationally

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<sup>10</sup> 'Indian Country' is a legal term defined by the U.S. government as all Native American reservation lands within jurisdiction of the United States' territory. This includes tribes that are not federally recognized, but are still classified as 'informal reservations'. The precise definition of 'Indian Country' can be found at 18 U.S.C. § 1151, or at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) website at <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-applicator-certification-indian-country/definition-indian-country>.



as Indigenous peoples began to use social movements as a tactic of anticolonial resistance (Smith, 1999, 11).

Following over a decade of activism, a 1980 U.S. Supreme Court case finds that the Black Hills were illegally appropriated from the Sioux nation based on the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. The Sioux peoples are offered a settlement of \$102 million by the federal government<sup>11</sup>. The Sioux refuse to collect the money as they define justice as the repatriation of their sacred *He Sapa*. Whereas the U.S. state has tended to define justice with Indigenous peoples in financial terms in ways that perpetuate the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous land by the settler state and its capitalist-colonial interests, Indigenous peoples' have defined justice as repatriation of illegally expropriated land, as demonstrated by this case (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

In contrast to the previous case, the 1980s and 1990s were characterized by the federal government's<sup>12</sup> diminishment of tribes' legal rights in order to weaken treaty rights and enhance the state's paternalistic domination over U.S. tribes (Steinman, 2012, 1073). According to Steinman (2012), this led to a reduction in visible social movement protests as tribes began to seek federal recognition. Champagne (2008) calls this Indigenous activism "The Tribal Restoration movement", under the wider "American Indian Self-Determination movement", which has resulted in over five hundred Indigenous tribes gaining federal recognition in the U.S. (1685-1686).

Realizing that tribal federal recognition does not protect Indigenous land-bases from governmental land expropriation or corporate resource extraction, Indigenous resistances since the 2000s have predominantly been made-up of land defense movements in the U.S. (Spice, 2016). Through the Indigenous Environmental Movement (Clark, 2002), or the

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<sup>11</sup> The uncollected money now adds up to over \$1.3 billion dollars (LeGro, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> The U.S. government achieved this by promoting the notion that Indigenous tribes are racial groups instead of federally recognized sovereign tribal nations with treaty-rights. This governmental strategy continues in today's politics with the U.S. Trump administration (see Hopkins, 2018; Diamond, 2018; Brewer, 2018).

Indigenous Environmental Justice Movement (Casas-Cortes et al., 2008), approximately two hundred Indigenous environmental justice groups have engaged in grassroots environmental struggles, primarily on reservations, whereby Indigenous treaties have been powerful and effective tools to protect the ecologies of traditional Indigenous territories (Clark, 2002, 412). These forms of Indigenous activism have increasingly collaborated with non-Indigenous allies working in the environmental and anti-globalization movements (Choudry, 2007). Notably, in 2016 a coalition between white ranchers and Native Americans from the Oceti Sakowin successfully thwarted the Keystone XL pipeline in South Dakota (Grossman, 2017). Unfortunately, such solidarity did not spread to North Dakota as Indigenous resistance against DAPL was met with a backlash by a majority of white settlers living in near-by Bismarck and the ranches bordering the Standing Rock Sioux reservation (Healy, 2016 September; Healy, 2016 October; 2017, field notes, June 3-5).

Overall, the anticolonial resistance of the Standing Rock movement emerges against the continuous settler occupation of Indigenous land in North America, and the ongoing appropriation and resource extraction of Indian Country in the U.S. (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). Throughout this thesis I draw on the relevant colonial and Indigenous histories in order to highlight the continuities of Indigenous dispossession by European colonization and the U.S. settler state, in order to interrogate how history is a politicized act of remembering as it relates to space, place, land and coloniality in the Standing Rock movement.

## Chapter 1 Literature Review and Methodology

In this thesis, I interrogate the ways settler colonial logics come to be (re)inscribed and ruptured in the geographies of solidarity in the Indigenous-led Standing Rock movement. This project grows out of my positionality as a white settler whose existence in North America is rooted in the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples and land, and as a feminist ethnographer who studies anticolonial resistance(s). As such, I am engaging with discussions occurring in Indigenous and settler colonial studies, which investigate how “the processes through which settlement, land theft, and ongoing forms of genocide are maintained, normalized and erased” both in feminist theory and political praxis in settler colonial contexts (Rowe & Tuck, 2016, 9). In particular, this project amplifies the theoretical and activist contributions of Native feminist theorists and Indigenous activists whose interventions into gender studies and whitemainstream feminism(s)<sup>13</sup> illustrate how white supremacist heteropatriarchy is forged by racialized, gendered, and colonial conditions of power (Arvin et al., 2013; Goeman, 2013). As a result, I generate a feminist analysis that examines how race and gender interact with settler coloniality in order to further the project of decolonizing feminism.

By utilizing a decolonial feminist<sup>14</sup> approach that draws on Native feminist theory, my project explores the possibilities for decolonization both in theory and praxis. In settler colonial contexts, decolonization cannot be achieved by 1) expanding, or gaining equality within, the settler state as it reinforces ongoing settlement and the imperialistic nation/empire building projects it founded on (Snelgrove et al., 2014); 2) uncritically utilizing “imperial methodologies” (Morgensen, 2012, 7) that reproduce “settler colonial knowledge production” as a “colonial collector of knowledge as another form of territory” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, 812-

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<sup>13</sup> Following Sandy Grande (2004) and Claude Denis (1997), ‘whitemainstream feminism’ describes universalizing strands of feminism that are couched within, and perpetuate, the wider logics of whiteness, and in turn reproduce imperialist and (settler) colonial discourses and projects.

<sup>14</sup> For Radlwimmer (2017), decolonial feminism describes itself as a “theoretical model, a subject of study and as a way of enacting feminism; it is set up as an ethics of investigation and of activism” (23).

813); and 3) contributing to feminist epistemologies and activisms that “consent to inclusion within a larger agenda of whiteness” (Arvin et al., 2013, 11). I write this thesis in response to calls made by women of color (Walia, 2014), Native feminist theorists (Smith, 2010; Arvin et al., 2013), and Indigenous Two-Spirit scholars (Justice et al., 2010; Driskill, 2010) for settler allies—and feminists in particular—to formulate critiques of the ways white settlers uphold settler colonial structures of power. As a result, this thesis contributes to anticolonial feminist scholarship by thinking through the possibilities for white settlers to become accomplices in dismantling white settler colonialism within decolonial movements.

### **1.1 Thinking Through Decolonization in Postcolonial, Decolonial, and Indigenous Thought**

The development of anticolonial scholarship has emerged from political projects that are linked to decolonization. Yet, the questions of how to decolonize academic disciplines and wider societal institutions, and what are the roles of scholars in facilitating decolonization, are topics that are contested across and within postcolonial, decolonial, and Indigenous studies (Morena, et al., 2008).

Postcolonial studies, which developed out of twentieth century anticolonial struggles and following the end of European colonial regimes in a number of Asian and African locations, aims to critically examine the colonial past as a “theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath” (Gandhi, 1998, 4). For postcolonial scholarship, this theoretical ‘remembering’ is essential because colonialism did not cease when European governance and military structures vacated the colony; rather, Eurocentrism continues in the subjects and processes of newly independent nation-states through the psychological dominance of colonial logics (Memmi, 1967, 1968), the ongoing hegemony of European thought (Said, 1989), and the false universality of notions linked to modernity and the Enlightenment that are entwined with the nation-state itself (Chatterjee, 1986; Bhabha,

1994). Utilizing structuralist and poststructuralist theories of discourse and the Gramscian notion of the ‘subaltern’, the South Asian Subaltern group<sup>15</sup> produced postcolonial critiques illuminating how the processes emanating from capitalism, nationalism, and modernity maintained colonial modes of thought leading postcolonial theory to question the very assumption that a postcolonial or decolonized society is possible.

Whereas postcolonial scholarship predominantly focuses on exploitation colonialism—or the exploitation of labor and resources of the colony—enacted by European powers in Asia and North Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Group develops analyses of colonialism by interrogating Spanish, Portuguese, and French (de)colonization of Latin America and the Caribbean from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries (Morana, et al., 2008; Mendoza, 2016). A central argument of the Modernity/Coloniality Group<sup>16</sup> is that (post/de)colonial conceptualizations must be geographically particular to attend to the different forms of colonial rule developed in various societies. They contend that postcolonial concepts from the Subaltern group, with its specific geographic and historical colonial experiences, constitute an ‘epistemic difference’ making them inadequate to understand the historically situated colonialisms in the Americas that originated much earlier in 1492<sup>17</sup> (Radlwimmer, 2017). Therefore, decolonial theory<sup>18</sup> and the notion of coloniality (Quijano, 2000, 2007) in particular, elucidates how racialized colonial logics survive in the Americas not only through Eurocentric representations and institutional norms, but also through everyday social relations and subjectivities in ways that

<sup>15</sup> This group included individuals such as Ranajit Guha, Homi Bhabha, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Spivak.

<sup>16</sup> Central decolonial theorists and concepts include Anibal Quijano and his notion of ‘the coloniality of power’ (2000, 2007), Maldonado-Torres and his concept ‘coloniality of being’ (2007), Dussel and his philosophy of liberation (1995, 2002), in addition to Walter Mignolo work on coloniality, subaltern knowledges and border thinking (2000).

<sup>17</sup> See Grosfoguel (2008, 2011) for more decolonial critiques of postcolonial theory and the subaltern group. Grosfoguel (2011) argues that subalternists’ use of Western epistemology privileges primarily Western thinkers thus constituting a “Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism...[that] limits the radicalism of their critique to Eurocentrism” (3). He contends that the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality group diverges from postcolonial thought and the subaltern group by aiming to “epistemologically transcend, that is, decolonize the Western canon and epistemology” by making critiques of “Eurocentrism from subalternized and silenced knowledges” as opposed to “producing studies about the subaltern” (2011, 3).

<sup>18</sup> Beyond the Modernity/Coloniality group, decolonial theory as a school of thought has been argued to have originated with W.E.B Du Bois in the early twentieth century with his critiques of racialization as it intersects with capitalist-colonial relations, and was continued by Franz Fanon and Aimee Cesaire.

reproduce asymmetrical conditions of power between ‘the West and the Rest’ (Morana et al., 2008; Mendoza, 2016). Furthermore, decolonial scholarship extends postcolonial critiques of knowledge production by integrating social justice aims into research practices in order to rethink ontological approaches in more political and collaborative terms (Falcon, 2016; Radlwimmer, 2017).

While postcolonial theory questions the possibility of decolonial futurities, for decolonial and Indigenous scholarship the project of decolonization is not only possible, but it is already manifesting through everyday actions, relationships, and solidarities in decolonial resistances (Alfred, 2005; Grosfoguel, 2011). Within these latter schools of thought—where this project is located—anticolonial struggles generate critiques of, and resistances against, coloniality in ways that (re)imagine and produce alternative social relations. Furthermore, following decolonial theory’s emphasis on studying colonial processes in their specificity, I draw on decolonial scholarship and Indigenous studies to 1) build my critique of how white settler coloniality extends into the Standing Rock movement and its anticolonial solidarities, and 2) couch my theoretical insights in the wider literature on decolonization in North America and settler colonial societies more broadly.

Consequently, by utilizing insights from Indigenous studies<sup>19</sup> as it intersects with settler colonial scholarship<sup>20</sup>, this thesis thinks through (de)colonization under settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is a colonial mode of rule that pursues the accumulation of land and functions through both internal and external colonial constellations of power “because there is no spatial separation between metropole and colony” (Tuck & Yang, 2012,

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<sup>19</sup> Indigenous studies grew out of Indigenous peoples’ grassroots resistances for self-determination and cultural revitalization that emerged around the globe in the 1960s and 1970s. During these eras, social movements developed in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the U.S., as well as heightened Indigenous activism amongst the Sami and Basque people and Indigenous peoples in the Middle East, Africa, Philippines, India, Asia, Americas, and the Pacific (Smith, 1999, 11).

<sup>20</sup> In the past two decades, settler colonial scholarship has grown into its own distinct field following the influential writings by Wolfe (1999, 2006, 2011) and Veracini (2010). The almost immediate institutionalization of settler colonial studies (in contrast to Indigenous studies which has continuously remained in a peripheral position in academia) has caused Snelgrove, Dhamoon and Cornthassel (2014) to be critical of how settler colonial studies can “displace, overshadow, or even mask over Indigenous studies” (9), in addition to subordinating Indigenous peoples and their issues within its scholarship.

5). In white settler states<sup>21</sup>, land becomes the foundation of “wealth, power, [and] law” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, 19). This colonial configuration not only seeks to dispossess and eradicate Indigenous communities to acquire land, but as Lowe (2015) demonstrates, settler colonialism also operates through “slavery and racial dispossession, and racialized expropriations of many kinds...[as] imbricated processes, not sequential events” (7). Therefore, settler colonialism requires both the expropriation of Indigenous peoples’<sup>22</sup> land for settlement and slave labor to work the stolen land, or a distinct racialized capitalism to produce profit.

Since settler colonialism continues<sup>23</sup> to be maintained through everyday practices<sup>24</sup> and naturalized logics<sup>25</sup> by settlers themselves, for Indigenous theorists such as Burgess (2000), both colonization and decolonization are primarily social processes because transformation of governance depends on the collective transformation of subjectivities as well. This understanding reflects Smith’s (1999) reconceptualization of decolonization,

<sup>21</sup> Following Sherene Razack (2002), I use the term ‘white settler state’ to describe the United States as a society “established by Europeans on non-European soil” that continues to maintain its rule through a racialized hierarchy and the ongoing dispossession of, and dominance over, Indigenous nations (2).

<sup>22</sup> The terms ‘Indigenous, Native, Aboriginal, and First Nations’ are descriptors to denote Indigenous peoples “prior-ity in time and place” to the unsolicited encounter that occurred through European expansionism and subsequent Indigenous dispossession (Pratt, 2007, 389-402). As a result, the term illustrates the essential relationality of settler-native. Although there is not a singular definition of who is Indigenous, feminist scholar Parisi (2010) uses the 1986 UN Working Group of Indigenous Populations set of descriptions that Indigenous peoples and nations generally self-identify as:

- “Self-identification as an Indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member;
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies;
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources;
- Distinct social, economic or political systems;
- Distinct language, culture, and beliefs;
- Form non-dominant groups of society; and,
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.” (UNPFII, 2006 found in Parisi, 2010, 221).

Furthermore, according to Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), the term ‘Indigenous peoples’ has been essential to develop a collective identity and platform for “colonized people” to “share experiences as peoples who have been subjected to the colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives” (7). As a result of the terms connection to a network of distinct Indigenous peoples, ‘Indigenous’ is most likely the secondary identification following a national or tribal identity (e.g. Iroquois or Maori) usually in their Indigenous language as opposed to colonial linguistic adaptations (e.g. Lakota as opposed to the French adaption Sioux, Diné as opposed to the Spanish adaptation Navajo).

<sup>23</sup> The continuation of settlement processes in settler nation-states—such as the U.S.—is constituted through multiple interacting structures of power including coloniality, white supremacy, anti-blackness, orientalism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism, (Morgensen, 2014; Snelgrove, et al., 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Raibon (2008) has termed the normalized social practices that perpetuate settler colonial violence(s) ‘microtechniques of dispossession’.

<sup>25</sup> Rifkin (2014) describes these internalized settler logics as ‘settler common sense’.

which was “once viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government” and is now “recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological divesting of colonial power” (98). Such divestments undo colonialism as opposed to remaking it in the ‘postcolonial era’. In particular, Indigenous and settler colonial scholarship are critical of how economic models in postcolonial contexts maintain coloniality. As Tuck and Yang (2012) assert,

The postcolonial pursuit of resources is fundamentally an anthropocentric model, as land, water, air animals, and plants are never able to become postcolonial; they remain objects to be exploited by the empowered postcolonial subject. (19)

Therefore, the realization of decolonial futurities requires the transformation of human relationships to land in ways that abolish property. In order to achieve such reconfigurations, Indigenous resurgence scholarship<sup>26</sup> calls on Indigenous communities to ‘turn away’ from settler colonial states to regenerate Indigenous thought through the revitalization of Indigenous languages and spiritual-ecological knowledges to build decolonial modes of existence.

As Indigenous anticolonial resistances attempt to forge decolonial, nonexploitative realities, Native feminist theory is vital as it critiques how Indigenous struggles for decolonization can be deeply gendered and risk reproducing heteropaternalist conditions. Additionally, Native feminist theory<sup>27</sup> critiques white settler coloniality as it intersects with heteropatriarchy in ways that explicitly avoids idealizing an “authentic past outside of settler

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<sup>26</sup> Indigenous resurgence scholars (Alfred, 1999; Simpson, 2011; Cornthassel, 2012) critique Indigenous activism and studies that seek to gain rights predicated on a politics of recognition because it risks “reproduce[ing] the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend” (Coulthard, 2014, 3). For Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene), recognition of Indigenous peoples by settler colonial states “inevitably leads to subjection” (2014, 42) because it obscures how the settler state itself is “founded on the dispossessed territories of previously self-determining but now colonized Indigenous nations” (37). Therefore, Indigenous resurgence scholars argue that Indigenous politics that focus on gaining recognition by and within settler states, actually reinforce the settler states’ power and authority; an authority that derives from Indigenous dispossession.

<sup>27</sup> Central Native feminist theorists include Linda Tuhiwai (1999, 2010), J. Kehaulani Kauanui (2008), Audra Simpson (2011), Andrea Smith (2010), Mishuana Goeman (2013) and Maile Arvin (2013), Eve Tuck (2012, 2013), and Angie Morrill (2013).



colonialism” (Arvin et al., 2013, 21). While Native feminist theory engages with women of color and third-world feminisms, it has a unique perspective in that Native feminist theory 1) approaches heteropatriarchal violence as a technology of ongoing colonialism; 2) formulates its theoretical contributions from grassroots Indigenous resistances; and 3) generates theoretical critiques and activist tools aimed to maintain Indigenous cultures and strengthen decolonial resistances for Indigenous sovereignty and land repatriation (Driskill, 2010). Altogether, Native feminist scholarship goes beyond mimicking “the map of territorial claims based on masculinist notions of male citizens” to envision realities that exceed settler colonialism, the nation-state, and heteropaternalism (Goeman, 2013, 18).

Indigenous resurgence and Native feminist scholars, who assert that the means of resistance must be consistent with its ends (Alfred, 2005; Simpson, 2011), claim that settlers<sup>28</sup> can transform through decolonial praxis within Indigenous-led decolonial movements themselves (Arvin, et al., 2013; Coulthard, 2014). Within this framework, Indigenous and non-indigenous solidarities become essential to disrupt the settler state and settler subjectivities, forge anticolonial relationships amongst people and with the land, and build decolonial futures collectively. It is this notion that guides my project as I explore how white settler<sup>29</sup> subjectivities were uprooted through their participation in the Standing Rock

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Settler’ is not an identity, rather it highlights the formation of subjectivities through settler colonialism. As Flowers (2015) elucidates, the term ‘settler’ is not synonymous with non-Indigenous nor is it a neutral term; rather ‘settler’ is “a product of social relations that produce privilege” (34). Tuck and Yang (2012) describe it as “a set of behaviors, as well as a structural location” (7). The term is used in Indigenous studies to reveal particular conditions of power, naturalized logics and subjectivities that are mediated through settler colonial modes of power. Its use should be discomforting as it denaturalizes and complicates non-Indigenous peoples’ past, present, and future on Indigenous land. By highlighting settlers’ location in relation to ongoing settler colonialism, the term also indicates a set of responsibilities settlers have in decolonial struggles (Snelgrove et al., 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Following Morgensen (2011), I use the term ‘white settler’ to emphasize the intersection of whiteness, white supremacy, and settler colonialism in the production of white settler subjectivities, logics, and habits. By referring to ‘white’ and ‘whiteness’, I am recognizing structures of power that become diffused into subject-formations and everyday practices as opposed to indicating phenotype (Tuck & Yang 2012, 3). Because I interviewed predominantly white settlers and Indigenous peoples, this thesis may read like there is a concrete settler-Indigenous binary; however, scholars writing about settler colonialism particularly in Hawaii have also interrogated “settlers of color” (Trask, 2000) and “Asian settlers” (Fujikane & Okamura, 2008). Moreover, Jodi Byrd (Chicasaw) destabilizes the perception of a settler-Indigenous dichotomy by introducing the term “arrivant” in *The Transit of Empire* (2011). For Byrd (2011) the term ‘arrivant’ describes “those people forced into the Americas through violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe” (xix). According to Morgensen (2014), the notion of the ‘arrivant’ not only describes “racialized non-natives [who] inhabit Indigenous lands while experiencing colonial and racial subjugation” but also highlights how arrivants both can participate in colonization while having a distinct interest in decolonial projects in ways that differ from white settlers (n.p.). The

movement in ways that produced possibilities for subjective and material shifts in allies' everyday lives in North America.

In addition, I also build on scholarship that is critical of the periodic nature of non-Indigenous solidarity and presumably well-intentioned settler allyship as they risk masking settler complicity with structures of domination (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Snelgrove et al., 2014). In particular, Thomas (2001) is critical of non-Indigenous environmental allyship that "tend[s] to be crisis-driven" as opposed to long-term, relationship-based solidarities founded on anticolonial praxis (216). Furthermore, Choudry (2007) illustrates how non-Indigenous anti-globalization organizations in North America working in coalition with Indigenous peoples against human rights abuses and environmental degradation tend to "amplify, appropriate, distort, or reinterpret Indigenous Peoples' struggles for their own purposes" (102). In addition, Burgess (2000) is skeptical of non-indigenous support for Indigenous movements when it becomes "the popular political thing to do," which further threatens the exploitation of Indigenous communities (152). These tensions are exacerbated when Indigenous spiritualities and culture are appropriated by white environmentalists, ecofeminists, and individuals in the New Age movement who participate in Indigenous land-defense actions (Smith, 1994; Taylor, 1997; LaDuke, 1999; Jacobs, 2003). Altogether, this literature demonstrates how settler colonialism as an internalized logic can become reconstituted through solidarities in decolonial resistances, even as these movements aim to disrupt dominant conditions of power.

Contesting colonialist narratives in non-indigenous allyship, and reimagining decolonial solidarities, are the central aims of my project as I explore the processes of allyship amongst diverse participants in the Standing Rock Movement. By doing so, I hope to formulate spaces where white settlers, and white settler feminists in particular, can rethink

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conceptualization of 'arrivant' is key to understand the complex processes of settler colonialism as it is closely linked to imperialist projects in order to build anticolonial solidarities and decolonial movements that contest multiple forms of racism and white supremacist imperialist violence(s) that oppress diverse communities of color.

forms of allyship by interrogating complicities with white supremacy and settler colonialism in order to further processes of decolonization. Moreover, by contributing to theorizations on settler colonialism, I seek to disrupt the normative research analyses in settler colonial societies that predominantly obscure and reify the “dispossession of Indigenous peoples lands, livelihoods, and futures” (Arvine et al., 2013, 25)<sup>30</sup>.

By firmly couching the Indigenous-led Standing Rock movement in ongoing processes of settler colonialism, my theoretical approach illuminates how the Standing Rock movement undermines the settler colonial project to eliminate Indigenous peoples<sup>31</sup>, and their relationships with the land, through the resistance’s emphasis on Indigenous visibility and existence in the face of five-hundred years of colonial erasure (Wolfe, 2006). As a result, my argument refutes social movement analyses that 1) divorce Indigenous movements from the centuries of colonial oppression in the Americas, 2) (mis)interpret Native Americans as solely a racial group<sup>32</sup>, and 3) bound Indigenous resistances and resurgence within the concept of a social movement; all of which obscure the historical and perpetual dispossession of Indigenous sovereign nations<sup>33</sup>.

For example, by Cable et al. (1994) and Wilke (2006) studying Indigenous movements through resource mobilization theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Morris, 1985)—which focuses on social movement organizations’ ability to gain media attention, public funding, and resources—they remove Indigenous resistances from their historical foundations

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<sup>30</sup> In particular, studies on settler colonialism have been critical of how scholarly intellectual projects in settler colonial societies “remain complicit with ongoing settlement” (Rowe & Tuck, 2016, 6). As Rowe and Tuck (2016) point out, while critical theory critiques dominant relations of power, it has often obscured the ongoing processes of settler colonization and subsumed Indigenous peoples, and their knowledges, into the category of racial minorities in ways that normalize “the normatively White Enlightenment subject, and the settler colonial grounds on which it is formed” (7).

<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that Indigenous peoples are extremely heterogeneous. There are over 250 million Indigenous peoples around the globe, and in the U.S. there are more than four million people who identify as ‘Native American’ (Cadena & Starn, 2007, 1). In *Indigenous Experience Today* (2007), Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn also describe indigeneity as forms of governance, subjectivities, knowledges and “a process; a series of encounters; a structure of power; a set of relationships; a matter of becoming” (11).

<sup>32</sup> As Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) articulates, in the United States “Native peoples were colonized and deposed of their territories as distinct peoples—hundreds of nations—not as a racial or ethnic group” (xiii).

<sup>33</sup> By centering a settler colonial analytic, I am not implying that race and racism do not impact Indigenous peoples in the United States; rather, I am arguing that a critical race perspective is insufficient without an understanding of how the continuance of Native American oppression is constituted by white supremacy and settler colonialism.

by portraying Indigenous peoples as racial groups who create organizations to promote their equality within the U.S., as opposed to colonized nations who desire freedom from the U.S. Furthermore, Wetzel (2009, 2012) overly focuses on the institutional goals and political outcomes of Indigenous mobilization, thus mystifying how Indigenous anticolonial resistances produce decolonial politics. Not only do these approaches locate power in organizations and the state, rather than in the agency of individuals who are participating in the movement, but they also ignore the decentralized and affective aspects of Indigenous anticolonial struggles, thus obscuring how Indigenous movements are involved in generating knowledges and practices that build horizontal power relations to transform colonial inequalities.

Along with scholars who have emphasized the connections between Native American movements and centuries of Indigenous resistance<sup>34</sup> to colonization (Johnson, 1994; Langston, 2003; Dhillon and Estes, 2016), I argue that research on Indigenous social movements that overlooks the five-hundred years of Indigenous resistance to colonial dispossession, risks minimizing Indigenous agency and misreading their land-defense movements. As Laguna Pueblo poet Leslie Marmon Silko (1996) reminds us, Indigenous resistance against colonial land expropriation and environmental degradation is “no new war”:

This war has a five-hundred-year history. This is the same war of resistance that the indigenous people of the Americas have never ceased to fight...There will be no peace in the Americas until there is justice for the earth and her children. (149-151, found in Clark, 2002, 430)

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<sup>34</sup> Following Cadena and Starn (2007), it is important to reiterate that although many forms of Indigenous resistance are couched within social justice struggles and discourses for transformative change “as a political order it can be motivated by different ideological positions, all of them able to effect exclusions and forced inclusions” (4). Therefore, when I say Indigenous activism or resistance I recognize that it has “never been a singular ideology program or movement, and its politics resist closure” (Cadena & Starn, 2007, 4).

## 1.2 Exploring the Possibilities of Anticolonial Feminist Solidarity and Decolonial Feminist Research Practices

As a white settler born on occupied Hopi, western Apache, and Yavapai land in what is now called Arizona, and raised on stolen Paiute territory in Eastern Oregon, it took three years of living abroad for me to recognize that my ability to grow up in North America/Turtle Island is inextricable from the structures of settler coloniality. It is from this situated and settled position, yet distant in location, that I seek to unsettle settler whiteness in the geographies of solidarity in the Standing Rock movement with the hope of furthering an anticolonial feminist project. In order to theorize the possibilities of an anticolonial feminist solidarity, I integrate intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological tool to explore the interlocking nature of settler colonialism and white supremacy<sup>35</sup>. By utilizing intersectionality as an analytical tool, I explore the ways settler colonialism can become both reconstituted and unsettled through the processes of solidarity in decolonial resistances.

Intersectionality as a concept and methodology elucidates how systems of oppression overlap by interrogating the ways injustices manifest themselves through categories of difference<sup>36</sup> (Crenshaw, 1989). As an approach, intersectionality requires assessing social practices and subjectivities as situated within, and shaped by, the matrices of oppression (Collins, 1998). Although Black feminists have argued that using intersectionality to investigate whiteness can further obscure the oppression of women of color by (re)centering whiteness (hooks, 2013; May, 2014), I argue that interrogating the ways that whiteness impacts the reproduction of white settler logics and violence(s) against racialized bodies within spaces of resistance is essential to theorize and build decolonial feminist praxis. Since settler colonialism is constituted by and constitutes white supremacy, “white settlers who

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<sup>35</sup> Drawing on Rabaka’s (2007) description of white supremacy, I locate white supremacy as essential to contemporary racial, social, and politico-economic relations within and across nation-states, and as an international hegemonic system that is linked to both modernity and postmodernity constituting a “*global racism*” (2). According to Charles W. Mills (2003), white supremacy is the transnational and “historic domination of white Europe over nonwhite non-Europe and of white settlers over nonwhite slaves and indigenous peoples” (37). Conceptually, the term highlights both the historical and ongoing prominence of “racial domination and subordination” (Mills, 2003, 40).

<sup>36</sup> For example, such as class, race, sexuality, nationality, age, religion, ethnicity and ability.

seek solidarity with Indigenous challenges to settler colonialism must confront how white supremacy shapes settler colonialism, our solidarity, and our lives” (Morgensen, 2014, n.p.). To this end, I draw on Levine-Rasky (2011) who uses intersectionality to analyze whiteness as a dominant positionality in order to adequately assess persisting inequalities among groups and examine how white settlers (re)inscribe racial power and colonial privileges in the geographies of allyship.

By investigating whiteness through an intersectional approach, I examine how hegemonic power relations impact bodies, spaces, and subjectivities in the Standing Rock encampments. As a result, I seek to highlight the necessity for intersectional analyses to expand beyond analyses of gender, race, and class to examine the ways “racial categories interact with occupation, the extraction of wealth, and the ongoing settlement of land that continues to dispossess Native populations” (Rowe & Tuck, 2016, 8). This approach is imperative because in the United States “settler whiteness” is mediated through white supremacist and settler colonial structures, and enabled by “anti-blackness, Orientalism, and Indigenous genocide” (Morgensen, 2014, n.p.). Building upon Morgensen (2009, 2014), I argue that displacing whiteness, unsettling settler logics, and interrupting white settler desires are crucial to forging anticolonial feminist solidarities within decolonial resistance movements. As a result, this project seeks to expose white settler complicities with colonial structures by “turn[ing] our gazes from the “Other” onto ourselves” in order to destabilize white supremacist and settler colonial power (Max, 2005, 79).

There is a long history<sup>37</sup> of white Western scholars studying Indigenous peoples from universalizing Eurocentric epistemologies and “the settler colonial gaze” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, 812) in ways that reframe culturally diverse peoples through a lens that “privileges the

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<sup>37</sup> Spice (Tlingit) (2016) argues that the origins of the anthropological discipline in the U.S. is rooted in studies on Native Americans that represent them “as static cultures on the verge of extinction” thus overlooking Indigenous agency and obscuring the context of Indigenous oppression at the hands of settler colonial violence (Spice, 2016, n.p.). Spice (2016) is critical of the way that notable cultural anthropologists—such as John Wesley Powell, Frederic Ward Putnam, Lewis Henry Morgan, Franz Boaz and Alfred Kroeber—built their careers by reconfiguring Indigenous knowledges and struggles into ethnographic material without meaningfully interrogating the colonial structures oppressing Indigenous peoples.

knowledges, memories and histories” of the “Western male canon of thought” (Grosfugel, 2012, 81-83). As Deloria (Sioux) (1969) demonstrates, white anthropologists in the U.S. have historically perpetuated problematic research practices whereby Indigenous peoples become “objects for observation...experimentation, for manipulation, and for eventual extinction” (81). Moreover, Smith (1999) argues that these epistemic violence(s) against Indigenous peoples are inextricable from the domination of Indigenous societies by European and Euro-American colonization<sup>38</sup>. In an effort to undermine extractivist methodologies premised on Cartesian dualisms that create a false distance between the researcher (read: subject) and those that are researched (read: object), I integrate methodological insights from feminist activist ethnography (Checker, Davis & Schuller, 2014; Lamphere, 2016) and anticolonial research-practices (Lewis, 2012; Tuck & Yang 2014).

According to Davis (2014), feminist ethnography is theoretically and methodologically couched within an activist paradigm seeking to produce knowledge that “unravels issues of power and include interventions that help move toward social justice” (413). By situating my project in activist-research, a “method through which we affirm a political alignment with an organized group of people in struggle” (Hale, 2006, 97), I have continually reflected on how my data collection and analysis furthers an activist project that benefits the Standing Rock movement in particular, and decolonial feminist struggles in general. Through convenience, snowball, and chain referral sampling methods, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews from June to September 2017 with twenty-one diverse

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<sup>38</sup> For example, social movement studies in the U.S. have represented the nineteenth century Ghost Dance Movement as ‘nativistic’ and ‘cultic’ (Wallace, 1956). Although the movement originated from a vision by Wovoka, a Paiute spiritual leader, the Ghost dance was predominantly portrayed as the “Sioux Ghost Dance outbreak” (Porterfield, 1987, 735), whereby a “frightened and infantilized” people performed “grotesque” and “pathological” movements at the command of “psychotic” shamans (La Barre, 1970, found in Martin, 1991, 680). Such scholarship dehumanizes Native Americans in ways that mark them as irrational, savage-like, immature, and in need of the paternalistic settler state. Furthermore, this rhetoric justifies the violence(s) perpetuated by the U.S. military on Indigenous peoples, which in the case of the Sioux Ghost Dance resulted in the massacre of approximately 300 Lakota, Dakota, Nakota people now known as the Wounded Knee massacre (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015).

individuals<sup>39</sup> who participated in the Standing Rock encampments. In addition, I engaged in participatory observation (Lewin, 2006; Lamphere, 2016) at the Standing Rock Nation Film and Music Festival on the Standing Rock Reservation over a three-day period, as well as participated in two water protector events that addressed local environmental and Indigenous sovereignty issues in the Puget Sound area in Washington state.

To avoid decontextualizing the obtained interviews from the broader socio-historical structures, I applied intersectionality as a method<sup>40</sup> to analyze the semi-structured interviews and organize the data into analytical themes. Drawing on Cuadraz and Uttal's (1999) intersectional method, their method required me to suspend my assumptions on how visible identity categories may influence interviewees' responses in order to later couch interview responses within contextual circumstances as they intersect with categories of difference. This method enabled me to investigate how participants' experiences at the Standing Rock encampments are framed by "situational location", "social location", and the "contemporary social context," which, according to Cuadraz and Uttal (1991), "historicizes the individual views, identifies common experiences across individual accounts, and brings the material context of their lives into the analysis" (173).

Moreover, to achieve a feminist reflexivity, my ethnography has perpetually reflected on the situated nature of my research (Haraway, 1988), whereby my view as the researcher is always partial and mediated (Lykke, 2014). As a result, I recognize my positionality as dynamic and embedded in my research, rather than fixed and separate from it. Furthermore, by exercising a feminist ethic of vulnerability (Behar, 1996), I have devised measures to

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<sup>39</sup> Nine of the interviewees identified as Indigenous, one interviewee was a mixed-race (European, Hispanic, and Lakota heritage) individual who identified as 'culturally Indigenous', ten of the interviewees identified as white or of European heritage, and one interviewee identified as African American. Interviews lasted anywhere between forty-five minutes and three hours.

<sup>40</sup> In social movement scholarship, intersectionality has been used to track central patterns of social relations—including gendered, classed and raced dimensions—to explore the nature of power relations (e.g. vertical, horizontal, informal or formal) as they influence coalition-building processes (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013; Chun, Lipsitz, & Shin, 2013; Laperriere & Lepinard, 2016).



safeguard the vulnerability of my research participants into my research design<sup>41</sup>. This also includes drawing on decolonial research practices (Smith, 2012) as to not exacerbate the power inequalities<sup>42</sup> that arise between researchers and human subjects (Patai, 1991). For example, as I analyzed my ethnographic data, I incorporated what Tuck and Yang (2014) describe as ‘practices of refusal’<sup>43</sup>, which “involve an active resistance to trading in pain and humiliation” of dispossessed communities to the settler academy (812). As Tuck and Yang elucidate:

The goal of refusal is not for objects to become subjects in the academy, but contrarily, to *object to* the very processes of objectification/subjection, the making of possessors and possessions... (814)

Following these authors’ (2014) suggestions, I have attempted to avoid reproducing the “god-gaze of the objective knower” (815) and refused sharing sensationalist interview quotes, and instead I analyze the interplay between individuals and dominant structures of power.

Finally, to avoid reproducing reductionist representations of Indigenous peoples as ‘Other’, or as an “object rather than as a knowledge-producing subject” (Grosfugel, 2012, 81), I also draw on Casas-Cortes et al. (2008) (re)conceptualization of social movements<sup>44</sup>, and their participants, as agential producers of situated “knowledge-practices” that need to be “recognized, built upon, and engaged with” relationally by the researcher (19). Within this

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<sup>41</sup> My research design included the following protections: 1) anonymizing research subjects’ information and de-identifying research participants’ interview responses unless explicitly asked by research informants to include their name and basic information; 2) storing all information about and from research participants in de-identified, password-protected, and encrypted-at-rest files; 3) designing interview questions with a particular sensitivity to avoid harming participants and their communities over time; 4) making participation in this research free, voluntary and ongoing; 5) putting research participants’ comfortability, privacy, and needs first; 6) facilitating transparency by disclosing information about this project to research participants; 7) ensuring mutual understanding between myself and research participants’ about the purpose of the research and how interviews will be used, how my research will be reported, and how research informants will be protected.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Patai (1991) underlines the insurmountable power differentials that arise due to the researcher having authority over what material from interview participants is used and how it is framed, in addition to exposing the inescapable degree of exploitation in research projects dealing with “living human beings” (Patai, 1991, 6). Ultimately, Patai (1991) comes to the conclusion that “in an unethical world, we cannot do truly ethical research” (150); nevertheless, she reminds feminist researchers that we have the obligation to pursue research questions and utilize methods that enhance the ethical nature of our research.

<sup>43</sup> Tuck and Yang (2014) couch research inquiry within ongoing settler coloniality to argue that it can be an extension of settler invasion. As a result, they promote researchers in settler colonial societies to integrate an ethic of refusal that rejects the “poetics of empire: to discover, to chart new terrain, to seek new frontiers, to explore” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, 813).

<sup>44</sup> Casas-Cortes, Osterweil, and Powell’s (2008) reconfiguration of social movements builds upon the ‘cultural turn’ (Johnston and Klandermans, 1995; Melucci, 1996; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Goodwin and Jasper, 2004; Polletta, 2004), feminist critiques of positivist approaches (Haraway, 1988), and critiques of structural and macro-political approaches to social movements.

framework, social movements are reimagined as spaces and processes where knowledge is co-produced by, and embodied within, the subjectivities of social movement participants (Chesters, 2012). By approaching the Standing Rock movement as a producer of knowledge-practices, it allows me to explore the possibilities of social change beyond the ‘active’ resistance at the Standing Rock encampments as movement participants continue to embody spatially and temporally embedded knowledge(s) from anticolonial resistances. This is essential to examine how anticolonial movements generate the knowledges, tools, and solidarities necessary to (re)imagine and forge decolonial existences.

By applying intersectionality, decolonial and feminist ethnographic methods, and activist-research practices, I (re)imagine how decolonization as an everyday practice intersects with solidarity-building processes in anticolonial resistances. To achieve this, I investigate how allies in the Standing Rock movement negotiate accountability and complicity amongst the continuing processes of Indigenous land dispossession. In addition, I interrogate the ways colonial logics and settler subjectivities are named and reshaped through anticolonial solidarities and knowledge-practices. By contributing to anticolonial feminist theorizing on multiplicity, this research is beneficial to grassroots coalition-building praxis with a particular focus on facilitating solidarity through anticolonial strategies that build upon, rather than flatten, difference.

## Chapter 2

### “Mni Wiconi, Water is Life”<sup>45</sup>: Indigenous Land-Based Ontologies, Intersectional Resistances, and Ecological Renewal

Within the Indigenous-led Standing Rock movement, I argue that Indigenous ontologies have been critical to upset capitalist-colonial relations between people and with the nonhuman environment. Before analyzing how Indigenous ontologies—in the form of Indigenous spiritual-ecological knowledges—became a tactic of resistance at the Standing Rock encampments, I examine how the historical suppression of Indigenous land-based ontologies has been central to European colonization in the Americas and the U.S. settler state’s project to sever Indigenous peoples’ relationships to land in order to render land as property. By utilizing Native feminist theory and Indigenous studies in conversation with Indigenous environmental education, I illustrate how Indigenous ecological knowledges and spiritual practices have been essential for the Standing Rock movement to build a global intersectional resistance that uproots colonialist configurations of land as property/resource/territory in order to generate decolonial existences.

#### 2.1 The Standing Rock Movement’s Resistance to the Historical and Ongoing Colonization of Indigenous Land

Whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen! –W.E.B. Du Bois<sup>46</sup>

The legal right for European settlers to claim North American lands and dispossess sovereign Indigenous nations<sup>47</sup> derives from the Doctrine of Discovery and *Terra Nullius*, which by European legal standards legitimized the colonization of non-Christian communities in the Americas and elsewhere by Spain, Portugal, England, France and Holland

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<sup>45</sup> 2017, field notes, June 3-5 at the Standing Rock Film and Music Festival.

<sup>46</sup> From Lewis (ed.) (1995, 454) *W.E.B. Du Bois reader*.

<sup>47</sup> In 1665, the British Royal Commission recognized the Indigenous nations of North America as nations. This meant that Indigenous “leaders are equal in status to the crowned heads of European states” and that they “have sovereignty over their traditional territories,” which required the settlers of North America to obtain the “consent” of sovereign Indigenous nations through treaties in order to enable legal settlement (Webber & Macleod, 2010, 237).

in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Miller et al., 2010). As Pasternak (2007) describes, the Doctrine of Discovery<sup>48</sup> in conjunction with the Roman Law *Terra Nullius* (meaning empty land) reconfigured any lands that were not ‘properly’ cultivated by European agricultural standards, and not ‘occupied’ by a Christian population, as uninhabited, vacant, and thus ‘discoverable’ for Christian Europeans.

Through the colonization of the Americas, beginning in 1492, Indigenous peoples were rendered as sub-humans, an inferior race, by androcentric European logics that linked religious beliefs to blood purity, which for Quijano (2000, 2007) continues in the everyday politics of the Americas today through ‘the coloniality of power’ or a diffused set of racialized logics and colonial power relations. Within these Christian/colonizing logics<sup>49</sup>, Indigenous peoples lack of Christian faith made them biologically inferior thus constituting a moral mission for colonizers to Christianize and civilize ‘heathen savages’ through colonial violence that aimed to remake the Native ‘Other’<sup>50</sup>. According to Rabaka (2007), these histories of European colonialism and imperialism stripped people of color of their legal “right to be human, of their right to self-definition and self-determination,” (10) in ways that “set the stage for what would later become racism and white supremacy” (3)<sup>51</sup>. Altogether, the Doctrine of Discovery not only erased Indigenous peoples’ prior sovereignty in the

<sup>48</sup> The Doctrine of Discovery developed from Pope Alexander VI’s papal bull in 1493 and is now international law (Pasternak, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> These logics were later exemplified in Euro-American settlers’ narrative of Manifest Destiny, which linked the notion of U.S. exceptionalism with expansionism in ways that predicated on “gendered and arrogant notions of the dominion of man over the earth” (Arvin et al., 2013, 26).

<sup>50</sup> This is evidenced in the following excerpt from the *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823) U.S. Supreme Court case, which adopted the Doctrine of Discovery into U.S. law: “On the discovery of this immense continent, the great nations of Europe were eager to appropriate to themselves so much of it as they could respectively acquire. Its vast extent offered an ample field to the ambition and enterprise of all, and the character and religion of its inhabitants afforded an apology for considering them as a people over whom the superior genius of Europe might claim an ascendancy. The potentates of the old world found no difficulty in convincing themselves that they made ample compensation to the inhabitants of the new by bestowing on them civilization and Christianity in exchange for unlimited independence...” (Chief Justice Marshall, 1823, 572-573 in *Johnson & Graham’s Lessee v. McIntosh*, 21 U.S. 8 Wheat. 543, Retrieved at *Justia US Supreme Court*: <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/21/543/case.html>).

<sup>51</sup> Charles W. Mills (2003) also has pointed to “European expansionism and the imposition of European rule through settlement and colonialism on aboriginal and imported slave populations” as the historical foundations for white supremacy as a “set of systems” (38).

Americas, but it reframed invasion and genocide of Indigenous peoples in the Americas “as the will of God by the Christian churches of western Europe” (Deloria, 1969, 30).

Furthermore, European settlers justified the expropriation of Indigenous land by marking Indigenous societies as agriculturally ‘backward’ based on androcentric European agricultural standards that demeaned Indigenous women who carried out the majority of agricultural labor in most Native American societies (Schneider in Justice et al., 2010). In particular, Locke’s ‘labor theory of value’ and his ideas of property and ‘improvement’ outlined in *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) enabled Indigenous dispossession by giving settlers the right to, in Locke’s words, “appropriate any parcel of Land, by improving it” (271, found in Lowe, 2015, 93). As Pasternak (2007) demonstrates, Locke’s language of land improvement—which centered labor, productivity, and profit—was so influential it not only established a “property right entitlement” utilized by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence (1776), but it also legitimized “settlers’ rights to appropriate indigenous land without the Crown consent” thus furthering the creation of an independent nation-state and extending capitalist-colonial technologies of rule over Indigenous land and life (n.p.).

Drawing on the idea of *Terra Nullius*, settler colonial modalities of rule<sup>52</sup> continue to attempt to “empty” the land of Indigenous peoples and their prior place-based ontological relationships (Ritske, 2017, 84). Historically—and with DAPL as well—Indigenous peoples’ refusal to possess and ‘develop’ land, as a form of individuated property based on Lockean notions, has been used as a justification for governmental and industrial expropriation of Indigenous land in North America<sup>53</sup>. For example, in the *Johnson v. McIntosh* Supreme Court case (1823), when the Doctrine of Discovery was adopted into U.S. law, it states: “the tribes

<sup>52</sup> According to Waziyatawin (2009), settler colonial technologies have resulted in violent incursions on Indigenous peoples and their ways of life in the United States through colonial regimes of domination that have assaulted every facet of Indigenous communities, including their bodies, economies, spiritualities, governance structures, food sources, languages, kinship systems, gender and sexual relations, and knowledge systems (192).

<sup>53</sup> As McCoy (2014) points out, within Indigenous ontologies land is conceptualized as collective as opposed to individuated property. Pasternak (2007) also highlights the “performative aspects of property” from an Indigenous ontological perspective whereby land consists of “mountains, forests, plants, animals, wind, rain, sun, and moon” and is interdependent with human communities (n.p.).

of Indians inhabiting this country were fierce savages...to leave them in possession of their country was to leave the country a wilderness.”<sup>54</sup> As Deloria (1969) notes, whereas “feudalism conceived man as a function of land...the early settlers made land a function of man” (176). Therefore, Euro-American settlers viewed Native American land-based dances, songs, and ceremonies—which constitute Indigenous spiritualities<sup>55</sup>—as indicative of Native Americans supposed ‘primitiveness’ and ‘irrationality’ as ‘non-modern’ communities. In particular, dominant Protestant work ethics perceived Indigenous spiritualities as the foundation of Indigenous peoples’ ‘collective indolence’ and their ‘inappropriate’ (read: uncivilized) relationship to land (Sullivan, 2006).

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the U.S. federal government attempted to eradicate Indigenous spiritual-ecological knowledges and tribal kinship structures through assimilatory efforts that suppressed Native American dances, songs, and ceremonies in order to 1) ‘modernize’ Indigenous peoples, 2) repress potential mechanisms of anticolonial resistance (e.g. the Ghost Dance), and 3) enhance the settler state’s control of land by reconfiguring land into individuated property inherited through patriarchal lineage, thus undermining the power Indigenous women derived from their traditional agricultural roles (Justice et al., 2010). For example, government-sponsored Christian boarding schools—which operated from the 1870s to 1960s—forcibly removed Native children from their families and put them into schools where they were physically and sexually abused for displaying their culture, practicing their spirituality, or speaking their languages (Soldier et al., 2012). In this way, boarding schools were one part of a larger ‘civilizational’ project that aimed to discipline Indigenous communities through violent forms of assimilation that were codified into law through ‘Indian Offenses’. In 1883, the Courts of Indian Offenses was

<sup>54</sup> See 590 in *Johnson & Graham’s Lessee v. McIntosh*, 21 U.S. 8 Wheat. 543 at *Justia US Supreme Court*: <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/21/543/case.html>.

<sup>55</sup> I say spirituality in the plural since there is no homogenous ‘Indigenous spirituality’, but rather a range of culturally diverse spiritual practices and ecological perspectives that are community-based and geographically particular within Indigenous nations and tribes (Deloria, 1972).

established to prosecute Indigenous peoples' participation in place-based spiritual practices, including ceremonies, dances and even hair braiding (Murphy, 2012). Altogether, these colonialist mechanisms sought to not only 'civilize' Indigenous bodies, but also to 'civilize' Indigenous relationships to land by reformulating land and tribal kinship through "the imposition of heteronormative patriarchal inheritance" of private property (Schneider in Justice et al., 2010, 16), or as McClintock (1995) states, the masculinist logic of "possessive individualism" (23-24).

The criminalization of Indigenous spiritualities lasted until the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-341). While this legislation protected Indigenous peoples 'right to believe' from a Western religious point of view, it did not protect the sacred ecological places that are essential for Indigenous peoples to practice their land-based responsibilities from private or corporate interests (LaDuke, 2005, 13-14). For Matt Remle<sup>56</sup> (Lakota)—an activist, writer, and educator who is an enrolled member of the Standing Rock tribe—Indigenous place-based responsibilities mean that:

Every tribe has its own roles and responsibilities which ties back to our origin stories. As Lakota people, we were given certain instructions and with those instructions comes particular ceremonies, songs, and ways of being that are unique to us...and one tribes' songs and ceremonies are not better than another tribes' place-based responsibilities.<sup>57</sup>

According to Youngblood Henderson (2000), these instructions, ceremonies, prayers<sup>58</sup>, and dances constitute "a living relationship" with particular ecologies (260). Hannah, a Sioux woman, described to me that Indigenous spirituality "is not a religion<sup>59</sup>, it is a way of life"<sup>60</sup>;

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<sup>56</sup> Matt Remle has been identified throughout this thesis upon the informant's request.

<sup>57</sup> 2017, interview, June 26

<sup>58</sup> For example, the Oceti Sakowin's (the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota confederacy) prayer 'Mitakuye Oyasin', which translates to 'All My Relatives', is emblematic of Indigenous cosmologies as it "teaches respect for the earth and all life forms and to become stewards of the land" (Soldier et al., 2012, 21). The prayer emphasizes that "we are all related and not only are we related, we are closely linked in a symbiotic relationship" (Soldier et al., 2012, 16). Altogether, the Oceti Sakowin, and its spiritual-ecological relationships, teach that "creatures, man, animals, birds, insects, reptiles, plants, water, and air are integral to the survival of the people and the earth" (Soldier et al., 2012, 16).

<sup>59</sup> In the Oceti Sakowin and the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota languages, there is no word for the term religion and their conception of spirituality—as an "experience that is lived on a daily basis"—varies drastically from Western conceptualizations of structured religion (Soldier et al., 2012, 16).

<sup>60</sup> 2017, interview, June 6

and these ways of life hold a set of instructions to live sustainably within a particular ecology that Indigenous nations are embedded within.

Couching DAPL firmly within the historical and ongoing processes of colonization demonstrates how corporate-government investments in the fossil fuel industry are a continuation of the colonial civilization project that seeks to eradicate Indigenous land-based pedagogies in order to “maintain and normalize property ownerships over land” and enable resource extraction (Ritske, 2017, 84). Contemporary Indigenous grassroots movements that resist both environmental injustices and the expropriation of Indigenous land, such as the Standing Rock movement, are rooted in Indigenous nations’ spiritual-ecological responsibilities<sup>61</sup> to their traditional land-bases (Smith, 2005). Matt highlighted this element in our interview when he explained that:

As Indigenous communities, our ceremonies are place-based. So when you have pipeline projects, or uranium or coal mining that are going to impact where we’re instructed to conduct a certain ceremony then obviously we are going to fight intensely. We’re not fighting for just our own existence, we understand that we are to go here and conduct a certain ceremony that is not just for our benefit but for the benefit of all creation.<sup>62</sup>

Because Indigenous spiritualities are land-based, they require the existence of a healthy ecosystem. As LaDuke (1999, 2005) has meticulously documented, resource extraction by corporate-government investments interrupt Indigenous spiritual-ecological relationships by degrading the environment and alienating Indigenous peoples from their sacred sites<sup>63</sup>. The destruction of both the environment and sacred sites through “resource extraction, animal extinction, land clearance, and pollution” inhibits Indigenous peoples’ ability to practice their spiritual-ecological responsibilities (Korteweg & Oakley, 2014, 132). Not only does this

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<sup>61</sup> It is vital to note that the Indigenous spiritual-ecological responsibilities and knowledges are not static, but rather have been in a perpetual state of change due to the shifting ecological conditions and forms of colonial domination (Goeman, 2013).

<sup>62</sup> 2017, interview, June 26

<sup>63</sup> In the Great Plains area in particular, the illegal expropriation and desecration of millions of acres in the Black Hills for its precious minerals has been a long-term struggle for the Lakota as the *He Sapa* (Black Hills) are the “center of the Lakota universe” in their creation stories (LaDuke, 2005, 91). In addition, Mount Rushmore (a U.S. national park in South Dakota) has the faces of four U.S. presidents sculpted into the Black Hills as a show of power by the settler state against the Oceti Sakowin peoples.



constitute a continuation of social, cultural, and spiritual genocide of Indigenous peoples, but it is also fuels environmental degradation globally<sup>64</sup>.

Environmental injustices cannot be adequately addressed without resisting settler colonialism. Since land is central to settler colonial structures of domination, “environmental degradation has often proceeded through and in support of settler colonialism” (Snelgrove, et al., 2014, 26). As Whyte (2017) remarks:

Settler colonial injustice is environmental injustice. For the U.S. settlement process aims directly at undermining the ecological conditions<sup>65</sup> required for Indigenous peoples to exercise their cultures, economies, and political self-determination. (11)

Within this context of ongoing colonization, justice for Indigenous peoples is (re)formulated as the ability to maintain and restore Indigenous peoples’ spiritual-ecological relationships with their traditional land-bases. This requires non-Indigenous people to go beyond participating in environmental struggles to work towards settler decolonization more broadly. Settler decolonization includes not only the “reclamation of Indigenous lands and waters, and recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination on those lands and waters” (Whyte, 2018, 145), but also a resurgence of Indigenous knowledges that can build decolonial futures beyond property ownership, the nation-state, and colonial ways of relating to each other and the environment (Smith, 2010).

As anticolonial resistances work to create more equitable co-existences amongst diverse human communities and with the nonhuman environment, capitalism as an economic structure that commodifies land, exploits humans and their labor, and exacerbates racialized, classed, and gendered inequalities, must also be challenged (Alfred, 2005). For Matt Remle,

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<sup>64</sup> Land-bases under the management of Indigenous peoples contain 80 percent of the world’s biodiversity despite the fact Indigenous peoples control only 12 to 20 percent of the land world-wide and make-up just 5 percent of the world population (Toledo, 1999; Kamal, 2017). This has caused environmental scholars to argue that the survival and empowerment of diverse Indigenous cultures is linked to the survival and preservation of the planet’s biodiversity (Knudston & Suzuki, 1992; Toledo, 1999).

<sup>65</sup> Whyte (2017) describes ecological conditions as “the complex relationships to place that are the substance of Indigenous governance systems” (11).

the Indigenous land-based knowledges diffused throughout the Standing Rock movement challenge capitalist-colonial notions that transform water and land into commodities and produce environmental and Indigenous rights violations:

With the Standing Rock movement, on display is Lakota culture, Lakota thinking, and the Lakota worldview. Take ‘Mni Wiconi’, or ‘water is life’, that slogan is global now...Really internalizing Mni Wiconi means looking at water differently... If you really break that word down, ‘m-n-i’, the ‘ni’ part literally translates to ‘life’ and the ‘m’ when you put it in front of ‘ni’, it means ‘it gives me life’. So ‘mni’, which we use for ‘water’, the real translation is ‘it gives me life’. If you were thinking about filling up your cup of water and instead of calling it ‘water’ say ‘it is giving me life’, even in English your relationship is going to change with that substance. You’re going to think about water differently. And ‘wiconi’ is a reference to ‘all creation’, like trees, birds, everything...So when you put those two words together it gives acknowledgment that all creation needs mni to live.<sup>66</sup>

Throughout our interview, Matt highlighted how the Standing Rock movement enabled non-Indigenous people from around the world to learn about an ontological understanding of, and relationship with, the nonhuman environment that contradicts colonial configurations of water as a resource and land as property and territory<sup>67</sup>. As a result, non-Indigenous peoples’ participation in an Indigenous-led environmental movement can foster opportunities for learning Indigenous environmental perspectives that are “concerned with relationships, relationality, and collectivity” and emphasize the interconnectedness of all life forms. This is what Lowan-Trudeau (2016) calls “protest as pedagogy” (96), whereby Indigenous and non-Indigenous alliances create possibilities for a shift in white settlers’ relationship with the nonhuman in ways that, I suggest, can support the creation of decolonial futurities.

Whereas the notion of private property is rooted in settler colonial modes of domination, exploitation, and conquest (Ritske, 2017), within Indigenous paradigms both the

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<sup>66</sup> 2017, interview, June 26

<sup>67</sup> As Matt’s example illustrates, these Indigenous land-based ontologies and spiritual-ecological knowledges are rooted in Indigenous language. Therefore, sustaining and revitalizing Indigenous place-based languages is essential to maintain distinct Indigenous environmental knowledge(s), Indigenous ecological relationships, and an overall healthy eco-system (Deloria, 1969; Smith, 1999). Korteweg and Russell (2012) go a step further by arguing that Indigenous languages are vital to not only achieve Indigenous self-determination, but to “Indigenize” environmental education and our relationships with the nonhuman thus enabling a future for humans, both Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, on this earth (5).

human and nonhuman are alive, agentic, and spiritually imbued, and therefore, are inextricably related to one another (Styres and Zinga, 2013, 301). Land holds knowledge and histories, it is “storied”; it is “not a blank space awaiting conquering” (Goeman, 2013, 200). As a result, ‘Mni Wiconi’ is not just a slogan to mobilize an environmental social movement, it is a land-based pedagogy that confronts the settler logics of ownership and property, and upsets the “cognitive imperialism of...Eurocentric universalism and its rule over ontology and epistemology” (Tuck et al., 2014, 13). Therefore, interweaving Indigenous place-based knowledges throughout the Standing Rock movement undermines the human/non-human hierarchy, challenges Western renderings of land as resource, and exceeds the notion that humans’ relationship with land must be contained within association of owner and property.

Indigenous land-based systems of knowledge, as exemplified by the slogan ‘Mni Wiconi’, are crucial to challenging the settler state’s formulation of land as a bordered territory and to transform Western anthropocentric conceptualizations of nature as an arena to be tamed; both of which the U.S. settler state is predicated on. Conceiving humans as ontologically interrelated with nonhuman relations confronts a Western dualist understanding of the environment that divides nature and humans whereby humans are hierarchically superior to nature (Plumwood, 1991). Therefore, non-indigenous solidarities with Indigenous peoples, and their place-based knowledges, are essential to interrogate the ways in which Western human/nature dualism, whiteness, and settler desires intersect to impact individuals’ understandings of, and relationships with, the environment. As the next section will illustrate, these solidarities informed new reciprocal relationships between individuals and the nonhuman environment in ways that are exposing and destabilizing our present colonial reality.

## 2.2 “Defend the Sacred”<sup>68</sup>: Indigenous Spiritual-Ecological Knowledges as a Resistance to Settler Colonial Violence(s)

The Standing Rock movement marked the largest gathering of Indigenous nations and tribes in “modern history,” which enabled diverse spiritual cultural traditions to be practiced at the encampments (Bubacz, 2018). At the Standing Rock encampments, Indigenous ceremonies, prayers, dances, and songs constituted a spiritual resistance to the fossil fuel industry’s expropriation of Indigenous land in order to “Defend the Sacred”. By integrating land-based spiritualities into their tactics of resistance, the Standing Rock movement 1) defied the ongoing capitalist-colonial violence(s) inherent within the settler colonial project to eradicate Indigenous peoples and their spiritual-ecological relationships to land; 2) contested environmental injustices emerging from settler colonial ownership, extraction, and pillaging of the environment; and 3) forged new anticolonial relationships predicated on Indigenous understandings of human/nonhuman interdependencies.

Generating anticolonial praxis is enabled through merging Indigenous land-based knowledges with political resistance, or what Coulthard (2014) calls “Indigenous modalities of place-based resistance” (14). For Coulthard (2014), Indigenous place-based resistance coalesces anticolonial, anti-anthropocentric<sup>69</sup>, and anti-capitalist critiques with Indigenous peoples’ knowledge of their traditional geographies “as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations...[that] teaches us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms” (13). At the Standing Rock encampments, hegemonic conceptions of land, space, and community were altered for many non-Indigenous allies by Indigenous modes of place-based resistance.

<sup>68</sup> Popular slogan written on signs and printed on t-shirts at the Oceti Sakowin camp in particular, and in the Standing Rock movement in general (2017, field notes, June 4).

<sup>69</sup> Anthropocentrism is the centering of humans and human interests (Jacobs, 2003, 669).

For example, Erin<sup>70</sup>—a U.S. American white woman in her early 20s who is an environmentally-conscious feminist<sup>71</sup>—discussed how her allyship in an Indigenous-centered movement exposed the assumptions underlying her, and other white settlers, environmental perspective:

I realized that even the way that we think about the environment is constructed through a colonial, Eurocentric, western, and elitist framework. Like how our national parks were founded: the preservation of land for rich white people to observe. I feel like based on my positionality, I'm not even able to say whether or not something is environmentally sound because my perspective is so fucked.<sup>72</sup>

Erin's quote speaks to the existing tensions between non-Indigenous environmentalists and Indigenous peoples whereby environmentalists' frame environmental struggles as issues of preservation and conservation in ways that displace Indigenous nations struggles for sovereignty and treaty rights (Long, 1997). As LaDuke (1999) notes, environmentalists who are ignorant of "Native ecological and economic systems" and the history of "Native tenure on these lands" tend to perpetuate an "environmental colonialism," or an environmental politics rooted in Eurocentric understandings of land that are intertwined with whiteness and settler colonial erasure of Indigenous histories (131).

For Ashley<sup>73</sup>—a white woman from the U.S. in her mid-20s who has been involved in past environmental activism—her time at the Oceti Sakowin camp highlighted the interconnectedness between human communities and the nonhuman:

The space that was built there [at camp] recognized how human beings and communities were a part of the whole ecosystem, not separate from it...Standing Rock showed me how we can form communities that are actively involved in the ecosystem around us, how we can be stewards of the land.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> 'Erin' is a pseudonym to protect the interviewee's identity as agreed upon with the informant.

<sup>71</sup> Erin made two extended-weekend trips to the Oceti Sakowin camp. In Erin's first trip to Oceti Sakowin camp, she led a college group of volunteers from the Pacific Northwest to help with the resistance efforts while her second trip aimed to conduct ethnographic research on the movement for her college thesis (2017, interview, June 21).

<sup>72</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

<sup>73</sup> 'Ashley' is a pseudonym to protect the interviewee's identity as agreed upon with the informant.

<sup>74</sup> 2017, interview, July 13

Together, Erin and Ashley's descriptions illustrate how their conceptualization of land through an individualist, capitalist, and Western masculinist<sup>75</sup> lens was undermined by Indigenous place-based knowledges at the camp whereby place is conceived as a "system of relations...[that] embody spirit and agency" (Delora, 1972, 61). This ontological framework contests atomized perspectives of human communities by situating communal relationships as sacred and deeply entwined in relations of interdependence with one another and the nonhuman environment, thus threatening settler narratives that draw on Lockean notions of land as property (Youngblood Henderson, 2000).

As both a structure and logic, settler colonialism depends on the violent erasure and elimination of Indigenous peoples, their spiritual-ecological knowledges, and their claims to their traditional land-bases in order to maintain the existence of settlers, the settler state, and capitalist-colonialism on Indigenous land (Wolfe, 2006; Coulthard, 2014). For Ritske (2017), this is the central "logic of white settler colonialism" whereby Indigenous peoples and their ontological relationships with land are "made murderable and, in fact, must be murdered for settler colonialism to be normalized and legitimated" (81). To disrupt these violent modes of colonality, the Standing Rock movement aimed to cultivate a resistance of non-violence, prayer, and ceremony in ways that contrasted the violence perpetuated by the fossil fuel industry<sup>76</sup> and the U.S. government<sup>77</sup>.

For example, Derek<sup>78</sup>—who is a white male sustainability coordinator from the U.S. and spent one weekend at the Oceti Sakowin camp—remarked:

There was this vibrant community being collaboratively held in this space at Standing Rock, and then literally right down the street it looked like a warzone. It was a really interesting visual juxtaposition... It was kind of this disconnect.

<sup>75</sup> For example, a Western masculinist perspective on land can be seen as deriving, in part, from the dominant Christian Creation Story in Genesis whereby man has 'dominion' over the earth.

<sup>76</sup> For example, the violence(s) against the environment and humans as a result of resource extraction and the ETP-hired security forces at the Standing Rock encampments.

<sup>77</sup> For example, the violence(s) perpetuated against water protectors at Standing Rock by the militarized response of local and state law enforcement.

<sup>78</sup> 'Derek' is a pseudonym to protect the interviewee's identity as agreed upon with the informant.

It didn't seem like there was anything to militarize against at Standing Rock, yet here are these militarized responses. Standing Rock was a group of people that were coexisting, and obviously there are demonstrations being held but they were all nonviolent. For me it really highlighted those differences of context and modes of operation between the movement and our government. One of the more powerful moments for me at Standing Rock was when one of the two-spirited youth leaders called on people in the camp to embrace, forgive, and hold everyone—including the security forces—in love and compassion, and to understand that they need healing too...One quote that stood out to me by the two-spirited youth leader was, “We can't expect to maintain this kind of prayerful, peaceful movement if we are dehumanizing the security people. We lose our humanity when we dehumanize another.” That really struck me...I realized in that moment, and in others, that the underlying movement at Standing Rock was about decolonization.<sup>79</sup>

This quote is demonstrative of how blockades, and other disruptive tactics of resistance by Indigenous peoples, are both a refusal of the violence perpetuated by resource exploitation and militarized security forces, in addition to an investment in alternative existences. Following Coulthard (2014), Indigenous place-based resistances are an “affirmative *enactment* of another modality of being, a different way of relating to and with the world...[that] become a *way of life*, another form of *community*” (169, original emphasis). The Standing Rock encampments, as a land-based direct action that temporarily blocked the ETP corporation's pipeline construction, also sought to build new ways of being rooted in non-violent relationships between humans, and non-exploitative relationships between humans and the nonhuman, as mutually reinforcing processes.

Central to these life-generating processes were the everyday acts of resistance that enabled Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to enact a non-hierarchical, non-atomized community at the Standing Rock encampments. As Matt explains:

For the people who went to Standing Rock, something that I've heard again and again from both Natives and non-Natives, especially Natives who are more urban or disconnected, is that at Standing Rock it was totally different from a Western disconnected lifestyle where you have your single nuclear family and you go to your job then go home to your isolated apartment and there's just disconnection all the way around. At Standing Rock, it was the opposite. Everybody has a role and a responsibility and no one is greater or

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<sup>79</sup> 2017, interview, July 13

more important than the other. So the folks who spend time in the cook shacks constantly preparing and feeding people are just as important as the folks who are going out and doing the direct actions, who are just as important as the folks that are doing divestment activism, who are just as important as the people doing the legal aid stuff, who are just as important as those doing childcare at the camp. It's all equally necessary and important and I don't think people are used to that.<sup>80</sup>

These enactments of alternative ways of being and relating, based on notions of equality and kinship<sup>81</sup> rooted in Indigenous ontologies, meant that many Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples wanted to set up a permanent, Indigenous-led community that would continue regardless of DAPL. Daphne Singingtree<sup>82</sup>—a middle-aged midwife of Standing Rock Lakota heritage as well as Hispanic and European ancestry, who was at the camp from August to November 2016—reiterated Matt's comments:

I think what people experienced and why they wanted to keep the camp alive, which was a very popular idea, was because of the experience of living in a community of people with a shared purpose and collectively resolving the kinds of issues that come up with day to day living. Most people in American culture today live very isolated from each other. You live in a family group, but you don't live in a tribe. You don't share meals with a lot of people or pray with a lot of other people or have ceremonies together. All of those activities happened in camp every single day and it was the first time that most people had experienced that type of community, including tribal people, it was the first time they had the experience living as a tribe.<sup>83</sup>

The quotes above by Derek, Matt, and Daphne highlight how the Standing Rock encampments were not just a strategic necessity to obstruct the construction of DAPL, they were an anticolonial political praxis seeking to generate a community centered in Indigenous knowledges. These communal processes are key to forge decolonial worlds since Indigenous resurgence and decolonization require collective discussions in order to destabilize the capitalist relations of individualism, atomization, and what Simpson (2011) calls "colonial isolation" as each constitute, and are constituted by, settler colonial conditions of power (69).

<sup>80</sup> Remle, 2017, interview, June 26

<sup>81</sup> In particular, the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota peoples' conception of kinship is "a philosophy of 'we', cohesion of interconnectedness and not a belief that an individual's needs are more important than the needs of the whole" (Soldier et al., 2012, 21). This understanding of kinship is inseparable from the Oceti Sakowin's spiritual-ecological beliefs and practices.

<sup>82</sup> Daphne Singingtree has been identified throughout this thesis upon the informant's request.

<sup>83</sup> Singingtree, 2017, interview, July 27



Moreover, the Standing Rock encampments have been essential to sustaining Indigenous spiritualities and strengthening Indigenous kinship and resistance(s) as each have been continuously fragmented by colonial violence(s). As Rachel Heaton<sup>84</sup> (Muckleshoot), an Indigenous activist who co-founded the divestment organization ‘Mazaska Talks’<sup>85</sup>, shared:

For me, being at camp was my connection. We all say that we went out there and found a little bit of our Indian, and we did because we all got to go out there and be connected to our people and the land. But I think it had to happen for me, Standing Rock changed my life. I wasn’t involved in this stuff before Standing Rock... Yeah, we have powwows and you’re on a reservation but you can’t just go and listen to our songs, listen to our language, and be emerged in it. For a lot of us [Indigenous peoples], Standing Rock gave us purpose, changed our lives, allowed us to reconnect to our Indigenous roots and it gave us a way to help our people. For me, that’s what camp became about because even when I couldn’t be there I was fundraising, working on divestment, if there were water protectors around they always had a place to stay, one of them lives with us now that we met at camp. We made families at Standing Rock...

Later in our interview, Rachel couches the Standing Rock movement, and its significance of (re)cultivating Indigenous connections, in centuries-long settler colonization and the Indigenous resistance(s) that have paralleled it:

Me having my girls, I’m the first woman in four generations of my family to keep my children from the time that they’re born to the age that they are now. So that trauma has clearly played into my life because my grandmother couldn’t keep her children, my mom couldn’t keep me, and it was because of the system of colonization, and what’s been put in place to remove our people... As somebody who was a part of the adoption act and separated from her family until I was a teenager, for me Standing Rock has connected me back to my relatives, my Indigenous relatives. Me and Matt [Remle] were talking about this one day, his people are Sitting Bull’s people and I was telling him that I’m related to Chief Joseph, and then we found out that Sitting Bull was leaving South Dakota to come to meet Chief Joseph and his band people met. Our activism has helped us connect our own histories and why we believe we ended up at Standing Rock. I truly believe that my ancestors, because of their involvement with Sitting Bull, with Chief Joseph, with these different leaders, that our ancestors have called us back to this work and it connects us back to their relatives, to Matt and to others. I really believe Standing Rock is even bigger on a spiritual level.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Rachel Heaton has been identified throughout this thesis upon the informant’s request.

<sup>85</sup> This phrase means ‘money talks’ as ‘mazaska’ translates to ‘money’ in Lakota.

<sup>86</sup> Heaton, 2017, interview, June 30

As Rachel's quotes demonstrate, the ongoing existence of Indigenous peoples, their kinships, and their ontological and cosmological relationships to land, continues to impede the settler project of eliminating the Native (Wolfe, 2006). In addition, the mobilization of Indigenous spiritual-ecological knowledges within a social movement encampment provides pedagogical opportunities for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to generate alternative conceptions about how to relate with each other and the environment.

Because Indigenous place-based ontologies manifest in collective tribal ownership of land as opposed to individual ownership, they continuously threaten capitalist accumulation and private property as colonial modalities of power. For example, during the Cold War era "communal tribal lands were designated as communist, anti-capital, and un-American" (Goeman, 2013, 91). In the 1950s-60s, this in part led the settler state to terminate and relocate Indigenous tribes in order to undermine Indigenous relationships with their traditional land-bases. Herein lies the significance of Indigenous peoples practicing their spiritual-ecological ceremonies at the Standing Rock encampments; not only do they do so in the face of hundreds of years of social, physical, spiritual and cultural genocide, but their land-based ontologies continue to threaten capitalist-colonial configurations of land. To reiterate a phrase that I heard by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples at the Standing Rock Film and Music Festival: "Indigenous existence is resistance"<sup>87</sup>.

As the previous quotes have shown, resistance at the Standing Rock encampments did not occur solely on the 'front lines' of the direct actions against law enforcement and the private security forces as many media portrayals represent; rather, resistance was diffused throughout the everyday acts of non-violence and "ceremony-based resistance"<sup>88</sup> in the

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<sup>87</sup> 2017, field notes, June 3-5

<sup>88</sup> This was a sentiment I heard repeated at the Standing Rock Film and Music Festival (2017, field notes, June 3-5).

Indigenous-centered spaces. According to Karina<sup>89</sup>, a white woman and a journalist who spent two weeks at the camp:

The camp wasn't just about protesting, it was about living and that itself was the protest. So the whole camp, by maintaining peace and prayer, was the protest...I saw 600 people dancing together with guns pointed at them. I saw people eating together and laughing with military sharp-shooting rifles pointed at them all day. Now tell me that isn't a resistance in itself".<sup>90</sup>

Karina's emphasis on dancing as a form of anticolonial political resistance has a much longer history. For example, the Oceti Sakowin peoples' participation in the nineteenth century Ghost Dance has been interpreted by Youngblood Henderson (2000) as a "postcolonial ghost dancing" whereby the dances maintained visions of life without colonialism and transmitted spiritual-ecological knowledges that are critical to environmental renewal (72-73). Furthermore, Indigenous dance can foster collective forms of resistance against practices of domination perpetuated by settler nation-states. As Goeman (2013) argues, "in dancing, people refuse to stay still and static in a collaborative politic that becomes a mechanism of resistance" (145). If we apply these insights to the Standing Rock movement, we can see how dance and ceremony within the encampments, on the one hand, facilitated collective resistance against the settler project to erase Indigenous spiritualities and relationships to land, while on the other hand, sustained Indigenous ontologies that enable imaginaries beyond the colonial nation-state.

Moreover, Erin expands on how spirituality as a tactic of resistance within the Standing Rock movement shifted her conceptions of resistance against the structures of settler coloniality:

Since Standing Rock, I have been thinking that spirituality can be a really incredible tool of not only self-sustainability that enables the centering of self

<sup>89</sup> 'Karina' is a pseudonym to protect the interviewee's identity as agreed upon with the informant.

<sup>90</sup> 2017, interview, June 3

and well-being as a part of a resistance, but also as a really anti-rational, anti-capitalist way of knowing that in and of itself is a way of resistance.<sup>91</sup>

Following Erin's ideas on spirituality, I suggest that Indigenous and non-Indigenous solidarities that center Indigenous spiritual-ecological knowledges destabilize settler colonialist, masculinist, and capitalist modes of relating to each other and the land as essential processes to build decolonial subjectivities, communities, and futures<sup>92</sup>.

In addition, Karina spoke to how her participation in the movement denaturalized the links between societal consumption and settler colonial inequalities:

We're addicted to fossil fuels. We just want to go into a room and turn on a dial and not think about where it's coming from, zero accountability. We get a lot of energy from dams, so you go into your dining room and you turn on your heat and you don't realize that Native American lands were taken again to build that dam. All of that *violence* just so we don't have to think about how to warm our homes. So teaching people to not take for granted what they use every day was a big part of being at the camp.<sup>93</sup>

This quote illustrates how the Standing Rock movement couches the everyday consumption practices of individuals within broader power structures as they are integral to the reproduction of capitalist-colonial inequalities. In this way, the camps' anticolonial resistances complicate capitalist discourses by exposing how such processes require feeding off of the resources of another's community, or feeding off of the "milk of pain" (Waheed, 2013, 85). By centering Indigenous ontologies that highlight our interdependencies, the movement attempts to transform individuated consumeristic subjectivities that are both produced by, and productive of, neoliberal<sup>94</sup> markets that require resources and land in order to satiate individual desire. These land-based knowledges reject that the individual supersedes the community thus upsetting the individualization and atomization of neoliberal power relations.

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<sup>91</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

<sup>92</sup> Similarly, Arvin, Tuck and Morrill (2013) argue that "engaging Indigenous epistemologies, without appropriating them or viewing them merely as a mystical metaphor, is a method of decolonization" in and of itself (25).

<sup>93</sup> 2017, interview, June 3

<sup>94</sup> I broadly define neoliberalism as the dominant globalizing capitalist paradigm promoting free-market values, privatization, and minimal governmental intervention (Hill et al., 2016), and as a Western "political project with a market agenda" (Griffin 2007, 221).

As evidenced by Ashley, Erin, and Karin's quotes, non-indigenous solidarities with Indigenous peoples enables white settlers to strengthen their understandings of how capitalism, colonialism, and neoliberalism intersect. According to Aziz Choudry (2007), anti-globalization activism in North America often obscures how neoliberal globalization is an extension of colonial violence(s). Choudry (2007) argues that non-Indigenous participation in Indigenous-led movements against neoliberal inequalities is a "potential pedagogical tool" to enhance understandings of how political, social, environmental, and economic injustices are embedded within ongoing processes of colonization in ways that can generate decolonial practices (100). Within the Standing Rock movement, solidarities also served as a pedagogical tool whereby movement participants developed more critical understandings of coloniality thus enabling Indigenous and non-Indigenous movements to potentially forge relational decolonizing praxis.

As Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples at the Standing Rock encampments came together in Indigenous-led ceremonies and direct action events, the ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies of Indigenous people were centered. It is in these practices where Indigenous spiritual-ecological knowledges<sup>95</sup> were shared, and colonial renderings of land as an extractable resource was disrupted, thus calling into question the capitalist-colonial processes the settler colonial U.S. empire is founded on (Alfred, 2009). Therefore, the Standing Rock movement does not aim to integrate Indigenous peoples within existing power relations, which risks state and capitalist co-optation of Indigenous grassroots mobilization. Rather, the movement seeks to fundamentally transform these structural inequalities by shifting the everyday consumeristic habits of individuals and their understandings of land/water/community in order to foster more equitable relations. As First Nations documentarian Josua Rivas, who spent six months at Standing Rock encampments, notes "I

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<sup>95</sup> As Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy (2014) highlight, it is essential that when sharing and learning Indigenous knowledge(s) we avoid "stereotyp[ing]" indigeneity by rendering Indigenous knowledge as fixed or a mythical knowledge source (11).

think after Standing Rock people knew that another world is possible, a world where we retain our connection to the Earth and fight for the right to be human” (in Bubacz, 2018). In the creation of new worlds, the movement’s transnational activism as resistance to capitalist-colonialism globally has been essential.

### **2.3 “Put Your Money Where Your Solidarity Is”<sup>96</sup>: Resisting Neoliberal Exploitation(s) through Transnational Indigenous-led Divestment Activism**

The mentality of patriarchy, power, and colonial conquest is...stripping us of our resources, contributing to our human rights violations—to our water-living-rights violations. –Rachel Heaton<sup>97</sup>

The resistance to neoliberal exploitation growing out of the Standing Rock encampments continues through Indigenous-led divestment<sup>98</sup> activism. At divestment actions, Indigenous activists highlight the ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples by settler colonial states in cooperation with the fossil fuel industry. By exposing the complicity of individual consumers within these systems, the divestment movement makes visible the links between individuals’ banking practices, bank investments into multinational corporations (MNC) projects, and the resulting violence(s) perpetuated by MNC ventures against both the environment and marginalized communities. The Standing Rock divestment activism aims to cease individual and community investments into financial institutions that benefit from perpetuating raced, classed, gendered, and environmental abuses by raising community awareness about the interrelated nature of banks, MNC’s, and human rights abuses, thereby mobilizing the collective economic power of communities to fight structural violence(s).

<sup>96</sup> Slogan featured on the global divestment organization website, Mazaska Talks. See it at <https://mazaskatalks.org/#theboycott>.

<sup>97</sup> 2017, interview, June 30

<sup>98</sup> This movement is inspired by years of divestment activism in other anticolonial collective struggles around the world. In particular, the Mazaska Talks website cites inspiration from the divestment campaign against South African apartheid in the 1990s, in addition to those in Sudan and Burma (see <https://mazaskatalks.org/about/>). Some other influential divestment campaigns include the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israeli apartheid (see <https://bdsmovement.net/>), university climate advocacy work by 350.org (Jarvis, 2013), and climate change activism in Canada (McSorley, 2014).

This divestment activism began at the grassroots level by asking individuals to divest from banks that were invested in DAPL and reinvest into alternative banks and credit unions<sup>99</sup> that are not investing in fossil fuels. The movement has grown into a coalition between environmental, Indigenous, and racial justice groups in order to not only address DAPL, but also the civil, human, and environmental rights abuses perpetuated as a result of the investments by Wall Street banks. As Matt Remle, a co-founder of the divestment organization 'Mazaska Talks', indicates:

I'm not going to say these banks are good just because they are not heavily invested in coal, yet they are heavily invested in private prisons...A part of our strategy...[is] to also work with the African American community who is organizing against prisons and with the immigrant community who is opposed to detention centers. We cannot sell out these other communities just because a bank might have phased out financing fossil fuels yet continues to profit off of human rights abuses.<sup>100</sup>

As Matt's quote illustrates, their divestment activism embodies a politics of intersectionality by connecting the multiple violence(s) perpetuated by MNC's with bank investments in ways that link the human rights violations occurring against Indigenous and non-indigenous water protectors at Standing Rock with detained immigrants and imprisoned communities of color. Such an approach recognizes the unequal power relations emanating from neoliberal projects as constituted by racialized, classed, and gendered inequalities as they intersect with the messy processes of colonialism, imperialism and empire-building.

The Standing Rock divestment activism essentially refutes the exploitative foundations upon which capitalism, colonialism<sup>101</sup>, and patriarchy are based, as evidenced in Rachel's quote at the beginning of this section. While this anticolonial resistance is rooted in critiquing dominant structures of power, it is also invested in generating new worlds. In a recent article, Matt Remle and Nikkita Oliver (2017) explain that their divestment resistance

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<sup>99</sup> See <https://mazaskatalks.org/divestyourself> for a list of Native-owned banks, Black-owned banks and credit unions, B-corp banks, credit unions, and fossil-free funds, where individuals can reinvest their money.

<sup>100</sup> Remle, 2017, interview, June 26

<sup>101</sup> Both settler colonialism and neocolonialism.

is founded upon collective transformation whereby our habits, relationships, communities, and institutions are transformed to ensure our shared future on this earth:

The continued resistance of indigenous people has awakened many non-indigenous peoples' sense and desire to live in ways that protect our natural resources and our shared human existence. Resistance and divestment are not enough. We must build the world we most need to see. This includes establishing shared financial institutions which, like us, also protect our natural resources and shared human existence. Our future—all of our futures—depends on it. (n.p.)

This model of resistance expands our notions of intersectionality to include the environment by illuminating the interrelatedness between humans' embeddedness within power structures, environmental degradation, and global neoliberal institutions—such as banks and MNC's (Kaijser and Kronsell, 2014). Altogether, the Standing Rock movement not only exposes the interdependencies between humans and the environment, but it moves towards a politics that recognizes the indivisibility of Indigenous, human, and environmental rights whereby the survival of the environment becomes central to the existence of humanity.

What started as grassroots groups calling on individual consumers and businesses to divest from financial institutions funding fossil fuel extraction has grown into a global movement with the aim of disrupting the operation of neoliberal markets. This resistance has been led by a transnational coalition of grassroots collectives<sup>102</sup> that demand city and state governments around the world, as well as the financial institutions themselves, to end their investments in projects that profit from poisoning waterways, propelling environmental degradation, and perpetuating human rights abuses. Such divestment activism recognizes the interconnectedness of transnational struggles thus rupturing the atomization and disconnection that obscures the interrelated nature of structures fueling global neoliberal oppressions (Gupta, 2012).

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<sup>102</sup> See <https://mazaskatalks.org/#theboycott> for a list of local groups, organizations, foundations, governments, and businesses who have already divested their finances from banks funding the eight Tar Sands pipeline.



The transnational divestment activism that emerged from Standing Rock continues to upset ongoing forms of colonialization that depend on the illusion of human disconnection to perpetuate humans' complicity in one another's suffering. For example, Rachel—who participated in an Indigenous delegation of activists who travelled to Europe to share their stories from the Standing Rock encampments along with promoting the divestment movement—notes:

Going to Europe was about teaching people over there about how their banks and corporations are investing in projects that are detrimental to our people and our sacred land by contributing to our genocide and to the desecration of Mother Earth.<sup>103</sup>

To counter these colonial processes, Rachel emphasized the necessity for transnational activism embedded in reciprocity, which she describes as “requir[ing] us to recognize how our institutions are impacting them... to really tie in these world issues because everybody’s land is going through something.” The sharing of stories and experiences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples globally hinders colonial hegemonies that repress Indigenous knowledges, and reduce land and water to commodities (Goeman, 2015). For Rachel, these relationship-based, transnational solidarities are fostered by connecting seemingly disparate fossil fuel projects through the violence(s) they produce on communities and the environment:

There are villages over there in Italy that are hundreds of years old and they are suffering from man-made earthquakes from nearby gas extraction projects... These people are having to leave their villages and their traditional food sources... Before Standing Rock, we saw each of these fights as separate issues but our activism has shown that they were always connected. So we all have to be involved in each other’s issues.<sup>104</sup>

Here, the Standing Rock movement makes visible both the land and bodies of those that suffer from transnational investments in fossil fuel projects in order to reveal how neoliberal oppressions intersect.

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<sup>103</sup> Heaton, 2017, interview, June 30

<sup>104</sup> Heaton, 2017, interview, June 30

By using Indigenous land-based ontologies, Indigenous transnational divestment activism reconfigures the ‘transnational’ by viewing land and water as continuously connected. As Goeman (2015) has theorized, Indigenous knowledges can shift colonial understandings of the transnational, whereby water is reconceived as the connector of land-bases globally “rather than water as that which divides continents, islands, and land,” (Goeman, 2015, 94). By focusing on interconnections as opposed to divisions, Goeman (2015) displaces the ‘nation’ in the ‘transnational’ and prioritizes human relationships to land and water through a “trans-Indigenous feminism” as a model that “centers our goals on relationships to land and water” (95). Within this approach, water and land are sovereign entities as opposed to nation-states. If we apply this framework to the Standing Rock movement’s global activism, Indigenous land-based ontologies within a ‘trans-Indigenous feminist’ praxis are critical to 1) challenge the “colonial logics of containment” that are reproduced through dominant conceptualizations of the ‘transnational’ (Goeman, 2015, 97), and 2) dissolve the atomized, coherent nation-state as we build decolonial modalities beyond the nation-state system and its violent borders.

Through its transnational activism, the Standing Rock divestment movement addresses the realities of the contemporary world-economy by building a trans-Indigenous feminist resistance. This is essential because as Grosfoguel (2006) elucidates, “a system of domination and exploitation that operates on a world-scale such as the capitalist world-system cannot have a ‘national solution’...It requires global decolonial solutions” (n.p.). As evidenced by the Standing Rock movement, I argue that such solutions should be built through a politics of intersectionality as an effective tactic to resist capitalist-colonial structures, and through Indigenous place-based ontologies as critical knowledges to imagine decolonial modes of being in the world.

Decolonization requires the eradication of capitalist exploitation of humans and the non-human, both of land and labor, thus demanding a rupture in colonial logics in favor of the creation of new ways of relating (Alfred, 1999, 2005; Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2011). Within this framework, settler divestment from notions of property, and the repatriation of Indigenous land, are not independent from global inequalities. As Goeman (2013) argues, underlying the “construction of global economies” lies the erasure of Indigenous peoples “as the constant present absence upon which the myth of nation-state dominance depends and expends” (157). By confronting the ongoing processes of colonization in North America, the Standing Rock movement destabilizes capitalism globally as it is inseparable from Indigenous dispossession (Goeman, 2013). Ultimately, the incorporation of Indigenous land-based knowledges into an Indigenous-led global divestment politics has been crucial to contest neoliberal inequalities, interrupt ongoing expropriations of Indigenous land, and inform new ways of being with each other, the environment, and our nonhuman relatives to create more equitable, just relationships.

Overall, the Standing Rock movement challenges the capitalist-colonial frameworks of land as property and water as resource by highlighting the ongoing existence of alternative human/nonhuman relationships rooted in Indigenous spiritual-ecological knowledges. While solidarity in Indigenous-led land-based movements can motivate allies to rethink the hegemonic human/nonhuman hierarchies and build more sustainable relationships with the ecosystem, the next chapter explores how white settler allies’ appreciation and desire to learn from Indigenous cultures can slip into romanticizing Indigenous peoples and their spiritual-ecological knowledges in ways that reiterate settler colonialism. Altogether, Indigenous ceremonies, prayers, songs and dances will continue to be hindered while Indigenous places remain occupied by settlers and their epistemologies, and the obstruction of Indigenous

peoples' access to their traditional territories risks exterminating their lifeways, economies, spiritualities, and arguably the ecosystem itself.

### Chapter 3

## “I Am Not Your Pocahontas Princess”<sup>105</sup>: Disrupting White Settler Coloniality in the Politics of Solidarity

This chapter examines how white settler allyship can (re)constitute a settler gaze in anticolonial resistances whereby Indigenous peoples, and their spiritual-ecological knowledges, come to be essentialized, exoticized, and appropriated. By exploring how Indigenous acts of refusal interrupted recolonizing forms of white settler solidarity in the Standing Rock movement, I argue that Indigenous refusals unsettle settler colonial conditions of power by rupturing internalized coloniality and denaturalizing white settlers’ existence on stolen Indigenous land, thus creating possibilities for decolonial ways of being. Drawing on insights from decolonial and Native feminist theory in conversation with Indigenous and settler colonial scholarship, I illustrate how white settler allyship can (re)produce colonialist power relations within the intimate spaces of solidarity in ways that exacerbate tensions between settlers and Indigenous peoples within active decolonial resistances.

### 3.1 The Fetishization of Indigeneity, “Culture Vultures”, and the White Settler Gaze

Allies can never become Native. They can never learn all of our knowledge. They can never own it. –Cika-la Win<sup>106</sup> (Lakota)<sup>107</sup>

Perhaps empire never ended, that psychic and material will to conquer and appropriate...What we can say for sure is that empire makes all innocence impossible. –Jacqui M. Alexander<sup>108</sup>

In the Standing Rock movement, the fetishization of Native Americans as “prayerful eco-warriors”<sup>109</sup> by settler allies reiterated a hegemonic narrative of Indigenous peoples as ‘Other’. Rather than a new phenomenon, I trace these racialized discourses back to the colonization of the Americas and the creation of the U.S. nation-state, while highlighting the

<sup>105</sup> Phoenix, 2017, interview, June 22.

<sup>106</sup> The interview informant is identified throughout this thesis by their Lakota name upon request.

<sup>107</sup> From 2017, interview, June 7.

<sup>108</sup> From *Pedagogies of Crossing: Mediations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (2006) found in Goeman (2013, 157).

<sup>109</sup> This quote is from the interview with Erin (2017, interview, June 21) where she was being critical of what she described as the tokenization of Indigenous peoples by settler allies.

(re)articulation of these stereotypes in U.S.-based counterculture movements throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. I suggest that the romanticization of Indigenous spiritual-ecological knowledges, and the tokenization of Native Americans themselves, sustains white supremacist and settler colonial power relations whereby Indigenous peoples become reconfigured through settler imaginaries in order to satiate white settler desires for a spiritual connection to the land.

Sitting on the grass in the lush Willamette Valley, encircled by sun-kissed Evergreen trees on a warm summer morning, Phoenix<sup>110</sup>—a female-bodied two-spirit<sup>111</sup> Tlingit-Haida and Cherokee Indigenous person and U.S. military veteran—asserted that:

...there was definitely a spiritual essence to the movement and others can communicate that to you, but that is not my job right now. It is really important for me to tell you that my time at Standing Rock was extremely violent and toxic, and it was for a lot of us.<sup>112</sup>

As our interview continued, Phoenix described this toxicity by explaining the ways non-indigenous allies tokenized Indigenous peoples through their solidarity and in their everyday lives:

Something that we face every day, but that is really intense and visible in a compounded moment like Standing Rock, is that we have been tokenized over time. We are broken down as people then redistributed as this idea of ancient mystic relics of the past, who are a humble, peaceful, quiet people, who are very one-dimensional.<sup>113</sup>

Over our interview, Phoenix is critical of how white settler imaginations romanticize Indigenous peoples as spiritual, pre-modern beings rooted in a utopian, prayerful existence.

The fetishization of indigeneity occurred within the Standing Rock movement predominantly through the fetishization of the “eco-friendly, prayerful, peaceful Indian”<sup>114</sup> as

<sup>110</sup> The interview informant is identified as ‘Phoenix’ throughout this thesis upon request.

<sup>111</sup> Phoenix described two-spirit as “a third gender” that is “not non-binary”. As she elucidates “it’s not like I am male and female, or male or female, it’s a fluidity” (2017, interview, June 22).

<sup>112</sup> 2017, interview, June 22

<sup>113</sup> 2017, interview, June 22

<sup>114</sup> This quote is from the interview with Erin (2017, interview, June 21) where she was critical of what she described as the tokenization of Indigenous peoples by settler allies.

an alternative to rampant individualism, materialism, neoliberalism, militarization, secularism and a perceived disconnect between society and nature in the United States. For example, Erin<sup>115</sup> described how in the camp “a lot of white folks would stop you and be like ‘Indigenous people just know it all. They are these harmonious creatures...They are going to lead us into our future. They know’.”<sup>116</sup> The portrayal of Indigenous peoples as innately ‘harmonious’ and ‘wise’<sup>117</sup> not only homogenizes and dehumanizes Indigenous peoples in what Jacobs (2003) calls “primitivist essentialism” (677), but it also reifies constructions of Indigenous peoples through a white settler gaze. This white settler gaze is embedded in Eurocentric, racist, and romanticized representations of Native Americans that dates back to the Doctrine of Discovery (Quijano, 2000, 2007), as explored in the previous chapter, and to the formation of the U.S. settler state.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Euro-American settlers began to seek independence from Great Britain, the imaginary of the ‘Indian’ became “the primary example and symbol of freedom-loving natural man,” and was instrumentally utilized during acts of rebellion<sup>118</sup> and to strengthen settlers’ critiques of modernity and a “decadent Europe” (Carr, 1996, 9). Following settler independence from the ‘Old World’, Indigenous peoples were (re)inscribed as the temporally backward ‘Other’, who was out of reach of Western modernity, in order to justify governmental expropriation of Indigenous land in the frontier (Smith, 1999). Once Indigenous armed resistance was broken at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, white settlers began to reiterate a more romanticized portrayal of Indigenous peoples as a ‘primitive’ people with a spiritual connection to nature as “an antidote to the immorality, conflict, and materialism of the increasingly large urban centers of the United States” (Sullivan, 2006, 133).

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<sup>115</sup> Erin is a white woman in her early 20s, who is an environmentally-conscious feminist from the U.S. that went to the camp on two separate weekends.

<sup>116</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

<sup>117</sup> Erin, 2017, interview, June 21

<sup>118</sup> For example, during the famous 1773 Boston Tea Party—which sparked the American Revolution—settlers in the Sons of Liberty literally ‘played Indian’ by dressing up as Mohawk Native Americans and yelling “Indian war whoops” as they threw shipments of British taxed tea into the Boston harbor (Deloria, 1998, 2).

Altogether, these representations of Indigenous peoples constitute what Deloria (Dakota) calls ‘noble savagery’ (1998): a term that emphasizes the inextricable nature of the desire to idealize Indigenous peoples with the violent impetus to remove them from their lands and eliminate them (4). Here, the representation of Indigenous peoples as ‘stoic noble savages’ functions both as a critique of the U.S. capitalism and individualism, and as a continuation of colonization that seeks to dominate that which is ‘savage’ and ‘uncivilized’ that began with the conquest of the Americas in 1492 (Deloria, 1998; Morana et al., 2008). I argue that the tendency for settler allies to fetishize Indigenous peoples and culture<sup>119</sup> in the Standing Rock movement is embedded within these histories of colonial and imperial violence, and the ongoing processes of coloniality, whereby non-Western subjects are reconstituted through Western desires. Following Goeman (2013), I read romanticized stereotypes of Indigenous peoples in contemporary resistance movements as reproductions of hegemonic discourses of ‘Indianness’, or a “commonsense image of the Indian...born out of ideological and physical violence” that has been instrumental for the settler state “to dispossess Native people of personhood and land” (164-165).

The ‘Indian’, as a spectacle for Western desire, is not a new phenomenon in U.S.-based social movements. Since the 1960s, the utilization of ‘the Indian’ as an imaginary to offset American social ills has become a widespread practice for counterculture social movements and “‘alternative’ settler cultures”<sup>120</sup> (Morgensen, 2009, 158). Fetishizing indigeneity led to cultural appropriation as hippies ‘played’ Indian by wearing feathers, beaded headbands, and burning sage (Deloria, 1998). Ultimately, the act of ‘playing Indian’,

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<sup>119</sup> I reference Native culture and spirituality interchangeably throughout this chapter to intentionally blur the boundaries between what is labeled cultural and spiritual in accordance with Indigenous philosophy that approaches such concepts as overlapping. For example, Deloria (1972) argues that neat categorical distinctions—such as between culture and spirituality—draw on colonial modes of classification that separate interconnected entities in order to make them more manageable and conquerable. Therefore, a white settler using a Native American peace pipe may be seen as cultural appropriation for some Indigenous peoples, whereas for other Indigenous tribes who use the peace pipe in spiritual ceremonies (e.g. Lakota) then the misuse of these items by non-Natives constitutes a spiritual appropriation.

<sup>120</sup> Morgensen (2009) describes such cultures as communities who are linked to anarchism, communalism and countercultures, including “rural communes, permaculture, squatting, hoboing, foraging, and neo-pagan, earth-based, and New Age spirituality” (158).



both in the 1960s and today, reifies the settler project to erase and replace Natives with settlers (Veracini, 2010).

At the Standing Rock encampments, the line between recognizing the value of Indigenous peoples' spiritual-ecological knowledges and fetishizing indigeneity was blurred. For example, Ashley<sup>121</sup> describes the weekend<sup>122</sup> she spent at the camp in the following way:

Something I was really honored to witness at Standing Rock was something closer to an intact culture...The intactness of culture is why I think a lot of people are drawn to Native American cultures, Southeastern Asian cultures, or these cultures that have spirit in them. I have felt myself drawn to these cultures because there's no spirit in our culture.<sup>123</sup>

Particularly revealing is Ashley's use of the term "intact culture" in regards to Native American and Southeast Asian cultures, which 1) implies the lack of 'wholeness' within U.S. culture; 2) denies differences within and across Indigenous cultures; and 3) obscures the fragmentation of Indigenous cultures as a result of historical and ongoing settler colonial violence(s). If Native cultures are viewed as 'intact', it absolves white settlers and the state from centuries of targeted violence against Indigenous peoples and their cultures, as discussed in the previous chapter.

White settlers' disillusionment with 'American culture' also fueled the fetishization of 'indigeneity', and its 'wholeness', as exemplified in the following quote by Jeremy<sup>124</sup>, an environmentally conscious white man in his 30s who spent about a month at the Oceti Sakowin camp:

A lot of people around me don't feel like this patriarchal American culture is working for us, it's like a culture that is culture-less. A lot of people are looking to find culture because we have lost our cultures. I saw this at Standing Rock too...and it can lead to a lot of cultural appropriation...There is

<sup>121</sup> Ashley is a white woman from the U.S. in her mid-20s who has been involved in past environmental activism.

<sup>122</sup> The influx of people at the Standing Rock encampments, and the Oceti Sakowin camp in particular, grew exponentially on the weekends and over holiday breaks as "weekend warriors," (most of whom were described to be white settler allies) descended on the encampments in a very short-term form of solidarity (Erin, 2017, interview, June 21; Lauren, interview June 21; Whitney, interview, July 28).

<sup>123</sup> 2017, interview, July 13

<sup>124</sup> 'Jeremy' is a pseudonym to protect the interviewee's identity as agreed upon with the informant.

a fine balance between appreciation and appropriation, and often it seems that the more someone appreciates a culture, the more they start appropriating it. I'm not sure if I think cultural appropriation is necessarily wrong...<sup>125</sup>

By stating that cultural appropriation is rooted in appreciation of Indigenous culture, Jeremy attempts to divorce the stereotyping and fetishizing of Indigenous 'culture' from the violent colonial processes and histories it is embedded within. As a result, he overlooks how the 'appreciation' for indigeneity reconstitutes a paternalistic colonial gaze, and reproduces the idea that 'culture' is attached to the 'Other' in places outside of the imagined 'West'. While Ashley and Jeremy seem to be discussing 'American culture' on the whole, I would argue they are specifically referring to 'white American culture'. This false universality of 'white American culture' not only serves to reify whiteness as the referent, but also divorces 'white American culture' (read: white settler culture) from the processes of individualism, overconsumption, white supremacy, and the ongoing mechanisms of colonization and imperialism (both internally and externally) that the U.S. empire is built upon.

Ashley and Jeremy's backgrounds in environmental activism in conjunction with their comments on a "culture-less" U.S. society vis-à-vis an "intact" Indigenous culture, reflects the long history of environmentalists in fetishizing and appropriating Indigenous spirituality. Taylor<sup>126</sup> (1997), for example, illustrates how appropriation has been a mechanism for the Deep Ecology Movement to counter the "emptiness of materialistic industrial culture" (205). This appropriation occurs not only because of a disillusionment with capitalism and materialism, but also because of discontent with dominant forms of patriarchy, as Jeremy's quote indicated. Donaldson (2001) has called the fetishization and theft of Indigenous spiritual-ecological knowledges "New Age Native Americanism," and she particularly critiques non-Indigenous women who misappropriate Indigenous spirituality as an alternative

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<sup>125</sup> 2017, interview, July 26

<sup>126</sup> Taylor (1997) provides a list of some of the most visible forms of spiritual appropriation by non-Indigenous people including the use of sweat lodges and peyote, burning sage, adopting a symbolic 'talking stick' at meetings, embarking on vision quests, assuming 'earth names', participating in 'war dances' with drums, use of tipis, addressing prayers to the Great Spirit, and adopting 'ho' and other community-particular phrases (186).

spiritual discourse to patriarchal monotheistic religions (237). As Jacobs (2003) elucidates, both the Deep Ecology movement and ecofeminists “turn to ‘non-Western women to provide guidance for an alternative society” (669) in ways that are “unsettlingly similar to earlier forms of colonialist appropriations...and retain the potential for (re)inscribing patriarchal and colonialist constructs and practices” (672).

Jeremy and Ashley’s quotes above, suggest that frustrations with the U.S. patriarchal capitalist society incited fantasies of spiritual, cultural, and identity wholeness. These anxieties and fantasies fueled the representation of Native Americans as the ‘New Age Indian’—an adapted reiteration of the ‘Noble Savage’—who is “an innately spiritual being who lives in perfect egalitarian harmony with all of life and, in so doing, redresses the wrongs of patriarchal capitalism” (Donaldson, 2001, 242). I argue that through allyship processes in the Standing Rock movement, a white settler gaze came to reconfigure Indigenous peoples into an archetype that resembles the ‘New Age Indian’.

The problematic assumptions attached to this white settler gaze were evident in Erin’s experiences at Standing Rock as she emphasized how:

It was like some white folks came to Standing Rock to *see* the ‘noble savage’ in action. Especially with the women in this movement, it becomes like this ecofeminist, ‘one with the earth’, Pocahontas-esque trope of Indigenous women fighting for justice...It was like people came in with this preconceived notion of what indigeneity is and then they left with the same idea.<sup>127</sup>

This speaks to Phoenix’s quote at the beginning of this section as she describes how white settlers tend to tokenize Indigenous peoples in their everyday lives. Following Said (1979) and Razack (1998), who have both shown how the racialized ‘Other’ is forged through the dominant gaze, I argue that the white settler gaze is not just about seeing, knowing, or exotifying Indigenous peoples, rather the gaze itself produces the Native as a subject of settler coloniality. Moreover, it is through the production of the ‘Other’ that the Self, or

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<sup>127</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

referent, is constructed (Said, 1979). As Carr (1996) notes, the United States national identity is premised on the myth that the “living Indian” is “already the *past*” (9). As a result, when settler allies aim to see Indigenous peoples as “ancient relics of the past”<sup>128</sup>, allies are actually confining Indigenous peoples to history thus constituting the settler as the present and the future of existence in North America. When Indigenous peoples are confined to history, then the elimination and disappearance of the Native becomes inevitable.

Some forms of settler allyship in the Standing Rock movement also reified settler colonialism and white supremacy when they appropriated Indigenous spiritual-ecological knowledges. Following Rabaka (2007), I argue that white settler appropriations cannot be divorced from conditions of white supremacy as it “enables and utterly encourages whites to theoretically and culturally loot the knowledge banks and cultural treasure troves of the colored world” as an extension of “white conquest and racialized colonization” (8-9). These issues are exemplified in the following quote by Emily<sup>129</sup>, a middle-aged white woman who is a self-described burner<sup>130</sup> and hippy:

...the Native peoples from all the lands who are trying to love the earth and show others how to love the earth, they have some good schooling to offer us. So to me, the idea is to be an ally because I love the earth and I work for her. I am under the command of the queen of the forest... But they [Indigenous peoples] make fun of the hippies, the cosmic children. I wish that these different cultures could also see that there are communities working within the white culture to come closer to the earth, to *take* the wisdom from the indigenous cultures, and to start to *embody* it, instead of making fun of us.<sup>131</sup>

The process of learning Indigenous spiritual-ecological knowledges and practices in order to ‘take’ them from their place-based communities is a continuation of settler narratives that presume Indigenous peoples’ inevitable elimination, thereby necessitating white settlers ‘preserve’ Indigenous knowledges and cultures. This also exemplifies how settlers’ ‘play

<sup>128</sup> Phoenix, 2017, interview, June 22.

<sup>129</sup> ‘Emily’ is a pseudonym to protect the interviewee’s identity as agreed upon with the informant.

<sup>130</sup> ‘Burner’ is a term used to describe individuals who are a part of the Burning Man Festival community.

<sup>131</sup> 2017, interview, August 22

Indian' (Deloria, 1998) whereby settlers appropriate Indigenous culture, knowledge and spiritual practices "in order to lay claim to the cultural power of Indianness in the white imagination" (168). Once hippies or New Age-ers remove Indigenous knowledges from both their ecologies and Indigenous peoples' centuries-long struggle for cultural survival, there is no need to "protect specific Native communities and their lands that are the basis of these spiritual practices" (Smith, 2005, 123). However, as Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) asserts, "you cannot do Indian spirituality without an Indian community" (in Caputi, 1990, 50). Ultimately, the appropriation of Indigenous spirituality and culture by white settlers not only facilitates cultural decline<sup>132</sup> (Tinker, 1993; Taylor, 1997; LaDuke, 1999), but it is also entrenched within the logics of settler replacement whereby possessing Indigenous eco-spiritual knowledge enables settlers to 'become native' to, and the rightful possessors of, Indigenous land in North America (Veracini, 2011).

Rather than being universal, Indigenous spiritualities are a set of place-based responsibilities embedded within particular ecologies; therefore, when someone appropriates Indigenous spiritual practices—such as ceremonial objects, songs, and dances—by removing them from the geographies they are specific to, it is fundamentally inaccurate as an ecological-based praxis. Indigenous activist, Matt Remle (Lakota) explains appropriation in this way:

My boss is from the Coastal Salish people, and they have ceremonies and songs related to the whale. So sometimes I explain cultural appropriation like 'imagine a Lakota taking whaling songs and dances and performing them in the middle of the Great Plains,' that sounds ridiculous doesn't it?... Or take for example the Salish peoples' salmon ceremonies. We don't have salmon in the Great Plains, so we'd look totally stupid doing a salmon ceremony on the Missouri River because that was not our place-based responsibility and ceremony to hold...Think about a functional healthy ecosystem, if you had

<sup>132</sup> Indigenous scholars like Tinker (1993) and LaDuke (1999) also argue that appropriation of Indigenous spiritual-ecological knowledges results in cultural decline as appropriation often reshapes Indigenous spiritualities within individualist and capitalist frameworks that New Age shamans and practitioners can profit from. Tinker (1993) asserts that reformulations of Indigenous spiritualities and ceremonies, disconnected from the land and communities they derive from, make it more accessible to non-Indigenous peoples at the expense of making it less accessible to Native communities (122-123).

every insect doing the same thing as a honey bee, then all the other functions towards a healthy ecosystem are not taking place. Not every insect is supposed to be pollinating.<sup>133</sup>

As evidenced in this quote, the ecological benefits and decolonial possibilities of white settler solidarity are voided if Indigenous environmental knowledges are appropriated<sup>134</sup> and removed from the places and communities they are embedded within, thus obscuring the geographically-specific responsibilities tied to such knowledge.

Furthermore, white settlers' solidarity with Indigenous peoples also increasingly enabled allies to recognize the ways they themselves, and other white activists, reproduced settler colonial power relations. Returning to Erin's quote at the beginning of this section, her response to white people telling her that Indigenous peoples are "harmonious creatures" who are going to "lead us into the future," was:

I hear you respecting other ways of knowing, and I hear you seeing the flaws of this colonial capitalist way of knowing and working in the world, but they [Indigenous peoples] are also just humans and not savages.<sup>135</sup>

For white settlers like Erin, their solidarity in an anticolonial movement helped them become critically aware of how white settlers can homogenize and distort real Indigenous peoples' experiences to satiate their own anxieties and appetites.

Another critical reflection can be found in the following quote by Lauren<sup>136</sup>—a white woman, environmentalist, and a college student in her 20s who went to Oceti Sakowin camp for a weekend—as she discusses, being at the camp and marching amongst Native Americans helped her become aware of her desires to fetishize and appropriate Indigenous spirituality:

We went to one direct action, which was at night, and we walked to the base of the Missouri river. There were armed police on the hill, and 3,000 people marched. It was really powerful to be a part of it and it felt really

<sup>133</sup> 2017, interview, June 26

<sup>134</sup> Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa (2009) argues that appropriation of Indigenous traditions by "imposing Western attitudes, categories, and terms by decontextualizing objects and symbols, by isolating them, disconnecting them from their cultural meanings or intentions, and then reclassifying them within western terms and contexts" is embedded within the processes colonialism (288).

<sup>135</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

<sup>136</sup> 'Lauren' is a pseudonym to protect the interviewee's identity as agreed upon with the informant.

intimate...but I definitely noticed that I want what they [Native Americans] have: their connection to the land, their connection to each other, and their connection to something greater than them that is rooted in the earth. And that's what I feel connected to, the earth, but it's not mine...At Standing Rock, I saw that spirituality isn't mine. I saw it so clearly as I watched hundreds of Native people marching, praying, singing, and being so intimately connected. I realized it wasn't mine, but I wanted it so bad, and that wanting to take is violent... I think at the bottom of it is this desire and hunger to be spiritual and to be connected to our ancestries, but not knowing where to start...I want so badly to belong to something and I feel there's such a loss of culture within me...When we stole and took this land we were separated from our past.<sup>137</sup>

Winona LaDuke (2005) attributes this settler hunger for indigeneity as “an effort to feed the immense spiritual void inherited from its colonial past” whereby “descendants of settlers are, in a sense, haunted by nostalgia for the lost cultures” (76). Here, Lauren’s desires to possess that which is believed to be ‘Indigenous’ is embedded within wider settler colonial logics that make “Native lands and bodies readily available for consumption” (Goeman, 2013, 102). However, Lauren’s experiences within the anticolonial movement denaturalized the normalization of these colonial logics, which Morgensen (2009) describes as the “desire to live on indigenous land and to feel connected to it—bodily, emotionally, spirituality,” thus illuminating the possibilities for decolonial forms of solidarity (157).

While white allies, like Erin and Lauren, began to unmask the white settler gaze, their ability to do so is because of the emotional and intellectual labor of people of color and Indigenous peoples. This is exemplified in the following quote by Erin:

At Standing Rock, a lot of white people were processing their white guilt and that labor was often put on people of color and Indigenous people. One thing I heard by this nice white lady in one of the two-spirit meetings<sup>138</sup> was her saying “I’m just so sorry that my people murdered yours,” and she was like crying. The two-spirit Indigenous leaders just kind of nodded and moved on, and that’s when I realized: “oh, her emotional processing is not their labor!”

<sup>137</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

<sup>138</sup> There were three main camps in the Standing Rock movement encampment: Oceti Sakowin camp, Rosebud camp, and the Sacred Stone camp. Within each of these camps there were multiple, shifting, internal camps that often had their own orientations and meetings in addition to the mandatory camp-wide orientations. In the largest camp, the Oceti Sakowin camp, there was a Two-Spirit Nation-Building Camp made-up of two-spirit indigenous peoples and other queer and gender non-conforming identities, which is the camp Erin is referring to in this quote.

Erin goes on to reflect on her college group's trip to the Oceti Sakowin camp, and their motivations for going:

Our whole group didn't know what the proper motivation for going to Standing Rock was. While I was there, I realized that a lot of my motives were very white savior-ish, and about me wanting to go on an adventure and be a part of this *tantalizing* moment in history. And before we went there, our group also talked about how excited we were for all the things we were going to learn. I realize now that it was so completely extractive and white-centered: this assumption that I'm going to be learning something and therefore, it's about me and my growth. And I did learn a lot, and all at the expense of very *uncompensated labor* by Indigenous people and people of color.<sup>139</sup>

Erin's quotes provide examples of the toxicity that Phoenix highlighted at the beginning of this section. As evidenced, it fell upon Indigenous peoples to explicitly 'educate' settlers on the many ways that they perpetuate settler violence(s) in the Standing Rock movement and beyond.

Contrary to undermining essentialist representations and white supremacist power structures, the fetishization of Indigenous culture by some allies in the Standing Rock movement can be read as an enactment of white supremacy whereby cultural appropriation satiates white settler anxieties of being 'culture-less'. Within this framework, I am critical of how white allies' desire 'to help' Indigenous peoples not only reproduces a heteropatriarchal white savior narrative where Natives are trapped within their victimization, but can also serve to legitimize allies' fetishization and appropriation of Indigenous culture and spirituality. For example, Wakinyan and Anpao Win<sup>140</sup>, two Lakota women who work in a Native American Arts and Crafts shop in town near the Standing Rock reservation, described white settlers who romanticized and appropriated Indigenous culture as "culture vultures". In our discussion, they shared stories of how white activists would come to their shop after being at the Standing Rock encampments for a few weeks and would attempt to buy sacred Lakota items that, in their opinion, cannot be sold to, or used by, non-Indigenous people outside of

<sup>139</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

<sup>140</sup> These interview informants are identified throughout this thesis by their Lakota names upon request.



the context of an Indigenous-led ceremony<sup>141</sup>. On one occasion, when a white woman was relayed this knowledge, the self-described ally responded to these Lakota women by accusing them of not ‘knowing’ their culture and claiming to have been given such items by Indigenous peoples at Standing Rock encampments.

Problematic forms of solidarity did not only occur within the Standing Rock encampments. Rachel Heaton discussed how allies tokenized her and others in an Indigenous delegation that traveled across Western Europe to raise awareness about the human rights abuses at Standing Rock and the subsequent divestment movement:

You definitely get the token Indian syndrome, where people are like “I want to look like I’m helping, but really I just want my Native here.” ...Some people were really...wanting to find a way to get back to being connected and spending time on the land. Then you had the people who kind of worshipped what being Native was, and that was weird. You got the ones who came dressed up, they had their chokers and their shirts with chiefs, or their beaded earrings. So some of our work became educating those people.<sup>142</sup>

Following Smith (2005), I argue that the impetus of some white activists to ‘know’ Indigenous peoples and ‘play Indian’ reiterates colonialist power relations that enable “a sense of mastery and control” over Indigenous peoples (120). The desire to know Indigenous peoples, and the craving to *consume* indigeneity, are constituted by a mystification, exotification, and commodification of indigeneity as processes that Other Indigenous peoples (Max, 2005). This Othering process ultimately enables white allies to consume that which has been fetishized, or as bell hooks states “eat the Other” (hooks, 1992). However, this process is not only about producing the ‘Other’; it is through the act of fetishizing that the fetishizer “become[s] de-othered, or restored to wholeness” and solidifies themselves as the referent and ‘Self’ to the abject ‘Other’ (Donaldson, 2001, 245). As Torgovnick (1990) argues:

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<sup>141</sup> 2017, interview, June 7

<sup>142</sup> Heaton, 2017, interview, June 30

...the West's fascination with the primitive has to do with its own crises in identity, with its own need to clearly demarcate subject and object even while flirting with other ways of experiencing the universe (157).

This argument reiterates the insights of Said (1979) and Fabian (1983) whereby the 'Occident' or the 'West' comes to know themselves through the process of Othering the 'Orient' or the 'Rest'.

Although Indigenous spiritualities contain vital ecological knowledges that can disrupt the normative capitalist-colonial relations by undermining the settler colonial project to reduce land to property, some forms of settler allyship in the Standing Rock movement reified white settler colonialism by re-centering white settler fantasies. Following Goeman (2013), this section has aimed to demonstrate that "tokenism, omission, and appropriation will not change the structures of the settler state," rather they counterproductively reproduce the asymmetrical power relations of coloniality between settlers and Indigenous peoples (132). The final section of this chapter demonstrates how Indigenous peoples within the Standing Rock movement resisted the white settler gaze, and contested settler ally narratives that romanticized indigeneity and Indigenous resistance, through acts of refusal.

### 3.2 Indigenous Refusals of Recolonizing Solidarities

We are not postcards. We are not dreamcatchers in a souvenir shop. – Phoenix<sup>143</sup> (Tlingit-Haida and Cherokee)

In the city, in the classroom, or at a protest, there is always a settler seeking my recognition. She wants me to recognize that she is distanced from the others. She is innocent...[She] wants me to see that she is a good settler, an ally. –Rachel Flowers<sup>144</sup> (Leey'qsun)

The fetishization of indigeneity, appropriation of Indigenous spiritualities, and the employment of the white settler gaze did not occur in the Standing Rock movement without

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<sup>143</sup> 2017, interview, June 22

<sup>144</sup> Flowers, 2015, 28

resistance. Following Lisa Lowe (1991) whose work has emphasized how subjugated groups upset colonial hegemonies and narratives, I argue that Indigenous peoples resisted the reiterations of white settler violence(s) in solidarity processes through acts of refusal that turned the white settler gaze onto itself. Indigenous acts of refusal—both through rage and humor—contested settler colonial modes of power within the intimate geographies of allyship by denaturalizing settler belonging on Indigenous land, undermining the romanticization of indigeneity, and destabilizing settler attempts to obscure their complicities in (re)constituting settler colonialism and whiteness.

On December 5, 2016, there was a welcoming ceremony for the 4,000 U.S. military veterans that came to the Standing Rock encampments through the organization Veterans Stand for Standing Rock (Taliman, 2016). At the ceremony, veterans, Lakota leaders, and media personnel watched and recorded as Wesley Clark Jr.—an Army veteran and son of General Clark Sr., a former NATO Supreme Commander of Europe—offered an apology on behalf of the veterans at Standing Rock for the military’s historical abuse of Native Americans where he said “we came here to...confess our sins to you because many of us, me particularly, are from the units that have hurt you over the many years” (in Schandorf and Kratzogianni, 2018, 4). He went on to acknowledge military massacres against Native Americans, and the federal government’s blatant land thefts and broken treaties with a particular emphasis on how settlers and the settler state have disrupted Indigenous spiritualities in the U.S.:

We stole minerals from your sacred hills. We blasted the faces of our presidents onto your sacred mountain...and then we took your children. And then we tried to take your language and we tried to eliminate your language that God gave you, and that the Creator gave you...We polluted your Earth...But we’ve come to say that we are sorry. We are at your service, and we beg for your forgiveness. (in Schandorf and Karatzogianni, 2018, 4)

First, Clark reiterates the same problematic portrayals of Indigenous peoples as the noble savage/New Age Indian. As Schandorf and Karatzogianni (2018) have articulately noted,

Clark's speech is a "mimetic representation of the stereotypical speech of the noble savage" whereby Clark draws on "the magic ecological link of native people to sacred nature in which the native people teach 'us' how to live as part of nature" (6). Second, Clark's apology falls within Tuck and Yang's (2012) notion of "settler moves to innocence," whereby settlers attempt to absolve themselves from "feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege" (10). Such apologies relegate colonialism to an event in the past thus ignoring how settlers benefit from the ongoing processes of settler colonialism that maintain Indigenous dispossession.

Coulthard (2014), drawing on Frantz Fanon (1963, 1967), argues that narratives of reconciliation—such as Clark's—attempt to sanitize Indigenous peoples' radical critiques of capitalist-colonial relations through performative acts that do not fundamentally transform the structural conditions of inequality between settlers and Indigenous peoples. As a result, Coulthard (2014)—a member of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation—calls on Indigenous peoples to reject these forms of misrecognition because, while they move away from explicit modes of state violence, they continue to sustain settler colonial relations disguised by a benevolent liberal multicultural politics. In the following vignette, Phoenix complicates the dominant media narrative that celebrated the veterans' publicized apology<sup>145</sup> through a politics of refusal that resists the co-optation of anticolonial Indigenous resistances by forms of settler allyship that do not fundamentally confront the dispossession of Indigenous land.

Phoenix first got involved in activism around Standing Rock by becoming a coordinator for a branch of Veterans Stand for Standing Rock. Eventually, Phoenix was "blackballed" from the organization after Phoenix confronted the "all-white cis-gender male leadership" on the military-type structure of their organizing and the "sexism, racism and toxic power dynamics" that accompanied it<sup>146</sup>. Phoenix vocalized their anger of being pushed

<sup>145</sup> To see examples of media portrayals of the event, see Amatulli (2016), Willoughby (2016), and van Gelder (2016).

<sup>146</sup> 2017, interview, June 22

out of the veteran organization, which is ostensibly committed to reconciling with Indigenous peoples, when Phoenix came face-to-face with one of the leaders from Veterans Stand for Standing Rock after the apology ceremony:

I walked up to him and went over all the problems I had with them...And this really important Indigenous female leader came up to us and she also starts calling him out. The one thing I took away from what she said was that the tribes had rented the pavilion, purchased food from the restaurant, distributed meal and beverage tickets for all the veterans, and the Veterans for Standing Rock claimed responsibility for doing that. And in response to this Indigenous woman, who spoke with such integrity, power, and conviction that she didn't need to yell, he responded like a toddler-white-boy and started to argue with her. I just said "No, that's not how you are going to respond to her. You will have respect. You have created a lot of issues here. Your job right now is to listen. *Allies need to listen before responding.*" He kind of shrunk his shoulders in that moment, he *heard* it. Afterwards a bunch of people found me and said "we all feel the same way and we have all witnessed different problems too".<sup>147</sup>

I read Phoenix's anger, and other Indigenous peoples in the face of settler moves to innocence (Tuck and Yang, 2012), as a refusal of settler coloniality that unsettles the internalized, representational, and structural violence(s) of settler colonialism that enter into every aspect of Indigenous life. Following Coulthard (2014), these expressions of anger can also be read as a "self-affirmative praxis" (109) that "indicate a breakdown of colonial subjection" and "open up the possibility of developing alternative subjectivities and anticolonial practices" (115). Within this framework, settler allyship that fetishizes the 'praying Indian' serves to discount Indigenous rage. As Erin noted "I was suspicious of some of the ways white people glorified centrist or pacifist people of color in order to demonize other people of color"<sup>148</sup>. For female-bodied Indigenous people in particular, they fail to fulfill the fantasy of the eco-feminist, Pocahontas-like, peaceful Indigenous woman stereotype when they display their rage, as Phoenix did in the anecdote above. This (intentional) failure to fulfill white settler imaginaries is powerfully exemplified when

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<sup>147</sup> 2017, interview, June 22

<sup>148</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

Phoenix asserts “I am not your Pocahontas-Princess.” This assertion disrupts the white settler gaze, and its gendered fantasies, as both attempt to construct a docile Indigenous subject. As a result, rage as a feminist act of refusal can unsettle the comfortability of white settler allyship by resisting the dominance of the settler gaze and upsetting the hegemonic production of indigeneity as both a desired and oppressed object. By interrupting this process, possibilities emerge for Indigenous peoples to generate subjectivities and decolonial praxis against and beyond coloniality.

Another manifestation of ‘settlers moves to innocence’ that occurred through some iterations of white settler solidarity in the Standing Rock movement was ‘settler adoption fantasies’. For Tuck and Yang (2012), settler fantasies of adoption by Indigenous peoples enable settlers to gain access to Indigenous knowledges, while being absolved from the settler guilt of colonialism that the United States as a country is predicated on (14). One of the experiences Emily had at the Standing Rock encampments is indicative of how settler allyship can facilitate settler desires to erase their complicity in structures of domination. Upon building a close relationship through solidarity efforts with an Indigenous brother and sister, Emily was given the name ‘Spirit Eyes’ in the Lakota language by the siblings. While this is an honor and emblematic of the strength of their relationship, Emily slipped into fantasies of settler adoption:

I brought up being given this name with an [Indigenous] elder that had offered me water and I remember him just sitting there and looking at me...I mentioned it again to one other Native person and he looked at me and said “I think I would call you ‘No Eyes’.” I don’t think I got it in that moment, but he was saying “you can’t see, you don’t see.” Even now, I don’t know if that was ego that made me mention the name, or was it wanting to be included or wanting to feel accepted?<sup>149</sup>

White settler desires for Indigenous earth names exemplify what Native Americans term ‘Wannabe Indians’, or white settlers who desire to “become without becoming Indian” (Tuck

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<sup>149</sup> 2017, interview, August 22

& Yang, 2012, 14). This move exemplifies one of Erin's observations from her time at the Standing Rock camps, which is that "there were just so many white people that in their trying to be allies they would not identify as white anymore"<sup>150</sup>. However, as Sullivan (2006) notes, for a white person "to become or think of herself as raceless is for her to actively cultivate a harmful ignorance of the many ways in which race is relevant to her life" (159-160). The dissociation from whiteness does not eliminate the ways whiteness comes to play a role in white activists' social interactions, nor in the ways that they accrue privileges and benefits from structures of domination.

As the previous story indicates, Indigenous peoples within the movement confronted settlers by interrogating forms of settler allyship that divorced settler allies from their positionalities as settlers on stolen Indigenous land. In two of the quotes by Emily, the one in the previous section about 'taking' Indigenous knowledge and the 'spirit eyes' quote above, Emily emphasizes the ways Indigenous peoples' "make fun" of her and other allies like her. I argue that along with rage, humor and acts of mocking can also be read as Indigenous refusals that resist forms of allyship that reproduce settler colonial asymmetries.

For example, Wakinyan and Anpao described an instance when a white ally—who had spent a few weeks at the Standing Rock encampments —stopped by their shop and repeatedly called themselves a 'wasicu' as a badge of honor to illustrate what they had learned at camp after having heard the term used by Indigenous peoples in exchange for 'white person'<sup>151</sup>. However, 'wasicu' is not a neutral term for 'white person', in fact, it literally translates to "those who take the fat" in Lakota and it is often used to describe people of European descent, someone who is rapaciously greedy, or a particular extractive relationship with land (LaDuke, 2005, 241). As a result, Wakinyan and Anpao had a good laugh at the white person arrogantly walking around the store calling themselves a 'taker of

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<sup>150</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

<sup>151</sup> 2017, interview, June 7

fat’, and while recalling the story to me, they mocked at the person’s smugness to appropriate Indigenous terms for their own purposes without knowing the context relayed within such linguistic phrases.

Building off of the Flowers (2015) quote at the beginning of this section, I argue that Emily’s desire for Indigenous people to “see that there are communities working within the white culture to come closer to the earth” and her fantasies of Indigenous adoption as ‘Spirit Eyes’<sup>152</sup>, in conjunction with the white ally’s pride in telling the Lakota women they were a ‘wasicu’, are each examples of settler attempts to gain recognition from Indigenous peoples as ‘good settlers’ through their allyship. Moreover, I suggest that in response to these attempts by settlers to erase their complicity with settler colonialist power relations, Indigenous peoples’ acts of humor constitute a praxis of refusal that negates the possibility that there can ever be a ‘good settler’.

‘Settler’ as a subject formation, set of behaviors, and structural location are constituted through power relations produced by ongoing settler colonialism. As Flowers (2015) elucidates, “settler subjectivity is...co-constituted through the colonial state...[and] directly and covertly engages with and mimics colonial institutional structures” (36). Therefore, attempts to gain Indigenous recognition as a ‘good settler’ not only sanitize the political impact of the term ‘settler’, but also legitimize non-indigenous existence and futurity on dispossessed Indigenous land. Solidarity that seeks to guarantee settler belonging on Indigenous land contradicts decolonial processes and is essentially recolonizing. Indigenous refusals of recolonizing forms of allyship not only resist ‘settler moves to innocence’ (Tuck & Yang, 2012), but these refusals are also fundamentally committed to enacting decolonial futures where Indigenous peoples neither have to seek recognition from a settler state nor give recognition to settlers. As a result, decolonial solidarities require settler allies to

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<sup>152</sup> 2017, interview, August 22



“demonstrate a willingness to be refused” (Flowers, 2015, 34) in order to rupture settler entitlement and white privilege as both underpin the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy that enable Indigenous dispossession.

It is clear how adoption fantasies, such as Emily’s account of being given the name ‘Spirit Eyes’, aim to indigenize the settler thus relieving them of settler anxieties of “un-belonging” (Tuck and Yang, 2012, 15). Settler anxieties arise in solidarity efforts with Indigenous peoples in anticolonial movements since a central goal of decolonization in settler societies is to denaturalize settler existence on expropriated Indigenous land in order to achieve repatriation of Indigenous land and life (Morgensen, 2010). Emily illustrates these anxieties when she states:

I am on this planet; therefore, I am supposed to be on this planet. I am in this particular body and it has this particular skin color. I was born in North America. I can’t go back to someplace else because I didn’t come from someplace else...This is my home, but I want it to be everybody’s home...<sup>153</sup>

Through months of participating in the Standing Rock encampments as an ally, the amnesia linked to settler histories and national myths were uprooted for Emily. Her position as a white settler living on stolen Indigenous land was unsettled thus contradicting her notion of ‘home’. In her quote, we see how she attempts to displace her guilt stemming from both her whiteness and the ways she has benefitted from the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous land.

Moreover, Emily’s wish to make North America “everybody’s home” can be read as an attempt to ensure white settler futurity and belonging on Indigenous land through the narrative of ‘co-existence’. As Flowers (2015) has shown, settler allies who prioritize ‘co-existence’ in social movements with Indigenous peoples, re-center the desires and futures of settlers, thus preserving unequal power dynamics by making decolonization a “self-interested process” (38). Nevertheless, anticolonial movements that inspire settler discomfort and feelings of ‘unbelonging’ are productive because they signal a disruption of settler futurity,

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<sup>153</sup> 2017, interview, August 22

which is essential to unsettle the illusion of permanence and natural-ness of the settler state itself (Simpson, 2014).

Within the Standing Rock encampments, some forms of solidarity reproduced settler colonial violence(s) through the fetishization of Indigenous peoples; yet, the physical participation of white settlers was crucial for many allies to recognize how they perpetuate settler colonialism. In the following quote, Lauren reflects on how her desires for Indigenous spirituality, land, and culture are not only violent, but also undermine processes of decolonization:

I am starting to realize that resisting the urges to take from other cultures is a form of personal spiritual activism in a way. I cannot be connected to the spirit and the land in the same sense that an Indigenous person maybe can... There is definitely a serious, gut-wrenching loss there. And I think one of the ways to decolonize your mind is to learn how to recognize and stop yourself from taking what isn't yours. Like do I really need to continue wearing these moccasin shoes? The benefit I get from it is nothing in comparison to the ancestral trauma and violence that it perpetuates.<sup>154</sup>

Because of her experiences as an ally in the anticolonial Standing Rock movement, Lauren has begun to couch her desires for an earth-based spirituality within the larger context of historical and ongoing exploitation of Indigenous land and culture. Through her bodily solidarity in an Indigenous-led social movement, Lauren's complicity with and reproduction of settler violence(s) is exposed, which led her to think through how to be an ally to Indigenous peoples in her everyday life as a form of anticolonial solidarity. Derek<sup>155</sup> echoed some of these same apprehensions and reflections:

Since Standing Rock, I have been interested in Native cultures more, and at the same time I'm more hesitant. Because for a while I was like "oh, I could look into Native cultures, traditions and religious practices and maybe get into that a bit," but now I don't know if that's appropriation... I mean I'm not going to put on a headdress and prance around at a festival, but I'm also deeply connected to the earth in a really meaningful and spiritual way. And there's a

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<sup>154</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

<sup>155</sup> Derek is a white male from the U.S. who works as a sustainability coordinator and spent one weekend at the Oceti Sakowin camp.

lot in Native culture that resonates with me in that way, but is that appropriate?<sup>156</sup>

Both Derek and Lauren's reflections reverberate Morgensen's (2009) claim that "settler radicals must ask how their feelings of attachment to Indigenous land and culture enact appropriation and violence" (158). As we have seen, settler allies' desires for a connection to Indigenous spirituality is linked to their desire to feel rooted in Indigenous land. How do these desires undermine the struggle to decolonize settler societies? As Morgensen (2009) effectively argues, an anticolonial allyship requires multiple "unsettlements" including interrupting settler ownership of land and uprooting settler "emplacement" on Indigenous land (158). Within anticolonial solidarities, white settler allies must let go of any hopes for intimacy with, and recognition from, Indigenous peoples as both can serve to comfort the settler and ensure settler futurity thus undoing processes of decolonization that aim to unsettle the settler (Morgensen, 2009, 2013).

As long as settler allies continue to own and occupy Indigenous land, and forge spiritual connections with the land in ways that further entrench the existence of settlers and the settler state, then a politics of settler solidarity will continue to fall on a continuum of settler colonial violence thus limiting decolonial possibilities. While settler allies like Lauren and Derek may start to interrogate their desires for Indigenous land and spirituality as a result of their experiences within the Standing Rock movement, we should heed Matt Remle's caution that "it's going to take a lot more than one trip to Standing Rock for anyone to begin peeling back these layers"<sup>157</sup>. Unless white settlers build long-term, place-based relationships with Indigenous peoples, and learn how to interrogate their layers of whiteness and settler coloniality prior to an active resistance event, then settler allies risk being a 'wasicu' within the geographies of solidarity in anticolonial struggles.

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<sup>156</sup> 2017, interview, July 13

<sup>157</sup> 2017, interview, June 26

Ultimately, the Standing Rock movement's resistance to white settler colonialism is evident not only in their encampment blockade that obstructed the appropriation of Indigenous land by corporate-government interests, but also in the spaces of solidarity where the white settler, and their gaze, became interrogated. Importantly, settler allies must learn how to upset the ways their everyday actions reiterate settler colonialism and white supremacy in order to avoid reproducing settler colonial violence(s) that operate through white privilege and coloniality within solidarity practices. As the next chapter argues, this can be achieved, in part, through the embodied resistances of allies in anticolonial resistances as corporeal vulnerability can enable individuals with racial and colonial privileges to learn anticolonial critiques and practices, and disrupt the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous life in ways that create opportunities for decolonial relationships and futurities.

## Chapter 4

### “Accomplices Not Allies”<sup>158</sup>: (Re)Imagining Solidarity as Decolonial Praxis

This chapter demonstrates how the spatial solidarity and embodied anticolonial resistance(s) of white settlers, people of color, and Indigenous peoples in the Standing Rock movement interrupts the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous land by settlers and the settler colonial state, enabling the co-creation of decolonial habits, subjectivities, relationships, and communities. In the first section, I draw on feminist literature examining the intersections of space, race, and coloniality to illustrate how the solidarity of some white settler activists (re)inscribed hegemonic racial and colonial hierarchies that (re)centered the dominance of spatial whiteness and settler privilege within the Standing Rock encampments. I then utilize feminist scholarship on resistance and vulnerability in conversation with Indigenous studies to examine how Indigenous and non-Indigenous embodied resistances generate opportunities to uproot settler coloniality and the racial privileging of whiteness.

#### 4.1 “Taking up Space”: Whiteness and the Spatial Dynamics of Settler Allyship

I always tell everybody that the [Standing Rock] camp for me, going between August and December, was like *watching 500 years of colonization happen in a matter of months*. When I went the first time, the only thing out there were tents and tipis. The grass was still tall, and there were only Indigenous people out there. At night you would literally walk from campsite to campsite and you’d hear Plain songs, AIM songs, Coastal songs, Salish songs, you would just hear the different Indigenous groups songs. We were under the stars, and there was nothing but fire and stars. That was my first trip, and I left the day of the dog attacks [by the ETP-hired security], which was kind of like the start of *invasion*. The next time I went, camp didn’t have that peaceful feel anymore. As the months went by, it got darker. In the summer the sun was out longer, people were out longer, it was more like a powwow kind of feel. But going back in October, the days were shorter, the dog attacks had happened, there were more people, DAPL was getting closer, actual pads were being dug for the pipeline, sacred lands had been dug up, it was more tense and the ceremonies didn’t feel the same. It was still mostly Indigenous people out there though. And then the third time going out there in December, there were hippies and people coming in and building their own structures without any regard to the land that they were on...It felt *colonized*. A lot of us didn’t leave

<sup>158</sup> Quote from the interview with Whitney Sparks (2017, July 28).

our camp...The camp became very desensitized. Witnessing the camp change was like watching gradual colonization to the point that you'd be out there and you couldn't find any Indigenous people unless you specifically went to someone's camp, you didn't hear our songs anymore, the tone of the camp was dark as we were covered by DAPL flood lights everywhere. –Rachel Heaton<sup>159</sup> (Muckleshoot)

As a Potawatomi environmental justice advocate, I often get asked by other environmentalists in the U.S. to share my views on what they can do to be good allies to Indigenous peoples. Those who ask usually identify themselves as being non-Indigenous, white, and privileged. They are U.S. settlers: people who have privileges that arise from the historic and ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples...One can't claim to be an ally if one's agenda is to prevent his or her own future dystopias through actions that also preserve today's Indigenous dystopias. –Kyle Powys Whyte<sup>160</sup>

Space is not empty, nor is it neutral; rather, space is imbued within power relations and structured through whiteness<sup>161</sup> and coloniality (Razack, 2002; Sullivan, 2006). For Ahmed (2007) whiteness is an “effect of racialization” (150) that impacts how raced bodies “take up space” in addition to what those bodies “can do” within spaces (149). As a result, a body's ability to occupy and transverse across spatial formations is mediated through gendered, racialized, and colonial conditions of power. Additionally, Sullivan (2006) illustrates, on the one hand, how racialized non-white bodies are restricted in their movements within and across spaces in the U.S. due to histories of Euro-American imperialism and ongoing colonialism. On the other hand, “white people tend to manifest a habit of lived spatiality [and] consider all spaces as rightfully available for their inhabitation of them” (Sullivan, 2006, 144). Whereas these power relations restrict non-white bodies within racially bounded geographies (i.e. reservations), whiteness enables bodily spatiality or an “ontological expansiveness” within and across spaces (Sullivan, 2006, 144).

Because whiteness and its norms of ontological expansiveness privilege spatial whiteness whereby white bodies are able to “move with comfort through space...to inhabit

<sup>159</sup> 2017, interview, June 30

<sup>160</sup> Excerpt in *Yes! Magazine* piece “White Allies, Let's Be Honest About Decolonization” by Whyte (2018).

<sup>161</sup> For Margaret Anderson (2003), whiteness is a pervasive unacknowledged norm across spaces in addition to a system of privilege(s) and a social construction.

the world as if it were home [and to] take up more space” (Ahmed, 2007, 159), the Standing Rock encampments intentionally decentered whiteness in order to (re)cultivate spaces where the bodies of Indigenous peoples and people of color were centered. In the mandatory orientation meetings for everyone at the camp, Lakota values, histories, and perspectives on colonization were shared in ways that outlined how white allies should attempt to alter their habits of racial privilege within and beyond the spatialities of camp. Whitney Sparks<sup>162</sup>—a Black woman in her early 30s who spent over a month at the camp while she was in her third trimester of pregnancy—describes how:

The intentional way that Standing Rock was set up with the direct action trainings and orientations included cultural sensitivity trainings that were well-organized and explicitly not white-centered. There were no white people in the front leading or talking down to you, and it changed the space.<sup>163</sup>

Similarly, Amanda<sup>164</sup>—a white woman from the U.S. who is a freelance photographer and journalist—reflected on the denaturalization of racialized, colonial, and gendered power dynamics throughout the camp’s spaces, as initiated by the orientation meetings:

There was culture shock on some level because it was a structured space unlike anything I had ever experienced. Being an Indigenous-led movement, and I’ve never spent a lot of time on a reservation, so being in a space that a white man is not in-control of was very different...There were meetings and the leaders would first introduce themselves in their Native language before speaking in English, and then Native women spoke first, Native men spoke second, women of color spoke third, men of color spoke fourth, white women and then white men were last. It was pretty incredible to be honest. It was a different dynamic. I’d go into the room knowing that I may be the first one in the room, but I’m not going to just go grab the best seat in the room. I am going to wait in the back, as a white woman, and after the seats are filled then I will find my place because I am not the first priority here. I need to just be patient and operate under the understanding that my needs are not first. As a white person born into this world I feel like we are quickly taught the assumption that everything is here for you, so just kind of checking that was a really important thing for me to learn personally.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Whitney Sparks has been identified throughout this thesis upon request.

<sup>163</sup> 2017, interview, July 28

<sup>164</sup> Amanda has been identified by her first name throughout this thesis upon request.

<sup>165</sup> 2017, interview, June 22

These anticolonial practices initiated in the camp's general orientation not only demystified how spaces are produced at the nexus of coloniality and racialized and gendered processes, but also complicated the whitewashing of spaces—or the ontological expansiveness of white bodies—in ways that actively forges space for historically and contemporarily subjugated groups to offer their own knowledge(s).

Which bodies are able to inhabit particular spaces, and what practices occur within those spaces, is critically important because it is inextricable from who has legitimacy to certain land-bases. Therefore, as the camps sought to block the extraction and transportation of oil, they also aimed to challenge commonsense settler colonial practices underlying resource extraction, including the “Western Protestant/capitalist ethic of settlement” as it operates through whiteness and ontological expansiveness (Sullivan, 2006, 162). By centering Lakota values, the Standing Rock encampments unsettled settler epistemologies and (re)mapped Lakota place-based knowledges in order to reclaim the land appropriated by the federal government and the ETP Corporation. As Goeman (2013) has shown, Indigenous (re)mapping is crucial to decolonize settler spatialities and enable spatial justice for Indigenous peoples in the face of hundreds of years of land dispossession.

As Rachel's quote at the beginning of this section illustrates, the Standing Rock encampments initially generated space(s) for Indigenous peoples to sing their songs, practice their ceremonies, and fulfill their place-based spiritual relationships in ways that reaffirmed Indigenous sovereignty with the land. As time went on, Rachel<sup>166</sup> describes how the space “felt colonized” at camp due to a number of factors including the increased militarization of security forces and the surge of white settler allies<sup>167</sup>. Similarly, Whitney explained how camp spaces shifted with the rise of white activists:

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<sup>166</sup> Rachel is a member of the Muckleshoot tribe and co-founder of the divestment organization Mazaska Talks who repeatedly visited the Standing Rock encampments from August to December.

<sup>167</sup> Heaton, 2017, interview June 30



I was there from late October to early November, then I went back and was there mid-November to early December...The energy shift was night and day between my two trips...We used to sit around the sacred fire at night and we'd play the guitar and hold space, but the second time I was there the camp exploded and there were way more white people, and everyone was staying inside their separate tipis and when I came back my Native friend's entire tipi was full of white people!<sup>168</sup>

The energy shift, and increase in spatial isolation and racial segregation between people of color and racially white individuals mentioned by both Whitney and Rachel was, in part, because of the increase in white bodies and how those white bodies operated in the spaces at camp. As Razack (2002) notes, space is a “social product” that is impacted by systems of power in ways that mediate bodies’ ability to move through, and interact within, spaces. As mutually reinforcing processes, spaces “race the bodies existing in them” and spaces are in turn “raced...by means of bodies” in a circular process (Sullivan, 2006, 150). Therefore, even though the camp held meetings to impact how bodies interacted within an intentionally Indigenous-centered space, the sharp proliferation of white bodies altered spaces at the camps in ways that reproduced the privileging of whiteness.

For Whitney, the increase in white people at the camps resulted in “little cultural shit shows everywhere”<sup>169</sup>, which Daphne Singingtree<sup>170</sup> discussed as the tendency for some non-Indigenous allies to disrespect Indigenous culture by not listening to, or modifying their behaviors based on, the Lakota values that they were asked to engage with throughout the spaces of the camps<sup>171</sup>. In particular, Daphne was critical of those she called the “selfies and go people”, who she described as individuals that came to Standing Rock to take exploitative selfies with tipis and Native Americans because of the movement’s growing popularity, but who would fail to meaningfully contribute to the anticolonial resistance<sup>172</sup>.

<sup>168</sup> Sparks, 2017, interview, July 28

<sup>169</sup> Sparks, 2017, interview, July 28

<sup>170</sup> Daphne is of Standing Rock Lakota heritage, as well as Hispanic and European ancestry, who identifies as culturally Indigenous and was at the camp from August to November 2016.

<sup>171</sup> Singingtree, 2017, interview, July 27

<sup>172</sup> Singingtree, 2017, interview, July 27

Spatial (re)production is a perpetual process entwined within ongoing settler colonial modes of power whereby whiteness and settlement are reconstituted through “intimate relationships” (Goeman, 2013, 85). This process extends into the intimate geographies of solidarity, as evidenced in the following anecdote by Whitney:

There was this white guy with dreads who was a huge problem at camp... There was this one incident when he took up space and used the sacred circle as his personal therapeutic session to get feedback from people of color about what to do with his family life. And again, in the moment you can understand how that happened. He didn't do it on purpose. He is a person with pain, but at the same time how much more of this can we [people of color] take? And people did shut him down eventually, and he took that personally. It's not wrong that he has pain or the fact that he needs healing, but this is not the space for that. Other people, people of color, have pain that never gets dealt with or acknowledged and that was the time and space for them.<sup>173</sup>

While the Standing Rock encampments attempted to center the trauma and needs of Indigenous peoples and people of color in order to cultivate space and healing for perpetually oppressed communities, some white settler allies continued to (re)center their experiences resulting in the spatial (re)privileging of whiteness and settler-ness. Therefore, white settler allies can unknowingly (re)colonize spaces by reproducing hegemonic norms rooted in whiteness and coloniality.

The Thanksgiving holiday at the Standing Rock encampments provides another example of how some white settler allies took up space at the camp materially, bodily, and emotionally, as both Whitney and Amanda describe below:

Thanksgiving was the most energetically charged day because there was an influx of all these white people who came on their time off for the holiday. Some of the people did acknowledge that it was a day of genocide, but a lot of people surprisingly did not seem to be aware of that. –Whitney<sup>174</sup>

When I was there during the holiday... some Indigenous people, who I heard from firsthand, expressed a level of frustration towards the white people because they were like “Where have you been? We have been fighting this fight for hundreds of years, and you're here now, finally?” I also heard a lot of gratitude, but with that gratitude was the idea that if you are here as a white

<sup>173</sup> Sparks, 2017, interview, July 28

<sup>174</sup> Sparks, 2017, interview, July 28

person then you need to follow these rules, and if you aren't following these rules and you aren't respectful of Lakota values or spaces that you are in, then you shouldn't be here. —Amanda<sup>175</sup>

Not only did white settler allies physically take up a disproportionate amount of space in the camp on Thanksgiving weekend, but their ignorance of how Thanksgiving—and its false narrative of mutual Indigenous-settler relations—is embedded within the U.S. national mythology of white settlement and the erasure of Indigenous genocide, put an emotional burden on Indigenous peoples on the day that some Native Americans call “Survivors Day”<sup>176</sup>. As Goeman (2013) highlights, the misrecognition of past violence(s) against Indigenous peoples by settlers—such as a sanitized discourse about the Thanksgiving holiday that mythologizes white settlers’ innocence as they colonized Indigenous tribes on the East coast—underlies the “structures that allow current violence to perpetuate” (194). Therefore, the misrecognition of Thanksgiving as bounded within the processes of ongoing settler colonialism constitutes the “historical aphasia of the conquest of Indigenous peoples” by white settler allies (Byrd, 2011, 24).

Erin<sup>177</sup> expands on how white allies materially “burdened” the camp on Thanksgiving weekend:

When I was there for Thanksgiving, the thousands of mostly white people that came for the holiday break put a huge burden on the Standing Rock infrastructures. The portable toilets were particularly overflowing... I was also taking up space so I was thinking that I needed to be somehow giving back to it.<sup>178</sup>

For Erin, the realization that she was physically taking up space made her consider not only her material use of the camp’s resources, but how her “unconscious habits of racial privilege” reproduced extractive processes within an anticolonial resistance (Sullivan, 2006):

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<sup>175</sup> 2017, interview, June 22

<sup>176</sup> 2017, field notes, June 3-5 at Standing Rock Film and Music Festival, Standing Rock Reservation.

<sup>177</sup> Erin is a white woman in her early 20s, who is an environmentally-conscious feminist that went to the camp on two separate weekends.

<sup>178</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

I definitely became aware that I was way more extractive than I was useful, both times I went to camp...I just had this huge realization my last night there...that I have hurt people; not even in this indirect way of being an entitled white person, but in a direct way I am causing violence by just being there.<sup>179</sup>

Erin's reflection illustrates how some white settler allies' participation in anticolonial resistance helped them gain understandings of how white bodies inhabit spaces in ways that perpetuate spatial settlement and (re)inscribe power dynamics linked to the structural underpinnings of racism. These understandings were obtained through the emotional and intellectual labor of Indigenous peoples and other people of color, as highlighted by Erin as she describes one of the defining moments that made her whiteness, and its performative aspects that attempt to mark whiteness as normative (Anderson, 2003), visible to herself:

In one of the group meetings at the Two-Spirit nation-building camp where I was staying, I didn't say my race when we went around and introduced ourselves and neither did any of the other white LGBTQI people. And we were called out by these two-spirit Indigenous leaders. They were like "None of you white folks just acknowledged your race. Why do you think you're here?" I didn't even get it when they said it. Actually being called out spurred the realization that whiteness is something that impacts my behavior...People of color have to think about race their whole lives, their identity is already so politicized and enforced all the time in this white supremacist society. For me it was an *earth-shattering* thing because my identity was based on me thinking I was a good person, like a good white person.<sup>180</sup>

In the two-spirit group meeting, the behaviors of white settler allies attempted to make invisible their spatially embodied whiteness. As Ahmed (2007) points out, "whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it, or those who get so used to its inhabitance that they learn not to see it" (157). Therefore, by overlooking their whiteness the white settler allies were complicit in empowering white normativity as the orientation in which spaces are structured through as the "normative reference point" (Anderson, 2003, 46). For Ahmed (2007), the (re)orientation of spaces around whiteness makes "nonwhite bodies feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible, different" when they attempt to inhabit the same spaces where whiteness is

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<sup>179</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

<sup>180</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

made normative (157). By failing to recognize their whiteness, the white allies in the meeting unconsciously contributed to the white-washing of spaces whereby to be non-White is to be a non-normative ‘Other’. As Erin reflected, this interaction demonstrated that she’s not a ‘good white person’ just by showing up to anticolonial resistances if her solidarity fails to implicate her whiteness and settler habits.

The lack of awareness of how bodies mobility in and through spaces is impacted by racialization and coloniality, meant that some white allies were oblivious to the colonial and racialized tensions at the camps that are rooted in a wider “politics of mobility” (Ahmed, 2007, 162). This is evident in Jeremy’s<sup>181</sup> reflection on camp dynamics:

There was a lot of anger and questioning of why people were out there, which is a good question to ask but in my mind the more people out there the better... If you are willing to show up and endure what we endured, I respect you. I wasn’t there to critique or analyze why others were there, I was there to build some buildings.<sup>182</sup>

Jeremy uncritically remarks that he is there to “build some buildings” without realizing how his very actions and ideas about how to ‘help’ the movement are tied to whiteness and settler coloniality. As Rachel explained:

I understand that people have skill-sets that they want to bring to the movement and Indigenous nations, but a lot of what they need to do is just shut up and listen...Listening to why our [Indigenous] practices are a certain way, why we have the teachings that we do, or just sitting down and having a real conversation about privilege...Allies need to be quiet, listen, and ask how can they can help us, rather than being like “I have a gift and I’m going to *help* you.” And I think that’s what happened, people came to Standing Rock and they wanted to put their own versions of what that help looks like...There were people who could build houses and they went in and built it...but if you know Indigenous ways, we didn’t have permanent structures, we always moved, we always recycled the land, we always made sure that when we left the land it could recover from it. But then you go and put these permanent structures and you’re drilling these lines to put a solar line through, and yes it’s with good intentions, but at the same time it’s totally defeating what the movement’s about.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Jeremy is an environmentally conscious white man in his early 30s who spent about a month at the Oceti Sakowin camp

<sup>182</sup> 2017, interview, July 26

<sup>183</sup> Heaton, 2017, interview, June 30

These quotes provide an example of how whiteness and colonialist discourses are reformulated through the social practices and spatial embodiments of white racialized subjects in ways that maintain the hegemony of white supremacist and settler colonial power dynamics in the processes of solidarity. As Shome (1999) argues:

Whiteness is not just about bodies and skin color, but rather about the discursive practices that, because of colonialism and neocolonialism, privilege and sustain the global dominance of white imperial subjects and Eurocentric worldviews. (108, found in Anderson, 2003, 29)

These quotes demonstrate how the contributions of some white settler allies undermined Indigenous land-based epistemologies at the resistance camps. This is problematic because in anticolonial resistances the methods of resistance must be consistent with the aims of decolonization (Alfred, 2005, 40-45). Therefore, how anticolonial movements resist settler colonialism is essential not only to upset colonial structures, but the struggle itself enables personal and collective decolonial transformation that can provide the foundations for a more equitable material reality.

Prior to their participation in the Standing Rock movement, the white settler allies that I interviewed had not viewed the United States as a settler state maintained through ongoing forms of coloniality that pervade settler subjectivities, logics and everyday practices. As Derek<sup>184</sup> reflected:

I had come to Standing Rock knowing there was an environmental aspect with water protectors, but I didn't know that this was decolonization work, or a resistance against colonization...I had subconsciously thought that colonization happened then, it was an event that happened in history, but I didn't think it was happening now...Before Standing Rock, I had never thought that we should give the land back to Indigenous peoples.<sup>185</sup>

Framing the struggle against DAPL solely in climate justice terms uncritically naturalizes settler occupation on dispossessed Indigenous land by removing environmental issues from

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<sup>184</sup> Derek is a white male from the U.S. who works as a sustainability coordinator and spent one weekend at the Oceti Sakowin camp.

<sup>185</sup> 2017, interview, July 13

colonial histories and ongoing technologies of settler colonialism. As a result, in the encampments and the broader Standing Rock movement, tensions have been exacerbated by a lack of recognition of how white settler allies are situated within, benefit from, and unconsciously uphold, settler colonialism and structural racisms. Whyte (2016) has responded to these frictions by reminding settler allies that they “are only allies if they work broadly toward decolonization” (n.p.).

Consequently, solidarity is not a self-evident nor a neutral process; it is deeply embedded within dominant power relations in ways that can seek to challenge environmental injustices while unintentionally reaffirming the logics of white settler colonial domination. As Phoenix<sup>186</sup> describes “a lot of people came to Standing Rock with the idea that they were going to save the day,” which for her meant that allyship often “comes incognito to preserve power dynamics.” In her own words, this is because “the idea of ‘helping’ a marginalized population is interwoven with preconceived notions that people of color are incapable of doing things themselves”<sup>187</sup>. Within this framework, white settler allies who impose their ideas of what anticolonial movements need or should do not only infantilize and victimize Indigenous nations and communities of color, but they also privilege Euro-American epistemologies and paternalistically attempt to maintain dominance over non-Western, non-white communities and their systems of knowledge. Altogether, such solidarity constitutes a white savior narrative whereby non-white communities are evacuated of agency, thus satisfying what Lee (2016) describes as “the white ally’s unconscious desire to be seen as a good person” as the “idealized morally good (white) subject position” (18). For Phoenix, then, white settlers who wish to contribute to anticolonial resistances must:

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<sup>186</sup> Phoenix is a female-bodied two-spirit Tlingit-Haida and Cherokee Indigenous person and a U.S. military veteran.

<sup>187</sup> 2017, interview, June 22

finally realize that they need to step aside, or they are being told to step aside, because to actually interrupt power dynamics...is to have the people who have been marginalized represent themselves.<sup>188</sup>

Significantly, Phoenix is highlighting how white settler solidarity must move beyond the idea of “helping” communities of color to attack the roots of structural and material oppression, which are inseparable from the social formations of whiteness and settler subjectivities (Anderson, 2003), in order to destabilize and transform hegemonic power relations.

Following Rachel and Phoenix’s comments, settlers who inhabit racially white bodies must listen to Indigenous peoples and people of color about the violence(s) perpetuated onto their bodies and communities by what hooks calls the “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal order” (1994, 26; 2003, 10; 2010, 24). Listening is a vulnerable process where the listener challenges their own reactions in order to go beyond acknowledging how they benefit from the racial privileging of whiteness to actively challenging their performative norms that reiterate whiteness (Anderson, 2003). For Matt Remle<sup>189</sup>, what he asked of mainstream, predominantly white, environmentalist groups who wished to act in solidarity at divestment demonstrations, was to support from the background and, if they were asked for comments by the media, to redirect the access to media platforms to Indigenous leadership<sup>190</sup>.

Listening as an everyday anticolonial praxis of solidarity fosters a decentering of self in ways that can undermine ontological expansiveness and spatial settlement by enabling racially white individuals to learn how to, in Sullivan’s (2006) words, “traitorously inhabit space such that they use their white privilege to work against racism” (162). I argue that these unsettled forms of solidarity go beyond a philanthropic conception of allyship by

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<sup>188</sup> 2017, interview, June 22

<sup>189</sup> Matt is an activist, writer, and educator who is an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Lakota tribe and co-founder of the Mazaska Talks divestment organization.

<sup>190</sup> Remle, 2017, interview, June 26



fundamentally exposing and transforming the power inequalities at the heart of racial and colonial systems of domination. As Phoenix stated:

Native people don't get to be seen, we don't get that excessive out-pouring of resources, we don't get to go to the same schools as you do, we don't get the same contacts as you and that is all by design...In order for us to be working together, the real work happens in the redistribution of power, education, resources, network connections, and of course, money.<sup>191</sup>

Returning to Whyte's (2018) quote at the beginning of this section, environmental activists are not allies to Indigenous peoples if their activism for environmental justice maintains the racial and colonial privileges of white settlers, thus sustaining the wider structures of racism and colonialism. To interrupt these power dynamics, the spatial occupation of Indigenous land by white settlers must be ruptured, in addition to uprooting settler configurations of land and unsettling its operations of capitalist-colonialism. Through these disruptions, anticolonial solidarities can generate subjectivities, habits, and imaginaries necessary to enact a decolonial, non-exploitative future between people and with the nonhuman environment (Tuck et al., 2014). Within this framework, decolonization is not an event nor an endpoint, but rather a perpetual "process of becoming that is also an unbecoming," which implicates and transforms everyone (Vimalassery et al., 2016, n.p.). To achieve this, decolonial solidarities must be committed to a future without settler colonialism and reoriented to what Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) call an "Indigenous futurity", which importantly does not erase "now-settlers in the ways that settler futurity requires of Indigenous peoples" but does aim to dislocate the settler and settler epistemologies (80).

Significantly, anticolonial solidarities must continue beyond active resistance events by white settler allies developing long-term, place-based, relational decolonial praxis with Indigenous communities (Irlbacher-Fox, 2014). By integrating anticolonial solidarity into the intimate geographies of settler lives (Hunt and Holmes, 2015), white settler allies can come

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<sup>191</sup> 2017, interview, June 22

to embody what Dhamoon calls an “ethos of unsettled solidarities” which is defined as “a way of being in the world” that recognizes how “everyone is ‘structurally implicated’ in the dispossession of lands” (in Snelgrove, et al., 2014, 25). As the next section illustrates, this anticolonial solidarity can be cultivated from white settlers’ active participation in anticolonial movements, where they can learn how to inhabit spaces in ways that call into question the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples’ land and life.

#### 4.2 Resisting Dispossession through Feminist Solidarity, Vulnerability, and “Holding Space”

...this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen...that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not want to know it...They are in effect still trapped in a history which they do not understand and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it...We cannot be free until they are free. —James Baldwin<sup>192</sup>

We will be victorious through tireless, prayer-filled and fearless nonviolent struggle. Standing Rock is everywhere. —Chief Arvol Looking Horse<sup>193</sup>

In “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance”, Judith Butler (2016) illustrates how collective gatherings of people resist dominant structures of power by mobilizing corporeal vulnerability whereby masses of people place their bodies in spaces of vulnerability—or at risk for bodily harm by police, security, or military violence—in order to contest the everyday vulnerabilities and precarious conditions produced by social and material inequalities. Within Butler’s (2016) framework, vulnerability is conceived as 1) a condition of our social and material relations where we are inherently dependent on, and interdependent with, other human beings and the nonhuman environment, and 2) a powerful resource for political mobilization and nonviolent resistance against state sovereignty and security forces. For Butler (2016), then, collective bodily vulnerability, or the “deliberate exposure to power”, is an agentic, embodied enactment of political resistance that undermines the masculinist

<sup>192</sup> Excerpt from Baldwin’s “A Letter to My Nephew” published January 1, 1962 in the *Progressive*.

<sup>193</sup> Looking Horse is a Lakota spiritual leader. Quote found in Markey (2017).

ideal of the rational, self-sufficient political subject whose agency is derived from maintaining control over vulnerability (22).

Drawing on Butlerian notions from *Precarious Life* (2004), *Frames of War* (2009), and her ideas on vulnerability and resistance (2016), Hammami (2016) explores how “intelligible”, “grievable”<sup>194</sup> Israeli and Euro-American bodies enact spatial and bodily solidarity with “unintelligible”, “ungrievable” Palestinians in the precarious West Bank. Specifically, Hammami (2016) demonstrates how grievable bodies, and their solidarities, produce “countervisibilities” against Israeli settler colonial erasure of, and violence against, Palestinian lives (167-168). However, the author concludes that Israeli settlers and Euro-American’s production of countervisibilities draws on and reproduces the same hegemonic racial and corporeal hierarchies that enable the violent conditions of precarity in Palestine in the first place (Hammami, 2016). For Hammami, then, the subversion of settler colonial power relations is in the everyday acts of solidarity by Israelis that generate relationalities with Palestinians in the West Bank outside of the colonized-colonizer binary. By Israeli allies refusing to operate within the regime of settler colonialism as either soldiers or as settlers trying to occupy Palestinian land, Israeli activists physically embody “an existential threat to the Zionist nationalist imaginary of an ethnically bounded Jewish Israeli nation” (Hammami, 2016, 185).

Following Butler and Hammami’s ideas on bodily exposure and spatial solidarity, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples’ resistance in the face of heavily militarized security forces at the Standing Rock encampments exemplifies how corporeal vulnerability can be mobilized to make claims to existence against corporate-government investments that fuel

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<sup>194</sup> Hammami draws on Butlerian (2004, 2009) notions to define “intelligible”, “grievable” bodies as those whose lives are ontologically portrayed as “worthy of substance and protection” by hegemonic representational frameworks, or the “human “us” in dominant Western (and colonial) norms”, and the “unintelligible”, “ungrievable others” as those “whose lives are perceived as disposable or not even human...by the racist operations of these same norms” (Hammami, 2016, 171).

human, Indigenous, and environmental rights abuses. In the following quote, Karina<sup>195</sup> reflects on the militarized conditions of camp established by the ETP-hired security forces and local and state law enforcement:

When I was out there, they were fully geared with every tactical instrument. Every night our camp was flooded with over fifty floodlights. They also had sound cannons that would start going off at eleven at night until three in the morning. They'd use this high pitch frequency sound so we couldn't sleep. They had tear gas canisters, and they would duct tape the ends of them so that when they'd shoot them off at us they'd blow up and create shrapnel on people. A veteran told us that that was a strategy they used when he was in Iraq...Law enforcement also started putting arrested water protectors into dog kennels. The gossip around camp was that they were using Standing Rock as a training session for Middle Eastern conflicts.<sup>196</sup>

As a land-based direct action, the Standing Rock water protectors used their bodies as a barrier between the Lakota's unceded treaty-protected land, and the ETP's construction bulldozers (Whyte, 2017). As a result, water protectors were subjected to constant surveillance and the use of teargas, mace, rubber bullets, concussion and 'flash-bang' grenades, "less than lethal" weapons, water cannons, sound cannons or Long Range Acoustic Devices, bean-bag guns, attack dogs, in addition to large-scale arrests and an embargo on state medical relief resources (Strickland, 2016; Nowatzki, 2016; Chow, 2017).

As white settler allies vulnerably inhabited spaces alongside a population that has been marked for death by settler colonialism (Ritske, 2017), their solidarity constituted an embodied resistance against the capitalist-colonial, neoliberal violence(s) perpetuated onto Indigenous communities and the nonhuman environment. Drawing on Hammami's (2016) insights, it is through these anticolonial alliances that possibilities emerge for subject-formations exceeding the colonized-colonizer dichotomy and for relational solidarities rooted in a shared vision for a future on earth. 'Water protectors'—a term used to describe both Indigenous and non-indigenous activists who struggle to protect 'land' as understood from an

<sup>195</sup> Karina is a white woman from the U.S. who spent two weeks at the Standing Rock encampments, predominantly at Rosebud camp.

<sup>196</sup> 2017, interview, June 3

Indigenous ontological perspective of the environment—can be read as not only a descriptor for activists but also a shared imaginary that provides the foundation for decolonial futures.

As Whyte (2017) notes:

The water protectors' morality flows, then, from Indigenous governance systems that support cultural integrity, economic vitality, and political self-determination and the capacity to shift and adjust to the dynamics of ecosystems. (159)

Consequently, the commitment of white settler allies to Indigenous peoples and their self-determination enacts a vulnerable, feminist, anticolonial resistance in ways that complicate their whiteness and settler habits thus threatening the androcentric structures of white supremacy and settler colonialism that the U.S. state is predicated on.

Moreover, the bodies that made-up the Standing Rock encampments produced a spatial countervisibility against the corporate-government partnership that attempted to make invisible the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota peoples whose land and bodies would directly suffer through their investments in DAPL. For these reasons, Whitney felt that the solidarity that emerged from camp is better represented by the term 'accomplice' as opposed to 'ally':

The Standing Rock camp was technically termed "illegal actions" because the U.S. government said we were occupying land "illegally". Because of the questions of illegality, not to mention the treaty rights issues, I think 'accomplice' is a better way to think about our allyship because we were being accomplices by having our bodies on the ground there, even for those who didn't know what to do when they were there. It was important to physically have your body there.<sup>197</sup>

Reconceiving allies—whose spatial and bodily resistance is deemed illegal by the hegemonic power structures—as accomplices, undermines and contests the subject-formation of 'settler' by treacherously inhabiting spatialities marked illegal by the U.S. settler state. In this way, accomplices forego their settler protections and privileges to problematize and resist the unjust expropriation of Indigenous land and disregard for Indigenous life. For both Lauren

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<sup>197</sup> Sparks, 2017, interview, July 28

and Amanda, such forms of anticolonial solidarity require white settlers to put their bodies in spaces of vulnerability:

What I've been starting to think about since Standing Rock...is that it's not our job to be at the front in a leadership-sense, it's our job to step down while putting our bodies at risk because for most of our lives we have been safe and their [Indigenous] bodies and lives have been at risk. —Lauren<sup>198</sup>

In the direct action formations, as an Indigenous person in an Indigenous-led movement you were prioritized and protected; and as a white person or ally, it was your job to protect the Indigenous center. So say you're forming a circle formation in a direct action against law enforcement, the Indigenous people are going to be inside of that circle and then white people are physically going to be on the outside of the circle, face to face and in between the police officers—who were predominantly white—and Indigenous bodies. You are forming a human shield around them. I see that also as my place since coming home. If you are in a situation where you see someone who has less privilege than you—whether that's a non-white, queer, or trans person—it's your job as a person who has been in a place of privilege for a very long time to protect that person, to stand up for them, to say something. —Amanda<sup>199</sup>

Placing one's body at risk as a form of anticolonial solidarity not only recognizes how bodies are unequally afforded bodily security within heteropatriarchal, white supremacist, settler colonial power relations, but this embodied solidarity also enables racially privileged allies to gain critical experiential knowledge(s) about dominant structures of power. This is demonstrated in the following reflections by Emily<sup>200</sup> and Amanda:

We are so brainwashed, and that's a part of being white. Just being out there, we saw that people, especially Indigenous people, were being surveilled and they were collecting information on them. I now believe that the United States is an enemy to the world. I would be called a terrorist to even say that about my government, which is how they got TigerSwan [the ETP-hired security firm] into there by calling us 'Jihadist terrorists'...I think what's important for white people is to listen to other communities and to understand that we don't understand what somebody else's cultural experience is, and has been, in large

<sup>198</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

<sup>199</sup> 2017, interview, June 22

<sup>200</sup> Emily is a middle-aged white woman who is a self-described hippy. In regards to the multiple types of risk Indigenous and non-indigenous activists faced by participating in the anticolonial resistance at the Standing Rock encampments, it is vital to note that Emily spent five months transporting thousands of pounds of resources and much-needed equipment to the camp, and her physical presence at the camp caused her—and many others who were there long-term—to have respiratory issues, such as pneumonia, and forego the majority of their income for the year (2017, interview, August 22).

part because of the white person's culture. Our culture has impacted many through genocide, slavery, impoverishment, and lack of resources. –Emily<sup>201</sup>

At the camp, you'd hear a helicopter flying 24 hours a day. There wasn't a moment when you wouldn't hear a helicopter or a plane flying low above you...As [white] Americans we are so spoiled, we have this sense of entitlement that we should be able to operate freely without anyone watching or caring...It was obvious at Standing Rock who was privileged enough to think that "no, they can't watch me" and those who were not surprised by the surveillance. It was expected by some and abhorrent to others. –Amanda<sup>202</sup>

A crucial aspect of Lauren, Amanda, and Emily's quotes, is the understanding that white settlers have had a general relative security—socially, materially, and bodily—within a system that deprives Indigenous peoples and communities of color of their basic security. In realizing that the racial and colonial privileges that white settlers possess in a white supremacist settler colonial society is at the expense of those who are marked Other(s), white settlers can begin to interrogate their positionalities as—what Lykke (2014) calls—an “embodied, intersectionally situated subject” (42) as a form of accountability and feminist resistance against hegemonic modalities of power. For Morgensen (2013), a feminist ethic of accountability that “fearlessly engag[es] complicity” (69) by “engag[ing] painful, fractious, or seemingly irreconcilable differences” can build “anti-oppressive alliances across differences” (70).

The ability of white settlers to learn from, and generate relational bodily solidarities with, Indigenous peoples and communities of color is critical to interrupt normalized spatial practices that are predicated on, and reconstitute, dominant racial stratifications. As Whitney elaborates:

There was no amount of preparation or reading books you could do for Standing Rock, it doesn't matter if you have this Black friend or this Native friend, none of it could substitute for the experience of being there and not knowing what to do or say and learning how to follow the Native lead. It wasn't only difficult in terms of white people's physical presence at camp sometimes, but also in terms of requesting that space be held and some people

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<sup>201</sup> 2017, interview, August 22

<sup>202</sup> 2017, interview, June 22

not knowing how to do that or who weren't willing to learn how to do that. Ultimately, it's much easier to ask for money or material donations, and there was a lot of money and things contributed, but if it hadn't been for the number of people who went it wouldn't have been what it was.<sup>203</sup>

Significantly, Whitney is highlighting the pedagogical element of resistance movements whereby through struggle activists learn to unsettle their racial and colonial privileges and subjectivities that perpetuate ontological expansiveness and settlement. Therefore, embodied anticolonial resistance(s) can forge the opportunities necessary for white settlers to learn how to contest their racial privilege(s) and habits of spatial settlement in order to forge decolonial existences.

Central to this process of building anticolonial habits, subjectivities, and relationships is rethinking the notions of taking up space and holding space through decolonial resistances. For Whitney, understanding who and what needs to take up space and hold space at the Standing Rock encampments required recognizing the interlocking power dynamics of history, space, race, and coloniality:

Taking up space involves centering oneself, and sometimes that's necessary. For example, the [Standing Rock] camp took up its own space because that is their land that has been occupied by the United States...So you need to recognize if you need to be centered, or you shouldn't be centered at that time. If you don't need to be centered, then you can offer to hold space for what and who *needs* to take space...In my opinion, a lot of work that needed to be done at Standing Rock was simply holding space...Listening to the stories of Indigenous people, listening to the youth and the elders and respecting them, and bearing witness to what was happening at Standing Rock... At Standing Rock, we were *bearing witness* to the nature of our country, the United States, what it's based in, and also what it continues to perpetuate. Basically what I realized this year, is that the problems that we say are historical in the U.S.—like slavery and the genocide of Native peoples—have never actually stopped. They have changed names, changed forms, and changed actors, but they have never stopped...and unless we confront them, they are going to continue. By holding space at Standing Rock, we were absolutely forced to confront that.<sup>204</sup>

As indicated in Whitney's quote, through holding space and bearing witness at the Standing Rock encampments, water protectors and their anticolonial solidarities confronted the

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<sup>203</sup> Sparks, 2017, interview, July 28

<sup>204</sup> Sparks, 2017, interview, July 28



continuation of white supremacist settler colonial violence(s), in addition to forging the vulnerability necessary to have their bodies, subjectivities, habits, and privileges confronted as well. As a result, some white settlers began to see how their history, politics, and existence in North America is already always racialized and connected to colonial technologies of violence, as evidenced in the following quote by Lauren:

We [white settlers] used our power to completely obliterate entire groups of Native peoples from their lands. And it has never ended, we are still doing it which is obvious with this pipeline...I can't believe that we just kind of forget it, I can't believe our history books...I can't believe that for twenty years of my life I didn't think about race and colonization...The lessons that I still remember most clearly from Standing Rock are the ones when I said something I shouldn't have or the ones where there was a lot of personal reflection. That feels selfish to have that be one of the biggest takeaways, but I think that's part of what getting involved in activism does to people like me...we realize that we are the problem, or a part of the problem, and it's something we can unlearn hopefully, although maybe not fully...I'm trying to let those lessons into every part of my life because then maybe I can walk about the world in a way that's less harmful and a little less violent than the way that I was.<sup>205</sup>

Through her embodied resistance in an anticolonial movement, Lauren's perspective on history and colonialism in the U.S. shifted to center the knowledges of Indigenous peoples and the histories of their dispossession. Not only does this understanding of history challenge hegemonic national narratives and imaginaries that naturalize settler occupation of North America, but it also calls into question the role of the white settler as it perpetually enables racist, settler colonial power relations. This was also illustrated in the following reflection by Ashley<sup>206</sup>:

Standing Rock made real...this idea that colonization is not just in our actions, but that colonialism is so built into my own bones, body, and thought-processes. Really getting to experience that was the most ferocious lesson that they could have possibly handed to all of these white travelers there...For so many people that went to Standing Rock, I think it showed how colonialism has really been internalized.<sup>207</sup>

<sup>205</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

<sup>206</sup> Ashley is a white woman from the U.S. in her mid-20s who has been involved in past environmental activism.

<sup>207</sup> 2017, interview, July 13

By exposing how white settlers embody and perpetuate coloniality, the Standing Rock movement forged spaces where the logics and violence(s) of white settler colonialism could be interrogated. For Smith (2010), gaining the understanding that “we have been inevitably marked by colonization” is productive for anticolonial solidarities:

When we no longer have to carry the burden of political and cultural purity, we can be more flexible and creative in engaging multiple strategies and creating a plethora of alliances that can enable us to use the logics of settler colonialism against itself. (58)

Similarly, for Erin, her physical participation in the Standing Rock encampments made visible the everydayness of white settler violence thus providing the opportunity for Erin to consider how white activists could interrupt such violence(s) in the future:

Standing Rock showed me that what I want to do in my life is be an organizer of other white people for racial equality because I think there is a large body of white folks who value racial equality but who are not aware that in our passivity, or in our assumption that we are not enacting violence, we are committing more violence...There’s a lot of labor that needs to be done and some of it must be done by white people.<sup>208</sup>

For white activists in North America, it can be “earth-shattering”—as Erin was quoted earlier stating—to learn how one’s subject-formation and habits sustain the racial and settler colonial hierarchies underpinning the U.S. state. However, the capacity of white settlers to vulnerably shatter, and destabilize the social practices and narratives that sustain white settler coloniality, potentially enables growth in non-dominating ways, as indicated by Erin’s previous quote. As Ritske (2017) elucidates, “decolonization must be both world shattering and world building” (85), and to shatter the world built by the “logics of white settler colonialism” (81), the white settler must also be unsettled.

This discussion raises the question of how white settler allies can complicate the ways that they normalize racial and colonial privileges without overly individualizing racism and

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<sup>208</sup> 2017, interview, June 21

settler colonialism and divorcing racial and colonial privilege(s) from what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2001) calls the “racialized social system” (37). For Anderson (2003):

...understanding white privilege only as a repertoire of taken-for-granted advantages is not enough. Without also understanding racism and racial stratification as the foundation of white privilege which is the very structure of society, acknowledging white privilege will only generate a sense of relief for dominant groups and will not dissect the institutional arrangements through which racism continues. (26)

Drawing on Shome (1999) who links the performative facets of individual whiteness to a set of discursive and social practices that maintain transnational systems of racial domination, Anderson (2003) argues that whiteness cannot be dismantled by “simply denouc[ing] white privilege and white identity” because whiteness is the foundation of wider structural racisms that produce institutional and material inequalities (29). While individual refusals of whiteness, racial prejudices, and settler privileges do not erase historical and ongoing racial and colonial injustices, I suggest that collective refusals through anticolonial solidarity can strengthen efforts to destabilize future stratifications rooted in racial and colonial asymmetries.

In a system that is reproduced through and depends on the complicity of white settlers, the capacity of the white settler to act as an accomplice in struggles for decolonization by challenging the ongoing processes of racialized colonial violence(s) through traitorously holding space with dispossessed communities, ultimately weakens white supremacist and settler colonial power relations. Moreover, witnessing and sharing one’s experiences as an accomplice in anticolonial struggles—as the interviewees in this thesis have done—undermines the false narratives of U.S. exceptionalism and historical white innocence. Through these relational forms of unsettled solidarity, white settler allies can develop the capacity to—what Youngblood Henderson (2000) call— “live with the ambiguity of thinking against themselves” as a critical process to disrupt white settler colonial logics (249-250) and become what Waziyatawin (2009) describes as a “self-rejecting colonizer” (153). Such

alliances can potentially invert the settler colonial project by uprooting the settler, thus threatening the settler state's very existence. Therefore, a central goal of anticolonial solidarities must be to unravel the settler as a subject-formation, structural location, and set of logics, habits, and beliefs (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

In 1823, when the Doctrine of Discovery was adopted into U.S. law in the Supreme Court case *Johnson v. McIntosh*<sup>209</sup>, Chief Justice John Marshall (writing for the majority) said European powers in North America operated under the understanding that Native Americans were:

...the rightful occupants of the soil, with a legal as well as just claim to retain possession of it, and to use it according to their own discretion; but their rights to complete sovereignty as independent nations were necessarily diminished, and their power to dispose of their soil at their own will to whomsoever they pleased was denied by the original fundamental principle that discovery gave exclusive title to those who made it.<sup>210</sup>

Following this precedent, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that:

The United States, then, has unequivocally acceded to that great and broad rule by which its civilized inhabitants now hold this country...They maintain, as all others have maintained, that discovery gave an exclusive right to extinguish the Indian title of occupancy either by purchase or by conquest...It asserted also a limited sovereignty over them and the exclusive right of extinguishing the title which occupancy gave to them...The title by conquest is acquired and maintained by force. The conqueror prescribes its limits.<sup>211</sup>

As Miller, LeSage, and Escarcena (2010) argue, this case gave settlers' sovereignty and property rights, as settlers and so-called 'discoverers' of the New World, over "the lands and native peoples" (824); yet discovery becomes a "complete title" only when settlers "actually occupy and possess the newly found lands...by building forts or settlements" (825). Therefore, the occupation and possession of Indigenous land by settlers legitimizes settlers'

<sup>209</sup> *Johnson & Graham's Lessee v. McIntosh*, 21 U.S. (8 Wheat.) 543 (1823). Retrieved at *Justia US Supreme Court*: <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/21/543/case.html>.

<sup>210</sup> 574 in *Johnson & Graham's Lessee v. McIntosh*, 21 U.S. (8 Wheat.) 543 (1823) at *Justia US Supreme Court*: <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/21/543/case.html>.

<sup>211</sup> 587-589 in *Johnson & Graham's Lessee v. McIntosh*, 21 U.S. (8 Wheat.) 543 (1823) at *Justia US Supreme Court*: <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/21/543/case.html>.

existence, sovereignty, and rights over Indigenous peoples and their lands. As a result, Indigenous dispossession continues to be legally maintained through the bodily and physical occupation of North America by settlers and the settler state at the expense of Indigenous people's self-determination.

I argue that the bodily exposure and spatial co-existence of white settlers, Indigenous peoples, and people of color at the Standing Rock encampments signals a loosening of internalized and relational coloniality, whereby the white settler resists the settler system that depends on their complicity to occupy Indigenous lands. By foregoing their commitment to the U.S. settler state through their spatial and embodied solidarity, white activists not only recognize the (prior) sovereignty of Indigenous nations but they also repudiate the narrative of 'manifest destiny'—whereby all land in North America is divinely-destined to be occupied and used by Euro-American settlers (Arvin et al., 2013)—by bodily resisting the appropriation of land for the settler state and its racialized capitalism. Since manifest destiny paved the way for a distinct American exceptionalism (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015), these anticolonial solidarities and decolonial resistances also defy transnational U.S. imperialism that is carried out under this same false narrative of exceptionalism. As Tuck and Yang (2012) elucidate:

*Decolonization “here” is intimately connected to anti-imperialism elsewhere...Settler colonialism fuels imperialism all around the globe. Oil is the motor and motive for war and so was salt, so will be water. Settler sovereignty over these very pieces of earth, air, and water is what makes possible these imperialisms. (31, original emphasis)*

Since the processes of settlement, white supremacy, and capitalist-colonialism in North America are closely entwined with the U.S. empire and its imperialist projects globally, to disrupt the power relations of one of them is to destabilize the conditions of power for the others.

In conclusion, when white settlers contribute to the destabilization of their embodied whiteness and settlement on Indigenous land, they simultaneously denaturalize the systems of white supremacy and settler colonialism that operate through white privilege and settler logics. Therefore, creating anticolonial solidarities that interrupt spatial and bodily whiteness and settler coloniality through everyday practices of embodied decolonial resistances are crucial to forge relationships and resistances predicated on anticolonial praxis. By (re)imagining more equitable co-existences through diverse solidarities, anticolonial resistances generate possibilities for decolonial futurities in living ecologies beyond settler colonial and imperial violence(s)

## Conclusion

Indigenous place-based ontologies can be shared through solidarities with non-indigenous peoples who are committed to decolonization in ways that can create more just relationships for both the Indigenous nations of the land, as well as with the ecologies which human communities inhabit. However, the logics of white settler colonialism can be reiterated within solidarity practices that romanticize Indigenous peoples and their spiritual-ecological knowledges. As a result, the Standing Rock movement's resistance to the hegemony of spatial whiteness and settler appropriation of Indigenous land and culture can be seen not only in the physical reclamation of land in the face of corporate-government interests, but also in the geographies of solidarity where the habits, narratives, desires, and futurity of white settlers becomes unsettled.

While Indigenous land-based ontologies can potentially deepen both Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples' ecological responsibilities, Indigenous place-based spiritualities will continue to be obstructed as long as settlers and the settler state occupy Indigenous land and maintain capitalist-colonial asymmetries rooted in the exploitation of the environment. Therefore, not only must settler allies learn how to interrupt the ways they reproduce settler colonial logics and dominant racial hierarchies through their everyday social practices, their solidarities must collectively contest the patriarchal, settler colonial, white supremacist, imperialist violence(s) underlying Indigenous dispossession, environmental injustices, and neoliberal material and social inequalities. As the Standing Rock movement demonstrates, this can be achieved through integrating an ethic of feminist vulnerability in anticolonial solidarities whereby the spatial and bodily resistance of white settlers, Indigenous peoples, and people of color in the face of hegemonic conditions of power, and its multiple intersecting violence(s), generates decolonial knowledge-practices that water protectors' embody and share far beyond land-based direct actions. Ultimately, the creation of relational

Indigenous and non-indigenous solidarities that incorporate Indigenous place-based knowledges and modalities of anticolonial resistance are fundamental to (re)imagining and forging the knowledges, skills, subjectivities, relationships, and communities necessary in order to enact a decolonial ecologically just future beyond capitalist-colonial exploitations and settler colonial realities.



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