

The Pathology of Modernity
A Climate Justice Practitioner's Journey Exploring Decolonization

As a Response to Climate Change

by

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ABSTRACT

This research explores Western society's inability to address climate change substantively and the pathology of modernity. This dissertation resulted in two deliverables: (1) a persuasive critical literature review that defined and framed the pathology of modernity, and (2) an autoethnography on the pathology of modernity. Paper one showed the connections linking climate change and colonization by drawing on political ecology, Indigenous studies, environmental justice, sociology, postcolonial studies, and decolonial studies. After building a case for Western society's responsibility for climate change, depth psychology was used to examine why many of contemporary society's Western leaders tend to deny or ignore climate change and related systemic issues. This mindset is proposed to be an expression of a societal illness I define as the pathology of modernity. In paper two, the pathology of modernity is described through an autoethnography of my community organizing. This research used both a decolonial methodology as well as was inspired by grounded theory. Methods for the deliverables included a critical argumentative literature review and autoethnography. This research intends to change the conversation around climate change, addressing the structural power-based issues and mentality in Western society that prevents climate justice and climate action.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to all colonized peoples; may the climate crisis push the world to a great transition
where we can truly experience a post-colonial society.

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I want to acknowledge that it takes a village, a PhD is seen as an individual accomplishment, but

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BAYAN

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Opportunity Statement

The connections between climate change and colonization are not being examined in the field of sustainability. Indigenous scholars (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019; Whyte, 2017) have linked climate change and colonialism but are largely dismissed in the climate or environmental fields. These scholars have had to decolonize environmental justice and create new fields such as indigenous climate change studies to be included. Addressing root social causes of climate change is not mentioned in the climate sciences. While in some social sciences (Fanon, 2008; Hidaka, 2012; Hier, 2003; Timimi, 2005) there has been an acknowledgement of the sickness within western society, the sustainability field has hardly mentioned it.

A societal addiction has been mentioned in Ecological Economics (Costanza et al., 2017), a piece I find foundational to my work as it relates to my discipline of sustainability. What this paper lacks is where this addiction to consumption, growth and extraction comes from, or rather the genealogy that connects this to colonialism and capitalism. In this dissertation I build upon Costanza's concept, by showing how colonialism and capitalism have created the societal conditions that have given us the societal illness that I have termed the pathology of modernity.

Political ecology has long since drawn the connections between ecology and capitalism (Austin & Phoenix, 2005; Babie, 2010; Jorgenson, 2006). Post Colonialism has also discussed in detail how colonialism, imperialism and globalization have had severe ecological consequences (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001; Sealey-Huggins, 2017). Decolonial studies have also expressed the limitations of climate and social progress while still embedded in a colonial mentality (Bulhan, 2015; Chilisa, 2017). However, these types of conversations are not included in sustainability. The field of depth and radical psychology has shown how the mentality that drives Western culture has created a sort of cognitive dissonance and psychic numbing (Frankl, 1984; Jung, 1933; Lorenz & Watkins, 2001; Neumann, 1990; Watkins, 2000) that allows for genocides

and is consoled through consumption (Passini, 2013). While sustainability education is an outlier in the field in that it has talked about the major shift that needs to happen for a sustainable future (Moser & Fazey, 2021), it has a narrower scope of changes to education specifically. My work is a transdisciplinary study that will draw upon all of these disciplines to define this societal illness. This paper is a contribution to the field, in that it is situated in the field of sustainability and is critically identifying a societal illness within Western society that prevents us from addressing climate change and poses solutions on the societal, community and individual level.

Why we are stuck

Western society has been unable to address humanity's most pressing problems: climate change and inequality. Through the Western positivist lens, climate change is a crisis of too many greenhouse gasses, especially carbon dioxide. The solution most offered is changing our energy sources - it is a problem "fixed" through technology and science. It is this lens, the dominant social paradigm, that has pushed the climate into a crisis, and resulted in no progress at a significant scale (Manuel-Navarrete, 2010). The solution offered does not get to the root of the problem. If we change all of our energy sources but continue to consume at the rate that we are, we will continue to steal indigenous land to violently extract precious metals used in renewable energy and batteries because our economy is built upon unequal exchange between the Global North and South (Jorgenson, 2006). The Western lifestyle is fundamentally unsustainable, as it relies on the exploitation of people of color and the theft of resources and raw materials from the people of the Global South (Siddiqui, 2008). Western society and culture are directly responsible for the climate crisis (Warlenius, 2016), a responsibility our leaders have evaded to the point where we have a decade left before the point of no return (I.P.C.C., 2018).

We cannot solve the climate crisis with the same colonial mentality that created it (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001; Costanza et al., 2017; Lorenz & Watkins, 2001). The United States is addressing climate change right now, but in the most colonial, individualistic America-first way

possible (Bachram, 2004). The government has more than tripled its funding of the border in response to scientific reports that climate change will cause massive migration of millions of people displaced due to lack of water and food. The Pentagon said it is ready to build a defensive fortress to keep the starving immigrants out (Miller, 2017). The same mentality that justified the genocide of 15 million Indigenous people, as well as the kidnapping and enslaving of 20 million Africans to settle the Americas, is the same mentality that decides we would rather build a defensive fortress to keep people away from resources, versus changing our behavior to prevent the scarcity of those resources (Fanon, 2008; Freire, 1970; Lorenz & Watkins, 2001; Watkins, 2000). This mentality is what I have named pathology of modernity, its symptoms include: supremacy culture, hyper masculinity, cognitive dissonance, narcissism and addiction to growth and consumption. The pathology of modernity is the root of the climate problem, it is the collection of our values, beliefs and morals as a culture that prevent climate action (McCright & Dunlap, 2010; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001; Waugh, 2011).

We have the science and technology to address the climate crisis (Jacobson & Delucchi, 2009), but we fail to make the required political and social changes (Waugh, 2011). This mentality has made us not want to take responsibility for the mess we created. We would rather sacrifice the lives of future generations and marginalized communities across the globe, than sacrifice our present comfort and luxury. This mentality is further magnified in relation to where we occupy in the social hierarchy, which is why conservative white males are least concerned about the climate or environmental issues, due to their position at the top of the social hierarchy (McCright & Dunlap, 2011, 2013). Until the Pathology of Modernity is changed, we will not address climate change in a positive way (Geisinger, 1993) .

The Problem with Western Solutions

Western Society's dissociation with themselves translates into how we try to solve problems, limiting the ability to solve sustainability problems holistically. Because

Western society has yet to address our pathology, science's relationship to climate change is still a colonial one. Solutions proposed to climate change still bear the marks of their origin: obsessed with control, domination, finding ways of profiting off the crisis, exasperating existing colonial inequalities, and failing to address root causes. The majority of solutions proposed by those in leadership are either market-based, thus perpetuating the myth of infinite growth with no acknowledgment of how growth and the market-based systems are actually (part of) the root cause of this crisis (Manuel-Navarrete, 2010). For example, the proposed solution on both the national and international scale involves carbon markets and carbon trading.

With carbon trading, its "arrangement parcels up the atmosphere and establishes the routinized buying and selling of 'permits to pollute' as though they were like any other international commodity"(Bachram, 2004). At its worst, this is the literal commodification of the sky, promoting the idea of ownership, domineering, and profiting off of nature. Although it has not been successful in the U.K., it is still being promoted as a solution on an international scale and is touted as one of the more realistic options. Nevertheless, realism is defined not by the constraints of the planet we live on, despite pushing past its boundaries (Steffen et al., 2015), but by the constraints of the current exploitative, extractive economic system in which we operate. Perhaps it is the case that, under this current system, we should not be entertaining such ideas since they will be perpetuating the status quo. Instead, we should promote idealistic solutions (Manuel-Navarrete, 2010) because it is only through our creative imagination that we can dream up a new reality outside of the one we remained focused on.

Carbon trading is not just problematic because it promotes the market-based system and commodifies nature; it has rebranded and repackaged colonialism through its system of offsetting. Corporations are always searching for quick fixes to the carbon problem; offsetting allows them to pay money to plant trees in the Global South. "Responsibility for over-consumptive lifestyles of those in richer nations is pushed onto the poor, as the South becomes a carbon dump for the industrialized world. ...Lands previously used by local peoples are enclosed,

and in some cases, they have been forcibly evicted" for the placement of carbon sinks (Bachram, 2004). Since the off setters are operating under the Western colonizer mentality, they refuse to acknowledge indigenous peoples' ability to manage and protect forests. Instead, countries in the Global South hire a western trained 'forest manager' whose job is to protect the trees from the native community surrounding them and to manage the forest in the universalized Western scientific way, neither ecologically nor culturally specific (King'asia, 2018). So, colonialism continues, Indigenous peoples are displaced off their land so the Global North can continue to pollute. The results are monoculture pesticide-laden plantations that neither sequester the North's pollution nor reduce local pollution.

Proper climate solutions require radical and power-shifting structural changes (Pelling et al., 2012), yet "from the beginning of the international discussions about climate change Western countries governments and corporate polluters have been opposed to the structural changes needed to combat the problem"(Bachram, 2004). Rather than what is needed which is systemic change (Klein, 2015), the current neoliberal system poses climate solutions as a matter of 'consumer choice' through the advent of things like sustainable consumption (Naderi & Stutton, 2015) and a green economy (Brand, 2012). While not a bad thing individually, it fails to address the root causes and issues: "the causes of global environmental change and social inequality are structurally coupled with current capital accumulation patterns" (Pelling et al., 2012). Instead of addressing our addiction to growth (Costanza et al., 2017), green economies and sustainable consumption promote a "business-as-usual scenario and the globalization of resource-intensive Western production and consumption patterns"(Brand, 2012). Even policies that are seen as socialist and holistic, such as the Green New Deal, adopt "the philosophy of unlimited consumption" (Geisinger, 1993). Framing sustainability as a consumer choice is more resource-intensive, as the sustainable choices become an additional option to current unsustainable choices; this requires multiple chains of production (Brand, 2012; Pelling et al., 2012). By placing the

responsibility on the consumer, poor people can be blamed for their lack of sustainable choices, while corporations who are ones responsible are not interrupted but continue to profit.

Finally, sustainable consumption and a green economy continue the colonial extractive relationship with the Global South. "Resource extraction is the other side of the coin for a resource-intensive economy in industrialized and industrializing countries. It is also the other side of the green economy since precious metals for high-tech products mostly come from countries of the South" (Brand, 2012). "The North is responsible for 90 percent of the anthropogenic greenhouse gas emitted during the past 150 years, and it has, therefore, benefited from its ability to use the global atmosphere as a sink for the harmful byproducts of industrialization" (Gonzalez, 2001). Thus, the North continues to reap the benefits, while the South bears the majority of the burden. For climate solutions to address these power dynamics, we would have to address colonialism and its connection to climate change, but the pathology of modernity actively suppresses this and continues to perpetuate inequities.

The Path Forward

What is needed is not more science and technology (van der Leeuw, 2012), Western society needs a fundamental cultural shift from the extractive and exploitative industrial system(Gonzalez, 2001). We need new people, perspectives, and types of thinking to address our shared future(Brand, 2012; Burman, 2017). It is not a technological problem or one that can be solved through the market alone (Bachram, 2004; van der Leeuw, 2012), it's a moral and values issue. A value shift that sees people and the planet over profits, an end to the colonial and capitalist system that creates the hierarchies that allow the dehumanization and destruction of the earth (Siddiqui, 2008). We need to decolonize, and that starts first with our mind and ego, changing the stories we tell ourselves to justify our consumption and the inner voice that guides us into the "bigger, better, faster, more" ideology. As Winsler, the leader in the Apache Stronghold, told me "in order to right the wrongs of today, we must return to the first chapter".

Dissertation Organization

This dissertation is organized into two deliverables:

1. A persuasive critical literature review - talking back to the field of sustainability about how until we address the root causes of climate change starting from colonization, we cannot effectively address climate change. I will also introduce and define the concept of the pathology of modernity and categorize its traits. I draw evidence for this from the literature across several disciplines and diverse and decolonial authors.
2. An autoethnography - The autoethnographic study will come from experiences I have had and continue to have as a community organizer and activist. It will also include experiences and conversations from those in the Global South most directly impacted by the pathology of modernity. It is autoethnography, using myself as the unit of analysis, looking at how the pathology of modernity shows up in my life and how I embody it.

Guiding Ethics, Positionality & Reflexivity

My lens and positionality as a Black queer leader in the racial and climate justice movement, direct action activist, first-generation college student, a daughter of a refugee from the Global South, and person indigenous to the Amhara tribe in Ethiopia is an essential component of my research. I also acknowledge my privileges as a light-skinned person with United States citizenship and acknowledge how that shapes my reality. The subjects I research are more than research to me; they are issues that have directly affected my life, my communities, and my ancestors. For these reasons, I am deeply invested in these topics. More than a career path, I find it to be my calling and understand the implications and the lives at stake with this work. Drawing on the methods from the womanism tradition (Floyd-Thomas, 2006a) that suggests if you don't have experience, then you do not have the right to speak on the subject, my embodied experiences as a climate justice activist and practitioner gives me epistemological privilege (Floyd-Thomas, 2006b) . I reject the idea of neutral or objective

research; instead, I openly acknowledge how my positionality affects and improves my understanding of these concepts.

Theoretical Framework & Methodology

Each study will use different methods, but the overarching theoretical framework and methodology are the same – decolonization (Alonso Bejarano et al., 2019; Denzin et al., 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019; Smith, 2012). I argue that colonization is the root cause of climate change, and a process of unlearning, undoing, and healing from colonization must be the solution. I have incorporated this approach in my methods in several ways. For example, focusing on the colonizer and not the colonized is decolonial. I am intentionally challenging power dynamics by turning the gaze inward to the dominant paradigm of Western culture and society (Priyadharshini, 2003). Colonization has taught us to blame the victims, like when poor countries in the Global South are blamed for not adapting to climate change, even though their poverty is because of the continual theft of resources and labor from colonization (Sealey-Huggins, 2017). It is a process of decolonization to name the perpetrator and challenge the narrative written by the conquerors, which this work seeks to do.

Another way I am drawing on decolonial approaches is by being in solidarity, building relationships with, and learning from Indigenous peoples, people most impacted from colonialism, and those in the Global South. From the peoples whose land I am on and throughout Turtle Island to indigenous communities in South Africa, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Canada, and Mexico, I have and continue to seek out building with and to learn from indigenous leadership. People from these areas of the country from the Western perspective are seen as undeveloped, but the decolonial lens I am using sees them as the developed ones, whom we need to seek help from, again seeking to flip the hegemonic order in this work (Deloria et al., 1999). I documented my learnings and experience from indigenous leaders worldwide I met through my activism through autoethnography in my second paper.

I intentionally use my positionality as an academic to liberate resources, or as some call it, theft by conversion (Mayorga et al., 2019). I have leveraged my position and knowledge to get grants for the community, shared my knowledge gained in academia with the community, used student government funds to fund community activists to educate us, and organized to ensure that BIPOC and marginalized students can make it in academia by fighting for their resources and spaces. Even in small ways, I have ensured excess food from conferences, and other events go directly to the unsheltered afterward to ensure that the ivory tower's excess does not just get wasted but shared with the larger community. I see my privilege in academia as a responsibility to give back to the communities most harmed by this institution. It is critical to me that my work gives back and does not just theorize but has a tangible impact on communities, which is why I have steered to more of a practitioner than researcher as a way to give back tangibly.

Choosing autoethnography informed by grounded theory was part of my decolonial methodology (Alonso Bejarano et al., 2019; Bell et al., 2019; Gonzalez, 2001). Research has been used to legitimize the colonial project under the guise of neutrality and the myth of objectivity. Autoethnography recognizes this; it rejects positivism and acknowledges the personal is political and is intentionally and transparently politically motivated and socially just, and rejects the "imprisonment of categorization" (Bell et al., 2019). Grounded theory is a method that generates theory grounded in data collected over the long term (Glaser & Strauss, 2010). Theoretical preconceptions are to be avoided; instead, research questions are derived from the data collected (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). I believe it contributes to the decolonial methodology because it requires you to start with the humble position of acknowledging you know nothing and requires reflexivity and self-examination. Reflexivity was a critical method in my research. To decolonize, you must consistently be checking yourself and examining your bias and assumptions. Throughout my research, and especially in my conclusion, reflexivity has been critical in my process of decolonizing. In this way, I attempt to move my research away from the

exploitative, disconnected, and ego-driven modus operandum toward one that is reflective, introspective, and humbling.

One thing to note is my use of the words “decolonize,” “decolonization,” and “decoloniality.” Decolonization is not a metaphor; it involves the repatriation of Indigenous land and life (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In the context of climate change, it involves climate reparations from the colonizer countries to the colonized countries (Tekola, 2018), and it involves the opening of borders for climate refugees (Chavers et al., 2021), concepts I have discussed elsewhere. In Western society today, these ideas are seen as radical, unfeasible, and traitorous to our country. Before we can have decolonization, which is in materiality, we have to decolonize our way of thinking and our entire culture - this is decoloniality.

“Coloniality refers to the internalization, at individual and collective levels, of structural systems of power that remain intact.....Decoloniality (is) ...therefore a disentangling of the colonial relations in terms of knowledge production and productive framings of identity....decoloniality is a process central to teaching and learning” (Carolissen & Duckett, 2018)

Different terms have been used to describe decoloniality. Bulhan describes this as meta colonialism on both the objective and subjective level, which is the occupation of being (Bulhan, 2015). My work is about decoloniality so that one day we can be ready for true decolonization in terms of climate responses.

Chapters and Research Questions

This dissertation presents a theory to explain these realities, termed the pathology of modernity. It also uses my personal experiences as an organizer to show how this mentality shows up in our own lives. In this dissertation, I will

1. Introduce the concept of the pathology of modernity into the sustainability field and the connections between climate change and colonization in the climate field.
2. Define the pathology of modernity and its symptoms, triggers, and drivers.
3. Explore the healing or decolonizing the pathology of modernity.

Chapter two sets the theory up for the rest of the dissertation, using a literature review. This chapter defines the pathology of modernity, its symptoms, origination from colonialism, and how it affects climate change, and briefly touches on how to heal it. The research questions we answer in paper one are: RQ1: How are climate change and colonialism linked? RQ2: What is “the pathology of modernity”? Chapter three is an autoethnography informed by grounded theory to flesh out the pathology of modernity theory through my lived experiences and how it shows up within me. Due to being informed by grounded theory, I did not start with a question. Instead, I observed how the pathology of modernity interfered with my work and its consequences in the Global South. Through an iterative process, a research question emerged: What is causing people to be inflicted by the pathology of modernity? Through my experiences as a climate researcher, practitioner, policymaker, activist, and organizer, I conclude with the scales and institutions best posed to address climate change in a decolonial way.

CHAPTER 2

THE PATHOLOGY OF MODERNITY

The latest research from the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states humans must be carbon neutral by 2030 in the hope of a livable planet for humans and many other species (I.P.C.C., 2018). The climate action taken in the Global North does not match the scale of the problem (Waugh, 2011), even though the available climate science could be our roadmap (Jacobson & Delucchi, 2009). Instead, proposed solutions that follow the science and attempt to scale up to the dramatic challenge we have, are gaslit by our society as “idealistic” “unreasonable, unfeasible, unrealistic, and a threat to our economy,” which seems to be more important than our future (Manuel-Navarrete, 2010). What causes this? What prevents us from taking action? How do we get Western society to take this collective threat to our future seriously?

To understand how we have failed to address climate change, we must look at how it all started. Carbon emissions began to rise during the first European Industrial Revolution and continued to grow during the American Industrial Revolution. These carbon emissions changed the chemistry of our atmosphere; some state this is the beginning of the Anthropocene (Albritton Jonsson, 2012). Historically, both of these industrial revolutions depended upon an extreme surplus of raw materials (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019). The West's demand for a steady supply of raw materials could not be met domestically; it was only through the colonization of the Global South that the Global North could have an industrial revolution (Whyte, 2017). The Global North came into the Global South and took resources, labor, and land for the West to develop and create capital. The looting and theft that happened during colonialism and imperialism contribute to the vulnerability these formerly colonized countries have today. These actions made the Global North most responsible and least impacted, while the South is the least responsible and most impacted (Sealey-Huggins, 2017). “Most impacted but least responsible” is often said in climate justice;

however, it is rarely rightfully attributed to colonialism (Stein, 2019). The connection between colonialism and climate change is not addressed in the climate science field. I argue that colonialism was the initial way communities began living beyond the resources that their local ecosystem provided, so we must address the source of colonialism to address climate change substantively.

I argue that the same behavior and mentality which motivated genocide and destruction during western colonization is now motivating the destruction of the planet by modernization and capitalism. Tenets of Western culture, including hyper-masculinity, cognitive dissonance, addiction to growth and consumption, supremacy culture, and narcissism, come from colonialism. I hypothesize that this pathology has created what we termed " the Pathology of Modernity" that makes us act in short-term, self-centered manners that focus on growth and immediate gain (Costanza et al., 2017), which affects our ability to care for those more vulnerable than us, including minorities and the planet. Since climate change is a collective action problem and Western culture is an individualistic society, until we change the colonial attributes listed above, we will be unable to address climate change in a manner that considers the needs of future generations and all living beings and the planet. This paper argues that the trauma of colonization goes both ways that the colonized and colonizer suffer from the trauma of colonization. The pathology of modernity is the flipside of the colonial mentality (David & Okazaki, 2006); it is a superiority complex Western society is suffering from. Both superiority and inferiority complexes are trauma to the ego, with the superiority complex requiring an inferior to feel fulfilled as the superior.

This paper will introduce the concept of the pathology of modernity, naming the symptoms of the pathology and the traits related to them. I draw evidence for this from the literature across several disciplines and diverse and decolonial authors. The pathology of modernity is a concept derived from Sarra Tekola, but in the process of decolonizing the

methodology (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019), intentionally collaborated with other diverse and different scholars to describe, synthesize and collate across disciplines the traits of each symptom of this pathology through this paper's literature review. These women and predominately femme of color scholars bring different perspectives and cultural experiences of the environment and its sustainability through the lenses of physical, social, environmental conservation, regulation, and justice. By the nature of being transdisciplinary, this research is without discipline but was intentionally placed in sustainability due to the possibilities but current gaps in the field. Sustainability is a new action-oriented and transdisciplinary field to solve wicked problems. This results-oriented field could help address systemic oppression and systems of power that create the environmental and social crises we face today. Unfortunately, currently, sustainability lacks a strong critical analysis. It rarely addresses the systems at the root cause of climate change and inequality, such as colonialism. Instead, it perpetuates the dominant social paradigm (Kilbourne et al., 2002), which is part of the pathology of modernity, further entrenching it as a tool of modernity.

Sustainability is a solution-oriented approach to research, but how does one solve systems of oppression like supremacy culture and capitalism? Sustainability researches physical problems in our environment and attempts to solve them through connecting knowledge to action. There is an increasing awareness of the limitations of technology and science (van der Leeuw, 2012). If it were simply a matter of technology to address climate change, we would have already solved this issue. However, as a tool of modernity, sustainability takes a technological approach with surface-level solutions that only temporarily mitigate harm without addressing the root cause and thus creating a level of job stability since the problem is never solved. What does solving climate change mean when we have already locked in a degree of warming? The lens of what is possible is framed through this pathological mentality, creating a positive feedback loop trapping us into the status quo, which is indeed what got us to this climate crisis in the first place.

Working in the climate science field was Tekola's first observation of the cognitive dissonance that drives modernity's pathology (Lifton, 1986; Neumann, 1990; Watkins & Shulman, 2010). The rugged individualism, desire to control and dominate, and the right to uninhibited freedom are part of what America is known for and its development based on (Austin & Phoenix, 2005; Estrada-Villalta & Adams, 2018), and these are also the core tenants of modernity's pathology. At its core is the ego autonomous from the self, driven by conquest and self-gratification (Watkins, 2000). As an organizer and activist, they have seen the pathology of modernity come up in their communities, even in those who organize against the colonial systems from which it originated. They have seen it in their motherland of Ethiopia despite their proud and rich culture - many Ethiopians desire all things Western with an implicit belief in its superiority (Bulhan, 2015). Most significantly, we see it every year in the United Nations COP climate negotiations, when the Western superpowers continue to deflect responsibility for the climate crisis and refuse to sacrifice anything for the sake of humanity's collective future. The aim has always been to stop and change the trajectory of climate change, but Tekola's research and life experiences have taken them from a focus on carbon dioxide to colonization and decoloniality as a response to climate change.

This mentality stems from colonial trauma- the guilt of the conquerors. Colonizers, those in and those who desire to be in Western society, suffer from cognitive dissonance and dissociation (Fanon, 2008; Jung, 1933; Lorenz & Watkins, 2001), creating what we call modernity's pathology. Western society is suffering from modernity's pathology, and until it is acknowledged, climate change's root causes will not be addressed. To do so would be too much of a shift in power and hierarchies for the beneficiaries of the colonizers to allow for willingly (Fanon, 2008; Freire, 1970). For these reasons, the decoloniality of Western culture is critical for a just climate future. Without that, the empire will continue building its armored lifeboat, letting the colonies drown and starve outside its fortress.

In this paper, colonialism is defined as taking resources, labor, and land from those they deem as inferior or weaker in the infinite quest for growth while simultaneously creating a self-hatred within the colonized subjects that aids in cultural homogenization. We speak specifically to Western colonialism as this is the beginning of modernity and the changing of ecosystems globally and the atmosphere (Albritton Jonsson, 2012). Our definition of modernity comes from decolonial scholar Dussel argues modernity is a European phenomenon that started in 1492. "Modernity appears when Europe affirms itself as the "center" of a World History that it inaugurates; the "periphery" that surrounds this center is consequently part of its self-definition (Dussel, 1993). This Western colonialism has evolved and adapted into many other systems, including imperialism, industrial capitalism, consumer capitalism, and now globalization.

The latest and most prevalent form of colonization is globalization (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001). Globalization is an insidious form of colonization because it seduces communities with the promise of material goods and technology. In this way, communities have the illusion of choice in their colonization instead of the traditional colonial way, where they are violently forced to assimilate (Bulhan, 2015). They throw away their culture, rich traditions, and ways of life for the western homogenization of material worship. Research has found that globalization is imposing Western culture on children in developing countries under the guise of its superiority but instead harms children's mental health (Timimi, 2005). Western cultural values of individualism, competitiveness, inequality, freedom at the expense of community and ambivalence towards children are taught in Western institutions within the Global South, including psychology, which has a bias toward only the Western model of mental illness. This has begun to weaken the social cohesion in nonwestern countries, raising the rates of psychosocial problems in the youth and undermining the local values of duty and responsibility to each other (Timimi, 2005). As more and more communities choose this path, indigenous communities who wish to remain traditional have less choice, as their ways of life become threatened (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001). The western lifestyle is an all-encompassing and consuming way of being. As more communities

worldwide adopt this way of life, it requires more land, resources, and labor to sustain it. This pushes market forces on more communities, giving them no choice but to adopt the Western market-based lifestyle, which is why we consider it a new form of colonization.

See (Fig 1.), the mentality begins and is rooted in supremacy culture; this contributes and grows powers and systems of oppression like religion, patriarchy, human and white supremacy. Patriarchy and white supremacy cause the individual to lose empathy for others, which allowed the system of oppression colonialism to exist and, in justifying its existence, created the symptom of cognitive dissonance and denial. The system of patriarchy indoctrinated into the system of colonialism and the domination of nature from human supremacy created the symptom of hyper-masculinity. The separation of humans and nature came from the system of human supremacy that objectified nature and turned it into an object allowing for the creation of materialism. Through the lens of hyper-masculinity and cognitive dissonance, these prior systems allow for capitalism to exist, which creates the symptom of addiction to growth & consumption. This addiction through the system of capitalism and materialism creates ecological consequences from consumption; humans' response to these consequences has been apathetic, which contributes to the final symptom of narcissism and individualism.



Figure 1. *How the Pathology of Modernity interacts with Systems to stop Climate and Social Justice.* The blue rectangles represent systems, the red represents symptoms of the pathology, and the green represents the traits and behaviors of the pathology.

I coined the term "the pathology of modernity" to describe the societal infliction I think is responsible for our society's inability to address our environmental problems and have a sustainable society. We have not seen this term in the literature, and, in our literature review of how colonization has affected our psyche in present-day times, it was almost entirely focused on the damaged psyche of the colonized and their complexes (Dascal, 2009; David & Okazaki, 2006; Fanon, 2008; Okazaki et al., 2008). We intentionally chose to focus on the mentality of those who colonized versus those who were colonized because we must focus on the perpetrator because they are the ones who control the power structures to change this system. The countries whose consumption makes us most responsible for climate change and environmental degradation are the countries that colonized other countries (post-Roman empire), also known as the Western countries. On top of this, it is also the Western countries who have the most influence and ability to change the global environmental trajectory we are on today due to their economic power. Thus, we choose to focus on the pathology of modernity derived from the colonizer countries rather than the colonial or colonized mentality. Although the pathology of modernity has not been named directly in the literature, we show how this phenomenon is evident across fields and disciplines with different names and concepts. **Table 1.** is a collation of the references of the pathology in other terms before this in the literature.

Pathology/ Symptom	Traits/Characteristics	Citations
Pathology of Modernity	Addiction to Growth & Consumption	(Costanza et al., 2017; Jung, 1933; Passini, 2013)
	Cognitive Dissonance	(Lorenz & Watkins, 2001; Stein, 2019)
	Narcissism & Individualism	(Cárdenas et al., 2017; Waugh, 2011)
	Hyper Masculinity	(Wonders & Danner, 2015)
	Supremacy Culture	(Srinivasan, 2014; Wynter, 2003)
Supremacy Culture	Universalization of Western Sustainability Concepts	(Chilisa, 2017; Geisinger, 1993)
	Science as a Religion	(Fang & Casadevall, 2015)
	Objectification of Nature	(Antal & Drews, 2015; Cudworth & Hobden, 2014; Leiss, 1972; White, 1967)
	White Supremacy	(Cone, 2000; Drussel, 1993; Gregory, 2020)
Hyper Masculinity	Contest Culture	(Matos et al., 2018)
	Domination & Control Complex	(Paarlberg, 2004)
	Division/Value of Labor	(Gaard, 2015; Onwutuebe, 2019)
	Violence Culture	(Downey et al., 2010; Lifton, 1986; Wonders & Danner, 2015)
	Extraction	(Daggett, 2018)
Cognitive Dissonance	Dissociation/ Splitting of the Self	(Lifton, 1986; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001)
	Ego Preservation	(Rabin, 1994)
	Conformity to Social Norms	(Bulhan, 2015)
	Dominant Social Paradigm	(Kilbourne et al., 2002; McCright & Dunlap, 2010; Norgaard, 2006)
	Pursuit of Privilege	(Heath & Gifford, 2006)
	Normalization & Non-Reflection	(Gifford, 2011)
Narcissism	Status Driven Individualism	(Cislak et al., 2018; Twenge et al., 2014)
	Lack of Sense of Community	(Chelstowski, 2012)
	Economic & Material Values & Goals	(Bergman et al., 2014; Lemaitre, 2016; Naderi & Stutton, 2014, 2015)
	Whitewashing the Transgression	(Bentley, 2017)
Addiction to Growth, Greed and Consumption	Materialistic Consumption	(Duh, 2015; Robertson, 2001; Schor, 1998)
	Exploitation of the working class	(D'Souza, 2015; Jorgenson, 2006)
	Gluttony/Overindulgence	(Cafaro, 2005; Costanza et al., 2017; Passini, 2013)
	Lack of self-actualization	(Frankl, 1984; Jung, 1933; Kasser, 2002)
	Reduced Social Cohesion	(Timimi, 2005; Werfhorst & Salverda, 2012)

Table 1. References of the Pathology throughout the Literature

2. What is the Pathology of Modernity?

So, what exactly is the pathology of modernity? Western society is suffering from colonial trauma of the "silenced knowings," which is the silence our society has around the 500 years of colonialism that we benefit from but do not speak about, "these knowings require our energy to sustain their dissociation and our numbing to evade their pain" (Lorenz & Watkins, 2001).

Operating with this mentality creates a severed self, on the psychological level, this makes us increasingly narcissistic and individualistic; it creates a removal from and "objectification of nature and others ..., isolation and loneliness, a shrinking of compassion and the consumptive frenzy occasioned by an empty self" (Lorenz & Watkins, 2001). Part of this complex arrives from the creation of the individualistic mode of selfhood, and it is in this creation, nature becomes objectified into a resource to be used for personal gain. The ego in this individualistic self strives for mastery and control, control is created through hierarchy, and the self sees all humans as competition, leaving the self isolated and lonely (Lorenz & Watkins, 2001). One manifestation of this behavior is the Western entitled behavior towards nature and belief behind Manifest Destiny. Americans often use Christianity as justification of the entitlement to natural resources, stating things like "we must drill in the Arctic for oil since God put it there for us to use, "illustrating how this type of behavior can contribute to environmental degradation.

How did one go from trading with other people from other countries to taking over their countries, murdering, raping, and stealing their entire country and its resources? More specifically, psychologically, how were they able to justify their behavior in their consciousness? In a study on Nazi doctors, (Lifton, 1986). Lifton found that the self doubles to perpetrate violence against others and not feel bad about it. "The colonizers, ...inexorably develop a distorted portrait of the colonized that explains and justifies the roles of both in the 'colonial system' as 'civilizer' and 'civilized' (Dascal, 2009). The splitting of self creates an inferior and superior; the inferior is projected onto the "other," the colonized subject, and the ego claims the superior position as their own. This allows the colonizer to create a narrative about their

superiority based on "intelligence, disciplined work ethic, logical thought, resourcefulness, scientific thinking elevating the colonial self and justifying control of the "cake" (Lorenz & Watkins, 2001). These types of justifications are found in documents from the empire during colonization. This splitting of self is also why history has been written in a skewed manner that is Eurocentric and suggests all other cultures as inferior (Grosfoguel, 2015; Orser, 2012). This also explains the lack of research on the colonizer's psyche as the splitting of self causes us to deny the reality that anything is wrong and stifles narratives that suggest otherwise. Orser said that modernity has four forces that hover over "the telling of history and the practice of research," these are colonialism, capitalism, racialization, and Eurocentrism (Orser, 2012). With the inclusion of globalization, these meta forces have created and allowed modernity's pathology to persist.

Western society has been living like it is their last day for the last 100 years, and our planet bears the consequences of our unbridled consumption, with environmental degradation, ecosystem collapse, and ever-increasing extinctions. Our economies are based on the false idea of growth forever on a finite planet, with no expectation of stopping, even though we have already passed some planetary boundaries and are consuming at a rate that will soon surpass all of them (Steffen et al., 2015). Costanza argues that our society suffers from a societal addiction "to inequitable over-consumption fueled by fossil energy and a 'growth at all costs' economic models" (Costanza et al., 2017). Some even argue that we are addicted to technology (Roszak et al., 1995) and that our belief that it will save us from our destruction could be fatal (van der Leeuw, 2012). The consequences of this mentality are great; they include "such widespread phenomena as depression, aggression and addiction (which) are not understandable unless we recognize the existential vacuum underlying them" (Frankl, 1984). The consequences also include societal problems such as climate change (Bachram, 2004), inequality (Lakner & Milanovic, 2013), and rising rates of alcoholism, depression, anxiety, and suicide (Hidaka, 2012; Hier, 2003).

The meaninglessness of life, an emptiness inside, consumerism, addiction, a numbness to the evil that allows for genocides (Costanza et al., 2017; Duh, 2015; Frankl, 1984; Jung, 1933; Lifton, 1986). This is all part of what we call the pathology of modernity. The pathology is "an ideology of separation and domination" that provides "the psychic freedom to harm nature" and those they deem as uncivilized (Geisinger, 1993). It is rooted in the need to control and dominate, vapid individualism and narcissism, entitlement, obsession with power and violence, and the belief of inferiority of "the other" (Fanon, 2008), "the other" being the poor, people of color and the Global South. This pathology was learned in modernity when Western society was colonizing the Global South or what some call "our frontier history," the West adopted these behaviors that still make up a core of our societal beliefs today (Waugh, 2011). This pathology makes Western society, in particular Americans, believe they have the right to "uninhibited freedom for individuals to emit as much carbon as they can personally afford, to buy as many things and to use as much energy as they can pay for"(Waugh, 2011). It is not for lack of belief in climate change why we have not taken action on climate (Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001), to quote President Bush in 2001 on his reason for pulling out of the landmark Kyoto Protocol "the American way of life is not negotiable" and economic growth is "the friend of the environment" (Austin & Phoenix, 2005). Any climate solution that does not address the societal roots of this issue is deemed to fail, for it is only addressing a symptom (like carbon dioxide) rather than the root cause- which is Western society's extractive, exploitative culture.

3. Symptoms

Supremacy Culture

Supremacy culture is a product of Western religion, Whiteness, science and technology, colonization, gender, and wealth. To understand supremacy culture and its constitutions, it can be defined as:

a "toxic substance... so ubiquitous that it has long been invisible to those benefiting from it and can seem desirable to those suffering from it. It manifests as white supremacy, male supremacy, ableist supremacy, straight supremacy, cis supremacy, and more - the belief that some [people] are normal, are better, are justified to take and do whatever [they] want, including harm each other and the earth" (Brown, 2020).

Western colonization normalized supremacy culture by enforcing Western societal norms and spreading the pathology of modernity. Supremacy's dominating narrative suggested that the Western way was the correct way, reinforcing the dominant social paradigm and its role in climate change (Kilbourne et al., 2002).

Supremacy culture has directly contributed to environmental and human degradation and must be dismantled by studying its origins to understand its manifestations. Modern civilizations saw themselves superior to nature and non-humans, giving them the right to exploit the environment and people "too" close to it, namely Indigenous Peoples (Cudworth & Hobden, 2014; Drussel, 1993). This gave way to the concept of human superiority, creating dualities between nature and humans, animals and humans, and civilized and "barbaric" humans (Cudworth & Hobden, 2014). As this new "standard of civilization" spread with colonization, it exacerbated the divide between humans and the environment and reinforced supremacy culture (Cudworth & Hobden, 2014; Gregory, 2020).

Western religion further perpetuated supremacy culture by embracing the notion that God created man to rule over the earth and that all of God's creations were created to serve man's purposes (Geisinger, 1993; White, 1967). Religion solidified man's domination by placing them at the top of the hierarchy, closest to God. This led to exploitation in the name of religion, causing some to call Western Judeo-Christianity the "most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen" (White, 1967). Humans' separation and domination over nature resulted in its objectification, serving authentic or meaningful relationships between the two before the rise of supremacy culture (Geisinger, 1993; Leiss, 1972; White, 1967; Wynter, 2003).

As Western religion spread via globalization and colonization, so too did Western ideologies and thought. The concepts of "development" and "sustainable development," which

are Western, suggested that is only one correct way to develop, and if nations did not conform, they were not "developed" or "civilized" (Chilisa, 2017). These terms are a product of the marriage between Western science and technology, which is the widely "accepted" approach to environmental management (Cone, 2000; Leiss, 1972; White, 1967). When this ideology is forced via academia, research, and colonization, it delegitimizes traditional knowledge, silencing diverse voices from the environmental movement (Chilisa, 2017; Cone, 2000; Geisinger, 1993; King'asia, 2018; Raju, 2018). Western societies' overreliance on science, technology, and reason hinders humans' ability to connect with nature, as seeking to understand something can lead to a loss of admiration or respect (Geisinger, 1993; Leiss, 1972). Nature then has instrumental value but no longer holds intrinsic value.

Moreover, competition within science and academia results in secrecy and loss of creativity and diversity, which can further objectify nature, resulting in environmental degradation at the hands of science (Fang & Casadevall, 2015). Increasing monetary awards embrace competition and supremacy in academia, strengthening the separation between people and nature (Chilisa, 2017; Fang & Casadevall, 2015). Science and technology allows humans to help nature, but humans have decided to control nature, perpetuating supremacy culture.

As early as the 1930s, psychologists like Carl Jung noticed that despite everything the modern man had, they still felt empty (Jung, 1933) or what Frankl calls the "existential vacuum" (Frankl, 1984). Jung discusses how "spiritually the Western world is in a precarious situation" (pg 213), "everywhere the mental state of European man shows an alarming lack of balance. We are living undeniably in a period of the greatest restlessness, nervous tension, confusion, and disorientation of outlook" (pg 231) (Jung, 1933). Jung stops short of saying that "white races in general, and occidental nations in particular, are diseased, [and] that the Western world is on the verge of collapse," but then suggests that they have evidence to back this radical claim (Jung, 1933). This unease that the modern western man carries, rooted in the emptiness of having lost

their soul and becoming dislocated from their spirituality - is how the colonizer mentality is produced.

Western religion, science, and technology, and colonization created the modern man that delegitimizes diverse voices, resulting in an adverse feedback loop that reinforces supremacy culture dominated by white Western nations' refusal and denial to address the true cause of climate change and human degradation.

Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance theory, first introduced by Festinger, suggests that inconsistency between attitudes and behavior is unpleasant for humans, and when it occurs, either attitudes or behavior must be changed to eliminate the dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Pertaining to climate change, cognitive dissonance is a reality faced by everyone due to the nature of this society. Humans, as individuals, have little control over climate change as a whole because it is a systems issue.

Cognitive dissonance can help explain climate change denial. While most people believe in climate change, they may give it a low ranking of importance relative to other aspects of life (Gifford, 2011). Even when science shows urgency, they live their lives as if they do not know or care about it (Norgaard, 2006). The true urgency of climate change requires radical structural changes and individual lifestyle sacrifices, but it is easier to change one's beliefs around climate change to alleviate the unease that not enough is being done than to take action. In interviews with Norwegian citizens, people described a sense of knowing and not knowing about climate change but not thinking about it in their daily lives. One interviewee even said that "people want to protect themselves a bit," suggesting ego preservation as a trait behind such dissonance (Norgaard, 2006).

Previously discussed dissociation and splitting of the self, along with the colonial narrative of "the other," has created a normalization of current practices based on justification of colonialism. Normalization of Western individualism, competition, and self-sufficiency is a significant trait of cognitive dissonance & denial (Lorenz & Watkins, 2001). People who are fortunate enough to have a comfortable lifestyle have the most interest in maintaining the societal status quo, revealing the pursuit of privilege as a trait behind cognitive dissonance and denial (Gifford, 2011). This can apply to larger groups, such as political organizations or even countries. Ignoring or failing to address climate change maintains dominant economic interests and perpetuates environmental inequalities (Norgaard, 2006). Powerful groups orchestrate this ignorance and inaction. For example, fueled and funded by major fossil fuel corporations, the American conservative movement has historically been a powerful force of anti-reflexivity against the environmental movement, where reflexivity is a necessary condition for resolving issues like climate change and is defined as a critical self-confrontation with the unintended or unexpected consequences of modernity's industrial capitalist order (McCright & Dunlap, 2010).

Where did this behavior come from? Western society has raped, killed, and stole for centuries to have created the wealth that protects them through colonization (Bachram, 2004; Whyte, 2017), capitalism (Austin & Phoenix, 2005), imperialism (Gonzalez, 2001), and now globalization (Siddiqui, 2008). The unearned privileges created through genocide, theft, and borders are known in Western society but hardly ever named, and it creates what Lorenz and Watkins (Lorenz & Watkins, 2001) call "silenced knowings," which manifest guilt and defensiveness. This creates further barriers when attempting to address the harm. Research shows that the absence of naming and discussing traumas, especially genocide, actually exacerbates trauma and causes it to be passed down through generations (Cox et al., 2009; Danielian, 2010). This problem will not go away until we begin to address it; it will only continue to be passed down through generations. My research works to surface the "silenced knowings" and begin the necessary work of healing and unlearning the pathology of modernity.

Hyper Masculinity

Hypermasculinity has traits of masculinity contest culture, domination, and violence. Masculinity contest culture is defined as recognized social dominance, prioritizing work above social and domestic spheres, and the need never to exhibit weakness (Matos et al., 2018). This cultural environment breeds corrosive leadership in which short-term rewards are more valuable than long-term consequences, active self-preservation is necessary, and abusive behavior is conducted. Leaders affected by this culture are concerned only with themselves and willing to sacrifice others for short-term personal gain. This is not just an interpersonal dynamic but also between countries. Economically and physically, the Global North is in a more powerful and advantageous position than the Global South: this power dynamic will only be exacerbated by the climate crisis (Casey et al., 2019; Gaard, 2015; Jorgenson, 2006) The same tendencies exhibited by hypermasculine leaders towards employees may also be displayed by the Global North towards the Global South due to masculinity contest culture. These comparisons can be drawn as political figures will neglect the climate crisis and their nations impact in hopes of short term reward, such as re-election or funds for their campaign. Short term economic gain, as it may be gained from utilizing non-renewable energy sources, leaves others-predominantly the Global south- to suffer. Their own growth and well-being sacrificed for the economic and political pleasures of a handful.

Hypermasculinity is a persistent threat found in a wide range of cultures, western society is no exception, and as a result, violence against women is also culturally present. "Mosher and Sirkin (1984) conceptualized hypermasculinity as a personality trait that predisposes men to engage in behaviors that assert physical power and dominance." (Parrott & Zeichner, 2003). This response is activated in any situation that threatens a man's masculine persona. Partaking in feminine activities or exhibiting feminines qualities is seen as a threat by those under the influence of hypermasculinity. Pro-environmental behavior and attitudes are cognitively categorized as feminine (Landry et al., 2019). Exhibiting feminine qualities or anything perceived

as less masculine is deemed threatening by those suffering from hypermasculinity. A hypermasculine culture cannot correctly address the climate crisis in which pro-environmental behaviors and attitudes are demanded. Actions that are pro-environmental threaten an established hypermasculine culture. If this hypermasculine culture were to be deconstructed, solutions that were once perceived as threatening could be then deemed acceptable.

Hypermasculine men exhibit dominating behavior such as physical and sexual aggression in order to uphold their macho personality (Parrott & Zeichner, 2003). This behavior is documented to disproportionately be inflicted against women. Females account for 70 percent of victims killed by intimate partners, this statistic remained steady since 1993 (Catalano, 2009). It is also noted that the rates of rape or sexual assault against females was 1.4 per 1000 and against males at a rate of 0.3 per 1000 (Catalano, 2009). Violence against women in the United States is a persistent and unaddressed problem. Hypermasculinity, the climate crisis, and violence against women are culturally prevalent and significantly interconnected. Women are more vulnerable to the climate crisis than men (Gaard, 2015; Onwutuebe, 2019). "Women and children are 14 times more likely to die in ecological disasters than men" (Gaard, 2015). A hypermasculine society in which violence against women is culturally ingrained cannot be reasonably expected to address a crisis in which women are the predominant victim. Black females are 4 times more likely to be killed by a boyfriend or girlfriend than White females (Catalano, 2009). Native Americans and Alaska Natives experience the highest rates of homicide and violence in the United States and Canada (Burns et al., 2020). Murder is the third leading cause of death of Native American and Alaska Native women (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018). The global climate crisis disproportionately harms women and people of color; this places women of color at the intersection. A society in which violence against Black and Indigenous women pervades, is incapable of addressing a global crisis that will first and most severely harm Black and Brown Women. Violence against women, women of color specifically, is a horrific stain on western

culture. This crisis is not an isolated issue, rather it stems from a hypermasculine culture and a belief in white superiority, symptoms of the pathology of modernity.

Addiction to Growth & Consumption

Addictive behavior to growth and consumption is primarily rooted in the following traits: capitalism, materialism, overindulgence, a diminished sense of self, reduced social cohesion and exploitation of the Global South. As climate capitalism and consumer culture continue to be a dominating force in American society, so do consumer debt, bankruptcy, and life dissatisfaction (Duh, 2015). The persistence of materialism drives a myriad of adverse socio-political and environmental outcomes that contribute to the ongoing climate crisis. As humans become increasingly greedy and materialistic, they tend to experience lower self-actualization and actively contribute to depleting natural resources for personal gratification (Duh, 2015). To fully understand why greed is embedded into ourselves and our society, it is necessary to understand the causes of greed. In the American capitalist society, as it is driven by self-interest and a quest for profits, high economic and social inequalities are created to maintain rapid economic growth (D'Souza, 2015).

The social cohesion of society is disrupted due to how inequality can magnify the differences between social stratification and the resources each household owns (Werfhorst & Salverda, 2012). These differences, along with television distortion of the average middle-class family household, contribute to some Americans treating "spending" as a social art and expending more than what is financially feasible to them to live more lavish lifestyles seen on TV (Schor, 1998). As the addiction to consumption grows, luxury symbols of products through consumption give Americans the social validation they crave. In a capitalistic society, an individual's identity can be heavily interconnected with the products they consume and the brands they support. With status-oriented purchases, consumption turns into a "self-esteem repairer" and identity constructor in times of self-doubt (Duh, 2015).

Westerners have an addiction to an excessive number of environmental vices, with even self-proclaimed environmentalists acting only when human life is in danger from the consequences of climate capitalism. Before the climate crisis started to affect vulnerable human populations, it was largely ignored by the public due to the aftermath of colonialism separating humans from their natural environment. Due to this, ecological degradation resulting from anthropogenic activity is sometimes excused on means of survival. However, depletion of natural resources is attributed to not only building new housing or increasing food supply but also maintaining the consumer culture that dominates American society today. This addiction can be attributed to greediness and gluttony, which has historically been used to describe sinful, childish, and inhuman peoples (Cafaro, 2005). Now, gluttonous behavior and overindulgence are praised as contributing to a "booming economy" and supporting rapid economic growth. Frequent consumption runs on the need for immediate pleasures over long-term interests and moral values, leading to a diminished sense of self when individuals want to consume ethically, but do not take steps to do so.

In a planet with finite resources, uncontrolled growth and free-market capitalism contribute directly to environmental degradation by exploiting the Global South. This exploitation stems from supremacy culture, where the lives of the Global South are not viewed as equally valuable to Western lives when the needs of the Global North are put forth. In our current capitalistic economy that feeds off of rapid and unsustainable consumption, linear business models are overwhelmingly upheld to achieve "infinite" economic growth on a finite, circular planet where that is simply impossible. "Upholding" this economy is only possible through the continued exploitation of the Global South because "more-developed countries externalize their consumption-based environmental costs to less-developed countries, which increase forms of environmental degradation within the latter" (Jorgenson, 2006). Through this unequal relationship, Westerners are allowed to continue practicing overindulgence and feeding into their

materialistic desires while those in the Global South suffer the environmental and economic consequences from the Western addiction to growth and consumption.

We will now look into how the system of capitalism has affected our psyche. Consumerism has not only changed our values as a culture but also given our society an addiction. Costanza (Costanza et al., 2017) describes what we have termed the pathology of modernity in a paper about societal addiction. In this paper, he states that we as a society are addicted to short term gains and unlimited growth and that "individuals pursuing their own narrow self-interests ...run afoul of these more adaptive long-term goals and can often drive themselves, and the communities of which they are a part, to less desirable ends(Costanza et al., 2017).

Passini also talks about societal addiction but more explicitly says Western society is afflicted by the "flurry of buying" or "binge-consuming" (Passini, 2013), which is also part of the colonizer mentality. Passini states that the consuming addiction afflicts not all citizens of western society but that everyone in western society is affected by consumerism since it has changed society's values and culture. Passini says consumerism's values include a greedy insatiability of desire, which is not only expected but necessary for the functioning of the socio-economic order. The insatiable desire describes what modernity's pathology has evolved into, namely the consistent dissatisfaction and continuous search for something new. This creates the emptiness described by Lorenz and Watkins (Lorenz & Watkins, 2001). The emptiness causes Western people to chase pleasures and constantly consume, attempting to fill the hole inside them (Passini, 2013). Frankl explains how "The existential vacuum is a widespread phenomenon of the twentieth century" that is described as:

"The feeling of the total and ultimate meaninglessness of their lives. They lack the awareness of a meaning worth living for. They are haunted by the experience of their inner emptiness, a void within themselves..." (Frankl, 1984)

So, they search for ways to fill the void by consuming goods and experiences (Hayase, 2014).

However, there are dangerous consequences when "the frustrated will to meaning is vicariously

compensated for by a will to power, including the most primitive form of the will to power, the will to money" (Frankl, 1984).

Narcissism

Entitlement assumed by Western civilization, tracing back as far as the first European Industrial Revolution, is the basis for the complete appropriation of the earth and its resources. The egocentric mindset and behaviors standardized by the West's efforts in creating capital have saturated the overall mentality of Western society, foraging a collective gilded perspective of the surrounding world. Unless the cognitive dissonance and dissociation that characterizes modernity's pathology are uprooted, the conceited, egotistical approach to life will forever plague Western society. This narcissism is a product of status-driven individualism, lack of sense of community, whitewashing the transgression while denying acknowledgment, and economic and material values and goals. With the rise of rampant consumerism, competitive nature has its direct effects on modern society's individualism by presenting green consumer products as a solution to the environmental crisis while refusing to acknowledge the institutional issues that have led to environmental degradation (Chelstowski, 2012). The Western's belief in self-exceptionality and the need for "decisional independence" takes priority over any analysis of harmful anthropogenic activity. This is why national narcissism is positively associated with support for anti-conservation policies and results in status-driven individualism (Cislak et al., 2018).

Economics, material values, and goods contribute directly to the negative impact of narcissism that prevents people from a) acknowledging climate change or b) acting on climate change. The Western economic system fosters individualism and narcissism by embracing the idea that everything can be bought and sold, therefore impacting consumption habits, resulting in adverse environmental and social progress (Chelstowski, 2012). Despite the belief that the current economic model can help climate change, the opposite is accurate, and only 5% of U.S.

consumers regularly engage in activities that support environmentally sustainable outcomes (Naderi & Stutton, 2015). Capitalism requires constant growth; it relies on increasing consumption (Chelstowski, 2012). Today's economic model also perpetuates the idea that material goods will lead to happiness and increased status. This creates competition in the market, increasing narcissism and individualism at the expense of a sense of community and self-actualization (Chelstowski, 2012; Lemaitre, 2016). As people put themselves in the center, they blind themselves from the consequences of consumerism that divides people from other people and nature (Bergman et al., 2014). However, researchers argue that narcissists and individualists could potentially engage in green consumerism if it is "socially lucrative" to advance social status or because green products are more expensive, signaling greater wealth than their counterparts (Naderi & Stutton, 2014, 2015). This concept is known as green narcissism (Naderi & Stutton, 2015). However, this approach may not yield behavioral change since the driver behind the action would still compete with others to climb the social hierarchy. In this sense, green narcissism could still perpetuate and contribute to modernity's pathology.

Coincident with green narcissism, another resulting trait of people being so blinded by their wants and the need to uplift their image that they overlook their wrongdoings is called "whitewashing the transgression" (Bentley, 2017). This term refers to the colonial pattern of overlooking or undermining colonial harms to retain their image as a form of ego preservation. It originates from an analysis of historical colonial apologies, which found that they typically function to elevate the position of the transgressor by allowing them to remove themselves from positions of blame, which presents the origin of apologies as a ritual based on a narcissistic desire to "cleanse settler shame and guilt" (Bentley, 2017). As the core of this action is to maintain authority, it is a direct extension of narcissism in the context of modernity. This narcissistic unwillingness of transgressors, namely corporations and the Global North, to accept responsibility is a significant constraint on addressing climate change given the nature of post-colonial system power dynamics.

5. Conclusions

PRACTICES AND PRAXIS

There are three steps for unlearning the pathology of modernity. We argue for these three categories in this order: 1) reconnecting to nature, 2) decolonizing our mind, 3) and solidarity with those whom we have harmed. We start first with reconnecting with nature; we start here because this part is spiritual. It opens our mind to new ways of thinking- thinking with our heart instead of our head. It is also a good starting point because it encourages vulnerability. This vulnerability that they will learn from nature and our interconnectedness to all organisms will help them with the next task, decolonizing the mind. Decoloniality of the mind happens in all three steps, but it is explicitly named because decolonization practices must be intentional and explicit. After having connected to nature, starting these decolonization practices gives us additional tools to check ourselves while working with communities that we have harmed, to make sure we are not perpetuating more harm, while also helping us unlearn our psychological barriers.

Starting with solidarity will not work because of the psychological barriers we have learned to put up when feeling ashamed or defensive of our colonial past. If people are brought into communities that they have harmed without doing any prior work on themselves, including working to decolonize the mind, they will likely perpetuate more harm, as we have seen many times with allies in activism. However, after they have learned to connect with nature and reconnected to their soul, and begun to decolonize their mind, they are in a better place to serve and support oppressed communities in a way that is not colonial like the savior complex. This process is iterative, is not a 3-step process that can be completed; it is continuously repeated, a lifelong process and way of being.

RECONNECTING TO NATURE

To start with, one may be wondering what does reconnecting to nature have to do with unlearning the pathology of modernity? "Simply put, one of the dominant metaphors in Western culture conceives of man and nature as separate and in opposition to one another" (Geisinger, 1993). This ideologically manifested divide has changed the way we relate to nature in a manner in which we dominate and control it and is being exported through development policies (Sachs, 1997).

Developmental agencies will hinge funding based on the requirement of adopting this divide; this has facilitated the deportation and displacement of thousands of indigenous peoples globally who still live off the land but are now forced to leave so they can enact "forest protection (Bachram, 2004). This separation comes from Western Judeo-Christian tradition, due to the creation story's existence of an "orderly, hierarchal succession, where man is created separately from the land, seas, flora, and fauna," but it is also found in Greek traditions (Geisinger, 1993). Both Western science and Greek philosophy were rooted in a teleological view that used ways of knowing to prove that there was a creator, thus rooted in science is the Judeo-Christian way of relating to nature, which is dominion.

Francis Bacon was able to remove science from its Judeo-Christian roots, suggesting it was not because of God we should dominate, control and manipulate nature, but because of human's superiority over all other organisms that we reign over nature (Sachs, 1997). "The capitalist system, in particular its inherent goal of unlimited wealth creation, reinforced the images of progress existing in Bacon's vision of scientific study. Together, these forces provided a substantial basis for a worldview that conceived of civilization in a role of active domination of nature, and that nature exists solely for the benefit of people"(Geisinger, 1993). Vandana Shiva talks about how even the term "natural resources" comes from the colonial legacy of "those parts of nature which were required as inputs for industrial production and colonial trade" and that "The white man's 'civilizing' burden was thus an essential part of developing natural resources

and making them available for commercial exploitation”(Sachs, 1997). Thus, trustworthy climate justice solutions must be rooted in removing the Western colonial, capitalist divide between humans and nature (Chakrabarty, 2009; Wynter, 2003).

To heal our separation from nature, we must reconnect with it. However, connecting with nature cannot solve the environmental crises supremacy, greed, cognitive dissonance, hyper-masculinity, and narcissism have created. Rather, we must foster meaningful connections with nature through lived experiences and education, which ideally fosters behavioral change (Antal & Drews, 2015). Education that uplifts diverse perspectives in the environmental field is essential to healing our relationship with nature. When nature is viewed as a partner, we can begin to cultivate change (Antal & Drews, 2015). Of course, other issues need to be addressed as potential solutions, as education is only one part of a complex mechanism.

The divide between humans and nature “provides the psychic freedom to harm nature” and creates a “lack of empathy and a heightened willingness to do harm” (Geisinger, 1993). Thus, the first step in ending the divide is learning how to feel again. Western society depends on our numbness to continue wars, genocides, and oppression required to keep up our standard of living. Repression of feelings has significant consequences, including creating a shadow self that will act out unconsciously on the self’s behalf (Neumann, 1990). To teach us how to reconnect ourselves, feel again and regain empathy, Joanna Macy has created what she calls despair and empowerment work (Macy, 1983). Macy has created and practiced workshops around the world to facilitate such work, and it is about creating space for people to feel the despair in society we tend to block out and helping people move through that pain to a place where they see the interconnectedness of the world and our place in the web of life. Her work is rooted in her religion, Buddhism, and uses various tactics, including meditation, group sharing and reflection, writing, dancing, theatre, and art.

The principles of her work are as follows: "1) Feelings of pain for our world are natural and healthy, 2) This pain is morbid only if denied 3)Information alone is not enough, 4)

Unblocking repressed feelings releases energy, clears the mind 5) Unblocking our pain for the world reconnects us with the larger web" (pg 22) (Macy, 1983). The last step is most important when we realize we are part of an interconnected web; this is where our despair comes from because we realize that what we have been doing to the earth, we have been doing to ourselves and that environmental degradation is self-destructive. Only then have we begun to remove the divide between humans and nature. The belief in our "interconnectedness with life and all other beings... the living web out of which our individual, separate existences have risen and in which we are interwoven" came out of Buddhism, but more recently, through "general systems theory," scientists have come to the same conclusion (Macy, 1983).

As early as the 1930s, much work suggests one way to address many Western societal and spiritual problems is through Buddhism (Jung, 1933; Macy, 1983; Suzuki et al., 1960; Watkins, 2000). Jung goes as far as to say that adopting Eastern spirituality traditions will "help to subdue the boundless lust for prey of Aryan man (Jung, 1933). Adopting meditation and mindfulness practices is part of the healing needed to unlearn this pathology and reconnect to nature, it will help us learn to be rather than have (Watkins, 2000). It is important to note that many of the Western practices of mindfulness and meditation come from Buddhism. Its also important not to essentialize Buddhism as the only way, prescribing it as a universal solution, which is part of colonialism (Grosfoguel, 2012a).

Adopting a spiritual practice that is not from one's own culture must be done in a way that does not perpetuate the behavior of the colonizer mentality. It cannot extract, exploit or culturally appropriate other people's practices but come from being invited and in relation with that community. Many new agers today, in their search for a soul, take and recreate other people's traditions and then take credit for the creation of it (like yoga), charge lots of money to teach you them and remain inaccessible to communities who have been colonized and even the communities whom they took the practices from. This is colonial; one cannot decolonize or unlearn the colonizer mentality while still actively colonizing other people's spiritual traditions,

one must be in relation and learn from those communities, and spiritual work should be profit-based.

Macy's workshops of despair work started in the 1980s during the nuclear age; the work was centered around getting people to feel the terror they were suppressing over what they thought was the impending and nearing end of the world due to the threat of a nuclear bomb (Macy, 1983). This work is still relevant because, with climate change, we are paralyzed with fear and need help in facilitating the feelings we repress. However, once we go through the despair work, we must move from feeling to doing. Macy makes this move through her work called "Active Hope," "passive hope is about waiting for external agencies" to save us, while "active hope is about becoming active participants in bringing about what we hope for" (Macy & Johnstone, 2012). Through her series of practices, she helps people move from paralysis over these significant problems plaguing the world to breaking them into small parts that make it manageable for a small collective to make a difference on them. This empowering work helps people realize, we do have agency, we can make a difference, how to have power with not over, and because of our interconnectedness to everything, we all have a responsibility to do something (Macy & Johnstone, 2012). If everyone were in small collectives of at the very least 3-6 people working to improve our ecosystem and everyone on it, the world would be such a better place.

SOLIDARITY WITH THOSE WHOM WE HAVE HARMED

Reflection, meditation, and spirituality are essential parts of the unlearning but taken in of themselves; they are not enough. Many new age spiritual people engage in the spiritual side and reconnect to nature but do nothing to be in solidarity with those they have harmed. On the other side, many activists work to be in solidarity with those they have harmed but do not connect with their spiritual side and end the divide between humans and nature. Neither is

sufficient for unlearning the colonizer mentality; they must be taken together, along with decolonizing the mind; this is the praxis. As Freire said:

“It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis”(Freire, 1970)

However, this quote also suggests that this is the role of the oppressed, and while some argue the capitalist society and corporations have colonized us all (Duran, 2006; Hayase, 2014), as Westerners, Americans also are the oppressor, for we are the group perpetuating the harm. This means the work will look a little different, but most importantly, we are in solidarity with, not for or to, we must be led by those we have harmed.

Joining movements led by the communities we have harmed is a part of decolonizing and unlearning the pathology of modernity. "Those who have enjoyed colonizing situations, often employing silencing techniques (consciously or unconsciously), need a group context where sociocultural differences are encountered"(Watkins, 2000). In other words, one cannot unlearn being only in relation with other colonizers; one must put themselves in places to hear from and listen to the communities they have harmed. Just the practice of trusting in the communities in which they believed in their inferiority for so long and blamed them for their situation helps one to unlearn this. Freire talks about how when the oppressors join with the oppressed, they bear "the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the (oppressed) people's ability to think, to want, and to know." He suggests that the oppressor:

“truly desire to transform the unjust order; but because of their background they believe that they must be the executors of the transformation. They talk about the people, but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change” (Freire, 1970)

These beliefs are critical to unlearn to engage in solidarity and liberation of the oppressed, the oppressed people are the only ones who can liberate themselves, but one must be in solidarity

and support the work they are doing. We must use our privileges to support them in how they ask us to, whether that is materially, physically, or otherwise.

DECOLONIZING OUR MIND

Solidarity and reconnecting to nature are all part of decolonization, but we must name specific practices of decolonization because the previous practices taken separately can perpetuate colonizer behavior. For example, in reconnecting to nature, (Plotkin, 2003), Plotkin created a series of practices which he claimed he created for Westerners to connect back to nature. However, it was the theft of nature-connecting, spiritual, indigenous rituals such “the sweat”, which he stole from Native Americans and repackaged as for Westerners. This type of cultural appropriation and theft of rituals is a form of active colonization. It has no place in decolonizing practices; Westerners should connect to authentic, lineage, and community-based teachings by building relationships with these communities to learn these practices. They cannot be commodified, extracted, or exploited; otherwise, one is colonizing, not decolonizing.

While the current work on decolonization rightly centers on those who have been colonized, the colonizer mentality is not working for either the colonized or the colonizer. In his book "Healing the Soul Wound," Indigenous psychologist Eduardo Duran said, "It is important to note that decolonizing does not apply only to Native people or other people of color who have been colonized. So-called mainstream Westerners also may want to decolonize from the collective consumer colonization process that has been imposed on them. Colonization processes affect human beings at a deep soul level..." (Duran, 2006). To decolonize is to open oneself up to new ways of thinking and learn more about how the old ways have harmed others. Much of this work is self-work, though pairing in small collectives to help be held accountable is important as well. In settler-colonial countries like the United States (Wolfe, 2006), the first step of decolonizing your mind must be to learn about the peoples whose land you are on, the legacies

of colonialism and how that has harmed them and learning how you can support these communities whom our presence has displaced.

Learning more about Western culture not from Westerners but from those whom Westerners have harmed can also help facilitate decoloniality. The perspective of an "outsider" can help us become aware of much of our violence and brutality that our society normalizes (Sachs, 1997). Then finally, reconnecting to one's indigeneity is crucial. Much of Western society does not have an identity outside of consumerism; doing the difficult and trying work of finding one's ancestors and traditions and reconnecting to them helps one develop an identity that cannot be so easily swayed by colonial and capitalist manipulation and rooted in one's own culture not stolen from an oppressed culture (Duran, 2006).

Western society is addicted to consumption, pleasure, growth forever, technology, and fossil fuels, to name a few (Costanza et al., 2017; Passini, 2013; Roszak et al., 1995). These addictions have caused significant harm to the planet and ourselves. Costanza (Costanza et al., 2017) suggests that our societal addictions should be handled, not unlike an individual addiction. They suggest using techniques like motivational interviewing, which helps inspire change in the addicted individual and is strength and value-focused instead of dwelling on the negative attributes of the addict. Another strategy for the community level suggested is to use community scenario planning. Envisioning the future as a collective helps people see how the vision they want in the future is not being practiced by themselves today (Costanza et al., 2017). Many of these tools are helpful in awakening people to the problem, but ultimately what is needed is a shift in consciousness, mindful consumption, and people taking personal accountability in doing their part to make a difference. Many of the practices in Zen Buddhism, such as meditation and reflection, can come in handy in helping us increase our mindfulness and realize our responsibilities to the collective (Suzuki et al., 1960).

MOVING FROM A LINEAR TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The root of unmitigated waste production by the Global North depends on linear business models under capitalism. The extraction of natural resources and raw materials for market supply, only to ultimately produce more waste to end up in landfills, is the current model that top business competitors thrive in. Instead of this "take-make-use-waste" model, the development of an entirely ethical, circular economy is one way to mitigate waste production while increasing the lifespan of raw materials. This means not only recycling but reusing, repairing, returning, and essentially any form of repurposing that will reduce the need for future input of raw material. [Climate] Capitalism has also manipulated the movement towards building a fully circular economy by presenting sustainable development as short-term, additive solutions rather than absolute. The commitment to move towards a circular economy is impossible as long as national narcissism and addiction to consumption exist. When the narrative shifts from "responsible consumption" to "reduce consumption," we can make progress towards addressing these societal addictions. The reliance on consumption to improve one's self actualizations and materialistic desires is a barrier to developing a fully circular economy, which requires minimal consumption and deviating from wasteful behavior.

Degrowth is another practice, or rather movement to join. Degrowth is not one specific practice or process; instead, it is a banner that invites us to a path forward for "an equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions" (Paulson, 2017). Though it has not one specific manual or guide, it does have principles such as: "ideas of degrowth provoke us to ask how imperatives and mechanisms of growth impact specific political ecologies (meaning evaluating how our growth hurts the Global South), ideals of degrowth call us to shift value and desire away from productivist achievements and consumption-based identities toward visions of good life variously characterized by health, harmony, pleasure, and vitality among humans and ecosystems" and "live degrowth as a multi-sited, multilingual and multiform network"(Paulson, 2017). This is critical so that this ideology

does not force its way and colonize others (Grosfoguel, 2012b). Degrowth looks like transition towns and community gardens; it looks like neighborhood community building and localization. Specifically, localization can play a considerable role in degrowth and decolonizing. Shopping local and at farmers markets should be seen as a political act, a form of resistance against globalization (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001).

Our current global food system relies on the oppression of the Global South. Crops like chocolate, coffee, bananas, and pineapples, to name a few, are products most Westerners consume daily. However, these crops are owned by multinational corporations who steal land through land grabs in the Global South and enslave the native populations to do the labor (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001; Gonzalez, 2001; Siddiqui, 2008). This capitalist system ensures that the producers are hidden from the consumers so that the consumers are never made aware of the oppression their daily breakfast is causing (Gonzalez, 2001). Creating a political intention to wean ourselves off of these crops and get to a point where we know the name of the people who grow all of our food is a critical junction in unlearning the colonizer mentality.

Frankl is the creator of logotherapy, a therapy that helps patients find the meaning of life. In his book named exactly that "Man's search for Meaning," he argues "logotherapy sees in responsibility the very essence of human existence" (Frankl, 1984). He suggests that though this responsibility will add tension, this tension is what gives meaning to life. Perhaps this is why Westerners feel so empty inside; the empires we reside in have removed all responsibility for our privileges. "The North's resource-intensive, consumption-oriented lifestyle is the primary cause of global environmental degradation" (Gonzalez, 2001), and yet the only solutions to climate change rest upon the idea that "consumers need not change their lifestyle" (Bachram, 2004). Our system blames the Global South for the environmental degradation, citing that their populations are growing too fast and that they are cutting down too many trees (Bachram, 2004; Lyon, 1977). True decolonization must work to unlearn the Global North and South divide; it must forge relationships of solidarity with those in the South and become a traitor to the North, asserting our

allegiance to the oppressed, not to our nationality or other colonial divides. The theft of resources for 500 years from the Global South to the Global North has left major chasms in material, infrastructure, and financial resources (Gonzalez, 2001; Jorgenson, 2006; Siddiqui, 2008).

Decolonial climate justice solutions must include reparations from the North to the South because this is a large part of the harm that is still felt today and makes the South more vulnerable to climate change. Reparations could be facilitated in various ways, including gifting the South the technology to transition to renewables, paying for and building climate adaptation infrastructure with no strings attached or required contributions to the U.N.'s Green Climate Fund. Individually, this can also be done by making relationships with people in the South on the frontlines and helping to transfer to them the resources they need. These are not to be seen as acts of charity to "help save the poor Africans" that mentality is still rooted in the colonial inferiority complex. Rather, this is Westerners fulfilling their responsibility as colonizers and working towards healing the colonial trauma. In fulfilling their responsibility, it will add meaning to Westerners' life, and by facilitating the transfer of resources, it will aid in the undoing of the Global North and South divide.

CONCLUSION

The Pathology of Modernity has affected all facets of our life, the psychological, societal, and political. Thus, the practices and praxis to unlearn it must be just as holistic as the problem. Practices must address the spiritual, the psyche, our relationships to others, to nature, it must include action on the political side and work on the internal side. Like many indigenous practices, this practice is cyclic; one does not just complete the three steps and then become decolonized. It is a lifelong process; one repeats it indefinitely. It is a way of being, with the earth, with others, and with one's soul.

CHAPTER 3

HOW I WENT FROM FIGHTING CO2 TO FIGHTING COLONIZATION: EXAMINING THE PATHOLOGY OF MODERNITY IN MY OWN LIFE

Climate change cannot be solved with CO2 capture or reduction - we have to address the power structures that cause CO2 to be combusted.

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 2 was to set the theoretical foundation and framework, by introducing the term “the pathology of modernity”. Even after that foundation was set, “the pathology of modernity” is still an elusive concept. To further flesh out the concept of the pathology of modernity, this Chapter focuses on the traits and characteristics of modernity's pathology. This was accomplished by drawing on my real-world experiences as a community organizer and activist. Drawing on methods of autoethnography, decoloniality, and grounded theory, I have documented and analyzed the activism I am engaged in through my own lens. Experiences I have had as an organizer were reflected upon and analyzed as case studies highlighting different characteristics of the pathology of modernity. One of the intentions of this paper is to be able to examine the pathology of modernity from different angles such as: how it shows up in our community, what it looks like within ourselves, how its emergence within ourselves actually prevents us from challenging oppression, and what triggers our inner colonizer to come out. Furthermore, the paper intends to ground the theoretical to the lived experience, exploring how the pathology of modernity impacts our day-to-day behavior and interactions contributing to and creating the society we live in.

One of the challenges of trying to bring a critique to Western society, while living, studying and doing research within it, is that it is akin to a fish trying to describe water to another fish. Many of the traits of the pathology of modernity are Western traits that we glorify such as individualism, consumerism, intellectualism, privatization, and US imperialism. It is

difficult to explain the faults of this type of thinking, while in the belly of the beast. There was a need to observe these phenomena from an outside perspective - this is not something I am able to do because despite my critiques I am still the product of this Western society. I am not a complete outsider that has not been immersed within this system. To get that perspective I drew on my experiences and journeys to Ethiopia, Mexico, the Philippines, Puerto Rico and South Africa. Learning from communities in the Global South was also a part of my decolonial methodology. It was recognizing that the people Western society considers "undeveloped" are actually further developed socially, emotionally and psychologically than our sick society - the "developed one". Their insight can help us in Western society to see ourselves in a way that we cannot do alone. It recognizes our mutuality, and their wisdom gained from a life non-westernized.

Research Questions

In true grounded theory fashion, I did not begin with a research question, but a curiosity on a social phenomenon and a desire to explain it in the social location I occupy. I observed the situations where the pathology of modernity became apparent and impacted our ability to conduct the work we do around social justice and social change. Through my observations I documented the ways in which it impacted the willingness for climate action. I learned of the ways in which the Global South is impacted from the consequences of this phenomenon. Through an iterative process, a research question emerged: What is causing people to be inflicted with the pathology of modernity?

Methodology and Methods

My theoretical perspective is informed by decolonizing theory (Alonso Bejarano et al., 2019; Denzin et al., 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019; Smith, 2012), and thus intentionally diversified from the field in which I am situated and academia in general. I used mixed methods, drawing

upon autoethnography, lived experience, grounded theory, somatic experiential learning (Holland, 2004) and literature reviews. I used autoethnography; meaning I journaled and wrote reflection pieces, most preferably after an event happened. I focused on my experiences as an activist, organizer and traveler.

I chose autoethnography (Alonso Bejarano et al., 2019; Denzin et al., 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019; Smith, 2012) specifically as a decolonial way of rejecting the positivist academic doctrine of objectivity and neutrality. To be neutral in the face of injustice is to be complicit. So, I am not neutral nor do I claim to be in this work. I am passionate about activism and social justice issues. This does not make me biased as the western academy claims. Using autoethnography was in line with the overall decolonizing methodology. In addition, ethnography as a method would not make sense because of the way it is detached from the communities it studies. Ethnography employed by anthropologists was used by colonizers to study the natives and learn how to dominate them. With my research I am not a colonizer studying some foreign outsider, I am studying and learning from my own experiences, in my own activism that in many cases I am actually leading (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). Trying to study the community in which I am immersed, living as an active participant and not as an observer brings up many complications and ethical issues that I am prepared to honestly and transparently engage with. One of the ways I am doing this is by using auto ethnography as opposed to ethnography because it provides space for honest reflection about the level that I influence as a leader in the organization I am studying.

My methods were also informed by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2010; Noble & Mitchell, 2016; Priya, 2013). I chose it because I see it as a decolonial methodology as it rejects positivism and makes researchers adopt a humble position. Researchers cannot bring their assumptions and preconceptions, they cannot begin to make conjectures until they observe and learn from the community or social phenomena that they are studying. Finally, grounded theory

is decolonial in that it rejects the Western logic and the paradigm of deductive reasoning by using an inductive abductive reasoning (Raju, 2018).

Data Analysis

I used the process of grounded theory to analyze my data and work toward theoretical saturation, though given the limitations of time I did not reach true theoretical saturation. Grounded theory is a method often used “to understand the basic social processes that underlie a phenomenon in socially or experientially relevant domains of human life” (Priya, 2013). Thus, grounded theory was best suited to allow me to describe and document the social phenomenon that I am calling “the pathology of modernity”. Grounded theory is most often used in social sciences, especially in psychology and generates theory from the data collected, unlike traditional sciences which create a hypothesis beforehand and tests it out by collecting data. There are many different ways and schools of thought in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2010; Priya, 2013). However, some similarities exist throughout them all including: memo writing, theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation.

One of the things that appealed to me about grounded theory is that it is an iterative process. For example, my motivation to understand “the pathology of modernity” led me to begin observing it in my own work and life, which informed my research questions. I was bound by the constraints of my PhD program, where I spent six years gathering data. So this was not true grounded theory, it was just informed by grounded theory, as I did not have enough time to reach theoretical saturation. However, I did draw from my experiences of being an organizer since 2012, as well as my whole life. Although, one of the limitations of recollecting the past is that some of my experiences were recalled long after they happened. Thus, there certainly was a possibility of remembering instances differently.

Significance of the study

The most significant thing about this work is that, since the pathology of modernity is a concept I created, this type of exploration and analysis of it has never been done. In other words, this study draws on the theoretical foundation in Chapter 2 by grounding it in real-life situations. The theory provides the foundation to observe the phenomenon in practice, while examining my hypothesis that the pathology of modernity is affecting the ability for us to address climate change.

Intended Outcomes

With grounded theory I was trying to not be too connected to an outcome, as that goes against the method. The point is to be open to go where your research and insights from the data takes you. However, my intention for this study is to make the pathology of modernity, the social phenomenon more clearly defined. I also hoped to show how the pathology of modernity is within us all, including myself, and to be able to determine what triggers it to show up in situations. I was also curious to find out how communities in the Global South are impacted by this phenomenon and their perspective on Western society in general.

Findings

Autoethnography is an important method for sustainability, especially in regard to climate change. Living in a fossil fuel-based culture and being a sustainability academic, you are basically required to use fossil fuel, whether it's to attend conferences or going out to do field work. Autoethnography gives us the capacity to face our own hypocrisy, which due to modernity it is often normalized, numbed and ignored, by acknowledging it helps others to acknowledge it and to begin to confront the hypocrisies and take action. Like my own journey that I went on

during this autoethnography, there needs to be an ongoing self-interrogation in sustainability, because if our discipline is truly aiming to address these "wicked problems" like climate change then the future of society depends upon our self-interrogation ensuring that we are on the right path. Finally, through this method we do not just commit to sustainable practices but have the self-reflection to incorporate sustainability in our own ways of living.

I struggled with how to present my autoethnography, as it turned out to be 145 pages (see appendix, pg. 86), not wanting to do a timeline as I wanted to continue to embody the principles of decoloniality I searched for something less Western and linear, indigeneity is so often focused on North America so I intentionally looked for an Indigenous concept to frame my work from Africa.

This is the Dagara Medicine Wheel, it represents the 5 elements of nature and its foundational to the indigenous Dagara cosmology, a people from Burkina Faso (Somé, 1999). I organized sections of my autoethnography based on the element they represent on this wheel.

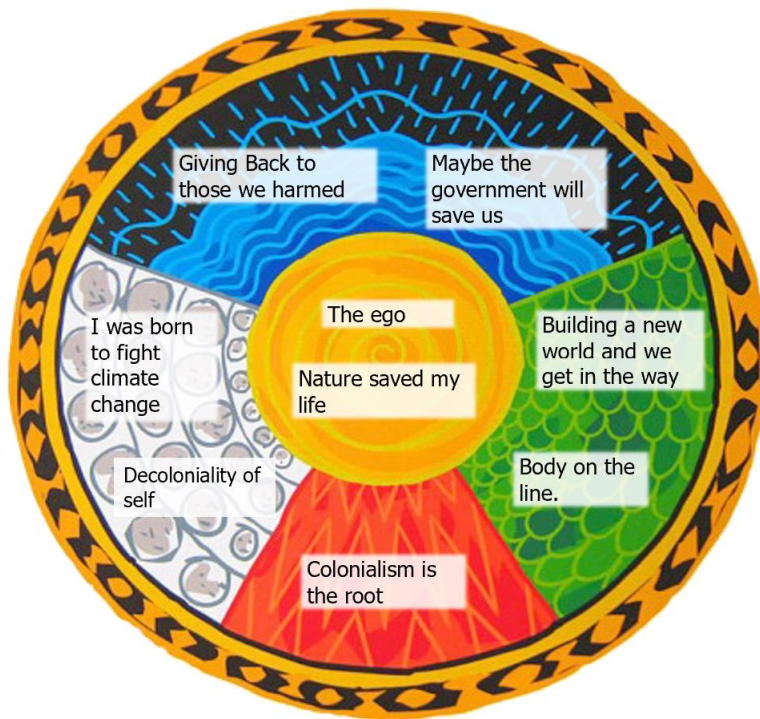


Figure 2. The Dagara Medicine Wheel, it represents the five elements of nature and foundational to the indigenous Dagara cosmology.

The first element of the cosmological wheel is fire, its pictured here as red, it opens the gateway to the world of our ancestors and consumes anything between us and our purpose. What opened this gateway and regrounded me to my purpose was figuring out how colonialism was the root cause of climate change. The second element is water, its pictured here as blue it brings cleansing, reconciliation, purification and peacemaking. My service work to the communities we harmed helped to cleanse me. More, learning the government wont save me was a reconciliation between what I thought I was doing and what I needed to be doing. The next element is earth, pictured here as yellow, it is our true home and regrounds us, it is where we come from and return to. My story starts here, with my connection to nature and it ends here, as I recognize my ego. The next element is mineral, pictured here in grey, it invites us to remember who we are and why we are here. I came into this when I realized my purpose to fight climate change, and then again when I delved into the work of decoloniality. Finally, the last element is nature, pictured here in green, it asks us to be open to transformation to realize our purpose. I came into this when I put my body on the line as a direct-action activist, as well as when we worked to build a new world and yet we got in the way.

So regrounding ourselves in the earth element- we start with nature saved my life. I was raised nontraditionally, my homeschooled upbringing allowed me to study that which I was interested in, and from the start had a deep connection to nature and wildlife and wetlands. In middle school, I had a rough transition to public school and experienced a lot of racism. These experiences caused me to forget my purpose and by 17 I was in a very dark and self-destructive place and was looking for an early exit from earth, but it was returning to the wetland that I grew up in, and I met a man who offered me a job in restoration ecology. It was here I was reminded of my purpose and the work I wanted to do for the rest of my life. "In doing restoration ecology I restored myself. By planting trees, I planted new roots to myself. I felt a paradigm shift, I would no longer let other people determine my destiny. I was coming to an understanding of my worth. My life was too valuable because now I had a calling, which was to

save the planet to repay her the favor of saving my life. This was my passion and purpose all along" (Appendix, pg 93) This was the first time I experienced the healing powers of removing the divide between humans and nature by accepting that nature was the one who saved me, which is one of the ways I suggest in chapter two to heal the Pathology of Modernity.

Returning to the mineral element- I found my purpose, now I needed to find my lane. I interned 13 different environmental nonprofits as an undergraduate. Initially, I specialized in wildlife, but I looked for the bigger picture. I found it with climate change. "Helping to stop climate change is how I could repay the favor to nature for saving my life. I started to realize nothing else mattered, not even my education because what is the point of getting an education if there is no future for humanity for me to use it on? The more I learned about climate change the more I felt the urgency to combat it." (Appendix, pg. 105) I found out that my own father was a climate refugee, it was the famine that caused the political instability that he fled from. And then I knew I was born to fight climate change, wanting to right the wrongs that displaced my father and my entire country in Ethiopia.

Given that climate change was caused by greenhouse gasses, I naively believed this problem could only be solved by science. Not just any science but physical, positivist data-oriented science. Studying as a physical scientist made me feel superior to everyone else. What I did not realize at the time was how the supremacy culture I was embodying through my belief in physical sciences superiority, was a symptom of the pathology of modernity, thus I was perpetuating what I was trying to combat.

The water element represents my reconciliation, that caused me to change fields multiple times. I conducted research at seven different labs in the physical sciences, the most important one to me was at NOAA. This project was on pteropods, tiny snail zooplankton that made up the bottom of the food chain. They were starting to dissolve in the current state of the acidifying ocean. This could cause a trophic cascade that would destroy the whole ocean. But NOAA couldn't do anything, we would write another report sounding the alarm and begging

Congress to take action. If scientists weren't going to stop climate change looks like I have to move to politics.

So, I got an internship with EPA, but I quickly learned EPA was more interested in not being sued by the oil industry than making a difference. "EPA and NOAA were my dream jobs when I started college but at this point, I decided the Federal government was part of the problem of why climate action was not being taken. I lost faith in their ability to protect the planet like their supposed mission was." (Appendix, pg. 115) I was not able to give up on governments completely, until I tried smaller government. My next job was as a legislative aide for a Seattle City Councilmember. I was given a lot of freedom to write policy, however with any policy that would actually interrupt the fossil fuel status quo, always involved more powerful stakeholders than even the government and made it impossible to get anything passed. It was here I observed the cognitive dissonance our government has to protect our addiction to growth and consumption. From federal to the city level- so many excuses were given to why the economy was more important than our ecology.

The nature element represents being open to transformation and putting my body on the line transformed my beliefs on how change happened. Science and government were not reflecting the urgency of the climate crisis. Climate Activism on the other hand, specialized in that. Through a coordinated struggle for three years at Divest UW, we were able to divest 200 million out of coal and 15 million into renewable energy. Simultaneously, I got involved in the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013, and through this developed my racial analysis and began to work more closely with Indigenous peoples against fossil fuel infrastructure. I went from protesting to direct action. During this time, I learned "Change did not happen at negotiation tables. The only reason we got to the negotiation table was because of direct action. Whether through protest, rallying the community to comment at public hearings or media spectacle, change happened when we no longer asked nicely and were willing to confront and call out the resistance to change and put our body on the line to change it." (Appendix, pg. 121) Through my

climate direct action I began to learn the importance of intersectionality, as too often these spaces were all white and despite good intention embedded with racism. This is when I joined with some friends to create Women of Color Speak Out, to address racism in the environmental movement and show how until systems of oppression were addressed, climate change would not be. This guided me to see the pathology of modernity.

The fire element connects us to our ancestors, & my ancestors have a long history of resisting colonialism. After learning the limitations of the physical sciences, I moved to the social sciences, initially studying communicating climate change to conservatives. I focused on them because I saw them as our biggest obstacle. But then I learned that conservatives, in particular white men and western countries, deny climate change due not because they do not understand but because they see taking responsibility for climate change as a potential threat to their current position, and when you are on top, you have nowhere to go but below. Modernity's inaction on climate was related to a protection of the colonial order. The Global South has the answers, because they are the ones who have the most to gain from a change to this current world order for climate justice. I traveled to Ethiopia, the Philipines, South Africa and the Zapatistas in Mexico.

We in the West believe we are better than developing countries. But I will never forget what a Zapatista told me about how they feel sorry for us, they hope one day we can experience the freedom they have, where we can own our land, labor and time and have no debt.

My travels also helped me to see the unequal ecological exchange that Western wealth is predicated on. This is only accepted because of supremacy culture. All our abundance comes from their poverty, ending this continued colonial theft from the Global South to the North would address climate change at a scale that is needed to stop the crisis. However, those in power are not interested in this type of global material and wealth transfer, even if it would address our ecological crisis. "To have traveled around the world and seen the oppression that a bouquet of flowers, a cup of coffee or a pineapple has on people in the Global South and the lands that they

live on, is a reminder of the violence my existence causes as an American consumer.” (Appendix, pg. 146)

Returning to the nature element, I had another personal transformation when I found that I was one of the greatest obstacles to creating the world we want to see. As I continued my racial and climate justice activism, I found that our work was really about creating the world we wanted to see free from these systems oppression like colonialism, capitalism and the carceral system. And yet I found we who dream of a better world were also the ones who were the biggest obstacles to the world we wanted, it was like we were building a promise land we did not deserve to be in, because we were too tainted from the systems we were trying to get away from. One of the biggest challenges was learning that urgency is part of white supremacy culture. With my focus on climate change where according to the IPCC we have until 2030 to peak carbon emissions, urgency was one of my main drivers, it was why I went from physical sciences to the government to activism- we needed to act now.

“This is fast culture, fast food, fast fashion- excess beyond abundance. It is extractive and relies on the theft of other people's resources. It is what is causing climate change, and it's why urgency is part of white supremacy culture, and I don't know how to get out of it while I am in it. We have eight years left to peak carbon emissions, so white supremacy culture is urgency, but white supremacy is urgently killing us. The colonizer doesn't sleep, so neither should we, right? But we can't win fighting like them? How do we resolve this contradiction?” (Appendix, pg. 179) It was here I began to realize that the pathology of modernity was in us all, even those of us who are consciousness or woke, those who are marginalized, all of us embody this pathology that we were fighting against.

The mineral element reminds us of who we are and where we came from, and this was what the process of decolonizing myself was about. I did this through four sites of study or organizing homes, all of which while making material differences to communities I worked in.

I cofounded and organized against state violence and racism in Black Lives Matter Phoenix Metro throughout which I pushed to hold a collective leadership structure. I fought for resources for minorities at ASU, by starting and winning a campaign for a multicultural center, which also became a healing of the colonial internalized inferiority complex. Finally, I worked to build an intersectional environmental movement here in Phoenix, it had many iterations, but it currently is the Phoenix Environmental Justice Coalition, working to ensure that directly impacted people of color led this work. It was the environmental work that was hardest for me to maintain, as I was starting to lose hope in our future. I questioned whether I should still lead environmental work if I was doubting our ability to win. "We are depressed because the wildfires burn us too. We are depressed because the hurricanes drown us in sadness. We feel and share the pain of the dying earth. The climate grief and eco depression can be paralyzing, but I know what makes me feel better is what makes the earth better. When I work on things I can do for her, I feel better about the situation, again returning to our interconnectedness. How can I feel the pain of the dying earth and not let it paralyze me from doing the work?" (Appendix, pg. 188)

The water element facilitates purification and cleansing, as does giving back to those we have harmed. As I explored how to heal from this pathology of modernity, I felt that one way to remove the cognitive dissonance that comes from the guilt of our consumption, was giving back to those who we have harmed through our consumption. This is what led me to developing a long term close relationship to a resistance community in Black Mesa in the Navajo Nation after learning that our power in Phoenix was (at the time) coming from a coal fired powerplant, coal that these communities were harmed by. This was a community on the other side of my comfort and privilege, the fact that we have reliable source of power and water in the heart of the desert in Phoenix is only because we take those resources from somewhere else. Capitalism often obscures the communities on the other side of our consumption, connecting with them felt like an important part of decolonizing our water cycle, as our wealth was predicated on their misery.

I was curious about where the motivation to do this came from, and whether I was doing it for the right reasons, I explored it further as I did volunteer work in Puerto Rico, helping a community recover from the hurricane that was inadvertently caused by the climate crisis whom we as Americans have the most responsibility for. What I learned regarding motivation for this work is that "It is as much for ourselves as it is for them. This is a reciprocal relationship. Even if we may give physically or materially, when we give back to the communities which we have harmed through our society we get in return something spiritual. It is a reduction of the misalignment of our values and beliefs, it is a calming of our guilt that comes from having privileges, it is the reduction of the dissociation that comes from not wanting to be a bad person but living in a society that causes you to kill violently every day." (Appendix, pg. 204)

Returning home to the earth element was a reckoning with my ego. As I went to finish my dissertation I hit a major writers block. I could not figure out what to end it with, I did not have any conclusion and I could not write anymore. It took a viral moment, 2 car crashes in two weeks and a meditative retreat to understand that my block was my ego. Since 2020 I was a leader in multiple spaces and we were having results! It had gone to my head I started feeling morally superior and not moving collectively. So of course, I am stuck! I am trying to write a paper on decolonization but have internalized one of the traits of the pathology of modernity-narcissism. I was stuck because my ego wouldn't let me see my flaws and where I went wrong. If I am organizing like a corporation, with urgency and prioritizing productivity, I am organizing towards capitalism. In moving fast, we leave our community behind and go back into our preprogramming, the status quo. Decolonization will never be the default. It takes daily and constant unlearning. "Sustainability starts first with the self, internally. Before you can "save the planet," you have to heal yourself. We must embody what we are trying to see in the world. Here I am as an activist, fighting for justice and a sustainable planet, and yet in no way was I modeling it. Working over sixty hours, I ran myself into the ground exploiting and extracting

myself in an attempt to stop the same fate from happening to the earth. In fighting against this exploitative capitalist system, I replicated it.” (Appendix, pg. 220).

So, what does this have to do with society and sustainability? Well, there are many parallels here. With the campaign for a multicultural center, I attempted to do the impossible, create a decolonial space in a white supremacist institution. I took it upon myself to be a hero and enforce a safe space in a place that could never be safe. Once I went viral and the university joined the fight against me, instead of trying to go the easy route and appease the university I fought back and brought the community together to take up this fight- but I had lost sight of the goal- which was to garner resources for the community. This is similar to the field of sustainability which also has a laudable goal which is to make western society sustainable but it is near impossible to do so without addressing capitalism or colonialism, so it continues forward serving to mainly greenwash, missing its main objective of tackling wicked problems. Through its creation of additional chains of production and gatherings, sustainability has ultimately just created an excuse to consume more. And this is the importance of reflexivity in the field of sustainability. We need to be more attuned to our failures, this is a method of self-correcting. In order to cure this pathology of modernity we have to put the personal back into our work. Decoloniality is going to be messy, we are not approaching it from an objective positivist, linear end, we are contending with the uncertainty. Destabilizing this notion of there being a clear universal path, we must be willing to try new things and use different ways of knowing, as the current status quo is what got us to this point.

CHAPTER 4

IN CONCLUSION

When I set out on my dissertation and started drawing the connections to climate change and colonization, I knew I was onto something, but it was important not just to be theory-focused. So, what if colonization and climate change are interrelated? What does that change about the material conditions? How does this change how we relate and address climate change? The praxis is as critical as the theory - too often, academics only write about problems they feel intellectually but do not offer any solutions. Nor do they engage as practitioners of the issue, despite being named the experts. That was not the type of academic I wanted to be. My dissertation needed to be helpful to the larger community, not just a collection of writings no one ever reads.

Initially, my dissertation was structured such that the first paper was focused on the theory - this is where I fleshed out the pathology of modernity. The second paper would be an autoethnography drawing upon my lived experiences, and the third paper would be on a class focused on decolonization practices. The last paper would include going up to Black Mesa to do a community project. The course was supposed to occur in 2020, but the pandemic hits and classes go online. It becomes unethical to bring students to the Navajo Nation, as the Navajo Nation was hit hardest.

I pivoted my plans and decided to draw out the autoethnography, and I could fit in the decolonization work later. Somewhere along the way on my journey as an activist, I got so focused on the output, on doing, and reacting that I forgot to do the self-work - the internal decolonization work. I intellectually theorized about decoloniality, but I no longer worked on it personally and internally. I got so focused on "doing the work" for social justice that it became more about the productivity of outputs than it was about intentionality and how we did the work.

The pathology of modernity is a societal illness embedded into that which is Western culture. All of us who live and participate in Western society are products of this society and thus

are inflicted by this societal illness, even those who are forced to the margins. Even those of us whom Western society was built off our backs or on our land. If we now participate in capitalism, academia, and/or the myth of upward mobility for survival, we will reflect tenants of this pathology. More contagious than COVID19, living in Western society will give you the pathology of modernity because surviving in this individualistic, extractive, self-serving culture requires adherence to the symptoms that make up this mentality. This dissertation has laid out the pathology of modernity and observed it in my own life. Before concluding, it was important for me to name the sickness and begin to touch on what the medicine for the pathology is.

In short, the medicine is to decolonize, but it requires deep societal and structural change. I have only seen this type of work possible on the local scale because universalism is a tenant of modernity and assimilation. Thus, the medicine must be tailored on a highly local scale. Ecologically, this allows us to address climate change in a specific way based on the particular ecosystem we reside in. On a more decolonial level, we need to tend to the land by reattuning to its ecology. To heal from the colonial trauma that separated humans from nature, we must reconnect to the land we live on and the peoples whose land we are on. The call for “land back” from Indigenous communities is a call for reconnection to the land through Indigenous stewardship since to decolonize means we cannot own land. Societally, a focus on the local also allows us to tailor interventions based on the culture of the communities we are situated in. Socially, the hyper-local scales down to the individual. We must address our egos, the inner local, and where much of our unconscious programming is driven from.

Decolonization is inherently about the ego (see Figure 2). I realized I had come full circle when I returned to the diagram, I had drawn in the first year of my doctorate, the precursor to Modernity’s Pathology. I suggested ego as the challenge all challenges stem from even back then. Six years later, I confirm that to be the case through my own experience of having my ego run amok. Now to be specific when I say ego, in the Freudian sense it’s really the id. Freud described the formation of the personality as id, ego and super ego (Freud, 1989). The id is the

primal instinct that helps to keep us alive, it is important for self-protection but also is completely guided by pleasure. The id is the horse and ego are seen as the driver of the horse, it provides the guidance. The superego is the moral driver of the three.

With the pathology of modernity, many of the traits are due to the id being in control, the "bigger better faster more" energy drives the colonial theft of land and killing of people. In Freudian terms, it is the id that is in control with the pathology of modernity. Colonization and capitalism are driven by the primitive, aggressive, undeveloped behaviors that make up the id. The ego is not a bad thing, the issue is when the ego is out of balance between its superego and the id. This is also the traditional western perspective of ego, it is aimed towards rationalism, enlightenment philosophy and Puritan ethics (Suzuki et al., 1960), it is a framework that is built with the building blocks of the pathology of modernity. It represents the western duality and creates divisions between self and the collective.

In contrast, in many Eastern ways of thinking ego is more about "making the unconscious conscious (which) transforms the mere idea of the universality of man into the living experience of this universality" (pg 107) "Zen in its essence is the art of seeing into the nature of one's being"(pg 114) (Suzuki et al., 1960). African philosophy also critiques "the Cartesian paradigm, which deattaches the observer, splitting psyche and world, foisting abstract categories onto experience" (Mills, 2006). In nonwestern thought, the issue with ego is the divide of self away from the collective.

Climate change is only a symptom of a more extensive system that is not working. Globalization is the latest colonial system that has wreaked havoc on people and the planet (Siddiqui, 2008). Globalization, capitalism, colonialism, and consumerism have one thing in common, they are driven by individualism and patriarchy (Orser, 2012). Consumerism requires narcissism to sustain itself, for people to be more concerned with themselves than the future of society and the planet (Bergman et al., 2014; Cislak et al., 2018; Naderi & Stutton, 2015). Private property and privatization, which are fundamental tenets of capitalism, are also driven by

individualism and patriarchy. The first private property was women (Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1982). Colonialism is driven by greed (individualism) and domination and control (patriarchy)(Cafaro, 2005; Geisinger, 1993). Globalization is just a remarketing and expansion of capitalism and colonialism. Globalization repackages colonialism under the guise of development and progress (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001). This way, Indigenous peoples give up their ways of being to adopt Western assimilation with the promise of a higher standard of living (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001). However, despite technological advances, it is the richest, most “developed” nations with the highest rates of depression, anxiety, and despair (Hidaka, 2012; Hier, 2003). Driving all these forces is ego, which whispers in your ear and tells you you need to work harder, go faster, buy that thing, own that person, take their land, and spread this mentality globally. At the root of changing everything, we have to change ourselves. We have to change our inner voice and address the incongruencies in our life rather than denying them and numbing ourselves.

I want to say after, but it is never after. There is no end to this medicine. Decolonizing is similar to reaching nirvana. It is a lifelong process. You must stay the course and constantly check yourself, check in with your values, and ensure you stay in alignment because even lifelong activists like myself can get off track.

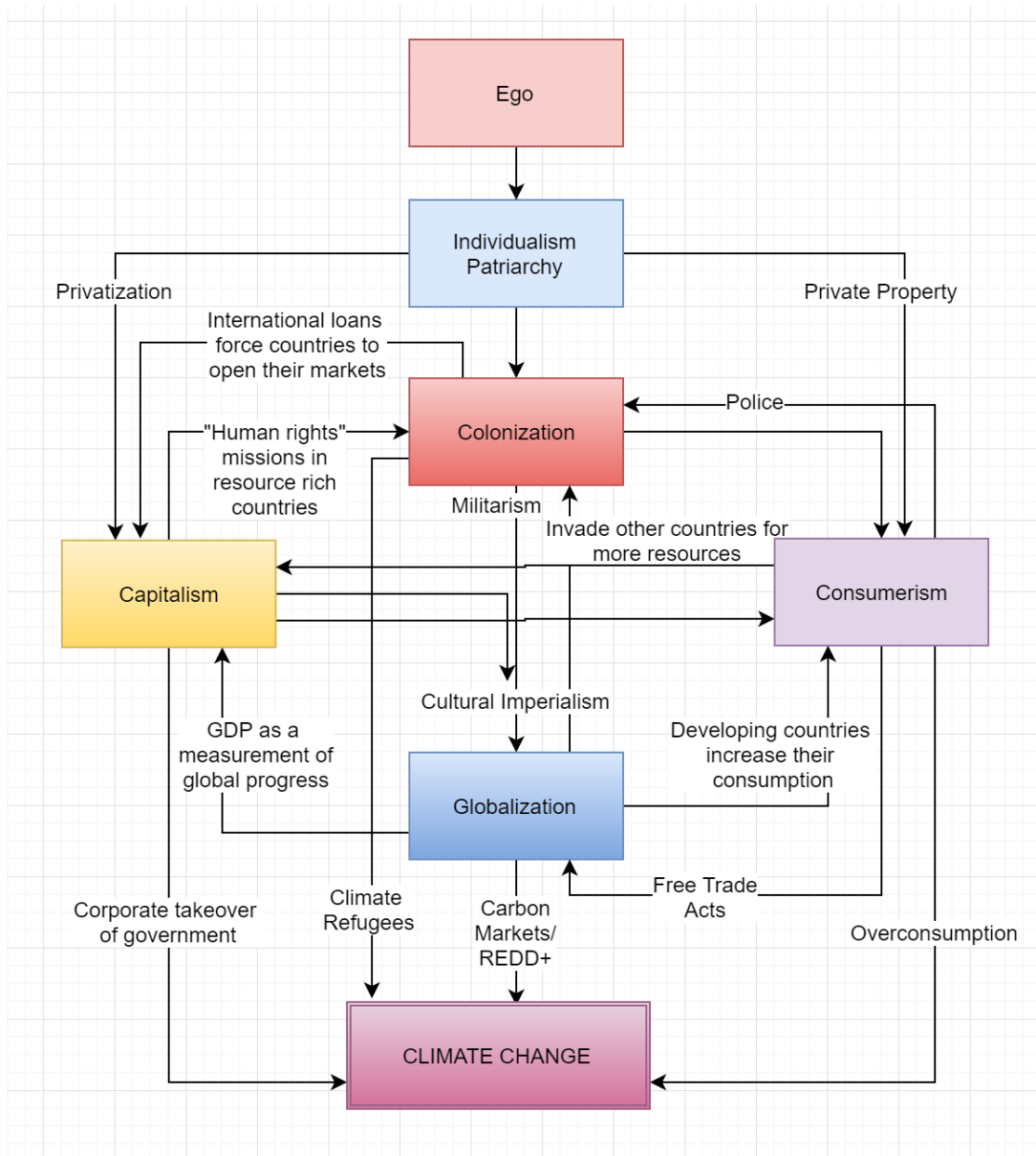


Figure 3. At its core is the ego autonomous from the self, driven by conquest and self-gratification(Watkins, 2000). At the root of climate change is the ego. Outwardly, this shows up as individualism, or when displayed as power over others, this is patriarchy. These selfish behaviors drove us towards privatization so that we no longer have to share and private property. Privatization and private property bring us to capitalism, which to amass more property, we get the system of colonialism. Capitalism drives us to want more things, which creates consumerism. Then, colonialism and capitalism team up to push globalization. All of these systems combined are why we have climate change, but to get at the root of climate change, we must first start within, to address the ego. The concept is derived from research, lived experience, and the work with Women of Color Speak Out.

Scales of the Climate Crisis

As you do this work, every institution or community requires a different response. From my experiences as an academic and practitioner, I share below some recommendations for climate action on the international, national, state, and local levels and academic, government, and nonprofit organizations.

Local Scale

Due to the carbon, this capitalist colonial system has already spit out, a certain level of chaos has already been locked in. It is too late to stop climate change as we know it - at this point, we can attempt to mitigate disaster and reduce harm. I believe local governments are our best shot at making progress on climate and moving towards climate justice. Generally, the larger an institution is, the less agile and adaptive it is, and the smaller its imagination is. Large institutions are more embedded in bureaucracy that prevents the changes needed for decolonization and adaptations tailored to the local ecology. Local small governments are also less susceptible to corruption from major corporations. This is true, especially in smaller cities whose size allows them to escape the radar of corporations. This creates space to dream up and build blueprints for the world we want to see and make models that can spread like wildfire across the country.

I have concluded that this is the most likely scenario that will bring about a climate policy across the nation. On the city and county level, there is more democracy, people's opinions matter more. Since it's much easier to get a city council member out of office than a Congress member, local politicians actually have to listen to us. Even in my own experience, in both Seattle and Tempe, we have been able to influence and actually shape their climate policy through lobbying, advocacy, and involvement. This is the best use of our time, as time is a limited resource with our carbon-imposed climate deadline of 2030. Often I am told the opposite, that

we have to work on the international or national level because of the impending climate chaos. That international is the only level where change can happen at the scale needed. However, it took 21 years for the international community to sign the climate accord, only to be ignored entirely. In my ten years of climate activism, I have not seen climate action happen nationally either. Instead of working on a climate policy nationally for another ten years, I think it's time to focus our efforts on where we know change can and has happened, and right now, that's locally and statewide.

State Scale

On the state level, there is also more possibility of a climate policy passing that is not a complete watered-down sham. California has many examples to point towards. For example, California's emissions standards are so strict that car manufacturers actually create whole lines of electric and hybrid versions specifically for the California market. Their carbon trading program has reduced pollution overall. One issue is the pollution hot spots it creates from larger companies who can afford to buy carbon credits and continue polluting, hence why carbon markets are not a good solution. However, a mass coalition of environmental justice organizations came together and were able to get some of the funding from the cap and trade bill directly into environmental justice and fenceline communities most impacted by climate change. When my sister lived in South LA, she was able to get solar panels on her house through this program. Washington and Oregon are making similar strides towards climate justice, though not without struggles and failures. State-level climate policy has promising hopes for progress. However, in all honesty, this is a lot less possible in red states like Arizona.

National Scale

On the national level, there is no progressive or just movement happening. Politics on the national level are sold out to the highest bidder, democracy is a farce, and corporations write and shape all the policies. Politics nationally are way too corrupted to see progress as it is currently. It does not matter if you elect the right people; it's a corrupt system. Similar to how

even good cops become bad cops in the current system of policing, politicians, even with good intentions, get corrupted. Obama wrote in "Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril" an essay entitled "The Future I Want for My Daughters", right when he got into office (Moore & Nelson, 2011). To quote he said, "Let's be the generation that finally frees America from the tyranny of oil." Once elected president, he opened up the Gulf of Mexico for offshore drilling. Shortly after that, the BP oil spill happened.

To believe electing the right person into office will save us is to get caught in the entrapment of individualism. There will be no savior but collective action. In my opinion, working on elections, especially on the national level, is a waste of time. In some cases, it creates more harm than reduces it and is mostly just an ego trip for the politician involved and everyone on their coattails. Those who want to work on climate policy on the national level should work on strengthening democracy, getting money out of politics, removing corporations' personhood so that they do not have the same rights as people. These more comprehensive strategies will gain back our democracy and crackdown on corruption. System change is needed for national politics to work so that the same power grabs do not continue to happen.

International Scale

For climate change to be addressed in a socially just manner that leaves no one else behind and does not create more sacrifice zones, international resource transfers and powershifts need to be made. Under this current world order, international climate deals and policy will only give more power to corporations through scams like carbon trading and lies like net-zero. Business as usual is moving towards carbon colonialism where the Global South will be forced to stay barefoot and in the dark, but with plenty of trees to pay for the West's ever-expanding carbon budget (Bachram, 2004). What is needed is reparations from the Western, richest countries that have benefited from colonialism to the Global South, the poorest countries indebted due to colonialism. This is the only way the Global South will be able to build the type of leapfrog development necessary to meet our carbon targets.

There needs to be a major power shift for this to happen because the rich countries- in particular the United States- refuse to give up power. In fact, the United States was largely why it took twenty-one years of global negotiations to get the weak Paris Climate Accord signed internationally (Austin & Phoenix, 2005). The USA is also why the climate accord was weak and held no legally binding mechanisms. So, what will it take for this major powershift to happen? I am convinced that it will take nothing short of a revolution. So, until that happens, I will not be focused on the international stage. I may make an exception only to protest, but I have to make sure I do not get too far within the fold, even with advocacy. While it feeds my ego and makes me feel important to work on the international stage, more often than not, becoming involved in the UNFCCC or other global regulatory bodies is to have blood on your hands and contribute to the lack of action and carbon colonialism. Instead, my role, I have determined, is to make space and uplift the Global South in their struggles against my country and do my part in the belly of the beast in holding my country responsible.

Institutions to Engage

Those are my recommendations for the scale to focus on in the climate crisis. However, there are many different ways to engage, whether as the government, academia, and otherwise. I have experienced most of them and will share my opinions based on these experiences.

Government

With government, my take is that the most effective way to engage with government is outside of government. Either as an academic, activist, or advocate, remaining involved but externally prevents limitations that you experience once you become the government. The government needs people to push on them from the outside and steer them in the moral direction. As a legislative aide, while I got to write policy, there were political rules I had to follow that I would not be constrained to if I was not in it. If you insist on going into government, work as a legislative aide. There is so much secret power here to write and build policies. You act as

the brain behind the politician; a politician is just a figurehead. For starters, legislative aides do the majority of the work writing policy and doing research. The politicians mainly just oversee the policies, sign them and remain the face. Almost everything down to their speeches is written by their staff. I am not sure everyone is aware of how overworked political staff are. I was one of four legislative aides in Seattle, though some council members had three. When I moved to Arizona, I learned that they had essentially defunded the government because it was a conservative state. City council members and Congress are only part-time jobs in Arizona, making them more susceptible to corruption, as many Congress members take on other jobs with corporate lobbyists. On the state level, members of the House of Representatives for the state did not even have one legislative aide! They shared one between multiple politicians. Because of this, many politicians will gladly accept written legislation from public members if you sell it to them because they do not have the time or capacity to write it themselves. You can create and shape policy without becoming a politician or even a legislative aide. This seems more effective than joining the already entrenched system in the status quo.

Academia

Academia can do a lot of good, but for the most part, it chooses not to. Much of this in the physical sciences is their insistence on positivism and remaining neutral, thus remaining out of the fight. However, this is also because of the tremendous ego in academia. They value publications over real-world impact. I will never forget what one academic told me in my first year at ASU; she told me to stop fighting for a multicultural center. She told me, "at the end of the day, no one will remember that you fought for a multicultural center. What they will remember is the contributions that you brought to your field based on your publications". Had I listened to her, students of color on every campus at the largest public university would not have a safer space in the multicultural centers created for them. Through my activism, it has made real-world tangible impacts. On the other hand, my publications have yet to change lives and, in fact, have hardly been read. This, however, highlights the issues with academics. They put more

effort into publishing their papers and becoming the first author than they do in the practice of what they study.

Academia is incredibly ego-driven, and because of which it makes it hard to work with academics, they all feel morally superior. They will often fight over semantics because they believe their choice to be more correct. These are my recommendations if you want to go into academia but do not want to continue this trajectory. First, be cognizant of your ego; academia builds up your ego in an unhealthy way. Create an intention before you join academia, write it down in a place you can see, and return to it to ensure you remain in alignment. Find an institution that values practitioners; this means when it comes to tenure, they should be including your community work as equal parts of your assignment. If not an academic institution, you can still be a researcher in a think-tank or research center that is more action-oriented. If you go the think-tank route, there is an excellent opportunity to partner and influence local governments with the reports and research you put out.

Nonprofit

Nonprofit organizations are another great way to take action on climate, so long as you do not fall into some of the pitfalls I have seen before. One of them is the green ceiling; environmental nonprofits have had a green ceiling of about only 16% of people of color employed in them for the last thirty years (Rachid, 2014). Aside from simply being immoral and uninclusive, this is an issue because communities of color are where the majority of the pollution is due to environmental racism. Not including communities of color is to not succeed in eliminating pollution. Another pitfall I have seen is they work in communities of color, but it is mainly white staff. This creates a white saviorship model that is alienating and can make people of color resent the environment.

Another issue I see is where you get funding from matters. You cannot think you can take money from corporations, banks, and oil companies and expect it not to influence the scope of your work. As I saw with the School of Sustainability, when Walmart funds your school, the

perils of consumerism are off the table for critique. In addition to that, most of the largest national environmental nonprofits actually become part of the problem. For example, World Wildlife Fund joined the carbon trading scheme and hired armed guards to forcibly remove indigenous peoples from the forest under the guise of "protection." They were protecting the corporations' right to pollute using carbon trading, which creates carbon colonialism. Money is the root of all evil. So even when you are not taking money from dirty sources, it can still cause issues. For example, my organization has committed to finding grants to fund our existing work, not creating work to chase grants. The problem with chasing grants is that you lose your focus and agency and start doing the work that funders want you to do versus the work in alignment with your vision and what you set out to do. That is all that to say that nonprofits can be a great place to make a difference in the climate, which is why I am focusing on this path after graduate school. With the ability to fund your own projects and research independent of government or academia, it gives you the freedom to build the world we want to see and the opportunity to meet the community's needs.

We are attempting to do this through the People's Budget Campaign. It is a community-based participatory research project designed by the community activists involved and focused on the community's needs. We try to meet demands by remaining nimble and not overly focused on our research objectives over the community's needs. For example, we designed a whole town hall to educate and mobilize the community around the city's budget. Nobody showed up, but we were at a community center in a low-income neighborhood, and a bunch of hungry Black children walked in and said we heard there was free food. Initially, we felt like this was for our town hall, but the kids were hungry, so we fed them. Once we started feeding people, the room was packed, and we realized this was our audience. We quickly huddled together and redid our whole agenda to "gamify" it and make it engaging for kids. We invited the kids to play budget-themed games, using gift cards as incentives we had initially bought for another purpose. That night because we did not get too focused on what we had planned to do and were willing to meet a

need for food and daycare for kids, we could build community and better learn kids' needs in the budget.

Community Organizing

I think this is the main takeaway from my work in the community. Even if you are a directly impacted person, you may think you know what the community needs, but you have to be humble and remain open. You cannot be too tied to the ideas and plans you have made. Activists like academics have to watch out for creating hierarchies of moral superiority between them and the community. Again, it comes back to the ego; you have to go in knowing nothing, only listening and willing to be wrong and changing your ideas. Initially, with our People's Budget research project, we intended to get 5,000 surveys in three months. However, our volunteers burnt out, and the efforts we thought would work did not become as successful as we had hoped. Instead of continuing in the first month, when we saw it not working out, we changed our goals and focused on building relationships with the community. This means that we will not meet our objective to have a statistically significant and higher number of surveys than the city has. It means we will not produce the report and hand it off to the city in time to influence this year's budget. This is a huge loss, but we prioritized relationships and community over the city's agenda and timeline. I think that is what the work is about.

You cannot take down the master's house using the master's tools. We cannot change this system with the same mentality, beliefs, and behaviors that created this system. We must decolonize- our belief systems, our modus operandi, our ways of relating with each other. We have to change everything starting from the inside out. Climate change is an opportunity to reevaluate our society and its structure. As I first heard in the Courage of Care training, we have the opportunity for a Great Transition or a Great Unraveling (Macy & Willis Toms, 2012). Currently, we are headed towards a great unraveling, the pandemic, and how we treated each other was an ample example of this. For a great transition that rights the world towards justice,

we need a change of heart and mindset; it starts within. We have to embody the world that we want to see.

Summary of Scales and Institutions to Engage

- The local scale is most amendable, can be tailored to the culture and ecology of a community, and thus most able to be decolonized. Coming in second is the state level, which depends on the state's culture. There is some possibility of creating strategies around the climate crisis that do not perpetuate the status quo.
- Nationally and internationally, corruption is so far gone that any policy created on this level will reflect the rampant corporate corruption and the current world social order of Western dominance. Work done on these scales needs to first address the corporate corruption and dominant hegemony that these scales are engulfed in, before we can see solutions that do not perpetuate the status quo.
- Governments and academia are institutions so subscribed to the bureaucratic dogma that my initial recommendations are to work with them from the outside. Whether through a think-tank, advocacy group, or consultant, an external role gives you the freedom to propose solutions outside the current dominant social paradigm.
- If you insist on going into these institutions, I suggest becoming a legislative aide versus a politician and within academia, ensuring your institution values community work equal to your publications.
- Finally, I suggest small nonprofit or community work as the scale most able to produce decolonial paths forward to address our climate crisis.

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APPENDIX A

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: HOW I WENT FROM FIGHTING CO2 TO FIGHTING COLONIZATION

My connection to the environment

I came to realize that to address climate change, we must change everything about Western society. My research is on the pathology of modernity, and this is the story of how I came to the conclusion that Western Society is sick and the main impediment to climate action. This autoethnography shares my experiences in the sustainability and climate justice field. Over the course of the last ten years, I have conducted research in 7 different labs, in mostly physical sciences, interned at 13 different environmental groups, and put my body on the line in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas trying to stop the fossil fuel empire. I have also been a community and environmental justice organizer in two states and have worked in government from City, State and Federal levels in the environmental and the policy side.

I most strongly identify as a practitioner. I learn by doing, a lot of doing, and it is all of these experiences I will draw from in the following narrative. I will share my story of how I went from believing the key to climate change was eliminating carbon dioxide to seeing that carbon dioxide was only an indicator of the sick society we created. I came to realize that we must eliminate colonialism first for our society to heal and truly address the climate crisis. To an outside observer, my journey shows one of instability and inconsistency, changing fields and research many times. Yet, it is exactly because of my consistency in understanding my objective to stop climate change (as much as it is possible at this point due to positive feedback loops) that I kept changing fields. As I grew into the field and different roles, I realized my objective was system change not climate change. I recognized that addressing climate change with the current status quo means more harm to the most vulnerable. Thus, I have pivoted to ensure climate justice is the outcome realized but also remain steadfast in my goal to address climate change. Throughout my story, I will tell of the many times I had to pivot and change fields because my work was not achieving my desired goals. I feel it's appropriate to start toward the beginning of my journey, though it was not a linear one, to fully understand where my commitment for the health of the planet began.

I loved wetlands as a homeschooler

My love for the planet started as soon as I had an opinion. As a five-year-old, I remember being fascinated with ponds and wetlands. I was born in Seattle, of the Duwamish peoples and the Coast Salish lands. I was born in a temperate rainforest, and everything was always wet and moist. Any consistent pooling of water I learned carried a whole new world, an abundance of life so unlike the world I lived in. I recently heard a Black scholar liken wetlands to nonbinary spaces, and though I had never considered that before I knew I was nonbinary. I think that was part of what drew me to the space. The space between where the water meets the land is one of the most biodiverse ecosystems, due to having both wet and dry options for habitat.

I had the privilege of being born to an Ethiopian refugee and biracial foster kid whose lived experiences made them skeptical of institutions. They did not trust public schools, but they did not have a lot of money to take us to a private school. So, they homeschooled me and my three sisters in a parent-owned cooperative, where each parent taught a creative class and students chose what they wanted to learn. This self-guided style of education supported me in exploring what I am interested in, which is why I was so encouraged to explore wetlands. I remember making my dad pull off on the side of roads and highways and sometimes even help me climb or enter into fenced off rainwater drainage wetlands so I could check out the flora and fauna. I remember collecting samples of the water and the critters and taking them back to my lab. I began to know the bugs that indicated good and bad water quality.

Our lab was a garage outside, we had multiple aquariums and tanks sourced from garage sales and thrift shops. Each terrarium was set up differently depending on the habitat that we found them in. My mom had invested in field books, and we would regularly go to the library to find more books about wetlands so I could identify the different species of animals I discovered. I had multiple net sizes and collecting devices. I had buckets to carry what I caught. Most of the time we would just collect insects and waterbugs like beetles, daphnia, mosquito larva and water strivers. My favorite was tadpoles. Unfortunately, not many of the critters that I brought to the

lab ever made it out, so though it set me up for a passion that would drive me for the rest of my life, initially my interest in this other world brought harm.

I Practice(d) ownership: The commodification of wildlife

It wasn't just wetlands; wild animals, birds, and feral cats would be "extracted, researched and investigated", even as a child who was very much self-taught, I was western in my relations. The way I had been taught was still through western sources, drawing from some of the original colonizers like field guides from National Geography and culture studies from anthropologists. The way I was relating to nature was colonial. I would extract and seek to own. For example, my sister and I made friends with a squirrel. The process took months. First, I would crawl on my knees like a squirrel and try communicating with him. Then I started feeding him. Eventually he got to the point where he would crawl up on our shoulders. What did we do with this trust and vulnerability that we spent months building to create this type of close relationship with him? We used it to trap him into a cage so we could own a pet squirrel. It was not enough to have made friends with this squirrel, instead we wanted to own him. So one day we tricked him into going inside a cage and then quickly shut the door on him. He stared at me from behind the bars with trepid indignation and utter betrayal. He had trusted me and I abused his trust. But I could not bear my friend's disappointment for long, so I let him go. But it was too late. This ruined our whole relationship and he never came back.

This desire for ownership and commodification of living beings is the colonizer mentality that lives inside of us. Despite being shielded from some indoctrination by being homeschooled, I was still indoctrinated with tenets of this pathology from living inside this culture. This was the beginning of my realization that I couldn't have a healthy relationship with wildlife because my obsession with them came out in ways that were controlling, manipulative, and commodified them into capital and private property.

Nature saved my life, I had to repay the favor

Neither of my parents had received their bachelor's degree. When my older sister started high school in ninth grade, my mom felt ill-prepared to continue homeschooling at that level. At the time we lived in a low-income, predominantly Black and immigrant community. My mom felt that if she worked more hours she would be able to take us out of the 'hood and then the public schools would be better. She searched for a new neighborhood using the state's public school test score rating, trying to find the high schools with the best test scores in neighborhoods she could afford, so that we could get the best possible education for free. In her mind this was setting us up for success the best she could with the resources she had. Unfortunately, the education system is so tainted and steeped in the systems of power and privilege that it reinforces itself. Standardized testing is based on the culture and psychology of the privileged white male. My mom had inadvertently created a filter for the whitest schools. Moving at twelve years old was traumatic, as I had spent my whole homeschooled childhood in Seatac and knew I would never see my friends and neighbors again. We quickly realized what it meant to have moved into an unincorporated part of the town. We lived between families who kept to themselves, flung confederate flags, owned horse ranches and operated meth houses.

Despite both of my parents being considered Black in America, being an African immigrant and foster kid adopted by whites, neither of them had a critical race understanding. We were unprepared for the level of racism we experienced and did not even fully understand what we were being subjected to. At the orientation for my first public school in sixth grade, the Physical Education teacher was jubilant to meet me. I did not understand why. He told me he had been waiting for me and that I was just what he needed for basketball. I had never played basketball in my life and could not understand why he thought I would be good. I had no context

of the stereotype he was basing his implicit bias on. I quickly saw I was one of the few Black people and really few people of color at this school.

I came home from my orientation crying because I felt alone as the only Black kid at my school. My dad told me he did not raise me to see color and that it should not matter. He was correct in that he did not raise me to understand systemic racism and the school to prison pipeline, so I could not know that I was in it. That is why when the school started punishing me for doing the same things I saw other kids doing, I did not know what was happening. White kids at my school kept asking me if my dad was an NBA player or was in jail and if I would rap against them. At the time, I did not understand where these lines of questioning were coming from but wanting to be liked and having taken creative writing for four years in the homeschool co-op, I thought rap was just like poetry and if I did this for these kids, I would make friends. So, I decided to rap battle one of the white boys who had been pestering me. It became a huge deal and the whole school during recess crowded together to hear us. I thought, "Wow, maybe I will make friends". But before the battle was even finished the principal came and grabbed me out of the crowd and took me to his office. I asked why he did not bring the white boy who was rapping against me to his office. He told me this behavior was my fault, that their kids were good and never did this until I came. I tried to explain that it was the other boy who had pressured me to do it and that I had never done this before, but he did not care and he suspended me and only me for two weeks for creating a crowd.

Once they figured out I was no good at basketball, they tried to get rid of me before I infected any of their other students with my Blackness. My mother, being skeptical of institutions, used mostly homeopathic remedies to treat me. With no understanding or analysis to process the racism I was experiencing, I internalized the pain and it came out physically in my gut. My mom found Chinese herbal medicine to quell my stomach cramps and heartburn. It was mostly ginger and cinnamon nerd candy-like red balls and they tasted good. To the white kids at my school, I

was an exotic animal. Everything from the clothing I wore, to the way I spoke and the food I ate was like a zoo exhibit for them.

One of the kids I thought was my friend started asking me what the red beads were I kept putting in my mouth. When I explained what they were he asked to have some. I shared a few with him, but then he ran off and told everyone the black girl gave him drugs. By the end of the day, the principal, escorted by the school resource officer (aka the police), came to my class to pull my twelve-year-old, now criminalized, behind, out of school and back to the office. I tried to explain that this was a huge mistake and I was not a drug dealer and this was a homeopathic remedy and it was mostly ginger. But it did not matter if I gave these kids ginger. The real issue at hand was that they had deemed my Blackness as a threat from the start and that if I could not help them win basketball tournaments then I had no business at their white school. They expelled me without due process. My mom, being the overprotective and overbearing parent that she was, was not going to leave it at that. She petitioned and met with the superintendent of the school district. However, not having a racial lens or understanding of the school to prison pipeline, she did not push back on the blatant racism and double standards we were going through. Instead, she agreed with them. If I went to drug counseling, then I could go back to school. So, despite being on only ginger and being only twelve years old, I had to "get support" for my drug problem. I did the drug counseling, and eventually returned to school. This is how this racist middle school pipelined me into drug usage.

After returning to middle school, the only people who would talk to me were drug addicts. This became my crowd, and by 13 I was smoking weed. As the racism I experienced got worse, I got heavier into drugs. In 2008, when Obama got elected and the rednecks at my school decided to take their anger out on all the Black people, they hung nooses from their trucks and called me the N word on my way to class. I complained to the school, but they told me it was my fault, that these kids are not used to people like me and I could change my class to not have to walk past them. I could not tolerate the high school, so I joined Running Start, a program that allowed me

to earn dual credits in high school and community college in my sophomore year of high school. I joined community college at age 16, freeing me from that toxic environment but it was too late and the freedom of community college only made my addiction worse. By 15, I had gotten addicted to cocaine. By 16, I was a raging alcoholic, and by 17 I was caught in a chokehold with crack cocaine. The worst part was that I was a highly functioning addict, so no one knew. I was holding onto a job at McDonalds and getting straight As in college as a high schooler while doing hard drugs. But at 17, things started catching up with me. I ended up in the hospital with a kidney infection, shortly after almost overdosing on heroin. Then one of my junky friends robbed me and emptied my bank account. When he got caught he then tried to tell the police I set him up to it, and they started to look at me for federal bank fraud charges. It felt like my only options were quickly becoming either prison or death. While I was considering the latter, I decided to give God one more chance, asking for a way out, a pathway out of this hell hole I had sunk into. I went down the street from my home to meditate on what to do with my life now. I chose my favorite place. It was still a wetland. I was very connected to this particular wetland.

When I had first moved out to Maple Valley, the property was actually not a wetland. It was a farmland with a creek in a ditch by the side of the road. I would go to the creek because in the fall there were salmon. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, I had always loved salmon as they are a huge part of our culture due to the Coast Salish indigenous peoples' connections to them. In fact, I loved salmon so much that when my grandma, who was a flight attendant and got free flights, asked me at 8 years old where in the United States I wanted to go, I said to Alaska to see the salmon make it home. The creek in Maple Valley wasn't large enough for the salmon and there was a beaver who dammed the creek so the salmon would spill out into the road when it rained heavily. I remember running around in my rainboots and throwing the salmon back into the creek from the road when I first moved to Maple Valley. But then one day the Department of Ecology for King County came and bought the property. It turns out that the salmon I was throwing back into the creek were actually Chinook salmon, which are an

endangered species. Thanks to the Endangered Species Act, they were able to get funding to buy the property and change the land. They restored the drained farm back into the wetland it was supposed to be. I remember they had a big community planting event in which I participated, helping to revegetate the new wetland they had re-created for the salmon. It had been five years since then, and I had watched the trees I planted grow much taller than me. I had watched the farmland turn back into the wild, and I watched the salmon enjoy the wetland and not the street. This was my happy place and why I went there to contemplate my life that day.

I would climb deep into the forest where no one could see me, and I could not see the street any longer. It was always just me, the trees and maybe the salmon. This time however, there was a man in my wetland! He had on fishing boots that went up to his waist. He was collecting samples in the wetland just like I had done as a kid. I went up to him both because I was curious and intrigued about what he was doing and because I wanted to know why he was in my special place. He told me he was getting measurements for a contraption, called the "beaver deceiver" to prevent the beaver from damming near the street. He explained the whole process, sharing what I already knew about how the Department of Ecology bought the farm and transformed it all for the salmon but this pesky beaver's dam kept spilling the stream into the street harming the salmon. He said this beaver deceiver would prevent this. For a moment I forgot the last terrible five years of my life and was enamored by this guy whose real job was to do what I used to do as a child. So I asked him if I could help him and he said yes and gave me his business card – turns out he was an ecologist – and a gift.

I realized that the wetland and the salmon might have just brought me my pathway out of the hellhole I was stuck in. I volunteered with his crew and had a great time. He told me if I liked this work I could do it full time with the Washington Conservation Corps, an AmeriCorps program that works with the Washington State Department of Ecology. It would be a dream job to do restoration ecology in wetlands - a dream I had forgotten since I started at public school. I had internalized the lies white people had told me. I was in community college to be a rapper

because I believed that was one of my two options as a Black person and I was too uncoordinated for basketball. The job was a bit of a long shot since most of the other applicants had bachelor's degrees in environmental science and I was about to be a senior in high school at only 17. You had to be 18 to be in the program, however I turned 18 the day after the start date for Americorps. I interviewed for the position knowing it would be a long shot, but actually it was not a long shot. It was my destiny to be there. I got the job.

This job was my chance at a fresh start, to put the racism, pain and addiction I was wrapped up in behind me. I had asked for a way out and I was given one and I could not bear to mess it up. It was that conviction to my paradigm shift and the planet that got me clean. I went cold turkey off all the hard drugs the day I turned 18 and started the job. In doing restoration ecology I restored myself. By planting trees I planted new roots to myself. I felt a paradigm shift, I would no longer let other people determine my destiny. It was not just that I would no longer do drugs, it was that I came to realize my life was too valuable to risk with drugs. I was coming to an understanding of my worth. My life was too valuable because now I had a calling, which was to save the planet to repay her the favor of saving my life in the form of the wetlands, the salmon, and that man. This was my passion and purpose all along. I had let other people's opinions and oppression affect my path but now I could not be budged. By the end of the year, I was graduating from high school having concurrently done a year of service, won President Obama's gold medal for volunteering and was finishing up an associate of arts degree. By the end of the year after working with ecologists I knew that what I wanted to be was not a rapper but a scientist, so I switched directions and started an associate of sciences degree.

Wildlife, Oppression, and the Human Hierarchy I Perpetuate

I discovered a love for volunteering through my service in AmeriCorps. I became a beach naturalist and then a master urban naturalist and, my favorite, a salmon naturalist at the hatchery. I worked my way up at a restoration ecology nonprofit to lead tree plantings in the

community and write grants for the nonprofit. I loved being able to give back and make the world a better place, but I searched for a bigger impact. As I was working on my prerequisites for being a scientist, I hoped that, through volunteering, I could find my specialization. I knew I loved wildlife and that a job working with wildlife would fulfill me. I interned at a wildlife rehabilitation center for a year and a half and learned a lot of things about the field. Initially, I loved it. I started with feeding the baby birds that would get dropped off at the rescue. With more experience, I was able to work with bigger birds and then hawks and then eagles and owls, and then deers and raccoons and other animals. I got to the point where I would pick up injured animals and release healed animals.

The baby birds were there mostly because of a human or cat disturbance. One of the most common injuries and causes of death for birds was running into glass windows. For hawks and eagles, it was when they would focus in on their prey and dive bomb for it and get hit by a car. For deer, it was getting hit by a car. Basically, every single animal was there because of a human or something humans created. When I started taking classes about wildlife management I learned that it is basically humans playing God and regulating the numbers of nature, mitigating human impact only enough to keep the species alive. I got particularly attached to one red-tailed hawk. I had raised him from a juvenile for about three months. I came to love him enough to not feel bad for killing the quails I had raised to feed him, in better understanding the web of life. One day I found out he was dead. He had died from a mold infection in his lungs. In that time, I had volunteered at multiple tree planting events and had planted a whole forest. I started to question my potential for impact in this field, wondering whether I was really helping wildlife. In the time it took me to rehabilitate one hawk, could I have created a whole habitat for what could be a family of hawks? I found myself getting too attached to the wild animals and questioning if I was making a difference.

I also had an experience at the wildlife rehab with a flying squirrel I was rehabilitating that started to solidify for myself that I was not supposed to be in this field. I was feeding this

animal for a few weeks, and I had never seen him. I was curious because I had never seen this species before and was so excited to be able to take care of him, but he was nowhere to be found. So one day when I entered his enclosure I started looking for him. Now because he was a recovering injured animal I had no business trying to look for him because that would just stress him out, but I did it anyway. I tried to tell myself I was only ensuring that he was actually in the cage but I knew ultimately it was only for me. I did find him and he flew around even though he was injured and hurt himself more. I later came to realize that since I was a kid, my love for animals has almost always harmed them. I started to see the dominance of the human hierarchy and how I could not be in a consenting relationship with the animal world due to the oppression that inadvertently is there from our power differentials. I tried to love animals from afar.

10 years later: To buy or not to buy the chuckwalla

It feels like as a human I have not done the work to be in relation with the non-human world in a way that does not perpetuate hierarchy and supremacy. I bear the marks of this colonial system. My love, though well-intentioned, had resulted in many deaths. That is why I left wildlife biology. I realized I couldn't be near wild animals without wanting to touch them, love them, hold them and take care of them. Yet, that only hurt them. I decided the only way to protect them was to leave, so I did. I left the field, I stopped working with wildlife even though it's a passion of mine. I distanced myself for their welfare and loved them from afar. But I cannot say I have not relapsed and gone back to meddling with their life from a place of saviorism. It happened just this year when I found a baby lizard who was dying on top of a mountain at Papago Park. Now, if there was any appropriate place for a lizard to die it would be where I found this lizard. But instead I tried to be a hero and save the lizard, because he drank water out of my hand and I thought that meant he needed help.

I took him home and through research discovered he was a chuckwalla. I had already been obsessed with this species. I had chosen the Chuckwalla as our mascot for Black Lives Matter Phoenix Metro. Our mascot is the orange-tailed Chuckwalla, a lizard only found in South Mountain, the redlined community where Black people use to be relegated to in Arizona. We saw ourselves in the Chuckwalla because it is also seen as dangerous and often disturbed just for being who it is, and because they are vegetarian which is a value most of us share. I had already imagined a future with this lizard, attempted to replicate his habitat in a tank with lights. But he died the next day. It was terrible and I cried. My friends helped me to hold a funeral back at the mountain where I found him to bury his body. I knew I had done wrong removing him from his ecosystem, so I felt the need to return him to his place.

This experience awakened my desire and love of reptiles. I had already given away my reptiles years ago because I decided my relationship with them was unprincipled. As I had gotten older, I started seeing how, as an abolitionist, owning animals was ethically questionable, and mostly not excusable. How can I as someone who identifies with values like nonhierarchical, anti-capitalist, abolitionist, and decolonial principles justify taking indigenous species out of their natural habitat and putting them in cages? This is what colonizers did to us as stolen African people.

But I love lizards and amphibians the most and I had become obsessed with chuckwallas. Once I got obsessed with the chuckwalla, I started studying, learning, and trying to find out how I can get a chuckwalla. While one can buy chuckwallas in other states, because they are native to Arizona, it's illegal to sell a chuckwalla. How could I make excuses for ownership of this indigenous species when I am trying to work on decolonization? How could I try to find a pathway to own this wild animal if I am aware of and trying to combat the human hierarchy? I battled with the contradiction as I searched on craigslist for a chuckwalla. I finally found a six-month-old chuckwalla on craigslist. I was reluctant to ask but I had to know if he was wild caught and turns out he was. So not only was it illegal but I would be contributing to the illegal

exotic animal trade. I knew I wasn't being ethical but my desire had taken over and I tried to logically make excuses to justify it using science.

I started looking for equations that would equate to my ownership being justified. How many chuckwallas are found in a square mile? If I can find that out, I can divide the numbers of chuckwallas by the square footage of area to find out how much space a chuckwalla in the wild needs. That way, if I can figure out how to give him ample space that is almost comparable to his wildlife habitat, then maybe I can give him a better life where he has no predators, a stable food source, and no threat of human development. Plus, it wasn't like I captured him. At this point I was just rescuing him from this other human who had already captured him. But who am I to tell him it's a better life from my human perspective?! Even if I was to not adopt this wild caught animal from craigslist, and got another lizard, I am creating demand for capturing wild animals even if it's a rehoming or rescue from craigslist. I just didn't know. Was it because the heart wants what the head says no to? Was this my heart?

Where does this love of animals come from if I always want to capture them and take them from their home to mine? Is this my inner colonizer? Is this a manifestation of my internalized human supremacy prioritizing my needs above the lizard's? Is this how white people see/saw us, as objects for gathering? Is dehumanizing the right word when they are not human or is that more part of the human hierarchy? Can I have a healthy relationship with another species or is the power dynamic so strong that we cannot ever be in a consensual relationship as owner and pet? Can animals consent to ownership? Can lizards? If not, does animal ownership perpetuate rape culture? Am I being selfish? Where does this deep desire to be in relationship with animals come from? Can it ever be healthy? I am the white people of ecology, dominating and controlling. We take what we want and we ruin everything else.

Private ownership is more part of the pathology of modernity. We must own wildlife, we cannot just let them be. In making the chuckwalla our mascot, I thought I was highlighting and honoring the species. I grew more to learn about them and then the desire to own one sprang

up and I unknowingly took what I later learned to be a baby chuckwalla home and fell in love and now I am about to buy another one. What am I doing? Is this okay? Am I going to do it anyway? What does that mean? Do I secretly think my needs are more important than the chuckwalla's? Could this ever be a good thing? How could I make this right? Would it be better to get another exotic animal? Is exotic or reptile ownership inherently unethical? Could connecting to the animal world and being in relationship with this chuckwalla reinvigorate my passion for native wildlife and conserving this ecology? Is that at the expense of the chuckwalla?

Would I rather be wild and maybe have a shorter or rougher life where I have to defend myself and food is not promised? Or would I trade captivity for stability? Is that not what we have done to ourselves in modernity? We trade freedom of our time for a stable paycheck, a home instead of our indigenous nomadic lifestyle. We trade growing and being in relationship with our home-grown organic heirloom food for GMOs and fast-food convenience. We would rather have strawberries all year, strawberries on steroids without much taste than the tiny juicy ones that nature came out with originally and we call this adaptation. Do I want to put the lizard in a cage as a projection of the fact that I am in a cage and since I survived I want to share this misery with others and call it a rescue? Is this any different than what white people did with indigenous peoples through boarding schools and colonization, forced to assimilate. "Kill the Indian and save the man," they said. Am I trying to kill the wild and save the lizard? Was my impulse to "save this chuckwalla" my own savior complex showing up? Should I not get this chuckwalla? Would it be better if I got another lizard? Who does it make me if I can think about all these systems of oppression and still not change my behavior? Do I deserve to be talking about decolonization for my dissertation if I am colonizing wild indigenous species? Who does it make me if I know all this and still take him home? Can humans unlearn this supremacy culture? White people can never be decision makers for my organization Black Lives Matter Phoenix Metro, because they always think they are superior. What is the equivalent of that for humans? We should never be around animals? Is ownership slavery? Can I ethically own another being?

Despite these deliberations and deep existential questions, I leaned towards buying the chuckwalla anyway. I have tried to think like a lizard but I myself am a captive species both as an indigenous person in modernity and as a Black person in America and stuck in this mindset. I recognize it as a blind spot but I still lean into it. I have tried asking earth, God, the universe and my ancestors, and I have no answers. Is it my ego? Is my ego muting out the reason and morals so that I can only hear my own selfish stubborn made-up mind? Is this my god complex? Can I be an abolitionist and put another species in a cage? Can I fight for liberation for Black people but interrupt another species' liberation? How can humans be in right relationship with the non-human world? Can we? Are we too colonized to be near them such that we will only cause harm with our presence? These are the many questions I still have yet to answer despite giving into my colonial human supremacy and adopting the chuckwalla.

Black people and the animal world

Below is an excerpt I wrote after I was falsely arrested by the Phoenix Police after a peaceful protest my organization Black Lives Matter Phoenix Metro led during 2020. They had no business to arrest us! After eight months of organizing, all charges were dropped. They had charged protesters with over 40 felonies! In the process of seeking justice, we found a ring of misconduct and illegal behavior from the police all the way up to the prosecutors. Thirteen officers (all of the ones that ambushed and arrested us) were put on leave as well as both of the prosecutors and now there is a call for Maricopa County Attorney Alister Adel to step down. I wrote the below shortly after being arrested before I realized that the charges were going to be dropped. Nothing was going to happen to me. During this time, I was in a dark place feeling dehumanized and then I realized that this is what animals must always feel like. I felt a deep connection, understanding and remorse for the animal world and the ways that we hunt down and terrorize animals. The following was edited for brevity.

I was arrested on October 3, 2020. It's currently October 20. I have not been okay. I was only in jail for about 14 hours but it was traumatizing. It wasn't just that I was kidnapped by the state. It's also the fact that they took my phone and wallet and they're calling me a terrorist and my organization a criminal enterprise. Now the lawyers said that they put all arrests together. That happened this summer, from our protest and other protests from throughout the summer. They are trying to connect us to what they are calling a riot. They're trying to say that our peaceful protest where no property damage happened was a riot. I was told that they are going to come and ransack my house and arrest me again, so the folks who got arrested with me left the city for the week. My poor mom was with me, visiting from Ethiopia, so I brought her along. I tried to make it more of a vacation but honestly, nothing about it was a vacation. The whole time I had sheer terror in the back of my mind waiting to be kidnapped again. I'm still worried that at any time they are going to come back to my house.

The way they came for me after the protest was inhumane. The panic that these terrorists put in me was unjust. They hopped out of their cars after driving onto the sidewalk, like they were on a kidnapping mission. I'm not okay. I feel unsafe in my city and I also feel trapped. I'm not allowed to leave the country and I can't see my family in Ethiopia.

I think something that came out of this is as a black person in America and as the daughter of an African refugee. As someone who's politically conscious and stands up against oppression. I feel like living in this Western Empire, I can better understand what endangered species go through. I think as Black people, we should have this connection and solidarity to the oppressed species that are not human because as Black people they do not see us as humans either.

When the police hopped out of the car in all black clothing with no explanation or order to stop but just running up on us and pushing people, it was chaos. Before they ambushed us, there was a single cop car that was following us around as we were on foot walking to our cars. We stopped and asked if there was a reason they were following us. The cop did not speak a

single word. Instead, he just pulled out his body camera and held it out in front of his face. I even asked if they wanted to arrest me because I was not trying to put up a fight. I would have gone with him if he asked but he didn't ask, as if I was not human enough to be told about my future entrapment in their steel cage.

It just reminded me of rhinos, elephants, and the big cats – endangered species, who are just trying to live their lives and end up getting caught or killed due to humans' desire to control and kill. It makes me wonder what the elephant is thinking when it sees a human stalking it in a car, whether their life flashes before their eyes, whether they wonder why they are not treated with dignity and respect. The fact that the lions, bears, and tigers do not attack and kill all humans as a form of self-defense, they are showing us a grace we do not deserve. It is humans who have caused western industrialization and that is what is endangering them. The fact that they do not do everything in their power to sabotage and destroy industrialization is honestly sad because it means their death.

I'm never safe. Right now I am trying to go on a walk and there are two unmarked cars. They are looking at me, I am looking at them wondering if this predator is going to kill me. And that's what these animals must feel like when they see us. When we say Black Lives Matter it's because our lives don't matter because we are still not seen as fully human. This is not just an American problem. White supremacy and anti-Blackness is a global problem. I will never forget when I was in Paris and was hanging out with some African immigrants I had met. Out of nowhere, we all started getting grabbed by police officers. They were all screaming in French and so I started yelling in English. As soon as they heard my American accent they let us all go and walked off like we did not almost get abducted. I asked my friends what happened, and apparently, French police will stop and frisk or take into jail groups of Black immigrants simply because they can. In that moment we were dehumanized and stereotyped to be undocumented and criminals, the only thing that saved us was my American privilege.

And that's why I feel like we have a natural allegiance with all species of the nonhuman world and all of the animals. Because we're being harassed, driven out, and killed too. We share many of the same risks from westernization and industrialization, which are killing their habitat and food sources. Our habitat is under siege by gentrification, which is driven by the same machine. Across America right now, white people are reversing the white flight of the 60s. Driven by artist lofts and hipster millennial techies the inner city is being invaded by the trojan horse of beautification, urban development, improvement districts, and investment opportunities. Where does that leave Black people? We are driven further to the margins, whether directly onto the streets or pushed out to rural areas with fewer resources, creating more pollution when we have to drive back to the city for work. Currently, we as Black people account for 45% of the homeless population but are only 13% of the country's population (Meghan Henry et al., 2022). Similar to us, animals are dying and becoming threatened from their habitat being invaded and destroyed.

The nonhuman world is a natural comrade in our struggles. So, as we fight against gentrification, we should fight against the destruction of natural habitat, the last rainforests, the last wetlands, the last habitats that there are. We know what it feels like to have our homeland ripped up from underneath us and told to move when there's no place to go. We know what it feels like to be chased down and thrown onto the ground and for our life not to matter enough to be hunted down in cars. They followed us for blocks, they put out their big headlamps on us, it felt like being a trapped zebra in a zoo.

If the national environmental movement had a more decolonial analysis, Sierra Club would be defending the hood against gentrification because cultural diversity is as important as biological diversity. We all have a role to play in the ecosystem we reside in, we all have a place and a function. Black and Indigenous women and queer folks are an indicator species in every society that we reside in. An indicator species is an organism whose presence, absence, or abundance reflects a specific environmental condition. In every society, Black and Indigenous femmes are always treated worse. The darker and less western you are, the more dehumanized

and disregarded you are. Our well-being is a proxy for how progressive, liberated, equitable and inclusive a society is. Black and Indigenous femmes must be protected at all costs because we are always at the bottom, because, when you improve our lives, you lift from the bottom making society better overall. If you only focus on the top, narrowest part of society you do not make a societal change - you just reinforce power.

It makes me feel so much compassion and empathy for animals, because it was dehumanizing to be put in a cage for 14 hours without water. When they wanted to talk to me they opened this hole with bars over it as if I would bite them if they came too close. I started to ponder: maybe I knew this all along and this is what drew me to wildlife since I was a kid. Even though I am still trying to learn the best way to be a comrade to the nonhuman world, maybe it was my innate understanding of our shared struggles that magnetized me to their existence.

The Big Picture: Climate Change

When I left the wildlife biology field, I felt at a loss. Here I was walking away from a field I had felt called to since I was a kid. But I did not feel that the impact I was making fulfilled my purpose. I knew there was something bigger, on top of feeling like my relationship with animals was not healthy. Initially, I thought I would go into ecology, a field I still feel passionate about. Ecology is about the study of organisms' relationships to each other. It investigates the interconnectedness of everyone and everything. How the trees need the salmon and how its roots collaborate with the fungus for nitrogen. I loved learning about the relationships of all beings and how they interrelate with each other. This information was important for me to know but I still felt it was not answering my call for how to save the planet. I decided a bachelor's degree at University of Washington (UW) in Environmental Science and Terrestrial Resource Management was broad and applied enough that I would be able to narrow down how exactly I would be working to save the earth while obtaining this degree. I quickly learned that I would not be getting the education I needed to save the planet in the classroom.

Education is still a product of the society it is taught in and we live in a capitalist society. Education bears the interest of its funder. In Washington State, one of the major economies was lumber because of the temperate evergreen rainforest that it's situated in. Had I known that this particular school was initially built to train foresters to strip the state of its trees, I would not have gone there. But I could not have known because after Earth Firsters (eco activists) burnt down the genetically modified Douglas Fir trees that my school was growing, they rebranded it for hippies like myself, and that is how I got trapped into the field. However, I later came to learn that words matter. Whether a program says environmental resources or environment depends on the relationship they are having with nature and to see nature as only a resource is to commodify her in preparation for extraction. Having already started college at sixteen as a rapper, I was a transfer student who had already spent three years in community college. Changing my major at UW at this point would mean spending even more years to finish my bachelors, and I knew I was not stopping there. I begrudgingly finished out the degree, raising hell while I was there. In some classes, the professor would take us out to the woods and teach us surveying methods to measure the number of cords in a stand of woods. I found it violent that while sitting in a majestic ecosystem with abundant interdependent relationships the skills they decided to focus on was how to quantify the amount of wood. Thus, the focus was on the amount of profit the forest could bring. It was such an extractive commodified relationship with the forest, but it was the type of education you receive when Weyerhaeuser, a privately held lumber resources company, gets to decide what the important parts of environmental science education are.

The most important thing I learned while studying environmental science was about climate change. There was not a single turning point or first time hearing about it that I can recall where it really moved me. In fact, it was the repeated lessons about the threat of climate change that started to sink in. No matter what field of ecology or environmental science I chose, no matter what social cause I wanted to focus on, all of the beautiful wildlife that I wanted to take home with me would all die because of climate change. This was the bigger picture issue I

was looking for all along. Working with wildlife and planting trees were beautiful relationships to have but did not address nature in the macro scale I was looking for. Climate change was my issue to focus on. Helping to stop climate change is how I could repay the favor to nature for saving my life. I started to realize nothing else mattered, not even my education because what is the point of getting an education if there is no future for humanity for me to use it on? The more I learned about climate change the more I felt the urgency to combat it and felt frustrated that my school and field was not doing enough. I realized that one skill I gained comes from the broad range of disciplines I have researched within. My perspective to solve ecological social problems is not limited to the boundaries of a subject, instead it draws from techniques of every field, as every field overlaps into other fields. This allows me to see the big picture.

A physical scientist at first

After getting the opportunity to support a graduate student's research where we got to climb old growth trees in the Hoh rainforest in Washington State, I realized research could be my vehicle to getting the education I actually needed to save the planet. Since my focus had turned to climate change, I felt that I had to focus on beefing up on math and chemistry and solidifying my focus on physical sciences. Given that climate change was caused by greenhouse gasses, I thought this problem could only be solved by science. Not just any science but physical, positivist data-oriented science. Studying as a physical scientist made me feel superior to everyone else just because the material I studied was complicated, even to myself. I struggled with numbers and spent the majority of my time at the university in a study group at my school's multicultural center being supported by peers. I would feel jealous when I saw people attending activities on campus and hanging out with friends, things I never felt I had the luxury to do in my field and I would make passive aggressive comments about how they must be art majors. In reality I wanted to be an artist originally, but as a kid my mom made it clear she would not support my

college if I went to art school. She wanted me to take care of her when she got old and a starving artist can't take care of anyone. So when I pivoted from going to school for music to becoming a scientist, she was proud of me and made me feel like my life would be better with science than art. Initially after my bachelor's degree in the physical sciences I felt that indoctrination into science actually made it difficult to think fluidly like an artist again, for example my tenure as a poet ended after I became a scientist. It is something I still struggle with.

Research made the grueling hours I spent studying worth it. During the three years I was at the university I participated in seven different research projects in five different fields that ranged from oceanography, fisheries, and wildlife biology, to public health and sociology. Whether I was examining hypoxia in Hood Canal, the trophic cascade caused from wolf extinction in Yellowstone National park, tracking carbon released from the Elwha Dam removal or communicating climate change to conservative communities, each pertained to my research interest in climate change and human-caused environmental degradation. Each experience helped me get closer to what I wanted to do. I started out in the physical sciences. My first research project was at UW's Aquatic and Fishery Sciences Department where I studied hypoxia in Hood Canal which has increased with higher temperatures. I worked to dissect fish stomachs, identify digested zooplankton, and prepare isotope samples to see how hypoxia was impacting Hake's trophic positions. When I first started doing research in this field, I was ecstatic to be involved and naïve enough to believe that what we were doing could save the world. I remember going to the weekly talks the school offered from scholars in our field. Afterward there was always an opportunity to network and comment on the research. One time I was listening to a talk from a researcher whose work was studying coral reefs. He said if we do nothing at all, coral reefs will go extinct by 2040 but, even if we stop right now, they will still go extinct by 2100. He was essentially making the case that it was too late and there was nothing we could do about it.

Being a new scientist to the field of climate change, I was bright eyed and bushy tailed and offended by his statement. I stood up to him, thinking I knew something, thinking we still had hope since I still had hope. I remember reading about how my state in Washington was waging a “war” against ocean acidification by putting millions of dollars towards it. I mentioned that effort and talked about research ideas I had heard about before such as putting calcium carbonate in the ocean or planting eelgrass. He told me all of those ideas were nice, but the pace of western industrialization is much faster than any single idea that we can try to undo. He said the solutions cannot attempt to localize this issue, the solution was to change western society globally. At the time I was not ready to hear that message, so it floated over my head and I walked off thinking I was in the right and that I had made a stand and that we did have a chance.

In fact, I was so embedded in thinking I was correct I walked around proudly afterwards in the networking session and upon meeting a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration scientist (NOAA) who was in the crowd, I boldly told them it was my dream to work for NOAA and that I would work for free to even just get access to interning at NOAA. The woman was a little taken aback at my boldness but told me she enjoyed my question and that the money the state put into tackling ocean acidification that I had mentioned was actually under her supervision. She told me we did have a chance and then she took down my email and told me she would try to find an internship.

Scientists Just Report Data

Before I knew it, I was connected with an emerging scholar at NOAA who was doing breakthrough research on ocean acidification. She had identified first in the Arctic Ocean that pteropods, tiny zooplankton snails that made up the bottom of the food chain, were dissolving in the current state of the acidifying oceans (Bednaršek et al., 2012). My task was to look through

the microscope at samples of zooplankton and pick out the pteropods. As I was pulling out the pteropods, I could see their shells already dissolving, some of the snails had the light pouring through their shells, others had actual holes in them. I was astonished. I had learned that climate change was going to create chaos later, but here it was the year 2012, we had not even ever reached 400 ppm of CO₂ in the atmosphere yet and still there were profound changes already happening before my eyes. Pteropods make up the bottom of the ocean's food web. If you pull out a foundation from a house it collapses, so what did this mean if pteropods go extinct?

Could this be the beginning of the collapse of the ocean's food chain? One third of the world's people are fed from protein from the sea. What happens to them when all of this collapses? I was scared for the future but proud that I was working with NOAA, the federal department in charge of protecting the ocean and the sea. This was my dream job and my mission in life and there, before my eyes, we had the evidence to finally take climate action. I eagerly asked the scientist what NOAA will do to stop this. She told me that wasn't our job, our job as scientists is to only report the facts. We will use this research to write another report and hope that Congress takes our recommendations and takes action on climate. I could not believe it—scientists have no power to stop climate change? I started to think I needed to be working in policy. I left the internship shortly after that and decided I no longer wanted to work for NOAA.

Still wanting to make a difference for the climate, however, I started to look for other more actionable methods. First, for a school project, I reached out to the same Pteropod scientist and started working on trying to see if we could get pteropods listed as an endangered species. Remembering how King County received funds from the Endangered Species Act to transform that whole cow farm in Maple Valley to a beautiful wetland, I thought maybe that would force the Federal government to transform our energy sources. It was an undertaking that I was not able to get off the ground but I discovered that the Center for Biological Diversity had tried unsuccessfully to do the same thing for polar bears. I was also advised that pteropods were not

cute enough to win a campaign to be designated as endangered because apparently cuteness privilege affects the ability for an organism to get protected. My incessant desire to take climate action led me to being a part of a research team that conducted a feasibility analysis for 100% renewable energy on my campus but the implementation was going to take more years than I was a student. I felt frustrated in feeling that everything from within these institutions was not fast enough and that I needed a way to do this work in ways that reflected the urgency of the situation. That is when I found 350.org and learned about fossil fuel divestment.

Bringing the Science to the Sidewalks

Through 350.org I learned that 350 ppm of CO₂ was the desired level of CO₂ where carbon won't warm the atmosphere. But the CO₂ level was soon to reach 400 PPM, a record high for the planet. Scientists did not know what that meant for society, but I remember being terrified of reaching that level. It felt like the point of no return. Essentially, we were told that in order to prevent higher PPMs, we had to change society to rid itself of fossil fuels. Yet lobbyists from the Big Oil industry have been creating doubt by putting out fake climate science to say it was a hoax, and preventing the government from making the necessary changes like removing fossil fuel industry tax breaks (Waugh, 2011). The fossil fuel industry does not want its product to go unused. It got deeper though, because their revenue was based on their stocks, which was based on both how much oil they have extracted and how much they have in reserve. However, we cannot use all the oil in the reserves because it will push us past 2 degrees of warming, and the Paris Accord restricts that marker to 1.5 degrees (Ewers et al., 2019). The market has already bought value that is based on oil that has not been consumed or extracted and cannot be extracted from the ground if we want to save society from climate change.

The solution we were told is to push for the divestment of fossil fuel stocks from institutions we were part of such as universities, churches or foundations, because if it's wrong to

wreck the planet then it's wrong to profit off that wreckage. So we embarked on a mission to divest our university from fossil fuels. I finally felt like I found people who understood and acted on the urgency of climate change. Finding other like minds encouraged me to become even more climate obsessed. I became a sort of climate evangelist: anyone who would talk to me on the bus, at the gas station, in class heard the news that the planet was dying and we were running out of time. I especially became fixated on the fact that we were about to hit a milestone, reaching 400 ppm of CO₂ in the atmosphere, and I felt that if I could just tell enough people I would be able to stop it.

I spent days at college in between classes tabling and passing out flyers on campus telling people to sign the petition to divest and help us stop us reaching 400 PPM of CO₂. I felt that I had finally found my calling to address climate change. It felt more important than my research at that point. I felt this was a tangible way to make a difference versus spending all my time on a publication that very few people read. I quickly rose to leadership in the fossil fuel divestment coalition because of my passion and because my climate evangelism which got more people to sign the petition than anyone else. I started to speak at Board of Regents meetings calling for divestment and immediately got picked up by media and crowds. Suddenly other people were inviting me to speak about the climate.

Unfortunately, we still reached 400 PPM of CO₂ in the atmosphere and I was shocked. Why didn't the world stop and see what we did? How come we did not take a global pause and evaluate the mess we made? No one stopped. NOAA put out an excerpt from climate scientists about this historic moment and probably only other climate nerds like myself read it. It felt jarring to see how comfortable modern society was at racing off the cliff of humanity.

I was born to fight Climate Change

My climate activism never stopped throughout my work in research and policy. The more I got involved, the more I started to understand how my identity as a Black femme and a daughter of an Ethiopian refugee shaped my urgency and care about climate change. One particularly moving moment for me was reading "Notes from a Hyena's Belly" (Mezlekia, 2002), a book about the revolution that my dad had survived and fled Ethiopia for. My father never would tell me much about that time in his life. I believed it was because he had suffered trauma and did not want to return to those memories. I did not know much about how he ended up in the United States, except that he fled Ethiopia when he was 18. He had escaped from the dictatorship takeover of the government, telling no one because they were killing everyone. He was a refugee traveling the world for ten years before finally settling in the United States.

Reading the book, it helped me fill in the gaps my father never talked about. One that stuck with me the most was that the overthrow started with a famine created from desertification of the Sahara Desert, causing millions to starve. The king's handling of the situation caused the political instability and led to a coup that toppled Ethiopia's last monarchy in a violent takeover that caused much suffering. I never knew the beginning of the story. My dad only talked about who took over, not why the kingdom fell. It was because of the environment; it was because of desertification which had been driven by climate change. Though he was ultimately uprooted due to the violence and chaos that descended afterward, inadvertently, my father was a climate refugee, and I was the daughter of a climate refugee. That was why this was my calling. I was born to fight climate change. Knowing this only stoked the fire to my passion.

If I have to Choose, it won't be Science

I was not ready to give up on physical science's ability to help climate change, even though I was not as passionate about it. Its glacier pace wouldn't be able to stop all the glaciers from melting in time. However, I still liked the idea of doing research, so I signed up for a

semester-long full-time research apprenticeship. The laboratory was at Friday Harbor Labs in San Juan Island, a beautiful paradise near the Washington State and British Columbia border in the waters of the Salish Sea. Being able to be a full-time researcher, without the distraction of organizing and all the other internships and volunteering I was doing allowed me to focus on this work. The apprenticeship was in marine sediment research, specifically looking at the Elwha dam removal which, at the time, was the largest dam removal in the country.

I was ecstatic to be involved because dam removal was a hot topic in the environmental movement and there was a push to get dams removed to protect salmon and support indigenous communities. I decided that I could combine two movements: the climate movement and the indigenous movement to get dams removed by studying what happens to carbon after a dam is removed. Does the carbon get stored or released back into the environment? This way we could answer the larger question: is dam removal a climate solution? I designed my own research project for it. In doing so I had to learn how to measure carbon through loss on ignition analysis, perform grain size analysis, use ArcGIS for my carbon spatial distribution maps and Matlab for my graphs and data analysis. While it felt like a bit of a detour from my climate work, I still felt like the work could help and I still was excited to be working in a lab on climate research.

That changed one day on the beach of the estuary of the Elwha River going into the Pacific River. We were retrieving samples for our research. For my specific project I was taking samples of the sand that had blown out from below the dam to measure their carbon content. I asked the researcher I was working with about the implications of this research, specifically if this caused the carbon to sink, if this could be a recommended climate mitigation tactic. Now I will admit I am the annoying person in class, who sits in the front and asks too many questions. I blame it on being homeschooled. I see education as more of a conversation. He had just graduated from a UC school and was working as a postdoc He was a young white male and yet I still saw him as a role model. I was constantly asking him questions about how to refine my methods and improve

my question. I also would talk about the most updated climate science and what needs to be done to address it at the scale of crisis. One day he snapped back at me. "You cannot do this," He said. "You cannot be a climate activist and a scientist. You have to choose. Being a climate activist means you have an agenda and thus a bias and that makes your research less reliable." He went on to tell me someone in his field –he studied beaches –was an activist to protect shores from development and that no one trusts her science because she has an agenda to save the beaches. "But climate change is about saving the world? What choice do we have? And aren't scientists most responsible to take action? Because we are the ones closest to the problem, we know just exactly when the human race will die out if we do not address this. We cannot just measure when we are all going to die and do nothing about it, wouldn't that make us most responsible for these deaths if we did nothing to prevent it?" He told me "no, that the physical sciences values positivism, meaning that we cannot have agendas or desires in our research." He said "it was actually more dangerous as a climate scientist to be an activist, since there are already climate denialists that try to poke holes in the research by attacking the researchers." He told me that if I continue down this path of being known as a climate activist, I will never be able to publish. I was shocked and defiantly told him "my goal is not to publish and make a name for myself, my goal was to save the planet and protect us from global warming". I left the physical sciences after I finished this research (Tekola, 2014), because, if I have to choose between social change and climate justice activism or physical sciences, I will choose activism. I have personally made differences in the world based on my activism, few people have ever read my research and it has hardly made a difference.

Maybe the government will save us: Shattering My Dreams and Waking me up to the reality: EPA

When I returned to school from Friday Harbor labs, I decided I needed to stop focusing so hard on research and start looking into policy and government. It seemed that this was where

change and climate action could be taken. My first stab at this was at the National Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It was another dream job of mine and I received this internship the same way I received the one from NOAA. I attended a public hearing EPA held about President Obama's Clean Power Plan. After I gave my two-minute testimony I walked over to one of the EPA employees, gave them my UW business card and told them I wanted to help them implement this and that I would work for free. I just wanted a foot in the door. They gave me a foot in the door alright, the front door. I got an internship to work on the content for their kiosk in the welcoming center in EPA Region 10. It was not research or policy, but it was a chance to interview the department head in each department, which was almost like a job shadow in each department to see which one would be the right department in which to stop climate change.

It was grunt work but I kept it entertaining by using my outward facing whiteboard in my cubicle to write climate facts like, "200,000 people a year die from coal dust - what are we doing to stop this?" I would only come in a few times a week but people would come by my cubicle when I was there to meet who was the obnoxious person telling them how they were not moving fast enough on the climate. When I finally got to interview the Climate Adaptation Manager, I had done my research to know that he was the one responsible for implementing the Clean Power Plan. When I walked in I asked him, "So just when are we shutting down these coal fired power plants?" He told me, "Shhh! Don't talk like that, you are going to get us sued." He told me that environmentalists had said that this would kill all power plants, but EPA was trying to reassure people in the coal industry that adaptations could be made like scrubbers so that it would not end the industry. I was confused, "But doesn't the best available climate science say that we must end coal use now since it's the dirtiest fossil fuel and uses up more of our climate budget?" He was like "yeah that is the science but the policy side is not as cut and dry like that, you cannot just end an industry that can create a whole ripple in the economy."

I started to question how well the environment was being protected if EPA was just going to prioritize the economy over the environment. The Oil and Gas was even worse, this

department is our last line of defense. They have the ability to shut down pipelines and all fossil fuel extraction. The manager explained how the majority of the work was litigation, because if they permit gas or oil they get sued by the environmentalist groups but if they do not permit the project they get sued by the oil industry. She then went on to explain that the oil industry usually wins and thus most projects end up going through. I was shocked as she matter-of-factly explained how the environmental protection agency could not actually protect the environment. My eyes became open and my reality of the world shattered. The agencies that were put in place to protect the planet are rubber stamping its destruction. EPA and NOAA were my dream jobs when I started college but at this point I decided the Federal government was part of the problem of why climate action was not being taken. They had been too far corrupted by the Oil Industry. I lost faith in their ability to protect the planet like their supposed mission was. I decided I needed to focus on more local policy change.

Even Local Government Sold Out: Seattle

I was getting closer to finishing my bachelor's degree and yet felt further away from knowing what I wanted to do than before I started. One day I was riding the bus in South Seattle where I lived. It was dark and I was surprised to see Seattle City Councilmember Mike O'Brien on the bus. At this time of night, usually we do not see white people in the South Side on the bus, especially not politicians. I knew him personally. He was an environmentalist too and had come out to Divest UW's campaign events to urge UW to divest from fossil fuel. I intentionally sat near him and started up a conversation. He asked me how it was going and I decided to be brutally honest and tell him the dilemma I was in. I had all this experience in climate research, but climate research was not going to save the planet. Policy seemed to be more the way, but no one would give me a job in policy because my experience was physical sciences. However, I do have the experience of fighting for policy change and have changed policy through activism but that is not seen as "real" policy experience. He told me that was ridiculous and that he

recognized the validity of my experience. He said his office was hiring. He gave me his business card and told me I should apply.

A few weeks later I was working as a legislative aide for him. It was an amazing job and position, initially my work was just answering his emails and scheduling appointments for him. However, he recognized my skills, being a climate and racial justice activist. At this point, I had joined the Black Lives Matter movement and led the BLM movement on campus where we organized the largest student walk out since the 1960s. After negotiations with the President of the University of Washington, we won millions of dollars reallocated toward racial justice and equity. I also joined the movement against a youth jail and protested the brutality in the Seattle Police Department. He let me cover his sustainability and public safety policy components. This meant I would do the research and draft policy and resolutions for him in these fields. During my time here I think the most relevant thing I did was being a conduit between the community and the government, making sure my community knew what the local government was doing with their future. One campaign I initiated was Block the Bunker, which fought to stop a bullet and bomb proof three-story police station from a POC neighborhood. We were able to get the money relocated to affordable housing, in part because the community learned about this project because of my access to this information. We created the first resolution in the country to call for the end of the detention for juveniles. From this, we were also able to allocate a few million dollars toward transformative justice and alternatives to jail for juveniles, in the fight against the youth jail. My successes in sustainability policy were less than this.

It always seemed that any work on sustainability involved more powerful stakeholders than even the government and made it impossible to get anything passed. For example, when we tried to pass an equitable climate policy for buildings, not wanting to hurt small BIPOC businesses we decided to focus on buildings larger than 20,000 square feet and excluded warehouses. The plan would force them to become 100% renewable by 2030, which is in line with where we need to be to stay under 1.5 degrees of warming. However, because of how we

wrote the bill we were really targeting skyscrapers and that is when I learned that there was a Skyscraper lobbyist group. They swooped in after I had worked with a climate group to write the policy and they said powerful things that scared the council into watering down the bill.

O'Brien's and my dream policy was to ban combustible engines. We dreamed up how we could do this in a way that would be equitable and leave no one behind and not impact the most marginalized. I drafted an electric car sharing program that would be attached to the housing department so those in public housing would have access to electric cars. We worked to make the car chargers across the city more equitable, focusing on South Seattle and other areas where there were disparities in car chargers and other amenities. Finally, working with an environmental think-tank they helped me determine just when we would need to ban the combustible engine to keep below 1.5 degrees of warming. I took this number to Seattle's transportation department and talked about the different ways to implement it. Their research aide told me that the policy was ridiculous, that it would never pass politically. I told him that climate policy needed to be based on climate science not politics and societal feelings on it. I was not here to get elected, I was here to implement climate policy to stop the climate crisis.

It was all going great, and I finally felt like I had found a place where I could implement what the climate science was saying, even if it was just on a local level. It still could be a model and spread across the country and catch on. That was until the mayor found out about it. The mayor was up for re-election. Seattle has an environmentalist base and he wanted to make sure he received the Sierra Club nomination. He heard that we were trying to create this big policy so he asked us to come sit down and make sure he supported it because we could not roll out a big environmentalist policy that he did not support. This would hurt his nomination. We sat down, I took notes and let Mike tell him the plan. He thought our plan was absurd, he called it unrealistic. Then he started yelling about how this was going to hurt his career, he got all red in the face and out of air. We left that meeting with our heads hung low. This is what drove me back into

research. Maybe what we need to find out was not how to reduce carbon, since we know what we need to do. Maybe the issue at hand is the need to know how to create the societal will to implement policy that will allow us to change society in the ways that we know we need to, to avert the climate crisis.

Back to Science: This time to study their own

This time I went into the social sciences, I felt I had reached my limitations in the physical sciences. Initially, I had thought the physical sciences were superior but now I knew how it was blinded by positivism and was too detached from the realities of the society we live in. Physical sciences tried to ignore all these details, but it was these details that I believed must hold the answer to why neither policy nor research was able to get us to adopt climate science. My first social science project was with UW Public Health School in a community based participatory research project focused on teaching rural communities about climate change. I chose to focus on conservatives because I felt it was their denial that most strongly prevented society from taking climate action. I worked with a high school and local council member and held a few events to discuss and talk about climate change. At one of the town halls, a few denialists came and argued with the crowd. They were both old white men who were clearly conservative. I was intrigued. If we could just figure out what was wrong with them, maybe then we could change the climate.

Purdue Research: Learning the Importance of the Messenger

This intrigue brought me to Purdue University as a visiting scholar one summer, through the Summer Research Opportunity Program. My research proposal was on communicating climate change to conservatives in conservative communities and I was brought into the Natural

Resources Social Science Department to conduct a summer long research project. I developed two surveys that asked people's opinions on different climate actions. One survey was written using liberal terms to talk about the planet such as protecting the earth, the other used more conservative words like protecting God's creation. I wanted to see if the problem was the way we were talking about climate change that was causing people to shut down and not take it seriously. What I learned quickly, as I toured country fairs in rural Indiana to get surveys filled out, was that the messenger was important. At one point I was called the N word and I got called a troublemaker and kicked out of a county fair because I asked if they wanted to take a survey about climate change and this big old white man started yelling and making a scene. When someone from the county fair came over, I explained I was a visiting scholar from Purdue and I was simply trying to get my surveys filled out. He asked me how I could prove that I was a scholar from Purdue. I pointed at my Purdue university car I had come in and he told me I could have stolen it, and before I could take out my Purdue ID he told me it was best us hooligans get out of here. Worse yet, I had introduced another variable into my research because the other undergraduates who were helping me get surveys were white and they were much better received than I was, so now there was liberal and conservative surveys and then a black versus white messenger that I was testing for at the same time. I did my best to analyze my data, which did not statistically significantly say much, but I had actually learned more from my literature review where I found research that suggested that it was not for lack of knowing that climate denialists deny climate change, it is actually because they fully understand what climate change will do (Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001). They do not want to change anything to the current social order because the status quo privileges them (McCright & Dunlap, 2010). One paper went so far as to say that rich white men deny climate change because they know that with their privileges they will be the least impacted so they would rather continue enjoying their power versus working toward a just and equitable future which would mean an upset to their unequal resources and power they currently have (McCright & Dunlap, 2011, 2013). I started to

realize conservatives don't not believe in climate change, it's that they don't want to admit it because it critiques their world view. The conservative worldview is what western society was built upon (Waugh, 2011). At the root of it is colonialism and the frontier or conquering white supremacy mentality. It really started to dawn on me that the climate problem was inherently linked to power and privilege and any solution that did not address the imbalance of power simply would not make a difference.

Time to put my body on the line: Introduction to Direct Action

Though we in the fossil fuel divestment movement expressed the urgency of the climate crisis, our institution did not move at the speed that reflected this urgency. In the first year they placated Divest UW. Despite obtaining thousands of signatures, the president of the university would not even give us a meeting. After a year we even tried to change the ask. We strategized that in order to sustain the campaign we needed at least a small win, so we decided to break the campaign into three steps. The first would be to get the university to divest from coal, the second would be to get the university to divest from gas and then oil. We scheduled it based on the timeline we have left in the carbon budget. We figured that because economically, coal was going bankrupt, there was a fiscally prudent excuse to divest from coal and we could start from there.

But still, the president and university ignored us. So for Christmas we sent him coal, literally coal that we bought for the purpose of sending it to our president. After continuous protests, rallies, street theater and a flash mob and the change of presidents at UW, we finally were heard. Initially, we met with the Treasurer of UW. It went well at first when they said they were willing to put \$25 million of the endowment into renewable energy but they would not budge on fossil fuel divestment. We spent a year trying to engage with stakeholders, but after nine months of editing a letter to Shell telling Shell is not to be a fossil fuel company, we realized

this was all a joke to keep us busy and not working on fossil fuel divestment. So, we went back out and protested. This time the president took up our ask, and held a vote to divest from coal.

After three years of organizing, we finally reached our first milestone which was to divest from coal. Till this day, the university has yet to divest from the rest of the fossil fuels. Throughout the campaign I began to realize something that I seen in other areas I was organizing, such as racial justice. Change did not happen at negotiation tables. The only reason we got to the negotiation table was because of direct action. Whether through protest, rallying the community to comment at public hearings or public and media spectacle, change happened when we no longer asked nicely and were willing to confront and call out the resistance to change and put our body on the line to change it.

Shell No

Nowhere was this clearer than my first city-level direct action. Shell docked their Arctic Drilling rig in Seattle, and we the people were not having it. The ship was called Polar Pioneer, because it would be the first time an oil company was going to drill in the Arctic, none of this would have been possible without climate change which was now causing Arctic Sea ice to melt during the summer. Shell thought it would go to the Arctic during the summer in its time of vulnerability, a vulnerability caused by the very action they were trying to do, drill for oil! The best available climate science had recently published findings based on the carbon bubble (McKinnon et al., 2015). The oil under the Arctic and Amazon rainforest was least accessible and thus should be tapped into last. All of the more accessible extraction sites would more obviously be used up first, and thus tapping into these in addition to those would push us over our carbon budget.

Back then, with a physical science background, I prided myself on relying on data to fuel my urgency. The data said that we were screwed so, I knew I had to stop this by any means

necessary. I rallied both my organizers from Divest UW and BLM. Even my council member said he was down to get arrested for this and we joined the frontlines. Initially, since the oil drilling rig was in the water, Green Peace, 350 Seattle and Backbone planned to protest in kayaks. They had twice weekly training drills throughout the city to practice kayaking to be able to deploy at a moment's notice to stop the rig when it tried to leave. The optics were good. Here we were hundreds of us in six-foot kayaks encircling a 60-foot oil drilling rig, like David and Goliath. The whole city came together to fight this death trap. Our movement here in Seattle got us named kayaktivists when news went global about our fight. The plan was simple. If we could just delay the rig for a few months until the end of summer, by the time they reached the Arctic the ice would have frozen over again for the winter, and they would not have a successful mission.

However, the folks of color including myself, many of whom I had brought to the frontlines of this fight, were not comfortable using kayaks. We trained only a few times, and then were supposed to jump in front of a 60-foot rig and try to run from the police and coast guard in the water on our kayaks. We wanted to show up, but we decided we needed a diversity of tactics. There were many ways to delay the boat, including preventing people from getting on the boat who were preparing it to leave. We created a splinter group for the people of color and anarchists who were not feeling represented by the mainstream liberal environmentalists. We called ourselves the Rag Tags Against Doom. Our call caught on and people from neighboring cities like Portland, Oregon, started showing up quite literally to our doors. We used this energy to organize the June against Doom picket lines and we were supposed to take part in the larger Shell No actions. But because this event was mainly organized and led by people of color, who had previously critiqued the larger Shell No events for being racist and not open to a diversity of tactics, we were not really supported.

The event was a three-day, twice-a-day for two hours, blockade of the streets that the Shell Oil rig workers drove down to get to work. To safely block all three roads, we needed about three hundred people. Each event garnered about fifty to seventy-five people. This was not

enough to stop traffic, but it was enough to shut down one road and reduce work by twenty five percent. All participants were able to protest in the manner that they desired, some of the protesters yelled and screamed profanities at the police. The mainstream environmentalists, predominantly white males, did not support this and one even said, "The megaphones needed to be taken out of their hands and given to the real environmentalists." Groups like 350.org and Backbone campaign refused to share our event details with their constituents and even scheduled overlapping events which took people away from the picket line street blockades to go to their solar powered party. In the end, due to the lack of support, one of our members ended up getting beat up by a worker and hauled off to jail.

Since the movement was city-wide, we had come up with a governance structure similar to Seattle's Occupy Wall Street movement, which I had also loosely participated in. They called it a Spoke's Council, it was similar to a bicycle wheel. Each group would send a representative or a spoke, who would join the hub, which would make decisions for the larger collective. We brought our concerns about how we were being treated because we were BIPOC abolitionists and how there was only space for one type of protesting and not diversity of tactics. Initially, it caused a huge ruckus, causing some white groups to pull out but I did see some of the mainstream environmentalists like 350 Seattle start to question how race was showing up in their organizing and have since made moves to change their white dominant culture.

In the end, as imperfect as our coalition was, we really felt like the city came together to stop this doom machine through a series of direct actions, people's filibusters and other delaying tactics. It concluded with the rig attempting to leave at 4 in the morning and us deploying throughout the city. Over 200 kayaks entered the water, tons of people got arrested on their kayaks by the Coast Guard including two councilpersons Mike O'Brien and Kshama Sawant. The ship left, and initially we felt that we had lost, but we waited to see what would happen. To our surprise we found out months later that Shell got to the Arctic late and the ice had frozen over. They did not do successful extractions, wasted a lot of money and canceled their Arctic mission!

We had won. The people united will never be defeated! We took direct action, and we saved the planet! It was the most amazing moment realizing the power of the people. This was how we were going to save the planet, I thought. Of course, the Arctic's extraction was only delayed unfortunately as a few years later Russia decided to drill and Green Peace's attempt to defend the Arctic led them to Russian prison.

Introduction to Blockadia

Shell was my introduction to Blockadia, a sort of counterculture of mostly white environmentalists, though they are often able to follow Indigenous leadership. They often have dreadlocks and do not shower and live in their car and fight for the planet. I knew there were issues given how white these spaces consistently are, yet there was still a taste of freedom and satisfaction I got from being in these spaces. Not only could I lean into my awkward homeschooler vibes and be accepted, but more than anything it was a space where everyone else was equally freaked out about climate change and willing to risk their life to do something about it. One of the most beautiful things about Blockadia, wherever it would arise was culture in them.

It was a culture of anarchism, security culture and anti-capitalism truly embodied. You could show up with nothing but a willingness to serve and they would take care of you, as long as you contributed. They were inclusive to everyone, except for cops and people with bad security culture. There was an expectation to be in the camp that you contribute somehow, whether it was helping to cook, clean or secure the place. Everyone had a task to do and each was equally important to make sure these places were able to run. There were community kitchens where food was handed out three times a day and everything was free, oftentimes medic tents would exist, and herbalists and masseurs offered their services. If you did not have

something usually you could ask the camp and they would have spare clothes, a tent or anything you needed.

I remember one time there was a need for a car and ours wouldn't work. The mission we were going on was a four-hour drive at minimum, and likely we were going to stay overnight. A woman walked up to me and gave me her car. it was a van which, when we looked into it, we could see she put a lot of work into designing the car and it was clear she was living inside her car, and it had a lot of her personal belongings. I was not sure where she was going to sleep because we just took her home, but she did not seem to care. She had just handed me everything, me a stranger, entrusting me with her house, car and belongings and did not even ask me for my real name or an ID. This was the type of culture Blockcadia carried. It was a divestment from material and capitalist possessions and a willingness to create the world that we wanted to see, by any means necessary.

Unfortunately, like all things I had seen in the environmental movement, there was still a culture of white supremacy and gender norms that played out. The women or more femme-aligned folks would be the ones in the kitchen. There was no attention paid to race and how direct actions by Black and Brown people were a higher risk to themselves and the team and no protections put in place to keep BIPOC folks safe which ended up causing harm. There almost seemed to be a belief that since they were so far removed from mainstream society that they were marginalized like a person of color too. While it was true they did not fit in due to their choice of hairstyles, piercings, tattoos, and other identity modifications, this was not the same as being born Black. They had no self-awareness of why their dreadlocks and remade slave songs for pipeline protests were offensive. Despite their claims of being radically inclusive, they were still only including white people, though often they were queer or disabled.

Introduction to the white racism embedded into mainstream environmentalism

This was not just evident in radical spaces like Blockadia; the mainstream movement had its own brand of racism. For example, I interned at 13 environmental nonprofits and not a single one gave me a job. Each one consistently ended my unpaid internship to hire and pay a white person to replace me. One of the worst times that happened was at a small environmental think-tank, which brought on three Black temporary hires over the summer while their all-white firm was learning about racism. It was the most awkward team meetings, to hear the white people cry about how bad they felt for having implicit bias to the three Black staff who should have never had to be subjected to their emotional dumping and white guilt. At the end of the summer, they let the Black staff go and hired all white people, but prided themselves for taking a diversity course over the summer in front of Black people.

Before becoming more racially conscious I did not understand tokenization. Being the only Black person at volunteer events and in internships, I did not see how they would use me to shield themselves from racism. From making sure I am in the front in every picture, putting me on the front of their newsletter, and profiling me on their website. I was not used to the attention, and I would think it was just because I was special. This was before I realized that I was being tokenized to make these nonprofits look more diverse than they actually were, without them having to do the challenging work of diversity. Worse yet, one environmental nonprofit which I had volunteered in every position from tree planter to grant writer, not only would not hire me but did not even want to plant trees in my neighborhood. I started to realize the disparities between North and South Seattle, and specifically my neighborhood in Rainier Beach. Though they were okay with putting my face in their newsletter, they would not put their bodies in my neighborhood.

Paris 2015: losing hope but gaining resilience

One of my most exciting moments in the fight against climate change was when Got Green? offered to let me be their delegate to the Paris Climate Talks in the national Climate

Justice Delegation between Grassroots Global Justice Alliance and the Indigenous Environmental Network. Activists around the world were planning to make sure by any means necessary at the Conference of the Parties (COP) 21, we would finally get an agreed-upon climate accord signed globally, because we were running out of time for the climate. France, who was hosting the global summit, took advantage of a terrorist attack that conveniently happened days before the climate talks and called for a ban on protests that started the day of COP21 and ended the day after COP21. It was obvious what they were doing, but they were serious, calling in their national guard to defend the talks and putting known climate activists in France on house arrest. They used the attacks as an excuse to ban from entry people of color from the Global South in participating in the civil society events because of the threat of "terror". Seeing the disparities in delegates between the most impacted like African countries and small island nations who would often have only one delegate in total versus countries like the United States who would bring over a hundred delegates it became very clear that no justice was going to be done here.

Attending the civil society events and hearing how it was going down in negotiations it started to become clear that governments and policies were not going to be how we solved climate. In fact what was happening here was only further entrenching the world social order. Western countries and corporations (who were invited members) were more powerful and fighting to continue the status quo, while Africa and small island nations pleaded to prevent the climate chaos from continuing. Solutions proposed like Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) and carbon trading were just climate colonialism, trying to keep the Global South barefoot and pregnant in the dark, while the West would use up their carbon budget. The most powerful moment for me was not when the world signed the Paris Climate Accord and agreed to our climate justice target of 1.5 degrees of warming. While this was world breaking and historic we saw through the small print. There was no way to enforce this commitment countries made. Instead, the most powerful moment was when civil society defied the protest ban on the last day and 30,000 people took to the streets from Arch De Triumph to

the Eiffel Tower. We all stated that we could not expect our governments to protect us and that it was up to we the people to create a better future. We all promised each other from around the world that by next year we would participate in a global civil disobedience if our countries were not keeping their commitments signed here.

Break Free

Coming home from Paris I was reinvigorated to the fight, even though I had become increasingly skeptical of institutions' and governments' ability to do anything for the climate. Instead, I knew it took us putting our bodies on the line and we had already promised civil society at COP21 that we would do this and unlike governments we intended to deliver on our promise. Working with 350 Seattle and Rising Tide, we took the lessons learned from Shell No to build a better, more inclusive fight. We identified a target: the largest point source of pollution in Washington State, an oil refinery. This time we first asked permission from the Indigenous Tribe whose land it was on, and then hired a member from the tribe to help guide this work to being in good relation with the tribe and ecology. We also sat down with the union of the workers of the refinery, learning from last time that making the workers the enemy does not help us build the movement. Initially, we tried to get them to join our cause. We highlighted their own struggles concerning safety, including an explosion that had killed some of the workers. We asked if we could add any of their demands to our action. We informed them that there would be an action, without giving too many details. It was a good thing we did, because initially we wanted to shut down the actual refinery, but they informed us this could cause an explosion. Instead of blockading the workers into the refinery we designed the action to blockade the train tracks and stationed kayaktivists to their port. This meant no oil came into the refinery because about 200 people including myself had occupied the tracks with our tents sleeping out on the tracks. Once refined the oil was put in tankers on the Salish Sea, often sending the oil to China and other international destinations. With kayaktivists blocking their port, no oil was able to leave the

refinery either but we also did not harm or endanger any of the workers. We kept this oil refinery shut down for three days, stopping around 600 tanks of oil. While individually it was a small act of resistance in coordination with our climate activists from around the world we put on at the time, the largest civil disobedience globally.

Intersectionality is the Answer

The climate activism movement was so powerful but if we did not learn to address the inherent embedded white supremacy we were not going to win. Knowing this is why I joined and cofounded Women of Color Speak Out. We were all activist women/femmes of color who had participated in Shell No and Break Free and saw the gaps in the movement and what needed to change. We came together to brainstorm how to make the environmental movement more diverse but concluded we did not want to “integrate our people into a burning building”. Until the environmental movement became more inclusive, we could not invite people of color to join this movement and get harmed at the expense of the environmental movement’s “learning”. We decided WOCSO’s work would be to make the environmental movement less racist, while also creating spaces for people of color to connect to the climate justice movement. Our theory of change was through dialogue, discussion and reflections. We would give a presentation about how the systems of oppression like colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism and white supremacy, were actually the root cause of climate change and not greenhouse gasses. These were only symptoms that the larger system was not working, and what was needed was system change.

Simply reducing carbon will not solve the issue. Working alongside these women helped develop my analysis and showed me how all of these different causes and issues I was fighting against were all connected and that they would all need to be addressed to be able to have a just transition off fossil fuels. Here I was trying to fight for Black lives, separate from the fight against capitalism, which I had separated from the fight for climate justice. But if we cannot even treat Black lives with respect, why did we think we would care for the non-human world? I

started out as a physical scientist thinking we could solve climate change by reducing carbon dioxide. I could not be further from the reality of the fact that it was colonialism that had caused this climate crisis societally, psychologically and ecologically and thus to create a new future we needed to decolonize from the trauma that has been modernity in western society.

How to Deal With the Problem of Carbon: A Carbon Tax?

The mainstream environmental movement's particular brand of racism became most obvious in the fight for a carbon policy in Washington State. Initially, I heard about this effort through Carbon WA at a UW event Divest UW was at. I was eager to get involved because they were fighting for a carbon tax and though I did not know much about it, I felt empowered to be involved in something solution-oriented. I met the leader of Carbon WA, a white man named Yoram Bauman. He was a stand-up comedian, economist and academic at my school. Yoram was a dorky-looking white guy, with a big nose and small dark eyes that hid behind his glasses and messy head of hair. I was a bright-eyed naïve climate activist and environmental science student. I did not know much about climate policy. I just knew that climate change had disrupted my father's homeland, and I needed to do something. With this urgency I joined their team. The team was a group of students with this economist as the leader. The whole team was white. At the time I did not notice. I told the economist I wanted to be on the policy team, but he said it was only for experts. Instead, as their token Black person they tried getting me to write and do outreach about how their revenue neutral climate policy was equitable to communities of color and poor communities.

Not realizing I was being tokenized and tricked, I brought it to Got Green?, an environmental justice organization. I was a steering committee member for their community based participatory research project where we were designing and rolling out a survey to ask South Seattle, specifically BIPOC communities, about their opinions on the climate crisis and what their city should do about it. We took the surveys and compiled them into a report. The findings

resulted in us highlighting the connections between gentrification and climate justice, and how displacement reduced climate resiliency in climate justice communities. This informed the City of Seattle in creating an Environmental Justice roundtable and a funding source to address these issues.

Got Green? was part of a larger coalition called Communities of Color for Climate Justice (now called Front and Centered). This group had not only heard of Carbon Washington but had already written a public statement denouncing the policy. I was very conflicted. I knew we needed climate action now, but I also wanted a climate justice policy that accounted for everyone's needs. My friends at Got Green? explained how a revenue neutral policy that redistributed money through tax cuts would hurt low income communities and communities of color, while benefiting large corporations. For example, it gave Boeing, our largest polluter, an exemption and an up to \$200 million tax cut yearly, which would leave the State short on revenue for social services and education.

Carbon WA's policy aimed to reach conservatives through their revenue neutral policy and business tax cuts. Low income communities would lose social services and not be able to afford renewable energy or electric cars and would be left behind in the energy transition. A just transition would mean no one gets left behind, and that the communities most impacted would be centered in the solution. They explained how Carbon WA was a bunch of white academics who were trying to push forward a climate policy without any consultation from the community. They told me how they were working with a group called the Alliance for Clean Jobs and Energy, and how this was a climate policy done right. Given my allegiance to climate justice, I quit working with Carbon WA and switched teams to the Alliance.

The Alliance started out by holding listening sessions around the State to consult with all communities in the State to find out what the needs were, especially communities that would be most impacted by this policy. The Alliance built a coalition of businesses, unions, churches, tribes, communities of color, low income groups, and environmentalists. They engaged with all

stakeholders. As such this work took much longer than Carbon WA, which was one economist with a team of "experts" (read old white dudes with PhDs) and students. Carbon WA was not community based but academic elites and so they petitioned and got their policy on the ballot much faster than the Alliance did. Carbon WA got their policy on the ballot before the Alliance was even finished with their listening sessions in the community that would inform their policy.

I tried to bring it to Divest UW and get them to back the coalition fighting for a carbon policy but I was shot down. My co-leader, a white South African, even went so far as to write an op-ed (that conveniently left out his picture) that as an African he was more directly impacted by climate change than American people of color and thus would be supporting Carbon WA. I tried to sit down with the Carbon WA leader. As someone who had started out on his campaign, I figured that he might be able to listen to me and join our efforts instead of building his own thing. I tried to explain the importance of climate justice. I thought he had heard me and that I may have reached him but shortly after that I saw his op-ed in the New York Times that stated why he was writing a bipartisan climate bill. He stated Republicans are our best shot at a climate policy because Democrats are too caught up in using class and race as a political weapon. This showed me he did not hear a word I said, and instead weaponized my attempt at helping us all. In the end, the white boys beat us to the polls, getting their signatures in before us. The two policies ended up canceling each other out, with the Alliance's funder Tom Steyer refusing to fund their policy since Carbon WA had beat us to the ballot and he did not want carbon policies competing. Then Carbon Washington's policy was rejected by the Sierra Club and lost with no support from the left or right. The policy failing at the ballot pushed us back another year without a climate policy, because when you do not include everyone, everyone loses.

Landback is a Climate Justice Policy

When I had entered the environmental movement, planting trees and volunteering, I had thought there was just one movement. But as I got older and developed my critical race analysis,

I realized that there were two climate movements, the mainstream and climate justice and these were by far not the same thing. The climate justice movement differs from the mainstream climate change movement in that it is a movement working for an equitable solution for all countries, especially countries in the Global South who are most impacted. Climate justice is a movement led by people of color worldwide. The mainstream movement was really about protecting natural places divorced from human beings. It felt like it was really about making sure old white people could continue to bird watch and go hiking. I then realized that aside from the inner cities where Black folks were defending the rights of where they live, work and play, climate justice work that was not mainstream was led by Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous peoples are most impacted because of their closer relationship to the environment, causing them to reflect the urgency that I shared. In addition to this I learned that Indigenous peoples were less than 5% of the population but were in possession of 80% of the world's biodiversity. A paper published in Nature actually validated that the best environmental policy to protect and preserve biodiversity and reduce carbon is to give the land back to Indigenous peoples. Once I realized this I began building with the Coast Salish peoples on whose land I resided. From a gas plant in Puyallup, to protecting Licton Springs in Seattle, to supporting the fight for Duwamish recognition, I quickly learned how broad the environmental movement was. It even brought me across borders in so-called Canada on Tsleuth Nation in BC fighting the Kinder Morgan pipeline, to supporting the land back efforts in the Wetsuten Nation in Yukon territory. Climate change was global so I went global too.

Colonialism is the Root

I see all of these systems of oppression as the reason why climate change exists. To me, colonialism is at the root of the climate crisis. It was colonialism that dehumanized people of color to allow white people to steal land, take people and commit genocide. Capitalism's foundation required a surplus of value, and that surplus was received from theft of people and

land, people of the Global Majority. White Supremacy's foundation comes from colonialism and thus was embedded into Capitalism. At the root of it is being in the wrong relationship with the people and the land. A relationship of only extraction and exploitation is at the root of the climate crisis and it came from the 500 years of colonialism, which is why decolonization is the only path forward to receive a different result and undo the mess that this has made. Not addressing colonialism will not protect the environment. I came to this conclusion from my experience in the climate justice movement, through my learnings from Indigenous peoples, and my experiences traveling the world. I saw repeatedly how countries in the Global South were too busy trying to survive the legacies and ongoing violations from colonialism to be able to worry about climate change, a problem framed as distant.

This was the analysis I came into the academy with, when I started at Arizona State University on my PhD in Sustainability. I chose the field of sustainability because unlike the physical sciences, it was solution-focused and action-oriented. It made space for practitioners to actually do the work, which was what I had been searching for the whole time. Finally, I found a new field that had to do with the environment but was not just focused on measuring when we were all going to die, but actually doing something to change that fact. I had honestly not really heard of the field before coming to ASU for a presentation for Divest UW but it seemed like a place I would really be able to do what I had been trying to do all along. There was only one problem, sustainability, though action-oriented, deeply lacked a critical or justice analysis. While I appreciated that social and physical scientists were coming together to solve “wicked sustainability problems” it was almost always solved through science and technology. Cultural and social change were never suggested as the solutions because that involves organizing and relating to people in a way that we just do not do in academia.

Not addressing colonialism will not protect the environment

People of color, people who have been formerly colonized, we are the Global Majority. This becomes an important factor when we talk about climate change. On one hand, taking a climate justice approach to the climate crisis, which centers people of color, is the morally right thing to do. It is what is right and it is what will save the most lives, since it is people of color most at risk. However, removing the justice component since historically and recently (such as the pandemic) we have seen Western society is not interested in justice, let's look at the logistics of pushing forward a solution that is not just. The reality is, since we are the people of the Global Majority, any proposed solution that does not ensure all of us are taken care of is a solution that will not work. Because if only the rich countries addressed climate change, but the countries of the Global South were not able to, the planet would still be caught in a climate crisis. This is the nature of a collective action problem. Simply put, nothing will work without including us since we are the majority of the population on this planet. So, if for no other reason than to want to ensure all of the planet's ecosystems and populations do not crash, we must center the people of the Global Majority in ensuring that solutions proposed address their inequities and make sure we help everyone to rise.

Leaving anyone behind is not an option if we want to have a safe future on this planet. That being said, unlike Western countries, Africa and small island nations, who are most impacted by the climate crisis, have a vested interest in the climate crisis being addressed. So, if it is not for lack of trying why have they not gone carbon neutral? The issue is capital, the type of green development we are asking countries who are still industrializing to do, is the same type of development our local governments in the richest country in the world are saying is too expensive to transition. We are asking countries in the Global South to do the impossible, to achieve something we have yet to achieve. We are asking them to do leapfrog development, to skip over the coal-fired power plant industrial stage, the oil and natural gas development stage to the green tech development stage. This requires tremendous amounts of capital, which these countries do not have because all of their wealth has been and continues to be stolen. This first

happened through colonialism and now through neocolonial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These neocolonial institutions continue the theft through structural adjustments to keep countries poor.

Theft also happens with unfair trading rules and regulations, including tariffs, that keep African countries from being able to refine and mill raw materials so that they are dependent on the West's technology to refine their natural resources. With all of these obstacles, it is no wonder countries in the Global South are not adapting and mitigating climate change. They are too busy trying to solve the continuing theft and extraction of their resources through the continuation of colonialism. As I started my PhD I decided I would take every opportunity possible to go to the Global South both for evidence to show the problems we were finding with western solutions as well as pre-colonial or decolonial solutions that existed.

Tax system in Ethiopia

Given my father's recent move back to Ethiopia after forty years, I found myself going to Ethiopia often. I knew these were rich opportunities for documentation and where else better could I learn about colonization and its impacts to the climate than the Global South. Of course, Ethiopia is a particularly interesting place because it was never directly colonized but the material conditions are the same. To me this shows how colonization was more than just the physical occupation, it is also for African countries about how Western countries limit their growth through trade agreements, refuse them international loans to stop African development, impede their ability to plan for their own future and prevent African countries from sovereignty. There are many examples of this, from more recently when Ethiopia built a dam at the headwaters of the Nile. Ecologically I was not a fan of this, but in the name of sovereignty I saw how this was a big deal for Ethiopia. They built and developed this dam without outside loans or help, and this was going to make Ethiopia the largest exporter of renewable energy in East Africa. Neighboring countries like Egypt started to complain. They tried to go back to their former colonizer Britain

and ask for help but Ethiopia refused to work with Western countries because they rightfully knew this was an African issue. However, the United Nations called them in and at that point Ethiopia's Water Minister had to remind the West that no European country has to get their dam approved but when an African country wants to make itself self-sufficient suddenly it becomes the West's interest. This is the type of colonization that persists, though not directly like old times. It still creates dependency and prevents the Global South from developing their own futures.

Initially, I started my exploration in Ethiopia around the cultural differences. Ethiopia is the birthplace of coffee. In our culture we have what we call the buna ceremony. The buna ceremony is the ritual that we do when we partake in drinking coffee. In Ethiopia coffee requires company and it requires time. "Buna tetu" which translates to "come drink coffee" is our communal tradition in Ethiopia. Families will go outside and invite the neighbors and even strangers walking past, asking if they want buna, come inside for buna. This practice creates the bonding in Ethiopians that is a key thread in the fabric of its society. Initially, we burn frankincense, then cook the green coffee beans. While the beans cook in a pan the host will smudge all the guests with the smoke of the coffee. Sometimes for holidays and special occasions we put cut grass on the floor to celebrate. The host will hand grind the beans and then put them in the Jebena, a clay pot, with water and boil it, cooking coffee without a filter, meaning it's all about the way you pour it. The coffee is poured into very small cups, almost the equivalent of an espresso shot and then we always do it three times. It can last from an hour to six hours. I think about how Westerners, including myself a graduate student, have taken coffee and abused it. Coffee was supposed to build community, it was supposed to be multiple hours to build family. A drive-thru where coffee takes a few minutes is a bit sacrilegious when you think about what the original intention is.

In August of 2018, I was visiting my father in Ethiopia. We went and met my sister-in-law's mother. She had us over for Buna. Unfortunately, my dad never taught me my language.

He thought it was not necessary in America and it being an indigenous language I struggled to find resources to learn it. My dad translated the conversation with my grandmother-in-law and me. I asked about modernity and western culture and its effect on Ethiopian traditional ways. She had a lot to say like how "the Ethiopian coffee ceremony is part of our blood, we bleed it. You can westernize us all you want but we will not change this and how it's the elder's job to remind the young ones of their traditions. The kids say coffee ceremony takes too long and that we should not waste time with it but it's through the coffee ceremony how traditions are passed down like where a woman learns how to make bread and where we get our news." She did talk about some worries she has today, such as Western clothes are cheaper than traditional loomed handmade clothes and she notices the young people have forgotten how to greet each other and elders when they see each other in the market. It used to be when they saw each other they would chat but now they are too busy.

At the time my family had land which had a few structures on it. One of them was rented out by a professor who also worked for the government. He was really friendly and offered to help me with my research. He asked if I wanted to talk to his class and job shadow him at work for a day. He taught a class in a government college about accounting and taxes. This had nothing at all to do with my research, but I thought it would be cool to go to a college class in Ethiopia, so I agreed. I got there and he kind of handed me the reins. There were a few things I observed including that most of the class looked to be in their forties making me definitely the youngest in the room, but I guess that was due to it being a college for government officials. I was really interested in their perspective. I told them a little bit about my work and asked them their thoughts. I asked them what they thought Ethiopia could teach the West and they said, "the buna ceremony should be taught in the West so that they have time to slow down and talk to their family." Ethiopia has a long history of religion. They were Christian before missionaries tried to bring it to the continent. This also translates to a more conservative culture. It was interesting to hear their perspective on what negative things they thought the West brought

them. They mentioned Western culture's negative impacts including drugs and alcohol, sexualization, gayness and hip hop. While on a cultural level I felt these results were interesting. It was not really what I was looking for, though due to wanting my autoethnography to be informed by grounded theory I knew that what I was searching for was emergent and thus unclear, so I continued to talk and explore.

My professor friend offered to take me to his work at the Ethiopian Revenue and Customs Authority. Initially, I naively thought I am studying about the environment and colonization, how possibly could a tax office be useful in my explorations? I knew that the offer came from my American PhD privilege, but it also stemmed from his hospitality and I did not want to be rude. I figured a day at the tax office in Ethiopia could not hurt, even if it was not useful to my research. Initially, I asked about the work culture. I was wondering how time played out in a government office since time is a Western European social construct, but this was also a bureaucratic office. He explained how the work culture is relaxed and people do not really get in trouble for being late. In addition, people usually get two hours off for lunch to be able to go back home and eat with family. He also shared that they have four months maternity leave and 10 days paternity leave, which I was impressed with since that is better than the United States, but not surprised since everything shared really imparted a culture that valued families and communities over the individual and business.

He went on to explain how the tax system was replicable of the UK System (which Canada also uses), however it is ten years old. Because of this, they have to do all taxes by hand on paper and then input it into the computer. Thirty percent of the country's GDP came from this branch. He discussed that the two major problems were due to the outdated system. They often did not have enough manpower to manually enter all the data and ensure the data was clean. This causes errors on taxes. The second major issue is corruption. The biggest tax evasion was through fixed assets. He mentioned how with a country with only 70% literacy and strong tribal and party affiliations it has created a culture ripe for corruption. As they were discussing

everything it was repeatedly brought up how China evades taxes. China is the major exporter of raw material from Ethiopia.

Most of the multinational corporations Ethiopia does business with are Chinese. The issue is that countries across Africa do not have the means of production. Instead, raw materials are shipped out of their country and then the finished product is imported back at more than double the cost. This is structural and intentional. It keeps African countries in a place of dependency on the more industrialized countries, while the industrialized countries get to reap the benefits and wealth that was originally derived from Africa. The reality is that it is the industrialized, westernized countries who are dependent on Africa for all their resources, without which there would be no production. He also mentioned how the IMF and World Bank affects their tax policy, as part of the loans they have received from these Western financial institutions require Ethiopia to allow them to play an advisory role in their tax policy. They will force them to open up their markets or give tax breaks to Western corporations as a means of "development."

He went on to explain how they did not have enough staff to be able to do the appraisal of the goods being valued for taxation. He told me about how some law firms representing these multinational corporations have more staff than their entire office, so they did not have the ability to substantially confront or contradict these appraisals. The result was, for example, a big Norwegian floral company who grows all their flowers in Ethiopia, informed the tax office the value of their bouquets are €1 Euro and is only taxed on this amount. Thus, the revenue from the taxation of the products from Ethiopia are not equitable to the value their foreign corporations were deriving from these products.

To add further insult to injury, a single Dutchman trademarked teff, our indigenous grain in Ethiopia that makes our staple food injera. For 16 years he was able to collect revenue from it as a trademark, because our entire country's government was not able to shut it down immediately. Instead they had to wait on a ruling from a court in the Netherlands. This Dutchman was single handedly able to lay ownership on our indigenous food and generate a

revenue from it, when our own country's government is still not able to generate revenue from resources and products being exported out of the country.

In another case, I remember the big controversy between Starbucks, a coffee company that originated out of my hometown Seattle, but grew into a global multinational corporation and Sidamo farmers. Sidamo coffee from Ethiopia is sold for \$25 dollars a pound at Starbucks, but the farmers were receiving less than a dollar of that revenue. They attempted to trademark their coffee, since Starbucks was marketing their coffee from the Sidama region as a specialty. Starbucks took advantage of these Ethiopian farmers and sued them into debt, resulting in the farmers being even poorer than when they started. I wondered after all this, how much is the government getting from Starbucks operating in Ethiopia? I asked them and was shocked to find out that Starbucks was not paying a dime to them. Instead, they went through a third-party corporation so they do not pay a single dime to Ethiopians or their government. This is modern day, legalized theft. It is present day colonialism, and it continues through tax policy, and international loans and trade agreements. This is why Africa and countries in the Global South are in poverty, not because of lack of intelligence, hard work or resources. It is because of the continued theft by Western countries and corporations. How could the Global South ever begin to think about building a new world and climate justice when they are struggling to keep their resources and revenue within their borders.

The Philippines and Multinational Corporate Colonization

Through BLM organizing in Seattle, I got to work with a lot of different groups. One group, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (lit. "New Patriotic Alliance") or BAYAN, was a Philippines alliance of leftist mass organizations. They were solid and helped us hold down the frontlines against the police and government during the first BLM uprising in 2014-2016. In 2016, a member said we have come to your frontlines, we would like to invite you to ours. So, before we knew it, we were on our way to the Philippines, but not before we studied the history. Attending

their Philippines, Society and Revolution (PSR) study beforehand on the history and contextualization was a prerequisite of the trip. The Philippines is an area rich in natural resources, from rainforests and mangos, to gold and copper. But their largest export is people.

These rich resources have made them a target of colonialism. Christianity was used to colonize them; instead of sending armies they sent teachers and Christian ministers. BAYAN called their status semi-colonial, it was "flag-independence," a different flag but same masters, a sort of pseudo-freedom. Similar to Ethiopia, they call it Bureaucrat Capitalism, "an undemocratic society controlled by corrupt officials for the material benefit of the few at the expense of the masses." In 1946, they were granted pseudo-freedom based on unequal treaties tying them to the United States. Seventy-five percent of the Philippines are peasants cultivating land they do not own, making it semi-feudal. They identify their three root problems as US Imperialism, Feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism. They talked about how US Imperialism is the single greatest cause of misery in the Philippines. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has already said she wants to move her troops to the Asia-Pacific region. The US is trying to move more bases there and already sends \$66 million in military aid to the Philippines. Oplan Bayanihan is a cointel pro project labeling activists as communists and then killing them to help mining corporations take indigenous peoples' land. There is a visiting forces agreement that allows the US Military to have special privileges in the Philippines. The Philippines actually subsidizes the US Military bases.

In the Philippines there are two classes: landlords and peasants who cultivate the land. Imperialism is foreign or outside oppression while feudalism is internal oppression. Ninety percent of the land is owned by less than 10% of the population. The majority of the population are farmers or peasants. Majority of their profits from farming goes to renting the land to farm, keeping them just barely getting by, sometimes making about a dollar a day. Most of the food they farm they do not get to eat; it gets exported to other countries like the United States. There is a decades-long history of peasant massacres where they were killed for protesting for food. Government money and taxes are not put toward the people. While parts of the funds go into

creating big cities, slums are still left creating unequal development. This has only ballooned; in 2004, 23 million were in poverty and in 2015 it was 66 million.

BAYAN has three basic demands: national industrialization, genuine agrarian reform, and national democracy. They defined national industrialization as a plan of industry for the benefit of the peoples. They will not just industrialize to keep up with the Americans but focus on the people's needs and the needs of the land. Natural resources would not be exported but used sustainably for themselves. They defined genuine agrarian reform as a massive land transfer back to the people, the landless peasants. It would also include making their practices more sustainable and tapping into their indigenous methods that work with the land, instead of domination over it. Finally, they demanded a national democracy, a government by and for the people. This would be a national democracy with a socialist perspective. In order for it to meet the needs of the people, they would nationalize industry. Industry would meet the needs of people, not their luxuries and not foreign capitalists. They would also nationalize services like healthcare and education for all. Their vision of the Philippines looks like peasants own their land, no more exports, end of mining and drilling, kicking out all foreign military bases and allowing indigenous peoples to live autonomously.

A people's democratic government looks like building a new state created by the people for their interests. It is important for it to be truly democratic for it to have representation from indigenous people, women, workers, peasants, youth and students. It would not be for the benefit of the rich and would respect the sovereignty of indigenous peoples. They would strive for cooperative enterprises as opposed to only privately owned.

There are two autonomous regions in the North Philippines and South Philippines. These places are sovereign nations until a multinational corporation wants their land and takes it by eminent domain. The national democratic movement is a completion of what began in the 1896 revolution. A perfect society is one that is changing and developing with the society. They talked about societal growth as moving from primitive communalism, feudalism, slavery, capitalism (the

current state) to advanced communalism. The things in their favor to move away from capitalism are finite resources, which they are especially feeling on an island. The population is growing, and they are already seeing that they cannot all be capitalists. Advanced communalism is an idea that is before its time but they must continue to fight and not let capitalism kill their hopes.

We first arrived in Mindanao. The point of the trip was to do a human rights observation, but also to become educated and aware about what was happening to these communities. We learn the struggle for land has been going on since colonialism, and the revolution is still going because the land was never given back even after the country was supposedly given its freedom. The indigenous peoples' land was taken first by Spanish colonizers then transferred to American imperialists, and now multinational corporations who are still mining their lands. The government has never taken care of the Lumad, one of the Indigenous groups we are working with. So, with the help of NGOs, they built schools without any help from the government. But the government never wanted them to become educated, because it made it harder to confuse them with contracts and take their resources when they were able to read. So the government has been occupying the indigenous schools, killing the teachers and shutting them down. They know once the Lumad are educated they will shut down the mining of their lands.

The specific land we are going to in Bukidnon is on the frontlines of resisting displacement. They are resisting the University which is attempting to take their land from the Lumad and rent it out to Davco which uses it to grow Dole Pineapples. We were told by the people, do not eat pineapples, they are dipped in blood. The pineapple plantations displace the Lumad, so pineapple consumption and demands displaces indigenous peoples. This is a trend across the country; the production of agriculture on leased land gets exported to big business outside of the country. Land reform programs have been subverted nationally. Feudal lords still exist as multinationals like Dole and Del Monte. The struggle for land is the struggle for life. The environmental destruction is a plundering by the capitalists. For us to see the real situation happening in the Philippines we must immerse ourselves in the struggle.

We arrive to the community. The BTL Farmers have been here on the land for 21 years. Some have even been here since birth. Most of them came from nearby places. This used to be idle land that was untouched before 1986 when they received it during a comprehensive land reform program. Central Mindanao University got them land and gave them a five-year contract from 2002-2007, after which farmers were able to stay through the status quo. However, harassment from CMU security guards since 2007-2011 has been rampant. The farmers were shot at and farm equipment was confiscated. They no longer allow them to build on their own land. After several appeals the Supreme Court granted them rights to the land. In 2011, they ramped up the campaign camping out at CMU and fighting back against the guards which temporarily stopped harassment.

A 77-year-old woman presented to us. She said Del Monte is not a Filipino business, but they bring their business so that they do not have to pay taxes. They do not have to pay taxes because of the World Trade Organization. They do not even have to pay tariffs. The government does not give water to farmers, they charge them \$2,550 per hectare for water which costs more than they make from the harvest so farmers are essentially indentured servants. The Usury lend them the money and they pay them back in the future. They have to buy water from the National Irrigation Administration. During the dry seasons, the price goes up to \$2750. She chose to continue to resist despite her anxiety over gunshots and harassment from guards and CMU. She only wants a stable life and to send her kids to college.

While there, we met with the President of Tamaraw. He is the second president here. Every other year they have elections. He did not choose to be president, the people chose him. It is a volunteer position. Responsibilities include conflict resolution and problem solving, planting and organizing. He received the position because he was going around Bukidnon and telling farmers what was going on about the land grabbing and organizing his community to stop it. The biggest issue is that they do not get any help from the government, and they have to borrow money from the Usury putting them in debt. His biggest hope is that they can have their land,

even though they lost the case in the Supreme Court. The farmers shared it is better to die from the bullet than to starve to death. For the farmers, this is life or death. They either will win the land or die trying. The land was distributed from the agrarian reform program but CMU is debating this in court. All over the country farmers are fighting disputes over land that was given to them out of a program that intentionally attempted to take land from the colonial ownership and redistributed it to landless farmers through the agrarian reform program in 1988. Today the fight to defend it continues but since the courts have failed them, now they need everyone to unite, all sectors to put pressure on the government.

The sad part of this story is that while I thought I could make a difference when I got home, I was not able to. I came home and continued to perpetuate the harm that my existence as an American causes. I was not able to get an American journalist to write a story about these farmers being kicked off their land. Worse yet I did not even have the self-discipline to avoid pineapples, Dole or Del Monte. At first, emboldened by these activists' stories and their self-sacrifice, I removed them from my diet. I did not eat pineapples or bananas. Bananas because I could not find ones that weren't sold by Dole, Del Monte and the other multinational fruit plantation banana republics that continued their colonial rule. However, after some food allergens my diet options became limited, and I started drinking smoothies in the morning and could not avoid bananas. I understand this is a peak first-world problem, however I think furthermore it speaks to how embedded we in the western world are to these systems of oppression and unsustainable consumption.

It is damn near impossible to live in this Western capitalist system and not be causing harm. To have traveled around the world and seen the oppression that a bouquet of flowers, a cup of coffee or a pineapple has on people in the Global South and the lands that they live on, is a reminder of the violence my existence causes as an American consumer. It makes me want to homestead in the woods and never buy anything again. Of course, land ownership in and of itself is a privilege that I do not have. In fact, I do not even have the ability or time to buy everything

from farmers markets or locally, fair trade, or even organic food. Currently the majority of my food is sourced from salvaged and surplus food stores like the 99 Cents store or Grocery Outlet. The salvaged nature of the food makes me feel slightly better about my own consumption but it also limits my selections to multinational corporations like Dole who are causing harm globally but I am too busy trying to survive off my low wages to be able to fight back through consumer choice. This is the issue with consumer choice: it so often puts the burden on individuals and market-based options versus holding these multinational corporations responsible. To solve this problem of chronic poverty and corporate greed in the Philippines and elsewhere, it cannot be by individual choices or actions, but rather collective action on the root causes of the semi-feudal, semi-colonial nature of the Philippines. Only when there is a government truly serving the interests of the vast majority of the population, the issue of land and resources in the hands of the people instead of foreign corporations and countries, can the Philippines be truly free and self-reliant.

Zapatista and western women

I had the privilege of attending the Zapatista's First International Women's Gathering in March of 2018. It was an amazing experience, one that made me wish I knew Spanish better and opened my eyes to the differences between Western feminism and indigenous feminism.

To give a little background on the Zapatista's, they are an autonomous group of indigenous people with agrarian livelihoods within Mexico. In 1994, they rose up, taking up arms against the government to fight for their own sovereignty. They did this in the year NAFTA passed because they foresaw the economic crisis that would follow when the American GMO'ed corn flooded the Mexican market and Mexican farmers couldn't compete and lost their livelihoods and entire way of life (causing an increase of migration to the States). They saw the dangerous neoliberal path Mexico was on and they broke away from it. Today, they have essentially formed their own Nation within Mexico. They have their own government, military, banks, economy, food

systems, water systems, and waste systems. On top of this they operate from a non-hierarchical system: there are no leaders, no bosses and no one gets famous. This is in part why they wear ski masks so you can only see their eyes and they do not tell you their real name. In this way, everyone is equal. Even women have been made equal.

I came with a crew from Seattle, we are all women of color and all activists who have worked together in the Pacific Northwest on the frontlines against the fossil fuel extractive exploitative empire and the imperialistic police state. So we had already built trust together. This crew had been working with the Zapatista community for almost a decade. They had taught me the protocols that were important so that we were respectful on Native land. These included absolutely no drugs or alcohol: this will get you banned from the Zapatista community. We wore modest clothes because the Zs dress modestly and we are on their land. We were told not to talk about EZLN, their military, because it is separate and you do not want them to think you are a spy. After a few months of conference calls I felt ready and prepared to show up to the Zapatista community.

Unfortunately, whiteness showed up in an unpleasant way that started to sour the trip. I really did not want to make whiteness the central focus on my trip down to the Zapatista community. I came here to learn from the Zapatista community, not learn what not to do. But whiteness started to take up space in a way that could not be ignored and it was upsetting.

The trip to the Zapatista community started at their autonomous school. We took a cab from San Cristobal and journeyed out for about twenty or thirty minutes, I could not tell you exactly where we were. The first step was registration. We had registered online but needed to pick up our registration. This took about three hours, so we stayed in line. While in line we noticed that although it was an international crowd, it was overwhelmingly white or light skinned participants. Now we know that white supremacy is a global phenomena and that especially in regards to Latin America the darkness of your skin correlates with the amount of poverty that you are in. The whiter you are, the richer you are; this is a colonial legacy. The majority of the

people were from Latin America, I saw the entire time no one came from Africa but there were Afro Latinos and people from Western countries of the African diaspora. Also, people from Asia were also vastly underrepresented. I saw one person from Singapore but every other Asian person was from a Western country. Latin America showed up in a big way, but most of the people looked like white people from the United States except they spoke Spanish, they had blue eyes and blond hair, wore skinny jeans and Nikes, wearing even some of the same trends that are fashionable right now in the States.

Everyone wears a nametag that states the place they are from so I could tell where they were coming from. As we got onto the bus, a large group of white people from Argentina got on the bus. They seemed to be a part of the same group, they were all wearing green bandanas. There were chanting and singing songs in Spanish, I could not tell what they were saying but some of the chants I am pretty sure I have chanted in English before at protests. The trip to the caracole was long and arduous. It took about five hours total in driving on a huge bus through narrow and sometimes dirt roads, but because we stopped for bathroom breaks it took about six hours. By this time it was dark, but we had gotten to Zapatista land. There were huge signs that said, "Welcome Women of the World!" As we started to file out and get our luggage from the storage of the bus, the Argentina group was ahead of us. Maya, one of the women from my crew asked one of the women from the Argentina group who was in the front looking for her luggage. "Could you please pull the luggage out instead of putting it back so that the people behind you can grab theirs as you are looking for yours?" She refused, stating that she was in a hurry. I am not sure why she was in a hurry because we had all just arrived and the line we were going to sit in for the next three hours really was not going anywhere.

After we get our luggage we joined the half-mile line to get into the women only zone of this "caracole". One of the members of our crew, Josefina, is a trans woman. She had been struggling in Seattle living undocumented in a rapidly gentrifying city, that she had made the choice to "deport" herself back to Mexico City. She had only been in Mexico for a month and had

been couch surfing with family members before she joined us. As such, she was unshaven and without makeup. People thought she was a man and tried to bar her from entering the woman only zone. When we explained to the Zapatistas that she identified as a woman they were immediately supportive and apologized, but Josefina continued to be hassled the whole time there. One interesting difference I noticed was that the indigenous and brown women would stare at Josefina, showing their misunderstanding or belief she was not supposed to be there. But the white women would either yell in Josefina's face to leave or get some of the Zapatista guards and order them to remove her! The level of entitlement was astounding here, this was not even their land and yet they wanted to dictate who could be here.

The next day we woke up and started looking for breakfast. Different caracoles were represented, each had their own kitchen and for only 10 or 20 pesos (less than a USA dollar) we could get food. The Zapatista women were running all the kitchens, cooking all the food, serving the over 5,000 of us for less than a dollar each. I felt horrible about this situation. It felt oddly hierarchical since the indigenous women who invited us here were serving us all for almost nothing at all, and given our ability to travel across countries indicates we are in a better position financially than they were. At the same time, I felt scared to try to help because I didn't want to offend them or step on anyone's toes. The Zapatistas are legendary to me, being so close to them was unbelievable. I felt star struck, fan boyed, and scared. The fear was odd, and took a while for me to place, it came from not wanting to do anything wrong. But, also due to my own heritage I have always been afraid of police. This extends to security guards, military etc, and so when I saw the Zapatista military I was terrified but I had to remind myself this military is on my side, and that I support them but it is not like that type of fear just evaporates. On the first night we were sleeping in this barn-like structure on top of a hill. The bathrooms were all the way at the very bottom. I woke in the middle of the night and had to pee. I decided I would just go to the back of the barn and pee in the grass so I opened the back door of the barn and there was a whole line of Zapatista military guards, masked up and armed. I almost pissed myself right there!

And yet I had to remind myself they are guarding us, I should be so honored, and yet I still decided I would rather walk all the way to the bottom of the hill than face them again.

As we walked around the first day, we saw another unfortunate pattern: the white women or the western women most disconnected from their culture, were culturally appropriating all the cultures possible. Examples of this included white women with dreadlocks, wearing dashikis and pants with Sanskrit on them, native tribal paint on their face and Mayan scarfs. It was quite painful to observe, it is one thing to be adopting a culture. This I can understand more, for example many people bought things in Mexico either from here at the gathering or elsewhere. I too was guilty of this. However, the way these women were wearing indigenous cultures felt colonial. It was like they were trying to take as many cultures as possible as their own. They were not learning about the cultures they were wearing either. They simply took parts of other cultures. This was evidenced by some of the tribal war paint they wore that should only be worn during war or ceremony. This is an example of the pathology of modernity, to have an entitlement over other people's culture, without giving it the respect it deserves to actually learn about the culture they attempted to adopt.

The pathology of modernity was rampant at this gathering. It was most apparent in white people regardless of whether they were from the Global North or South, from Argentina to Germany we saw a pattern. These people took up more space than others and were completely dissociated from their body to realize this (Lorenz & Watkins, 2001). However, this sense of unconscious entitlement came from most of the western women, even Mexican women who came from Mexico City behaved much differently than the Mexican women who came from the rural countryside. One such example was during a workshop when a white woman pushed to the front of the crowd, pushing past Mayan grandmothers who were much shorter than her and children who could also not see over her. As she got to the front she sprawled her yoga mat on the dirt floor and sat in the very front blocking the view of others who had gotten there before her.

While standing in the purified water line, I noticed a Canadian in front of me with sacred geometry tattooed on her. As we stood in line on this grassy muddy hill, an elder with a cane tried getting past us, everyone in the line moved out of their way, but this Canadian woman was completely oblivious to her. The elder came back around the way, and again myself and the Mayan women around me moved out of the way but the Canadian again was not aware. She then decided she wanted to wash her bottle while in line, with the unfiltered water. There was a Mayan woman washing her feet in the fountain. Behind her others waited to use the fountain. The Canadian again did not seem to notice and cut the Mayan woman off by taking the water from the fountain. The Mayan woman was very humble about it and simply took a step back and allowed her to take what she wanted. When it came her turn for the purified water she placed her bottle under the faucet and waited for it to fill. The turnout of the gathering was higher than expected and thus the filtered water was running very low. Once the Canadian finished filling up her water bottle she walked away, allowing the limited source of filtered water to spill out on the ground. A Latina woman behind her gasped and ran to catch the spilling water, shocked she would waste this precious resource but the Canadian was not even aware of what she did. Multiple times I saw white women walking away from running faucets and saw brown women running to shut it off.

This mentality was so visible due to the stark contrast of westerners' behavior while interacting with Zapatista indigenous people. As we were playing soccer, this behavior showed up again. I was on a team with westerners against a team of Zapatista women. The Zapatista women were quite a bit smaller than us, some of them played barefoot. The western women did not seem to notice the body size difference and despite it simply being a friendly match, they played so aggressively that they were injuring the Zapatista women. The westerners got so aggressive that I dropped out of the game because I no longer felt comfortable behaving in that manner towards the Zapatista women. The westerners were not conscious of this behavior. Rather, the conditioning from living in a competitive capitalist society has caused them to assert

domination, control and aggression during a friendly match of football. It was in stark contrast to the Zapatista women who grew up outside of this competitive capitalist society and were able to play a friendly match of football without asserting this behavior.

As you can begin to see the way whiteness or the pathology of modernity showed up in indigenous land was harmful. This is the mentality that all of us have to some degree living in Western society. This mentality affects our relationship with people and the environment, it has created a culture of individuals acting all in their own self-interest, with no one looking out for the future of society as a whole. Our dissociation with ourselves translates into the way we try to solve our problems, limiting our ability to solve sustainability problems holistically.

While at the Zapatista's First International Women's Gathering, I had the pleasure of talking with Zapatista women. Due to my limited Spanish it ended up being more of an interview. I wrote my questions and had a friend translate them. Zapatista women have actually gone much further in their fight for women's equality than we have been able to in the West. This women's gathering was organized and created for only women and the Zapatista women put it on all by themselves with the Zapatista men supporting by cooking food and watching the children. This was also evident when we asked them what it was like to be a woman Zapatista. They could not answer the question because they had not experienced difference between a woman and man in the Zapatistas. Work is shared, and the only gender differences they talked about were more due to biological strength differences than anything else.

My work is about changing Western society, so that we are not dependent on exploitation and extraction. It is critical I visit places and people who have created new societies to learn how they did it. This was my intention in visiting the Zapatista community, to learn how they changed their values and ways of treating each other and the land and how they created independent economies without recreating capitalism. Being indigenous people, many of them did not need to unlearn but rather resist the modern ways of being. However, patriarchy and

hierarchy were systems of oppression they did previously struggle with so these were some the questions I had for them.

What I found most eye opening was when I asked them about what they thought about the West. Now these women I was speaking to were women farmers from the Global South. They are "campesinos" whom most international development agencies would consider in need of aid or development despite the fact that they are self-sufficient and not interested in western development. They replied how they felt bad for us. We (Westerners) were the ones in need of aid because we are the oppressed ones in the West compared to them. We (Westerners) have bosses who tell us what to do and our bosses own the fruits of our labor. We have to work long hours under a boss who dehumanizes us. The rich people and government have taken all the land and that is not right, we have no space for land. We have no space to farm and grow our own food and we do not own our time so we do not have a lot of time to spend with our family. Then she said, "Us Zapatistas are looking for the right formula so that nobody suffers anymore."

She went on to say that they live free without any bosses, free to grow their own food and live their own life without anyone telling them what to do or how to do it. She said she wants everyone in the world to have access to this freedom. She said she thinks about us in the City and feels bad because we are so exploited and she said the, "Zapatistas fight for your freedom too so that you can know freedom like us." I was so shocked and humbled at this answer, it completely turned my worldview around. I thought I was the privileged one, that I had more "freedom" in America than they had in rural Mexico, but they were right: we are the exploited ones. We are the ones who don't know what is in the food we eat, who don't have enough land or time to grow our own food, who don't own our own time and don't get to choose how often or long we see our family and loved ones. We are the ones who cannot be free in this system.

I was reminded of this when I started looking into buying a home. I had received a three-year fellowship that would allow me to have the stability mortgage brokers look for and like

the Zapatistas I was tired of having a boss. Living with landlords I have been harassed for composting, for attempting to grow food on my property, for having patio furniture, for keeping my bicycle outside, for training and watching dogs at my house and for letting other people sleep on my couch. I wanted to be free. I wanted to own my land so that I could grow on it and do what I wanted the way I wanted. Many of the sustainable modifications made to a house to use less resources, I could not make because I did not own it. How can I be sustainable if I do not even have control of how I live?

Having grown up during the economic recession and Occupy, I had a healthy distrust of banks. I have made a conscious effort to make sure the banks cannot ever take control of my life by never taking out a loan or getting a credit card. I have bought every car and large purchase with cash. I have not bought things I could not afford and I worked and "scholarshipped" through both undergraduate and graduate school. I have vigilantly worked hard to have no debt. But in America, you have to have debt to buy a house or rent or really do anything. So in order to fulfill my dream of owning my own land and not having a landlord over my head, I had to give up some of my freedom to the banks, by creating credit and getting debt. This is exactly what the Zapatistas meant when they said you are not free in this system.

The Zapatistas have really opened my eyes to how exploited we are in the West and are a reminder of why we need new voices and ideas brought to the table in the field of sustainability. The field of sustainability often attempts to put pressure on individual actions, often only pushing for responsible consumerism (which in my opinion is an oxymoron). This is in part because of who controls the conversation. If it was the Zapatistas leading the conversation on sustainability they would push for a world where multinational corporations don't control everyone's resources and all people experience true freedom, where they have time to grow their own food and spend time with family. To me this is the true intersection of sustainability and happiness.

The Problem with Progressives: Anti-Racist but Pro-Colonial

Note: **lakʷalás** (Place-of-the-Fire, Thomas R. Speer) of the Duwamish First Nation helped me write the history section of this piece.

Since the Black Lives Matter movement became big in 2014, being an anti-racist has become trendy again amongst White liberals. But being anti-racist is only a skin-deep commitment that doesn't really equate to actual solidarity or camaraderie. Many of them will march with signs that say, "I love my Muslim neighbors," which is an objectifying way of promoting solidarity. But they won't even shop at Halal grocery stores or go to Middle Eastern restaurants. They say they are anti-racist but then will continue to live in the White suburbs, or send their kids to a private school, because they think public schools are "bad" and aren't willing to invest time in trying to change them so all kids receive equal education. I believe this is because people may be anti-racist but are not anti-colonial. Without addressing colonization, we continue the current hegemony of Western White supremacy. The issue is much bigger than race in America, as we like to focus on. This issue is Western imperialism, but liberals are not interested in addressing this because as US citizens we not only benefit from Western imperialism. As taxpayers we pay for the bombs that keep the Global South in shambles, meaning there is blood on US citizen's hands. This is something that is never brought up in our political scene, not even from the most progressives we have in US politics like Bernie Sanders. In the alt-right which ran the Trump administration we are seeing a proliferation and promotion of outright colonization and Western imperialism to the point of fascism.

But where did this start? Climate change is caused by over consumption, which is not just a problem for Western culture. It defines it. We celebrate holidays and birthdays by consuming. We show power through what we can afford to buy through consumption. We entertain ourselves by shopping AKA consumption (Schor, 1998). To be against consumption is almost to be anti-American.

If we go back in society to where it started we see consumerism begins with coffee, chocolate, tobacco, sugar, and tea. These were the first commodities that were unnecessary for survival but became staples, and the beginning of mass production of luxury goods. These products share a commonality: they are all products of the British Empire that were imported from their slave plantations. The beginnings of consumerism as we know it today are directly tied to colonization, and it continues today (Ghosh, 2017). Our lifestyles depend on being able to exploit poorer countries for resources. In order to uphold the American standard of life, we must restrict others from having enough to eat and drink. This is why neo-colonial institutions like the World Bank, IMF and USAID, promote development to model US consumption, but it is a finite planet so not everyone's GDP can grow infinitely within the limits of the planetary boundaries (Steffen et al., 2015). Instead, through fraudulent loans and military "assistantship", which includes handing the rebels arms, we destabilize and hold countries down so we can protect the American standard of life. This is what today's colonization promotes and why we will not see actual solutions to climate change and inequality, because we may promote an end to racism but not an end to colonization.

This is what has stalled global negotiations around climate change. It is the Western colonizing countries that are most responsible for climate change, yet it is the Global South, those that have been colonized that are most affected. If we are going to address climate change, the resources that have been stolen from the Global South and were used to build up the Global North need to be returned or at least redistributed equally so that the Global South can adapt, mitigate and move to renewable energy. When this conversation was brought up in the climate talks, the Western Imperial powers (led by the US and Britain) saw the call from the Global South that the Global North must pay for a green fund for developing countries as reparations and walked out of the talks. This caused a huge stall in the climate negotiations. Until we address colonization the only solutions on the table for climate change will remain toothless

policies that don't address consumption and technology, that only promotes further colonization through tech that relies on precious metals extracted from foreign countries.

That is a very high-level example. More specifically is an example even closer to home. My favorite city in this country is my birthplace Seattle. Seattle is a beautiful place with probably the furthest left politics in the US, home to the only elected socialist city council member in the entire country. We were the first city to end its banking contract from Wells Fargo. We were the first to implement a \$15 minimum wage and quite possibly the first to take money from what would have gone to build a police station and reappropriate it to housing during a housing bubble that is pushing lower income people out (see the Block the Bunker campaign). If any city is anti-racist it is clearly Seattle. Nevertheless the City of Seattle's work on racism is truly ahead of the rest of the country. In 2004, the City of Seattle created the Race and Social Justice Initiative, to address institutional racism in their city. At the time no other US city had ever undertaken an effort to explicitly address institutional racism. Today only a few cities have followed in Seattle's footsteps modeling Seattle's own initiative. If there was a US city to be considered at least attempting to become anti-racist I would say it's Seattle. Certainly, we have our host of racial equity issues, but we are at least talking about them which is more than the rest of the country can say. I was formerly a legislative aide for Seattle City Council and had the honor of attending one of their classes on racism with the entire City Council. During the class, a council member gave an example of blatant racism, using the Red Sox, which uses a Native Chief as a mascot. They talked about how dehumanizing it was to be objectified into a mascot. That was ironic I thought as I stared at the podium which had the city's emblem, our own Native mascot, Chief Seattle of the Duwamish tribe. These types of contradictions come up in our anti-racism because we only want to address racism but are not interested in becoming anti-colonial which would confront these contradictions.

You see, in one of the most anti-racist cities in the country, we use Chief Seattle as our city emblem but his own tribe is not federally recognized. This is the excuse for why Seattle's

own Tribal Relations Director refuses to work with the Duwamish tribe, not even allowing them to sit at the table. This is why Chief Seattle's face on the Seattle seal is nothing more than a mascot when his very own descendants aren't even given recognition in the city that stole his name. If Seattle wanted to, they could pass their own policies on recognizing the Duwamish tribe, and at the very least work with them officially through the Tribal Relations Director. After all, Seattle does not have a problem with going against the federal government when the federal government puts out racist policies. For example, Seattle openly refused to follow the deportations order, by declaring itself a sanctuary city, but the city will put up countless excuses on why they can't recognize the Duwamish. As a legislative aide I tried to work with members of the Duwamish Tribe and the City of Seattle to give the Duwamish access to collect red clay in one of their sacred sites, Licton Springs, now a Seattle City Park. It was illegal for anyone to take from city parks, and as an unrecognized tribe they have no right to practice their ceremony in the park. We proposed for them to restore the park, give the Duwamish access and signs in the park talking about the precolonial history as a sacred site for Salish Sea Nations from Seattle to Bellingham. Of course, Seattle being the passive and non-confrontational city that it is, put us through an endless bureaucracy that finally led us to the fact that they would not do any of this for the Duwamish but the tribe could work with the recognized tribes to achieve this. But this is where it gets even more complicated, thanks to neo-colonization.

Neo-colonization is a new form of colonization that has a progressive face. They create a system whose end result is colonization (Bulhan, 2015). The most effective form of neo-colonization has been to pit the same people against each other so they fight amongst themselves. This tactic has been employed by various Western imperial powers in Africa to get neighboring tribes to kill each other usually so the Western Empire can get easier access to their resources as we are seeing right now in Congo (Ayres, 2012). Colonization has been extremely successful at waging a psychological warfare on those who were colonized to believe in the myth of their inferiority and white supremacy. This is powerful because once a people hate themselves

you know longer have to directly control or enslave them (Fanon, 2008). They will kill themselves as we see with the high rates of Black-on-Black violence and Native suicide. For the Duwamish people, the people responsible now for blocking them from being Federally recognized are its own people, the closest tribes in the region to them, Muckleshoot, Suquamish and Tulalip.

The Treaty of Point Elliott, was signed by the Salish Sea tribes. Chief Seattle was a principal signatory to the treaty and thus the Duwamish is the first Nation listed. It was this treaty that gave the Duwamish, Muckleshoot, Suquamish and Tulalip reservation lands, however the Duwamish never received those lands, while the Muckleshoot, Suquamish and Tulalip did. These tribes received protected lands outside of Seattle City limits and as a result have become politically influential and wealthy. These tribes are now objecting to the Duwamish Tribe's request for reconsideration to the Federal Board of Indian Appeals under the Secretary of the Interior, and as a result for the second time have interfered with the Duwamish's review by the Federal government. This is because under this capitalistic system that puts us in competition with our own people, these other tribes see Duwamish recognition as a threat to their own profit revenue gained from casinos and other commodities, since once recognized the Duwamish could open and run their own casino and would share federal benefits with them. Of course this is not the only reason the Duwamish has not been recognized. The Duwamish people's historic homelands are along Elliot Bay, the Duwamish River and Lake Washington. These lands are now home to some of the most expensive real estate and commercial industries in the county including Bill Gates' house, Boeing Fields, and the Port of Seattle to name a few. Giving any amount of land in this high usage, densely populated and developed land today would mean giving up billions of dollars. Herein lies the real issue at hand, an issue Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative completely leaves out when it maps the areas of inequity. This is the difference between anti-racist and anti-colonial. The neo-colonial powers are acting exactly as they are supposed to, Seattle leaders can point to the conflict between tribes as an excuse for why we must continue to exclude the Duwamish people from our governance. Even though if you look at

campaign donations almost all City council members and the Mayor take money from at least one of these three large wealthier tribes. The Muckleshoot even went as far as to pass a resolution that said anytime they are in a room and the Duwamish are recognized they are to leave the room. It is these other tribes that object to Duwamish recognition. They are consulted by our Tribal Relations (TR) Director in the Office of Intergovernmental Relations (OIR). These three other tribes have refused to work with our TR director if the Duwamish are given a seat at the table. As a result, we continue to exclude the only Native tribe within our City limits from being consulted by our government. We erase the Duwamish people while using their Chief Seattle's face as the seal on all our official documents. If that is not a mascot, or a form of cultural appropriation then I do not know what is. It is this colonial mentality, which created the pathology of modernity, that is the fabric of our country. It prevents us from actually addressing climate solutions and makes anti-racist cities promote blatant racism against one tribe using a neo-colonial excuse of "tribal conflict" that our own federal government created. Actual system changes call not just for anti-racism but anti-colonialism, to truly uproot our systemic issues.

Building a New World and we get in the way

I do not notice any resistance to envisioning new futures but I find when I try to come up with solutions to anything my solutions are very narrow due to my indoctrination into the institution of higher learning. It narrows how I see solutions. For example, I wanted to do something about the water crisis in Arizona because we are literally running out of water. I started trying to abolish green grass lawns and golf courses. I thought it was a radical solution that would drastically cut our consumption. I was humbled by a comrade whom is indigenous to this land they are drying up. I had asked about the idea of abolishing lawns and she said that's all great and everything but it is another one off reform to try to make the colonial settlement less violent and extractive. At the end of the day the way to solve the water crisis is to give the control of the water back to the people's land you are on.

I have to question if my rush to find solutions is coming from a savior complex. I want to be action-oriented and this is urgent because my people are dying but at the same time urgency is part of white supremacy culture. When we organize urgently we replicate capitalism's grind culture that continues an unhealthy pace of consumption. I think these are the things I struggle with when it comes to trying to envision a new future. Am I imagining something new or am I just rebranding the same system that created the issue in the first place? Am I creating a process by which we ensure the path to that future is not using the same tools or energy of the present that we are trying to change? Is the way to create that new future a solution that has to be enacted or is it something we create through embodiment? Is a solution framework part of the same type of white savior thinking that thinks it can just fix that which it created? How do we embody the urgency of the climate crisis and the need for a different future without replicating the western capitalist go-go-go culture?

Whiteness Inability of Solidarity without Centering Self

Journal Note: On white supremacy interfering with the work 8/20/18

So I wanted to talk about how this work gets complicated. I'm not sure how to deal with people who say they want to help but instead their colonizer complex comes out. I had this happen to me when I asked my TACAB coalition for help around Black Mesa. They were all really excited and said that they would help but unfortunately what ended up happening was that they did not. The only person who helped was the only other black woman in the group and she did all the work and everyone else was white, mostly white men, so we recreated a system of oppression. When I brought that up, one of the members, a white woman, had a problem with it. She basically told me because I'm not indigenous I shouldn't be doing this work and she went behind my back and asked the indigenous person that I was working with to do the same work

separately. It was really concerning and when I confronted her about it, she was not accountable. So I told her until she deals with her ego that we cannot work together on this project.

I was sad it was the first time I had to kick someone out for the Black Mesa project. I'm not trying to be a gatekeeper but at the same time there's a difference between protecting and preserving. As far as myself as an activist who is accountable to these people and an academic, I have a responsibility to not bring people who haven't really dealt with their ego. I saw this person wasn't remorseful and instead was trying to defend it and attack me. I realize this person wasn't in a good space to work with. However, I am thinking in terms of restorative justice, how do I do this in the future? I don't like cancel culture. I don't like getting rid of people. I don't like kicking people out I think that's why ally group for BLM is really going to be helpful because I'll be able to send folks who haven't dealt with their ego and white fragility to this group. They can work on that analysis so that they can be better organizers and activists overall.

Savior or Solidarity? : Puerto Rico

I ended up in Puerto Rico because the Ford Foundation, of which I had received a three-year fellowship, was shipping us out there for our annual Ford Fellows conference. I had never been to the Caribbean, so I wanted to take full advantage of the trip. I extended the trip from three days to ten and enjoyed my time there. However, as with most trips, I do not know how to chill. So my trip was spent a few days at the conference, the weekend at a Zen Buddhist center, and the week doing volunteer service work. Initially, I was skeptical of volunteer tourism; it felt like colonial white saviorism. However, a trusted friend and Latina recommended it and said she felt like this group intentionally contributed to and hired from the community.

The NGO intentionally would get there after the big disaster organizations like Red Cross have already been there and are starting to leave. They work to address the long-term issues after a disaster happens. While I did not want to be a part of saviorism, I felt that I had a duty to

clean up my mess as an American. The United States per capita and consumption have the most significant carbon footprint. These natural disasters are happening more frequently because of climate change. Puerto Rico is at risk of going underwater if we do not address the climate crisis. The United States is most responsible for the climate crisis. It is also most responsible for the poverty and crumbling infrastructure that Puerto Rico has that made it more vulnerable to natural disasters.

Though I am the offspring of an African refugee, I was born an American. Doesn't that make me responsible for doing my part in cleaning up the mess and undoing the harm? I felt like it did, that instead of being global policemen, what if we were working to address the damage our country's imperialism has caused. I felt driven and responsible for supporting Puerto Rico in its disaster relief because I felt partially responsible for the hurricanes that continue to rock this island due to my carbon consumption as an American. Not to mention that they were already being robbed by the United States, which is actively colonizing Puerto Rico, forcing them to be one of their colonies. I have never understood how this active colonization persists or is even socially acceptable.

Puerto Rico, Yacuboa 10/7/19

I have yet to do a day of work, but I'm really enjoying it. There are 80 people here at the compound. We sleep on bunk beds in a warehouse. We are fed two times a week and given materials to make lunches. The program is a kind of work trade. We get a free place to stay and eat in exchange for our labor. I arrived late, so I stayed at base camp. At first, the quest for productivity was intense. I felt a deep shame in not working, my pathology of modernity coming out. But then I realized I deserved a day off and managed to do a lot even though I finally slowed to an island pace. I realized these were sights of exploration of the pathology throughout

the trip. When someone from western culture, which is the dominant hegemony, is placed in a culture that's not their own, you really see yourself- if you are looking. Simply going to another country as an American, you start to see your obnoxiousness with the proper self-awareness.

In San Juan, I went out with many folks of color, primarily Latino but a few Black folks. We were all from the Ford Fellows conference. We went out to eat, the food took an hour and a half, but also there were nine of us. The waiter repeatedly apologized, but my friends got mad and started saying rude things to him. It made me feel gross how scared he got because of the power dynamic at play. As Americans, we were threatening his livelihood with our privilege by getting mad since if we gave them a bad review, they would fire him. Some of them did not tip with their massive bills! It made me see ourselves real hard. Even though we are oppressed by capitalism and white supremacy in America, we still have power over people of color in the Global South. Isn't that what we as people of color fight against? Yet here we were perpetuating the racial hierarchy and citizenship caste system, embodying the supremacy culture baked into this empire.

The supremacy culture was already peeking through in the camp. This old white lady told me how she has done this in many countries and bragged about how many people she helped. I was very intrigued by what brought all these people here. I asked many people why they did it. The vast majority of them are college-aged, doing a gap year or summer. Many do not really know what they want to do, but this felt right. Some said they wanted to give back or do something meaningful; others wanted to help people. Many of us are volunteering as a way to travel. It made it more affordable. The NGO is international; they host you for free.

Interestingly, I talked to a former NGO staff, I stayed with her at the Zen center in San Juan. She told me the NGO is shutting down their domestic work because primarily American volunteers don't want to help the poor in America. This speaks to the white savior mentality of "saving the Third World," deemed more exotic than the First World's poor. This was just another

example of the savior complex, which is a factor in their motivation to do this work. Even myself, I never had domestically volunteered with them and just came to Puerto Rico to do it. She brought up a few other critiques, like they do not pay the locals high wages with the excuse that they do not want them to become dependent on their salaries. They work their staff into the ground and always want to expand and go bigger.

Okay, back to my day, I had a deep conversation about my research with two folks who seemed interested. One of them immediately brought up spirituality and Eastern philosophy perspectives. He said how mindfulness and Buddhism have helped him become more aware of himself and his thoughts. I also felt that it has helped me become more present to see what is at play.

10/8

Today I got to work on a site. The work was gruesome but rewarding. I have been continually asking people why they volunteer. Many tell me their life lacked meaning or wanted to give back, some also use it to travel, but all of them do it because they want to help people. Helping people seems communal, not western individualism. I struggled with this. I tried to find the savior complex, but it was not their words but their actions. We are separate from the community. We have a base camp compound with barbed wire and a chain-link fence.

Today we went to karaoke. A Puerto Rican volunteer from the Bronx walked there with me. She told me how she felt rejected at the camp and had cried the night before. She came here to volunteer like everyone else. She had lived a hard life, with her family in and out of prison. She worked really hard to get here but then felt like a stranger. We connected sharing that experience as an outsider even though most people were from the USA. There were also people from Switzerland, the UK, Poland, and Costa Rica. We left like outsiders because the majority are White Westerners from privileged backgrounds.

We go inside the bar to karaoke. I meet the Black dude who has been pretty distant. He immediately introduces himself as a Dominican, almost to say he's not Black. He tells me he was the one who set up the karaoke at the bar, and it's the most traffic they get at the bar all week. He says this is how he likes to give back to the community, getting volunteers to patronize local businesses. He has been here for 18 months. I watched how all the volunteers, who are primarily white, were on the dance floor while the locals sat at the bar or dining room watching us from afar. At dinner, I remember being watched by the neighbors through the chain-link fence.

During the day, we patch roofs that were cracked in the hurricane and had been leaking ever since. The homeowner always cooks us food. They serve it to us and go back inside. I realized the savior complex wasn't just a belief, and it didn't need to be overt. However, you uphold the hierarchy by maintaining the local and international divide. And without talking about the Jones Act and Puerto Rico's colonialism, you must feel like you are saving this poor country. So that's the sticking point for me. Without educating about the global political system that created this mess, you blame the victim and maintain the hierarchy.

10/9-

I don't have much to write. I am tired no longer interested in socializing, so I hung by myself. The lady from the Bronx connected with me, and we vibed for a bit. The biggest problem here is whiteness. Today a man came to volunteer for a day here. He was half Puerto Rican, half white American, and had the most enormous ego and American superiority complex. He was staying in San Juan for a gap year. He kept making problematic generalizations about Puerto Ricans, like how they make poor short-term decisions and how they do not know any better. It got so bad even our white team lead had to step in and correct his blatant racism and stereotypes. But aside from me and the team lead, no one else corrected his racism.

I started to think, is this what they all think secretly inside? Maybe his halfness allows him to be more explicitly racist against half his family? He was particularly awful and was trying to argue that it's been debunked that standardized testing is rigged for the rich. I was honestly just shocked. I started to spiral and question everything. Are people only helping to volunteer because you think these communities are inferior and feel paternalistic toward them? As if these brown people were helpless fawns in need of saviorship? Is this the real driving force behind volunteering in a place like this? I kept thinking that these people go to a different country but don't even know how to interact with a different culture (such as anyone not white or American). The volunteers weren't even able to kick it with the few BIPOC individual volunteers, yet they are in a country of BIPOC people. Why do they think it's okay if they have no BIPOC friends in their own country?

They go into these communities with such Eurocentrism, thinking they will save the Natives from their indigeneity and civilize them into being Western. They want to save them with their electricity and resources, which were stolen from them in the first place. Now the benevolent colonizer has bestowed upon these communities the gift of a non-leaky roof. Okay, so maybe I took it to an extreme but is there any way to do this in a way that doesn't reinforce the colonial Global North and South divide or perpetuate Western superiority or white saviorism? Is it context?

If they knew how the United States caused their poverty would these Americans be more humble? I am not sure. I got a migraine and went in early, so I missed the team meeting, but a local woman was there, and she spoke about how this base camp is her land. She gave it to us. It used to be a school but had long since shut down. Local heroes had turned it into a clinic during Hurricane Maria. I kept wondering are we taking jobs? Would it be better if we let them do it themselves? Paying the locals what they paid us in food and resources? I am not sure.

These are the things I struggle to answer as I am doing the work and questioning my own savior complex that led me here.

Fossil Fuel Divestment and ASU's reinterpretation that continued the capitalist conquest of mother earth

When I first got to ASU, I was all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, hot off the campaign wins of Seattle in 2015. I thought I could replicate them and easily win fossil fuel divestment. I was aiming for system change, but my cocky individualistic behavior perpetuated the pathology of modernity, which is the behavior that has driven this entire capitalist colonial empire. Usually, my collectivist values come out in my organizing. I do not believe in one leader. All groups I start are leaderful, have a consensus style decision-making structure, and shared leadership. Given my experience organizing and my various privileges and positionalities (being dominant and masculine leaning, light-skinned, and a Ph.D. Candidate), it is effortless to assume leadership. However, I make a consistent effort to share the stage, go slow so we can go together, make it community-based, and take the time to co-create collective goals and values. But the urgency of climate change made it such that I was not using my values and principles. Instead, I was operating in a frantic and frenzied goal-oriented behavior. I was trying to "solve" climate change with a type of one size fits all assimilation model.

When I came to campus, I got to work. I checked out the landscape scoured the Facebook groups and registered student clubs to find the student organizers. I was particularly interested in getting involved with fossil fuel divestment. I saw that a group had sprung up for fossil fuel divestment in 2013, right about when I got involved, shortly after 350.org's Fossil Fuel Free national tour. There was a petition already made with a few hundred signatures. I reached out to the page, boosted the petition, and waited for the organizers to contact me but quickly realized the campaign had been ghosted, and all that left was a virtual footprint of it. So I started trying to get people to join and restart it. That was difficult; hardly anyone knew me.

I hadn't even convinced people to be my friend, yet here I was, trying to get people to join a campaign. It was a little wild, but I was eager and tried anyways. I would sneak free printing from spaces I had access to, cut out the flyers myself, and flyer the campus. I gave announcements in classes about the campaign, tabled during lunch, and emailed out meeting times for the new student club. I even attended Powershift at Berkeley and used the breakouts by region section to network with U of Arizona students and build a state-wide network for divestment. I did everything right from what worked in Seattle, but we were not in Seattle. I could not grow the campaign more than two individuals, and one was a master's student and leaving the following year.

As a community organizer, I would typically take that as feedback that this campaign is not something the community wants and put it down. But I felt stubborn and self-righteous, like I knew this was what needed to be done and that I was the right person to get the job done. I continued forward despite the indications to stop. My copilot and I, the only campaign members, jumped the gun. Wanting a win, we tried to pull a fast one and demand that the ASU Foundation divest, speaking on behalf of all the students that signed the petition from 2013. We did not have the people power needed to sufficiently hold a campaign. Instead, we had determination and a savior complex for the planet. But it worked, we thought, at first.

The President of the ASU Foundation, who is in charge of the endowment we were trying to divest, gave us a meeting. This was shocking and threw me back because it took over a year to get a meeting with the officials at my last university. So here I was thinking I had sufficiently punked them and that we two humans would be able to divest a multimillion-dollar endowment simply from a meeting with them, but the universe decided to humble me. We sat down with the ASU Foundation President, Treasurer, and Money Manager. We proposed fossil fuel divestment and laid out our case.

They told us they would give us a million dollars to invest as a pilot project, and if we had good results, he would be open to divesting a more significant component of the endowment. This felt too easy; just like that, he would hand over 1 million dollars so that we could prove once and for all divestment was a win? But the right way is never easy or given freely, so I started to get nervous. Should I say no? Maybe this is a trap? But the novelty and ego of it all made me give it a try and accept the deal. We knew it was a stalling tactic on their hands, but we thought it could only help our campaign. Boy, were we wrong.

After our meeting, I made an announcement from our Facebook page, already bragging and calling it a win. I knew social change did not come this fast, but I figured at the very least that something was going to happen. But nothing happened- at first. It was complete radio silence; we did not hear from them all summer. Come fall, my copilot and lone other member left, having finished her masters already. I was trying to pick back up the campaign, but with no members all over again. As I registered for classes, I realized there was a sustainable investing class. It is a class where they would get to invest \$1 million of ASU's endowment into real stocks for this pilot project. They had taken the promise they gave me and turned it into a class, cutting me out from the project entirely.

There was no credit to the original organizers of this work, nor was their honesty about how this came out of a fight for fossil fuel divestment. Instead, ASU co-opted and plagiarized our idea and then gave us this neoliberal reinterpretation of divestment to suffice. It was awful. I had specifically asked to choose the professors who would lead this project to ensure a level playing ground. Once I met the professors teaching this, I realized that they never intended to divest. They chose the portfolio manager who was in the meeting with me and the ASU Foundation CEO. Yet, he gaslit me and denied that the creation of this class had anything to do with our meeting in front of everyone. He was friendly but snake-ish, in the sort of way that full-time Wall Street capitalists are. He gave me a kind of Rich Uncle Pennybags vibe.

On the other hand, the sustainability professor was more of a cheap, ugly version of the wolf on Wall Street. He was suave but greasy, the type of person who would shake your hand, smile, and lie in your face, like a used car salesman. He said he was in Sustainability, but he was a professional greenwasher. Their job was to turn me, the sole divestment activist, into the enemy, to ridicule the idea of fossil fuel divestment to the rest of the class until the class was successfully propagandized enough to believe the biased professors' tales that they sold as education.

When oil companies write sustainable stock ratings, they rig the entire criteria for their game and come out on top. That is what I learned as I dug into the ESG (Environmental Social Governance) socially responsible investing, which I found out to be a big sham. As I dug through the energy sector, primarily fossil fuel, I noticed how solar and wind companies had significantly lower ratings than oil companies like Exxon. This could not be right. The problem is that people who work at companies like Exxon are the people who wrote the standards, and they chose to make the rating based on irrelevant indicators that are biased in their favor. There is a rating for whether you measure and track your carbon emissions. However, there is no automatic boost if you are (relatively) carbon-free like solar and wind. So, because carbon-free companies are not producing and thus not measuring their carbon, they become less sustainable than companies like Exxon, which makes gigantic amounts of carbon but has now invested the money to track it.

When I spoke in class to make these points, the professors would intentionally contradict me to make me look like I did not know what I was talking about. One time, I spoke about how Exxon could absolutely not be in our portfolio regardless of what ESG was saying. They were among the worst oil companies who lobby and produce propaganda that pushes climate denialism (#ExxonKnew). While I spoke, the "sustainability" professor pulled up on the projector how Exxon is the most sustainable oil company according to some bogus rating probably written by Exxon's lawyers. These businessmen' gaslighting and mental gymnastics to protect the fossil fuel industry were shocking. They were not even on the payroll for oil, yet they still so valiantly

defended the system. The more I thought about it, I believe this is how the fossil fuel industry stays so resilient. The consumers, especially those who consume the most, are so addicted to it that they protect it (Costanza et al., 2017; McCright & Dunlap, 2010; Waugh, 2011).

As the class started, I immediately told them that I wanted to focus on energy investments. I had worked on fossil fuel divestment campaigns for three years at this point, so I felt I had expertise in this sector. One week I missed class because I was in New York at Climate Week, specifically attending a conference about Sustainable Investing. I was told that my sector would be electronics when I got back. I asked the professors why they did not put me in my desired ranking, which I am an expert in, and I was told the class decided. The course had both undergraduate and graduate students in it. One of the undergrads was one of my former students I had been a Teacher's Assistant for. I figured he was an ally in the class. I asked him why the group did not put me in the energy sector at the end of class. He told me the group thought I was biased towards fossil fuel divestment. I asked him how my expertise became biased, and he sheepishly told me he just figured we shouldn't rule out entire sectors like fossil fuel. Even my own sustainability students bought into the lie that fossil fuels are essential and cannot be replaced!

What is worse is that the professors intentionally isolated us, trying to keep their dirty greenwashing to themselves. At the beginning of the semester, he stated we could not share anything from this class with the larger public or outside of the course. If we did share, he would consider it cheating and punish us for plagiarism. Even though it did not make sense how he would get away with it, it was enough to be hesitant about sharing it. It took until the middle of the semester to get my old grassroots club sustainable changemakers back up and running again. Even then, we had two to three people involved. It was not enough to fight a whole campaign to save me from getting kicked out. That was a campaign I later had to fight, but by then, I had amassed enough community support to be able to fight back.

So I decided to tell my club what was happening and strategize how to fight back. Finally, my faculty chair had to help me ensure my grade wasn't affected by this crap. In the end, the portfolio came out with a bunch of fossil fuel companies still in there, making ASU's new sustainable portfolio a new marketing tool to attract conscious donors. It was utterly greenwashing because it was intentionally deceiving people to look sustainable. Instead of helping the campaign for fossil fuel divestment, I actually killed it. After this experience, I gave up on the campaign and the student club I had started to work on these issues. Momentum was squashed; any push for divestment the university could now point to a sustainable investment portfolio, killing us with my own concession.

This was a humbling lesson for me. I learned the dangers of urgency culture and why it's essential to go slow enough to build relationships. I also was reminded to humble my ego, there was no reason I should have taken this on when I did not have the human power to hold them accountable, but I thought I could do it alone. Social change has never happened alone, leaders are most often just the charismatic people in front, but it takes the community together for there to be a front to lead. My ego got rubbed when I heard we could make a difference and jumped ahead instead of feeling in, which I knew would be an issue down the line. I also learned what happens when you prioritize progress over values and production over relationships. This is the same type of behavior that built this empire. It cannot be used to take it down.

Line 3 and Urgency is white Supremacy Culture

In my first year of my Ph.D., I struggled with my new course load and moving to a new state. So, when Standing Rock kicked off, I was torn. On the one hand, I desperately wanted to be involved, understanding the historical moment that it was, but on the other hand, I was drowning in work and struggling with imposter syndrome. When my whole Black activist organization in Seattle went for Thanks-taking, I was upset that I could not join them but at the same time knew I could only afford to leave for four days, and that felt extractivist. Because of

this, I decided I would go in December, not in November. However, by December, it was over. My crew fell apart and ended up ceasing to exist due to the fallout from this poorly planned execution. I felt responsible for this and felt like it would have been different if I had just gone. But five years later, I realized why this thought was egotistical and part of the pathology of modernity because the next time, it happened the same.

The first trip started with two weeks' notice. A religious faith leader in a local chapter of a national group asked if I wanted to come to Minnesota for the Treaty Peoples Gathering. I jumped at the chance. I thought this was my chance to make up for Standing Rock. I knew that this was urgency culture and had gotten me in trouble before, but the climate crisis was urgent. I had heard about the fight against Line 3 for years, and soon this fight was coming to an end. The pipeline was supposed to be finished at the end of August. I had also shared a stage with a prominent Line 3 Indigenous leader at a conference, and I had told her that I would join her frontlines. This was the chance to make good on my word! Was that my ego speaking or my conscience? I would later find out.

So, I jumped at the chance; wanting to be value-aligned, we drove from Phoenix to Anishinabe lands near Canada and the Great Lakes. I gave my team only a week's notice, and two other BLM members pulled up with me. We drove for three days straight across and up the middle of the country. We arrived at the camping grounds in a secluded area that felt like a predominantly white rural area. We get out and see a bunch of granola hippie vegans and queer anarchists; as three Black femmes, we were definitely felt out of place. At first, I felt incredibly awkward and wondered if I had made the right choice. While I had learned the microaggressive environment of the mainstream environmental movement, I was concerned my Black comrades from BLM had not. I was unsure how long they would tolerate the fuckery I knew would undoubtedly be here.

Then I saw some Coast Salish people whom I learned how to organize for the environment from in Seattle. At that point, I knew I was in the right place. We would just need to figure out how to deal with whiteness. We positioned our tent outside of the way of the camp and got situated. Unfortunately, one BLM member was impacted by racism in particular. First, a white woman came up to her in the base to tell her she was so brave for wearing a BLM shirt and went on to say her husband didn't allow her to because it was too political. This is an excellent example of the microaggressions you see in liberal environmental circles. This white woman at a direct action camp about to potentially break state and federal laws and commit civil disobedience won't wear a BLM shirt because that is where she draws the line at controversy. As if it is more controversial to be anti-racist than what the right calls an environmental terrorist.

We were invited to stay in a hotel overnight because of the storm at the end of this trip. One of the white housekeepers corners her in the hallway to read her BLM shirt and then claps both of her hands on my member's face and tells her to be a good girl! At that point, my team had it and made the three-day trip back home in a day and a half by not sleeping. We quickly decided the Midwest was too racist to just drive through as Black femmes alone.

During the training at the camp, our 3-person caravan of the Phoenix affinity group joined with Seattle's affinity group. You can't do much with a team of three, but with damn near twenty, we could get our hands wet. Even though it was a white majority, it was grounding that my Irish friend, whom I knew prior from divestment work in Seattle, was in leadership on their side. He was rooted in his culture and had a good understanding of his place as a white person. While he understood his privilege, I did not feel he was invested in the concept of whiteness that so many white Americans are. This is an embodiment of what it means to work towards abolishing whiteness.

With this groundedness and the aid of 1,500 people total, we were able to take direct action, stop the flow of oil for at least 72 hours and cause the immediate, though temporary,

ceasing of environmental destruction by putting our bodies on the line. When oil was stopped, and the people were together, I had more hope than I had had since COP19 in Paris, six years prior. Though governments have forsaken us, the people united will never be defeated. I felt strong and powerful together against this multinational corporation, this foreign invader that our government has allowed to steal from us, destroy the water, and take from the Indigenous peoples whose land it is. I felt an embodiment of hope that reinvigorated my spirit to continue to fight. I was reminded of the importance of these spaces; though we do not win the battle, we will win the war. I went home a day later, but I did not go home. My heart and spirit stayed on the frontlines, and I knew I needed to return.

That was in June; we planned on going up in September and started moving as such. We were trying to get nonviolent civil disobedience training from a national group before going up. But summer happened fast, my parents came down, and we could not get it going. Then, the faith group told us that there was an opportunity to go down the last week of August with a few weeks' notice. This would bump up our trip a bit, but I thought I could make it. Then I realized we had an organization-wide BLM staff retreat the weekend right before I committed to going out of town. That was fine; I could drive back and fly out. Then I realized that my disabled mom needed to go back to Ethiopia in the middle of their civil war because our house was sold suddenly, and she was about to lose all their stuff.

To go would mean that I would have to go from a retreat Friday-Sunday, fly out that Monday, land back on Sunday, and fly out to Ethiopia that Tuesday. It was a wild idea but caught up in my savior complex, I tried to do it all and spread myself too thin. I saw it when it was happening but felt urgency again, which I knew was a problem. But this was the end, the pipe would be in by September, and this was the last stand. My heart had been there since June, and I needed to return to give it one last try. I knew I wasn't showing up entirely, but I felt like I

needed to be there. In the end, the action did not succeed its original goal. There were mass arrests and police brutality to the level of full-out warfare. Many people were hurt.

Notes from a reflection afterward-

Urgency and extractivism really impacted the trip. We went in with a schedule that was not really flexible and tried to rush into things. We were too goal-oriented but did not think about the larger movement building. By going with the national group early, we prioritized money and resources over relationships and the time needed for planning. We moved the date of the trip and went forward even though it was rushed and we didn't have an action plan. In our debrief, it was mentioned indigenous folks here in Arizona have trouble working with allies because of their rushed timelines and mentalities. I knew it was going wrong when I hadn't solidified specific details by certain timelines, but I went anyway.

I kind of got a big head about leading the training for the national affinity group when I was told that it would pay for the trip. My original intention was to bring in a trainer, but we did not have time to do so. When I was asked to do it, I was like, wow, they need me when the reality was I did not know how and I was too embarrassed to ask for help. I froze, procrastinating until the last minute, and ended up piecing it together and leaving out so much. This contributed to them getting hurt and us bringing unprepared people on this trip and not achieving the objective. In the moment, I did not feel I had much of a choice, things needed to happen, and they would with or without me. For some reason, I thought it would not have gone right without me, but it did not, regardless. So, what was that? My savior complex? And the reality was that pipeline was going in that week. Would it have been better to do nothing at all?

I feel like I am constantly running. I don't know what or why but I'm always late for something. Urgency causes you to rush. When you rush, you reset back to old patterns, the status quo, and recreate the system you are fighting against. In the last month, I crammed a

BLM retreat, a trip to Minnesota, and Ethiopia across the world in the middle of their civil war and a pandemic. Time is a western colonial construct. White people's time is genocidal. We keep trying to increase our GDP by going bigger, better, faster more, powered by the blood of the earth- fossil fuel. This is fast culture, fast food, fast fashion- excess beyond abundance. It is extractive and relies on the theft of other people's resources. It is what is causing climate change, and it's why urgency is part of white supremacy culture, and I don't know how to get out of it while I am in it. We have nine years left to peak carbon emissions, so white supremacy culture is urgency, but white supremacy is urgently killing us. The colonizer doesn't sleep, so neither should we, right? But we can't win fighting like them? How do we resolve this contradiction?

We rushed through the BLM retreat, but the schedule was packed, so we worked late. We stayed in Prescott an hour and a half out of town in an attempt to build community amongst each other, but I worked until midnight, so people went to bed instead of hanging out. We did a little fifteen-minute activity to show our culture in our transformative justice work, and it immediately became toxic. We were running each other over, people were shutting down and disengaging, and only the loudest voices in the room were heard. The three people who had spent the most time in the white institutions of academia pushed everyone aside to push forward to get an answer. We say that we move by consensus, but we don't. The biggest and loudest take over, and they usually are the people with the most accumulated privileges amongst us all as Black folks.

This includes me most often as the Ph.D. candidate light-skinned able-bodied, thin privileged person that I am. Our facilitator showed us that we immediately agreed to what became an oppressive condition of only fifteen minutes to complete the requirements. Instead of pushing back against that, we made our members conform to it. We reverted back to old patterns. The status quo is ingrained in us all living in this western capitalist white supremacist

system, even those who have been colonized. Even as BIPOC people, if we are not intentional and thinking specifically about decolonizing, abolishing, and recreating, we will perpetuate and recreate the status quo.

When we got to the camp in Minnesota, it was rushed, we were part of an affinity group that we did not even know or feel comfortable with yet, and now we are all together on the frontlines. Because I had to go to Ethiopia the day after returning from this trip, I had to move differently than I did last time. I could not be in leadership because that role risked arrest. Staying off the frontlines made me question if I should have come. I teeter back and forth on this.

If I had not gone, this would undoubtedly cause my team's worry, and some other members might feel it would be too intense for them. After all, for two of our BLM members, it was their first action camp. In some ways, going but staying off the frontlines allowed new members of my team to assume leadership roles that I usually hold. This was overall positive but might have happened even more if I didn't go at all. In going but staying to support the camp in operation roles, I was able to fill frontline positions as it took many hands to do light work to run a community that fed numerous peoples three times a day, among other operations. I took long shifts all night and day and practiced decentering myself and seeing actions as more of an ecosystem where every species or actor has an ecological niche or role in the food web. Standing in the middle of the night in the forest on the watch plays a vital role in the larger ecosystem of stopping the pipeline.

However, if I really had decentered myself, I would have just used the money spent on me to fund an indigenous person to go. The goal was to intentionally build solidarities of Black and Indigenous people, with us going down there as BLM to support Anishnabe indigenous water protectors. Instead, we rushed in, did not make space to build relationships, and did not get the goal accomplished. Not to mention we brought many first-timers out from a national group we

did not have time to build relationships with, and they got hurt. The national group was following our lead, which may have reduced the chances of working together in the future. However, we were able to grow through it with the local chapter due to the proximity to space and time we have with them.

After that bust of a trip, I rushed into the next adventure, getting my disabled mom to Ethiopia with all her belongings. We get to the airport and are already running into trouble. Despite getting our necessary COVID19 PCR tests, my results are password-protected, and the password is not working. Once we figure out that hurdle, we are told that we do not have visas to get into Ethiopia. Our experience has always been getting the visa upon arrival, but this lady with American Airlines suggested this would not work this time. She let me through anyway after some pestering. Because of COVID19, our bags weren't free despite being international travel and cost me \$600. Despite all this, we made it through and flew from Phoenix to Los Angeles; the next stop was Doha from LA.

As we were boarding Qatar Airlines, I was told the same thing and taken off the plane. Apparently, while I was on the frontlines of the fight against fossil fuel in turtle island, the civil war in Ethiopia had heated up to the point where Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed closed the borders to all non-residents. My mom, who has been living there for the past few years, had the correct visa, I did not, and just like that, I was booted off the plane. My mom tried to make a scene and protest it because she really needed me, but I could see that it was likely only going to get the both of us arrested, so I prayed with my mom right there and then bowed out.

The flight attendant told me I could get a visa from the consulate in LA and then take the next flight the day after. So here I was running from a retreat to the frontlines, to an airport, and now I was stranded in Los Angeles. But I tried to keep running. I found a hostel as close to the Ethiopian consulate as possible. I took all my bags from the airport to the hostel via an uber that cost more than the hostel itself. The following day, I woke early and headed to the consulate.

After many hours of waiting, I finally got an appointment with the consulate, and they told me to come back in three hours. At this point, I had to check out of the hostel. So, I returned to the consulate early and sat on the sidewalks with all my bags. I felt homeless and discarded, but it was through my own doing.

I ran and ran until I couldn't run anymore and ended up stranded. The running didn't stop. Once I got the visa from the consulate and ran back to the airport, I begged to get on the next flight using my \$1400 flight I had been kicked off to pay for this one. It did not work; while I would be halfway reimbursed for my flight, they had already canceled my returning flight. So I would have to book a whole roundtrip flight. The next flight was \$2600, and it would be in three days. I had already spent a couple hundred dollars in 24 hours in Los Angeles. I could only imagine how much more money I would have to spend to exist in LA for three more days, including paying for my bags again.

I finally stopped resisting, realizing I was spending money fast enough to burn holes in my bank account. At that point, I realized I should never have even tried to make this work. Instead of fighting the reality that I was not going to Ethiopia, I tried to make the most of it. I called up my friend in LA who lived near Venice beach and went to the ocean. When I finally got to the sea, it was dark, and I had a private moment with the universe and me. I cried out, I felt overwhelmed and defeated, but the universe told me to not despair but be humble. That I been running and running, and it felt I needed a time out, so it stranded me in Los Angeles. I needed to use this time to regroup, stop trying to be a superman, and reflect on how to be present and stop running.

Decoloniality of Self

Through my experiences, I realized neither science nor government would save us, and thus organizing would be the way to solve the problem. However, I kept seeing the same behavior from the Pathology of Modernity show up through organizing. How could we organize against these systems of oppression when they are within us, and we perpetuate them? Everything is connected. If the beginning of the climate crisis starts with colonization, then the end of it must begin with decolonization. I had started out thinking it was the elimination of carbon dioxide that would stop the climate crisis but instead, it is the elimination of colonization that needs to happen. It starts with the mental indoctrination of colonialization. It begins with decolonization or, more specifically, decoloniality, which is the mental colonization. It's about removing the colonizer in our heads. I started to explore this as a solution.

South Africa decolonial school

First, on the frontlines, I felt decoloniality and decolonization as a practice was liberating and empowering. But as a theory, I found myself feeling it fell short. First off, in the United States and Canada, it is mainly done by indigenous peoples and about returning to their indigenous languages and practices. But what about those indigenous peoples who, by force through colonization, were detribalized and had no practices or language to return to? Was it not those of us who have been detribalized who need this the most? And how do we practice it in an authentic way that does not equate to stealing or adopting other people's practices?

I also had an issue that in the States, Indigenous peoples are mainly defined as those in the Americas. I felt the erasure of Africans as Indigenous people were anti-Black. This is especially because when we look at decolonization as the removal of colonizers from their country, it started in Africa. However, it is challenging to find recent work on this from an African or even Global South perspective. There is a privileging of American or First World Indigenous

peoples, which is the opposite of decoloniality. To learn from people in the Global South and find African perspectives on decoloniality, I traveled all the way to South Africa to attend a Decoloniality Summer School.

It was here where I got the name the Pathology of Modernity. Previously I was calling it the colonizer mentality. The reason being that this was a mentality born out of colonialism and that when people adopted this behavior, they were acting like a colonizer. The problem with this name was the white fragility it was causing in whites, such that they were no longer hearing what the concept was about but being triggered in being called a colonizer. The other issue was that this behavior was not just from white people. Those that adopted and assimilated into the system would perpetuate colonial thinking and behavior.

In a discussion about whiteness in the decolonial summer school at the University of Capetown, Dr. Zodwa Radeba said, "whiteness is not a privilege; it is a pathology". She explained that in a conversation with her daughter when she was explaining white privilege, her daughter remarked that privilege is supposed to be a good thing, and she did not want any of these privileges that came with whiteness. Dr. Radeba explained that whiteness was more of a pathology, a societal illness that causes people to act in narcissistic, extractive, and egotistical ways. It was then it dawned on me that I had been studying not a mentality but a pathology deeply rooted in the ethos that is modern society.

While there, I went scuba diving. Reefs are not doing well, but this was the healthiest reef I have seen from the Philippines to Kenya. Scuba diving and seeing coral reefs bleached and dying remind us that we are running out of time with climate change, but seeing life still alive is a reminder of why we still have to fight. The hard part is that wildlife conservation in the Global South is almost entirely run by white people from the West who think Africans are responsible for the death of wildlife and not white people's project of "modernity." They are always very rude to

me, questioning my qualifications as a scuba diver until they find out I am from America, and then they are nice because they assume I am not African.

It feels like racism is baked into wildlife conservation work. It made me think about what a decolonized wildlife conservation would look like? One conversation I had with a South African scholar named Vuyolwethu Seti-Sonamziwas about how conservation is a Western concept. That it is still rooted in the Eurocentric obsession with control. She shared how these white people who fly in from the Global North never realize that if they shared their millions of dollars raised to keep the Rhinos alive in the community where the Rhinos live, those kids wouldn't have to grow up to shoot Rhino to eat the next day. These issues are related; you must solve the systemic poverty created thru colonial global relations to save the animals and earth. The western paradigm of wildlife conservation will never work because it leaves out the community.

The Gift of 2020: Its all connected: Depression and the Death of the Earth

9/19/2020

I am rethinking a lot of decisions right now. Even coming back to my research after months of organizing, advocacy, and activism, many of the things I was doing in academia make no more sense to me. I have my research broken up into my three fractured pots as that was what I was doing in my organizing- trying to keep it separate. The Black Mesa/ indigenous rights work is separate from BLM. The racial justice work and the Sustainability and environmental activism are also separate as if these things exist in silos. They do not. It is all connected.

I feel exhausted. I do not know if it is because I am close to burnout or if it is because I am mourning a dying planet. 2020 has been a whirlwind starting with the coronavirus, which left the world changed forever, I think corona really squashed Western society's ego. The dominant social paradigm in modernity is that humans are above nature and control the earth. A pandemic taught us precisely who is in charge, at whatever time nature wants to be. This is why I think

countries closer to their indigeneity, like African countries, seem to be doing better than Westernized countries. The USA is doing the absolute worst due to our ego and belief we are superior and cannot be controlled by a virus.

When corona finally made us appropriately scared of each other and businesses got closed, then the economy and the whole capitalist structure started to be called into question. We stayed at home and got to learn and connect with our family in a way we have not been able to do with the oppressive ruling order of having a boss and someone else controlling your time so that you can afford to exist. This starts to call into question the cracks of the whole system. This is why people had been stuck at home in the timeout earth gave us; without the modern-day opiates of the masses, which is professional sports, the masses could be awakened. This is why I think the uprising happened for racial justice during the pandemic. Because corona crashed the economy paused the opiates of the masses and other distractions so that we could finally no longer ignore the state of our society. What happened to George Floyd, which woke the whole nation up, is nothing new. They have been legally lynching us since they brought us here in 1619. But the conditions that the pandemic brought opened our eyes to the inequality that has been here all along.

I frequently heard in 2020 the sinking sadness and darkness that people are finding themselves in. Of course, the pandemic has caused us to slow down, and those things that we keep numb by keeping busy are now no longer able to be silenced. Many relationships were broken in part due to the pandemic, including my own. It was as if we could fake it while we worked jobs and spent time away from each other. Being trapped in a house "quarantining together" was a level of intimacy we had not had in the seven years of our relationship. Our relationship was not strong enough to hold it. The bickering and fights that remained tolerable because we could leave suddenly were not tolerable anymore when there was no escape. But aside from ruining or rather revealing relationships, the pandemic also made it so that we could

not ignore our depression and internal darkness as well. When vices like drinking at bars with friends and going mindlessly shopping or traveling were taken from us, it caused us to have a long hard look at ourselves and what is going on in our souls that could no longer be ignored.

My depression came up during the pandemic, but I became busy due to the uprising, and it subsided again. But then the whole of the Western United States went on fire, while the East and Southern coast of the USA was pummeled repeatedly by hurricanes causing floods. A deep heavy sadness entered me again. What made me more upset by this all was that I was not working on environmental justice work. I am still working on the Navajo Nation and resisting land displacement, but that has really transitioned into survival work/ food boxes. I had co-founded Sunrise Movement Phoenix, but they got really electoral, so I stopped working with them. I had started Sustainable Changemakers, but after receiving a grant for the work and having trouble with my teammates, the result was no longer enjoyable. It felt like pulling teeth to get people to join, so I put it down. I also had let the Phoenix Environmental Justice Coalition I co-founded lay dormant when the uprising started.

So, here we are with the West on Fire, the East underwater, and me, a supposed climate activist who was not doing climate action when this shit hit the fan. Part of why I backed away from that space, especially in the last couple of years, is that I have seen a large influx of youth climate organizers that are amazing and needed. When I started, I was a youth climate organizer in college; however, this next generation is beginning even younger, with many leaders being in high school or younger. They are so bright-eyed and genuinely believe that they can change the climate trajectory and save their future. I remember when I started in 2012, the world was still below 400 PPM.

I would tell anyone who would listen to me that we needed climate action now that we could not go over 400 PPM because humans had never been on earth with that much CO₂. I really thought breaking this atmospheric record would change people. It would get people to act

right, that our leaders would hear this and change their behaviors. But it didn't... here we are 8 years later at 415PPM, and business as usual has not changed. That is why I stepped back when the youth stepped up because I remember having their hopeful energy, but today I no longer have that.

When I think about the climate, I think about death and destruction, the hopelessness, and how I think it's immoral to even have children because their future is fucked. These are not child-friendly thoughts, so it started to feel wrong to be in youth climate spaces. I took a step back, but this latest climate chaos made me realize even if I have lost hope, I still need to continue the work. If nothing else, at least I do not feel so terrible about it. At least I can know I am doing my part.

As the wildfires rage on, I find I am not alone in feeling climate depression. Many of the vocal climate activists I follow, including youth, are finding themselves in a deep state of depression due to the conditions of the earth. This calls into question the whole Western paradigm that humans are separate from the planet. In reality, we really are not. We are depressed because the wildfires burn us too. We are depressed because the hurricanes drown us in sadness. We feel and share the pain of the dying earth. The climate grief and eco depression can be paralyzing, but I know what makes me feel better is what makes the earth better. When I work on things I can do for her, I feel better about the situation, again returning to our interconnectedness. How can I feel the pain of the dying earth and not let it paralyze me from doing the work?

Speech I gave at the Climate Strike 11/12/21

We are here today on the last day of COP 26- the annual international UN Gathering where world leaders meet to debate and delay taking action on climate once again. We have gone so far backward from even the Paris accord, which by itself already was not enough to save us from the climate crisis. In the Paris accord, the world agreed to curb our temperature rising to only 1.5 degrees. This would allow Africa and small Island nations a potential future.

To keep below 1.5 degrees of warming, the world needs to go carbon neutral by 2030. This year, World leaders at G20 from the most polluting countries silently threw away our future by moving the carbon neutrality goal from 2030 to twenty years out -sometime in the mid-century.

Pushing out our carbon neutrality goals by two decades is a crime against civilization. This is the western world declaring once and for all that capitalism and colonialism are more important than human life as we know it.

Our world leaders have left us to rot, the seas to rise, and the people to fend for themselves as western countries like the United States only invest in the armored lifeboat approach to climate action, building out a defensive fortress to keep the starving migrants out. These are the same migrants who are only displaced because of the actions taken by Western imperialist nations like America, who displace and disrupt countries in the Global South as they rob and pillage their lands for resources like fossil fuel. The fossil fuel they steal creates climate change, leaving the Global South in the state of poverty and instability that the USA made and then blamed them for their own conditions.

So after pushing out the carbon neutrality goal by twenty years, ensuring that all the old men, including Biden, who made that decision, will be dead by the time we have to deal with it, what did our world leaders focus on? More lies and betrayal. Net-zero does not mean carbon

neutral. It does not mean we actually stop drilling and digging and fracking for fossil fuel. Instead, it is a continuation of colonialism.

The idea of net-zero is that Western countries can continue to live business as usual, pollute and destroy the planet, and pay for their transgressions. They will pay to keep the Global South barefoot and un-industrialized because if the Global South stays poor and doesn't use up their fair share of emissions, then the West can use it and, through some rigged equation, call it a net-zero. This so-called solution is just more of carbon colonialism. It allows for land grabs of Indigenous peoples' communally owned lands to be turned into manicured tree plantations to pay for the Western carbon sins.

Capitalists have literally found a way to buy and sell the air through carbon capture markets, dividing it up amongst Western countries, leaving nothing for the people of the Global Majority. We know real climate solutions look like giving the land back to the Indigenous peoples, who are already caretakers for 80% of the world's biodiversity despite being only 5% of the world's population. Actual climate solutions look like keeping the oil in the soil & ensuring that coal and gas shall not pass. Instead, world leaders snuggled up to finance and continued business as usual, ensuring our collective future is doomed as we know it. And this is not just world leaders.

Biden did not even take a year to backstab us all. Our elected officials like Sinema, who we voted in, have forsaken us to make the other side happy. We are seeing this with the Build Back Better Plan, in which they promised us free college and paid sick leave, but now we get neither. Instead, they allocated 100 billion for roads and only 50 billion for the climate. So on the national scale, we have also been forsaken.

We need to start preparing for what happens when you are forgotten. We are in the scorching desert, left alone to figure out the climate crisis ourselves. We are already experiencing apocalyptic conditions. That is why we need a local green new deal, one that is tailored to our

particular conditions- like the drought and extreme heat. We have to invest in our resilience as communities because our leaders have forgotten us.

But where will we get all this money to invest in local climate adaptation and resilience on the city scale?

Across America, including here in the Valley, most city budgets go to the police. Cities tell us they do not have the money to address climate change, yet they spend hundreds of millions on the police. It's not that they don't have the money; it's that they have the wrong priorities. They do not see climate change as a threat to our public safety. They do not know how the police won't protect them if we run out of water. Instead of healing resources and climate resilience for our community, they invest in carbon-intensive militarized vehicles and artillery for the police. Our cities are choosing to prioritize violence and control over sustainability and health. But we can choose differently because it's our government, and that's our money- what's missing is our voice.

That's what we are doing with the People's Budget in Tempe. We are pushing for direct democracy. We ask the community how they want to spend our city's money. What should we prioritize? Because right now, Tempe prioritizes police 200 times over sustainability based on the budget differences. We are also working to redefine public safety investments to include water conservation because we are not safe without water. Public safety also looks like: green jobs training because when people do not have jobs, they have to steal to eat, housing because without access to shelter, people can die in this heat, and mental health because without access to care, individuals who are struggling with mental health issues are often criminalized and even killed by the police. This is what building resilience looks like.

That is why direct democracy and local governance are critical parts of a just climate adaptation strategy. We must focus on the local side because local governments can be held accountable to a higher standard. Focusing on the local side allows for more decentralized and

decolonial approaches that are locally adapted and reflect the communities they come from. Phoenix's Pueblos Budget that Poder in Action is leading will look different from the People's Budget in Tempe because the communities look different, which is direct democracy. It includes a diversity of experiences allowing for decolonial approaches instead of universalized solutions. Universalization by its very nature requires assimilation and bureaucracy that dehumanizes and leaves out communities that are not the dominant hegemony of white suburbia.

Get involved in direct local democracy. Let's realign our cities' priorities to invest in the future. Let's show that another world is possible.

The Fight for a Multicultural Center: Consequences of Resisting Assimilation

The following is an excerpt from what I sent to my University's Student Rights and Responsibilities as they opened three investigations against me and tried to get me kicked out. It is an example of what happens when you stand in your decolonial truth resisting assimilation in the hotbed of a hegemonic white supremacist institution.

1. Can you elaborate more on your culture in relation to yelling?

First off, I want to mention how this question is anti-Black. You are taking what I said out of context. Second, as an academic institution I would think that people would have the cultural education to not have to ask this from Black students but seeing the rest of the questions asked here I see that you do not, this is again an act of racism.

To answer your question, I will provide the following resources but invite you to look into professors and research happening on campus that would educate you on this.

I invite you to read Fordham's anthropological study on how Black women are loud to subvert racism and patriarchy (Fordham, 1993).

This is an autoethnographic narrative that ends with:

"Everyday we risk being labeled "bad" or dangerous simply because of the color of our skin, so we take pleasure in making beautiful noise—music, art, laughter, and love—that isn't mired by the expectations of docility and submission. Everyday we risk exposing our vulnerabilities in a society that constantly tells us we don't get to be soft, so we take pleasure in getting lost in those moments where we get to just be *real*. I don't know how many laps I swam that day. What I do know is when we are loud doing anything we do—winning, playing, running, dancing, creating, loving, sweating, singing, laughing, and even swimming—we are loud because, in that moment, we are free" (Richardson, 2018)

Here Bell Hooks in her book *Teaching To Transgress* (pg 187), talks about how schools and classrooms perpetuate racism and classism when they punish people for being loud or heated.

This is another case of schools not embracing diversities of experiences or culture.

"I have found that students from upper and middle class backgrounds are disturbed if heated exchange takes places in the classroom. Many of them equate loud talk or interruptions with rude or threatening behavior. Yet those of us from working-class backgrounds may feel that in discussion is deeper and richer if it arouses intense responses. In class, students are often disturbed if anyone is interrupted while speaking, even though outside of class most of them are not threatened. Few of us are taught to facilitate heated discussions that may include useful interruptions and digressions, but it is often the professor who is most invested in maintaining the order in the classroom. Professors cannot empower students to embrace diversities of experience, standpoint, behavior, or style if our training has disempowered us, socialized us to cope effectively only with a single mode of interaction based on middle-class values." (hooks, 1994)

This is an article about how Black people are constantly policed, punished and even killed for being loud like you are doing to me right now:

" Black noise can easily be dismissed as antagonistic, abrasive, and futile, but it is survival. It forces people to acknowledge black experiences and oppression, and it's loud even when no one wants to hear it....There's always an association with us and anger, and that informs the perception that we're loud and disruptive," Phillips-Cunningham said, adding that the stereotype of the angry black woman often puts us at a disadvantage. But it's more than that: it's readily believed, and cost two women in the book club to lose their jobs. People, and organizations, pathologize the mistreatment of black women because of a public perception that black people — women in particular — are inherently obnoxious, confrontational, verbally abusive, and loud." (Martis, 2016)

So, you can see that not only is our culture different from the dominant hegemony, we are constantly punished for it. Right now, you are investigating me for being a loud angry Black woman, a racist stereotype that gets us killed. You are continuing a national practice of racism

that makes Black girls arguably the most at-risk student group in the United States. You are continuing a long history of racism in America that is particularly pointed to my identities, a racism that gets Black women even Serena Williams unfairly targeted and punished.

"In interviews conducted by USA TODAY with more than two dozen researchers, academics, educators, juvenile justice advocates, legal experts and black girls, the same message percolated again and again: Black girls are being criminalized at alarming rates. They are hobbled by negative societal stereotypes that stretch back to slavery. By educators, counselors, caseworkers and judges who fail to address their trauma and emotional needs. By school discipline policies that push black girls out of school and punish them more often and more harshly than their white peers. We celebrate Rosa Parks and talk about all of these women who were part of the construction of democracy," Morris said. "Yet when black girls speak their truth they're told that they are being disruptive to the learning process." (Rhor, 2019)

I will finish this with the reality that despite the fact that ASU researchers published a few days ago research on how Black students are pushed out and punished at higher rates (Borman et al., 2022), you are attempting to do that right now. ASU's investigation towards me and the other women of color will go down in our community's history as another example of institutionalized racism and sexism, and has given my research a final case study of which I am situated in.

The following is a piece I wrote shortly after going viral from the multicultural incident, I was being attacked globally by white supremacists so I thought I would tell them about themselves.

White culture's politic of terrorism and dog whistle coded language

There is no such thing as white culture. Whiteness is power and privilege. Irish, Scottish, Italian, and other European people gave up their culture to gain the benefits of white power by assimilating and indoctrinating into the culture of modernity and whiteness. My research is on the pathology of modernity, the societal illness that has caused climate change and colonization.

Globalization has been the most effective colonization. Globally people desire to be westernized

and rush to adopt white culture to forgoing their own. The more people embrace whiteness, the more narcissistic we become because that's what whiteness is. If one were to assign whiteness traits, it would include supremacy culture, genocide, slavery, capitalism, colonialism, consumerism, theft, and culture appropriation. This is because the construct that created whiteness was always based on supremacy, violence, and hierarchy. For white people to decolonize and regain their connection to humanity, they must abolish their identification with and protection of whiteness.

White supremacists have always been triggered by our existence and our fight for a multicultural center. They feel like by us having a place where we feel safe, they somehow lose something. We have often gone viral on the conservative side of the internet and trolled, stalked, doxed, and threatened. Why are white people so threatened by us having a space? White racism these days is not direct. They use dog-whistle politics and coded language to hide their true motives. These days few are brave or stupid enough to call you the N-word to your face but will call us a thug, gang member, and intimidating and aggressive.

When the Maricopa County Attorney created and charged us, Black Lives Matter activists, as gang members, it solidified Blackness with gangs, codifying their racism into policy. These days racists no longer wear hoods but intentionally placed red MAGA hats, Bass Pro Shop logos, Chick Fil A cups, and Police Lives Matter symbology to spell out their racism without directly saying the N-word or claiming KKK. Every time the Multicultural Solidarity Coalition calls out this dog-whistle racism, we are gaslit and told we are making racism out of nothing. But white people changed how they are being racist and when we call out their own rules, they freak out on us. Being gaslit and told their dog-whistle symbols are not inciting violence continues the mental terrorism or what Fanon calls our alienation from ourselves as Black people in this white country, which constantly denies our humanity and dignity. But we will not be silenced. We will continue to call out and confront coded language racial slurs.

Decolonizing in the University?

Am I such a fool? That I thought I could change ASU. I knew it was racist, but I thought little of me could change it. So at this point, I knew and tried anyway. Is that my ego and savior complex or internalized oppression? Is it some type of attachment wound or self-hate that allows me to keep trying to change the university despite knowing it hates me and refuses to change? There are basic concessions that they have refused to make, like condemning racism and white supremacy after multiple hate crimes occurred, which tells me they are on the side of white supremacy. Yet, here I am, continuing to change and work with them. Does that mean I attempted to work with white supremacists by working with Arizona State University? What is wrong with me? Why was I so invested in seeing this place change? It is like wanting to be accepted by the same people who bully you, so you keep coming back to them despite being humiliated repeatedly. It reminded me of a teaching I learned from the book *Radical Dharma* (Williams et al., 2016).

“You will be attuned to I don’t even need to have this conversation, what are you trying to prove to people where there is no love? Get out of that conversation, just don’t be there. Too many of us are doing that and that is the result of us being habituated to suffering. We are habituated to being the victims of suffering and we are habituated to being the perpetrators of suffering. We go around and we beat people up who we have no investment in. I have watched so many people of color just banging their head against that wall trying to make those spaces change. That is deep, deep, internalized oppression. We are desperately trying to make our abusers love and accept us when they do not love and accept us without them doing their work, and you cannot do their work for them. I do not care how much you want to love them into being, they have to do their own work. So you have to insist upon only living in the vibration of love. Love that changes, love that confronts, love that holds you, love that allows you to make mistakes but only within love.”

Hearing Rev. angel Kyodo Williams’s words pierced my soul. It helped to realize it was time to put the campaign down, not because I was giving up, but because I needed to love myself more in not putting up with the abuse of the institution. I need to leave a space with no love, and I cannot do the university’s work for them.

Furthermore, in stepping back, I realized that multicultural centers at universities have always been spaces of assimilation. They are support programs for minorities to ensure their

successful assimilation, which equates to success in these predominately white institutions. At my undergraduate university, I did not have a decolonial analysis yet. The services and support programs I was in were indubitably why I could succeed and go on straight into a doctorate program from a bachelor's.

For that, I will forever be grateful. It was through my mentors of color that I was taught how to dress professionally, told to take out my box braids for straight hair at my scientific conferences, and taught how to assimilate to succeed. Though during the time, I did not see it as such, I saw it as my university being anti-racist by providing the resources students of color need to succeed. However, that is the catch-22 because we are talking about success in a hegemonic white supremacist institution; success is indeed assimilation.

Thus, as I started this campaign at ASU, it was doomed from the start. The campaign started out as a decolonization effort to see the value in our own culture and community so that we could work together. However, in making a campaign rooted in being unapologetically Black, we actually were not helping Black students to succeed since success requires assimilation. The university only accepts Blackness as an aesthetic, not the culture, just the flavor. They love Black football players to make them lots of money, but those same players cannot be too loud or "Black" in the classroom because then "they are a disruption to the learning environment." The environment is whiteness. The Black leaders ASU chooses to work with and favor are only Black enough to check the box but not go out of the box and disrupt the status quo.

This is why the university co-opted our titles and names of our demands but not their philosophy. They only wanted the aesthetic of culture, not the roots it comes with. That is why the university pressed charges on me and the other women of color who rebuked the white supremacist ideology the white boys brought into the space. We were indeed being punished for not assimilating, for attempting to change the dominant hegemony, for disrupting the status quo. This is why I realized my work does not belong in academia. To continue to attempt to change it

when it has shown itself unwilling is to beg an abuser to love me. To walk out of academia and stop trying to change the university is a radical act of self-love, self-care, and decoloniality.

Black Mesa Resistance Camp

Artistic Expression

I want to take you to the indigenous land in the Navajo Nation called Black Mesa. I want to introduce you to the land here and share with you a conversation I had with the land.

Land: I am the land of Black Mesa, I am a female mountain, I am vast and far reaching, if you stand on my highest peak, you can still not see me fully in all my greatness. While my land looks barren, that could not be further from the truth. Because I have supported people since time memorial. Till this day I still support the whole of Arizona with my resources, and I feed both herds of sheep and other livestock owned by Indigenous peoples as well as wild horses owned by no one other than myself. There is hardly any grass to cover me, I am covered in sage brush and Juniper, both of which are used in ceremony, and feed the sheep. I am sick and I am poisoned, by you.

Me: By me? I haven't done anything; I just came out here to help?

Land: You live in the Phoenix Valley, correct? (Me: Yes) You have running water and electricity? (Me: Yes) Where do you think the never-ending supply of water comes from? Ahem. Did you think it was natural to have an abundant supply of cheap water?

Me: Well No....

Land: Well it is not, that land and electricity was stolen. Stolen from me! You see everything was all fine until the white men drew lines on me and decided to hold captive Native Americans on me. I think you people call them reservations. Well, I really thought I won the jackpot because I seen the way the white man did to my relatives and I did not want them on me anyway. He chopped and scraped and destroyed my relatives. But the white men held the Natives prisoner on

these reservations you call them, and do not allow them to have any tools or machines so they could not destroy me like they did on the rest of the white lands. But then in the 60s the white men started getting more desperate to rip my liver out and drain my veins of the water you seek. They started digging and drilling, desperate to take my liver out of my body so they can steal the coal. They call it mining I call it rape. They never asked consent. Jokes on them because my liver was intended to stay underground, if they burn up too much of my black diamonds it will cause the climate to change, but I guess it's too late to stop that. I cry out in pain, that is why there is earthquakes and floods. The white men uncovered that underneath me I hide millions of Black diamonds, you all call it coal. They decided they had made a mistake by giving me to the Natives, so they started a fight between the two tribes living peacefully on top of me, the Navajo and Hopi so that a white man named John McCain could come in and draw lines over me putting up fences to split me up. Forcing relocation to hundreds of thousands of the Native people who lived peacefully on my land. But you cannot split me up, I am one, I am whole no matter what borders or walls you put up. Then Peabody Coal Mining Company came in, they forced the Native people of this land to rape me to power your city. They forced them to go deep inside me and steal my diamonds. I fought back as much as I could, killing many miners with Black Lung disease. It was no offense to the miners I just needed self-defense; my diamonds were never meant to go above ground!

Me: Wait a second, I still do not understand how we in Phoenix are responsible....

Land: I am getting there be patient! The water you get is stolen from the Colorado. That water that you drink should not be in Phoenix. It is stolen so that you guys in the heart of the desert can have green grass meanwhile the Navajo Nation doesn't get access to the Colorado and 40% of the almost 400,000 people in the Navajo Nation do not have access to running water. I used to have water too, Peabody used 1 million gallons of my water every day to move the coal from Black Mesa, across the state to the Mojave Generating Station, and hauled coal from Black Mesa to Paige. In Paige, the coal is used for the Navajo Generating Station. This coal fired powerplant

uses its energy to pump the Colorado river water uphill so that you all can have readily available stolen water and stolen energy. You stole that from me, you have my blood on your hands every time you turn on the water. Even now they are stopping my rape, but when the mine closes down, I am not healed. All my veins have been opened, my water has been stolen, I have no more- you used it all! I have deep sinkholes where I caved in on myself once my aquifers became dry. There is no grass because I have no water to feed her, it looks barren because you have stolen everything from me. But still I rise.

Me: I am so sorry I did not know. I had no idea I was oppressing anyone when I turned on my water.

Land: Yes, I know this capitalist white supremacist system that values white lives over Black Brown, Indigenous and non-human lives seeks to bring the white and Western communities comfort at our expense. The Western standard of living is only possible by oppressing the Global South and exploiting the land. Part of how they keep you complicit in this destruction is hiding the oppression of me and all the rest of my non-white and non-human relatives.

Me: So how do we interrupt it?

Land: Stand up for me! Stand up for those who cannot speak themselves and those who have been silenced. Stand with Indigenous and Black people, because they fight for the land in a way that does not objectify it, as these white environmental groups still believe they own me. Right now, my relative, Oak Flat is about to be raped and destroyed like I have. Winsler, an indigenous relative from the San Carlos Apache peoples is camping out in Oak Flat to defend me. Join him. Prevent this massacre from repeating.

Me: Why does this keep happening?

Land: It happens because white supremacy allows it to happen, white supremacy is the system that unpins my devaluation and allows for Indigenous land to be stolen from them, because their lives do not matter as much as white lives. If these hierarchies exist settler colonialism will continue. We need land defenders who are willing to give up power, to interrupt the status quo

to change this. We need those with the most privilege- white middle class Americans to be able to risk that privilege to see change to this system. Are you with me?

Me: Yes, I am with you, I am with the land.

How it Started

My work examines the connections between colonization and climate change. More specifically, I am investigating Western society's colonial trauma and colonizer mentality created from the 500 years of colonization and imperialism and its many transformations, including industrialization, capitalism, and globalization. These transformations, starting with the Global North's theft of resources, labor, and land that began with colonialism but continue today with capitalism and industrialization, are what created climate change. Drawing from indigenous activists and scholars worldwide (Burman, 2017; Whyte, 2017), I argue that actual climate justice work will end the Global North's imperialism legacy and seek to use decolonization as a climate solution.

Decolonization has almost always been focused on those who are colonized. Decolonization was first used when discussing countries throwing off the colonial powers ruling over them. Much work has been done on the psychological consequences of colonialism. Classics like Fanon's "Black Face, White Mask" to Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" dive into the dynamics of internalized inferiority in colonized peoples (Fanon, 2008; Freire, 1970). What is less studied is the psyche of the colonizer; however, this is important not to sympathize and make excuses for them but to understand how to change them. Climate change is disproportionately caused by the Global North (Gonzalez, 2001), the Westerners, modern society, otherwise known as the colonizers. Thus, we must focus on changing the responsible ones, not those victimized by the system the perpetrators created.

"Decolonizing is a process of liberation" (Duran, 2006), and liberation must be for those who have been colonized. Unlearning the colonizer mentality requires building solidarity with those who they have oppressed (Freire, 1970). For these reasons, one of the first communities I

sought to build solidarity with is the people whose land we are on. My analysis of indigenous liberation being connected to and the same as environmental protection came from my work as a frontline fossil-fuel direct-action activist. There is much literature that supports this work, but I learned this through civil disobedience while putting our bodies in between the earth and the manmade fossil fuel infrastructure that intended to destroy her. In this work, situated in the Salish Sea, I learned how to ask for permission from the peoples whose land it is before engaging in actions on their land. I knew that where there is environmental degradation, native people, particularly native women, are also being murdered and missing. I also saw that indigenous people are constantly on the frontlines fighting back against the fossil fuel empire.

In 2016, I was at the Powershift conference, a youth climate action conference. I had just moved to Arizona. My group Women of Color Speak Out gave a lecture about our work. After the presentation, a Navajo man and his two sons thanked me. We had met the day before in the regional meet-ups. They also lived in Arizona. He asked for my contact, which was my first connection with the Indigenous community in Arizona. He was eager to teach me, and I was very interested in learning from him. He no longer lived on the reservation, but his family was from Black Mesa. He gave me multiple resources about the history of Black Mesa, then he connected me with a Black Mesa Solidarity group. They informed me of the Resistance Camp that Belina was starting. They made a grand call for all land defenders to come and live on the camp until further notice. The camp was inspired by Standing Rock. This is how I connected with Amy. The Resistance camp was started because the family was harassed by Rangers trying to impound their sheep and kick them off their land. The Rangers made it about land tenure, but really it was for the coal underneath the ground they lived on. Amy knew that bringing Western settlers to the camp, their privilege would protect her since the Rangers wouldn't do anything in front of us. I showed up at the base as an activist. Even though I brought one professor and one student who helped facilitate the trip (one with the car the other with the funds), they could not remain engaged later.

Coming to the resistance camp as an activist was essential to me; I am an activist first. Academics have a poor reputation for transactional relationships and are often disconnected from the community. It felt important for them to know that my relationship building with them was the end, in and of itself, and that I would continue to do that regardless of if I would be able to conduct research with them. However, as I sat with Amy and the other allies, discussing how we could support the camp, Amy said they needed researchers to conduct testing of the water, soil, and other properties to make the case in court that their communities were being poisoned. It was then I decided it would be important to reveal my background. From there, we built a relationship based on me using my privilege in academia to gather the resources she needed for the camp.

It has been challenging to navigate academic privilege, settler colonialism, institutional racist bureaucracy, and intergenerational trauma. Since 2018, we have been working with the Black Mesa Resistance camp. We advertise and bring out supporters on the Facebook page I made for them. Supporters are settlers who can live for a few months to herd the elder's sheep. We also help move resources to the community. The Jade and Jane family spoke at the Local to Global Justice conference in Tempe, Arizona. Afterward, we met with them. In attendance were: 3 generations of Jades, one member of the Janes family, a Navajo and Hopi man whom I had been working with on another project but who had never met them, and another Dine indigenous activist.

The meeting was like many other meetings we have had before. To give a brief summary of the meeting, we discussed the needs and what was planned in the future. A massive snowstorm occurred, which meant the sheep fed solely by grazing were not eating. There was an immediate need for fundraising for hay. In the future, there were plans to plant this spring. We discussed ways to bring students and Native youth out to plant for the elders and then discussed rainwater collection systems to help water the plants.

Thanks-taking Holiday at Black Mesa 11/27-12/1/2019

Truthfully, I could not have wanted to be anywhere else on Thanks-taking. There is so much guilt I have in celebrating it. "Thanksgiving" is the celebration of the genocide of Native Americans. However, America tells the story that it is when the pilgrims and the Indians came together to eat together during the winter. It felt good to be doing thanksgiving the right way, working with the people whose land we are on. The good feelings made me reflect on why people do this themselves. Something is comforting as a settler on stolen land to give back to those you have harmed (side note, I am not exactly a settler as a stolen indigenous African, but it's complicated being the daughter of a refugee as well). However, I believe that it settles the soul as a settler to give back on the people whose land we are on (we are actually specifically on Akimel-O'Odham land, but Navajo lands are in the state of AZ).

It made me think about why people do this, which has been a theme of my work since Puerto Rico- What made you want to do this? It is as much for ourselves as it is for them. This is a reciprocal relationship. Even if we may give physically (manual labor) or materially (food boxes and resources), when we give back to the communities which we have harmed through our society (capitalism, colonialism etc) we get in return something spiritual. It is a reduction of the misalignment of our values and beliefs, it is a calming of our guilt that comes from having privileges (American privilege, first world, college education etc.) it is the reduction of the dissociation that comes from not wanting to be a bad person but living in a society that causes you to violently kill every day.

We kill through our consumption: through the meat, the coffee, the chocolate, the sweatshop clothes, the lithium-ion batteries that power your phone, cigarette, laptop, and car, resources that were violently stripped from the earth and stolen, causing thousands to die in places like Congo and Bolivia (Ayres, 2012; Downey et al., 2010). These are places we don't have to think about, but if we look, you see the oppression in almost everything, and that is a hard

way to live, so we dissociate so we don't have to feel it. But doing this type of work causes us to realize it's okay to feel when you are living your values, which is healing.

Everyone has their numbing tactics: some buy things, others eat, or work too hard, or drink too hard, or sex- vices, we call it. Something we have to do to get through the day because of the pain that it is to exist in a violent world. My vice is smoking. When I go to Black Mesa, I quit cold turkey. It is out of respect for the land and the people. I understand trauma is associated with intoxicating substances, and I don't want to offend the community that hosts me. For the most part, I can quit. The pain subsides when I am on this land, and I no longer need to numb myself. I feel fulfilled. This is a gift you can't buy. So many drug companies profit off people feeling empty by stuffing them with pills. But when you come out here, you no longer have to numb yourself.

We came on Wednesday. We left our house around 10 am and met up with a woman who gave us food and coolers, clothes, and herbal teas. We stopped in Flagstaff by 2pm. The food bank had stopped giving out food boxes, but I begged them to let me in. It worked after I mentioned ASU, which I was pretty upset at. At the same time, it made me think about how with privilege comes responsibility. Instead of feeling guilty for having access to education, I used my education to secure more food resources for Indigenous elders. This is how privilege should be used; we should all be traitors to it and try to use our privileges to help with access with those who do not have it.

We stopped in Red Lake to drop off food boxes with Sally Jane's family. They took 3 boxes of food and warm clothes and were very thankful. We finally got to Amy's house around 8pm and brought the food to the Hogan, where we stayed the night.

Thursday morning-

Around 7am, we get woken up by Peterson in the morning. He is super excited to see a fire and came into the Hogan to warm up. He has just arrived from Flagstaff. Amy said she wanted us to work on the chicken/turkey enclosure the night before. Peterson and two

supporters who had been there the whole month decide to check out the gathering in Cactus valley. The meeting is of supporters (about 40 coming from Nevada, Utah, Cali, Oregon). It is called the caravan, which they do every year. They bring firewood and food to elders deep in Black Mesa. They also intended to talk about the coal-fired powerplant closure and what it meant for Black Mesa.

We start out on Amy's request to fix the chicken coop and turkey pen. The work was a little frustrating because the last time we were there, she wanted us to take a wall down, and this time we were here, she wanted us to put it up again. There are endless supplies around Amy's house. We were able to find scrap and reused pieces to put up two walls. Having put up and taken down so many walls and gates and fences, I realized that she adapted the chicken and turkey coops throughout the year based on the season and their needs. We managed to lose a chicken. I feel pretty bad about that.

11/28 The Sheep's Gift

I approached a sheep. The sheep had been tied up in preparation to be the sacrifice for the ceremony. The sheep lay there for multiple hours. As I approached him, he lay there peacefully, his eyes moved to look at me, but he did not spook as I got closer, as sheep usually do when you approach. His feet were tied hog style, he was on his side in the dirt, his fur was full of alfalfa. At first, I did not understand where his peacefulness was coming from in the final hours of his life. But then I remembered the Diné way of animal slaughter, and you ask permission, and you get consent before you kill it.

What a difference consent makes! There was no struggle in his death. I watched the sheep give himself to the slaughterer. As they kneeled before the sheep, the sheep opened up his neck and gave himself to the people doing the slaughtering. As the knife slit the sheep's throat, the sheep did not resist or fight back. He did not cry out or make sounds. The last sound from the sheep was a deep sigh that almost sounded of relief before the blood split out, which was caught in a bowl. I never thought death could be beautiful, but indeed it was. His spirit was

given up willingly. I had never seen anything like it. The sacrifice the sheep gave up was not taken for granted. Every piece of the sheep was used, from the sheepskin that would later get cured to the sheep's blood for sausage. Elders enjoy the stomach lining (I literally could not stomach it). Intestines are fried and eaten like a sausage. The head of the sheep, including the eyeballs, was cooked for four hours on the fire, and served as a delicacy. I was lucky enough to be given an eyeball; it was pretty good if you could get past the texture. The Jades invited their extended family over and feasted and shared the meat with the rest of the family to take home. Thanks to the sacrifice that the sheep gave, they fed five families.

11/29 Sheep in the Blizzard

We wake up in the morning after it has rained all night. We are staying in the Hogan, a traditional Navajo dwelling. After hours of heavy rain, it started to leak inside a bit; it still remained warm. Within the first hour of waking, the snowfalls. The rain hitting the chimney to our woodstove aggressively, goes quiet. We do not feel the temperature difference with the soil insulation despite the dirt floor and no electricity. We open the door, and snow has blanketed the land. 6 inches have fallen within an hour. We head over to get directions from our leader, Brenda Jade. In her late 80s, she is the oldest person in their family, and she speaks no English, only her Indigenous language. Diné society is matriarchal. Women are the traditional leaders. At the Jades, she is most definitely the leader here.

I do not speak Diné, so I ask Amy to ask Brenda what she wants us to do today. She tells us the sheep need to be moved from the summer camp to the winter camp. The summer camp is a fifteen-minute drive from where we are, and walking back with the sheep herd, even if it was not a blizzard, will take hours. We do not argue and nod our heads and head over. When we get to the pen, the sheep are eager to get out. They immediately start running when we release them. Anxiety wells up inside me. Over 60 white sheep here are running into a white blizzard.

I was sure I would lose them. The sheep spread out over an area of one hundred feet. I am unsure whether to continue to push from behind or run back and forth, trying to get them to condense the space they are in. Suddenly I realized the sheep knew what they were doing a lot better than I did. I remember what Brenda said after Amy tried to advise her against letting us herd in the blizzard. Brenda says the sheep knew the way. I do not know where I am going, the wind and snow are falling so hard I cannot see very far ahead of me, and it hurts to keep my eyes open. Over two feet of snow has already fallen, and each step feels like I am falling into a hole. I realized I had no choice but to trust the sheep, so I did.

I trust that they will not get lost. I trust that the sheep know where they are going, and the anxiety falls away. The fear was coming from this desire to control. This is the Western way. Once I trusted the sheep, I started to feel a deep admiration of how they could keep together. They keep their heads down grazing, but once the herd got too far away, they would poke their heads up and run to catch up to the pack. Only the young ones would sometimes graze too long, and if they felt they lost the herd, the babies would cry out "baaaa," and another sheep in the herd would respond "baaaa" back. They would do that repeatedly, like a game of Marco Polo until the lost sheep found the herd again.

A few different times, when I want them to stay in a canyon or on the road, I attempt to corral them in, and the majority would push past me. I learned you cannot herd a crowd with a minority of the herd. The sheep refuse to be separated from the majority. We herd for hours. We go up and down over valleys and roads and forests. After three hours, Amy's son texts us asking us if we are okay. I find it amazing I have service out here. I admit that I had no idea where we were and sent my GPS coordinates. It turns out we were only on the other side of a hill away from the winter camp. The sheep knew where they were going all along. They just decided to go the route that would allow them to eat the most food. I learned that day to trust the sheep.

11/30 A Sad Joke

I woke up, mopped, swept the floor, and shoveled the walkway. This was the first few hours of my day. Amy was a bit crabby. Everyone did not sleep. They did the ceremony all night from yesterday morning until 5 am on Saturday morning. While sitting at the breakfast table with the rest of the family, including one of Amy's brothers, he talks about how tired he is. He had mentioned he lived in Paige, which was 3 hours away in these conditions.

I asked him how he was going to drive like this. He mentioned he had a house on the mesa and used to live and work here. He said he retired a year ago. I asked him if he worked at the mine. He told me yes for 27 years. I told him, wow, you got lucky cuz it's a good time to retire. I chuckled, alluding to the fact that mine had just closed this month. He did not smile. Instead, he told me that the mine closure made him retire early and that he wished he was still working. I felt horrible realizing how poorly my joke landed. Amy said he got paid out by Peabody. I don't know what she meant, but judging from his truck from the 80s, he probably isn't making too much in his retirement.

Sheep at Night

It is the end of the day. The days end here when the sun goes down since there is no electricity and flashlights only carry you so far. This keeps you connected to the earth and the natural cycle of things. The time is 5:30pm. I walk over to Brenda's house to find out if there are any last things I need to do. I let Amy know that today was my last full day, and I would be starting the six-hour journey home tomorrow. Since I was leaving, there were many things she needed us to do. One of them was to bring the sheep from the corral in the back of their property to the front so that once the supporters left, the elders would still be able to feed their sheep by themselves. It is dusk. I reckon we have about thirty minutes before it goes dark. I have never herded sheep in the dark, but I have not forgotten the lesson I learned yesterday, to trust the sheep, so I head over.

I open the pen, and the sheep do not run out. This is odd behavior for them. I get into their stall and push them out. As they walk, they stay close together. I have been herding these sheep every two or three months for two years. I have never seen the sheep remain close together. Usually, as we walk forward, sheep veer off from the group to graze, but this time they walked huddled together. Sheep's vision is not very good, especially at night, so they knew better than to walk far away from the herd. I am impressed by the sheep again. They know their boundaries and do not test them. This may seem like a pretty basic concept, but too many humans struggle with this.

The sheep go in their other pen with no prodding or harassment. The relationship I have with the sheep is an odd one, based on a mutual understanding that is complicated. They know I am their herder; they appreciate that I let them graze, yet they are terrified of me if I get close to them. They do not want to let me touch them, so I herd them not with a stick or whip but by getting close to them, and they freak out and run back into the herd. I represent both predator and provider. They know I bring alfalfa and graze them, but I must respect their boundaries and not touch them. The sheep have taught me a lot.

How It Is Going

The work very much shifted during COVID19. Initially, I was supporting six elders in Black Mesa with food boxes. I had connected with a small food bank, got their information and IDs, and would be able to fill up the back of my car with the boxes to support them. COVID19 enters the scene, and everything changes. First off, I would no longer go sheep herd on their land for fear of putting them at risk. Second, the Navajo Nation was one of the worst-hit places in the country, made further worse by the fact that it was already a food and hospital desert. The closest hospital from Brenda's house was almost three hours away, and there are only 13 grocery stores in the entire Navajo Nation for over 200,000 people. Furthermore, the communities in

Black Mesa that we support do not have running water, making washing hands frequently and without contamination difficult.

Initially, I had wanted to do this work in academia. I had a whole plan to do permaculture and natural home building projects through a class I would teach on decolonization. But then COVID hits, and it no longer would be ethical to bring students out to this community most impacted by COVID19, so I canceled the class and that chapter of my Ph.D. Amy starts calling me for help. She says that there is no food on the shelves of their grocery stores, and they are afraid of COVID19 to leave the reservation. She asks me if I can bring food for 20 people. I had been doing this work primarily alone at this point, though I had a few inconsistent tag-alongs like my partner. But my partner and I could not do this alone. 20 boxes would mean at least two cars, not to mention the challenges of getting food in March of 2020 when everyone's shelves were empty, and they were implementing food quantity limits. I called for help from anyone.

Initially, I was very protective of who I would bring up there, but what could I do? It was urgent, they needed help, and I could no longer do it alone. After bringing up 20 boxes, she said she needed more. Eventually, it went from 6 to 60 families at the height of the food shortages in 2020. Moving from a place of urgency is never value-aligned. I wanted people to do an orientation before they came up, but I was accepting anyone who could come up or volunteer. We no longer wanted to sleep up there, so for the first iterations of the COVID trips, we would go up and down on the same day. It would be 25 to 28-hour days. I would work my volunteers down to illness. After a trip, we would usually collapse for a day or two. It was messy, and volunteers usually would not come back. Initially, 2-4 people and two trucks would go up. On one trip, I had not slept in two days, and I ended up backing the huge truck I was driving into a car and leaving (I saw no damage). The cops got called, and the car I was borrowing from an organization no longer was lent to us. Now I was out volunteers and the vehicle we used for supplies. Something had to change.

Luckily, shortly after, I connected with Phoenix Mutual Aid. After the uprising and the massive influx of volunteers in Black Lives Matter Phoenix Metro looking to be helpful, we started to build a base. At its height, we had over 40 dedicated volunteers, we were going up every other month, and at our largest drive ever, we brought up fifteen trucks of food to share with multiple communities. At one point, I had thought I could still do the decolonial class, but within the community groups I was already working with. However, I was driven by the urgency of the communities in need of food and stretched thin working on Black Lives Matter as we turned it into a nonprofit, building a multicultural center at ASU, on top of this project. I could not do the practice in the value-aligned ways that I wanted to. Instead, we created an orientation presentation with my core team of six leaders on this project. This was used to educate volunteers on the history, cultural sensitivities, and responsibilities as settlers on stolen land using stolen water. I settled for this as the decolonial foregrounding of the project.

As the pandemic slowed down, the Navajo Nation was no longer in the news so both funds and volunteers slowed down. The families we were serving went down to 45 in 2021, but with less than half of the volunteers we had before, this put tremendous pressure on our most loyal volunteers. The tension came to a head when I had a covid exposure and had to step down from one trip. This put even more pressure on my tiny team. One of our most dedicated volunteers in BLM stepped up to take my place, and they cracked. They led the volunteers in the packing for several days and then joined on the actual voyage at the last minute.

From the burnout of the first iterations of trips, we usually do not have the same person packing and traveling. I checked in with them multiple times, and they said they were good and they got it. They encountered snow and other challenges on the trip, and the volunteer had a terrible experience. After the trip, we received this large message from the volunteer who accused us of being just like capitalist corporations, only worse because we do not pay people. They called us abusive and said they would never work with us again. I was shocked. At the time, I did not think I had done anything wrong.

Being a white person, I felt this person weaponized their tears as many white people do. I felt this was their white savior coming out. This would not have happened if this person did not sign up for everything and over-commit and push past boundaries. It was not until about a year later that I saw that I was dismissing their concerns and not taking accountability for my role in why they left. The thing that hit me the hardest was they said that we were no longer the same BLM that this person joined in June of 2020, and they were right. So much had happened, moving with urgency to react to the crisis. We were also caught up in our savior complex. Feeling like we had to do everything quickly, we lost sight of our values and reacted from a triggered and traumatized place. In addition to our transition into a nonprofit organization and the need to get funding, we lost sight of our original intentions.

Instead of overextending ourselves because we felt responsible for feeding these elders, we should have expressed our limitations and worked to build out our networks and ask for help. Moving forward, we realized we could no longer sustain as many families as we had because we had to make sure we were sustaining our volunteers. Ultimately, we learned many lessons from this experience. Now, I check in with all my volunteers and bring food to eat, and take breaks. We put limits on how much one person can volunteer and for how long to ensure that none of us are over-extending ourselves. The people who are attracted to this work have a tendency to overextend themselves for the greater good. As facilitators of these spaces, we have learned the need to take care of the caretakers to make this work sustainable.

Getting Unstuck

Feeling stuck, I searched for logical answers for why, but there was none, so I figured the issue was more profound, maybe even spiritual. I was stuck on my Ph.D., unable to write this conclusion. I was stuck in my relationship, all my organizations, and everything else in my life. Everything felt stagnated. People kept telling me to just do it, but I didn't feel like I knew how anymore. I needed a different perspective for answers, a new lens to look out from. I found that

new lens during my retreat. I have a terrible habit of doing everything to the extreme, so it was not enough to just pray and meditate. Instead, I sought out a meditative retreat in the woods. I told almost no one and left by myself. The retreat was in the woods without service. Having gone on the spur of the moment, I did not pack for the weather.

I set up my camp as far out as possible from everyone else. I ended up moving my camp and car twice in search of seclusion. It was not my car; it was my friend's car I had borrowed because my car's tabs are expired. The first time I tried to move the car, a bigger car nearly pushed me off the road, and I hit the bushes. After moving the car for the second time, I realized my bump with the bushes scratched the vehicle. I felt terrible. First, I borrowed my little sister's car and totaled it, now I have messed up another person's car. I started spiraling, feeling unworthy to borrow anyone's car, thinking I should have never been trusted with someone else's car. But I tried not to get fixated on my mistakes and turned inwards to get ready to meditate at this retreat.

I started to focus on my intention- why was I stuck on my Ph.D.? What was I missing? Why am I stagnated? How can I find my conclusion to this never-ending project? I could not find these answers. Once we had settled in high on the mountain to meditate, I realized how unprepared I was. I was so excited about this trip I had not really eaten the whole day. I was freezing, but it had already started, and I could not move. I felt weak, and all I could do was surrender to what was happening. It got increasingly colder, and I realized I had made a mistake.

I curled into a ball under my meditation mat and got lost in my thoughts. I don't remember everything I was thinking about, but I remember thinking, wow, look how accomplished and superior I was compared to my parents. I did it by myself. And then I saw myself. "What a judgmental egotistical asshole you are," my conscience snapped back. "You are not a very good person; you only do nice things to fill up the emptiness inside, but deep down, you are very jaded inside. That is why you can't keep friends. You think you are better than

them, you keep them around for ego boosts to make yourself feel better, you just use and use and extract from everyone. You try to fight these corporations for extracting the earth, but you do the same to people, only keeping them around because they are useful. It is no wonder you are lonely and never want to be alone. Who would want to be alone with an asshole like you? You are not nice to Sarra, little Sarra, inner child Sarra. You work her like a slave, you are mad at her for being a woman, and you beat her up for it, and nothing she does is good enough.”

At first, I tried to fight back. Nothing I am thinking about is true, I thought. I got defensive, and then I cried and cried and cried. My conscience was right. Deep down inside, my inner thoughts are awful. I try to make up for it by doing good work, but it does not change. I am terribly hard on myself, set impossibly high standards, and chastise myself when I fail. At one point, I got lost on the mountain and wanted to come back down to my camp, but it was dark, and I was without a light. So I just walked around in the dark, on the mountain. Finally, I started to get frustrated. I couldn't figure out how to get off this mountain. My conscience asked me “if I was ready to come off my high horse and join the common folk?” At first, I was like, “what are you talking about?” But as it got darker and colder, I begged for help. I finally said I was ready to come off my high horse.

I have set up this image of being morally superior to justify judging people. Who is it that does this? Inner Sarra cares about everyone far too much- who is this asshole who beats me up? It is my ego, and I was finally able to observe it. I then realized inner Sarra had been trapped. Since 2020, almost overnight, with the uprising, my organization exploded. We went from six leaders and an Instagram account of 2,000 people to four leaders and an Instagram of 40,000 on Instagram. I became the last standing cofounder.

Though we are non-hierarchical, I became the unsaid de facto leader. I had the most experience, and everyone looked at me for advice. After the summer of the uprising, the campaign I started at ASU five years prior for a multicultural center won! Though we were never given credit, it almost made it worse. I knew it was thanks to my persistence, never giving up on

the multicultural solidarity coalition, even if it meant having to rebuild the organization every two years. Then Crow, the President, made me one of only six students on the African American Advisory Council. I led a group of 40 students in making the Design Phase 1 development report for the University.

On top of this, BLM Phoenix Metro's work started getting noticed, and all these people started giving us money, the type of money we never had access to. In January of 2021, we hired our first staff. I was the only person on my team who knew grant writing, aside from white volunteers. In one year of operating as a nonprofit, we became an almost half a million-dollar organization that I was leading. For all this to happen at only 28 while working on a Ph.D., was a lot. I was still a volunteer for my organization, refusing to get paid because I was stuck on some morally superior sacrifice, even though I was working full time for free and struggling to pay bills. All of this happened in 2020 and continued in 2021, and it blew up my head.

My ego started running the show and basically remained on autopilot since 2020. I started feeling like I was the most important person on my team, feeling indispensable like if I didn't do it, it would not get done. I failed to acknowledge my own gatekeeping because of my bloated self-importance. While my organization has been financially successful for the last two years, my members have been dropping like flies. We went from an all-volunteer grassroots organization to an almost all-paid nonprofit. I refused to see my role in all of it. Instead, I blamed it on the culture of the organization. We hired a transformative justice facilitator, and I washed my hands of it, thinking this would "fix" the problem. Not acknowledging this was the problem in all spaces I was organizing, not just BLM. I was the common denominator.

Seeing my ego, everything made sense. Of course, I was stuck. I am trying to write a paper on decolonization but have internalized one of the traits of the pathology of modernity-narcissism. I was stuck because my ego wouldn't let me see my flaws and where I went wrong. I was stuck because my ego wanted to protect itself from being seen, it wanted to continue to

blame everyone else for my problems, but my logical brain knew something was wrong. My ego was protecting itself.

In the same way the ego is resilient, capitalism protects itself and is resilient enough to prevent fundamental changes to the status quo (Pelling et al., 2012). I didn't know what to do because I didn't want to take responsibility for my actions and behaviors. This is just like how conservatives deny climate change is happening, so they do not have to take responsibility for how modernity created climate chaos (McCright & Dunlap, 2010; Norgaard, 2006; Waugh, 2011).

I did not want to admit I was a fraud and living in a facade. My values, thoughts, and actions did not align, and I did not want to admit that because I didn't want to change. My ego had gotten so big that I didn't realize the lengths it was going through to protect itself, how it was preventing me from learning the lessons the universe was trying to teach me. So, the lessons came back repeatedly, louder and louder, but my ego just clamped my ears and eyes shut. I got into a car crash in Phoenix on December 10th, 2021 - a hit and run. I was injured, but my car was fine. Then I flew to Seattle and borrowed my sister's car up there, parked on the street, and came back, and my car was again the victim of a hit and run. This time the car was totaled, folded up like an accordion. This was December 23rd. Two hit and runs in two weeks in two different states?!! I tried to think about whether this was a sign, but instead, I made up a story that it was probably someone following me trying to kill me. Had I been in my sister's car at the time of impact, I would be dead. Bloating up my self-importance and paranoia, I figured these haters were obsessed with me and trying to kill me.

I looked back at the viral multicultural incident. I was painting myself as the victim, rallying up the whole community to back me up from a lawyer working pro-bono to the PR firm that a foundation spent a considerable amount of money on. This was on top of the dozen or so community organizations that showed up in my time of need, to the faculty and staff who rallied behind me, and the 4,000 supporters who had sent letters in on my behalf. At the end of the day, the whole incident was a situation I had purposely blown up by live-streaming it in hopes

that people would see that ASU wasn't protecting us. But I overreacted, making the general public take their side, not mine. Then instead of apologizing, admitting that my plan backfired, my ego would not stand down.

I ran this whole campaign Sarra vs. ASU for what? What good did it do but make me a martyr who almost lost their Ph.D. over it? The thing is, I had built this community up around me, who shielded me from my own mistakes and consequences. This made me feel all the way more justified in continuing to fight ASU at the cost of resources, funding, community labor, my sanity and safety, my family's safety, and my career. It was selfish and stupid. At the end of the day, I lost track of my vision, goal, and whole point of the campaign for a multicultural center. We were no longer fighting for resources for students of color. I had dragged my community into a chest-bumping contest with ASU by refusing to back down.

Sustainability as a field is in a similar place. Despite not having success with its current approach, it continues forward. Instead of admitting that sustainability as a consumer option or minimal life change falls short of the necessary deep changes society needs to make, it has committed itself to the rhetoric of sustainability or "going green ."You can now find sustainable conferences, journals, and purchase options, but it has lost sight of its initial vision, goal, and the whole point. At the end of the day, sustainability has caused more consumption, not less. Through its creation of additional chains of production and gatherings, we ultimately have just created an excuse to consume more (Brand, 2012).

I was out of alignment with my values, and I have been that way since 2020. I thought that being judgmental was a critical analysis, but I was just being a judgmental asshole. I thought I knew better than everyone and was not following the advice I was given. I felt that I was anti-racist, but I had become resentful towards white people and was taking it out on strangers. I call myself anti-capitalist, but I am making money from these capitalist overlord foundations. I call myself an environmentalist, but I had lost my spiritual connection to the planet when I had lost my values. I have essentially become a jaded fatalist who no longer even

believes in the hope of our power to change things, in part because of my own hypocrisy. How can the world change if I cannot live up to my values as dedicated as I am?

As I left the retreat, I felt humbled. I could not continue as I had been. For the raging chaos that had consumed my life for the past two years to end, I needed to get back into alignment with my own values. I could start with my friend's car I had scratched. I wanted to get it fixed before I returned it to them. For too long, I have not taken responsibility for the messes I have made. For too long, I let my network rescue me out of situations of my own causation. Today, I will fix my own mess. It was Sunday, I called every car body shop in the valley, but they were closed. Finally, I found a mobile repair body shop that quoted me \$700. It was a hairline scratch, but it was on both the front and back door. I choked at \$700, but I will not talk my way out and take responsibility.

I washed, vacuumed, and filled up their tank and dropped the car off at their house. I told them what I had done to the car, apologized for my mistake, and told them it would be fixed the next day. They checked out the scratch and laughed, "thank you for taking responsibility for this, but you did not do this. That scratch was there". Wow, I thought, was this just a test to see if I was ready to change? My new outlook was already changing things for the better.

I realized what you focus on, you manifest. Having been focused on how I was such a victim and how everything is so hard had exacerbated that reality. To change my circumstances, I had to first change my thoughts. I had to change my inner voice. This is the beginning of decolonization- changing your automatic thoughts and judgments. Decolonizing is inherently about the ego, working with it, being aware of it, and supporting it in seeing other realities. It is divesting from the "me" and investing in the "we ."To change everything, we must change ourselves first.

Sustainability is a field ripe for climate and environmental justice practitioners. The field has freed itself from the academic prism of theory and writing only and focused on the practice and solutions. However, without the guiding principles of equity, justice, and critical analysis, it

will only be steered in the direction of science and technology. Other ways of being and knowing are not being explored under sustainability's current paradigm (Chilisa, 2017). What we are doing right now in sustainability and the climate field is not working. Bringing experts with multiple ways of knowing to the table would allow different possibilities, solutions, and practices to explore (Burman, 2017). Explorations that may bring us closer to the realities we are trying to create, building a sustainable world.

Sustainability starts first with the self, internally (Horlings, 2015). Before you can "save the planet," you have to heal yourself (Bejarano et al., 2019). We have to embody what we are trying to see in the world. Here I am as an activist, fighting for justice and a sustainable planet, and yet in no way was I modeling it. Working over sixty hours, I run myself into the ground exploiting and extracting myself in an attempt to stop the same fate from happening to the earth. In fighting against this exploitative capitalist system, I replicated it.

Burning my candle at both ends, running a nonprofit organization as a co-director and full-time volunteer organizer, co-president of the Black Graduate Student Association, starting an environmental justice coalition, being on the board of Hive Fund and Rowan Institute, working on climate work nationally and trying to get a Ph.D. at the same time. I got obsessed with what I thought was my purpose of saving the planet that I made myself the sacrificial lamb. While I had initially started out trying to repay the favor of nature saving my life, I tried to become its savior. The idea you can save the planet is egotistical and unrealistic. While I still feel my purpose is to work on climate change, I no longer think it can be stopped or saved. At this point, all we can do is create a world where the most impacted are not forgotten as the chaos of climate change continues.

I had forgotten something I learned a long time ago. The reason I recycle religiously and do not eat meat is not that I think that will save the planet. It is because spiritually, it puts me in alignment with the earth helps me to better feel the interconnectedness of everything. It reminds me of the spirit in everything and the finiteness of the planet's resources. Organizing is no

different; there is a spirit in it as well. If I am organizing like a corporation, with urgency and prioritizing productivity, I am organizing towards capitalism. In moving fast, we leave our community behind and go back into our preprogramming, the status quo. Living in Western society, decolonization will never be the default. It takes daily and constant intentionality and unlearning.

I became a reactive organizer while trying to combat the system and everything it threw at us. When you are reacting to a colonial capitalist system, you embody it. I exhibited the traits of the pathology of modernity, the very thing I was trying to study to the point where I could no longer continue my research, and I grinded to a halt. I was unaware of why I was stuck. The ego will do everything in its power to protect itself and thus hide from your own awareness. It was only until I slowed down and honestly looked inwards that I was able to see what had happened. I will now focus on centering my own healing and self-work to embody the world I want to see. My organizing can then become grounded in the values we aspire to, and we can begin building a new world and way of being.