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TRAVERSING PARADIGMS: AN ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNEY TO BODY AND MIND

By

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Thesis

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Traversing Paradigms: An Environmental Journey to Body and Mind

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Traumatic life experiences altered the way I perceive the world. As a result, I embark on a journey to reshape my relationship to self, the built and natural world; to environment. In this thesis I ask: How do I want to relate to the environment? Considering I am a doubly colonized agent, I also aim to decolonize my relationship to environment along the process. Therefore, this work aims to formulate a new, personal, relationship to environment through academic literature, history, psychology, Indigenous knowledge and science, and literary studies, among other fields of knowledge. This work is interdisciplinary in nature; life is interconnected and so is this work. I look to theoretical concepts like the prose of countersovereignty, colonial discourse, violence, and the ethics of care to aid in the reshaping of relationship. Through this work, a healthier mode of relationship has been possible for myself. The work is not over as I aim to implement this in everyday life, as is the case with intentional communities and intentional living—practices I was a part of whilst at The University of Montana. Continuing along the lines of decolonization, the thesis closes with a chapter looking into decolonizing canon and Academia, as well as community based participatory research as a way to further aid in decolonizing canon and Academia.

Acknowledgments

I would first and foremost like to thank my mom. For the love and care she gave me since birth has kept me alive, believing and working to reach my goals. I would like to thank my family, friends, committee members, professors, the FLAT community, and the earth for giving me everything I have ever needed. This work would not have been possible without the support and guidance of the people mentioned.

My mom has always said “the mind is very powerful.” I was raised believing this idea. This work is testament to the powers of the mind.

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Introduction

Relationships, since birth, shaped me into the being I have become. But what happens when trauma alters the relationships around you? When trauma obfuscates and darkens your worldview and understanding of it? It can diminish your light, lead to hate, disgust, distrust of everything—including the self—and it can alter the way you relate to your body and the world, built and natural. At least, that is what happened to me.

I was born in México in 1996 and came to the United States in 2003, allotting me seven years in Mexico—enough time to be socialized. The time following the move led to another form of socialization—that of the American way of life. I made the English speaking world the public world and the Spanish speaking world the private world. I separated myself into two beings not knowing how the paradigms I incorporated into my life as a child would impact my adult life. I would become a doubly-colonized agent, following expectations and behaviors taught to me in Mexico and in the US. I would go on to become a very troubled kid with conflicting information coming from opposite ends. Undergraduate education would cement English as my primary language, an American mode of relationship as my primary lifestyle, and California as my home. I forgot who I was in order to become who I thought I needed to be.

Fast forward to June 2021. I was driving on 1-15 northbound, distracted, eyes away from the road. 88 miles per hour read the odometer. BEEEEEEEP. I saw the orange sign a couple feet in front of me, black, shattered glass. The dirt from the plants in the back seats covered the dashboard, mingling with broken glass. I had impacted a stopped Idaho State Police vehicle.

I was helicoptered to the hospital, rushed into surgery, people on both sides of me asking questions, taking me from room to room until they finally injected fentanyl into my body. Everything went black. I woke up in the ICU, grateful for the life I was let to continue to live.

I was off my feet for three months, living in Southern California. My life had been shattered into a million pieces. Everything I believed in was destroyed. I was shook to the core.

As a result, and because amidst all of this I was in the middle of a graduate program, I decided, with the guidance of my advisor, to explore what my relationship to the environment should be. I wanted to restructure my worldview. I wanted the resurfacing trauma of years of abuse as a child to disappear. The worldview I had constructed was no longer functional.

The material presented in my courses allotted me the time and knowledge to think about these topics. Surely, some form of rehabilitation or reintroduction to society would've helped immensely but I do not have that kind of money or time, so academia had to now serve another purpose: academia, and in particular Traditional Ecological Knowledge, would become the medicine I needed to restructure myself; to restructure my relationships.

This thesis centers relationships, and in particular my relationship to environment. Environment, in this work, means the body, the built and natural world. Here I ask: How do I want to relate to the environment? Through this question I venture into an interdisciplinary exploration of my environment, the relationships I want to craft with said environment, and the paradigms shaping and not shaping these relationships and understandings thereof. I utilize intentionality, meditation, and self-care as method. Without these practices, I would not have been able to ground myself in my body, allowing me the relaxation needed to read dense work and write freely. I utilize the writings of authors and scholars from a wide range of backgrounds, from anthropology, Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Science, Psychology, History, and Literary Studies, among others. This work is interdisciplinary. I do not write for one particular field or another but rather I seek to find and make the connections that abound in the world.

The first chapter is a creative exploration of my relationship with my body, the built and the natural world. Environments are personal, public and private. In the first section, a detailed exploration of body and mind takes place through the understanding of trauma, the inner child, and modes of relationship with self. The second section explores a relationship with the built world, tying this to slow violence and alternative modes of living. Finally, a third section looks to the natural world and Indigenous knowledge to find an understanding of how I want to relate to the natural world.

This section of the thesis serves to demonstrate how I have, through critical readings, academic work, and practice, attempted to craft a healthier way of relating to my environment: my body, the built and natural environment. This chapter, and this thesis in general, is driven by the desire to decolonize myself, my life, and the beliefs that make up my worldviews. This chapter is made up of four sections, which, together, form an aspirational environmental relation. This relation is not the end. Rather, it is a blueprint for myself which will help guide how I want to move forward in my life.

The second chapter focuses on the paradigmatic understandings and shaping of place. I explore childhood memories and experiences of the natural world. Further, I present understandings of environment through the Spanish language and Indigenous Knowledge from my home state of Michoacán. Salish history in the Bitterroot Valley and the Missoula Valley follow this section, demonstrating a different paradigm rooted in place and its people. Finally, a section on Missoula and its colonial history presents an alternative paradigm tied to place, one which now reigns over ancestral Salish territory.

The purpose of chapter two is to demonstrate how belief systems are intertwined with societies; how beliefs and society are in dialectics, meaning one is shaped by the other and vice

versa. Further, this chapter aims to demonstrate how understanding the past, the history of the places we call home, can aid in moving forward in an honorable way. To know the past relations people had to place can help guide present relations as well as the future ones. Learning from the past to be in the present and guide the future is essential. Notwithstanding, understanding the past has also aided in my understanding of my positionality in my present which aids in my rehabilitation towards a healthier future.

Chapter three opens with an understanding of sovereignty and its meanings. I explore Indigenous sovereignty, establishing it as the true sovereignty on the land we call The United States of America, to explore the US's countersovereignty and the prose that came with it. This prose highlights settler accounts, rumors, and understandings of the land, its people, and centers settlers at the heart of the land—all lies told to justify and maintain colonial power over stolen land. An exploration of colonialism and colonial discourse follows. This section is intended to present an understanding of colonial discourse with the hopes that the reader understands the importance of decolonizing. Slow violence follows this section. Here, I present a theoretical concept articulated by Rob Nixon which encapsulates the violence not seen but felt over years by marginalized communities, the “others” of the world. Finally, I explore the ethics of care and care as a mode of relationship.

Chapter three aims to articulate dense theoretical concepts abetting decolonization. Understanding society's complexities can be very useful in the process of decolonizing the mind, rejecting the current state and beliefs of Western society, and aiding in reimagining what is possible if only we are brave enough to question what we think we know. The prose of countersovereignty is meant to present an understanding of how US history has been written to undermine Indigenous presence on the land, establishing Americans as the central character in

the story of the land we call the USA. Colonialism/Postcolonialism is meant to bring the idea of discourse—that which holds societies together—into the light, while providing an understanding of how it works with the hopes of enabling readers to question discourses around them. Slow violence and violence in general aims to work as a reality check. We live in a state of constant violence and we must reject that—for violence lends itself to more violence—and demand accountability. Finally, care and the ethics of care functions as an articulation of what it means to care and how these ideas can be used to reshape our relations. On a personal note, these theoretical concepts aid in my understanding of the shaping of the world I find myself in—the colonized world. Theoretical concepts aid my life in many ways. For example, understanding concepts like the prose of countersovereignty helps change the narrative taught to me in school, allowing me to form a more accurate narrative of historical events that don't erase people. The same goes for colonialism, violence, and ethics of care. These theoretical concepts are meant to enlighten and change beliefs by presenting grounded theoretical understandings of the world.

Chapter four is an exploration of alternative ways of thinking, opening the doors for different or more intentional research to occur. I begin with an exploration of canon, its meaning, its role within academia, and look to possibilities of decolonizing canon, or at the very least expanding canon to eventually decolonize it and academia. These ideas are followed by a research practice common in the health sciences known as community based participatory research. I explore what this mode of research is and its pros and cons. I follow this section expanding on community based participatory research through the lens presented by Jessica Hernandez and her work with CBPR with Indigenous communities and conservation.

The aim in this chapter is to demonstrate alternative modes of doing research which center the subject of the research rather than the researcher and their academic careers. Further,

decolonizing canon and academia, and community based participatory research are presented as a possibility of doing research that upholds different, nonwestern values which aid in the conception of research projects with aims of helping marginalized communities. My goal with this chapter is to present ways research can be changed in order to change academia from within—a long but worthy process.

I hope this thesis presents alternative modes of thought and demonstrates relationships as dependent upon each individual and their environment, that being their body, the built and natural world. My family says that each mind is its own world. I believe that but I also hope that this work presents the reader with ideas, practices, and/or readings they can incorporate into their life, work, or relationships.

Chapter 1: My Body, My Relations, My World

My Relations

On a sunny day at UM's Forum for Living with Appropriate Technology (UM FLAT—a two-lot property made up of two houses, inhabited by six residents, a studio, and 11 garden beds and chickens. I called this intentional community home for two years, during which I attended the University of Montana to complete coursework for my Master's degree) I, riddled with anxiety and fear, decided to take a walk along the river. Exposure therapy, a longtime friend of mine, knocked and knocked, urging me to do as I had once before to appease my anxiety and fear of the world. Exposure therapy is a fancy term used to describe practices done by individuals where they put themselves in uncomfortable or fearful situations to eliminate or reduce their irrational fear of the situation (PTSD Clinical Practice Guideline 2017). For example, as a teenager I was terrified of going into Hollister but through exposure therapy I was able to go in there, shop, and eventually apply for a job with them, which I turned down because I was hired elsewhere first.

I put Henry's harness on him and attached the leash, placing the hooped end on my wrist. Let's go buddy, I said as I motioned him to follow me. His eagerness infecting his body, tail wagging, excitement oscillating through his scraggly hair. This little guy, a nearly six pound dog, became my rock in a place too wholesome and too distant from my family, a place I could not feel safe in but which forced me to question many aspects of my life.

We left the FLAT, our feet crossing paths, heading east for a block, jaywalking across the street as if in Los Angeles, to finally head south on a bike path to meet the Clark Fork River. A light breeze filled the air, cooling my skin from the beating rays of the sun. The water flowed by quickly, almost as if in a rush. I felt the world's eyes on me. Nobody was looking my way. We turned left and walked along the cement path lined with grass, dirt, and trees to both sides, this

time a bit further than any previous time before, past Beartracks Bridge, formerly the Higgins Avenue Bridge, pushing myself to go out of my comfort zone once again. The accident, a collision with a parked Idaho State Trooper on I-15 at 88 mph, shattered my world, my body and any safety I had ever imaged having.

Past Beartracks Bridge, Henry and I came to what is today known as the Clark Fork Natural Park and the Garden City Island, southeast of which are a cluster of small islands along the Clark Fork River. This area was “established as a wildlife education area in 1995 by the City of Missoula and the Five Valleys Land Trust” (Parks & Recreation 2007). This space had a sign indicating the area as a wildlife education space, which I misread for a wilderness space. I was confused, yet this confusion led to many more questions.

At the time, beginning my third semester at UM, I was taking Traditional Ecological Knowledge. I learned about the history of the Salish, their home (the place I was carrying out my studies), their way of life, and about some of the Salish relations to the world.

I questioned how it could be possible to designate space within a city as wilderness. Based on the Western logic previously engrained in my mind through years of study in chemistry and a year of environmental studies, it made no sense to have such a space within the city. This space did not align with Western Environmental paradigms which tell us that wilderness must be tamed and is separate from man. As a result, and with discussions with my advisor, I set my mind to thinking. How could these spaces exist with such complicated history? How does a city create wilderness space knowing the land they claim as their own is stolen land, tended and cared for by the Salish for time immemorial?

As an outsider to Salish territory and Missoula, I began questioning my and the City’s relationship to the natural world, which led me to think back to my childhood in México and my

relationship to the land there. These thoughts brought me to the question: How *should* I relate to the environment? The italicized should, in theory, would allow me to veer into the unknown, exploring possibilities regarding how western society tells us we are to relate to the environment. Whether the relation be through romantic Western Environmental ideas, Indigenous paradigms, or those from other countries and ways of life, ‘should’ gave me the freedom to explore and find the ‘best’ way of relating to the environment. Today, almost a year after the initial proposal, I ask a different but similar question: How do I want to relate to the environment? The shift, while appearing minute, is immense. I am taking the agency and deciding for myself what that relationship is, how I define environment, and attempting to discern paradigms to better live in this world for myself.

How do I want to relate to the environment? It all depends on me, my agency, my willingness to learn from and for life, and a desire to carve my own life path rather than do as I am told or expected to. As part of this thesis and my relationship to the environment, agency, “the feeling of control over actions and their consequences” is paramount, and the most important aspect of this work (Moore 2016). To find this agency or self-agency (both will be used interchangeably), I draw on Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, 1993, and contributors, 2018) and his ideas required for liberation that tell us that action requires reflection and reflection or critical thought requires action. I further understand liberation as decolonization, a term, concept, and idea I have explored in chapter 3 and which will aid in understanding this chapter.

I come to an understanding of environment through theory as well as the way I perceive the world rooted in my growing up in México and California, my education in California, Scotland, and Montana, and living in Spain for a year. These varied life experiences have led me

to understand the environment in a dialectical relationship (Scott and Swenson 2015). Here I understand myself and the natural and built world as intertwined beings, tangled in a dialectical relationship; changes in one result in changes in the other and vice versa. I am entangled with the natural and built world just as much as they are entangled with me. My actions and inactions have consequences that may impact other beings, living and nonliving, on this earth. I extend the notion of environment to my body, a space my mind inhabits, and which I am responsible for nurturing, caring for, and providing to, to meet my needs in order to have the agency required to shape my life and the environment around me. I invoke a definition of care provided by Joan C. Tronto and Berenice Fisher, in chapter 2, within the book *Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives*, edited by Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson, which takes into account the human body as part of one's world. They say that "caring be viewed as a species of activity that included everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'wold' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves [sic], and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Fisher and Tronto 1990, 103).

Further, a relationship is not a monolith. Relationships are essential to answering my question because I believe in the entanglement I share with the world; I must form, organize, and rearrange relationships to navigate this world as these shape me and I shape them. Relationships entail care, they can build and/or destroy, and they can alter the way we see the world. I would like to further add the notion of revolutionary relationships to the understanding of relationship I hope to craft here. Revolutionary relationships, as I understand them, are relationships of strength, where one entity does not prey on another entity; relationships without captivity, therefore having full autonomy or *bebas*, as discussed in chapter 3; relationships built on

comprehension and created by improvement and development of one another in a reciprocal manner, free of expectations (Däg 2022; Salazar Parreñas 2018).

A last but very important concept is decolonization, and extending this idea to the self. Decolonization is the way to move forward (Loomba 2005; The Red Nation 2021). Here, I want to present an idea of what it might look like to decolonize; what someone might do to achieve some semblance of decolonization while not coopting other modes of life, like sacred Indigenous modes of life.

Decolonizing is the process of learning to unlearn, a process that requires a double perspective. I understand the process as requiring a lot of knowledge, self-awareness, and a deep sense for the need to traverse through this journey. For me, I believe this journey began in high school when I began to “remove myself from society” as I called it. I focused on unlearning traits I had picked up from society, to question why certain behaviors were expected, why certain people held certain beliefs while others thought in a polar opposite way. I left the world of social media in college to focus on my studies, trying to meet people in person rather than online. I learned to cook my family’s traditional meals from scratch instead of buying them pre-made or at a restaurant. I closed off from popular culture and the popular world, grounded myself in my culture and my family, and learned as much as I could from them and others. I affiliated myself with Latino Outdoors, forging a community with other Latiné people, and began going to a BIPOC support group. I read literature in Spanish, published in México and learned about Indigenous people from my home state of Michoacán. I am still learning, I do not think I will ever stop. I hope I never stop.

These actions enabled a lot of knowledge acquisition, personal growth and development, and a renewed imagination. Reading radical literature and challenging my beliefs and ideas aided

in furthering this process. I am not done decolonizing as I am just getting started but I feel more content the further I stray from traditional Western beliefs and ideas of how to be in this world. I have been harnessing my imagination to further enhance my way of life. The FLAT certainly helped, especially through intentional living. Living intentionally at the FLAT, being in a wholesome space in which community, demonstration, and education were at the forefront of my everyday activities, coupled with the studies I undertook whilst in EVST, gave me purpose and removed many stressors from my life. I did not worry about bills or rent, giving me enough mental peace and clarity to focus on myself, my health, and my community. During this time I organized, met with others, helped curate events, and went to class, curating a space of safety, free from sensational violence and slow violence. Participating in an intentional community was a way of creating safety for myself.

Environmental Body Relation

Why a relationship to body, to self? Because I have lived through five years of trauma, a near-death experience—which I am at fault for and am taking accountability for my actions, living and learning through the consequences—, and because, once again, after years of not feeling joy, I feel joyous, curiosity and an excitement for life. I know this, I feel this. The idea that to feel is to know is called autognosis (Torres et al. 2014). Autognosis is “an understanding of one’s own psychodynamics” (Merriam-Webster n.d.). The spark I felt within me growing up is back and I will not let that vanish. I am taking the reins of my life and making the best of it with what I have. To feel is to know. And to feel authentically is to rely on my senses and how my body feels, to pay attention to my body and feel my emotions in a way that allows me to process them in healthy ways.

I pay attention to my body and its sensations because I didn't for many years. I was numb; I numbed my body because of trauma. Bessel A. van der Kolk discusses the effects on the brain, mind and body from childhood trauma in his book *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in The Healing of Trauma* (2014, 2021). This book, while difficult to read for me because of the constant triggers, opened up new doors for my understanding of my body, mind, and brain's development or lack thereof. van der Kolk's work is instrumental in the development of a healthy relationship to my body along with other works presented herein.

To decolonize is not simple. I sometimes wonder if I am doing it right but I quickly remind myself that by crafting my own relationship to my body through the understanding of modes of relationships is plenty. I have the power to choose how I relate to my body, not society or coping mechanisms that one helped me survive but which no longer serve a purpose. I decide how I view myself, what stories or myths I internalize about bodies like mine, no one else. I am powerful and I get to forge my own path.

So, what does a relationship to 'self' mean or look like? I first learned about the idea of having a relationship with yourself through self-parenting. John K Pollard's *Self Parenting: The Complete Guide to Your Inner Conversations* (2018) became paramount in navigating through this concept and forging trust with myself. Trust, the "assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something," became my first lesson (Merriam-Webster n.d.). Learning to trust myself and my body after the collision and years of self-sabotage coupled with dangerous behavior made it very difficult. But living intentionally at the FLAT helped a lot. Having the ability to curate a safe space for myself allowed me the freedom to heal from my past. In this crafting of relation to self, I began meditating and practicing yoga almost daily as a means of inhabiting my body. To learn to be in my body once again.

Along the formation of a relationship to self, I came across self-compassion. As defined by Kristin Neff, a “pioneer in the study of self-compassion [...] being the first one to operationally define and measure the construct” (Self-Compassion 2022), self-compassion

“entails three core components. First, it requires *self-kindness*, that we be gentle and understanding with ourselves rather than harshly critical and judgmental. Second, it requires recognition of our *common humanity*, feeling connected with others in the experience of life rather than feeling isolated and alienated by our suffering. Third, it requires mindfulness—that we hold our experience in balanced awareness, rather than ignoring our pain or exaggerating it” (Neff 2011).

Showing myself compassion, understanding, basking in the shared humanity of the world, and mindfulness were instrumental along the way in my relation to self. I showed myself love and understanding when needed. I learned patience with myself, with my brain’s thoughts. I learned to understand my body in terms of a brain which holds my mind, connected to my body through neurotransmitters, hormones, and chemicals. I began to show my body and mind love, giving myself physical hugs when in distress, as suggested by Neff (2011). Forging a healthy connection to self through the formation of a healthier narrative within my mind gave me the capacity to forge a healthier, happier relationship to my body. I am still working on this relationship but I am more capable today. The future of this relationship lies in my hands, my learning, and my desire to be the change I want to see.

Furthermore, understanding the conversations in my mind was paramount in the relationship to self. Communication has been discourse I have worked hard to learn about and be

better at. As a kid, I was raised to be seen but not heard. I was instructed to speak only when spoken to, and to remain silent when others were talking. The justification here was respect for my elders. Today, while I attempt to remain respectful of others, I understand and want to forge a better way of communicating. Marshall Rosenberg's *Nonviolent Communication* (2015), opens up doors for better communication. Some principles I have learned from his theories include being open to give and receive compassion and love, understanding my emotions as signals for what I need at the moment which enables me to be responsible for my emotions, thus handling them in ways that flow through me without negative outcomes, empathizing, and making requests rather than demanding. At the start of my thesis work I told my advisor I wanted to work on something because I wanted to, not because I had to. I am better able to understand my initial desire through Rosenberg's theories on nonviolent communication.

Like societies' stories, which help hold society together, the stories I am telling myself, stories of love, compassion, and understanding, are holding me together. Similarly, Indigenous stories of reciprocity, compassion, reverence, and many more stories I am unaware of, shape Indigenous communities, guiding them in a path more harmonious with life on this planet. This is not to idolize Indigenous ways of life, as their lifeways are examples of existing possibilities, just like those of others around the world. I hope to learn from Indigenous modes of relationship to forge a better, more sustainable path for myself.

Fires are oftentimes viewed as bad, leading to destruction and death. A look at the 2020 fires in Australia signals this idea. However, without death and decay, without fire, growth and new life could not come about. Indigenous relations with the natural world in California entailed cultural burning, or the use of fire to promote plant growth, thus preventing the buildup of fuel for fire as is common with western management practices and as was seen in Australia and as we

see every year in California (Anderson 2005; CSKT 2021). For new life to come, there must be death. The Day of the Dead, an example from my culture, tells me this. I have never feared dying because death is normal for me. This does not mean that I want to die, but it does mean that I understand and see death, destruction, the end of things, as part of a new beginning. For a new healthy relationship to self to arise, there must be an end to an old one.

Another piece of Indigenous knowledge tells me that, as stated by Hernandez, “when we take care of nature, nature takes care of us” (2022, 28). I want to extend this relation to my body, understanding that if I take care of my body, my body will take care of me. I have been doing this through intentional living: curating healthy meals, growing food, crafting unique friendships, and opening up to others about my past experiences. These are but examples of some of the activities I have lived by as a way of taking care of my body. In return, my body has taken care of me, allowing me to feel healthier, more content, and less fearful of what is out there.

In my past relationship to self, if you could call it that, I was reckless, destructive, selfish, and many other adjectives used to describe a relationship to self rooted in hatred, disgust, and judgment. For a positive perception of myself, I had to learn to trust myself, give myself respect, listen to myself, and learn from others, opening up and accepting things as they are. I have also learned a great deal from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars who have written about Traditional Ecological Knowledge and other ways of being in this world. My relationship to self, while somewhat formulated above, is still developing and will continue to develop over the years.

The Built Environment and Me

Is a relationship to the built environment possible in the way that a relationship to self is? I want to believe so, however, it is proving more difficult than I imagined. To think of the built environment is to think about infrastructure, connectivity with the world, homes, buildings, and the jungle metropoli, their ever stretching concrete arms consuming everything nearby. Are these built environments centers of consumption and extraction of labor, wealth, food, water or can they be centers of rejuvenation, healing, reciprocity and abundance. In this section I hope to think through and articulate some possibilities for a relationship with the built environment rooted in the latter.

What would a relationship to the built environment look like? To dig deeper, I situate myself as a member of a community, I do not operate in the built environment all on my own. Community has various understandings, it is “a place, a location in which a group of people interact with one another[, ...] the social system itself, the organization or set of organizations through which a group of people meet their needs[, ... and] a shared sense of identity held by a group of people” (Flora et al 2015, 14). I am in direct and indirect contact with the built environment through my workplace, home, academia, and other built locations required for everyday life in the Western lifestyle I find myself in. I am a part of many communities. Even in México, a post-colonial country, these relations abound and are difficult to escape. To escape them would be to live on the periphery of society, something that sounds amazing in theory, though I am unsure about it in practice. I have isolated myself in the past which led to detrimental outcomes to my personal life. Further, community “is often based on a shared sense of place. This sense of place involves relationships with people, cultures, and environments, both natural and built, associated with a particular area” (Flora et al. 2015, 14). I understand myself in

a community because of the relationships I maintain to people around me and the varied cultures and spaces I navigate.

If the built environment is built by us and our machinery, a result of investment of monetary capital and extraction, how can I forge a healthy relationship with the built environment? While I do not see the extraction happening in front of me, it doesn't mean it is not happening elsewhere. People and communities in other parts of the country and the world must endure this extraction for my Western mode of life to continue. Slow violence onto the land and communities far removed from my periphery suffer as a result of the built environment around me. If the built environment around me was built through resource extraction, destruction, and death, all symptoms of colonialism (Loomba 2005), how can I forge a healthy, noncolonial or anticolonial relationship with the built environment whilst remaining a member of society and within a community? Further, how can I forge this relationship to the built world while relying on nonviolence and an ethic of care or mode of relationship. I surely can build an alternative home from recycled materials and implement an alternative mode of living, like the FLAT's, at a smaller scale. But how would this occur at the level of a community or society? Would people even want to live this way knowing all the comforts that abound in the West? Some people might, but would most? These are some of the many questions arising as I ponder through the idea of a relationship with the built environment.

Entertaining these thoughts, a future society comes to mind which answers these questions and works together to forge a healthier way of living. One which does not extract without end in sight and which sustains itself and its members. Examples of different possibilities come to mind. The Village Homes in Davis, CA "consist of 242 single- and multi-family residences on sixty acres. Houses are planned as energy-conserving buildings around

common open spaces with play areas and share gardens. A sizable part of the development is devoted to community open space, including orchards, vineyards, and play areas” (Francis 2002, 23). Another, less western, example are the Domes at UC Davis. The Domes are a “living-learning cooperative community of 26 students that encourage critical thought, communication and cooperation between individuals and the community, active maintenance of an open and inclusive space, and resistance to consumerism and structures of oppression” (Student Living and Learning Communities n.d.). Projects like these, like the FLAT, make the possibility to decolonize a relationship with the built environment evermore possible. These structures are small examples of the possibilities one can look to for inspiration to imagine future relations to the built environment.

Further, Robin Wall Kimmerer, in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, presents her working of a mode of relationship with the built environment rooted in care for the natural world. Here, she enters a mall, finding her way to “the habitat of [her] quarry” where she has been going “for years for [her] traditional harvest of writing supplies” (2013, 318-319). She gathers her favorite legal pads, attempting to “conjure the gathering mentality, to bring all the rules of the Honorable Harvest to bear, but [she] can’t do it without the bite of mockery” (2013, 318-319). Her attempts at “harvesting” paper and pens, synthesized from petrochemicals, are futile and she realizes this stating she’s “trying hard to make this work, but what [she] feel[s] in the woods, the pulsing animacy, is simply not there” (Ibid, 319-320). The sensations she experiences with the natural world are not present in the built environment, as life in the built environment is dead, “[e]verything for sale is dead” (Ibid, 320).

I find the task of forging a spiritual relationship to the built world difficult. Rather than giving up, I want to think of the built environment in a different way. My former education in

chemistry taught me everything is made up of atoms, comprised of positively charged protons, neutral neutrons, and negatively charged electrons. These atoms have a nucleus made up of neutrons and protons with electrons circling around in intriguing clouds or orbitals. These orbitals house electrons which interact with one another via intermolecular forces, attracting or repelling each other depending on their net charge or by sharing electrons. These forces come to play on an atomic understanding of a relationship with the built world. The built environment is also made of atoms, bound together in intricate ways, shaped by us and other forces. Bodies function as a result of intricately bound molecules with distinct roles and responsibilities. Rocks form in crystalline structures at a molecular level, forming angles at every bond. I learned that energy is neither created nor destroyed, but rather transformed. Is that what we are doing with the built environment? Are we transforming it? If so, can we transform it in a way that honors our past, pays attention to our future, and serves a purpose to our present? Can we transform the atoms of a tree into paper and not destroy it? I don't know, but I do know that Indigenous modes of relationship can aid in reimagining our relationship to the built world.

Further thinking about molecules, the built environment, and my relationship to it brings me back to slow violence and my experiences in Los Angeles under the landing path of airplanes, skin coated with jet exhaust, lungs full, my blood and my body pumping chemicals. I cannot help but think I am already in relation with the built environment but in more sinister ways. How can this be undone? How can we remove all the chemicals in the natural environment, like PFAS or forever chemicals, from our water, clothing, and food (LaFrance 2019; Jha et al. 2021; Scher et al. 2018). Can this relationship rooted in violence be stopped? Indigenous people did not have this form of relationship pre-contact. Will we ever be rid of these chemicals?

A look at *The River is in US: Fighting Toxins in a Mohawk Community*, an ethnography by Elizabeth Hoover (2017), paints another picture of slow violence and the relationship between a mohawk community and the built world. The river they once enjoyed and sourced their livelihoods from has literally entered their bodies, harming them. Chemicals in the river, the composition of the river, have literally entered Mohawk bodies. These chemicals are coming from discharge created by companies in the near vicinity (Hoover 2017). As a result, the Mohawk community must endure life with the effects of slow violence; of chemicals interacting with their organs, causing damage, mutations, and other adverse health effects. Is this the future of all of our relationship with the built world? Will we ever live free of built chemicals? I hope we get there for our future generations.

The built environment, while difficult to reimagine, can be changed, redone, and updated to meet all of our needs, in more levels than just monetary. Integrating animal habitat, building sustainably without causing harm to other communities living or nonliving is not impossible, but it does require a reimagination of what colonial discourse tells us is possible; what Western society tells us we can do. I hope to continue learning to reimagine my future, our future.

Natural Relations

At the FLAT, during my second year at UM, chopping brussels sprouts on a wooden cutting board from Target, with a Princess House knife (Princess House markets itself as a quality home and kitchenware catalog shop, usually sold by a representative – a family friend) my family gave me before I left to Missoula in August of 2020, I found myself deep in thought about modes of relationship rooted in anticolonialism, or noncolonial modes of relationship. I felt unhinged, chopping with a knife, slicing living cells open for the nutritional value they afford my body. In

this moment, I noticed, after halving various sprouts, they all look the same inside. They have a strong, dense, arrow-shaped core from which leaves come out and wrap around the center.

Society, I thought, would be better off with a similar structure to this one. Not just society, but any group, organization, friendship, family, and relationship, to name a few. A strong core, sense of belonging, or uniting principle, sheltered, protected, and cared for by leaves who surround and are connected to the core make a strong system. Like a brussels sprout, strong from the inside out, strength can be found alone or in numbers, so long as one remains connected to their core.

Many modes of relationship to the natural world abound in literature. Here, I aimed to highlight literature from nonwhite, nonmale, western academics, however, that is not always possible. Following are some of the modes of relationship to the natural world that stood out to me the most.

Beginning with Karuka, whose work has been cited in this thesis, I return to the Indigenous modes of relationship he presents in *Empires Tracks* (2019). From his articulation of Ella Deloria's mode of relationship which articulates a social consciousness rooted in and shaped by place, to Winona LaDuke's mode of relationship demonstrating a collective, cross-species, mode of relationship, Karuka highlights theories brought forth by Indigenous intellectuals pertaining to Indigenous modes of relationships. These theories, like much of the intentional living I have been attempting to do for the past two, going on three, years are rooted in a dialectical relationship of self and nature. Deloria, in her mode of relationship, further demonstrates, through story, how the Dakota people use property to renew relationships and strengthen them; how generosity, rooted in collective life and caring for others around you, is shaped by community, in turn shaping you, but also results in giving back to the world in the form of collective relationships (2019, 22).

LaDuke further expands Indigenous modes of relationship. She elaborates, through story, how “Indigenous relations with nonhuman animals, plants, rocks, and water [...] form the foundation for Indigenous collective life” (Karuka 20219, 30). She demonstrates this through the co-evolution of prairie ecosystems, buffalos, and Indigenous nations, who managed to live more sustainably than we do for thousands of years. We are not close to year 300 of industrialization and the world seems to be falling apart. She further elaborates on ideas of killing, pointing to colonialism and the senseless killing of animals, plants, humans, and life in general, at the hands and practices of violence. These practices, both sensational and slow, abound in colonial modes of relationship. In opposition to the killing of colonialism, Berkes, in *Sacred Ecology*, points to a Cree understanding of animals giving their life for humans (2018, 111). To the Cree, unlike western management practices which aim to control population numbers, animals have the agency to “decide whether or not to give themselves” to humans, to the hunt (Ibid, 111). Animals have the choice to be seen. Like a hunter listening to the signs the natural world is giving him, animals are doing the same. If they decide to show themselves to the Cree, then the hunt is meant to be; the Cree do not hunt down an animal for capricious reasons.

Another understanding for how to relate to the natural world rooted in Indigenous knowledge is from *Fresh Banana Leaves*. Hernandez says this over and over in her book: “nature takes care of you if you take care of nature” (2022, 24). I understand this as reciprocity. If you give without requiring something in return, something or someone will give back to you in whatever way possible. To give to the world will result in something being return to you. Reciprocity is not new although it is coming into fashion. Many Indigenous cultures abide by this belief, and many are in reciprocal relationships to the land (Andersen 2005; Goodyear-Ka’ōpua, Hussey, and Kahanawaika’ala Wright, eds, 2014; Berkes 2018; Karuka 2019;

Hernandez 2022). For the people of Hawai'i who understand the volcanos as living beings, a reciprocal relationship to the land means protecting the land from the grips of industrial development for the rich, greed, and from the military power of the United States. The land gives everything to the people who give back to the land, and to give back to the land can look very differently depending on who you ask.

Giving back to the land may look like regenerative agriculture, where nutrient cycles are kept as closed as possible to ensure nutrient retention in place. Some Indigenous groups give back by presenting small gifts or offerings to plants they have harvested from, while others give thanks through prayer, among other practices. On a personal note, I like to give thanks to the environment for allowing me to be here, reading, writing, walking, and being alive. I do this through meditation, yoga, by being grateful for life, and by trying to spread more kindness, compassion, and generosity when feasible. Some of these teachings come from my family's practices since before I was born, while others are things I have learned and picked up over time, like yoga and meditation. The latter forms of mindfulness and intentionality aid in my personal relation to the world and myself.

So what is a relationship to the natural world? I think the answer is complex, but is rooted in dialectics, interactions or dialogue or discourse between people, a push and pull. The answer also depends, on a personal note, to familial relations to world. I would like to understand these at a deeper level to discern their past: whether it be a colonial or noncolonial past. This understanding is important because it will help guide present and future relations. For example, my family, even in México, is very connected to town, giving back how they can, volunteering to help during events, and making food for fundraisers. These practices tell of a mode of relationships rooted in communal care for community and place. As a result, they are esteemed

in town and they receive help when they need it. Reciprocity abounds in this mode of relationship, which is very different than colonial modes of relationship.

Modes of relationship abound all around us. Discerning through their past aids in determining if they are worth bringing into the future. A relationship rooted in extraction is one left behind while another, grounded relationship rooted in only taking what you need is one that I want to bring with me. These relationships are everywhere, all the time. We are shaped by them and we shape them but it comes to a point where a decision needs to be taken.

I want to have a noncolonial or anticolonial relationship to the natural world, and I extend this relation to the world beyond. This relationship can be one in which I learn from the natural world around me, letting plants, animals, and everything around me guide and direct me; surrendering myself to the forces that keep the world at play. As if, as Robin Wall Kimmerer mentioned, to become like a bay (2013). I understand her words as to let the ebbs and flows of life guide me, shape me, forge me into who I am. This does not mean being a passive agent in life. Rather, using my agency to learn from the natural environment to live in harmony with myself and the world, built and natural in the time of today.

Chapter 2: Paradigms

Growing in México

Growing up in Jiquilpan, Michocán, México, I became familiar with the outdoors through outside play, on dirt, among trees, with my sister. I was not brought up with Romantic ideals that permeates ecological narratives stemming from “European romanticism in general, and sometimes [from] British and American Romanticism in particular” (Harrison *n.d.*). Authors like John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, and, more recently, Neal Evernden, and Donald Worster are prime examples. If I knew any environmental narratives then, they were unlike like the paradigms taught by American institutions regarding how one *should* approach the natural world.

My family lived catty-corner to Escuela Primaria Ignacio A. Gudiño, my primary school. To the right of the school, across from my family’s brick-laid home was a plot of land with trees, like a bosque, or forest as I knew it as a kid. This bosque was an empty lot of land ready for development—though it would not be developed until many years later. In this bosque, among 30 or so trees, I had my first experiences with the natural world. I use natural in opposition to the built world purposefully. The memories of many firsts in the outdoors, like climbing trees, playing hide and seek, digging dirt to make mud, and many other games I played are very different than the experiences I have had—and will continue to have in the natural world away from home—in Montana, California, and any other natural space I may visit.

Trees and other flora and fauna cover the bosque. Prior to its development into a church, the bosque, which was about the size of una manzana, or about 1 hectare, was home to guamúchiles, pinos, mesquites, and ocales—trees known in English as madras thorn, pine, mesquite, and eucalyptus. To me, this empty lot of land—a place where nature was growing at its own volition—, was a forest. This “forest,” from what I remember, was also used as storage

for industrial farming equipment—though this was so old, and had been sitting there for so long, that it was red-orange, covered in rust. It was not uncommon to see orange among the brown and green of plants there. This orange material served other purposes in the games I played. This imaginary forest, rooted in a plot of land not yet developed, with its green, brown, and orange was my playground.

I played outside on a daily basis in this forest. I made mud with my sister, shaping it into cakes and letting them dry overnight in our play-restaurant. We made tacos by pulverizing mud or old bricks we found, collecting leaves and filling them with the colorful filling we made from the ground. We lived out our childhood on the dirt, shadowed by trees and life's abundances without ever considering if we were in a wild place, a park, or another form of green space. We did not know of any separation between us and the world we played in almost daily—that of the natural world. This space was a hybrid space with multiple purposes for me and my sister. Today, this “forest” is gone. In its place sits a round, cement building known to the people of Jiquilpan, Michoacán as Templo Juan Pablo II, the 7th place of Catholic worship in a town of right over 36,000 inhabitants.

Memories on this dirt beg many questions about what I am told the environment is in the new life my family gave me by coming to the United States of America. A life I did not choose but was forced to live. The dirt of my childhood makes me wonder what México's environmental paradigms are, if they exist. What are people's relationship with the land there? Further, I wonder about the Indigenous cultures of México, which are marginalized but whose culture is often celebrated as part of a national identity—that of being Mexican. Specifically, I wonder if their ways of knowing and relating to the world manifest themselves in any way across the environmental narrative in México, if such thing exists.

I further question Western environmental narratives because the words for environment in Spanish, *medio ambiente*, *entorno*, or simply *ambiente*, have various meanings that tell of a different positionality within the world. *Medio ambiente*, in a literal sense, translates to middle ambience/ambient or environment; *entorno* literally translates to environment, but is defined and translated as a “conjunction of circumstances or social, cultural, moral, economic, professional, etc., factors that surround a thing or a person, collective or epoch and influence their being or development” (Oxford Languages via Google; English translation by Ceja Mejia). Finally, *ambiente*—as noted earlier—translates directly to ambience/ambient, environment or atmosphere, and is defined and translated as “atmosphere or air that surrounds living beings” and as an adjective for fluids “that surround a body or circulate around it” (Oxford Languages via Google; English translation by Ceja Mejia). I understand *entorno*, along with its definition, as a feedback loop where our surroundings influence our development and our actions. All of these definitions allude in some way to the idea that, in Spanish (and French, another Romance language), the environment is around us, alive as an actor which influences us, like a feedback loop influences our behavior, understandings, and ways of life. I am not the only one who thinks this, as this mode of thinking of the environment has been academically theorized in the past.

A look at *Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics*, an anthology edited by Emily Aliza Scott and Kristen Swenson points to an understanding of the environment as landscapes. Here, the concept of landscape has “been hitched from the beginning to aspects of human use—labor, property, domestication, jurisdiction, and so on—with a dialectic between humans and the land at its core”, and “acknowledges the mutual “shaping” of land and people” (Scott and Swenson 2015, 3). Further, the anthology invokes another understanding of the production of space, rooted in French philosophy, which states “a new understanding among geographers,

architectural theorists, sociologists, philosophers, artists, and art historians of space as a social and political concept—something that produces and is produced by economic and social relationships rather than being solely a physical domain” (Scott and Swenson 2015, 19). I understand this as the feedback loop aforementioned, as a “mutual “shaping” of the land and people” reflects this idea. To influence the world around you is to influence society—one cannot remain stagnant while the other changes. Rather, we adapt to the changes by changing ourselves. I did this when my family brought me to the United States as a child; I internalized American ways of life and began a journey of assimilation in order to fit in. The world around me was dramatically changed, thus I changed dramatically. I am now working to undo the many years of assimilation, embrace my culture, and work to decolonize the mind—a journey I believe will lead me to a healthier life in relation to the environments I find myself in, built or natural.

Indigeneity in México

In México—like the United States—there are many Indigenous groups who continue to practice their ways of life, though not exactly as they did pre-colonization. Like the US, México is a mixed settler state also intent on erasing Indigenous people from the land (Hernandez 2022). This total erasure was not accomplished, and like the US, Indigenous peoples in México are not a monolith, thus their cultures and understandings of the world, while similar in some ways, are different in other ways. In other words, there is not one way of relating to the world from an Indigenous perspective, rather these relationships vary based on geographic location (Hernandez 2022). Jessica Hernandez, in *Fresh Banana Leaves: Healing Indigenous Landscapes Through Indigenous Science*, tells of her life’s story as an Indigenous woman with roots in Oaxaca and El Salvador, two places that endured violence at the hands of settlers governments (that of México

and El Salvador) (2022). She speaks of many ways she, her family, and her ancestors relate to the land, some of which include reciprocity, respect, and reverence for the natural world (2022). Further, she brings forward “a message that is grounded on his [her father’s] Indigenous principles as a Maya Ch’orti’ man: *nature protects us as long as we protect nature*” (2022, 24). This notion permeates her book and speaks to the intimate relationship Indigenous people carry with them.

In my home state of Michoacán, México, before colonization, there were the Nahuas, Otomíes, Matlatzincas, and Tarascos, the latter in this list was the dominant group (Dirección General de Culturas Populares 2012). The Tarascos are more commonly known as P’urépechas, and they prefer the latter as the former is the name given to them by the Spanish upon contact (Dirección General de Culturas Populares 2012). They had a relationship to the land, gods and goddesses, and a way of life different than that of Westerners. In their artisan work, these relations can be seen through the rich, symbolic iconography present on the art. Like tribes in Montana, they had a way of understanding spatial awareness, their gods manifested in the bodies of animals, and they sustained their relationships with the gods through prayer and offerings. For example, the gods of their understanding of North were the gods associated with the right, the primordial Gods, while those associated with the South, thus the left, were the Gods of their ancestors and the dead, who are today celebrated in the popular tradition known as Día de los Muertos (Dirección General de Culturas Populares 2012). These relations demonstrate interconnectedness, reciprocity, reverence, and a deeper understanding of the natural world, much like many Indigenous tribes across the Americas. This should not be taken as monolith because these communities, despite having similarities, are still culturally different.

Finally, a search looking into ecological notions in México depicts the extent to which American conservation has reached. These notions, rooted in racism and colonialism (Hernandez 2022) are perpetuated across my home country. Now, I do not think conservation is bad; however, like Jessica Hernandez, I also believe that those wishing to practice conservation must:

- 1) “Educate themselves on settler colonialism to understand the root causes of why conservation is now needed.
- 2) Reflect on their positionality and reeducate themselves on how they were taught to practice conservation practices that continue to be oppressive toward Indigenous peoples because settler colonialism is deeply embedded in this field” (2022, 69-70).

In order for conservation to be truly successful, Indigenous people and their science must be uplifted and brought to the forefront. At the same time, white men and those who were trained in the Western way of knowledge production must take the back seat and support the conservation goals of Indigenous people. I believe this will allow everyone to have a better, and deeper, understanding of our environments and their importance.

Salish History

For thousands of years, long before the continent of Europe became the “civilized” world, people inhabited the land we live on today; land we know as the American continent, made up of North and South America. Many societies, commonly referred to as tribes, clans, or bands inhabited this land from the circumpolar north (like the Inuit) to South America (like the Incas) (Stevenson

2014; History.com Editors 2021). These societies had—and some continue to have—a way of life much different than that of the positivist, reductionist, and “progressive” dominant Western society (Merchant 2013). Indigenous societies practice different ways of life than that of Westerners, but which have the power to heal many damaged aspects of the current societal model in which we live in.

The Salish are an exemplary tribe in North America. The Salish are one of many tribes that continue to celebrate and live by their culture despite the pressures of Western culture, in addition to the erasure perpetuated on Indigenous communities by the dominant narratives in the U.S. The Salish, like other tribes in the Americas, have a reciprocal way of tending to the natural environment, one which encompasses knowledge, practice, and belief (Berkes 2018). They learned from their ancestors, who taught them ancestral practices through stories and by going out on the land and practicing ancestral traditions developed through years of practice. Similarly, experiential learning, western practice similar to traditional ecological knowledge, is taking ground in academic settings. This form of knowledge production and acquisition is becoming popularized and more accented within the ivory tower. Indigenous people around the world have been practicing TEK since time immemorial and is now, more than ever, being accepted in academia. So much so that M. Kat Anderson wrote a 500+ page book on the importance of fire on the land (Anderson 2005).

The Salish are of great importance in this work because I have conducted my studies on their ancestral camp grounds, a place better known today as the University of Montana. The Salish, among various other tribes in the geographical region known today as the Pacific Northwest, came from one original tribe known as the Salishan, with one original oral language (CSKT 2018). The population of the Salishan, over thousands of years of tending to the land,

grew and dispersed across the region. Over time, the dispersal led to the various distinct tribes that inhabit reservations across the region, each with their own language and culture (Ibid). Today, in what is known as Western Montana there resides in the Flathead Indian Reservation the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT 2018); two of the five or six original tribes who inhabited what are now Montana, Washington, Idaho, and British Columbia—an expansive territory that allowed the tribes to hunt and gather, live with the cycles of the seasons, and maintain one of the most sustainable ways of life I have ever come across (Ibid; Bear Don't Walk 2019).

The land has been here for thousands and thousands of years. The Salish have too, and so their tribal history is extensive. Archeological records found in the Salish-Kalispel territories date back over 12,500 years (CSKT 2018). That is thousands of years long before Christopher Columbus mistakenly reached the continent; thousands of years before the idea of the United States was even conceived; thousands of years long before Europeans had a “civilization”. The Salish were present on this land long, long, *long* before the conception and development of a western God. Other evidence indicates these tribes have lived on their territory for longer (CSKT 2018). Salish oral history or creation stories, as they are known amongst the tribe, speak of ancient events, like the melting of glacial lake Missoula that took place some 15,000 to 13,000 years ago, or of the flourishing of tribes and the 23 languages, 33 dialects, and 9 sub-dialects that were spoken by the tribes originating from the original Salishan tribe (Ibid).

Long before settler colonialism tarnished the land and ancestral ways of life, the Salish people hunted for buffalo, elk, deer, and various types of fish (Smith 2010; CSKT 2018; Bear Don't Walk 2019). They traveled across the continental divide to reach the plains of eastern Montana where they would hunt. Today, the Salish are in charge of the National Bison Range

located on the Flathead Indian Reservation (Bison Range Restoration). The tribes sought out berries, bitterroot, camas, and other foods and medicines throughout the expansive territory they, and other descendants tribes of the Salishan, inhabited (CSKT 2018; Bear Don't Walk 2019).

Salish life-ways incorporated an ethic directed towards every living and nonliving being. The Salish ethic “centered on a relationship of respect with all creatures” (CSKT 2018, 22). This ethic meant that nothing would be wasted; all products of an animal were used, and the same was done with plants and all else. The Salish lived a true sustainable life, as modern Environmentalists would likely describe it. Bison had numerous purposes within the tribe besides meat consumption and fur use. Rawhide could be used for masks, ornaments, drums, straps, shields, snowshoes, and more; bones were used for arrowheads, eating utensils, jewelry, shovels, war clubs, and more; and fat from the buffalo was used for soaps, tanning, hair grease, and other purposes (SQCC 2019). Most, if not all, parts of the bison were used including the liver, tongue, beards, hoofs, brains, teeth, blood, and dung (Ibid). The Salish used their resources wisely and ensured that they got the most use out of whatever it is they hunted or gathered. Bison is one example of the extent Salish creativity and tactfulness went. They were not the only tribe to have intricate uses for animals and plants, but they are a great example of the many achievements of Indigenous civilizations.

When Lewis and Clark first encountered the tribe and their surrounding land, they assumed it was the result of untouched wilderness. They were wrong. Whether settlers in the 1800s purposefully perpetuated these claims or settlers were that ignorant of their surroundings, the land was tended to and cared for by the people who inhabited the land. The Salish world was a result of “human presence – or more precisely, a particular kind of human presence, a particular cultural relationship to the land, a particular way of life” (CSKT 2018, 21).

Unfortunately for the Salish, Lewis and Clark could not fathom such things, and as a result of Manifest Destiny—a false narrative enacted by settlers—the land and all of its bearings were taken from the tribe. The tribe was sent to the Flathead Reservation following the signing of Hell Gate Treaty in 1855, and the removal of the tribe followed in what some call the Salish Trail of Tears (a result of the Garfield Treaty, “signed” with an X by Chief Charlo in 1872) (CSKT 2018; CSKT 2021). The Garfield Treaty was never actually signed by Chief Charlo. James A. Garfield, a future president of the US, forged an X on the document to represent Chief Charlo’s signature, and thus the treaty was ratified by Congress. This action sealed the fate of the Salish and marked the start of a colonial world on tribal land, an ancestral campground and food source of the Salish—the same land I found myself in for two years undergoing education in a graduate program at the University of Montana.

Missoula History

The land I ventured into to undertake my Masters is known to the Salish as Nemissoulatakoo or “river of ambush/surprise” (Destination Missoula n.d.). This area is the place where Lewis and Clark, in 1806, passed through on their return trip, camping along the Blackfoot River (City of Missoula n.d.). Prior, in 1805, they, along with a party of about 400 whites, had their first encounter with the Salish, south of what is today known as Darby, Montana (City of Missoula n.d.). The Salish were kind and welcoming to the party of whites, not knowing the true intention or reasoning for the presence of these white bodies.

Looking at Missoula’s history, the one portrayed on the city website, there is no other mention of the Salish besides the first encounter with Lewis and Clark; there is a gap of information between 1806 and 1860, when the Washington Territorial Legislature created

Missoula county “at or near Worden & Co. Trading post in Hell Gate Ronde” about four minutes west of the current location of downtown Missoula (City of Missoula n.d). There is no mention of the Hell Gate Treaty of 1855, the Garfield Treaty of 1872, nor the Salish Trail of Tears—the forced removal of the Salish from the place known today as the Bitterroot Valley. With a critical, anti-colonial, queer, intersectional lens, I can only imagine this information is missing in order to ensure the comfort of whites. Traditionally, queer refers to sexuality, and queer theory “challenges the normative social ordering of identities and subjectivities along the heterosexual/homosexual binary as well as privileging of heterosexuality as ‘natural’ and homosexuality as its deviant and abhorrent ‘other’” (Browne and Nash 2010, 5). My aim with a queer lens is to challenge narratives as queer scholarship is “anti-normative and seeks to subvert, challenge and critique a host of taken for granted ‘stabilities’ in our social lives” (Browne and Nash 2010, 7). Challenging whiteness, the narratives perpetuated by whiteness and thereby Missoula’s narratives about its conception, a queer lens is important to destabilize white normative narratives. Whiteness, according to Hernandez,

“grants those who are white the power and privilege due to the racial hierarchies settler colonialism introduced. It is the system that continues to determine that white individuals dominate our political structures and leadership. In the United States whiteness is what made many European immigrants, those who came after the thirteen colonies were formed, assimilate to the white American persona.

Whiteness embodies the white American persona and identity that continues to be associated with the United States, even globally” (2022, 41).

It is this whiteness that is protected through the erasure of Indigenous presence and short history presented on the city's website. The erasure of Missoula's history from the collective imagination ensures whiteness is protected, validated, upheld, and sustained—the goals of white supremacy culture. By omitting the violence Indigenous people endured during their removal from their lands, whiteness is sheltered, protected, and a narrative riddled with Christian justification of progress and civilization is upheld and protected by white supremacy. White supremacy is “a set of toxic systems that ultimately favor white men and women and grant them the power to enact any form of violence or oppression in order to maintain whiteness in the Americas” (Hernandez 2022, 41).

The city's history goes on, ignoring any presence of Indigenous bodies or labor, when Warden & Co. moved to the north end of Higgins Ave Bridge—renamed as the Beartracks Bridge in 2021—in 1864/65, marking the founding of Missoula. As time went on, the town grew, and Indigenous bodies were pushed out, the town obtained many of its firsts: a hospital, newspaper, library, telephone, and Fort Missoula—an historical landmark in the town's periphery.

Missoula obtained its first charter in 1883, electing their first mayor, and had the introduction of railroads with the arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Railroad colonialism had reached Missoula. Railroad colonialism, as defined by Karuka, is “territorial expansion through financial logics and corporate organization, using unfree imported laborers, blending the economic and military functions of the state, materializing in construction projects across the colonized world” (2019, xiv). This concept is important because by the 1880s Missoula had become a “trading center in earnest, distributing produce and grain grown in the agriculturally prosperous Bitterroot Valley”—the same valley from which the Salish were forcefully removed

by white settlers (Destination Missoula n.d.). In 1889 Montana became a state, joining the United States of America, and in 1895 the University of Montana opened its doors with 50 students on what once was Salish camps.

The town continued as a white space, upholding white supremacy culture as well as settler colonialism. With the destruction of forests and public land came to Missoula the regional headquarters of the Forest Service in 1908, ensuring “the country’s forests and watersheds would always be protected” while at the same time ensuring a multiple use policy (Destination Missoula n.d.; U.S. Forest Service n.d.). As a result of demand, logging prospered in Missoula until the mid-1970s, after which the logging industry dwindled until it was shut down by the early 1990s (Destination Missoula n.d.).

Today, Missoula, a town forged by settlers, is a town on stolen land full of live music, art, locally grown food, local shops, and green space all around for outdoor enthusiasts to recreate at their leisure. Missoula is estimated to have “136 trails, covering more than 700 square miles” ([EvenzaMaps](#) n.d.). Furthermore “Missoula County Parks, Trails, and Open Lands (PTOL) manages 91 parks and more than 40 miles of shared-use paths and trails” (Missoula County n.d.). The majority of the land in Missoula county is now either privately owned or land held by the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (Montana State Library 2016). Missoula is a green park catering to ecotourism and those with enough wealth to leave the hustle and bustle of cities for the peace and quiet the natural environment has to offer. However, Missoula endured a lot of extractivism at the hands of settlers, many of which struck it rich through the violence they acted on the land, Indigenous people, and Indigenous culture, violence which continues to impact the land and therefore the Salish people and their culture. Extractive industries, while not decimating the land at the pace at which they once did, continue to cause

harm through dams, mining, and the aftereffects of mining operations that went awry (Anaconda is a prime example. Despite having been started near Butte, MT, it's environmental impacts reached Milltown, in the periphery of Missoula). In the same vein, ecotourism harms the land by putting a price to access the land, creating boundaries, demarcating use of land, and raising costs of transport, housing, and desirability of the land as a result of capitalism and colonialism.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Understanding

Sovereignty/Countersovereignty

As I grew up and began formal schooling my mother explicitly told me, “¡No somos Indios!” — making sure I understood we were not “Indians”. I can only imagine she said those words because of my darker complexion in a town founded by Spanish missionaries, my hometown of Jiquilpan, Michoacán, located on what used to be a lake. I did not understand the broader cultural context in which she said those words to me, but I ran with it and found joy in being Mexican with possible European descent. It should come to no surprise that when I learned about conquest, I was enthralled and wanted to learn about the colonial history of Mexico and the formation of the place I called home.

When I think of the history I learned in my formative education in Southern California I think back to varied instances of American exceptionalism and incredible heroic actions. I was told about the “discovery” of the American continent (or Turtle Island as many Indigenous groups on the continent know the place) by explorers like Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés, and many other heroic men who embarked on arduous journeys across the ocean. They discovered “new” land and established colonies, giving rise to the new world, the world we inhabit today. In those formative years, I adored stories of conquest and colonization.

I eventually learned about the colonial history of the thirteen colonies, the growth of a nation, and about its expansion west under the guise of Manifest Destiny or the belief “that the United States [was] destined — by God, its advocates believed — to expand its dominion and spread democracy and capitalism across the entire North American continent” (History.com Editors 2010). While learning all of this history, I do not recall any mention of Indigenous people. I either I don’t remember at all or they were erased from history altogether.

Today, I know Indigenous people are alive, working arduously to revive lost cultural traditions and practices to preserve their way of life; they never left but were erased from the pages of history. Despite Indigenous communities' fight for survival and visibility, they still face a lot of cultural erasure, oppression, racism, and ill treatment at the hands of settler colonialism, its legacy, and the government entity maintaining a seemingly "progressive" and "forward thinking" grip on the continent, ensuring its very own survival.

Stories like these are common in the United States, where kids of all ages are taught history from one particular lens. This lens is that of those writing the history, the American man or woman. Their history is a history of triumph, upward mobility, progress and expansion, as well as economic growth, national development and pride. However, this history, which aims to establish itself as the true and "right" history of this continent, is really, as I've grown to understand it through the process of working on this thesis, the prose of countersovereignty.

To understand countersovereignty we must first understand what sovereignty, and in particular what Indigenous sovereignty is. Sovereignty is defined as the "supreme power or authority; the authority of a state to govern itself or another state; a self-governing state" (Dictionary.com n.d.). Knowing this, we can now look at Indigenous sovereignty to understand what it is and what it looked like before settler colonialism.

Long before western settlers began colonizing the 'American' continent, Indigenous people tended and worked the land, making tools, clothing, food, medicine, homes, and baskets, among many other artifacts (Anderson 2005; Berkes 2018; CSKT 2018). Indigenous people maintained, and continue to maintain a unique relationship to the land. The Indigenous communities living on the Americas prior to European arrival and domination had intricate ways

of knowing the land, relating to one another—living or nonliving—, and embracing the world around them. In this sense Indigenous people, long before contact with Europeans and settlement from Euromerican settlers, had and practiced sovereignty; they had leaders, land, homes, food, tools, and populated the “Americas” from North to South; they were truly free to manage their civilization as they pleased. I use the term civilization not in the traditional Western context used to denote a binary between the civilized and the savage, but rather to denote a group of people with complex social structures, rules, and ways of life. Indigenous sovereignty is the supreme power and authority of Indigenous people to govern themselves and their land. Before the arrival of settlers and westward expansion under the guise of Manifest Destiny, the gold rush and land theft, Indigenous people controlled their land use, and did so in very efficient ways (Anderson 2005; Berkes 2018; CSKT 2018).

To fully understand countersovereignty, I turned to *Empire’s Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad*, a historiography by Manu Karuka in which he “offers structural analyses of capital and imperialism from distinct colonial standpoints, crossing the borders of discrete subfields of Indigenous and ethics studies in its citational practice and in its theoretical and methodological approaches” (Karuka 2019, xiv). I deem crossing discrete fields very important; not only is the world interconnected but we must also move past the hard lines of separation between academic disciplines in order to more fully understand the complexities of life.

Focusing on what he terms “the prose of countersovereignty”, the history of the United States takes on an entirely new meaning. Through this idea, detailed below, US history can be better understood and interpreted as an incomplete, biased, or “white-washed” history aiding in the establishment and ensuring the longevity of the United States in the minds of its body politic.

““What people believe is true reflects how they perceive themselves, their associates, and the conditions under which they live.”” (Karuka 2019, 5, citing Gary Fine and Patricia Turner).

As we understand countersovereignty, the United States must first be understood not as a nation but as an empire. A nation is defined as “a large body of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular country or territory” (Oxford Languages via Google n.d.). On the other hand, empire is defined by Merriam-Webster as “a major political unit having a territory of great extent or a number of territories or peoples under a single sovereign authority; the territory of such a political unit” (n.d.). The United States was conceived of nothing—prior to colonization and land theft, there was no territory, history, language, nor did people share a common descent besides that of Europe—yet today is considered one of the most affluent nations in the world in terms of its gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. Capital, of course, is what runs today's westernized world; everything is about money. My mom often said while I was growing up, “con dinero baila el perro” or “with money the dog will dance” and I could not agree more. Additionally, the United States has military bases across the world. According to Politico Magazine, as of 2015, the United States has “nearly 800 military bases in more than 70 countries and territories abroad” (Vine 2015). Karuka articulates the conception of the US empire as one rooted in war and finance (2019), which can be seen today through the many corporations and money generating industries, the military presence across the world, and its hubris. The western way is not the only way.

Further, the United States enjoys from an imperial economy, maintained through its own influence and mighty grip on the world. This can be seen in recent times as former President Donald Trump initiated a trade war with China, in which an increase in tariffs caused US exporters' profits to decrease. This thesis is not about economics, but the goal is to articulate how

a simple change of economic practice influences the world and its revenues. In short, “[t]he United States claims and maintains control over its “domestic” territories at the nexus of war and finance” (Karuka 2019, xii).

So what is countersovereignty? Let’s break down the word. We know what sovereignty is from above, but the prefix counter-, according to Dictionary.com is “used with the meanings “against,” “contrary,” “opposite,” “in opposition or response to” (countermand)”. Knowing this, and placing the word in the context of Karuka’s *Empire’s Tracks*, countersovereignty can be better understood as “a position of reaction to distinct Indigenous protocols governing life in the spaces the United States claims as its national interior” (2019, xii). Karuka further expands on countersovereignty: “as a mode of political authority, [it] is closely linked to counterintelligence, counterinsurgency, and counterrevolution, all modes of reactive anxiety, fragile modes of power that can take overwhelmingly violent form” (2019, xii). US claims of sovereignty are unstable, need control to ensure maintenance of power within and outside its borders, and reactive to any possible threat of delegitimizing its made-up authority.

You may wonder, “How does this work?” A close look at *Empire’s Tracks* paints a very clear picture created through a close scrutinization of archives. Made seen is how rumors were twisted with altruistic motives benefiting settlers and the establishment of the US empire. Karuka points to the way “[i]nteractions between Chinese and Paiutes are recorded as rumors in the archives of Nevada settlement and colonization” (2019, 3). He further elaborates how “[t]hese interactions open possibilities of a history in which colonial claims to legitimacy and authority are seen as properly peripheral, coercive, and reliant, ultimately, on violence (Ibid, 3). Karuka’s questioning of these rumors opens up new possibilities of what was happening at the time. Rather than relying on a history book written by a white settler functioning as a historian, Karuka

brings forth new questions that cannot be answered by the settler imagination flipping history on its head, and providing new possibilities that pay attention to Indigenous and Chinese experiences as central to the story, therefore reducing settler accounts to the periphery.

There are multiple versions to every story. Karuka uses an “anticolonial approach to U.S. history”, as this type of approach “calls for rumor control as one of the its contributions” (2019, 6). The control of rumors is crucial because rumors are based on “nonnormative evidence” (Ibid 2019, 6). However, there remains a problem:

“Claims of countersovereignty made through the repetition and dispersal of rumors, masquerading as empirical fact, deviate from the experiential memories of Paiutes who controlled their territory. Rumors raise questions for competence and trustworthiness of sources, questions central to empiricist approaches to telling history, which often mask the violence patchily recorded and enacted in archives of countersovereignty. Hence, in the folklore of the settler community, we see moments of origins in contact, fantasies of Indigenous disappearance, and paranoia about invasion and displacement from the South or the West, from those who cannot share entirely in the authorship or reception of the rumor of countersovereignty” (Ibid 2019, 6).

This is what I believe is happening in Missoula. The anxiety of “others” coming in and changing their narratives results in the microaggressions, intolerance, and fake liberalism displayed across town.

The prose of countersovereignty is then the archives, written work, and the history of the United States of America. This is a one sided history, that of the winners—as anxious and fragile as it may be. This history remains fragile as it is rooted in rumors and false notions of events rooted in the collective imagination of settlers. Like the gold rush, the belief of striking it rich out west drove Euro-Americans to this part of Turtle Island, causing the destruction of Indigenous ways of life; western greed has no limits. In the context of Paiute and Chinese workers, Karuka elaborates, “the function of the colonial archive, and the historiography that proceeds from it, is the prose of countersovereignty” (2019, 8). “In its form of address, its mode of authorship and transmission, and its content, the prose of countersovereignty orients itself toward delegitimizing Indigenous modes of relationship and solidifying a colonial sovereign unmoored from them” generating rumors or myths like, “Indigenous disappearance, social evolution, and the inevitability of the bourgeois political economy order” (Ibid, 8).

It is evident how powerful the writing of history can be, and how rumors and history are intertwined to convey a desired narrative that aligns more closely with settler imaginations. The problem is Turtle Island was never a white-settler place; Turtle Island had, and continues to have, vibrant social orders, economies, foods, religions, and ways of life. It is imperative that accountability be taken, the truth be known for reconciliation to commence, and for Indigenous people to lead those living on Turtle island into a healthier, equitable, sustainable, and richer way of life.

Colonialism/Postcolonialism

Colonialism, or European colonialism, has shaped my life since before I was born. In México, I learned to navigate a world understood there by the mixed class, which became the dominant

group. This group, made up of a collective identity and culture, controls the dominant idea about who, what, how, where, and when México is. But when I came to the United States with my family, I internalized another form of colonialism thus becoming a doubly-colonized agent. I tried my darnedest to fit into the new society I was in, to assimilate and forget the past self that was formed in another world, south of the border.

Colonialism, as a professor once told a group of us in class, is like the boogeyman; the boogeyman “is a type of mythic creature used by adults to frighten children into good behavior” (Wikipedia 2022). Similarly, in a broad sense, colonialism was used by colonizers to “frighten children into good behavior”, that is to ensure the colonized obey the colonizer. Before we dive deeper into colonial discourse and the differences among colonialism based on region, it is important to understand some ideas about colonialism and its reaches.

European colonialism is different than other forms that occurred in the past, however, the reaches and implications of colonialism are far greater than I could have ever imagined. “By the 1930s, colonies and ex-colonies covered 84.6 percent of the land surface of the globe”, meaning the majority of the world is living under colonialism’s/postcolonialism’s legacy (Loomba 2005, 3). I say is rather than was because colonialism, despite having formally ended, remains in modes of relationships, the cast systems, and the capitalist markets in postcolonial nations. Considering the vastly different geographies, peoples, cultures, and overall ways of life across the world, it is not safe to assume colonialism functions the same across all regions. This is why I say that I was doubly-colonized—I internalized two different but similar systems in order to traverse across worlds, with limitations of course. But if colonialism works differently based on, but not limited to, the factors aforementioned, how can we define colonialism?

Simply defined, colonialism is, according to Loomba, “the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods” (2005, 8). A Google Dictionary search, powered by Oxford Languages, defines colonialism as “the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically”. However, these definitions do not explain how European colonialism functioned or how it was different. Nor do they explain how México’s modern colonialism/postcolonialism functions or how the people experience their lives under such system, much less the experiences in the USA. Let us first understand how European colonialism is different. Loomba describes how, according to Marxist thinking, earlier colonialism was pre-capitalist while “modern colonialism was established alongside capitalism in Western Europe. Modern colonialism [...] restructured the economies of [countries it conquered], drawing them into a complex relation with their own [country], so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries” (2005, 9). Colonies served as a money making machine for Europe, allowing the region and the countries doing the colonizing to flourish and invest into their own advancement (Loomba 2005; Galeano 1997). In order for the rich to exist, there must be a poor. Europeans stole wealth from the colonies, thus poverty exists in the world as a result of their theft.

Colonialism varies by region and cannot be encapsulated under one umbrella-term, doing so would be taking a step back to universal beliefs, ultimately harming minorities and erasing their unique experiences. As a result, intersectionality is of much importance. Intersectionality is “the acknowledgment that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalize people—gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc.” (Taylor 2019) and can be further understood as recognizing “that identity markers (e.g. “woman” and “black”) do not exist independently of

each other, and that each informs the other, often creating a complex convergence of oppression” (YW Boston 2017). This is why geography matters in understanding the varied forms of colonialism, and why colonialism must be looked at through an intersectional lens. A brown person’s experience in the United States is much different than their experience in México.

I am a cisgender, queer, brown male living in the United States—specifically California. I am college educated and working towards the completion of my Masters. In the US, I navigate a system of oppression that favors and upholds whiteness; however, I, a brown male, have more privilege than brown females. I recall an instance where my friend and I were stopped by a police officer late at night. We were sitting in my car, listening to Lana del Rey post doobie. We were deep in conversation about boy troubles, enjoying many laughs with Lana when blue, red, and white flashed behind us. As we waited in my car, a police officer approached my side of the vehicle. He spoke in a stern voice, asking what we were doing at the park at such a late hour. He smelled the lingering smell of cannabis, emanating from my car. He took my license and registration, gave us a speech about DUIs and how troubling this was, then went back to his car. Upon his return, his demeanor and attitude towards us changed. He saw my driver’s license address, telling him I lived in Davis, CA at some point. He then asked if I had gone to UC Davis, followed by what I had studied. I explained to him that I had obtained a B.S. in chemistry and had just moved back to the area to work for a cosmetics manufacturing company.

He gave us a ticket, told us we needed to go to court even if we didn’t get anything in the mail regarding the ticket, and let us drive home. We went to court twice, only to find out he never turned the ticket in. I was relieved to know I had gotten a pass, when I could’ve gotten a DUI right in that moment. I do not know that he would have done that had I been a brown male

without a college education working as a chemist. This is speculation on my part. While I face discrimination, I am afforded other privileges.

In México, it is a whole other story. I recall my aunt making a comment indicating that no one would ever guess that I was as educated as I am because of the way I dress—I wear shorts, a t-shirt and sandals when I am in México. It is generally hot and humid in my hometown, so I dress for comfort, not to impress others. I didn't fully understand what she meant by her comment, but I can only speculate that someone with the education I have under my belt would dress differently within Mexican society. As a result of my education, mannerism, and the way I enunciate my Spanish when I speak it, people oftentimes speak to me in *usted*, the formal Spanish used to show respect to others. This brings me back to the ideas Hernandez presented in her book, in which she discusses the hierarchy of race in México. She “break[s] down this racial caste system into six power structures, starting with the highest power and privilege: (1) peninsulares, (2) criollos, (3) mestizos, (4) mulattoes, (5) Indigenous, and (6) Black” (Hernandez 2022, 49). Hernandez further elaborates on the caste system, indicating “Indigenous and Black people who *mixed* with any Spanish blood gained more access in the racial caste system Mexico established as their main goal was to *water down* or *dilute* Black and Indigenous blood. It was the blood quantum narrative Mexico portrayed for so many years and continues to uphold in its current system of power” (2022, 50). As I mentioned earlier, my mother would tell me that we were not Indians. In México, the more Spanish blood you have, the higher in society you are (Loomba 2005; Hernandez 2022). Lighter skin is preferred and dark skin is looked down upon. One of my cousins, who is of a darker complexion, has had to move schools two or three times as a result of bullying for his skin color. I am the darkest one in my immediate family, and I can

only assume my mother would say the things she did to me as a child to protect me from the possible insults others might have for me.

A feature of colonialism is whiteness. And to uphold whiteness, white supremacy was established in the United States, along with many other colonized places, including México. It is the ultimate goal of white supremacy to protect whiteness at all costs.

These examples can be further scrutinized and understood through colonial discourse. Let us first look at discourse, as theorized by Foucault. Discourse,

“after the Latin curses or ‘running to and fro’, carries several meanings—onward course, process or succession of time, events, actions; the faculty of reasoning or rationality; communication of thought by speech or conversation; a narrative, tale or account; familiarity, and a spoken or written testament of a subject in which it is treated or handled at length. This last meaning, the dictionary tells us, is the prevailing sense of the word today. In the work of Michel Foucault, some of the earlier meanings are restored and others added to the word. It is in this expanded sense that ‘discourse’ has currently become central to critical theory and postcolonial criticism” (Loomba 2005, 37).

I understand discourse as the box American teachers, instructors, professors, and/or academics are always telling their students to think outside of. Let me explain. Environmentalism and environmental studies have definitions for what constitutes as the environment. These definitions were created by someone—likely someone who studied these ideas or had motives for protecting the land, extracting its resources, and/or maintaining a “pristine” wilderness for the rich to enjoy

(See Carolyn Merchant's *Reinventing Eden* for a detailed account of the rise of environmental narratives and ideology). Within these ideas of what the environment is and isn't, certain groups fit in and others do not. It is why Native Americans "disappeared" from the land and why the ideas surrounding wilderness exist. A read through "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" by William Cronon (1996) presents strong arguments for the dissolution of wilderness. However, wilderness will not be disbanded. An entire paradigm has been built around it, so disbanding wilderness would present a lot of troubles for many companies, agencies, and other entities wishing to protect natural spaces set aside for preservation and conservation purposes. Here lies the problem with the box of discourse. When something or someone does not fit within the box, within the ideas of what is and isn't environmentalism or environmental studies, within environmental discourse, it all falls apart. How would environmental groups working to protect wilderness spaces navigate and justify their cause if the wilderness environmental paradigm was erased? What would a world without wilderness to protect look and work like? What environmental discourses would we believe in and uphold? It is important to be open to new ideas and concepts, to generate new knowledge and be open to changing beliefs in order for discourse, in general, to continue advancing. If we do not push the boundaries of the box, of discourse, we are stuck in the box.

Environmental discourse, I would argue, limits us, keeping us on a trajectory with pre-made boundaries enshrined with the idea of progress and technological advancement as the only way forward. To reflect on discourse, to me, means to think beyond the box, to forget the box, and reimagine what is possible, to let Native Americans lead us to a better world, not to indigenize _____ (fill in the blank), for that would be co-opting. Rather, let Indigenous people be our leaders, our elected officials, our curators of knowledge. This is not to say we should discard

science altogether because science has its place in the world. To understand discourse is to understand the fabrics of society, and to reimagine society, we must reimagine discourse.

Violence

Violence, like a shadow, has trailed behind me, shaping me, shaping us into the world of today.

9/11, a tragic event in American history, marked its 21st anniversary this past September 2022. The day was riddled with messages reading “Never Forget”, terrifying images from 2001 along with images of ground zero, and a page by The New York Times devoted to 9/11—an anniversary page titled “9/11 and After”—in which many stories are shared about life after 9/11. A line from that site reads, “How a single day continues to shape us, 20 years later” indicative of how this single, violent moment in time remains engrained in the imagination of the American people (NY Times). However, compared to the COVID-19 pandemic (under which we are still living in and which took the lives of more than one million Americans), 9/11 left 2,977 victims dead. Yet 9/11 is remembered with an almost nostalgic memory, one which remains a pillar in the American imagination, almost mythologized as *the* definition of violence against a country (Nixon 2013).

Two situations engulfed in violence: one, a sensational, flame ridden, horrifying event took place in a single day, while the other with larger, worldly impacts remains ongoing, nearly three years after it officially began. The populace who lived through both of these events lived through violence. Although these are different types of violence (one more readily accepted as “true” violence by the media and the popular imagination), they both have had detrimental effects on those who lived through them. Herein, in what follows, an exploration and broadening

on what is accepted as violence is made visible following the thinking of Rob Nixon's slow violence.

Violence, according to Oxford Languages via Google, is "behavior involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something"; "strength of emotion or an unpleasant or destructive natural force"; and in law "an unlawful exercise of physical force or intimidation by the exhibition of such force" (n.d.). According to Rob Nixon's slow violence, these definitions of violence limit our understanding and conception of violence. What about the elementary kids at Felton Elementary School, who inhale air under the landing path of Los Angeles International Airport and next to Interstate 405? What about their lungs and the long term impacts jet fuel and vehicle exhaust can have after years of exposure? I am one of those kids. And I was exposed to emissions for six years, from ages 7 to 13. Is this not a form of violence? Did I and all those other kids not suffer from long term health consequences that have gone ignored because our lungs didn't suddenly combust from contact with jet and vehicle exhaust?

Rob Nixon certainly thinks so, made evident via his articulation of slow violence. Slow violence, he conveys, is "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed at all" because violence "is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space and as erupting into instant sensational visibility" (Nixon 2013, 2). Here, 9/11 can be seen and understood as the defining moment of violence while the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to nearly 15 million dead across the world, might not be perceived as a form of violence because it is not instantaneous, sensational, or explosive. Further, other forms of slow violence, posed by Nixon, include "petro-imperialism, the megadam

industry, outsourced toxicity, neocolonial tourism, antihuman conservation practices, corporate and environmental deregulation, and the militarization of commerce, forces that disproportionately jeopardize the livelihoods, perspectives, and memory banks of the global poor” (Nixon 2013, 5).

An expanding of our perception and understanding of violence is crucial if we are revolutionize the world into a better, truly sustainable and equitable place. We must face the discomforts we look away from in our greenscape bubbles and manicured spaces; we must face the ugly truths that make the comforts of the West possible. In doing so, we might be able to empathize, make visible the long lasting impacts of slow violence, demand legislative change, and make a difference for everyone and everything in our home.

Furthermore, I would like to extend these notions of slow violence onto the natural environment more directly. Salazar Parreñas’ *Decolonizing Extinction*, introduces *bebas*, autonomy in English, or “free; not a slave in the power of another; having freedom; not fixed, able to move; without, not subject to; not occupied, not in use; lavish; clear; free from doubt, difficulties, obstacles, etc.; carefree; light-hearted through being free from anxieties; footloose, independent; without responsibilities; not dependent on or controlled by another person or thing” (2018, 135). She tested the term with Nadim after they witnessed a forced copulation of a prepubescent female orangutan at the hands of a male orangutan. Orangutans at the Lundu Wildlife Center live enclosed in six kilometers squared, forced into close proximity with one another; overcrowded. This lifestyle is unnatural to them but they are there because the wildlife center is working to ensure orangutans do not go extinct. Parreñas asks Nadim, “‘Bebas?’” He replies “‘Bebas, tapi takut,’ literally, ‘free but fearful’” (2018, 135).

I seek to extend to persons at the hands of colonialism in western society, our society, the concept of free but fearful (free being understood as bebas). With this understanding, ideas of violence can be further expanded upon and thought of. Coupled with Rob Nixon's slow violence, free but fearful becomes more sinister and malevolent. Victims of this form of violence can be understood as free but fearful; free but at the hands of possible violence from forces out of their control.

Similarly, we enact violence onto our natural environment when we cut trees, let "wilderness" grow rampant creating fire fuel, decreasing the available water moving through streams, and damaging our ecosystems. We create this violence on the natural environment by preventing cultural burning from taking place like it did for time immemorial. Many tribes in the West burned to remove excess vegetation and to increase plant productivity and growth (Anderson 2005; KCET n.d.; CSKT 2021). We are perpetuating violence by directly preventing ancestral Indigenous relationships with fire to continue, oftentimes resulting in loss of cultural practices and forced adaptation of culture. Much of the violence and slow violence we experience is done for profit. From detrimental health effects like those in Amity and Prosperity (Griswold 2019) and jet and vehicle exhaust to erasure of cultures through the prevention of ancestral practices, violence is enacted by large, powerful companies whose sole purpose is to generate wealth for their leaders. The lives of many are impacted through slow violence so a few can have the riches they so dream of. We are living in a world where violence, at every level, is normalized, internalized, and accepted as part of everyday life. We are living in a world where to be bebas is to be free but fearful.

To Care

Why do we care about our circle of friends and relatives but not those whom we have no physical contact with or relation to? Are we not all one large community of beings working together in a single planet to ensure the survival and existence of us all? How can we ensure the longevity of the planet and all its beings, living and nonliving, if we do not care? And what does it mean to care in this larger context? Herein, I intend on exploring what it can mean ‘to care’.

The ethics of care can be defined differently based on context. Care can be a “practice, a value, disposition, or virtue” (Sanders-Staudt n.d.). Care itself is not a monolith nor is it theorized as such. For example, a care ethic can be “defined in opposition to justice, a kind of labor, and a particular relationship” (Ibid). Care can also be understood as a cluster of practices and values. Scholars like Tronto and Fisher have gone further to construe care as “a species of activity that includes everything we do to maintain, contain, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves and our environment” (Sanders-Staudt citing Tronto and Fisher). It is precisely this broader understanding of care with which I seek to move forward.

Understanding care as a form of relationship can aid in the formation of a relationship with the self, other humans and nonhumans, the world, and any relationship thereof. For example, my mom has always told me to do things—whether it be cutting vegetables, washing clothing, or even closing doors—with patience and without use of force; to do things “con calma” or taking your time with things and being intentional about what we do, to do things with care. I understand her saying as a form of care for the things around us; as intentionality mixed with care.

Care as a relationship leads me to thinking about modes of relationships, their use, purpose, and having the choice to decide what types of relationships I want to incorporate into

my life. For example, transactions, “an instance of buying or selling something; a business deal,” or transactional relationships are harmful (Oxford Languages via Google n.d.). This is what capitalism and colonialism are based on (Karuka 2019). In these relationships, resources are extracted from the land and cheap labor from working people. This is not the only form of relationship that abounds. My family is a big believer in giving to others, whether it be food, clothing, or other resources, without expecting or requesting anything in return. Giving to others can be viewed as a form of relationship, a form of care—one that aids in building relationships, as understood in the context of modes of relationships presented by Karuka’s *Empire’s Tracks*. He articulates that Ella “Deloria [in *Waterlily*] theorized Dakota practices of property and distribution, in relationship between humans and other species, recirculating food to enhance well-being. Property renews relationships across gender, generation, and species” (2019, 21). While my family does not give in this sense to every nonhuman, they practice, to a degree, this mode of relationship in the town we live in. This mode of relationship is a form of care.

Karuka presents other modes of relationships as theorized by other authors. For example, he articulates “Sarah Winnemucca’s theorization of a colonial mode of relationship” (2019, 26). This particular mode of relationship is the relationship by which most of us abide, it is like the transactional relationship I mentioned above. In this mode of relationship, destruction and scarcity abound and security is eliminated and exchanged for wealth for a handful (Karuka 2019). The destruction of forests for timber, depletion of fish in the oceans and rivers for food, and the dispossession of land of Native Americans are all examples of the consequences of this mode of relationship. This relationship is a relationship of violence, in its traditional sense, and slow violence. Colonialism is violence, colonialism is slow violence, and this violence is ongoing and continuous for those who do not fit within the colonial narrative. This mode of

relationship is not rooted in care, nor does it encompass any ethic of care. Additionally, this mode of relationship is rooted in the protestant ethic which justifies murder, dispossession of land, and theft with the notion of “civilizing” the “uncivilized” (Karuka 2019).

Lastly, Karuka articulates Winona LaDuke’s mode of relationship: “Indigenous relations with nonhuman animals, plants, rocks, and waters, “our older relatives—the ones who came before and taught us how to live,” form the foundations for Indigenous collective life” (2019, 30). This mode of relationship emphasizes a collective mode of relationship, similar to Deloria’s, although here it is distributed across species in the world and not about material property. This mode of relationship, as articulated by Karuka and LaDuke, further articulates how “Indigenous modes of relationship work through interdependence” and Colonialism “works through dependency [and] seeks to annihilate the collective, destroying and homogenizing life and consciousness in place” (2019, 31).

Modes or relationship, care being one of them, can aid in rethinking our approach to everything we do. From sharpening a pencil and thinking about the tree which gave its wood to a mass production facility so we could write or draw, or the vegetables we buy from the organic section without considering if this organic product was sourced sustainably or industrially from the land, modes of relationship, coupled with concepts of violence, colonialism, and the prose of countersovereignty can aid in rethinking and restructuring of our relationship to the world. This is the journey I seek to venture into, this is a way I am decolonizing and rethinking what I know to better learn and approach a world riddled with violence and inequality.

Chapter 4: Academia, Canon, and Decolonization

Decolonizing Academia

I don't remember when I decided to go to college or if I ever made that decision for myself. I grew up around teachers asking, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

"A scientist!" I answered in third grade because my best friend at the time said he wanted to be a scientist. Frankly, I didn't even know much about scientists nor their work. But he wanted to be a scientist and so did I. I lost contact with said friend in seventh grade when my family moved to Ventura County from Los Angeles because of a medical emergency my dad went through while visiting my sister.

As I got older I heard, "What college are you going to go to?" I had no idea, but I was determined to go to college to meet the expectations other had for me.

Unknowingly, throughout my life, teachers were planting seeds in my mind that would ultimately shape my future. Their job besides teaching? I guess it was to push students to attend college, get a degree, go to work and earn more money than past generations did. Considering my mom and dad did not finish elementary school and they grew up in México all their lives, it would not be difficult to do better than they did. I had all the opportunities I needed so long as I worked hard enough to obtain the grades required for college admission.

I completed elementary, landing in honor roll every trimester, followed by honor roll in middle school ever quarter. In high school, I obtained mostly As, some Bs, and a C or three in P.E. and my last semester of calculus. I was not a runner and I was certainly not about to start running either. Calculus... Well, I just didn't care anymore—I had already been accepted by my top choice for college: University of California, Davis. I was very happy with myself and believed I had worked too hard to not go directly to a four year. In retrospect, I wish I would've

attended community college, taken my time, and truly taken the time to prepare myself for the rigors of such a highly demanding and elitist setting. I didn't know any better so I went to UC Davis knowing I would get a degree in some science.

Engineering was out of the picture—I deemed it too difficult and I was not about to put in that much work; I viewed social science not as science—I had to become a scientist; my computer science friends gave me second-hand anxiety so I switched majors and stopped talking to them; and business, in the event all else failed, was the last option.

My thought processes at the time led me to chemistry. In high school, I thought chemistry was an easy A—then I learned that others were struggling to understand how electrons in orbitals could be donated, bonds made, and new molecules synthesized. But don't think I was a star student. I chose forensic chemistry because I didn't have to take much biology—a subject I learned to fear in seventh grade.

I then took Spanish because I needed to fill in some credits. I was hooked and double majored in Spanish. I learned about Mexican literature, gay culture in Mexico, and about societies. I learned about the world, formed a positivist, reductionist understanding of the world and how things “ought to be,” and went along with life believing I was some smarty pants who could do it all. My accident taught me otherwise.

Academia shaped my mind, my beliefs, my desire to continue learning about the world, and, more recently, to give back to people and be the change I want to see (Thank you EVST, I mean that). But the academia of today, while still an elitist circle comprised of highly intelligent people keeping information from one another out of fear that information will be stolen and published elsewhere, is a difficult space to navigate, thrive in, and highly extractive in its nature.

Academia, as understood in the West, can be traced back to its conception through Plato's "written philosophical dialogues, [and] the teaching and writings of his student Aristotle" as well as other ancient Greek philosophers and texts (Trelawny-Cassity n.d.). However, Academia has since changed a great deal as a result of the rise of other disciplines like psychology, chemistry, English Literature and Literary Studies, Environmental Studies and so on and so forth. But in order to study these discrete disciplines there must be a conglomeration of accepted texts used to teach and articulate the accepted "truths" within each field. This is known as canon.

Canon, according to Doherty, is defined as "a standard collection of works specific to each discipline" (1998). Further, "the point of canon is "to underwrite the authority of a text, not merely with respect to its origin as against competitors in the field [...] but with respect to the present and future in which it will reign or govern as a binding text"" (Ibid). Here, I understand canon similarly to discourse though on a smaller scale, that of the academy rather than at the level of a society. For example, the canon within EVST's Nature and Society, a course I was a teaching assistant for, included authors like Charles Darwin, Roderick Nash, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and many other authors, which together, comprise part of the canon that make up Environmental Studies. The course itself told the story of Nature and [Western] Society as understood through the white imagination. Though it is important to keep in mind that there are many stories about the environment that do not necessarily fall within the canon; these are non-canonical texts. One thing about canon is that regardless of where you study Environmental Studies, many of the authors highlighted above will be read and discussed. This is a way of standardizing a topic, yet it can also be a form of censoring voices who also write about the environment, but whose writing does not align with prevailing environmental narratives.

I bring this up not to scrutinize EVST or its courses but to bring attention to the importance of selecting and analyzing texts and what this does on a larger, societal level. It is in the same vein as visibility on television and movies, the importance of seeing representation of those similar to you on “the big screen” or as authors, curators of knowledge, and as leaders at every level. This adds to my belief in diversity, in listening to voices often marginalized and to learning from them. It is why I believe change is necessary and new paradigms are warranted. In order for new paradigms to emerge, canon and non-canonical texts must be presented, as suggested by Doherty (1998). Maintaining a balance between both forms of texts allows for further exploration which aims to push the limits of canon.

Returning to the Academy and its libraries, as articulated by Doherty, librarians, in partnership with academic departments, play a huge role in the development of collections (1998). These collections form the canon each department has access to—whether they be journals, archives, books, magazines, or other relevant material used for research. Typically, someone in power within standardizing organizations, is making decisions regarding what is accessible and what is not. With this in mind, “canon is mainly the manifestation of the mainstream disciplines that define it” while anything “outside” the canon, meaning anything that others do not deem important enough to be in the canon, is left out. Canon “reflects the “elitism and exclusivity” of a discipline (Ibid). I also understand that not everything can be included as it would lead to a hodgepodge of information, texts, knowledge, etc., and thus information does need some curation. It is the process of curating knowledge for the distribution that needs more attention and intentionality.

These thoughts bring me to an important question: How do we decolonize Academia? How do we decolonize research? After all, my goal in this chapter is to think beyond what I was

taught academia is and shine some light into the possibilities for research beyond those found within our colonial mode of relationship that floods Western Academia.

To begin to answer these questions, I look to an “article that offers a critical but appreciative reading of Gurminder Bhambra’s and John Holmwood’s *Colonialism and Modern Social Theory*” (Ehrmann 2022). Here, Ehrmann offers a close reading of chapter 1, titled “Hobbes to Hegel: Europe and Its Others,” which “discussed the strategies of intervention into the canon proposed by the authors and argues for complementary strategies of transformation if decolonizing the canon means moving beyond the myths, metaphors, fictions, and false universals of modern European thought,” which influenced and was the foundation of American thought (2022). Ehrmann articulates how Bhambra and Holmwood point to colonialism as having given rise to modernity but also being “inscribed in the central concepts of those thinkers from whose works the canon has been constructed” (2022). As a result, canon is part of the ongoing colonial project, and the need to decolonize academia, and therefore canon, is imperative if we are to move to a diverse, equitable future in which marginalized voices are part of knowledge production at a greater scale.

Ehrmann, in agreement with Bhambra and Holmwood, supports, though has questions, the idea of reconstructing or transforming the canon, in their case, of Political and Social Theory. While their work lies in political and social theory, the suggestions posed for a reconstruction of canon, and therefore a step towards decolonizing canon, can be applied to the canon surrounding much of the social sciences and humanities. Restructuring canon, as mentioned earlier, can begin with a library collection comprise of equal parts canonical and non-canonical texts. Furthering this idea, “critical engagement with the canon [...] is transformed by a plurality of voices that cannot easily be attributed to the canon of European thought. It is this rather hidden dialogue

with Indigenous Critique, Black Critical Thought, and anticolonial and postcolonial theories as the critical repertoires that allow the authors to expose and confront the canon's colonial unconscious" (Ehermann 2022). I understand this as an interdisciplinary approach to research, one which learns from many different voices—especially the voices of marginalized or othered voices. I have attempted to take a similar approach in this thesis, which traverses across fields of knowledge and paradigms to make some understanding of complex ideas and move beyond Western thought and my relationship to my body and the world, built and natural. "Bringing in these voices who have been represented as the Other of universal reason will transform the canon significantly. They confront the canon from within, but also move beyond and sometimes bear witness against it" (Ehermann 2022). Listening to the voices of those with different perspectives becomes imperative when desiring to change the canon, and coupling these needs with non-canonical texts can aid in restructuring canon as a means to decolonize it and therefore taking a step toward decolonizing Academia.

Furthering the idea of decolonizing Academia, the way in which research is done matters just as much as the canon available. Research, like relationships, is dialectic in the sense that canon influences research and vice versa; both research and canon are in an interlinked relationship shaping the future of one another. However, there are other methods of doing research in a way that respects people, their cultures, and their desires to not be used or taken advantage of. A prominent example is community based participatory research or CBPR. Community based participatory research is exactly what it sounds like; it is research in which a community participates in the research process, from the conception of the research study and data collection, to data analysis and sometimes authorship (Springer and Skolarus 2019; Hoover 2017). Elizabeth Hoover, in *The River is in Us*, provides a more concrete definition. She says

CPBR “is “a collaborative process that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change to improve community health and eliminate health disparities”” (2017, 128). She adds that CPBR “is not a method but rather an orientation to research that takes “a more democratic and ecological approach to scientific study” (Ibid, 128). This type of research requires a partnership, a mode of relationship, between the researcher and community stakeholders. This is not the traditional research approach in which a researcher helicopters into a community, gathers data, and helicopters out, publishes and receives all the accolades of their work while never going back or providing the research to the community from which the data was obtained. It is important to not helicopter into communities in which one is doing research. Rather, forging relationships rooted in reciprocity and respect that go beyond the current ethical standards within research foster healthier—I would argue, even noncolonial—modes of research.

Research conducted using the community based participatory research approach has many benefits as well as limitations depending on the community participating and their respective culture. Benefits to CBPR, in contrast to non-CBPR studies are huge. For example, a big benefit of undertaking CBPR is these research studies incorporate some form of social action (Springer and Skolarus 2019; Hoover 2017). Part of the goal of using CBPR is the “development of a new intervention or to stimulate policy change” that will aid the communities being studied (Springer and Skolarus 2019). Further, these forms of conducting research aid the community in capacity building that enable them to be more self-sufficient, meaning that a community will have more knowledge and skills necessary to bring change into their community (Hoover 2017). Furthermore, CBPR is interdisciplinary, a team is required to carry out these large, complex

studies, and with a team of people working together, many new ideas for innovation come to fruition (Springer and Skolarus 2019; Hoover 2017). Innovation and new voices can aid in the process of decolonizing research methods, especially in the case of the Mohawk community working with Elizabeth Hoover in her book (2017). Here, the community pushed back with regards to the way data was collected and the time it took to do interviews; the community set the expectations, doing things their way and not the way researchers are taught in academia. Another benefit is community commitment to the research which aids in improving relevance of research while simultaneously benefiting the community as they gain knowledge, education, and job skills along the way (Springer and Skolarus 2019; Hoover 2017). These benefits to the community and of the research approach in itself are instrumental in changing the way research with and within communities is done. The research leads to the bettering of community cohesion and their skills for furthering themselves, and to a community feeling like they are part of the research rather than being a subject of the research.

Not everything about CBPR is a benefit however. Some limitations do occur though these are often faced by researchers. Funding, for example, can be a limitation if adequate funding is not obtained. Springer and Skolarus provide an example where more community members than expected showed up to participate in the research. As a result, the researcher ended up using their personal money to reimburse participants (2019). Also, because some communities, like the Mohawk, prefer doing research on their own time frame, studies can take longer than anticipated, thus costing researchers more funds (Hoover 2017). In Indigenous communities, a lot of information is sacred and not available to the public so what can be published and what cannot requires sifting or not talking about it at all. According to Springer and Skolarus, a larger setback to CBPR is the time required to build trust with the community (2019). While some

researchers may view this as a limitation, this can also help build stronger modes of relationship rooted in reciprocity. It really depends on the outlook of a researcher. Personally, I think taking the time to get to know the community you will be working with is part of the due diligence needed to enter a community unknown to you. Like when traveling to another country, you will be faced with different modes of relationship as well as societal expectations and ways of doing things. I like to inform myself about customs and traditions before going into another community. Doing so demonstrates my willingness to learn from them, it shows that I do not believe I know everything, and it allows the community to lead the exchange of information, or whatever the exchange might entail. Finally, while more time and monies are required in the CBPR process, it can lead to lifelong friendships and relations that can ultimately aid in the future of academic research.

A final exploration I want to venture into on this research is a bottom-up approach as opposed to a top-down approach, traditional in Western modes of relationship, for research. In conservation, this top-down approach “centers scientists and conservationists as the knowledge holders who continue to come into Indigenous communities and territories and advice Indigenous people what to do with their environment” (Hernandez 2022, 82). Rather than following this approach, Hernandez uses a bottom-up approach to her research, both in her masters and doctoral research. Her understanding of a bottom-up approach “allows conservation initiatives and projects to come from within the community” centering “communities from the start as it does not assume or introduce demands, commands, and practices” (Ibid, 87). She couples this bottom-up approach with CBPR, indicating that in her doctoral dissertation she identified six principled to abide by when doing this form of research with Indigenous communities. These principles are: “1. Follow and create fluid and dynamic approaches that do

not follow the linear research method. 2. Respect tribal sovereignty and Indigenous autonomy. 3. Follow Indigenous protocols and their way of being and doing things in their communities. 4. Respect intellectual property. 5. Embrace all Indigenous epistemologies relevant to the community. [and] 6. Be an Indigenous-led project” (Ibid, 88-90). By incorporating these principles into CBPR, especially when working with Indigenous communities, it is possible to stray further from the colonial mode of research taught and elevated in Academia. The importance of these principles in CBPR are paramount if one wishes to truly conduct research that uplifts Indigenous communities and wants to help them.

Research varies from field to field, but when doing research with Indigenous communities and other communities who do not have the platform to do their own research, it is important to consult with them first. Their input in the conception of the research project is important, making the research more relevant to them. Additionally, doing research through these methods can aid in pushing the canon in each field further, aiding in the slow but worthy process of decolonizing canon, and hopefully Academia.

Conclusion

Modes of relationships are everywhere, so deciding how I want to relate to my environment became a very personal, but needed, journey. I learned to be in my body and to rewrite some of the narratives that fill my mind. My relationship to the environment is intricate and will continue to change and grow as I grow, change, and learn from my experiences. Relationships of every type are important and useful in traversing paradigms, as these are dialectical, shaping us as we shape them. I came to understandings of self, the built and the natural world which aided in crafting the relationships needed to heal from trauma, learn to be in community, and get ready to venture out into the “real world”. I believe understanding the paradigms that shape us from early childhood, in particular those rooted in history and our understandings of the world, are paramount. The understanding can help guide different beliefs that may challenge current ones, but without this challenge, growth is not possible. Growth is required, it is part of life—just like death and decay are part of life.

The linear process told by much of western society through practices and beliefs is but one of many ways of going about the world. Understanding how the history of the US has been weaponized to curate ideas and beliefs for a nation to exist became crucial in determining how to go about future relationships with others, especially for someone not born in this country like me. These understandings further contribute to my desire to journey into a noncolonial or anticolonial understanding of the world, if one is to be imagined. Coupling concepts like the prose of countersovereignty and colonial discourse with violence and the ethics of care aid in formulating new ideas of what it can mean to decolonize and point to some possibilities on how to start the process.

Furthermore, tying theoretical concepts like those discussed in this thesis have aided in reshaping my relationship to self, the natural and built world. I look at cities differently, spotting the violence of the concrete jungle at every turn. I am able to venture into the natural world with a deeper and more respectful understanding that I am entering into someone's ancestral home, whether they are there today or not. I am capable of imagining new ways of living—ways which harm the environment less and aid in my desire to live an anti-consumerist lifestyle. The explorations presented in chapter one provide a new outlook for my life. Through discussions with my therapist, I have learned that imagining a future for kids who experience trauma is difficult. This work is invaluable to me. It provides a blueprint with ideas for how to move forward, carving the life I want, through the relationships to my environment envisioned by me.

Doing this work has also afforded me the ability to look to possible ways of doing research in a less colonial or noncolonial fashion, or attempting to do so. It is important to me because while I come from a post-colonial nation and have been doubly-colonized, I aim to push against what I *should* be doing; I aim to break from the mold I was put into through my academic studies and experiences in post-colonial spaces. I seek to help push the conversation further to decolonize academia, canon, and western beliefs in general.

Through this work, I hope readers can craft more understandings of their environment or at least become curious to change something about their current relations. Relations shape us from birth just like we can shape them through the dialectical understanding of the environment, that being body, built and natural worlds.

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