

Peyote: A Decolonial Analysis of Religious Freedom and Indigeneity

by

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ABSTRACT

Peyote is a subject which renders the mechanisms, forces, and assemblages of colonialism clear. It is in the very inability of the colonial world to categorize, locate, understand and react to peyote that reveals so much about how colonialism operates. A primary goal of this project is to demonstrate that through understanding peyote, and its role in both colonial and contemporary history, one may come to better understand or recognize racial hierarchies and colonial forces which have not gone away with time.

The first chapter is primarily a discussion of the Ghost Dance, I lay out some of the difficulties that indigenous appeals to religious freedom face both in terms of political power, but also conceptual, cultural, and academic thinking. In chapter two I move more specifically to the topic of peyote, tracing peyote's history from precolonial times to the present. Chapters three and four deal with peyote as part of the borderlands and part of the War on Drugs respectively.

I argue that understanding peyote can benefit a broader decolonial project within scholarship. The richness of the intersections between peyote and myriad other subjects is vastly understudied in academia and continued decolonial scholarship on the topic could have immense potential in bringing new insights into view. I draw heavily on scholars such as Edward Said and Aimé Césaire, but I have also been strongly influenced by other scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Frantz Fanon, and Gloria Anzaldúa. In keeping with the decolonial mission, it is important to recognize that much of what I am presenting in this work is necessarily new or radical to the indigenous communities who are close to the topics at hand. While I present my own novel insights and discoveries, I

also intend for this project to be a call for greater attention and study to be brought to the subject of peyote.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO PEYOTE AND COLONIALISM: A MEDITATION ON THE RISE AND FALL OF THE GHOST DANCE

The goals of this project are numerous and multifaceted, the primary thesis of this project, however, can be summarized in the following way: Peyote, I argue, is a subject which renders the mechanisms, forces and assemblages of colonialism incredibly clear. It is in the very inability of the colonial world to categorize, locate, understand and react to peyote that reveals so much about how colonialism operates. The focus through which I demonstrate this is the history of peyote, and its role in both colonial and contemporary history. Through understanding the unique place peyote inhabits in the world, one finds evidence and representation of very old hierarchies and colonial forces which have not gone away with time. To follow in the footsteps of Tisa Wenger, I frequently refer to Deleuze's concept of assemblage as a useful framework for understanding concepts such as race, religion, hierarchy, any other myriad forces present in the world, both historically and to this day. Or in her words, I use "the Deleuzian concept of assemblage to highlight the heterogeneous, contingent, and contested conditions in which diverse groups of people shape their own identities and distinguish themselves from others as they navigate imperial relations of power in the modern world. Race, gender, sexuality, class, and religion are interlocking assemblages, forged and sustained through the discourses, institutions, and material relations of daily of daily life as intersecting models of classification and control."¹ The reason why peyote is such an important subject for

¹ Wenger, Tisa. *Religious Freedom: the Contested History of an American Ideal*. University of North Carolina PR, 2020. 3.

discussion and analysis is that it lies at the intersection of so many colonial forces and assemblages. A discussion of peyote which takes into account the many facets of this intersection and matrix of concepts holds profound potential for furthering decolonial scholarship. This is precisely what I hope to accomplish with this project. Through my work on the subjects presented in this work, I intend on elucidating certain important insights and discoveries. Though at the risk of downplaying my own accomplishments, it is important for me to proclaim that many of the ideas and histories which I present in this work are not necessarily groundbreaking. A major aspect of this project is the way I tie together the myriad histories, topics, forces, subjects, and scholarship on the topics associated with peyote in novel ways so that new insights into the workings of the colonial or postcolonial world become illuminated in an original and productive manner. In doing so, my goal is to present or platform pre-existing scholarship and knowledge that I regard as important just as much as I am trying to present my own original ideas. Peyote, understood as a decolonial topic of discussion has received some scholarship, and it has received some specifically decolonial scholarship. My concern is that decolonial scholarship is both in shorter supply than the richness of the subject warrants, and the scholarship which does exist is not prominently featured in either scholarly discourse nor the cultural imagination at large. Given the nature of this concern, I aim to both add my own voice to this chorus in the hopes of making it louder, as well as adding to it with my own insight and discoveries.

I see this project primarily as a piece of decolonial scholarship. In regards to my own understanding of decolonial scholarship, I would present it in the following ways. The role that I see for a decolonial scholar is to question and interrogate the assumptions,

institutions, and ideologies that make up and operate the world, notably the western world, in such a way that an acknowledgement is made of the forces of colonialism, imperialism, racism, sexism, and other hierarchies that lie at the heart of those forces. I view the acknowledgement and recognition of these forces as necessary tasks as for decolonial scholars. I see the topic of peyote, as well as plants and drugs more broadly, as a nexus point for revealing and understanding colonial forces, legacies, and apparatuses in a way that I see as productive, not just for the study of the specific topics at hand, but for scholarship more broadly speaking. My hope is that the assemblages and colonial forces present in institutions of power and authority can be more readily recognized and either transcended or combatted at least in part through the attempts at decolonial scholarship of myself and others. I also wanted to make it very clear that most of what I am presenting in this project is not radical or novel to many of the indigenous or colonized communities who are relevant to, or found within, the histories and subjects that I am engaging. One of my goals is to raise the volume of discussion involving these questions, topics, and insights. I am not challenging indigenous and decolonial scholars to do anything different, I am challenging those with privileged and normative positionalities to pay closer attention to these issues and topics, and to engage with the ideas in this work in order to make the challenging of injustices in the world more productive and informed. Throughout this work, when I critique the flaws or shortcomings in the attitudes and perspectives of political forces, I am critiquing normative, privileged, often white and Christian perspectives on the topics this project is concerned with. This project aims to amplify the histories and topics relevant to understanding colonialism, with some insight of my own, in order for it to better reach

the ears of those who cannot already hear what decolonial scholars are saying. This project is intended for any kind of reader, but I am directing my attention most towards those who benefit from, and are blind to, the colonial forces that operate in the world. These intended readers may be scholarly or not.

To the best of my abilities, as a person and as a scholar, I try to be first and foremost a decolonial scholar. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith put it in the introduction to *Decolonizing Methodologies*, “The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonized peoples.”² Decolonial scholarship is an ideal I strive for in all things. In light of, and despite, my own positionality and my role as a Western Scholar, through the goal of decoloniality I hope to break certain cycles of coloniality that have been, and remain, present in scholarship. In the hopes of performing scholarship that is productively decolonial I have succeeded in some ways, and in others failed. It is an ongoing process to interrogate and reflect on my own positionality in such a way that I grow as a person and as a scholar, in the hopes of recognizing my biases, assumptions, and privileges. Along these lines I am unable to admit perfection, as this process is perpetual and unending. To these ends I have been influenced by countless scholars who have come before me. While some but not all of these scholars can accurately be described as decolonial scholars, notable influences which have shaped my understanding of decolonialism include Edward Said, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Frantz Fanon, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Aimé Césaire. While these and the many other scholars one will encounter

² Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed, 2012. 1.

throughout this work may appear to greater or lesser extents, they have been formative in the development of my thinking not just on the topics presented in this work, but my intellectual development in general. They are a powerful presence in my thinking at all times, even when the topic I am discussing has no direct relation to their work as it is presented here. The direct incorporation of decolonial scholars, and scholars who represent non-normative positionalities was a goal of mine. While in many respects I did not succeed, and many of the citations one encounters throughout this work still represents scholarship from privileged and normative perspectives, I did my best to incorporate, include and represent decolonial and nonnormative perspectives when I could. I must admit, I started some of the work and research found within this work many years ago, before I could even define the phrase ‘decolonial.’ While of course I have rethought, reworked and re-examined everything within the bounds of this project in light of my growth and reorientation as a decolonial scholar, this is still a work that represents the intellectual journey of someone who comes from a place of privilege, and it would be wrong for me to ignore or deny that.

Each chapter of this project engages a different dimension of peyote’s history and role in a number of contexts, in addition to discussion of peripheral yet relevant subjects. While the first chapter is primarily concerned with the Ghost Dance, it serves to illustrate the context and ecosystem of ideas pertinent to the study of peyote. The three chapters that follow each explore a different facet of peyote’s place in North America over the last one hundred years or so. I primarily engage peyote’s role in the United States, though I do spend some time looking at Mexico as well. As one of the primary goals of this work is to demonstrate the ways in which peyote lies at the intersection of far more than one

might have previously considered, each chapter introduces a number of the different facets or dimensions of peyote's role in American history, life, or political reality.

In the first chapter I trace the rise and fall of the Ghost Dance, a revivalist movement which swept through many Western Plains Tribes at the tail end of the nineteenth century. My goal is to figure out what this part of American history can tell us about colonialism, about the way religion is conceived in the American colonial or cultural imagination, and in that context figure out to some extent why the story of the Ghost Dance happened the way it did. Not only does the first chapter represent many of the topics and questions I engaged with at the start of my scholarly journey towards this project, it also represents a historical, chronological precursor of sorts to the peyote movement. It was my work on the Ghost Dance a number of years ago that led me to the topic of peyote, that led me to find some of the answers I was seeking in the study of peyote. I hope the reader sees not just how my own engagement with the Ghost Dance represents and resonates with my work that follows on peyote, but also the ways in which the journey of the Ghost Dance in American history itself resonates with the journey of peyote. Many of the same forces are at play in these two histories and seeing the ways in which the Ghost Dance and peyote are both similar and different is a powerful way to observe the mechanisms and assemblages present in colonialism in a productive way. Throughout, I trace the trajectory of the Ghost Dance, present some of the indigenous figures involved, and take a close look at the role of early anthropologists, notably James Mooney, in the story of the Ghost Dance.

In the second chapter I present a history of peyote in North America. I trace early archeological evidence for the relationship between humans and peyote going back thousands of years. I examine the colonial encounter between indigenous communities who used peyote and the Spanish as well as the way in which peyote came to the attention of American authorities. There is discussion of how peyote grew from a provincial piece of the American Southwest to being the pillar of the largest pan-indigenous movement in the United States. I also briefly present some of the legal battles faced by the Native American Church and indigenous Americans who practiced religious uses of peyote. My goal in this chapter is twofold: first, to introduce the reader to a brief yet broad depiction of the history of peyote; second, to make it abundantly clear that peyote is a feature of North America with origins deep in the continent's history. Peyote is not simply a drug that hippies discovered in the 1960s, it has a rich and complex history. Its role in indigenous lives is significant and unfortunately needs validation in a colonial world.

The third chapter is primarily interested in peyote as a spacial, geographical, ecological, and indigenous part of the borderlands between The United States and Mexico. Providing an analysis of peyote's role in the lives of people on both sides of the border, I am concerned with questions and ideas pertaining to what it means for the border between two settler colonial nation states to bisect the very limited and endangered habitat of peyote. Significant to peyote's history are concepts like mobility, migration, exchange and trade. The reality of the U.S. Mexican border complicates the role of peyote in indigenous communities on both sides of the border. I aim to present these issues and concerns in such a way that sheds light on rarely considered concerns

from non-indigenous perspectives. Whether it is access to peyote or the preservation of peyote, indigenous communities are confronted with difficult and complex obstacles to their practices and traditions. I conclude the chapter with an extended meditation on colonialism, orientalism, and surrealism, through discussion of, most notably, Edward Said and Aimé Césaire.

The fourth and final chapter is primarily an analysis of the War on Drugs. I provide a discussion of the classification of drugs that include peyote in order to critique and shed light on the ways in which the definitions, classifications, and logics of the War on Drugs are not simply at odds with scientific and medical research, but also a feature of American life which perpetuates and enforces a myriad of racist and colonial forces and institutions. I also discuss the ways in which, despite having the legal right to practice peyote use in The Native American Church, this does not defend indigenous Americans from the complications that arise from participating in religious practice that involves a plant designated by the federal government as a schedule 1 controlled substance.

The legacy of colonialism, imperialism, fascism, racism, to name a few of the forces present in the world is fundamentally rooted in hierarchies. What I aim to explore and demonstrate throughout this project are the multitude of ways in which these hierarchies are reinforced and perpetuated, but also inverted, transgressed, and maneuvered by various communities or forces. Hierarchies dictate and mandate that there are certain groups, races, religious traditions, and civilizations which are superior and meant to govern, and those who are lesser, and meant to serve, or be eradicated. Colonial and imperial regimes rest upon a bedrock which is so fundamentally indebted to these

hierarchies, that they demand static, strong, and immutable boundaries. To disrupt the hierarchy, is to disrupt the very fabric of power which operates and controls entire civilizations. This means that to an equal or greater degree, the threat of the Other, the lesser, the colonized, is rivaled by threats to the stability of this hierarchy, no matter from which direction that stability is threatened. Where the boundaries of identity, race, and other assemblages become porous, the threat to the societal order is most severe. One of the most important arguments I make is not necessarily original, it has been said by many decolonial scholars before me. It is that all of these assemblages and hierarchies which have dictated and guided the exploitation, domination, genocide and violence at the hands of the colonial regimes of history have survived and extended into the present. They are not gone, only less obvious to those who benefit from their political realities. Where some originality on my part presents itself is where I choose to point this decolonial lens. It is no accident that the most successful pan-indigenous religious movement in United States History is the Native American Church, along with its use of peyote. It is also no coincidence that nearly a century later there are still many questions and concerns over how the hegemonic political institutions of America interpret and manage the rights and liberties of the Native American Church. The use of peyote in the ceremonial, spiritual and religious context in which the church partakes, has created an environment in which the porousness of colonial boundaries become clear, and the stability of colonial hierarchies rendered vulnerable. The colonial order needs two things to maintain itself, clear boundaries dictated by its hierarchies, and an enemy, represented by some Other. Peyote's role in American Religious History presents one of the clearest threats to both of those requirements. As a decolonial scholar, I see this as an opportunity of great

importance and severity, one which could prove beneficial if we are to ever shed the nightmarish legacy of colonialism, and its attendant assemblages.

It is important to note why the history of peyote takes on the character it does, especially in comparison to other indigenous religious movements. Understanding why some never achieved the legal and cultural legitimacy they sought and The Native American Church did reveal facets of the structures and institutions of colonialism and empire that these movements had to appeal to. The rise of peyote is understood in a variety of ways, one such articulation is as follows:

“At least three key factors helped transform the use of peyote from an ancient but relatively localized ritual tradition into a powerful pan-Indian new religious movement... The first was the massive relocation of Native Americans from across the United States onto reservations in Oklahoma and Texas. This brought Native peoples from around the country into close proximity to peyote use; many of them were also living in fairly brutal conditions on the reservation, amid rampant poverty and alcoholism, and were often in search of new spiritual alternatives... Second was the building of many railroads in the south, many of which went right through peyote territory, allowing for easy cheap spread of peyote...”³

However, integral to our broader discussion here is the third factor in Urban’s explanation, “Finally a third key factor in the spread of peyote was the rapid rise and tragic demise of another massive Native American movement, the Ghost Dance.”⁴

Around the time that peyote was first starting to make itself known to authorities of the United States, there was another indigenous movement that was already prominent and caught in its own battles. I am referring to the aforementioned Ghost Dance. I would like to spend some time now presenting a modest history and overview of the ghost dance, the kinds of challenges it faced, and how it relates to the questions we are confronting in the context of peyote and the Native American Church. What I hope to make clear is

³ Urban, Hugh B. 2015. *New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements: Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America*. Oakland: University of California Press, 29.

⁴ Urban, *New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements*, 29.

twofold. First, the saga of the Ghost Dance acts as both a mirror, and a microcosm, which depicts the forces, hierarchies, and power structures which manifest in the history of peyote and the Native American Church. Secondly, understanding the ways in which the Ghost Dance was rejected from entering some form of American religious legitimacy where the Native American Church was accepted requires a meditation on the history of the Ghost Dance and the conflicts at play in it. A decolonial analysis between the Ghost Dance as well as peyote and the Native American Church yields similar stories and similar insights. Putting them in dialogue is important not just because they illuminate colonial forces in novel ways, they of course do, but also because the histories are closely connected. Despite providing historical overview and analysis of both the Ghost Dance and peyote in my work, I hope to make it clear that they are not separate or provincial discussions, they are intimately connected both on their own terms, but also in what they reveal about coloniality. Since, as stated above, the spread of peyote, at least in part, came out of the ashes of the Ghost Dance, I think it best we take a closer look.

So what is the Ghost Dance? In the prairies of the American midwest and southwest of the late nineteenth century, the Messiah appeared.⁵ This was not the Christian messiah or the Jewish messiah, and in a time when being American practically meant Anglo-American Christian,⁶ this was not even a white Messiah. This messiah was named Wovoka,⁷ and he was a young man of the Paiute tribe.⁸ Wovoka, also known by

⁵ Mooney, James, and Wallace, Anthony F. C. *The Ghost-dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*. 1st Phoenix ed. Classics in Anthropology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965, 2.

⁶ Smoak, Gregory E. *Ghost Dances and Identity: Prophetic Religion and American Indian Ethnogenesis in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008, 192

⁷ Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, 5.

⁸ Mooney, 2

his ‘white’ name Jack Wilson⁹ spread the word of a prophecy of a revitalized Earth as well as a doctrine of how to bring about this new idyllic Earth.¹⁰ The main feature of Wovoka’s preaching was the Ghost Dance, and it swept a large area of the nation as several large tribes in the region would practice the Ghost Dance for a number of years.¹¹ The Ghost Dance was misunderstood even during the time of its popularity but in studies of it that spanned more than a century afterward, there is continued confusion.

Overshadowing the Ghost Dance due to its political and historical significance, to this day the mainstream perspective of the Ghost Dance tends to be little more than a footnote to the Battle at Wounded Knee.¹² What was not anticipated by myself, and others who study the Ghost Dance today, was the sheer amount of insight that the Ghost Dance, as well as early anthropological studies of it, illuminated about the way that Americans, Europeans, and western perspectives conceptualize the world, and those who live in it.

Most of what is known of the Ghost Dance comes from anthropologist James Mooney’s work. James Mooney’s *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* is one of the most influential pieces of writing in anthropology from the late nineteenth century and serves as the axis around which all further study of the Ghost Dance revolves. I admit that there are aspects of the methodology used in this chapter that can be flawed, using the accounts of figures with a colonial gaze in order to critique the colonial gaze is not ideal. It has its uses, as well as pros and cons, and I use this here to the best of my ability, but I fully admit that there are indeed shortcomings to this

⁹ Ibid, 6.

¹⁰ Ibid, 14.

¹¹ Ibid, 48-49, 61.

¹² Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity*, 2.

approach. The depiction of the Ghost Dance found here is hardly an objective one, because most early official depictions were written from a colonial perspective with a colonial gaze, we must take the information, records, and depictions with a grain of salt. Mooney's account is one of the earliest firsthand accounts of the Ghost Dance not to be derived from a military perspective and it serves as, at least compared to hegemonic perspectives at the time of the late nineteenth century, one of the more faithful and sympathetic depictions of the doctrine behind the Ghost Dance and its prophet.¹³ This is not to deny its problematic aspects, as I previously alluded to, which I will elaborate on more clearly later. Mooney also provides historical information surrounding the conflict between the military and the Sioux.¹⁴ Just as importantly, Mooney's unique sympathies toward Native Americans for an anthropologist at the time represents a progressive shift in consciousness towards a more tolerant and understanding relationship with Native Americans, while at the same time clearly belonging to a colonial order in terms of his profession, training, and assumptions.

First, an introduction to the origins of the Ghost Dance, according to Mooney. When Wovoka was a young man there was a solar eclipse and he had a vision.¹⁵ The date of this eclipse, according to Mooney, is most likely "The total eclipse of January 1, 1889."¹⁶ Mooney explains that "he saw God, with all the people who had died long ago engaged in their oldtime sports and occupations, all happy and forever young. It was a pleasant land and full of game. After showing him all, God told him he must go back and

¹³ Smoak, 14.

¹⁴ Ibid, 70.

¹⁵ Mooney, 13-14

¹⁶ Ibid, 16.

tell his people they must be good and love one another, have no quarreling, and live in peace with the whites; that they must work, and not lie or steal; that they must put away all the old practices that savored war; that if they faithfully obeyed his instructions they would at last be reunited with their friends in this other world, where there would be no more death or sickness or old age. He was then given the dance which he was commanded to bring back to his people.”¹⁷ When Wovoka awoke, he began spreading word of his prophecy. He prophesized that there will come a cataclysm, described as a “trembling of the earth”¹⁸ which wipes every human off the face of the earth.¹⁹ But after this great cataclysm, “The time will come when the whole Indian race, living and dead will be reunited upon a regenerated earth, to live a life of aboriginal happiness, forever free from death, disease, and misery.”²⁰ The Native Americans will be resurrected, all of them, and they would all be young and healthy forever. The land would be lush and filled with animals and game.²¹ The white people? As Mooney explains, “The white race, being alien and secondary and hardly real, has no part in this scheme of aboriginal regeneration, and will be left behind with the other things of earth that have served their temporary purpose, or else will cease entirely to exist.”²² They would not be resurrected, they would be gone from this Earth, for God was now standing with the plight of the Native Americans, and it would be they who are rewarded. It is worth noting that there are some interpretations that state that the white people will simply go to a separate world or

¹⁷ Ibid, 14.

¹⁸ Ibid, 24.

¹⁹ Ibid, 27.

²⁰ Ibid, 19.

²¹ Ibid, 28.

²² Ibid, 19.

place.²³ In a sense, the prophecy is one of the death of all, and the resurrection of the Native Americans.

In order to bring about this cataclysm, and subsequent redemption of the world, the Native Americans had to do two things. One requirement was participation in the Ghost Dance: “By performing this dance at intervals, for five consecutive days each time, they would secure this happiness to themselves and hasten the event.”²⁴ Members of the tribe “danced around a tree or pole set up in the center of the ring.”²⁵ Sometimes upwards of two hundred individuals²⁶ would move and dance in a circle all night until sunrise several days in a row. The act of dancing would cause many to collapse and have visions of the world to come, of seeing their loved ones again and all the wonders of the redeemed world, these individuals would either be woken up by medicine men or allowed to recover on their own depending on the tribe with which they danced.²⁷ On the morning after the last night of dancing “the medicine men ascended a small butte, where they met and talked with the expected god, and on coming down again delivered his message to the people.”²⁸ The dance maintained these characteristics across all the tribes with only slight variation between them. Thus the dance serves as the first of the two primary dimensions of Wovoka’s doctrine.

Significant to the prophecy was also the second requirement, the doctrine behind the Ghost Dance. While hardly the complete collection of ideas that belong to the Ghost

²³ Ibid, 27.

²⁴ Ibid, 14.

²⁵ Ibid, 46.

²⁶ Ibid, 59.

²⁷ Ibid, 58.

²⁸ Ibid, 58-59.

Dance, a good summary is achieved by returning to Mooney's explanation: "God told him [Wovoka] he must go back and tell his people they must be good and love one another, have no quarreling, and live in peace with the whites; that they must work, and not lie or steal; that they must put away all the old practices that savored war; that if they faithfully obeyed his instructions they would at last be reunited with their friends in this other world, where there would be no more death or sickness or old age."²⁹ The doctrine of the Ghost Dance was remarkably nonviolent and great effort was made to make it abundantly clear that until the redemptive process came to fruition there was to be harmony between white people and Native Americans. Mooney explains that "all believers were exhorted to make themselves worthy of the predicted happiness by discarding all things warlike and practicing honesty, peace, and good will, not only among themselves, but also toward the whites, so long as they were together."³⁰

Following the doctrine of the Ghost Dance a sense of cultural anxiety was removed. Yes, they had to continue to work with, and for, the white man, they had to go to their schools, and wear their clothes, but this was to bring them closer to the world where their troubles are no more. Although great sacrifices to their immediate way of life were made, they did not forget or let go of their self-understanding and identities as indigenous entirely, they were merely hidden from the colonial gaze. The Ghost Dance and its doctrine spread rapidly across the western half of the United States, a Cheyenne named Porcupine was "One of the first and most prominent of those who brought the doctrine to the prairie

²⁹ Ibid, 14.

³⁰ Ibid, 19.

tribes.”³¹ Among the tribes to participate are the Paiute,³² Arapaho,³³ Cheyenne,³⁴ Washo and Bannock,³⁵ Kiowa,³⁶ Shoshoni,³⁷ Sioux³⁸ and more.³⁹

Many indigenous revival movements and religious movements had surfaced during centuries of colonization, but none were quite like the Ghost Dance. It was thoroughly Native American, but had heavy Christian influence and symbolism. The Doctrine speaks of a God, a singular, all powerful God, and Wovoka claims to be the recipient of divine revelation.⁴⁰ The messianic nature of Wovoka and the Ghost Dance was so profound that using the term messiah to describe Wovoka was standard even among white people and white authorities.⁴¹ There are smaller details that are borrowed from Christian groups such as the Ghost Shirts adapted from a Mormon piece of clothing, which were believed to offer impenetrable protection from bullets.⁴² Mooney says “it is easy to see how an idea borrowed by the Shoshoni from the Mormons could find its way through the Arapaho first to the Sioux and Cheyenne and afterward to more remote tribes.”⁴³ Additionally, a very European, Protestant work ethic and relationship to authority is found in the doctrine, “It preaches peace with the whites and obedience to

³¹ Ibid, 26.

³² Ibid, 26.

³³ Ibid, 22-23.

³⁴ Ibid, 23.

³⁵ Ibid, 27.

³⁶ Kracht, Benjamin R. *Religious Revitalization Among the Kiowas: The Ghost Dance, Peyote, and Christianity*. University of Nebraska Press, 2018. xv.

³⁷ Kracht, *Religious Revitalization Among the Kiowas*, 28.

³⁸ Kracht, 29.

³⁹ Ibid, 28.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 15.

⁴¹ Ibid, 8.

⁴² Ibid, 34.

⁴³ Mooney, 35.

authority until the day of deliverance shall come.”⁴⁴ And this Christian character of the doctrine reveals something about the relationship between Native Americans and Anglo-Americans at the time. This unique intersection between Native American religion and Christian religion served an important purpose in the life of these tribes. Warren explains that “To appreciate the essential modernity of Ghost Dance teachings, it helps to keep in mind that a central appeal of any religion is how much it enables believers to resolve seemingly irresolvable contradictions. Seen in this light, the Ghost Dance taught believers how to take up activities demanded by assimilationists (schooling, farming, and church attendance) while continuing to dance and remaining Indian, thereby rejecting assimilation.”⁴⁵

The religion thus served as a bridge straddling one of the greatest paradoxes facing indigenous Americans: “the contradiction between their pre-industrial, stateless, autonomous past and their increasingly industrial, state-supervised, dependent present.”⁴⁶ Bridging the gap between traditional life and the ever encroaching wave of Western modernity, the Ghost Dance served as a synthesis that enabled tribes to adapt without completely sacrificing their identity. In his discussion of the Kiowas, Kracht says “Although current beliefs and religious values are centered around Christianity... these belief systems are infused with religious symbols from nineteenth-century Kiowa society.”⁴⁷ At the time, the only means of survival entailed the adoption of Christian values, myth and teachings, and so the tribes of America underwent this adoption.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 25.

⁴⁵ Warren, Louis S. *God's Red Son : The Ghost Dance Religion and the Making of Modern America*. New York: Basic Books, Location 5692 of 8735. 2017. Kindle

⁴⁶ Warren, *God's Red Son*, 368.

⁴⁷ Kracht, xv.

Religious adherence is not a simple matter, however, and through practices such as the Ghost Dance, many funneled symbols, rituals and creativity that was uniquely indigenous into the seemingly Christian doctrines. The result was the survival of Native ideas along with the adherence to an Anglo-American, Christian theological existence. The Ghost Dance doctrine was exactly this, and it was not just Christian and modern, it was remarkably peaceful.

Some Americans did not see it this way, however. By this point, nearly all members of the Sioux were already quarantined into an ever-filling reservation. The tragedy of which is described by Mooney:

“The reservation thus established was an immense one, and would have been ample for all the Sioux while being gradually educated toward civilization, could the buffalo have remained and the white man kept away. But the Times were changing. The building of the railroads brought into the plains swarms of hunters and emigrants, who began to exterminate the buffalo at such a rate that in a few years the Sioux, with all the other hunting tribes of the plains, realized that their food supply was rapidly going. Then gold was discovered in the Black hills, within the reservation, and at once thousands of miners and other thousands of lawless desperadoes rushed into the country in defiance of the protests of the Indians and the pledges of the government, and the Sioux saw their last remaining hunting ground taken from them.”⁴⁸

The Americans responsible at the reservations tried to stop all participation in the Ghost Dance. Mooney says that “When I visited Wind River reservation in Wyoming in June, 1892, the agent in charge informed me that there was no Ghost dancing on his reservation; that he had explained how foolish it was and had strictly forbidden it.”⁴⁹ At a time when more and more land was taken from the tribes, while less and less food or resources were given to the tribes, and a program of assimilation was little by little eliminating the expression of identity which tribes tried to retain, the Ghost Dance was

⁴⁸ Mooney, 70.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 52.

becoming the only thing means they had left in which to perform and embody that identity. Despite its Christian aspects, the Ghost Dance was something they could call truly their own. Tensions would rise between tribes and American authorities, with starvation and a lack of resources plaguing many Native Americans.⁵⁰ One of the many tragedies of this is that these rising tensions eventually led to an event known by several names, most commonly the Battle of Wounded Knee. But the most apt name would be the Wounded Knee Massacre. The U.S. Military slaughtered over 200 Sioux which included men, women and children.⁵¹

How could something like the Wounded Knee Massacre happen? Warren provides his own answer: “One answer is that popular racial prejudice presented Indians as “primitives” incapable of modernity. By these lights, no Indian religion could be anything but barbarous and backward - if any of their “superstitions” could be said to amount to a religion at all.”⁵² Due to the fact that much of the Ghost Dance rituals were deemed unacceptable in the eyes of white Americans, the mere existence of ecstatic dance or communication with the dead was enough to scare authorities. The result of unacceptable rituals persisting was the perception that the Native Americans who participated were dangerous and rebellious. Warren’s answer is fine, but if one is to conclude with this answer, it would be the same as saying ‘the reason bad things happen to certain people is because racism exists, the end.’ If any nuanced understanding of how a massacre like the one at Wounded Knee could be seen as a triumphant victory in much

⁵⁰ Ibid, 72.

⁵¹ Ibid, 118.

⁵² Warren, 14-15.

American history, it is unacceptable to give up here. Let us return to the question of how? How, as Warren says, “is it possible that a religion extolling wage work, farming, and education could be stigmatized as dangerous savagery in 1890?”⁵³ The good, albeit too simplistic answer seen above that Warren offers has some points that should be expanded upon more. The idea that prejudiced opinion at the time prevented Native American religion from being seen as anything but barbaric contains a lot to unpack.

The greater world and culture in which the Ghost Dance took place plays a key role in grasping how the Ghost Dance was understood at the time. What it means to be American was not something set in stone around the time of the Ghost Dance. Smoak argues “The struggle to define what it meant to be an American raged in the nineteenth century, and it continues today.”⁵⁴ What it meant to be American, and who was American, were questions on the minds of many living in North America, and everybody wanted to assert their claim that they are what constitutes being a proper American. The process of coming up with an answer to this problem is a tough one, “The construction of meaningful social identities, be they ethnic, tribal, racial, or otherwise, is always a reflective process... the process takes place in conversation and interaction with the other.”⁵⁵ Unfortunately this conversation was, and is, not exactly fair, Anglo-American Christians firmly established themselves as the dominant force in the United States. They were the ones with a monopoly on most of the resources, technology and authority. The dominant party in a conversation about what constitutes proper identity usually decides

⁵³ Ibid, 14.

⁵⁴ Smoak, 192.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 192.

what constitutes proper identity. In this case it was the white Christians who got to enforce their standards on the minority groups of America, “For these influential citizens, evangelical Christianity and individualistic, competitive capitalism were the hallmarks of American identity.”⁵⁶ The strongest and most common ingredients in a melting pot have the most impact on the flavor. In the religious melting pot of America, Native American perspectives were overpowered or excluded entirely. Thus, in the consciousness of those who controlled American culture, much of what constituted Native American perspectives was left outside of acceptable religion and ritual.

It is important to note, and I will be doing so throughout this project, that hegemonic theories, perspectives and institutions are not universal. They too have unique origins, a provincial nature, and specificities that could radically change how they are understood. Multiple cultural perspectives are battling for supremacy in the cultural marketplace, yet the dominant perspective, that of White Christians, is not acknowledging its culturally specific origins. Instead of offering its perspective as one of many, it operates as the one true path. When one inquires about a religion which they are not familiar with, often the first question asked is ‘what do people of this religion believe?’ This question seems simple enough, but a critical examination of this question should reveal that the emphasis put on belief is a predominantly Christian idea. The definition, role and significance of this idea is not the same everywhere. It is important for “us to be aware of the complexity of the concepts that we draw from our own culture, which have a history and contextual compulsion of their own which often ill-match the

⁵⁶ Ibid, 192.

ideas and actions they are used to interpret.”⁵⁷ One might ask how belief made its way from Christianity to the minds of even the most secular westerners. Malcolm Ruel explains:

“four periods have been selected from the history of the church in which to discuss the idea of belief and how it is involved in any definition, corporate or personal, of Christian identity. They are: (1) the critical, initial phase in which Christians, the Nazarene sect, emerged as a distinctive religious movement, a community of believers; (2) the immediately succeeding period leading to the Council of Nicaea (325) that witnessed both the developing formal organization of the Church and the establishment of orthodox creeds, sanctioned by the Church councils; (3) the Reformation and in particular Luther’s reformulation of what it means to believe (i.e. to have faith); and finally since we cannot leave ourselves out, (4) the present period, which might be characterized in both Christian and secular contexts as belief diffused - “beyond belief” in the phrase of one (diffusely) believing anthropologist.”⁵⁸

The significance of belief in academic analysis of religion is provincial in origin, it is not universal. This is not an effective way to measure and study all other religious or spiritual traditions and cultures around the world.

Belief is hyper specific and limited as a focus of scholarly study. Yet historically it was the foundational point from which all studies were conducted. The danger was, and is, that most religions and cultures do not fit this model, but anything outside of this model is often considered savage, or inferior, or incorrect. One of the characteristics of religion that Christians often have a lot of difficulty with are those that often get thrown under the broad designation of pagan. Anything involving ecstatic movements, dances, trances or contact with the dead was seen as insane and possibly dangerous. As Warren explains, “In this moment, the adoption of ecstatic religion by Indians, many of whom also claimed to speak with the dead, created a kind of cultural conflagration as suspect

⁵⁷ Davis, J., and Malcolm Ruel. *Religious Organization and Religious Experience*. London: Academic Press, 1982, 100.

⁵⁸ Davis, J., and Malcolm Ruel. *Religious Organization and Religious Experience*, 101.

bodily movements and beliefs were taken up by brown-skinned people already thought to be savages.”⁵⁹ By the standards of the white, Christian American worldview certain characteristics of the Ghost Dance, such as the ecstatic dancing and communication with the dead, were simply heretical and pagan. It did not matter that the doctrine and purpose behind them was largely Christian in nature, that the participants of the Ghost Dance were taught to work with and for the white man, live in peace with the white man, among other aspects which should hypothetically sit well with Anglo-Christian sensibilities. Due to the fact that there were certain arbitrary cultural boundaries which were crossed, many white, Christian Americans could not view the Ghost Dance as anything other than barbaric and heretical. Unfortunately, these ‘heretics’ were on the losing side of a battle waged to decide what constituted proper American identity.

It is essential to always peel back the layers behind these historical forces and perspectives to uncover where they come from, where their justifications come from, and where the reasons for their perpetuation originate. To continue with the theme of removing certain ideas from a position of universality and revealing their provinciality, I would like to go one step further, where does a bias like that of these white Americans come from? Where does an assumption so profound as believing one’s perspective to be the one true, natural path come from? In a sense, this is a question as old as humanity, but the specific phenomena occurring in colonial America in the late nineteenth century does in fact have specific origins to be acknowledged. Over the course of my work I hope to illustrate the historical threads of a variety of significant ideas and forces pertaining to

⁵⁹ Warren, 14.

colonialism. I hope that it becomes clear how these meditations also pertain to the story of peyote, the Native American Church, and American coloniality more broadly as well, but here I focus on the historical forces at play regarding the Ghost Dance. Some aspects of these cultural forces find their origin in the Enlightenment. My argument is not to judge the enlightenment as an objectively good or evil intellectual tradition, but rather to argue that an undeniable result of the Enlightenment is an ignorance of the degree to which Eurocentric perspectives are not in fact naturally superior. In his discussion of the history of the Enlightenment in Europe, King explains that “It is these regional power struggles, brought about by the fracturing of medieval Christendom that culminated in the sanctification of the sovereignty of the nation-state at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. This coincides with the emergence of the modern concept of ‘religion’ as an identifiable phenomenon.”⁶⁰ King locates the birth of the concept of religion as being one specific to a moment in history in Christian Europe. King goes on to say “The reification of this concept, [religion] I argue, has played a crucial role in normalizing the sacred mythology of the modern ‘secular’ nation-state.”⁶¹ This act of sanctifying the secular is precisely one of the rationals that enabled the violence present in the history of the Ghost Dance. It established certain parameters and guidelines which define the legitimacy of certain traditions or practices, with the specificity of its European origins leading these parameters to also be specific, and biased.

The establishment of the distinction between the secular and the religious served a variety of purposes and had significant implications. An additional reference to King

⁶⁰ Hinnells, John R., and Richard King. *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 2007, 234.

⁶¹ Hinnells, John R., and Richard King. *Religion and Violence in South Asia*, 234.

illustrates one of the most important facts needing to be acknowledged, “Failure to acknowledge the murky history of complicity between Western secular liberalism and the colonial project however, continues for as long as one specifically associates violence and aggression with ‘religious’ worldviews rather than as a recurring feature of human ideologies in general (including Western secular liberalism).”⁶² Integral to both King’s argument and my own, is not just the idea that the concept of religion is a product of the Enlightenment in Europe, but the fact that one of the aspects of the events that produced the concept of religion was the allocation of violence, dogmatism and ideology strictly to the ‘religious’. The result of this designation was the incorrect assumption that with the rejection of religion, the troubles and dangers of its ideologies went with it. With this assumption something strange happened. Many in the Western world came to identify themselves with the enlightenment, and by identifying with that which has transcended a sort of religious ideology, it is easy for one to believe that they too have transcended ideology. By the time the dust had settled in the Western world, two boundaries were drawn. The first boundary was drawn around ‘enlightened’ individuals who had relegated religion to the private sphere. Once religion, namely Christianity, was relegated to the private sphere it was seen as acceptable, even if it was still susceptible to dogmatic ideology, and another boundary was drawn around that. Anything outside of that boundary constituted improper religion. Anything that is not Judeo-Christian in the Way Europeans understood it to be was outside of that realm of ‘correct religion’.

⁶² Hinnels & King, 220.

The result of all of this was a strange and dangerous phenomenon, as two things happened. One route taken was the aforementioned relegation of religion to the private sphere of life separating it from the political sphere causing many to believe they had transcended dogmatic ideology, justifying their actions and beliefs on the presumption that they were no longer trapped by religious ideology. The danger here is that acknowledging one's biases and the specificity of one's perspective is prevented by a whole new layer of deception and confusion. It is difficult to acknowledge one's biases when one believes to have already transcended their biases. The other option was the growing confidence of Christians in their beliefs. On this Heimann argues that "the new 'scientific' thinking of the Enlightenment period rose to prominence precisely because it appeared to contemporaries to offer irrefutable proofs of what were held to be the central truths of Christianity."⁶³ No matter which way an individual leaned, the result was Western Europeans placing their perspective and ideas on a pedestal. The danger of these results presented itself in the history of the Ghost Dance in a profound way. White Americans either held biases against Native Americans on the ground that they were scientifically and technologically inept compared to white Americans and Europeans, or the Native Americans stood against certain Christian ideas. Either way Native Americans were looked down upon, and injustice became easily justified.

It is important to turn a critical eye towards those peripheral to the Ghost Dance, such as those who studied the Ghost Dance as scholars and anthropologists. Doing so may reveal much about how certain ideas and events were understood or processed at the

⁶³ Hastings, Adrian, and Mary Heimann. *A World History of Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000. 465.

time. James Mooney was a central figure in the history of the Ghost Dance, he was closer to many of the participating tribes than any other non-indigenous American at the time in the public eye. Mooney's attitudes and rhetoric about the Ghost Dance and the associated tribes demonstrate many of the ways in which colonial attitudes can manifest themselves even among 'allies.' The kind of racist and colonial attitudes that need to be recognized and reckoned with in nuanced ways can be understood through a closer look at James Mooney. One example of this is when Mooney says "Only those who have known the deadly hatred that once animated the Ute, Cheyenne, and Pawnee, one toward another, and are able to contrast it with their present spirit of mutual brotherly love, can know what the Ghost-dance religion has accomplished in bringing the savage into civilization."⁶⁴ In this excerpt Mooney is clearly trying to demonstrate the value and importance of the Ghost Dance, even as a distinctly indigneous phenomena, yet he attributes that value to the fact that it changed tribal culture to be more like that of civilized America, of the western world. He is applauding the value and brilliance of the Ghost Dance doctrine while still referring to Native life as savage. A second example is from later in the same work. After drastically changing the context of their survival, subsistence, independence and way of life, the Sioux were slow to adapt to this more European, American, Western existence that was forced on them. On this Mooney says "It took our Aryan ancestors untold centuries to develop from savagery into civilization. Was it reasonable to expect that the Sioux could do the same in fourteen years?"⁶⁵ Once again Mooney tries to validate the struggles of the Native Americans. He argues that of

⁶⁴ Mooney, 25.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 70.

course it would be difficult to forcibly have your culture, religion and identity changed in such a short time. Yet he still makes it clear that despite the hardship that is wrought on them, their previous way of life was still inferior. He still refers to their old way of life as savagery, and that despite the troublesome way it happened, they were uplifted to civilization, to something better.

There is much insight to be gained through looking at Mooney's relationship to his colleague and mentor John Wesley Powell. Powell was the director of the Bureau of Ethnology at the Smithsonian⁶⁶ and was one of the most powerful and influential individuals in anthropology in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁷ As dark as this may seem, compared to many at the time, Powell held beliefs that represented the "progressive" views of the mid-19th century, "To his mind, the key to understanding modern society hinged on older theories of social evolution, which held that certain stages of social development were universal and that all peoples, no matter how "savage," could reach the advanced stage of civilization that white Americans and Europeans enjoyed."⁶⁸ At this time, the idea that non-western peoples were worth assimilating, and that perhaps they deserved better than physical genocide, that perhaps cultural genocide will suffice, was considered progressive. Powell firmly believed in the superiority of white culture, the only difference between him and many others of his time was that he believed that Native Americans could be civilized eventually.

⁶⁶ Lee, Jeffrey A. 2007. "Great Geographers: John Wesley Powell." *American Geographical Society's Focus on Geography* 50 (2): 35-36.

⁶⁷ Lee, "Great Geographers: John Wesley Powell." 34.

⁶⁸ Warren, 332.

Powell's beliefs serve as the perfect example of King's theory, "Adapting older ideas of social evolution to the study of religion, he [Powell] maintained that all religions advanced in stages from primitive, animistic beliefs - "the lowest and earliest stage" when "everything is a god" - to civilized, monotheistic faith, which developed only with a strong dose of the morality that was assumed to evolve with civilization."⁶⁹ This is a clear example of putting one's own understanding of religion in the role of proper, civilized religion of the highest order and of the highest virtue. All of this led to Powell believing that assimilation was the correct way to handle the Native Americans, and that it was the ideal goal to strive towards.⁷⁰ While to some degree Powell's sentiments are expressed in Mooney's work, Mooney actually spent a great deal of effort arguing against assimilation, Mooney had what was considered a radical proposal at the time, that Native Americans deserved to live how they wanted, to live not as assimilated Americans, but as the Kiowa, Sioux and Arapaho that they are, and his career became under attack for it.⁷¹ Despite the radical nature of Mooney's ideas within the context of late nineteenth century anthropology, he also undeniably thinks within a hierarchy in which white, European Christians are fundamentally superior to the indigenous people he studied. No amount of advocacy on behalf of the indigenous communities involved with the Ghost Dance could hide the nature of this hierarchy in his thought. This lingering sense of hierarchy, racially, culturally, and religiously is a feature of thought and scholarship that I urge us to all

⁶⁹ Ibid, 332.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 332.

⁷¹ Ibid, 325-326.

remember and recognize. The illumination of this and similar hierarchies will hopefully prove to be one of the primary takeaways one would find in this work.

Powell was one of the most powerful forces in anthropology at the turn of the century, and Mooney, despite the antagonism he faced, was a crucial figure in much of this history. The beliefs of these men shaped scholarly study of non-western cultures, and their biases dictated popular understanding of non-western cultures. As Vine Deloria Jr. explains decades later, “Many Indians have come to parrot the ideas of anthropologists because it appears that the anthropologists know everything about Indian communities. Thus many ideas that pass for Indian thinking are in reality theories originally advanced by anthropologists and echoed by Indian people in an attempt to communicate the real situation.”⁷² For a long time, small steps were taken in the right direction. Mooney became the champion of anti-assimilation sentiment, and through his work the field of anthropology slowly came around to the idea of accepting native cultures as they were, without feeling the need to save their people by bringing them into the arms of western civilization, even if only slowly and over a long period of time. This was an important step forward. But something undeniable remains. While anthropologists and academics were no longer heralds of assimilation, they did not let go of the sentiment that they were from a more civilized, proper world. This sentiment has never died, the other steps forward in the field, in a sense, allowed the remaining pitfalls to perpetuate, shrouded by premature pride and denial, and they enable injustice and violence to be continually committed. No matter how much the romanticization of history, anthropology and non-

⁷² Deloria Jr., Vine. *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. New York: Macmillan, 1969. Monday April 8, 87.

western cultures takes place, history shows that if hegemonic institutions cannot stop privileging their own perspective, there will continually be a box around what is considered correct, and in doing so justify violence to the rest of the world which is kept outside of it.

CHAPTER 2

PEYOTE'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND JOURNEY

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. One goal is to present a functional definition, history, and context for discussion of peyote. The second goal is to use this historical material to demonstrate the depths in which peyote rests in history, to establish that it is nothing new. Throughout this chapter I will present a history of peyote that includes archeological information which illustrates some of the earliest history of peyote, that scholars are aware of, from thousands of years ago, to tracing some of the colonial encounter with peyote, as well as its journey from provincial southwestern cactus to the central feature of a pan-indigenous movement in the United States in the early 20th century. Peyote was new and foreign to the colonial forces that arrived in the New World, but peyote and its use in indigenous traditions is not new, it is old and an integral part of the landscape of indigenous American history. The depth and breadth of peyote's history should become more evident by the end of this chapter.

So, what exactly is Peyote? As I have alluded to, the categorization and designation of peyote is wrought with confusion from the colonial perspective. In one sense Peyote is a plant, it is “a small, spineless cactus having psychedelic properties which grows in a limited area principally in northern Mexico and southern Texas.”⁷³ In another sense,

“Peyote is a sacred medicine; peyote protects; peyote allows one to see the future, or to find lost objects; peyote gives power to the user that may be manifest in various ways; peyote teaches; peyote may be used by Christians or may be incorporated with Christian ideas; a pilgrimage to gather peyote plants is viewed as an act of piety to be undertaken if possible, and so on.”⁷⁴

⁷³ Stewart, Omer Call. *Peyote Religion: a History*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993. 3.

⁷⁴ Stewart. *Peyote Religion*, 41.

Finally, in a third sense Peyote is on the federal list of schedule 1 controlled substances, which “are defined as drugs with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.”⁷⁵ The difficulty lies in the fact that all three of these different conceptions of Peyote are practically true, though the truth of the third conception will be challenged in the final chapter of this thesis. Throughout its history peyote has meant a wide variety of things to a wide variety of people and interested parties. As it should become clear over the course of this project, peyote serves another purpose for us in the context of this scholarship. To repeat the claim that I made at the outset of this project, Peyote is a subject which renders the mechanisms, forces and assemblages of colonialism incredibly clear. It is in the very inability of the colonial world to categorize, locate, understand and react to peyote that reveals so much about how colonialism operates. This not only reveals its moving parts, it also reveals some of the underlying forces of colonialism, which, in another time and place were forced underground, but now become clear because of the unique properties and identity of peyote. The difficulties and confusion throughout the history of the colonial encounter with peyote is revealing and significant.

The relationship between peyote and colonial forces exists on multiple levels and I intend to engage a variety of the forms in which this dynamic manifests. Let’s start with some instances of straightforward identification issues. Looking back at the history of Peyote in America reveals that this kind of confusion and misidentification is a constant over the last century or more. Various plants played a role in the lives, rituals and cultures of various indigenous communities living in the Americas but “when peyote came to

⁷⁵ “Drug Scheduling,” DEA, U.S. Department of Justice, accessed April 29, 2019, www.dea.gov/drug-scheduling.

popular and then official attention in the United States, the term *mescal* was used for all three plants: peyote, agave, and *frijolillo*.⁷⁶ This confusion of semantics and vocabulary was the status quo for much of the early decades of Peyote’s relationship with the U.S. government and it had significant ramifications for the communities involved; “Officials of the U.S. Indian Service continued to refer to peyote as “mescal” until 1907, when their confusion of terms led them to lose a lawsuit against the use of peyote by the Indians of Oklahoma.”⁷⁷ This confusion is indicative of a larger difficulty to reach a consensus on how to handle Peyote in the United States, but I want to establish an understanding of Peyote that is accurate and clear, an understanding that can be used in a functional discussion of the history, use, and significance of Peyote. Later, I will return to Peyote as a schedule 1 substance and as a drug, but for now I will discuss Peyote in the sense of the first two perspectives, as a plant and as a sacred medicine.

We have established that Peyote is a cactus native to Northern Mexico and parts of Southern Texas, its scientific name is “*Lophophora williamsi*”⁷⁸, but it is important to understand just how vast the history of Peyote is before engaging in a discussion of Peyote in the era of the U.S. state control. The relationship between indigenous Americans and peyote is ancient, “According to archaeological evidence, the ritual use of the peyote cactus can be traced back at least four thousand to seven thousand years.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, “Dried buttons found alongside ancient rock art in the Shumla caves on the

⁷⁶ Stewart, *Peyote Religion*, 5-7.

⁷⁷ Stewart, 8.

⁷⁸ Adovasio, J., and M. Fry. "Prehistoric Psychotropic Drug Use in Northeastern Mexico and Trans-Pecos Texas." *Economic Botany* 30, no. 1 (1976): 94-96, 94.

⁷⁹ Urban, Hugh B.. 2015. *New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements : Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America*. Oakland: University of California Press, 26.

Texas side of the Rio Grande have been radiocarbon dated to around 4000 BCE, and shown still to contain mescaline at a concentration of around 2 per cent.”⁸⁰; and still others claim that psychedelic plants have been consumed as far back as eleven thousand years ago, “Recently, however, a series of well dated archaeological sites from northeastern Mexico and Trans-Pecos Texas have demonstrated that the use of psychotropic drugs extends back to the ninth millennium B.C.”⁸¹ Regardless of the exact age of peyote use in the Americas, it is an undeniable archeological truth that this is not a new or radical phenomenon. Unfortunately, peyote, its effects, and its indigenous use was both new and radical to the European colonists who arrived in the New World.

It is important to note, however, that peyote is not the only character in the cast of plants that played a role in indigenous life, others include the red bean that was recognized alongside peyote by the Spanish during the colonial era.⁸² Notably, the San Pedro cactus, which contains mescaline as well, leaves a large footprint in the indigenous world of South America.⁸³ All this lends credence to the idea that peyote use is an ancient tradition, which will be an important attribute to consider later during discussion of the political and legal context of peyote.

But Peyote is significant not just for the depth in which its use lies in history, the way peyote affects individuals who consume it is an integral part of Peyote's role in this greater story. Peyote is often referred to as a psychedelic, entheogen, or psychotropic

⁸⁰ Jay, Mike. *Mescaline a Global History of the First Psychedelic*. Yale University Press, 2019, 34.

⁸¹ Adovasio, J., and M. Fry. "Prehistoric Psychotropic Drug Use in Northeastern Mexico and Trans-Pecos Texas." *Economic Botany* 30, no. 1 (1976), 94.

⁸² Adovasio and Fry, "Prehistoric Psychotropic Drug Use", 94.

⁸³ Jay, *Mescaline*, 15.

drug.⁸⁴ Its effects are profound and play a large part in the religious significance of peyote. The effects and experience of ingesting Peyote, according to Urban, can be summarized in the following way:

“The effects of peyote are often divided into two stages, the first primarily physical and often unpleasant, and the second involving mental, perceptual, and emotional changes. It is often said that the hangover precedes the euphoria with consumption of peyote, because initial symptoms may involve nausea, vomiting, sweating, dizziness, and headaches. The mental changes often involve a sense of heightened visual and auditory acuity, synesthesia or the blending of sensory experiences (for example, sight and sound becoming one, such as “seeing music”), and often a profound sense of identity between self and nonself or a feeling of connectedness with the external environment... In addition to these physical and mental effects, peyote users also report a wide range of spiritual effects. These include, for example, a sense of intimate closeness to God or the Creator; a deep sense of humility, serenity, and incommunicable peace; a feeling of sorry for past misdeeds and a hope for forgiveness; emotional, spiritual, and often physical healing; and a general sense of harmony with both the community and the natural environment.”⁸⁵

The reality of these effects is the source of most of the tension surrounding Peyote because while the aforementioned qualities serve a religious purpose for some, those same effects are the precise reason why use of Peyote has been challenged, suppressed and punished since colonial powers discovered it.

The history of the suppression, elimination, and punishment of peyote use in the Americas is vast and serves as crucial context to understanding the role peyote plays in religious and political life today. Peyote use was very prominent in the lives of many of the indigenous communities near the region where it grew when Europeans landed on America’s shores, “By the time the Spanish arrived in the Americas, peyote was used as a central part of rituals by the Aztec, Huichol, Cora, Tarascan, and other indigenous groups.”⁸⁶ The colonial history of peyote is complicated and bloody. From the moment

⁸⁴ Adovasio and Fry, 94.

⁸⁵ Urban, *New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements*, 27-28.

⁸⁶ Urban, 26.

the Spanish first encountered peyote up until twenty-first century United States political debate, there has been a colonial crusade against peyote and those who associate with it. Urban captures the complex and ironic nature of the colonial oppression of indigenous experience; “As early as 1620, the Spanish Inquisition denounced peyote as diabolic and made its use illegal and punishable by torture and death. Ironically, it is worth noting that 1620 was the same year that the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, seeking refuge from religious persecution in England.”⁸⁷ Now, exactly four hundred years after indigenous people were first put to death legally for their ancient religious practice in what is now Mexico, the struggle still continues and the legal landscape that peyote occupies in North America is by no means simple. Throughout all of the brutal history of colonialism, one significant dimension of colonality was the oppression of any use of peyote, whether for religious purposes or otherwise. The relationship that indigenous communities had with peyote “presented the Spanish with profound problems of interpretation.”⁸⁸ Many tried to understand peyote, though ultimately, the purpose of understanding was to better equip missionaries for converting the indigenous populations through combatting their beliefs.⁸⁹ The result is that “Between 1620 and 1779 the Inquisition heard seventy-four cases against what they referred to as raíz diabólica, the ‘devilish root’.”⁹⁰ The Spanish often employed such characteristics in an effort to delegitimize and villainize peyote. But the association with the devil fostered by hands of the Spanish colonial authorities was not the only designation given to peyote by colonial powers.

⁸⁷ Urban, 36.

⁸⁸ Jay, 36.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 37.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 40.

The United States government was quite a bit slower to become aware of peyote compared to the Spanish, but from the very first moment that peyote use was brought to its attention, a similarly brutal campaign was waged against peyote that continues in a number of ways today. This campaign took many forms and many different methods: “In 1886, peyote use was first reported to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), who labeled it an intoxicant and issued an order to seize and destroy peyote buttons.”⁹¹; “In 1909, to deal with Oklahoma’s “peyote problem,” the BIA appointed a special officer, who raided peyote meetings and destroyed buttons.”⁹²; and “Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the BIA worked hard to demonize peyote, dismissing the claim that it was part of a “religion” and arguing that it was a threat to the Indians’ ‘acculturation process.’”⁹³ Various departments and members of the U.S. government have spent almost a century trying to rid the United States of peyote. However, it would be wrong to assume that this campaign was successful, in fact, a religion surrounding peyote would become one of the most successful projects in combating the religious oppression of Native Americans. This is the story of the Native American Church.

Peyote started to carve out a presence for itself in the firmament of American life a little more thanks to an important character from the previous chapter, James Mooney. To white, non-indigenous Americans, interest in peyote can be traced back largely to “November 1891, when James Mooney, an employee of the Smithsonian Institution’s Bureau of Ethnology, made a presentation at the Anthropological Association in

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

Washington about a peyote ceremony he had witnessed the previous summer among the Kiowa Indians of Oklahoma.”⁹⁴ Advocates for the indigenous use of peyote grew in size and support, and after a few decades of religious persecution, in 1918 they managed to become legally incorporated with the creation of the Native American Church (NAC).⁹⁵

There has been much discussion of, and debate over, how the peyote movement started in its modern form but after a century of study there are a few theories. Peyote underwent a transition from an ancient, geographically specific ritual into a near nation-wide tradition due to three primary factors;⁹⁶ The concentration of Native Americans in the Oklahoma and Texas reservations, in which ideas, traditions and rituals were shared and exchanged, but combined with impoverished living conditions resulted in a yearning for spiritual options;⁹⁷ The prolific construction of railroads in the south near peyote habitat allowed for easy and cost-efficient trade of peyote over wider distances;⁹⁸ and “Finally a third key factor in the spread of peyote was the rapid rise and tragic demise of another massive Native American movement, the Ghost Dance.”⁹⁹ With these three factors, though no doubt thanks to others as well, The Native American Church became some form of what it is now,

“Today, the peyote movement is the largest indigenous religion among Native Americans, practiced by more than three hundred thousand people in fifty tribes across the United States and existing in many different local variations with complex mixtures of native and Christian themes. In this sense, the NAC is rooted in an ancient tradition, but it has emerged as a new religious movement and as a fusion of Native American and Christian elements that has had to adapt to a modern legal context.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Dawson, Alexander S. *Peyote Effect: From the Inquisition to the War on Drugs*. University of California Press, 2018, 14-15.

⁹⁵ Urban, 26-27.

⁹⁶ Urban, 29.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 27.

This reveals an important aspect of the Native American church. Yes, the church is thoroughly rooted in Native American traditional peyote use, “To the church’s members, peyote is the essential ingredient, the sacrament, in their well-established, unique ceremony.”¹⁰¹ However, there are explicitly Christian elements within the Native American Church as well, so much so that “According to a famous quote that is frequently attributed to [Quanah] Parker, peyote offers a far more direct and powerful way to communicate with God than the preaching or sermons found in the white churches: ‘The White Man goes into his church and talks about Jesus. The Indian goes into his tipi and talks with Jesus.’”¹⁰² The Native American Church has survived until the present day, and “Considering the number of its adherents, its intertribal solidarity in the face of opposition, and the uniformity of its beliefs and rituals, peyotism is perhaps the major manifestation of pan-Indianism in existence today.”¹⁰³ This survival has not been easy though, nearly all of the twentieth century has been a battle for religious freedom, it was not until 1993 that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act was signed by President Bill Clinton into law.¹⁰⁴ In 1964, the case *People v. Woody*, helped affirm certain uses of peyote, “Collectively these conclusions opened a very limited space for peyotism to be exempt from state laws banning narcotics. Peyote, an otherwise dangerous substance, could be licit if it met two conditions: It had to be used in ways that did not cause harm, and It [sic] had to be central to the religious beliefs of a community.”¹⁰⁵ As Urban

¹⁰¹ Stewart, 3.

¹⁰² Urban, 31.

¹⁰³ Wagner, Roland. "Social/Cultural Anthropology: Peyote Religion: A History. Omer C. Stewart." *American Anthropologist* 90, no. 3 (1988): 704-05, 705.

¹⁰⁴ Urban, 40.

¹⁰⁵ Dawson, *Peyote Effect*, 105.

summarizes, “Much of the debate surrounding peyote has centered on how this plant is labeled. For members of the NAC today, peyote is usually called either a “sacrament” or a “medicine” and is regarded as a gift from the divine that brings about spiritual, emotional, and physical healing. For the US government and law enforcement, however, peyote has come to be identified as a controlled substance and a drug, and these conflicting definitions are in large part responsible for the long history of legal debate surrounding its use.”¹⁰⁶ This debate once again became a legal one when, in 1990, the case *Employment Division, Department of Human Resources of Oregon v. Smith* occurred. I refer to this case as *Oregon v. Smith* from here on out. Focusing on the dilemma facing Smith brings to light the complications that arise due to peyote’s difficult legal status:

“As a young man, Smith suffered from alcoholism, but he finally recovered through the help of Alcoholics Anonymous. During his recovery, Smith rediscovered his Native American roots and became an active member of the NAC. Smith was then hired to help develop drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs for Native Americans. In 1984, however, the director of the program learned that Smith and a coworker, Galen Black, were attending NAC services and demanded that they cease doing so, since he considered peyote to be a drug and since the possession of peyote was a felony in the state of Oregon. Smith and Black refused to stop attending, arguing that peyote was not a drug but a “religious sacrament,” and they were subsequently fired. As Smith later explained, the primary issue in his opinion was simply a misunderstanding of cultures and languages; while he repeatedly tried to explain that peyote was a “sacrament” and not a “drug,” his employer was unable to think about it in any other terms”¹⁰⁷

The courts ruled against Smith.¹⁰⁸ Smith, and others like him, would not be defended from precariousness in employment due to their involvement with peyote, despite their legal right to participate in those practices. Peyote is still caught in the paradox of being protected by federal law for use in a religious context, while at the same time still

¹⁰⁶ Urban, 37.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 38.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 39.

considered a schedule 1 drug by federal law, this tension has not been resolved to this day.¹⁰⁹

The legal persecution of peyote use and Native American religious expression more broadly has its roots all the way back in the beginning of the colonial project, but it has also taken different forms over time and informed newer forms of legal control. The War on Drugs is the most significant and powerful program in the U.S. pertaining to drugs. The War on Drugs is a collection of policies, programs and campaigns aimed at combating the existence of drugs and drug use in America, which became a program not unlike an actual war, when, in “1973, President Richard Nixon declared ‘an all-out global war on the drug menace’”¹¹⁰ and it continued to expand in the Reagan administration with inclusions such as “Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” program that was formally announced in February 1985.”¹¹¹ In the years leading up to the War on Drugs peyote was designated as a schedule 1 controlled substance which “are defined as drugs with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.”¹¹² In other words, ranked among the worst substances in existence, at least according to the U.S. federal government. The reality of this situation is filled with misinformation, political exploitation and blatant lies, it was a deeply political campaign whose implications have not been truly reckoned with to this day. I elaborate on these claims in detail in the final chapter of this work.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 27.

¹¹⁰ “The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Years 1970-1975.”
https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/1970-1975_p_30-39.pdf, 34.

¹¹¹ “The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) 1980-1985.”
https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/1980-1985_p_49-58.pdf, 56.

¹¹² “Drug Scheduling,” DEA, U.S. Department of Justice, accessed April 29, 2019, www.dea.gov/drug-scheduling.

The political journey of peyote in America is long and arduous, in nearly every decade of the twentieth century, the indigenous communities involved achieved new victories and had to fight new battles. Despite the wide variety of approaches taken to fight the use of peyote, “a continuous line can be drawn from these first contacts to the contemporary ‘War on Drugs’, which still retains the vestiges of its origin in religious and racial taboo.”¹¹³ The way that Americans understood peyote, as well as how they responded to it, is part of a wide tapestry of influences and conceptions. It is no secret that there has always been a thread in American history and identity that marks a clear dividing line between the European colonists and the indigenous populations of North American. It is a story as old as the nation itself, “Anglo-European chauvinism and religious intolerance did not cease with American independence, despite the Constitutional provision for freedom of religion. General Sullivan’s forces against the Iroquois celebrated Independence Day in 1779 with the toast ‘Civilization or death to all American savages!’”¹¹⁴ This process of civilization would become more than mere sentiment, as before long it would become formalized with explicit government plans. As Talbot explains:

“‘As early as 1790,’ writes Tom Holm, “George Washington and his Secretary of War, Henry Knox, urged Congress to pass the first trade and Intercourse Act, in part to ‘civilize’ American Indians.” In 1819, Congress set up a “civilization fund” of \$10,000 for the American Indian. The small amount notwithstanding, it was a harbinger of the forced cultural assimilation policy that came to dominate Indian affairs by the end of the century.”¹¹⁵

Put into American law another way, there was *Johnson v. McIntosh*:

¹¹³ Jay, 39.

¹¹⁴ Talbot, Steve. "Spiritual Genocide: The Denial of American Indian Religious Freedom, from Conquest to 1934."

Wicazo Sa Review 21, no. 2 (2006), 10.

¹¹⁵ Talbot, "Spiritual Genocide,"10.

“In the United States it became officially enshrined in the 1823 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Johnson v. McIntosh*, which ruled that the “right of discovery” by the European powers took precedence over the aboriginal rights of Indian peoples and nations... It also gave plenary power to Congress to abridge the sovereign rights of Native peoples whenever and wherever it was in the interest of the larger nation to do so.”¹¹⁶

It was on these pretenses that a constant assault on the use of peyote in addition to countless other indigenous rituals, rites and expressions took place. Coming into the twentieth century, the tenor and angle of approach would change in the fight against indigenous religious freedom, but many of the original, underlying ideas remained influential.

The variety of disparate influences are all part of a broader colonial legacy that has morphed and transformed with the times, remnants of early theories are found throughout the legal history of peyote in America. Early religious attacks on peyote were embedded into other rationalizations of the cactus, “By the time anti-peyote campaigns emerged in the United States in the late nineteenth century, government policy was largely conducted in the modern language of public health and social progress, but it was still shaped by missionaries for whom the suppression of peyote had long been a crucial aspect of the war for souls.”¹¹⁷ The religious and moral dimensions of this war for souls did not get relegated to the frontiers of the United States, it had far reaching influences beyond America’s borders:

“Texts from this era’s anti-drug crusades were incorporated into the international treaties of the twentieth century and still underpin them today. The 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Drugs, the foundation of the global drug control system, is unique among UN documents in its use of the word ‘evil’ to describe the dangers that drugs pose, a term not deployed in its official definitions of child abuse, terrorism or genocide.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Talbot, 9.

¹¹⁷ Jay, 39.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 39.

It is in part through the dissemination of these religious aspects of the colonial enterprise in the twentieth century world that allows coloniality to survive in new forms. The aforementioned civilizing of the indigenous population did not go away after the turn of the century either. The battle took on many different forms and as well as a diverse vocabulary, but the colonial threads remain constant. The story of peyote was not all bleak, however, though there was an abundance of attacks, there were occasionally victories made on the part of indigenous communities. The Native American Church would be founded in 1918, and legally recognized as a religion,¹¹⁹ however, as alluded to earlier “even then, the NAC would have to fight a series of legal battles over the use of peyote that went all the way to the US Supreme court in 1990.”¹²⁰ While the freedom for the Native American Church to use peyote in ritual contexts is very different from its status 100 years ago, there is still the very paradoxical aspect of peyote’s place in American society. Being a Schedule 1 Federally Controlled Substance, a pillar of a pan-indigenous religion, as well as an endangered cactus is a very difficult position for the authorities in the United States to reconcile.

The history of peyote is much richer and older than one might assume, the information presented here is only a small fraction of the vast material that could have been included. Another dimension of peyote’s place in North America that I will explore in the next chapter is spatial and geographical in nature. The aforementioned statement regarding peyote as an endangered cactus is not just a passing note, it is in reality a serious danger facing peyote and the communities who rely on its continued growth.

¹¹⁹ Urban, 26-27.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 26-27.

Peyote and its history intersect with a wide range of scholarly fields and theories, and in the following chapter I will discuss peyote's relationship to border studies, with interest in such topics as migration, infrastructure development, and sustainability.

CHAPTER 3

THE BORDERLANDS, ORIENTALISM, AND THE FORCES OF COLONIALISM

There are a variety of religious, cultural, ideological, and political forces in American history that have shaped, informed and clashed with indigenous communities and traditions. Forces both secular and religious have played a role in defining the trajectory of American religious history. It is important to recognize the ways in which these forces are intimately tied to colonialism, even as they clash, and even as some may appear well intended at times. Tisa Wenger illustrates the way that both Christian missionary forces as well as their enemies, the more secular modernists, both clashed with indigenous communities and perpetuated a variety of aspects of colonialism in their own way. Wenger lays out how ‘secular’ forces took a larger foothold in American Institutions after the Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy:

“After the controversy, aided by their expanded definitions of “religion,” cultural modernists would unseat the Christian establishment as the dominant voices in this arena - part of a much broader “secular revolution” waged by American intellectuals who sought to replace religious with secular authority in the major institutions of American public life.”¹²¹

This shift towards a more secular America carried with it its own forms of imperialism and colonialism informed by Euro-American cultural, historical, and colonial legacies. Despite the modernists being harsh critics of the religiously motivated and draconian policies of the missionaries who predominantly controlled Indian affairs prior, they still contributed towards the stripping of land and rights from indigenous communities, often informed by rumors that claimed that indigenous communities were committing horrible

¹²¹ Wenger, Tisa. *We Have a Religion: the 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2009, 4.

acts or engaging in improper behavior. One such example is when “rumors about what went on at Blue Lake may have helped to justify President Theodore Roosevelt’s decision to strip the lake and its environs from Toas and add it to the National Forest Reserve - an action that the tribe continued to fight until congress finally returned the area to them in 1970.”¹²² Influenced by false rumors spread about the indigenous communities involved, land was taken by the Federal government. To describe the myriad ways in which land was taken, stolen or removed from indigenous control would require a project far beyond the scope of the one I am presenting here. Instead, I would like to spend some time illustrating the ways in which peyote and the Native American Church fit into this history of land appropriation, and illuminate the lingering implications of this legacy for a religion that has attained legal legitimacy today. To do so, my aim is to begin this chapter with an extended meditation on the elaborate role that peyote plays in such topics as border studies, migration, trade, exchange and the development of infrastructure in the American Southwest.

Peyote occupies a unique role as a topic of study and discussion, it is always transgressing boundaries, both physical and conceptual. Peyote is a substance in which the dissolution of boundaries is a core aspect of its identity. Peyote put into conversation with border studies, and a decolonial study of the borderlands, is an essential discussion to be had. Thus far, however, examples of such analysis are few and far between. Although border studies is not the primary lens of analysis for my project, I believe this discussion is essential to include.

¹²² Wenger, *We Have a Religion*, 3.

Is religion inherently transnational? To borrow from Matory, “In a word, my answer is yes.”¹²³ Some of the most significant emerging theories, lines of analyses, and fields of the last few decades all map out onto the story of peyote, yet little scholarship of that sort has been done. The kind of borderlands that can be mapped onto peyote is one drawn from Anzaldúa:

“The actual physical borderland that I’m dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.”¹²⁴

Within these borderlands is a confluence of different flows, phenomena and movements, a kind of globalization that can be described in part as a “mobility regime.”¹²⁵ Much of the history of colonialism is the history of contact and interaction. The borderlands is the perfect medium with which to make the forces of contact visible and identifiable. As Hendrickson argues, “A remarkable site of continuous cultural contact and colonization, the borderlands area provides a fertile matrix for transcultural exchange. These cultural and colonial contacts were often violent and deeply contested.”¹²⁶ Taking these diverse aspects of the borderlands into account, I argue, is an essential aspect of any decolonial project. And a decolonial approach to peyote in the Americas is a project that needs to be undertaken. The movement, travel, and mobility of peyote and those who use it operates

¹²³ Csordas, Thomas J., and J. Lorand Matory. “The Many Who Dance in Me.” *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization*. University of California Press, 2009. 236.

¹²⁴ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*. Fourth Edition, 25th Anniversary. ed. 2012. 19.

¹²⁵ Vasquez, Manuel A. “The Limits of the Hydrodynamics of Religion.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 77, no. 2, 2009, 438.

¹²⁶ Hendrickson, Brett. *Border Medicine: A Transcultural History of Mexican American Curanderismo*. North American Religions. 2014, 20.

in the context of the U.S.-Mexico border in which “Several scholars suggest that the nature of the U.S.-Mexico border, as a site of perennial contact and negotiation, is especially suited for the sharing of narratives and the exchange of ideas, people, and things.”¹²⁷

In addition to the U.S.-Mexico border, there are other dimensions of travel and migration that are significant to the history of peyote. Peyote as part of a broader narrative of the borderlands can be understood across reservations, states, geographical territories and trade networks. Given that this case, it is important to understand how movement and mobility played an integral role in the initial spread of peyote religion in the United States.

The spread and rise of peyote use in many Indigenous communities is intimately connected to developments in travel, trade and movement, as well as the interactions and encounters between many different communities. The trade and exchange of peyote was radically transformed as the region in which it grows became the site of new paths of travel, “After the Texas–Mexico railroad was opened in 1881 trains stopping at the station in Aguilares, 10 miles west of Ojuelos, were regularly filled with barrels of dried peyote for transport to Laredo and on as far as Oklahoma.”¹²⁸ As peyote reached Oklahoma thanks to the new means of transportation it also reached new audiences. From here the trajectory that peyote followed through the indigenous communities of America took on a fascinating character. Here we return to Urban’s explanation:

“At least three key factors helped transform the use of peyote from an ancient but relatively localized ritual tradition into a powerful pan-Indian new religious movement... The first was the massive relocation of Native Americans from across the United States onto reservations in

¹²⁷ Hendrickson. *Border Medicine*, 177.

¹²⁸ Jay, Mike. *Mescaline a Global History of the First Psychedelic*. Yale University Press, 2019, 61-62.

Oklahoma and Texas. This brought Native peoples from around the country into close proximity to peyote use; many of them were also living in fairly brutal conditions on the reservation, amid rampant poverty and alcoholism, and were often in search of new spiritual alternatives... Second was the building of many railroads in the south, many of which went right through peyote territory, allowing for easy cheap spread of peyote... Finally a third key factor in the spread of peyote was the rapid rise and tragic demise of another massive Native American movement, the Ghost Dance.”¹²⁹

Peyote use in America in its current incarnation is one deeply intertwined with travel and inter-tribal contact. Outside of the prominence of peyote in the colonial history of America, it turns out that peyote has always occupied a position at the intersection of communities, regions and cultures. Though peyote cacti grow in a very limited geographical area “The trade in the cactus beyond the limits of its natural range is ancient, perhaps as ancient as its indigenous use. The tradition of annual pilgrimage and harvesting established in prehistory among the Huichol and their neighbours had long made peyote into a commodity that was preserved, stored, transported and traded.”¹³⁰ The colonial era’s dispersal and trade of peyote is only one incarnation of peyote’s well traveled identity. To understand this identity more, it is important to look at the role of pilgrimage in peyote’s place in many indigenous communities.

For many, pilgrimage and traveling is an integral part of the religious matrix that is Peyote. This is true of many North American indigenous tribes, but one of the most significant groups to look towards for this discussion are the Huichol. The Huichol of Northern Mexico find themselves the subjects of anthropological study in a unique way:

“They have become an archetype of traditional psychedelic shamanism and, though peyote is only one element in their highly elaborated cosmology and ritual, it now dominates western perceptions of them. Some scholars regard them as surviving exemplars of an archaic peyote culture that spanned northern and central Mexico centuries before the Spanish conquest: Peter Furst, along with Weston La Barre, the twentieth century’s leading authority on peyote religion in the USA,

¹²⁹ Urban, Hugh B.. 2015. *New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements: Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America*. Oakland: University of California Press, 29.

¹³⁰ Jay, *Mescaline*, 61.

argued that the Huichol peyote rituals are ‘probably the closest extant to the pre-Columbian Mexican rite’ and ‘may well be virtually unchanged since Cortéz’.”¹³¹

This position that the Huichol occupy is complicated and poses several different topics of discussion that are important for both anthropology and decolonial studies more broadly, but also for the study of peyote more specifically. It is with the Huichol that a dimension of peyote pertaining to pilgrimage is made clear:

“In Myerhoff’s assessment, ‘peyote occupies no utilitarian place on any level of Huichol life. Even the visions obtained by it are not used for religious illumination, or didactic purposes.’ The peyote hunt is a return to paradise, through which the pilgrims become their own ancestors and their own gods.”¹³² Even more fitting is the fact that the regions where peyote grows were often called peyote gardens.¹³³

This account reveals an aspect of peyote that is often overlooked. So much of the scholarship and interest surrounding peyote is fixated on the psychedelic and ritual aspects of its use, but equally important are the spatial and geographical dimensions of peyote’s existence. In the aforementioned excerpt the regions in which peyote is found are referred to as the peyote gardens, and to some practitioners “a pilgrimage to gather peyote plants is viewed as an act of piety to be undertaken.”¹³⁴ The role of these gardens is significant, and serves as a space in which a vast network of trade and communication has taken place, “These gardens drew visitors from many tribal groups and became a centre for cultural exchange. Peyote rarely changed hands for money: it provided the impetus for a barter economy in which a constellation of goods, artefacts, ideas and practices circulated.”¹³⁵ Thus, it turns out that in both pre-Columbian times and colonial

¹³¹ Jay, 46.

¹³² Ibid., 45-46.

¹³³ "Praying for the Holy Peyote: Twenty-five Years after Texas Legalized the Religious Use of Peyote by Indians, Changing Agricultural Practices Have Left the Native American Church of North America with Hardly Any of Their Sacramental Plant." *The Globe and Mail (Index-only)* (Toronto, Ont.), 1995.

¹³⁴ Stewart, 41.

¹³⁵ Jay, 61.

times, peyote and the land it was found in served to create a world of pilgrimage, travel, exchange and mobility. There is of course the elephant in the room. Given all of this, the travel and movement so integral to the history of peyote, it must be remembered that the very limited geographical region in which peyote grows has been split by the U.S.-Mexico border. The border complicates peyote's place in the world, and currently there are many indigenous communities in the United States facing a crisis.

The fate of the Native American Church and other indigenous communities who hold peyote to be important are in the hands of the governments of the United States and Mexico. And in recent years a crisis has fallen on many communities in the United States, "When the Native American Church of North America recently held its midyear conference in South Texas the top priority facing church leaders was not a question of law, doctrine or liturgy but a critical shortage of their sacrament, the hallucinogenic peyote cactus."¹³⁶ A shortage of peyote is not an insignificant problem, "To the church's members, peyote is the essential ingredient, the sacrament, in their well-established, unique ceremony."¹³⁷ A large part of the problem is that the habitat of peyote on the United States' side of the border is rather small, and much of the land is inaccessible now.¹³⁸ The rest of the habitat of peyote is in Mexico, and this poses major problems for the Native American Church, "because peyote is classified as a controlled substance, U.S. law prohibits its importation."¹³⁹ Thus, the Native American Church is struck by both a dwindling domestic supply of the cactus, as well as being prohibited from importing

¹³⁶ "Praying for the Holy Peyote" *The Globe and Mail (Index-only)* (Toronto, Ont.), 1995.

¹³⁷ Stewart, Omer Call. *Peyote Religion: a History*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993, 3.

¹³⁸ "Praying for the Holy Peyote."

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

more from the only other place it grows. The situation is even worse however, while there is a much larger amount of peyote available in Mexico, it is also under attack by exploitation and unsustainable harvesting methods. It is not just indigenous people who are making pilgrimages seeking peyote, tourists are as well, and illegally harvesting peyote in Mexico.¹⁴⁰ The situation in Mexico regarding tourists and peyote is summed up well in the following way:

“Since it is illegal in Mexico for anybody who is not part of the Wixárika [Huichol] tribe to harvest and use Peyote, many tour guides take people to places where the cactus grows to let them reap the crop without giving them any instructions on how to sustainably harvest the crop... A loophole in Mexican law allows people to come to San Luis Potosi to consume *Lophophora Williamsii* in the desert without risking jail time. It is only illegal to harvest and remove the plant from San Luis Potosi to use it in other places.”¹⁴¹

Additionally, although collecting it is technically illegal “most police officers in Mexico tend to look the other way when tourists steal the plant.”¹⁴² Given the different realities of this situation, there is an urgent crisis on both sides of the border regarding peyote’s survival in the wild. There is a mobility regime¹⁴³ established in this dynamic, the indigenous communities who rely on peyote are facing barrier after barrier preventing them from continuing their religious practices, yet privileged tourists from the United States are allowed to travel to the limited habitat that remains in order to unsustainably take peyote buttons without any practical consequences. This crisis of shortage and access is fundamentally a crisis of the borderlands. This is also a crisis that is taking place today, as I write this.

¹⁴⁰ Israel, Michael. “Mexican Government Protects Peyote for Native Rituals.” *The Borgen Project*, Borgenproject.org, 28 Apr. 2018, <https://borgenproject.org/peyote-native-rituals/>.

¹⁴¹ Israel. “Mexican Government Protects Peyote for Native Rituals.”

¹⁴² Israel.

¹⁴³ Vasquez. “The Limits of the Hydrodynamics of Religion,” 438.

Peyote has always occupied a difficult spot in American and academic consciousness. It was initially only conceived of through the lens of missionary work, then through political suppression. Now, despite the Native American Church being able to legally perform religious rituals involving peyote, the scholarship and work on the subject is hardly exhaustive. Furthermore, conversion and political controversy are hardly the only dimensions of peyote's history, and scholars have been ignoring a topic of research that sits so perfectly at the intersection of so many important discussions within the field. While not the only dimension worthy of discussion on the topic, peyote is a prime subject for border studies and the study of the borderlands. In the words of Stacy B. Schaefer "The borderlands of South Texas have always been the gateway for the peyote religion in the United States."¹⁴⁴ Study of the borderlands is a relatively new line of analysis, but a part of me is shocked that this dimension of peyote's history in the Americas has not been explored more. I argue that it needs to be. Peyote lies at the intersection of significant and urgent struggles in a multitude of ways on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. It is important to have a meaningful understanding of the topic, especially if any decolonial progress is to be made. To reiterate, this tangent into some of the dimensions of peyote's place in America, such as border studies, is not the primary aim of this project, but one of the many realms of discussion that I am practically begging for more scholars to engage with. I hope to illuminate topics of discussion, and directions to move in, more so than write a comprehensive analysis of a select few topics.

¹⁴⁴ Schaefer, Stacy B. *Amada's Blessings from the Peyote Gardens of South Texas*. 2015. 31.

To reiterate one of my primary aims of this project, I hope to illuminate the ways in which the forces of colonialism, imperialism, and the hierarchies of bigotry have perpetuated and survived into the present. Returning to the work of Césaire, at multiple points he provides passages from a variety of writers, politicians, government officials, academics and more, showcasing the many faces of colonial evil. There is one that he includes that I would like to showcase here. In order to demonstrate, as Césaire did, one of countless examples of colonial attitudes being refurbished for newer sensibilities.

“It is the destiny of the Occidental to face the obligation laid down by the commandment *Thou shalt leave thy father and thy mother*. This obligation is incomprehensible to the Madagascan. At a given time in his development, every European discovers in himself the desire... to break the bonds of dependency, to become the equal of his father. The Madagascan, never! He does not experience rivalry with the paternal authority, “manly protest,” or Adlerian inferiority - ordeals through which the European must pass and which are like civilized forms... of the initiation rites by which one achieves manhood...”¹⁴⁵

I would like to refer to Césaire’s thoughts on this passage not to parrot them, but to illustrate the kind of analysis that I intend to present to the reader in a different context, in regard to different subjects. To illustrate the point that colonial attitudes remain, and continue to perpetuate a variety of problems, Césaire says this about the previous passage, “Don’t let the subtleties of vocabulary, the new terminology, frighten you! You know the old refrain: “The-Negroes-are-big-children.” They take it, they dress it up for you, tangle it up for you.”¹⁴⁶ The attitudes, bias, and violence done through the racism and bigotry of colonialism, though not outright proclaimed the way it might have been previously, nonetheless remains real and impactful.

¹⁴⁵ M. Mannoni, quoted in Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2001, 60.

¹⁴⁶ Césaire. *Discourse on Colonialism*, 60.

Césaire had a muse from which he drew inspiration that informed much of his work, surrealism. Surrealism served to inspire the broad anticolonial mission of Césaire and many of his friends, family and colleagues. Although surrealism did not just inspire anticolonialists like Césaire, philosophers like Walter Benjamin drew from surrealism as a means of capturing and articulating radical ideas regarding imagination, perception, time and possibilities for new futures. Tara Forrest brings together thinkers such as Benjamin, Breton, Baudelaire, and many others in *The Politics of Imagination: Benjamin, Kracauer, Kluge*, specifically her chapter on Benjamin's experience with hashish and his meditations on the relationship between hashish, imagination, childhood, and our perception of time and experience. One facet of this discussion is important for our purposes here. An undeniably central feature of the story of Native American Church is peyote, which is a psychedelic, a drug. Its effects on perception are not just the interest of some college students experimenting in the 1960s. Its effects on consciousness lie at the heart of its political legacy as well as its spiritual power. In his reflection on consuming hashish, Benjamin comes to many realizations and thoughts, one of which pertains to the relationship between childlike imagination's capacity for conceiving of what could be possible and the kind of perception of experience that can be ushered in through consuming hashish. Forrest notes the nature of this particular discussion in a profound way.

“Central not only to Benjamin's, but also to Baudelaire's and Breton's analyses of the radicality of childhood perception and cognition is not only the child's heightened mimetic capacity for recognising and producing similarities, but the extent to which the child's capacity for imagination is not limited by what the adult world deems appropriate and/or possible.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Forrest, Tara. *The Politics of Imagination: Benjamin, Kracauer, Kluge*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007, 62.

In this context they are primarily discussing the imaginative limitations on what is thought to be possible due to societal limitations, standards and pressures. Though I argue that this is not just a philosophical issue, it is also a colonial one. What happens when these imaginative capacities for a different world are not the domain of a childlike or hallucinatory state, but the unique perspectives of colonial subjects confronting the very different and powerful perspectives of colonial empires with radically different metrics for what is normal, possible or acceptable. It is this confrontation between radically different perceptions of what is possible that defines the colonial encounter with peyote. The tensions and pressures will persist past the initial colonial encounter and continue through the 20th century and the journey of the Native American Church, despite federal legitimacy and protection.

Peyote is a unique part of colonial history. There are a near limitless amount of possible examples of traditions, rituals, identities, etc. belonging to indigenous Americans that disgusted or offended the sensibilities and attitudes of colonial invaders, though few of them strike the same chords in the Occidental consciousness in the same ways or to the same extent as peyote. Returning to Forrest's analysis, she references Breton as he describes the nature of some of these limitations on imagination and their role in regulating knowledge production.

“Experience today, Breton writes, paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge. It too leans for support on what is most immediately expedient, and it is protected by the sentinels of common sense. Under the pretense of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Forrest. *The Politics of Imagination*, 48.

Under the pretense of civilization and progress, certain forms of thinking, experience, knowledge production, and practice can be deemed illegitimate or even dangerous. In the above quote, the example given is when something is considered superstitious. The question is, who gets to decide on such a designation? What happens when it just so happens that a colonial empire deems the indigenous identities and practices they encounter as such. I argue that, like earlier, this is not just a philosophical problem, but a colonial and political one as well. Benjamin was interested in hashish, which is quite different from peyote, but it nonetheless provides an interesting instance in which a substance designated as a drug by contemporary legislation in a place like the United States, for example, serves to stimulate creative intellectual developments. Peyote may have its own provinciality, a different continent, a different plant source, different psychological and physiological effects on its users, different traditional uses, and a different legal journey through a colonial regime, but the study of substances like hashish and peyote are similar, and limited, in many ways.

The story of peyote includes the persistent threat to a colonial regime which does not extend just to the spaces and bodies of its subjects, but the minds of those it controls as well. Despite the aforementioned differences between Benjamin's hashish and the Native American Church's peyote, Benjamin's experimentation has relevant similarities. Forrest's analysis includes consideration of the relationship between the consumption of intoxicants, imagination and future possibilities. It also includes analysis of how aspects of the modern world and the industrial world limit the kind of experiences that one can have, which Benjamin's experience with hashish can abet, "For Breton, the most significant side-effect of the diminution in the quality of experience is the breakdown of

the capacity for imagination and, with it, the waning of the ability to envision a different kind of existence.”¹⁴⁹ The discussion presented in Forrest’s piece has to do with the ways that contemporary Western society stifles the imagination of its members, and how it alienates its subjects. It stifles the capacity to imagine new possibilities. I would like to inject another perspective into this discussion. The exporting of this limiting societal dynamic to the indigenous world and the global south is a primary feature of colonialism, and we as scholars need to interrogate all dimensions of colonialism. There is no shortage of examples of how imagining new possible futures has been seen as a threat to colonial regimes.

With attention already having been placed on Césaire, I would like to briefly meditate on Surrealism. Césaire saw in Surrealism a possibility for the imagining of a new future, one which transcended and left behind the colonial orders that erased and smeared the identities, histories and value of African civilizations, and Benjamin and his contemporaries considered the ways in which perception and experience could change in such a way that new possibilities could be conceived of or envisioned. The counter to the perpetuation of the colonial order is the imagining of new possibilities. New possibilities are a threat to imperialism and colonialism. Anything that threatens the hierarchies and “natural” order as seen by the colonial empires is a threat to their rule and domination. I argue that peyote lies in a matrix which is thoroughly decolonial, from its indigenous historical and spiritual identity, to its effects on those who consume it, and it threatens colonial hegemony. Perhaps one of the many tools we have to utilize in our quest for

¹⁴⁹ Forrest, 48.

novel forms of analysis we could benefit from is not simply engaging their novel ideas, but through understanding the muses and inspirations for their ideas as well.

A work which serves as a great inspiration of my own calls for specific mention here. Edward W. Said's monumental *Orientalism* has offered a level of insight and guidance that simply could not be overstated. Said shares his attitude towards his work in the following way, "It isn't at all a matter of being optimistic, but rather of continuing to have faith in the ongoing and literally unending process of emancipation and enlightenment that, in my opinion, frames and gives direction to the intellectual vocation."¹⁵⁰ I share this sentiment in that the work of scholarship should be oriented towards the unending process of emancipation that a decolonial project demands and strives for.

In the Preface to the 25th anniversary edition of *Orientalism* Edward Said introduces the reader to a discussion of how the forces of Orientalism were on full display in the U.S. war with Iraq. He proclaims that "Without a well-organized sense that these people over there were not like "us" and didn't appreciate "our" values - the very core of traditional Orientalist dogma as I describe its creation and circulation in this book - there would have been no war."¹⁵¹ The essential key in Said's argument is that the forces that are made manifest in this war are not new, they are the same forces at their core that drove the orientalism of Europe hundreds of years ago. Recognizing the unchanged, and more importantly unchallenged, forces that drive the political and colonial violence of empire is a task Said demands of his readers and it is a task I demand

¹⁵⁰ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York, New York: Vintage Books, 2003, xv.

¹⁵¹ Said, *Orientalism*, xx.

of mine. Though the continent, century, and political leaders may be different, everything Said expounds in the above quote is true of the topic I engage with in this project. The same forces and justifications that allowed for the U.S. to engage in the war in Iraq are similar forces and justifications that allowed colonial officials to essentially wage war on the indigenous Americans they encountered in the new world. Even in the twentieth century, indigenous Americans struggle to maintain religious freedom because of certain assumptions and categories that are the result of forces that are hundreds of years in the making. My work is not strictly about orientalism, but colonialism and orientalism are inextricably linked and it is only by being steeped in an analysis and critique of the myriad forces of colonialism that we are able to decolonize anything.

The kind of relationship between colonialism and those who have been subject to its power is one that echoes the story of orientalism in a profound way. The mechanisms and character of this relationship often explicitly mirror those of the relationship between the Occident and the Orient. The relationship can be summed, at least in part, as follows, “The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.”¹⁵² The dynamic between the West and the orient is all of these things and more, but it is the last component that I want to stress and elaborate on. The orient as image of the other is crucial for understanding the forces of colonialism in many, or perhaps indeed all, contexts. This idea of the other, and its representations that are fixated on within the

¹⁵² Said, 1.

colonial imagination, is a persistent theme in the history of peyote. The orient does not just exist as an abstract category, it serves explicitly to benefit, and fulfil certain ends, of the West, “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.”¹⁵³ The orient is necessary to exist as an Other, as a mirror image to the Occident in order for the Occident to fashion itself an identity of its own. It needs an Other to contrast itself to, to fight, to struggle against, in order to justify and perpetuate certain institutions, ideologies and programs. The argument that I intend on making and justifying, is that descriptively this is the case in other instances of Western colonialism and imperialism, but prescriptively it does not need to be the case. In fact, the need to maintain these oppositions and contrasts is indicative of a colonial project, and if there is ever a hope for decolonizing our world, there needs to be explicit effort to transcend and eliminate this need for an Other, for an enemy. There are many ways to conceptualize this antagonistic but integral feature of the colonial project, such as Schmitt’s. Keller explains that in Schmitt’s theory, “unification of people as a people takes place only to the extent that they share a common enemy.”¹⁵⁴ This need for an enemy in order to theorize oneself is seen manifesting in explicit ways in certain historical contexts, but I would argue it manifests often in more subtle ways in the vast majority of colonial history. The relationship between colonial actors in and the indigenous communities of America demonstrate this in an important way. Furthermore, this particularly American colonial context is not just indicative of the broader trends of

¹⁵³ Ibid 1-2.

¹⁵⁴ Keller, Catherine. *Political Theology of the Earth: Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for a New Public*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018, 22-23.

colonialism and orientalism, of which it most certainly is, it also presents certain new problems and ideas.

Orientalism pits the West against the East in a battle between the civilized and the uncivilized, but ultimately between two human worlds. The bigotry and coloniality of orientalism was inherently dehumanizing, and orientalized peoples were seen as less human than western peoples. However, they were still seen as human in some categorically significant way. While there was a vast spectrum of attitudes towards Indigenous Americans, they were often seen by colonists as part of the natural world, and thus significantly removed from the status as fully human, in a way that something like the Ottoman Empire never was. As Albanese points out, “When William Bradford wrote of the Pilgrim landing at Plymouth harbor, he recalled the terror of “a hideous & desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild [sic] men.””¹⁵⁵ I have no intention of presenting a dehumanization or oppression race, rather that in addition to the ways in which Said’s theories of orientalism can aid a decolonial analysis of American colonialism in the context I pursue, the specifics and categorical differences at play in the American context demand that we go even further than Said in extrapolating the relationships and forces which are intertwined and demanded of colonialism. A general theme or trend of my project is how the context in which I am working, the role of peyote and the Native American Church in the broader system of colonialism, is one in which all of the brilliant theories and work done by other scholars are profoundly relevant and resonant, but also a springboard for opening entirely new directions and spaces for theorizing, analysis and

¹⁵⁵ Albanese, Catherine L. *Nature Religion in America from the Algonkian Indians to the New Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 34.

critique. For example, Said's *Orientalism* is one of the bedrock theoretical works in my own thinking, yet I view his work as a steppingstone that leads to, and unlocks, much more than any one piece of work can cover on its own.

Throughout this work I intend on elucidating the many facets of colonialism, both past and present, but one that I intend on giving extra focus to is the fact that many of the horrors of colonialism still remain. Most of the violence, forms of domination and control, exploitation, coercion and alienation have a straight line of continuity from deep into the colonial past to the present day. The difference is the presentation of these colonial evils, they are less obvious, better hidden, reconceptualized to be more palatable to contemporary social imaginaries. Or they are simply relegated to the global south out of sight of those who care, and just far enough from those who might otherwise be upset if it was happening in 'their own' country. Just because the labels change, the leaders and individuals change, the countries or continents change, and the victims change, it does not mean that the horrors of colonial reality are not extant today. There have been victories throughout history in the quest to eradicate injustice and the horrors of imperial violence, and those struggles are worthy of acknowledgement, but we, as both scholars and human beings, would be doing those who fought for justice before us a disservice if we did not direct our critical gaze at the other injustices and horrors that remain. As I referenced from Césaire earlier, "Don't let the subtleties of vocabulary, the new terminology, frighten you! You know the old refrain."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Césaire, 60.

Let us look at colonialism more closely with some more insight from Césaire. One of the crucial insights of Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* is that colonialism is not just the gratuitous domination and violence that it wrought. It is undoubtedly those things, but it is also a way of thinking.¹⁵⁷ If colonialism were merely imperial domination and exploitation by European empires then the argument could be made that colonialism is largely eliminated. Though I urge readers to consider how even this may not be the case. Colonialism is not eliminated, its impact, hierarchies and ontologies are alive and well all across the world. No matter how many restrictions get placed on the more explicit forms of violence, it will not matter if all of the institutions, cultural forces, and motivations that stood behind them remain. Césaire wanted to not just liberate the world from the physical forces of colonialism, he wanted to liberate the world from the psychic forces which continue to justify colonialism.

The details of the context in which Césaire was working may be slightly different from what I am working through, but I argue that his claims and concerns ring true to a profound extent within the North American struggle for indigenous religious freedom. It would be unwise to try to universalize any theory of the sort to all experiences and occasions, but I would not be surprised if the multitude of ideas found in *Discourse on Colonialism* ring true in many decolonial and anti-colonial struggles around the world. It must be said that while Césaire's goals and interests had their specificities within the intersections of the French, Martinican, African, and poetic worlds he operated in, it

¹⁵⁷Kelley, Robin, in the Introduction to Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2001. 27.

would be a disservice to him to make it seem as though his gaze did not encompass the struggle against colonialism that rages in every corner of Earth.

Césaire was interested in certain questions that I have no intention of abandoning. The central pillars of my inquiries are the notions of boundaries and categories. Understanding where lines are drawn, boundaries are set, the Other marked, and why. These pursuits are integral to the work I hope to accomplish. I argue that they can offer insight into the perpetuation of the colonial project. We have already established that, to Césaire, and me as well, the strength and power of colonialism lies not just in the force it exerts through military and economic institutions, that there is an aspect which pertains to the forms of thinking that are embedded in culture and society. The boundaries and borders set by imperialism and colonialism are found, reinforced, and embodied within popular thinking, rhetoric and culture. Thus, “the dishonest equations *Christianity = civilization, paganism = savagery*, from which there could not but ensue abominable colonialist and racist consequences, whose victims were to be the Indians, the Yellow peoples, and the Negroes”¹⁵⁸ is not just a component of governmental agencies, it was a fixture of mind and imagination in colonial nations’ populations. Rhetoric and framing within a multitude of contexts are important for colonialism. It is a tool within politics, law, and popular consciousness for reinforcing certain attitudes which in turn reinforce the assemblages of Empire which aid in colonialism's continued existence.

There is an aspect of colonialism, although it is not unique to just colonialism, that needs to be recognized, addressed, and acknowledged. The true crimes history, in the

¹⁵⁸ Césaire, 33.

eyes of the colonial regime, the Occident, the West, are not the acts of violence and exploitation towards the colonized, it is the act of turning those methods towards the colonizers, towards white people, towards westerners. Césaire articulated this so clearly, I would think it a shame not to include the entire passage, which demonstrates the hypocrisy and perversity of this biased perception of violence:

“People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: “How strange! But never mind - it’s Nazism, it will pass!” And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves, that it is barbarism, the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that it is Nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole edifice of Western, Christian civilization in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack. Yes, it would be worthwhile to study clinically, in detail, the steps taken by Hitler and Hitlerism and to reveal to the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that without his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler *inhabits* him, that Hitler is his *demon*, that if he rails against him, he is being inconsistent and that, at bottom, what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not *the crime* in itself, *the crime against man*, it is not *the humiliation of man as such*, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the “coolies” of India, and the “niggers” of Africa.”¹⁵⁹

One of the great atrocities of human history is the persistent justification of barbarism and violence directed towards an Other. Many of history's worst crimes were committed by the ‘civilized’ West, and yet the “barbarians” and “savages” are the ones who required tutelage by the hand of the Occident. The category of the Other is created and perpetuated to serve a purpose. Though I am not the first to argue this, I argue that heading in the direction of eliminating the divide between ‘us’ and the ‘Other’ is an essential step in any decolonial project. As long as there is an Other to which political, economic, militaristic, cultural and psychic energy can be directed, colonialism will persist. In this respect I am not introducing anything revolutionary to religious studies decolonial scholarship.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 36.

Instead, what I hope to do is to bring these questions into a context and matrix of topics that is vastly under-examined. It is my claim that there is a wealth of insight to be gained by examining the story of peyote and the Native American Church and its relationship to American empire and American colonialism that is not just novel, but important. My hope is that through this I can provide at least some insight that will help aid the decolonial project in order to move towards a better future. The colonial past is filled with horrors and atrocities, and in many ways the present is no different, “For us, the problem is not to make a utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the past, but to go beyond.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 51-52.

CHAPTER 4

THE WAR ON DRUGS: THE INTERSECTION OF PEYOTE, RACISM, AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

I would like to return to an earlier concern regarding the concept of dismissing knowledge or thought deemed superstitious. Central to the Western conceptions of control and domination is the gatekeeping of legitimate forms of knowledge. The West likes to fashion itself the rational, logical, scientific, and objective seekers of knowledge, purveyors of truth. Though I can and will make the argument that in reality these are misrepresentations of Western knowledge production, here I would like to focus on the effect of this attitude. By ‘the West’ I am primarily referring to the perspectives and ideologies that occupy hegemonic, dominant positions and perspectives in parts of the world like the United States or Europe. These perspectives and ideologies are often the inheritors of thought from the Enlightenment, and usually heavily informed by Christianity as well as typically white. The West is many things in addition to these, but since they represent hegemonic, normative perspectives, they can be understood through my use of the term ‘the West.’ Whether the West is correct or not in believing themselves to be the arbiters and cross-bearers of truth in a superstitious world, the undeniable fact is that the gatekeeping and silencing of other perspectives, lifeways and forms of knowledge production has lead to, and justified, violence, as well as the oppression and suppression of much of the non-Western world.

It is simple, when one believes themselves to be in sole possession of truth, then everyone else must be wrong. It may have not been articulated in a way this simple

throughout much of history, or between all individuals, but there is an undeniable chauvinism at the heart of the colonial regime that extends from Western Europe across the globe. It is obvious within the Orientalist paradigm, a paradigm which is intimately related to, and interconnected with, colonial regimes. The rest of the world was to be taught, lectured, educated by the West, because clearly, in the eyes of the Western empires, the rest of the world lacked the objectivity and rationalism that defined the Western intellect. As Said points out, “at the outset one can say that so far as the West was concerned during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West.”¹⁶¹ In the relationships between the West and the various nations, communities, empires and cultures it came into contact with, there was not a question of mutual exchange and mutual learning, it was a one-directional relationship in which one side viewed the other as incapable of the intellectual achievements or faculties necessary for civilization given their own philosophical and educational institutions, traditions, or methods.

The reach of Western empires across the Near-East, Far-East, Africa, and beyond contained methods and strategies for administering and controlling the empire’s conquered subjects, these methods and strategies, as well as attitudes, were exported to the New World as well. So if we are to understand colonialism in its particularly American forms, (by this I mean both in terms of the North and South American

¹⁶¹ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York, New York: Vintage Books, 2003, 40-41.

continents more broadly, as well as the United States as a nation) we must look at its origins. For this task, we may refer to Said's *Orientalism*.

An aspect of Orientalism which, in my eyes, is of the utmost significance, is the necessity of dichotomies, a separation, between 'us' and 'them, some might say a necessity for an enemy, an Other. Central to the Orientalist paradigm was a distinction between the West, the Occident, to which the category of 'us' applied in the normative hierarchies and hegemony, and the Orient, the East, to which the category of 'them' applied to designate the Other, that which is not 'us.' This dichotomy serves a purpose that could not possibly be overstated. No matter how it was articulated at a given point in time or by a given individual, the fundamental notion that 'they' are different from 'us' permeated all aspects of Western, colonial society, culture and governance. This dichotomy is complex, it is not just a neutral distinction between two parties, it carries at a deeply fundamental level, certain assumptions and attitudes regarding the two halves of the dichotomy. In this dichotomy, only one side was ever considered superior. Only one side was considered to have the necessary capacity and tools to carry out knowledge production, self-governance and civilization. The side that was deemed capable, was also deemed responsible for controlling, uplifting and educating those that were not.

I have decided to use peyote as the central focus of this thesis because to understand peyote's place in colonial history means confronting, and illuminating, many features of colonialism both historically as well as how they have perpetuated today. Peyote occupies a role that is deeply entwined in the formation and continuation of these dichotomies and hierarchies. The kind of experiences and knowledge derived from

human experiences with peyote represent an Other in a profound way, and as I will elaborate on throughout this chapter, the implications of this are significant and lingering to this day. In this chapter my goal is to reflect on the US War on Drugs and present a closer look at the effects of the attitudes and policies which the War on Drugs is responsible for, as well as their place in the perpetuation of colonialism's legacy.

The following section borrows heavily from a paper I wrote in an undergraduate ethics course and subsequently published in an undergraduate journal.¹⁶² The essay's purpose was to take a look at the War on Drugs and examine the ways in which its policies and laws were ethical or unethical, how they compared to medical and scientific research on certain drugs, and how the program's reasoning, goals, and attitudes are related to racial prejudice in the United States. While revised heavily due to the growth and evolution of my writing and thinking since then, many of the following passages are heavily derived both directly and indirectly from that paper. My research and work in those early days of my academic career are valuable still to the work I am doing today even if my understanding of the topics, and decolonial scholarship more broadly, have grown and changed dramatically. Thus, in a sense the following few pages are a sort of second attempt at my earlier paper, except this time it is primarily in the service of my broader project, as one of the many pieces of the puzzle in my attempt at decolonial scholarship on the topic of peyote and colonialism in North America.

¹⁶² Rosenberg, Harrison C. (2019) "Your Brain on the Truth," *Relics, Remnants, and Religion: An Undergraduate Journal in Religious Studies*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.

One of the many goals I hope to accomplish in this work, is demonstrating how peyote is not just some small cactus that drug users and Native Americans like to consume, but rather a nexus point for a whole host of historically and culturally significant ideas and forces; also that peyote is not only more significant and important than popular attitudes and laws might have one believe, but also far different from typical cultural understandings of the cactus. I intend to unpack peyote's identity as a drug in US law and the War on Drugs. I will expand the discussion to other, similar drugs as well in the hopes of presenting a critical analysis of the political, racial, and colonial dimensions of the War On Drugs. Afterwards, I will connect this discussion to the broader themes and topics of my broader project. There is one important disclaimer I feel needs to be made. I would like to make it abundantly clear, I am not advocating for the use of any illegal drugs or substances outside of their prescribed medical or professional uses, or outside of legally allowed religious contexts. At no point in this project am I saying, explicitly or implicitly, "you, the reader, should do drugs." At the risk of complicating things, however, I would like to remind the reader that making such a disclaimer in the first place carries with it certain colonial and problematic implications regarding the nature of drugs. Nonetheless, given the present state of the institutions, society and cultural context I inhabit, it needed to be said. The nature of this dilemma is something I hope becomes more clear throughout the following passages, as well as throughout this project more broadly.

In the contemporary cultural landscape of the United States, the word 'drugs' does not elicit a positive response. For decades the War on Drugs has informed Americans that drugs and addiction is an evil to be avoided and condemned, to return to a

reference from chapter 3, “The 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Drugs, the foundation of the global drug control system, is unique among UN documents in its use of the word ‘evil’ to describe the dangers that drugs pose, a term not deployed in its official definitions of child abuse, terrorism or genocide.”¹⁶³ Heavily influenced by, and pressured by, American attitudes and laws regarding drugs, this remains relevant to this day, and affects countless people around the world. To describe something as evil in such black and white, moralistic terms tends to result in that which is described as being banished from the realm of healthy discourse. If a concept is evil, it is to be avoided, not engaged with and understood, typically speaking. My goal is to show that not only can we engage in a discussion of the topic of drugs in a nuanced fashion, but in doing so reveal that such proclamations of pure evil are more complicated than those originally making those proclamations would have one believe. Drugs are not just something that people use to get high and become addicted to, they have occupied deeply complicated and significant roles in the events that shape the world.

Substances, plants and sometimes chemicals that we might refer to as drugs have, upon closer inspection, occupied central positions in economic, geopolitical, and colonial history. One needs look no further than Colonial Britain’s relationship to India and China, “There was a time when maps of the world were redrawn in the name of plants, when two empires, Britain and China, went to war over two flowers: the poppy and the camellia.”¹⁶⁴ The camellia, the plant from which tea is derived, and the poppy, from

¹⁶³ Jay, Mike. *Mescaline a Global History of the First Psychedelic*. Yale University Press, 2019, 39.

¹⁶⁴ Rose, Sarah. *For All the Tea in China: How England Stole the World's Favorite Drink and Changed History*. Penguin Books, 2011, 1.

which opium is derived, were central features of Britain's policies and decisions regarding their trade and interaction with India and China. While Rose's book is primarily concerned with the history of tea, she makes it very clear that "Opium was equally significant to the British economy, for it financed the management of India - the shining jewel in Queen Victoria's imperial crown."¹⁶⁵ Growing opium in colonial India, Britain forced China to become reliant on its trade and sale to which they had a monopoly at the time. The significance of this arrangement cannot be understated,

"The opium-for-tea exchange was not merely profitable for England but had become an indispensable element of the economy. Nearly 1 in every 10 sterling collected by the government came from taxes on the import and sale of tea - about a pound per person per year. Tea taxes funded railways, roads, and civil service salaries, among the many other necessities of an emergent industrial nation... The triangular trade in botanical products was the engine that powered a world economy, and the wheels of empire turned on the growth, processing, and sale of plant life: poppies from India and camellias from China, with a cut from each for Great Britain."¹⁶⁶

Here we can clearly see a historical instance in which plants and drugs served an indispensable role in the shaping of our world. It was not the first nor the last time that drugs would be the conceptual domain in which politically significant battles were fought, and subsequently won or lost. I hope to illustrate some of the myriad ways in which the War on Drugs in the 20th century United States is another historical instance in which drugs play a significant role in the formation of hegemonic cultural institutions.

To repeat what I said in Chapter 2, the War on Drugs is a collection of policies, programs and campaigns aimed at combating the existence of drugs and drug use in America. While Drug Warriors existed in US government and institutions long before, in addition to earlier legislation, ramping up dramatically in the 1960s in response to rising

¹⁶⁵ Rose. *For All the Tea in China*, 1-2.

¹⁶⁶ Rose, 2.

countercultural sentiment, in “1973, President Richard Nixon declared ‘an all-out global war on the drug menace.’”¹⁶⁷ Nixon would not be the last president to wage such a war. As referenced earlier, the Reagan administration would also participate in the project, “With this nation's cities blighted by drugs, Nancy Reagan told the nation to “Just Say No.””¹⁶⁸ I would like to point out here that this ‘just say no’ attitude is one of the many features of the US War on Drugs’ which contains remnants of a colonial legacy. As I will touch on later, drug addiction is not as simple as one otherwise might imagine, and while it is beyond the scope of this project to elaborate in detail here, I would argue that the issue of addiction is a systemic one. Approaching the issue in the way Nancy Raegan does, by just saying no, carries crypto-protestant baggage in its singular focus on the actions, decisions and morality of individuals. I would like to note that the history of the War on Drugs is vast, a full depiction of its rich history is beyond the scope of this project. Before I expand upon the impacts and implications of the War on Drugs any further, I want to discuss the definitions and designations of certain drugs and their relationship to what research is starting to reveal regarding some of these drugs.

During the mid-twentieth century there was a rise in a variety of countercultural forces, movements, and communities. This occurred both in the United States and Abroad. In many of these countercultural communities drugs were prominent, notably substances like Cannabis and psychedelics such as LSD. While the War on Drugs targeted drugs of

¹⁶⁷ “The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Years 1970-1975.” https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/1970-1975_p30-39.pdf, 34.

¹⁶⁸ Small, Deborah. “The War on Drugs Is a War on Racial Justice.” *Social Research*, vol. 68, no. 3, 2001, pp. 896–903. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40971924, 896.

pretty much any kind, there was particular fury regarding the actions and attitudes towards what are sometimes referred to as the classical psychedelics. Among the classical psychedelics are Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), Psilocybin mushrooms, N,N-Dimethyltryptamine, and mescaline. Mescaline being the primary component in the peyote cactus responsible for its hallucinatory effects. It was not just hippies and counterculture figures who were associating with these substances, research was being done on a variety of medical and psychological uses for these substances as well, “Psychedelics found their way into psychotherapy, where they were used to treat a variety of disorders, including alcoholism, anxiety, and depression.”¹⁶⁹ Both the counterculture as well as the medical research were shut down once the War on Drugs reached a certain degree of prominence. Targeting one of the counterculture’s most important sacrament, psychedelics of just about every kind were designated as schedule 1 controlled substances. According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (the DEA), “Schedule I drugs, substances, or chemicals are defined as drugs with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.”¹⁷⁰ Schedule 1 is the category of highest severity, danger and criminality. I intend on focusing our attention towards the two criteria which are relevant to this definition, possible medical applications or lack thereof, and the potential for abuse. The following passages will provide an analysis of studies conducted involving some of the classical psychedelic substances categorized as schedule 1 substances.

¹⁶⁹ Pollan, Michael. *HOW TO CHANGE YOUR MIND: the New Science of Psychedelics*. PENGUIN BOOKS, 2019. Pp. 3.

¹⁷⁰ “Drug Scheduling.” *DEA*, U.S. Department of Justice, www.dea.gov/drug-scheduling.

These two criteria, regarding the potential for abuse and potential medical use, need to be critically examined. I am by no means claiming that these substances are impossible to abuse, and I am not saying that there is unanimous or conclusive agreement on many of the claims I am either making or presenting on behalf of others. Rather, I am simply amplifying the perspectives found in the findings of more contemporary research on the subject, whose findings are increasingly working against the claims made by the institutions of the War on Drugs. Researchers like Griffiths and Carhart-Harris are publishing work and findings which are starting to challenge and change the narratives around psychedelics, their study, and their medical applications. Regarding the second criteria, the potential for abuse, recent studies and research seem to indicate that the level of addictiveness and toxicity of many psychedelics at the very least causes one with a critical eye to raise suspicion around their scheduling. Pollan, in his account of the contemporary history and study of psychedelics summarizes the findings of more recent research, “Psychedelics fit awkwardly into the profile of a drug of abuse; animals, given the choice, will not self-administer a psychedelic more than once, and the classical psychedelics exhibit remarkably little toxicity.”¹⁷¹ In light of such claims the scheduling of classical psychedelics as the most dangerous drugs, their scheduling being more severe than substances like methamphetamine and cocaine can certainly be cause for one to scratch their head. Foreshadowing our discussion of the second criteria, Carhart-Harris’ research into medical and therapeutic uses of Psilocybin mushrooms demonstrates something important, “symptom improvements appeared rapidly after just two psilocybin

¹⁷¹ Pollan. *HOW TO CHANGE YOUR MIND*, 50.

treatment sessions and remained significant 6 months post-treatment.”¹⁷² A substance which is able to affect significant positive change in patients with just two doses, in which the positive impact remains meaningful 6 months after treatment without subsequent doses clearly does not fit the character of a typical drug of abuse.

The first of the two criteria, regarding medical application, calls for scrutiny, because the claim being made in the current scheduling of classical psychedelics is that there is no currently accepted medical use. Certainly, mainstream clinical use of psychedelics for medical or therapeutic purposes is almost nonexistent, though research into potential medical applications for psychedelics seems to indicate the opposite of what drug scheduling would have one believe. It was only half a century ago that the study of LSD, for example, occupied a prominent role in medical research, “it was the discovery that LSD affected consciousness at such infinitesimal doses that helped to advance the new field of neurochemistry in the 1950s, leading to the development of the SSRI antidepressants.”¹⁷³ More contemporary research also presents evidence which challenges popular assumptions regarding the potential use of these substances. Research like the aforementioned work by Carhart-Harris, as well as studies conducted by Roland Griffiths. This research seems to indicate that a variety of the classical psychedelics may potentially be used in groundbreaking ways to treat a variety of mental health disorders ranging from depression and anxiety to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and addiction. In Griffiths’ work for instance, “a single dose of psilocybin produced substantial and

¹⁷² Carhart-Harris, R L et al. “Psilocybin with psychological support for treatment-resistant depression: six-month follow-up” *Psychopharmacology* vol. 235,2 (2017): 399.

¹⁷³ Pollan, 293.

enduring decreases in depressed mood and anxiety along with increases in quality of life and decreases in death anxiety in patients with a life-threatening cancer diagnosis.”¹⁷⁴

There was mounting evidence in medical research during the early years of the War on Drugs, and once again research seems to be revealing potential uses for these substances.

So why am I laying this out here? I am doing so for two reasons: first, to amplify and platform research and scholarship which presents evidence which challenges hegemonic or normative narratives around this topic; Second, to make it abundantly clear that major components, arguments, and goals of the War on Drugs are not informed by, or are derived from scholarship, science, or medical research. The War on Drugs, as I will continue to discuss, is in large part a contemporary institution which perpetuates colonial and racist paradigms in culture and law in the United States. I once again urge the reader to recall the quote from Césaire, “Don’t let the subtleties of vocabulary, the new terminology, frighten you! You know the old refrain: “The-Negroes-are-big-children.” They take it, they dress it up for you, tangle it up for you.”¹⁷⁵ The rhetoric, framing, and enforcement of the War on Drugs is exactly this, the next iteration in a long line of racially charged institutions, logics, and apparatuses. It is not difficult to demonstrate the ways in which this plays out, one need only look at the American criminal justice system and the racial disparities playing out within it.

¹⁷⁴ Roland R. Griffiths, et al. “Psilocybin Produces Substantial and Sustained Decreases in Depression and Anxiety in Patients with Life-Threatening Cancer: A Randomized DoubleBlind Trial,” *Journal of Psychopharmacology* 30, no. 12 (2016): 1195.

¹⁷⁵ Césaire Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2001. 60.

Racial disparities exist in a wide range of ways in the United States, as I will elaborate on later, the racially charged issues derived from the War on Drugs not only dramatically impact the lives of African Americans, but indigenous Americans and beyond. Deborah Small is one of many who have critiqued the War on Drugs in harsh terms. According to Small, “the ‘war on drugs’ has replaced chattel slavery and de jure segregation as the main method of perpetuating America's long history of racial oppression.”¹⁷⁶ The War on Drugs has perpetuated and amplified systems of oppression to such a degree that the sociological evidence for racial disparities is at times staggering and undeniable. The disparities are so great that “In at least 15 states, Black men are sent to prison for drug offenses at rates that are from 20 to 57 times greater than for White men.”¹⁷⁷ I want to make it very clear, however, that this is not purely a legal issue. The War on Drugs can hardly be described as simply a bureaucratic piece of legislation, it was an entire program, institution, and cultural force. The effects of which extend far beyond the arm of law enforcement. The way that ordinary Americans absorb these attitudes is reflected in various pieces of data as well, “research has shown that drug and alcohol abuse rates are higher for pregnant White women than pregnant Black women, but Black women are about 10 times more likely to be reported to authorities under mandatory reporting laws.”¹⁷⁸ The War on Drugs was a program which aimed, and to a large extent succeeded, in not just criminalizing, but villainizing drugs, and those who were associated with them. Let me be abundantly clear, it was the drugs that were

¹⁷⁶ Small, “The War on Drugs Is a War on Racial Justice,” 897.

¹⁷⁷ Small, 897.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 898.

prominent in, and associated with, minority communities and communities of color which were the primary target of these campaigns. As I have briefly demonstrated, the fallout of this campaign bears out in contemporary sociological studies of incarceration and law enforcement. I simply cannot emphasize enough the degree to which the War on Drugs is politically and racially motivated. That is why I will not, instead I will let John Ehrlichman, President Richard Nixon's domestic policy chief, do it for me:

“We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.”¹⁷⁹

Once again, I would like to clarify, I am not extolling any argument that drugs are ‘good’ or urging the reader to partake in illicit drug use. My goal is to focus on, and illuminate, the ways in which hegemonic narratives about drugs and drug use is not only divorced from much of the scholarly research regarding drug safety, effects, and usage, but also racist and problematic in such a way that the War on Drugs can aptly be described as an apparatus of the perpetuation of colonialism and racism in the United States. It is a hegemonic cultural and legal force which has rendered the United states for much of the 20th century until today, for people of color, as “a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Baum, Dan. “Legalize It All,” Harper's Magazine, last modified April 2016, harpers.org/archive/2016/04/legalize-it-all/.

¹⁸⁰ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York, New York: Grove Press, 2008. xii.

The War on Drugs is the perpetuation of racism and colonialism not just for African Americans. Indigenous Americans and peyote are deeply connected to the implications and reality of the War on Drugs. Mescaline is part of the category of classical psychedelics, so peyote also became a schedule 1 controlled substance. The War on Drugs continues to reinforce colonial relationships and logics going back to the Spanish encounter with peyote, “The end of the Inquisition did not signal the end of deep and often ugly conflicts of peyote.”¹⁸¹ Peyote represents a threat to colonial authority and power in a number of ways. Peyote and those associated with it have consistently represented a threat to the kinds of hierarchies, categories, boundaries, and authority that colonial regimes demand of their subjects. Readers must forgive me for the inclusion of such a long passage, but in it, Dawson summarizes major aspects of peyote’s relationship to the colonial imagination and its authority in a way that is profoundly insightful and comprehensive:

“peyote is one of a group of hallucinogens (similar to psilocybin, LSD, and MDMA) whose effects are unlike alcohol, marijuana, or opium. The latter substances have historically been associated with drunken bodies, and as such present a problem for modern civilization, which relies on the sober worker in order to ensure industrial discipline and safety. By contrast, peyote is more closely associated with the body that is beyond control of the mind or external authority, even as the mind under the influence of peyote is said to possess an acute clarity - much greater clarity than the sober mind. As with other hallucinogens it is a mind that lacks the will or desire to conform to social rules, a mind that is unable to dissemble. Peyote produces bodies that are preternaturally brave, often exceptionally strong, able to endure privations, defiant. They are also bodies that reveal truths, whether or not the mind wants those truths revealed. This is the nature of the body under the influence of peyote, and the source of its greatest threat. Peyote reveals what the body and mind would otherwise conceal. In some ways this claim describes a physiological experience produced by the drug. The hallucinating body, overwhelmed by sensation, finds it difficult to dissemble and conceal. It is the mind possessed by the body as the antithesis of the body controlled by the mind. It is also a body that is less inclined than it otherwise might be to bow down before authority, especially when the desires of the mind and body do not perfectly align. In colonial and postcolonial settings, where physical obedience is required but the disciplined body does not necessarily indicate willing acquiescence, peyote has the power to disrupt the performance of power. This presents a distinct kind of threat to colonial and

¹⁸¹ Dawson, Alexander S. *Peyote Effect: From the Inquisition to the War on Drugs*. University of California Press, 2018. 3.

postcolonial states, and for these reasons the forces of order have long responded to peyote with visceral disgust, translating that affect into an argument that peyote is disordering, dangerous, and destructive.”¹⁸²

Peyote is so powerful as a subject and topic for discussion because through the study of peyote’s role in colonial history, the insight such study reveals is couched in both its role as a drug which threatens the order demanded by colonial power, as well as its uniquely indigenous character. In popular imagination, psychedelics like LSD also threaten to disrupt the adherence to rules and authority because of its effects on the user, a threat at the core of the War on Drugs’ logics, but peyote carries the additional threat of being inseparable from indigeneity.

As I have already stated numerous times, hierarchies and boundaries are important for the maintenance of colonial power and authority. The porousness and flexibility of the constituents of hierarchies is one of the many ideas I hope the reader takes away from this project. Peyote poses a threat to the colonial order not simply from the outside. During the middle of the twentieth century many saw the interest of white, western subjects in peyote as cause for concern. I would like to make it clear that I am not advocating for the kinds of appropriation that many white, westerners engaged in during the mid-twentieth century, their appropriation of psychedelics and indigenous rituals surrounding them is one form of the perpetuation of colonial hierarchies, regimes, and power dynamics. I am simply saying that in their seeking out of counter cultural spiritual and ideological outlets, many white westerners transgressed their colonial and racial categories or boundaries from the opposite end of the indigenous actors fighting for the freedom to use peyote. This substantiates the claim that peyote is a danger to colonial

¹⁸² Dawson. *Peyote Effect*, 6.

regimes and hierarchies. As Dawson explains, “Those who ventured to the sierra, who studied with or aspired to become shaman, were doing everything they could to transgress these boundaries, to enter a realm where their bodies, their consciousness, their relationship to reality could be disrupted.”¹⁸³ The fear of white children and teenagers being contaminated by drugs grew more extreme in combination with the indigenous elements inherent in the encounter with peyote and its accompanying ritual elements which many young people found so intriguing, as psychedelics became more prominent in the American cultural imagination.

The reality of contemporary America is that indigenous Americans are in a difficult position in regard to the right to use peyote in the Native American Church. Being legally protected in the use of peyote in a technical sense does not protect practitioners from the complications that arise from living in a society so deeply saturated with the logics and assumptions of the War on Drugs. When just about everyone else is considered a criminal and a drug user for consuming peyote, indigenous, legally sanctioned peyote users are at times inevitably inseparable from depictions and assumptions about drug users in the popular American cultural imagination. Recall the second chapter when I quoted Urban and his description of Smith’s employment dilemma from the case *Oregon v. Smith*:

“As a young man, Smith suffered from alcoholism, but he finally recovered through the help of Alcoholics Anonymous. During his recovery, Smith rediscovered his Native American roots and became an active member of the NAC. Smith was then hired to help develop drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs for Native Americans. In 1984, however, the director of the program learned that Smith and a coworker, Galen Black, were attending NAC services and demanded that they cease doing so, since he considered peyote to be a drug and since the possession of peyote was a felony in the state of Oregon. Smith and Black refused to stop attending, arguing that peyote was not a drug but a “religious sacrament,” and they were subsequently fired. As Smith later explained, the primary issue in his opinion was simply a misunderstanding of cultures and

¹⁸³ Dawson, 163.

languages; while he repeatedly tried to explain that peyote was a “sacrament” and not a “drug,” his employer was unable to think about it in any other terms”¹⁸⁴

What I hope to demonstrate by presenting this case again in this chapter, is that these difficult realities regarding definition, legality, and exemptions are not purely theoretical. These difficulties and ambiguities directly impact and shape the lives of people who are intimately tied up in these histories and political realities. The War on Drugs is not just a war against the substances which are defined as drugs, it is also a war against the indigenous people and the people of color whose lives are bound up in histories and associations with these substances. The racism towards African Americans, and the racism towards indigenous Americans which is present in the institutions which govern contemporary America are part of the same colonial legacy. They both represent, and illuminate, the perpetuation of colonialism through the evolution and obfuscation of rhetoric, hierarchies, and power.

How to think about these realities and where to go from here are questions I hope this project has encouraged the reader, and fellow scholars, to think about more. My desire is for more scholars to engage the myriad histories and topics I presented here with a greater degree of specificity, depth and insight than I ever could within the bounds of a Masters thesis. What I hope I have made clear throughout this project is that there are certain conditions, forces and realities present in the world today which are not only rooted in a deeply problematic past but perpetuate aspects of that problematic past. I do not claim to have answers about what to do from here, I do not even know if it is my place to define those answers. In order to figure out where to go from here, we must

¹⁸⁴ Urban, Hugh B.. 2015. *New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements : Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America*. Oakland: University of California Press, 38.

understand where we have come from, and where we are now. These two elements which are necessary for moving towards a decolonized future are some of what I hope I have engaged with in a productive way in this thesis.

The myriad dimensions of peyote that I covered throughout this work span thousands of years of history in North America, numerous justice-related concerns, and even multiple sub-fields of religious studies. As I stated at the beginning, my goal was to present the histories, concerns, and topics relevant to the history of peyote that exist regardless of whether or not I embarked on this project. In doing so I hope to have brought attention to and urgency to these discussions, in addition to presenting my own insight on the matter. To simply list the topics and issues covered in the nexus of peyote would be impractical and enormous, I urge the reader to take away some degree of understanding on as many as one can from this work. Whether it is the depth of peyote's history in North American life, the ecological crisis facing the wild habitat of peyote, or the hegemonic power of the War on Drugs in American life, there is so much work to do in order to understand and combat the forces of colonialism as they remain today. I began this project in the first place because it appeared to me that peyote occupied a unique position in which it could reveal and expose the colonial forces that dominate much of the Western world. Not only did studying peyote end up being far more helpful in this venture than I expected, it helped me gain a deeper understanding of indigeneity and the role of colonialism in American life. I hope this aspect of peyote became evident over the course of this thesis. The role of peyote in American life is unique and important, and I urge anyone reading, scholar or otherwise, to continue the work of interrogating the kinds

of forces I presented here in a way that goes beyond what I, and the decolonial scholars who came before me, have done thus far.

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