Crude Stages of the Frontier: Performance and Petro-imperialism

By

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Abstract

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Crude Stages of the Frontier is a study of performance and petro-imperialism—actions undertaken to excavate for, extract, and transport fossil fuels to global markets. Following the tradition of postcolonial scholarship that acknowledges culture is as much part of imperialism as raw materials and military strength, I argue petro-imperialism cannot be reduced to economic critique, or the scholarly equivalents to environmental impact assessments, but must account for its cultural dimensions as well. While leading petrocritics have indicated the global oil economy is a spectacular system, built on and sustained by proliferating cultural significations, oil spectacles have yet to be analyzed through their dramaturgical constructions. I study oil spectacles in Alberta, North Dakota, and the Niger Delta to illustrate how an *ecological false consciousness* is produced to manufacture consent to petro-imperialism by re-animating the racial and ethnic hierarchies of colonialism used to justify dispossession and extractivism, and to illuminate how artists and activists on these oil frontiers work to foster the development of a *petro-political consciousness*—awareness of the negative social and environmental costs of a political economy of oil, and a sense of seeing oneself as part of a collective whose interests depend on ecological stability. *Crude Stages of the Frontier* is a study of how performance enables petro-imperial violence to be normalized, and it is an effort to lift up the work of Indigenous and anti-colonial artists, scholars, and activists who interrupt those colonial and imperial systems of thought and power, and advance decolonial alternatives premised on ecologically sustainable relationships.

My case studies range from a civic festival designed to preserve and promote western heritage and culture in Calgary, Alberta, to a blockadia-style encampment blocking the development of a pipeline near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota, to a television series satirizing urban life shaped by a political economy of Nigerian oil. Each site is a contested terrain where rival versions of civil society vie with each other, and the definition and management of nature is most at odds. A specific kind of social drama I call *extractive frontier dramas* occur on these oil frontiers to negotiate the deep social tensions that occur when survival norms are violated, and to give the appearance of sense and order to the events up to and constituting the crisis. Extractive frontier dramas reveal the colonially-inscribed forms of power and dynamics of consent and coercion in which petro-imperialism become justified, as well as how we might counter these regimes and engage with the realities of life being produced through them. Through my study of oil spectacles, I advance a critique of petro-imperial violence as it is maintained though fictions and fantasies of frontier life that anaesthetize us to the violence of fossil-fueled modernity and obstruct eco-activism and the transition to an ecologically sustainable and socially just future.

Acknowledgements

As a fourth-generation settler born on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Peoples in the place now called Alberta, Canada, I come to a study of petro-imperialism as an individual who has benefitted in incalculable ways from the extraction of mineral resources on Indigenous land. I carry embodied knowledge about life on a resource frontier, and I have also come by knowledge about life on other oil frontiers through brave individuals who have spoken out, through compelling forms, to draw attention to the violence to which they are exposed. This dissertation comes from a place of responsibility to amplify these struggles and their recommendations for action, and to be part of the struggle to break free from the chains of colonialism and its oppressive legacy.

My thanks to my dissertation committee: Professors Shannon Steen, Catherine Cole, Shannon Jackson, and Donna Jones. My thanks as well to Angela Marino, Julia Fawcett, Abigail de Kosnik, Sansan Kwan, Beth Piatote, and Lisa Wymore for their many teachings during my time at Berkeley. I was fortunate to be surrounded by smart and sassy colleagues who, like me, were passionate about performance and always ready to shake it on the dance floor: Juan Manuel Aldape, Katie Bruhn, Miyoko Conley, Lashon Daley, Jess Dorrance, Natalia Duong, Randi Evans, Martha Herrera-Lasso, Megan Hoetger, Caleb Luna, Lyndsey Ogle, Christian Nagler, Bélgica del Rio, Takeo Rivera, JT Tamayo, and Joshua Williams. Finally, I am grateful for the love and laughter provided by my parents, Linda and Ken Richards, and my extended family: Keith, Theresa, Aaron, Julia, Thea and Elliott.

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"The problem isn't that we're running out of oil, but that we're not"—Stephanie LeMenager

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Introduction

On August 20, 2018, a fifteen-year-old Swedish girl named Greta Thunberg staged a one-person strike for the climate by sitting in front of the Swedish Parliament with a hand-painted sign, "*skolstrejk för klimatet*" ("school strike for climate"), and some homemade fliers with facts about climate change and global warming she thought everyone should know. Thunberg had learned about climate change when she was eight years old and was shocked that adults did not appear to be taking the issue seriously. At age eleven, she became so depressed about the issue she stopped attending school or eating. Thunberg takes the climate crisis personally, querying, "Why should I be studying for a future that soon will be no more, when no one is doing anything whatsoever to save that future? And what is the point of learning facts in the school system when the most important facts given by the finest scientists in that school system clearly means nothing to our politicians and our society?"[1]

Fig. 1. Greta Thunberg on strike, August 2018. She and her growing army of youth strike every Friday, rain or shine, demanding their governments' policies align with the Paris climate agreement. Photo by Michael Campanella/ The Guardian.

Thunberg has quickly emerged as a voice of a generation burdened with the failures of previous cohorts of politicians and powerful actors and unified in the struggle to address the climate crisis and end fossil fuel combustion. She has spoken at the World Economic Forum in Davos and at the United Nations COP24 gathering in Katowice, Poland about the dangers of carbon emissions and the consequences of surpassing the 1.5℃ of global warming, and she has inspired youth climate justice groups like the Sunrise Movement, Extinction Rebellion, Zero Hour, and #FridaysforFuture.[2] Following Thunberg's example, on

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[1] Greta Thunberg, "School Strike for Climate- Save the World by Changing the Rules," TEDxStockholm, December 12, 2018, accessed March 25, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAmmUIEsN9A

[2] In May 2019, Thunberg was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize because "the climate threat may be one of the most important causes of war and conflict," and the massive movement she helped to set in action is an

March 15, 2019, more than 1.6 million students skipped school in more than 100 countries and held more than 2000 protests from Washington, DC to Moscow, Tromsø to Invercargill, Beirut to Jerusalem, and Shanghai to Mumbai to strike against government inaction on climate change. The event was one of the biggest environmental protests the world has ever seen. In response to the youth strike, António Guterres, the U.N. Secretary General, called for a climate summit, commenting "these schoolchildren have grasped something that seems to elude many of their elders … climate delay is almost as dangerous as climate denial."[3] On the stage of the world's economic forum, the truth-telling, clear-faced child, sporting her characteristic plaited braids, mauve leggings, and periwinkle sneakers astutely remarked:

> Adults keep saying, 'We owe it to the young people to give them hope.' But I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. *I want you to act as you would in a crisis.* I want you to act as if the house was on fire. Because it is.[4]

Thunberg's message cuts through all complexities: the climate crisis has already been solved, we already have all the facts and solutions; if the emissions must stop, we must stop the emissions. Despite the clarity of these facts, vast quantities of oil continue to be extracted and burnt, prompting the questions: if burning fossil fuels threatens our existence, why do we continue to burn them? Why aren't they made illegal? Why aren't there more emergency meetings and breaking news reports?

Crude Stages of the Frontier is a study of performance and petro-imperialism—actions undertaken to excavate for, extract, and transport fossil fuels to global markets which sustain the industrial and financial commitments to the expanding system of petro-capitalism. Following the tradition of postcolonial scholarship that acknowledges knowledge and culture are as much part of imperialism as raw materials and military strength, petro-imperialism cannot be reduced to economic critique, or the scholarly equivalents to environmental impact assessments, but must account for its cultural dimensions.[5] Petro-imperialism is not merely a set of energy projects or economic policies, it rather, and more significantly, results in spectacular displays of power and "progress."

"important peace contribution." Freddy Andre Oevstegaard, one of the three Norwegian parliamentary representatives who put forth Thunberg's name to the Nobel Committee. Quoted in Hillary Leung, "Swedish Climate Activist Greta Thunberg Has Been Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize," *Time* March 14, 2019, accessed July 22, 2019, https://time.com/5551172/climate-greta-thunberg-nobel-nominated/.

[3] António Guterres, "The Climate Strikers Should Inspire Us all to Act at the Next UN Summit," *The Guardian,* March 15, 2019, accessed March 23, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/15/climate-strikers-urgency-un-summit-world-leaders.

[4] Quoted in Jonathan Watts, "Greta Thunberg, Schoolgirl Climate Change Warrior: 'Some People Can Let Things Go. I Can't," *The Guardian* March 11, 2019, accessed March 25, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/11/greta-thunberg-schoolgirl-climate-change-warrior-some-people-can-let-things-go-i-cant.

[5] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

Fig. 2. Thunberg at the World Economic Forum. Photo by Marcus Schreiber/ AP.

Thunberg's remarks at the U.N. Climate Change COP24 conference—"We cannot solve a crisis without treating it as a crisis"[6]—and her call for "acting as you would in a crisis" invite deeper thinking about how the language and the "sense" of crisis mobilizes bodies into particular repertoires and forms of assembly. *In theatrical and political terms, how does one act "as if" in a crisis? In what kinds of cultural performances does one act, individually or collectively, as they would in a crisis? And how does performance, as a means of identity formation and political expression, enable individuals and communities in crisis to define themselves and produce a world based on their values and beliefs?*

In her study of the postwar "good life" fantasy and rise of neoliberalism in the United States and Europe, Lauren Berlant describes the present as a "moment of extended crisis, with one happening piling on another."[7] For some, the sense of crisis is an existential threat that emerges when we become aware of how the values and aspirations that have come to be associated with dominant conceptions of freedom in modernity (like autonomy and automobility) are contingent on a finite resource. As Dipesh Chakrabarty observes, "[t]he mansion of modern freedoms stands on an ever-expanding base of fossil fuel use. Most of our freedoms are energy intensive."[8] Others might attribute the source of crisis to the detachment from land spurred by more than five hundred years of colonialism. In the words of Taiaike Alfred (Kahnawake Mohawk) and Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee), "[e]ven if neoliberalism has intensified the scope and the pace of dispossession, it is nothing new, but rather the deepening, hastening and stretching of an already-existing empire."[9] The extraction of natural

[6] Connect4Climate, "Greta Thunberg Full Speech at UN Climate Change COP24 Conference," December 15, 2018, YouTube, accessed March 25, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFkQSGyeCWg
[7] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 10.
[8] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 208.
[9] Taiaike Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, "Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism," *Government and Opposition* 40, no. 4 (2005): 597-614.

resources for capital accumulation runs through colonization as the world is related to as "a frontier of conquest—rather than a home," and "the colonial mind nurtures the belief that there is always somewhere else to go and exploit once the current site of extraction has been exhausted."[10] For a third group, this "moment of extended crisis" may be synonymous with the Anthropocene, proposed by geologists and climatologists as a new conceptualization of geological time used to describe the effects of human activities on earth systems, and used in more popular contexts to acknowledge the impact humans have had on the planet through the atmospheric consequences of practices like the extraction of coal, oil and gas.[11] Heather Davis and Zoe Todd understand "the current start of the crisis as inherently invested in a specific ideology defined by proto-capitalist logics based on extraction and accumulation through dispossession—logics that continue to shape the world we live and that have produced our current era."[12] While a number of dates have been proposed to signify the start of the Anthropocene, Davis and Todd suggest dating the Anthropocene as the beginnings of colonization to underscore colonialism as being responsible for our contemporary climate crises. They write, "The Anthropocene is the epoch under which 'humanity'- but more accurately, petrochemical companies and those invested in and profiting from petrocapitalism and colonialisms—have had such a large impact on the planet that radionuclides, coal, plutonium, plastic, concrete, genocide and other markers are now visible in the geologic strata."[13] Conceptualizing the Anthropocene in this way emphasizes why Indigenous knowledges and anticolonial traditions of critique and praxis should provide the basis for decolonization.[14] As the Anthropocene implicates all humans and hides the power relations that have resulted in the ongoing violence of white supremacist and heteropatriarchal systems that certain humans created, and others resisted, other nomenclatures have been proposed, like the Capitalocene, a term credited to Andreas Malm which directs attention to the global, world-historical, politico-economic organization of capitalism over centuries of colonialisms, industrializations, and globalizations as the source of today's biospheric crisis.[15] It is the ultimate consequence of an ideology of profit-above-all-else, the ultimate manifestation of capitalist colonial violence enacted on bodies and lands.

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[10] Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2015), 170.
[11] Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stroemer, "The Anthropocene," *IGBP [International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme]* *Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17.
[12] Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, "On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16, no. 2 (2017): 764. Proposed dates range from the birth of agriculture, to the first steam engine, to the "great acceleration" of the mid-twentieth century, which the Anthropocene Working Group proposed to be the start date (due to the measurable anthropogenic changes that began at that moment, such as carbon dioxide levels, mass extinctions, the widespread use of petrochemicals including plastic, and the plutonium left in radioactive form by the detonation of atomic bombs).
[13] Davis and Todd, 763.
[14] On Indigenizing the Anthropocene, see Zoe Todd, "Indigenizing the Anthropocene," *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies,* ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 241-54; Kyle Powys Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene," *Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, eds. Ursula Heise, Jon Christense, and Michelle Niemann (London: Routledge, 2016); Macarena Gómez-Barris, "The Colonial Anthropocene: Damage, Remapping, and Resurgent Resources," *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, March 19, 2019, accessed April 28, 2019, https://antipodefoundation.org/2019/03/19/the-colonial-anthropocene /
[15] John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York, *The Ecological Rift* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010); Klein, *This Changes Everything*; Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6, no.1 (2015): 159-65; Jason W. Moore, ed., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016), 6; Nicholas Mirzoeff, "It's Not the Anthropocene, It's the White Supremacy Scene, Or, The Geological Color Line," in *After Extinction*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

Whether focusing on capitalism, colonialism, or their combined geophysical effects, we can understand our present moment of crisis as a phase in a planetary social drama. As Victor Turner observed, once a breach of a norm, rule of morality, law, custom, or etiquette occurs in some public arena, "a mounting crisis follows, a momentous juncture or turning point in the relations between components of a social field—at which seeming peace becomes overt conflict and overt antagonisms become visible."[16] In the crisis phase of social drama, "sides are taken, factions are formed, and unless the conflict can be sealed off quickly within a limited area of social interaction, there is a tendency for the breach to widen and spread until it coincides with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the parties in conflict belong."[17] When Thunberg calls for us to "act 'as if' we are in a crisis," she is calling for us to recognize that a breach has occurred—*and will continue to occur*—so long as we do not recognize the climate emergency, prioritize climate justice, and redress the crimes of epic proportions resulting from fossil-fueled modernity.

While Thunberg's call to action was directed at economic and political leaders, citizens of oil frontiers in spaces like Alberta (Canada), North Dakota, Louisiana, Texas, and Alaska (United States), the Orinico Belt (Venezuela), the Niger Delta (Nigeria), the Khuzestan region (Iran), the Eastern Province (Saudi Arabia), Western Siberia (Russia), and the Barents Sea (Norway) have been acting in a state of crisis occasioned by the violence of resource extraction. Oil frontiers are amongst the most important regions in the world today as they are the battlefield over coveted resources and staging ground for rival ecological imaginaries. Police officers armed with pepper spray and rifles and accompanied by attack dogs meet resistance from those who put their bodies in the way of development as the last blockade before their homes and sacred sites are destroyed. Oil frontiers are critical terrains for resisting resource extraction and reorganizing social and ecological life based on Indigenous principles of coexistence with the nonhuman world.

Although the notion of the frontier is most often associated with the historical context of North American settlement, the abuse of the environment in the modern world has rendered the frontier a useful analytic in other geographic contexts in which the industrial world economy has expanded to reach new spaces of accumulation.[18] For example, in the field of political economy, Jason W. Moore coined the term "commodity frontiers" to refer to the incorporation of remote sites of abundant natural resources and low human-land ration into global circuits of resource extraction and commodity production, and the environmental transformations, degradation, and relative exhaustion in one region after another due to resource extraction. Geographer Michael Redclift's definition of frontiers as "contested zones, where rival versions of civil society (or its denial) vie with each other, and where it was often their definition and management of nature that was most at odds" befits the oil frontiers I discuss.[19] Michael Watts offers an even more refined definition than Redclift: "If frontiers are deprived of particular sorts of historical and cultural association (the American

[16] Victor Turner, "Social Dramas and Stories About Them," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 150.
[17] Ibid, 150.
[18] Frederick Jackson Turner's famous argument about the significance of the frontier in American history (by which he meant the United States) emphasized the frontier as an actual place with a distinct geography and social ecology. Turner understood the frontier as the edge of free land pushed forward by expanding settlement, a migrating region of wilderness and the meeting point between "savagery" and "civilization." He claimed the frontier produced a society of pioneers who possessed strength, worked hard, and were courageous and self-reliant. When the 1890 census revealed no such tracts of land existed, Turner feared American development would come to a close. In his later essays, Turner kept adding more history, noting, for instance, the Western oil boom that occurred after 1890 showed many frontier-like characteristics. Yet, the public held onto the Frontier Thesis in its 1893 form and the idea of there being a great discontinuity between the frontier and the Western present.
[19] Michael Redclift, *Frontiers: Histories of Civil Society and Nature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), ix.

frontier, the Chinese or British Imperial frontier), then they became pervasive, even recursive forms of what one might call 'economies of violence.'"[20] Following Watts, I understand oil frontiers as "particularly dense sorts of spaces—at once political, economic, cultural, and social—in which the conditions for a new phase of (extractive) accumulation are being put in place. They are both exemplary of frontier capitalism with speculative, spectacularized, and violent forms of enclosure, dispossession, and profit-taking."[21]

As much as oil frontiers are material realities and "economies of violence" in which accumulation by dispossession figures centrally, they are also social constructions constituted through performative practices, representations, and acts of the imagination. A specific kind of social drama that I am calling "extractive frontier dramas" occur on oil frontiers to negotiate the deep social tensions that occur when survival norms are violated, and to give the appearance of sense and order to the events up to and constituting the crisis. As with other social dramas, extractive frontier dramas are "in large measure political processes" involved in "competition for scarce ends—power, dignity, prestige, honor, purity—by particular means and by the utilization of resources that are also scarce—goods, territory, money, men and women."[22] Although they are not homogeneous, extractive frontier dramas reveal the colonially-inscribed forms of power and dynamics of consent and coercion in which petro-imperialism (and the modalities of racism and colonialism that are used to bridge nationalism and imperialism) become justified, as well as how we might counter these regimes and engage with the realities of life being produced through them. Extractive frontier dramas entail converting individuals, communities, and sometimes even nations into shared ecological values through either Indigenous creation stories or colonization stories about how they came to be in a place, and their relationships to land and water comprising their epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies.

Extractive frontier dramas, like the "frontier performances" Douglas S. Harvey describes in his study of the "theatre of empire" in the United States, 1750-1860, help to condition audiences and establish assumptions that "perpetuate, or resist, imperial expansion."[23] Extractive frontier dramas can be bound up with the systemic subjugation and destruction of various "Others" that are disingenuously characterized to "sugar-coat" crime and abuse.[24] They are the form through which the logics, fantasies, and norms of petro-imperialism circulate, powerfully interpolating subjects on the basis of the fossil-fueled economy. In frontier dramas on oil frontiers, clashes occur between those who claim to be entitled to a long life and those who are relegated to violence or death. Stories told through public display help to navigate what is overwhelming and relay a site-specific narrative about the frontier.

Agents of petro-imperialism who must justify violence as a matter of rational choice to a disturbed social group and situate this reasoning within a historical narrative about the land and its people regularly deploy spectacle as a mechanism of power to control the contagious spread of breach, crisis, and consensus of social values through the machinery of redress. In *Oil Culture*, the first sustained attempt to understand how petroleum has infused the Western imagination, Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden propose spectacle is a useful

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[20] Michael Watts, "Oil Frontiers: The Niger Delta and the Gulf of Mexico," *Oil Culture*, eds., Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 191.
[21] Ibid, 190.
[22] Turner, 152.
[23] Douglas Harvey, *The Theatre of Empire: Frontier Performances in America, 1750-1860* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2010), 1. Although extractive frontier dramas exceed Harvey's understanding of empire in the late colonial, revolutionary, and early republic period in English-speaking North America and as the "colonial expansionism inherent in the libertarian economics of the British Empire and its scion, the United States." Ibid, 2.
[24] Ibid, 19.

model for studying the deep ties between oil capitalism and cultural representations. They postulate the peculiar physical properties of oil have demanded petroleum producers and distributors make elaborate efforts to affirm oil's social and economic benefits, distract publics from the violence with which it is associated, and recode the resource to render oil a viable commodity. As Barrett and Worden observe, more than any other commodity, oil demands an unceasing generation of imaginative interpretations of its value—the sort of mystifying signs that constitute the spectacle in Guy Debord's account. The excesses of the oil economy readily finance spectacular cultural productions to produce fabulous fictions, and "the resulting images, narratives, and discourses have contributed to the formation of an oil spectacle that has sustained industrial and financial commitments to the expanding system of petrocapitalism."[25] The anthropologist Fernando Coronil and the geographer Andrew Apter have each exemplified how state wealth, derived from oil rents (rather than the accumulation of surplus value through labor or commodity production), resulted in an illusion of sudden national prosperity, modernity, and "progress" in Venezuela and Nigeria. Spectacular signs of material development disguised the absence of a productive base.[26] While these leading petrocritics have indicated the global oil economy is at its roots a spectacular system, built on and sustained by proliferating cultural significations, oil spectacles have yet to be analyzed through their dramaturgical constructions. When we start to take seriously spectacle as a cultural and performative genre within the context of energy and oil, serious questions emerge: how do these spectacles, and the performances that variously constitute their powerful messaging, manufacture imagery, and distract spectators from the menace of petro-imperialism? What aesthetic strategies do oil spectacles deploy to legitimize frontier attitudes of conquest and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and lands? And, alternatively, what are the possibilities of performatively producing a sustainable alternative to petro-imperialism? How might decolonial performance practices on oil frontiers alternatively shape and guide how we think and act towards fossil fuels and the social imaginaries produced through their economies and consumptions?

Victor Turner's description of social drama is helpful for understanding the range of cultural performances that extractive frontiers dramas can include. Of reintegration he writes,

> [The] mechanisms vary in character with such favors as the depth and significance of the breach, the social inclusiveness of the crisis, the nature of the social group within which the breach took place, and the group's degree of autonomy in regard to wider systems of social relations. The mechanisms may range from personal advice and informal arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery and, to resolve certain kinds of crises, to the performance of public ritual. Such ritual involves the liberal or moral "sacrifice," that is, a victim as scapegoat is offered for the group's "sin" of redressive violence.[27]

The redressive work of the spectacle can break down and revert to crisis ("'determining' and 'fixing' are indeed processes, not permanent states or given") just as performances of (re)conciliation (as well as coercion) can prove inadequate to cope with a deeper division of interests and loyalties than appears on the surface and new conflicts, roles, and relationships (some of which may only be redressed through rebellion, revolution, and systemic transformation).[28] The performances I analyze arise from situations of crisis ranging from sheer physical survival, to the survival of a social group with its own unique culture and

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[25] Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden, eds., *Oil Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), xxv.
[26] Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
[27] Ibid, 151.
[28] Ibid, 158; 152.

values, to the survival of the very possibility of agency and dissent. These case studies represent a range of oil spectacles, spanning an urban festival in Calgary, Alberta, a blockadia-style encampment blocking the development of a pipeline near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota, and the sudden, surprising growth of urban development in Lagos, Nigeria. While these spaces might not otherwise be organized together in one study, they are united by their resource-rich territories and the sheer ambition of fossil fuel companies in their quest for valuable commodities. I approach these sites with the view that oil spectacles are powerful sites for the production, negotiation, transmission and transformation of ideologies and cultural values, performatively producing the context in which petro-imperialism is normalized and excused.

In *Crude Stages of the Frontier*, I show how performance analysis can envision a more articulate theory of petro-imperialism—one that accounts for the ways in which participation is encouraged and attained, and myths are recreated through immaterial labor and embodied acts. I follow a tradition of scholars expanding Raymond William's "dramatized society" to account for the theories of the spectacularization of culture that Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, and Jean-François Lyotard identified with late capitalism.[29] Baz Kershaw has argued that we are living in a "performative society" wherein performance is so pervasive it has come to constitute the human. He writes, "[i]n the final decades of the twentieth century performance became to culture what water is to nature, an element indispensable to life."[30] Jon McKenzie similarly argues that "performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth; that is, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge."[31] These framings suggest that the possibilities of stopping carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels and addressing the climate crisis are shaped by performative politics.

My central argument becomes clear when we consider how oil spectacles furnish a "false consciousness" that prevents a person from perceiving the true nature, not only of their social or economic situation, as Marxist theorists have argued, but also of their ecological situation. Like George Lukács, who first developed the notion of false consciousness to articulate why not all working class people are *ipso facto*, socialist revolutionaries, I deploy the term to mark why not all people, given sufficient information and time to reflect, would understand transitioning towards anti-extractive modes of energy production to be within the best interests of the collective.[32] My project is twofold: first, to illustrate how an "ecological false consciousness" is produced through spectacular frontier dramas on oil frontiers that support the ideologies and values of a powerful minority of elites who control an unequal social system and prevent spectators from seeing their collective interests and power; second, to analyze how artists and activists on oil frontiers are responding to petro-imperialism and creating images, cultivating narratives, enacting practices, and inspiring actions that foster the development of a "petro-political consciousness." The fact that petrochemical industry leaders, financial elites, and politicians find it necessary to use their tremendous financial and media resources to produce oil spectacles to control the images and narratives vital to petro-imperialism, and conceal, distort, and obscure the realities of exploitation in the service of capital accumulation indicates that alternative visions exist—ones that convey the potential to overthrow this system of domination. These alternatives can be characterized by the awareness of the negative social and environmental costs of a political economy of oil, and a

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[29] Raymond Williams, *Drama in a Dramatized Society* (Inaugural Lecture) (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 1-21.
[30] Baz Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 1999), 11.
[31] Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001), 18.
[32] György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971 [1920]).

sense of seeing oneself as part of a collective whose interests depend on ecological stability that runs in direct conflict with petro-imperialism and fossil fuel usage.

So, when Sheena Wilson, Imre Szeman, and Adam Carlson ask in their study of petrocultures, "[i]f the twentieth century was transformed by oil, why has it taken until the twenty-first century for us [humanists] to begin to grapple with the cultural and social consequences of this transformation and with the substance that made it happen?"[33] My answer pertains precisely with a mass-mediated, image-dominated, corporately-constructed world of the society of spectacle wherein economic agents pursue self-interest and an increasingly isolated, alienated, passive citizenship resorts to market ideology. These oil spectacles manufacture consent to petro-imperialism by re-animating the racial hierarchies of colonialism used to justify the dispossession of those who stand in the way of the extraction of tribute and the development of the infrastructure required to transport it to market. The petrocultural world we inhabit requires cultural productions that anesthetize us to violence as the normal and necessary price of the "good life" of fossil-fueled modernity.

Crude Stages of the Frontier is a rigorous questioning of the normalized culture of petro-imperial violence in which we are now immersed and an effort to lift modes of imaginative resistance to petro-imperialism. It is about the moves toward an ecological and ethical understanding of relationality and a meditation on how new kinds of political thinking is practiced. The project is to show how fossil fuel extraction and transportation pertain to colonial feats of denialism and racism in which a disposable periphery is depleted to fuel a glittering core, *and* to lift up the work of decolonial artists, scholars, and activists who interrupt colonial systems of thought and power and advance decolonial alternatives.

POLITICAL PERFORMANCE AND PRECARIOUSNESS IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Various commentators have noted that movements against fossil capitalism and accumulation by dispossession require a different anti-capitalistic political resistance than that of classical socialism or communism.[34] For example, Nick Estes (Lakota) writes, "Whereas past revolutionary struggles have strived for the emancipation of labor from capital, we are challenged not just to imagine, but to demand the emancipation of earth from capital. For the earth to live, capitalism must die."[35] David Harvey has argued that a "new imperialism" has emerged where "accumulation by dispossession" (the centralization of wealth and power in the hands of a few by dispossessing the public of their wealth or land) surpassed "primitive accumulation" and "expanded reproduction" as the primary contradiction within the imperialist organization for capitalist accumulation to be confronted.[36] The unequal development immanent in capitalist expansion has, as Samir Amin

[33] Sheena Wilson, Imre Szeman, and Adam Carlson, "On Petrocultures: Or, Why We Need to Understand Oil to Understand Everything Else," in *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture*, eds. Wilson, Szeman, and Carlson (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 5.

[34] For example, Raymond Williams points out that under capitalist and imperialist influence, the majority position amongst socialists has been that the answer to poverty is to increase production. Although increased production has transformed and generally improved conditions, it has also created new forms of poverty. Even more importantly, we cannot go on with existing patterns of production because of real material limits. Raymond Williams, "Sociology and Ecology," *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso Books, 1989), 215.

[35] Nick Estes, *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (Verso: 2019), 257.

[36] David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 172. Accumulation by dispossession shares all of the features of primitive accumulation that Marx identified: the commodification and privatization of land; the forceful expulsion of peasant populations and formation of a landless proletariat; the release of that land into the privatized mainstream of capital accumulation; the conversion of various forms of

points out, placed on the agenda of history another type or revolution, that of the peoples of the periphery for whom capitalist development is intolerable and who are deemed disposable because they count so little in terms of capital. This revolution is anti-capitalist in the sense that it is against capitalist development, but it is not based in class struggle.[37]

Our dependency on fossil fuels, and the ecocidal logic of petro-imperialism, produce precarity on a global scale, requiring cultural scholars to scale up our thinking about precariousness and its performative politics. Precarity and precariousness are often used to describe the forms of disenfranchisement that have become more visible within the rise of neoliberal rationality, which produces a condition of systemic negligence and compromised sense of responsibility that people who do not make money are disposable. Frederick Buell's characterization of petroculture as an "'age of exuberance' […] haunted by catastrophe" is a testament to the deterioration or displacement of ethical and sustainable relationships in favor of the proliferation of a peculiar death wish. Powerful politicians and business leaders use the resources at their disposal to prevent, or postpone environmental disasters or other catastrophes from inspiring the underclass to rise up against the forces of their oppression that enable and/or accentuate the experience of disaster in the first place.[38] The notion of precarity that I am articulating here is more than "a byword for life in late and later capitalism,-- or, some argue, life in capitalism *as usual*."[39] It is about the ontological condition of dispossession that, as Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou articulate in their theory of political performativity, "marks the limits of self-sufficiency and that establishes us as relational and interdependent beings."[40] Butler and Athanasiou argue that if all humans are fundamentally dependent on those powers that alternatively sustain or deprive us, our shared experience of dispossession is also the grounds from which we may enter forms of collectivity to oppose our dispossession. They write, "we are interdependent beings on whose pleasure and suffering depend from the start on a sustained social world, a sustaining environment."[41] This formulation (in which a shared condition of precarity situates our political lives, even as precarity is differently distributed) is helpful for imagining the transformative potential of a petro-political consciousness because it sees our common ground, and our situation of interdependence, as the conditions for political mobilization.

A crucial component of the petro-political struggle is disrupting the Manichean categories of settler / native / slave, or colonizer/ colonized produced by colonial logics and systems of property relations that constitute colonial capitalism and hinder the possibilities of alternative relationships and alliances. As the environmental historian Jason Moore quips, "Shut down a coal plant, and you can slow global warming for a day; shut down the relations

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property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights and the privatization and enclosing of formerly common property resources, such as water; the suppression of rights to the commons; the commodification of labour power and suppression of alternative forms of production and consumption; and colonial, neo-colonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources). Harvey notes that wholly new mechanism of accumulation by dispossession have also opened up, including the escalating depletion of the global environmental commons, and proliferating habitat degradation that preclude anything but capital-intensive modes of production resulting from the wholesale commodification of nature in all its forms, as well as the corporatization and privatization of hitherto public assets.

[37] Samir Amin, *Imperialism and Unequal Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977) 172-73.

[38] Frederick Buell, "A Short History of Oil Cultures; or, The Marriage of Catastrophe and Exuberance," in *Oil Culture,* eds. Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 71. For an analysis of this phenomena, see Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007).

[39] Nicholas Ridout, Rebecca Schneider, and Tavia Nyong'o quoted in Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider, "Precarity and Performance: An Introduction," *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 6.

[40] Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (London: Polity, 2013), 5.

[41] Ibid, 5.

that make the coal plant, and you can stop it for good."[42] Without romanticizing the hard work of decolonization, energy transition requires we change everything, including the terms through which we relate. This is also why Naomi Klein argues that climate change offers "a catalyzing force for positive change" and is, in fact, the best argument we have for galvanizing a post-capitalist democratic practice concerned with rebuilding and reviving local economies, reclaiming democracies from corporate influence, blocking harmful new free trade deals, investing in public infrastructure like mass transit and affordable housing, taking back ownership of essential services like energy and water, remaking our sick agricultural system into something healthier, opening borders to migrants whose displacement is linked to climate impacts, and to finally respect Indigenous land rights.[43]

Developing a petro-political consciousness is about an ethical relationality that holds that the histories of colonialism are manifesting in the present and influencing the future. On the subject of ethical relationships between settlers and Aboriginal people in Canada, Dwayne Trevor Donald (Papaschase Cree) writes,

> The possibilities that emerge cannot deny difference, but rather seek to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. This form of relationality is ethical because it does not overlook or invisiblize the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a particular person understands and experiences living in the world. It puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across frontiers of difference.[44]

Donald's comments resonate with Dipesh Chakabarty's now classic argument that the geological effects of fossil fuel consumption warrant a global politics that envisions the human species as a whole, even as it retains a "postcolonial suspicion of the universal."[45] Donald writes, "[ethical relationality] requires that we see ourselves as related to, and implicated in, the lives of those yet to come. It is an ethical imperative to recognize the significance of the relationship we have with others, how our histories and experiences are layered and position us in relation to each other, and how our futures as people similarly are tied together."[46] These terms of ethical relationality, which I am suggesting define a petro-political consciousness, require us to rethink our positionality, and understand ourselves to be ecological actors on vast spatial and temporal scales.

Our reliance on fossil fuels entrenches us within a set of social and ecological relationships that are fundamentally extractive. While the term extractivism is most often understood in relation to large-scale operations of mining and drilling to remove raw materials from the earth, and into a global economic market, it refers more broadly to the habits of thought that enable dominance-based systems that approach resource-rich territories as areas for plunder, profit, and racist adventure. Extractivism is premised on nonreciprocal, dominance-based relationships that are the opposite of stewardship, which involves taking care so that the regeneration of future life will continue; extractivism is, in Naomi Klein's terms, "the reduction of life into objects for the use of others, giving them no integrity or value of their own—turning living complex ecosystems into 'natural resources.'"[47]

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[42] Jason Moore, "The Rise of Cheap Nature," in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism,* ed. Jason Moore (Oakland: PM Press, 2016), 94.
[43] Klein, *This Changes Everything,* 7.
[44] Dwayne Trevor Donald, "Forts, Curriculum, and Indigenous Métissage: Imagining Decolonization of Aboriginal-Canadian Relations in Educational Contexts," *First Nations Perspectives* 2, no.1 (2009): 6.
[45] Chakrabarty, 221.
[46] Donald, 7.
[47] Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 169. On extractivism, see Naomi Klein, "Dancing the World into Being: A Conversation with Idle No More's Leanne Simpson," *Yes Magazine!* March 5, 2013, accessed April 28, 2019, https://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/dancing-the-world-into-being-a-conversation-with-idle-no-more-leanne-simpson; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through*

Extractivism ignores the interconnections among ecosystems and the consequences of severing them. It is intimately tied to imperialism and notions of racial superiority, and the production of disposable populations and peripheries—those lives, lands, waters, and air sacrificed to fuel colonial economies and feed a glittering center. Klein astutely points out, "in order to have sacrifice zones—places that, to their extractors, somehow don't count and therefore can be poisoned, drained, or otherwise destroyed, for the supposed greater good of economic progress," you need to have people and culture who "count so little that they are considered deserving of sacrifice."[48] These extractive relationships are mediated through oil spectacles which "function not *merely* as a collection of images, but as a social relation among people mediated by images."[49]

The presence of Indigenous people at the forefront of resistance to petro-imperial projects is not surprising given these communities are burdened with the most harmful effects of colonialism, capitalism, and climate change.[50] "This situation is hardly accidental," writes Métis scholar Warren Cariou. "Low population densities, ongoing histories of colonial disempowerment, and the existence of alternate (non-capitalist) value systems within Aboriginal communities make them particularly attractive targets for the incursions of large energy developments."[51] As Nick Estes, a member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe writes in his extraordinary book about the development of the Dakota Access Pipeline and the long tradition of Indigenous resistance in the Dakotas, "Our lands, and lives, were targeted not because they held precious resources or labor to be extracted. In fact, the opposite was true: our lands and lives were targeted and held value because they could be wasted—submerged, destroyed."[52] At the same time as Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by resource extraction, their claims to land rights often offer the most formidable opposition to resource extraction and pipeline development. Many Indigenous communities have maintained a "radical consciousness," both anti-capitalist and anti-colonial, deeply embedded in history and place since the original colonial encounter.[53]

Thus, to critique, resist, and respond to petro-imperialism in decolonizing terms I engage the teachings of Indigenous scholars, artists, activists from Africa and Turtle Island who draw upon centuries-old traditions of resistance to colonialism in the struggle against petro-imperialism. This is not because I believe Indigenous societies possess *the* solution to energy transition or climate change—in fact, as Estes points out, many Indigenous nations actively participate in resource extraction in order to strengthen their self-determination.[54] I

Radical Resistance (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), especially 75-76; and Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017).

[48] Ibid, 170.

[49] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1977), thesis 4.

[50] Throughout the dissertation, when I am deploying the term "Indigenous" I am doing so to describe internal collaboration and a politics of strength amongst communities, clans, nations, and tribes of people who are Indigenous to the lands they inhabit. Jeff Corntaseel (Cherokee) and Taiaiake Alfred (Kahnawake Mohawk) define *Indigenous peoples* "in contrast to and in contention with the colonial societies and states that have spread out from Europe and other centres of empire." I am aware this term collectivizes many distinctive populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different and its usage risks perpetuating a form of colonialism that brushes over national specificities and tribal differences. I name those cultural and political categories when they apply and use the term "Indigenous peoples" strategically to internationalize and collectivize experiences of land theft, colonization of land and culture, and denial of sovereignty, and struggles for self-determination. See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 7; Alfred and Corntassel, 597.

[51] Warren Cariou, "Aboriginal," *Fuelling Cultures: 101 Words on Energy and Environment*, eds. Imre Szeman, Jennifer Wenzel, and Patricia Yaeger (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 17.

[52] Estes, 12.

[53] Ibid, 22.

[54] Ibid, 22.

center Indigenous knowledge because Indigenous people have been theorizing in academic and practical terms how to live within conditions of dispossession, and intervene in sites and narratives of multicultural liberal democracy that tend to either ignore Indigeneity as much as possible, or manufacture images and narratives of reconciliation that attempt to smooth over injustices.[55] As Corntaseel and Alfred write, "It is this oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples from other peoples of the world."[56]

Furthermore, I believe that *Indigenous resurgence* is a means of disrupting the colonial project. As defined by Taiaiake Alfred in the context of settler colonialism:

> Resurgence is acting beyond resistance. It is what resistance always hopes to become: from a rooted position of strength, resistance defeats the temptation to stand down, to take what is offered by the state in exchange for being pacified. In rejecting the temptation to join the Settlers and their state, seeking instead to confront settler society in a struggle to force an end to the imperial reality and to lay down the preconditions for a peaceful existence, we would choose to use contention as a means of widespread enlightenment and societal change.[57]

I listen to—and regard, observe, reflect upon, and am affected by—those pronouncements, declarations, and interjections articulated through bodily expressions because I have learned that Indigenous aesthetic and cultural practices –dances, songs, oratory, and regalia—are performative forms of politics in and of themselves. Despite my disciplinary training to see the world through the lens of performance, I do not understand Indigenous performance and cultural practices as "performance first," a move which would "atomize" and "dismember" it from its political contexts, assimilate useful ideas, and resort to an extractive relationship, approximating the mining Indigenous art, culture, and expressions as resources to enrich a theoretical discourse.[58] But I take seriously performance to better understand strategies that may in some small way help resist the destruction of lands, waters, and biodiversity, and to attempt to provide some recommendations for how settlers and non-Indigenous people can support Indigenous resurgence and renewal, and overcome some of the barriers that exist to fostering a petro-political consciousness and inspiring social movements that disrupt petro-imperialism, the dispossession of communities under radical class inequalities, and environmental damages resulting from the development of pipelines transporting oil to global markets, burning of fossil fuels, release of hydrocarbons into the atmosphere, and planetary destabilization of global warming.

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[55] Despite these robust knowledges, Indigenous studies remains marginalized within imperialist centers of knowledge. Jodi Byrd, a member of the Chicksaw Nation of Oklahoma, describes this sorry state: "After more than forty years of existence within the academy, American Indian studies has in many ways come into its, yet the interventions of Indigenous scholars offer to theories of colonization and genocide remains marginal at best." Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xxvi. Key texts informing my understanding of dispossession include Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States (Durham: D*uke University Press, 2014); Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014); and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

[56] Alfred and Corntassel, 597.

[57] Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 151-2.

[58] Dylan Robinson, "Enchantment's Irreconcilable Connection: Listening to Anger, Being Idle No More," *Performance Studies in Canada*, eds. Laura Levin and Marlis Schweitzer (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 213.

PERFORMANCE AND PETRO-IMPERIALISM: CHARTING NEW FRONTIERS

Despite the importance of fossil fuels in the twentieth century, only recently has a humanist discourse emerged to address the degree to which access to easy oil has transformed everyday life, shaping our existence, while making us dependent on diminishing subterranean minerals, volatile markets, shady politicians, and networks of power. To help us undertake the work of energy transition, and the transition in the values and practices that have been shaped around our use of vast amounts of energy provided by fossil fuels, artists, humanists, and social scientists have begun investigating how oil has saturated social life and brought into being new social imaginaries called "petrocultures"—the "political structures, built environments, social dynamics, gendered realities, educational systems, discursive modes, and everyday values, practices, habits, feelings, and beliefs that have developed in relation to and as a result of the shaping force of fossil fuels."[59] Scholars working in the field of the "energy humanities" center oil and energy to draw together and analyze many of today's most urgent social, economic, and political issues, tying petroleum consumption to sociopolitical aspirations, and examining new social practices premised on access to easy oil.[60] Although oil is no longer "'offshore' in social and cultural consciousness," to this point, little research has considered performance as a constitutive element of petrocultures, constructing norms of energy consumption through repetitions that transform the material world in both cultural and geophysical.[61]

My analysis of spectacles on oil frontier is informed by two traditions of anti-colonial thought and practice generated by communities with strong ties to land who have always defended themselves against colonial threats to life: radical resurgence theory produced by Indigenous scholars in the territories now named Canada and the United States (especially Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Glen Coulthard, and Audra Simpson), and anti-colonial liberation struggles for national liberation (mainly Frantz Fanon). Although these anti-colonial traditions are typically separated as distinct intellectual genealogies, I hope bringing them together in one study will contribute new avenues of thought to the development of a petro-political consciousness that refuses the destruction of lands and bodies. My research agenda is motivated by political agenda that does not approach decolonization as a

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[59] Imre Szeman, Ruth Beer, Warren Cariou, Mark Simpson, Sheena Wilson, "On the Energy Humanities: Contributions from the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Arts to Understanding Energy Transition and Energy Impasse," SSHRC Imagining Canada's Future Initiative: Knowledge Synthesis Grants: Energy and Natural Resources (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 2016), accessed May 2, 2019, https://petrocultures.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Szeman-OEH-KSG-Final-Report.pdf.

[60] For Dominic Boyer and Imre Szeman, the "energy humanities" is a field that contends that "our energy and environmental dilemmas are fundamentally problems of ethics, habits, values, institutions, beliefs and powers—all areas of expertise of the humanities and humanistic social sciences." Dominic Boyer and Imre Szeman, "The Rise of the Energy Humanities," *University Affairs* (March 2014): 40. Key texts within this nascent field include: Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden, eds., *Oil Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Dominic Boyer and Imre Szeman, eds., *Energy Humanities: An Anthropology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017); Amitav Ghosh, "Petrofiction," *New Republic* 2 (March 1992), 29-34; Peter Hitchcock, "Oil in the American Imaginary," *New Formations* 69, no. 2 (2010): 81-97; Matthew Huber, *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum and Culture in the American Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy* (New York: Verso, 2011); Imre Szeman, Jennifer Wenzel, and Patricia Yaeger, eds., *Fuelling Cultures: 101 Words on Energy and Environment* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017); Patricia Yaeger et al., "Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale-Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power and Other Energy Sources," *PMLA* 126, no. 2 (2011): 305-26.

[61] I borrow the phrase from Graeme MacDonald in his "Oil and World Literature," *American Book Review 33.3 (*2012), 7.

metaphor.[62] I believe the labor of settler scholars like myself should be to imagine alternative ways to be in relation with Indigenous people. In using the term "settler" to describe non-Indigenous people living on Indigenous land, I am referring to the idea that being a settler is not only an identity, but a structural position and experience of power and privilege.[63] Settlers settle into territories where other populations are exercising self-government and create independent homelands for themselves. They are in Lorenzo Veracini's framing defined by conquest, and they are "founders of political orders and carry their sovereignty with them."[64] They do not require labor, but they do require Indigenous people to vanish. More recent immigrants face a political order already constituted, and they are co-opted into the settler colonial regime, becoming settlers themselves as they benefit from the original dispossession of Indigenous peoples and contribute to ongoing dispossessions.[65]

Across the dissertation I describe how Indigenous peoples on oil frontiers are asserting citizenship and nationhood informed by place-based philosophies, ceremonial practices, and ontological priorities in relation to lands as they know them, contesting colonial and frontier logics by instead emphasizing the relationality and connectivity that comes from living together in a place for a long time. I have tried to flag the ontological and epistemological limitations of my own perspective, and to privilege Indigenous knowledge that is available to me. I attempt to strategically position divergent experiences, stories, perspectives, theories, and decolonizing methodologies in relation to one another to help us envisage ourselves as rooted in ongoing, dynamic relationships embedded in webs that connect us through an ecological imagination.

To my knowledge, *Crude Stages of the Frontier* is the first study of this scale to address petro-imperialism through the lens of performance. In order to develop and model different approaches to analyzing petro-imperialism through performance analysis, I selected case studies that represent varied dramaturgies of spectacle and radically different performative responses to the historic challenge of petro-imperialism. As the frontier framing can work in tandem with "rural" and "urban," the "West" and the "rest," the Global North and the Global South, I move, perhaps unexpectedly, across sites of considerable difference. I study an extractive frontier drama on a different oil frontier in each chapter, and I hope that considerably more critical attention is paid to these sites and those like them.

In chapter one, I analyze the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, a century-old civic festival designed to preserve and promote western heritage and culture in Calgary, Alberta, Canada's oil capital. In light of George Yúdice's claim that we have entered a new epistemic framework in which culture is a resource for resolving problems previously in the province of economics and politics, I approach the Stampede with a performative understanding of the expediency of culture in relation to the economic and political agendas of Alberta's petroleum industry and the local, provincial and federal political entities that control its

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[62] Eve Tuck, and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40.

[63] Rachel Flowers (Coast Salish First Nation) asserts the terms "non-Indigenous" and "settler" are not synonymous, "settler" is a critical term that denaturalizes and politicizes the presence of non-Indigenous people on Indigenous lands and brings ongoing colonial power relations into consciousness. Rachel Flowers, "Refusal to Forgive: Indigenous Women's Love and Rage," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 4, no. 2 (2015): 33.

[64] Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 94.

[65] Though I have also recently learned the term "arrivants" from Jodi Byrd (who borrowed it from African Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite) to signify those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe, and who have functioned within and resisted the historical project of the colonization of the "New World." The arrival of people by force and by choice is an important distinction and attunement to the conditions of settler colonialism and the historical relationships with Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Byrd, xix.

global distribution. I illustrate how the production, negotiation, and dissemination of frontier ideologies at the Stampede have been used as a strategic tool to advance Alberta's petro-political agenda and reify the hegemony of white settler colonialism. The ten-day celebration of the cowboy culminates in rodeo cowboys acting out the taming of the West and human domination of animals in the worlds' richest rodeo. I argue the Stampede conditions us to accept the risk of our ecologically destructive forms of production and decision making, and it illuminates why Albertans continue to support the development of fossil-fuel infrastructure when production and transportation have inspired intense resistance from other regions of the country. Across the chapter I show how the immersive spectacle of the Stampede produces an affective climate of "crude optimism," a binding optimistic attachment to fossil fuel extraction, pipeline development, oil consumption, and *jouissance* of the perceived adventure and opportunity of frontier life despite disrupting Indigenous relationships to land and interpolating us as subjects of the fossil-fueled economy.

In chapter two, I examine the assembly of water protectors at Standing Rock, North Dakota who gathered to protect the land and waters from the development of the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016. The development of pipelines designed to connect sites of extraction to refineries and export ports are not spectacular in and of themselves; in fact, development would be easiest if it were not perceived at all. And so, when Indigenous people organize, and disrupt the development of extractive projects that risk destabilizing ecologies, the state must resort to spectacular image-making. As Glen Sean Coulthard writes:

> If history has shown us anything, it is this: if you want those in power to respond swiftly to Indigenous peoples' political efforts, start by placing Native bodies (with a few logs and tires thrown in for good measure) between settlers and their money, which in colonial contexts is generated by the ongoing theft and exploitation of our land and resource base.[66]

I argue that the mischaracterization of water protectors as protestors in the mainstream media contributed to the production of a false consciousness in the service of petro-imperialism's colonizing agenda. I approach water protection—grounded within ecologically-informed political epistemologies understood, articulated, and enacted by Indigenous artists and activists—as an expression of sovereignty, and an anticolonial ethical and political practice best understood through its performative dimensions. I detail how acts of water protection like those enacted at Standing Rock in 2016 are distinct from other forms of protest and public demonstration that work through spectacle to make their political intervention.

While the mischaracterization of water protectors in the media can reinforce the policing of Indigenous bodies, the call to "Stand with Standing Rock," and take on the labor of water protection and land defense, challenges settlers and non-Indigenous people to confront their complicity in petro-imperialism and disrupt the lines of their affiliation and alliance. Later in the chapter, I re-source the public archive of water protection available on Facebook created by members of the #NoDAPL struggle, and I look to the representations of water protectors and the prayer camps established at Standing Rock by two Indigenous artists and image creators: the photographer Josué Rivas (Mexica/Otomi), who lived at Sacred Stone Camp for seven months, and the artist collective Winter Count who produced a short film, "We Are in Crisis," as a response to their time spent at Standing Rock, and as a tribute to the water protectors. I argue that these representations of the #NoDAPL movement disrupt the narrative of Indigenous political action as irrational terrorism, foster the development of a petro-political consciousness, and establish water protection as an issue of common concern, crafting the contours of the political field itself by extrapolating subjects from previous forms

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[66] Glen Sean Coulthard, "#IdleNoMore in Historical Context," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society,* December 24, 2012, accessed May 1, 2019, https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2012/12/24/idlenomore-in-historical-context/

of attachment. All the while, they highlight the importance of Indigenous resurgence premised on grounded normativity for insuring the continuation of Indigenous peoples and challenging the crudely optimistic settler colonial present.

In chapter three, I discuss the possibilities of fostering a petro-political consciousness in Nigeria, where postcolonial independence in 1968 coincided with the discovery of vast petroleum provinces, and oil replaced labor as the basis for national development. In hindsight, it is easy to see how the failure to invest Nigeria's oil money in national development had disastrous consequences. However, during Nigeria's boom in the 1970s, the excess of oil money transformed the nation in a spectacle of development. We have much to learn from Nigeria regarding the ways that the production of "petro-magic"—that is, oil's seemingly universal promise of wealth without work, and progress without the passage of time—formed through signs of progress and development like new sports stadiums, highways, and palatial hotels, "imagineer" a performance of the state that "explains" the sudden wealth and unprecedented prosperity, and that disguises the harm petroleum extraction does to humans and other forms of life.[67] I focus on the television series *Basi and Company* written by Ken Saro-Wiwa who became internationally recognized for leading the Movement of the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and presenting *The Ogoni Bill of Rights* to the Nigerian federal government in an effort to gain political and economic autonomy and self-determination for the uses of the natural resources of Ogoniland, where multinational oil corporations were extracting crude oil in the early 1990s. Saro-Wiwa was executed—alongside eight other MOSOP leaders—by the Nigerian government for this dissent. Given his commitment to activism, and his status as a spokesperson for the Ogoni tribe from the oil rich southwest Nigeria, it is interesting that Saro-Wiwa dedicated his time and energy to writing a popular television series for seven years, especially given that *Basi and Company* did not represent the struggles of Ogoniland. I read episodes in the series alongside the anti-colonial liberation theory of Frantz Fanon to illustrate how Saro-Wiwa satirizes Nigerian society overdosed on crude optimism, and attempts to develop "crude pessimism"—a pessimistic attitude towards fossil extraction, pipeline development, and the culture of petro-excess, that does not see the fossil-fueled economy and petro-politicized regime as leading the postcolonial state to the best of all possible worlds. In so doing, Idetail how in Nigeria, the emergence of a national consciousness entailed the emergence of a petro-political consciousness—one that is grounded in an awareness that the political economy of oil destroys the real productive base.

It is interesting to focus on *Basi and Company* which is relatively muted in its politics considering that Saro-Wiwa was an overt protestor and figurehead, especially when there are many under-studied examples of performative acts against petro-imperialism in Nigeria. Young men routinely resorted to kidnapping and sabotage to pressure oil companies into giving them jobs, money, or compensation for environmental damage, and there is a surprising tradition of women in the Niger Delta occupying pipeline terminals and threatening to strip naked if their demands are not met by the oil companies (as mothers of policemen and soldiers, it would be an abomination for them to be seen naked).[68] In this chapter, I am most interested in illuminating how the existence of an oil frontier affects the broader populous, and how artists work to amplify issues emerging from petro-imperialism.

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[67] Michael Watts, *Petro-Violence: Some Thoughts on Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1999), 7; Margaret Werry, *The Tourist State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), x.

[68] See, for example, Sam Olukoya, "Nigeria's Women Oil Protestors," *BBC News,* August 18, 2003, accessed July 18, 2019, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3155525.stm; Rafiu Ajakaye, "Women Protest in Nigeria's Oil-Rich Delta—Naked," *Anadolu Ajansi*, October 7, 2013, accessed July 18, 2019, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/women-protest-in-nigerias-oil-rich-delta-naked/213152

The narrowness of my focus only illuminates how much more work there is to do in studying performative political responses to the sudden explosion of oil rents and spectacles of modernity in third world countries, such as Venezuela and Nigeria, that fell into a colonial trap in which the extraction and export of a few commodities became the means towards national development, tethering newly "post"-colonial nations to transnational corporations, global markets, and cycles of boom and bust, and curtailing actual decolonization.

The impetus behind this multi-sited project stems from Dipesh Chakrabarty's pointed remark that the periodizing and dividing of knowledge endemic to the university does not help us understand the Anthropocene; learning to think "anthropocenically" means letting go of the divisions of time and space that have defined humanistic inquiry and the geopolitics of knowledge production. I look across oil frontiers to connect and build on ideas of decolonization and liberation that are usually separated in established intellectual genealogies with the hope that doing so may indicate new avenues of thought that promote alternatives to petro-imperialism and the dominant logics colonialism has left us in the Anthropocene. Oil frontiers draw attention to the central role of the "periphery" in the making of the modern world.[69] By analyzing the social, historical, and ecopolitical contexts of these oil spectacles, as well as the narratives of "progress" that explain them be it via nation-building agendas, or the guise of economic growth, I attempt to show how the dominant ideology of petro-imperialism that requires the eradication of Indigenous peoples and the original owners of oil- and resource-rich lands is reproduced. I hope that in understanding how power operates through oil spectacles might enable us to foresee, and perhaps intervene, in their political denouement. And I hope it will them contribute to our understanding of the cultural impasses to transitioning away from a fossil-fueled society via the interplay of political, economic, and cultural practices. Preventing climate disaster requires us to understand the etiology of petro-imperialism and its part in the world-making that fossil fuels inaugurate. *Crude Stages of the Frontier* is a primer for new kinds of political thinking and practice that reflect on how political goals that desire a less exploitative, more sustainable world system might be achieved.

[69] On this topic, Fernando Coronil argues that oil frontiers "decenter […] Eurocentric conceptions that identify modernity with metropolitan cultural formations and relegate the periphery to a pre-modern domain…. [and] recasts metropolitan modernity as its dominant form rather than as its (self-proclaimed) universal standard." Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 8.

Chapter 1. Crude Optimism: Romanticizing Alberta's Oil Frontier at the Calgary Stampede

An immaculate young woman regally waves at a sea of enthusiastic fans. Perched on her head is a white cowboy hat embellished with a tiara bearing in rhinestones the title, "Calgary Stampede Queen." She is a vision of "westernness" in cowboy boots, a buckskin skirt and jacket, and turquoise jewels. Her express purpose this hot July afternoon is to welcome the 115,000 folks attending the "Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth," the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede. She is a "welcome figure," like those white-cowboy-hat-wearing individuals in the Calgary airport who stand in the visitor's path and greet travelers.[70] Members of the public may not recognize these welcome scenes as political expressions that affirm the settler's authority to host. Nevertheless, these performances of western hospitality amount to a performance of power: the assertion of settler sovereignty over all things in the domain, namely, the land and its subterranean resources. They are just one performative manifestation of the affective logic of settler colonialism at the century-old festival designed to preserve and promote western heritage and culture in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

As a fourth-generation settler born in southern Alberta, I regularly attended the Calgary Stampede as a child. There was a time when I fantasized about being the Stampede Queen, galloping around arenas on a fast buckskin horse, upholding the ideal of white femininity, and drawing people into the Stampede spectacle through affective appeal. Competing in the Calgary Stampede Queen competition when I was 20 years old, and attending the Stampede in nearly all of the years since, shored up many questions: Why aren't the Rodeo Royalty—the Queen and her two Princesses—more racially and ethnically representative of Calgary's increasingly diverse population?[71] Why does the Stampede's espoused value of "commitment to the community" translate into the celebration of volunteerism when more than a million visitors annually pass through the gates, paying CAD$18.00 for an adult ticket?[72] How has the spectacle of frontier life enacted at the Stampede helped to brand Alberta as a Wild West full of the optimism and excitement of frontier opportunity across the unfolding of the western Canadian settlement and cattle frontier (c. 1880–1920) and the oil frontier (1941–present)?

The answers to these questions are bound up with how performances at the Stampede aid Alberta's oil and gas industry by reinforcing affective ties to the oil and gas industry, as well as creating distractions and diversions from decolonization that Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call "settler moves to innocence." Even though settler colonialism has been characterized as a structure, system, and logic, affective networks also need to be considered

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[70] I borrow this term from Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson's essay "Welcoming Sovereignty," which examines Indigenous sovereignty and gestures of welcome that take place in spaces of transit and gathering. Dylan Robinson, "Welcoming Sovereignty," *Performing Indigeneity*, eds. Yvette Nolan and Ric Knowles (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2016), 24.

[71] Women between the ages of 19 and 24 who are Canadian citizens, have been a resident of Alberta for at least 12 months prior to application, and have never been married or had children are eligible to compete in the Calgary Stampede Queen and Princesses Competition. Competitors are judged on their ability to look presentable and professional, as well as their riding ability, personality, and ability to speak comfortably with people from all backgrounds and walks of life. Once crowned, the Royal Trio receives outfits and jewelry for all appearances as well as makeup, manicures, hairstyling products, a custom saddle, and a year's worth of riding lessons. Currently the Royal Trio receive small honorariums throughout the year ($1,000 monthly) and a $2,000 scholarship if attending a postsecondary institution. For more information on the history of program, Jennifer Hamblin, *Calgary Stampede Queens* (Calgary: Rocky Mountain Books, 2014).

[72] The core values of the Calgary Stampede brand are western hospitality, integrity, pride of place, and commitment to the community. Throughout this chapter when I cite financial information, I am referring to Canadian dollars.

to understand how settler colonial governmentality operates.[73] Settler moves to innocence "attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege," and build on the worldview that I call "crude optimism."[74] Playing off Lauren Berlant's notion of "cruel optimism," crude optimism is a binding optimistic attachment to fossil fuel extraction, pipeline development, and consumption despite the brutal realities of extractivism and climate destabilization caused by the release of carbon into the atmosphere. Crude optimism, like cruel optimism, exists "when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing."[75] To be "crude" is to be in a natural or raw state, "not changed by any process or preparation," not manufactured, refined, tempered, etc.[76] Crude optimism is confidence that our fossil-fueled economy and petro-politicized regime will lead us to the best of all possible worlds. Crude optimism keeps us "loving oil," as Stephanie LeMenager describes our deep attachment not to the substance itself but to the "good life" fantasy that fossil-fueled modernity makes possible.[77] At the heart of the issue are the questions: Why do we stay attached to oil despite clear evidence of its instability, fragility, and cost? What has led us to this impasse, and produced or sustained a culture of climate denial and willful ignorance?

Fig. 3. Interactive photo opportunities are prevalent at the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, where everybody can be a cowboy. Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards.

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[73] See Mark Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense: Queerness and Everyday Colonialism in the American Renaissance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
[74] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not A Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no.1 (2012): 10.
[75] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.
[76] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "crude (adj.1a)," accessed 4 June 2018, www.oed.com.libproxy.berkeley.edu/view/Entry/45152?rskey=Bxe3ml&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid.
[77] Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 102.

Today the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede features the world's richest rodeo with more than $2 million in prize money, chuckwagon races, country and western music concerts, a parade, midway, Calgary Stampede Indian Village, trade show, livestock exhibitions, western art competition, and grandstand show featuring an eclectic display of youth talent, vaudeville acts, and First Nations dancing and drumming. Many of these performance practices produce an affective climate of crude optimism that is politically and economically expedient for the petroleum industry, underwriting settler innocence and legitimizing the expropriation of Indigenous land. Through the participatory dynamics of the Stampede, and the idealized versions of history re-enacted, the fantasy of the American myth of the frontier comes to relate to ordinary life.[78] The celebration of the cowboy is not simply nostalgic—a marker of what is lacking and desired; the frontier is a crude and cruel fantasy in which the community imagines itself as still existing.

Following Jon McKenzie's observation that in the condition of globalization, entertainment and efficacy must be approached as two strands of one braid, I understand the spectacle of the Stampede as not "merely" entertainment enacted "for fun," but as reproducing the contexts in which petro-imperialism is rationalized and excused, thus re-making the social and political conditions of the Capitalocene.[79] My analysis of the Stampede is informed by George Yúdice's study of the uses of culture in the global era in which he argues that culture as a resource is "the lynchpin of a new epistemic framework in which ideology and much of what Foucault called disciplinary society . . . are absorbed into an economic or ecological rationality, such that management, conservation, access, distribution, and investment—in 'culture' and the outcomes thereof-take priority."[80] Yúdice observes that previous conventional notions of culture and artistic excellence, such as the model of uplift (following Schiller or Arnold), distinction (following Bourdieu), or its anthropologization as a way of life (Williams), have lost force, and culture is increasingly called upon to invoke or solve problems in the province of economics and politics. This transformation should not be understood as a manifestation of "mere politics" to the neglect of what is just or right, but indicates what is considered right or just is contingent on the play of interests.

Following Yúdice's call to attend to the "performative understanding of the expedience of culture," and those "strategies implied in any invocation of culture, any invention of tradition, in relation to some purpose or goal," I am interested in the instrumental uses and "cultural power" of spectacle towards the explicit ideological and market goals of petro-imperialism.[81] Yet, while I take Yúdice's model of culture as resource as an important frame through which to address petro-imperialism, I do not eschew the "content" of culture or the experience of *jouissance*. Like Elizabeth Walden, I believe these areas (and related

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[78] For consistency with scholars of Western cultural history like Richard Slotkin, who traces the historical development of the myth of the frontier in American literary, popular, and political culture from the colonial period through the 1990s, when I refer to the "American myth of the frontier," I am referring to stories drawn from US history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing U.S. ideology and moral values. Slotkin explains, "Over time, through frequent retellings and deployments as a source of interpretive metaphors, the original mythic story is increasingly conventionalized and abstracted until it is reduced to a deeply encoded and resonant set of symbols, 'icons,' 'keywords,' or historical clichés." Although the vast, fertile land amenable to cattle ranging and agricultural development in Western Canada meant that late nineteenth century frontier life was not solely an American experience, the myth of the frontier is a distinctly American cultural construction, having first been used to explain and justify the establishment of the American colonies, and later deployed to account for the rapid economic growth, emergence as a powerful nation-state, and distinctive approach to modernization. Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 5.

[79] Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[80] George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 1.

[81] Ibid, 38; 25.

issues of representation and identity politics) are intertwined, and one of the difficult tasks of cultural analysis is being attentive to the complexity of that intertwining. Walden aptly retorts "culture cannot be a mere resource": for culture as a resource has not "superseded culture as a sphere of ideology, as Yúdice suggests, but is the ideological form of this order. In which case, we must not work within its terms, but develop an alternative 'moral-political vision' that would still be true to the shape of economic, social and political reality."[82]

In the body of this chapter, I detail the ways crude optimism is produced through re-enactments of the myth of the frontier at the Stampede to counter the sense of guilt and fear that accompany the "death-logic" of colonialism and its hyper-extractive manifestation in petro-imperialism.[83] Behaving crudely, and refusing to temper fossil fuel extraction and usage, is a thrilling experience like living life on the edge of the frontier, exposing oneself to risk and reward. I approach the Stampede's spectacles as sites for the production, negotiation, and dissemination of ideologies—ones specific to the cultural and material conditions of the frontier. While carnival in the Bakhtinian sense provided a temporary suspension of the established hierarchy and its privileges, norms, and prohibitions, no longer does this "festive time" exist outside of coercive socioeconomic and political norms and organization of the neoliberal order and petro-imperialism. As Richard Schechner observes in his study of the future of ritual that "with rare exceptions, today's festivals and carnivals are not inversions of the social order but mirrors of it."[84]

I argue that performances in the extractive frontier drama of the Stampede are socially, politically, and economically expedient for the petroleum industry as they provide a cathartic release for social anxieties about the riskiness of frontier life, underwrite settler innocence, and legitimize the expropriation of Indigenous land. If the system of settler colonialism normatively produces "risk societies" in which we are conditioned to accept the risk of our ecologically destructive forms of industrial production and techno-economic decision making as simply the dark side of "progress," this process is ever more pronounced on oil frontiers such as Alberta.[85] Alberta's oil sands have the third largest oil reserves in the world, after Venezuela and Saudi Arabia. According to Statistics Canada, capital investment in Alberta's upstream energy sector, which includes oil sands, conventional oil and gas, mining, and quarrying, was equal to about $28.3 billion in 2016, estimated at $26.5 billion in 2017, and is forecast at $23.7 billion in 2018. In 2017, approximately 140,300 people were employed in Alberta's upstream energy sector.[86] In Alberta, settler moves to innocence are about managing anxiety, the "looming but never arriving guilt," and "the relentless remembering and reminding" that is "the cost of subjugation . . . [,] the price paid for violence, for genocide."[87] In order to manage this crisis of consciousness, settler moves to innocence are re-enacted, annually, to affirm the settler worldview "where the wild land and

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[82] Elizabeth Walden, review of "George Yúdice (2003) *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era.* Durham and London: Duke University Press." *Culture Machine* (2005): n.p.

[83] I'm borrowing the term from Puerto Rican philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres who describes decolonial projects in the Americas as "dedicated to the incessant task of elucidating the perverse forms in which the logic of coloniality operates, as a death-logic which is constitutive of modernity, and to opening up a horizon in which human life might be possible in all its abundance." Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 18.

[84] Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 48.

[85] Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society*, trans. Mark A. Ritter (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1995), 2.

[86] Government of Alberta, "Alberta Energy: Facts and Statistics," Government of Alberta, 2018, accessed 30 May 2018, www.energy.alberta.ca/OS/AOS/Pages/FAS.aspx.

[87] Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," *Handbook of Autoethnography*, eds. Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013): 642; 643.

wild people [are] made for his benefit."[88] They are necessary for assuring white settler subjects who "can only make his identity as a settler by making the land produce, and produce excessively, because 'civilization' is defined as production in excess of the 'natural' world (i.e. in excess of the sustainable production already present in the Indigenous world)" that he or she is innocent, entitled, rational, and legitimate.[89] Settler subjects have only two choices: to accept the "daily injustice" for one's own benefit, or to accept a "never consummated self-sacrifice." Since a life of guilt, shame, and anguish is virtually "unlivable," the colonizer will typically choose to "conform and to defend the colonial system in every way," even though these advantages and privileges result in the "loss of the soul."[90]

Sandy Grande (Quechua) points out spectacles work to this end, abrogating settler dis-ease, solidifying the settler state, and consolidating whiteness.[91] Drawing on British media theorist Nick Couldry's claim that "every system of cruelty requires its own theatre" in which it can acquire "legitimation" via public and "ritualized performance," Grande argues, "Productions in its [the settler state's] theater of cruelty rely on spectacle to obscure and 'smuggle' past the violent rituals of settler colonialism as normative."[92] Thus we can understand the Stampede as a "theater of cruelty," staging rituals that enact, *as play*, "an acceptable version of the values and compulsions on which that cruelty depends," justifying the system of petro-imperialism.[93] The practices of everyday life, like the occupation of Indigenous land, and usage of natural resources (flora, fauna, minerals) to service (hu)mankind in a petro-political regime are enacted to legitimate their norms and values, and purge pity and fear, and other social anxieties.

The Petro-politicization of the Myth of the Frontier

The Calgary Stampede began in 1912 when an American cowboy turned vaudeville entertainer named Guy Weadick pitched a six-day spectacle entitled the Frontier Day Celebration and Cowboy Skills Championship to four prosperous Alberta ranchers: George Lane, Pat Burns, A.E. Cross, and Archie McLean. He was helped by Harry C. McMullen, general livestock agent for the Canadian Pacific Railroad who had contacts in the ranching industry.[94] Weadick was aware of Frederick Jackson Turner's famous lecture on "The

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[88] Tuck and Yang, 18.
[89] Ibid, 6.
[90] Alfred Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 147; 148.
[91] Sandy Grande, "Refusing the Settler Society of the Spectacle," in *Handbook of Indigenous Education,* eds. E.A. McKinley and L.T. Smith (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2018), 12.
[92] Nick Couldry, "Reality TV, or the Secret Theater of Neoliberalism," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 30, no. 1 (2003): 3; 10; Grande, 12.
[93] Ibid, 12.
[94] Calgary began hosting an exhibition and agricultural fair in 1886, which was designed to share knowledge about agricultural practices, advertise district wealth, promote settlement, bring business to the young city, and create an opportunity for social interaction and entertainment for the diverse population that had settled the Canadian West. In 1908, the federal government awarded Calgary $50,000 to host the Dominion Exhibition, a kind of miniaturized World's Fair intended to highlight regional production and encourage farmers and ranchers to improve the quality of their livestock, grain, and dairy products. The eight-day event also featured the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch Wild West Show, the troupe with which Weadick was touring and performing as a trick roper. Weadick hoped to stage a "Frontier Days and Cowboy Championship Contest" in Calgary as early as 1908, but he was dissuaded by McMullen who felt the time was not yet ripe for such an event. It was not clear that rodeo entertainment and its perceived elements of animal cruelty would be well received amidst emerging ideas of social taste and respectability in the urban centre. Yet rodeo had remained popular in smaller centres, and Weadick was a persuasive campaigner, and in 1912 Weadick and McMullen ascertained financing for the event. They did not receive support from the Exhibition management until 1923, but then the Stampede joined with the Exhibition which helped to address the expense of staging the Exhibition after the collapse of the land settlement boom and amidst the lingering post-war depression, and update the fair which was losing its appeal

Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893) in which Turner argued that the American frontier had ended in 1890 with the disappearance of the vast reserve of undeveloped land, and expressed his fear that, with its disappearance, Americans had lost the conditions through which they acquired their virile character.[95] Weadick believed that the romance and culture of the "disappearing" Old West would be popular in Alberta.[96] But while Turner's thesis indicated the frontier had ceased to exist as such in the United States, in Alberta, the frontier remained a material reality even as the nature of the frontier evolved rapidly from a cattle-ranging frontier to a prosperous agricultural frontier, and later to an oil frontier.[97] Weadick received $100,000 of credit from the "Big Four" (Lane, Burns, Cross, and McLean), and replaced the fantastical elements of the American Wild West show with the "authenticity" of the Canadian frontier by featuring real cowboys in a professional rodeo.[98] The 1912 event was memorable and led to a postwar victory restaging in 1919, and it became an annual event in 1923.

Fig. 4. The cowboy and the western horse are celebrated in public art in Calgary, including *By the Banks of the Bow* created by Bob Spaith and Rich Roenisch, located on the Stampede grounds. Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards.

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amidst increasingly sophisticated urban audiences. See Max Foran, "The Stampede in Historical Context," *Icon, Brand, Myth: The Calgary Stampede*, ed. Max Foran (Athabasca: Athabasca University Press, 2008); Lorry W. Felske, "Calgary's Parading Culture Before 1912," *Icon, Brand, Myth: The Calgary Stampede*, ed. Max Foran (Athabasca: Athabasca University Press, 2008), 73-110; James H. Gray, *A Brand of Its Own: The 100 Year History of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede* (Saskatoon: Western Prairie Producer, 1985).

[95] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company [1893], 1921), 1-38.

[96] Wendy Bryden, *The First Stampede of Flores LaDue* (New York: A Touchstone Book, 2011), 142–44.

[97] Foran, 5-6.

[98] Buffalo Bill (William Cody) (1846–1917), a trapper, Civil War soldier, Pony Express rider, stagecoach driver, scout, and buffalo hunter; and Wild Bill Hickok (James Butler Hickok) (1837–1876), a gunman and guide, had been the subjects of laudatory fictions published in dime novels. They collaborated with frontier mythmaking by mythologizing their own lives and reenacting their real and perceived adventures in circus-like pageants that staged reenactments of key scenes of the Wild West like the buffalo hunt, pony express ride, and battle of Little Big Horn. The Buffalo Bill Show went on to be seen by more than 60 million people and was a major influence not only on American ideas about the frontier past but was an influential overseas advertisement for the United States during the period of massive European emigration. Their Wild West shows were important prefaces to the Stampede phenomenon that featured Canadian cowboys.

The Stampede emerged at a time when settlers were gaining land titles and commencing wheat farming, effectively privatizing the land. Early Stampedes capitalized on nostalgia for the golden age of the cowboy when boundless free land existed for cattle ranging and homesteading. Now that the adventurous life of the cowboy on the open range was coming to an end, it was opportune for the formation of a performance space in which the life of unlimited opportunity for a strong, ambitious, self-reliant individual to thrust his way to the top could be dramatized. Donald Wetherall contends the frontier narrative enacted at the Stampede erases important aspects of Alberta's history, merely portraying Indigenous life and culture as a source of colour, and offering a vision of ranching life that had only existed for a limited time: "It posited that rodeo represented the essence of the Anglo-Canadian Protestant conquest of the West and saw open-range ranching (not railways, wholesaling and distribution, mining, irrigation, wheat farming, and land development, and other elements) as the formative cultural and economic event in the history of southern Alberta."[99] As such, Wetherall argues the Stampede is an invented tradition in Eric Hobsbawm's sense—the kind of mass-produced tradition that occurs in rapidly changing societies to establish new bonds of loyalty, and promotes a sense of community—such as nostalgia for an imagined past.[100] This historical narrative would serve as the basis for white settler mythologies that would become codified in law and legitimate occupation while negating other ties and claims to the territory.

Despite Weadick's efforts to stage an authentic representation of Western Canadian frontier life, by the mid-1950s the generic myth of the American frontier took hold due to the popularity of televised westerns—a transformation facilitated when western film and television actors like Duncan Renaldo and Leo Cariollo (Cisco Kid and Pancho), James Drury (The Virginian), Roy Rodgers and Dale Evans, and Jay Silverheels (Tonto) performed in or attended the Stampede as special guests. The loss of historical specificity is particular to the development of the spectacle coincides with the "false consciousness of time" and the eradication of historical knowledge, resulting in the mythologization of the frontier.[101] In *Gunfighter Nation*, Richard Slotkin argues when the American agrarian frontier was perceived to "close" in 1890, it was replaced with a proliferation of cultural productions of frontier life. The frontier became a set of symbols—a mythology—produced and transmitted through symbolic narratives in various genres of cultural expression. Eventually, the frontier's explanation in mythology outweighed its importance as a geographic place and social and political culture. The myth of the frontier transcended the limitations of a specific temporality, variously serving the needs of progressives and conservatives alike.[102] While the political, economic, and social conditions under which oil frontiers develop differ from the agrarian and mineral frontiers of the 1800-1870s, the myth of the frontier continues to be deployed as a hero-tale to explain and justify the use of violence in industrial development. Alberta's oil and gas industry has been able to justify its risky undertakings through this mythology. The myth of the frontier served as a foundation for a creation story neither continuous with the British Empire, East Coast authority, nor Indigenous worldviews.[103] It

[99] Donald G. Wetherall, "Making Tradition: The Calgary Stampede, 1912–1939," *Icon, Brand, Myth: The Calgary Stampede*, ed. Donald G. Wetherall (Athabasca: Athabasca University Press, 2008), 42.
[100] Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass Producing Traditions: Europe 1870–1914," in *Representing the Nation: A Reader: Histories, Heritage and Museums*, ed. David Boswell and Jessica Evans (London: Routledge, 1999), 61–86.
[101] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1977), thesis 158.
[102] Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 18.
[103] Frontier imagery in Calgary extends beyond the Stampede and is linked to urban identity through public ceremonies, public art, and architecture. See Robert M. Seiler and Tamara P. Seiler, "Ceremonial Rhetoric and Civic Identity: The Case of the White Hat." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2001): 29–49.

has enabled Calgarians to define and articulate their guiding beliefs, explain their deepest and most persistent concerns, and provide direction for future action. The frontier narrative normalizes the violent subjugation of the First Peoples as well as turbulent and sometimes overwhelming booms and busts of frontier life (and mineral markets), and helps the community adjust to, manage, and/or rationalize the discrepancy between the reality of their lives and the "good life" they imagine and expect. After all, the tough cowboy is more likely to survive the "end of oil" than the suburbanite who depends on modern amenities.

The Stampede is an immersive festival where participants shift between performer and spectator, reinterpreting and reproducing the symbols of the frontier. People take time from work to go to the rodeo and revel in the "grotesque realism" (to borrow Bakhtin's phrase) of cowboys landing in dung when they are flung from the back of an animal, snot streaming from the noses of calves when they are hurled to the ground by tie-down ropers, and barrel racing and chuckwagon horses drenched in sweat from charging around the arena.[104] The Calgary Stampede retains a carnivalesque atmosphere based in laughter about bodies, the lower strata, and comic shows of the marketplace, but it is also one that services elite petro-politicians and oil executives whose position in society is no longer distinguished by their preference towards "high culture." Oilmen as well as royal visitors like Prince William, Duchess of Cambridge, and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge can entertain a grateful population and embrace the Western spirit by adorning thin disguises in the form of western attire. The whole city "goes western," temporarily regressing to a rustic state: downtown business owners dress up their storefronts with hay bales and lumber facades to imitate the Calgary of the 1880s, and most Calgarians, even those without rural roots, don a Stetson hat, denim jeans, a leather belt, and cowboy boots. "Playing cowboy" denotes a conscious desire to participate in a civic tradition. The simplicity of the cowboy "uniform" means that Calgary's increasingly racially and ethnically diverse population can appear to fit into the community so long as they can afford the necessary costume pieces—and are willing to demonstrate an investment in whiteness.

The desire to play the role became especially apparent when I attended the TransAlta Grandstand Show in 2015. In the midst of a flurry of song and dance, acrobatic acts, pyrotechnics, and a special appearance by retired Canadian astronaut, Chris Hadfield, a young man sporting a white Wrangler shirt, pressed jeans, and white Western hat walked across the massive stage, presented himself to two judges adorned in judicial attire, raised his right hand, and swore "to be faithful and bear true allegiance to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada, her heirs and successors," observe the laws of Canada, and fulfill his duties as a Canadian citizen. Upon completing the citizenship oath, a young songstress donned in a white cowboy hat belted the chorus of a popular track by the Canadian pop star Chantel Kreviazuk, "It feels like home to me," as the emcee of the show shook hands with the new Canadian. This performance of citizenship exemplifies the invitation for new immigrants to frame their experiences in this territory within the mythology of the frontier, and to produce themselves as part of a community of cowboys. This saccharine moment represents the Stampede's capacity to use spectacular performance to shield the populace from the historical and contemporary acts of colonial state violence that continue to be perpetrated on these lands and produce a spectacle of post-racial politics—an image that would justify claims that Alberta is the producer of "ethical oil" in comparison to crude producers like Saudi Arabia, Libya, Nigeria, and Venezuela which are lacking environmental protections and have considerable records of human rights infringements even though obtaining the oil depends on the dispossession of Indigenous nations and communities.[105]

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[104] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 18.
[105] Ezra Levant, *Ethical Oil: The Case for Canada's Oil Sands* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2011).

My point here is not simply to accuse diasporic migrants from participating in, and benefitting from, the dispossession of Indigenous land because I recognize that not all could refuse arrivant colonialisms from the post- and neocolonial geographies of the Global South. But I wish to indicate how ethnic minorities are assimilated into Canada in ways predicated on white supremacy and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, and the exercise of domination via the enforced adoption of cultural habits and customs that reinforce certain understandings of culture and the environment. The spectacle is working here to solidify the setter state and consolidate whiteness by reproducing model citizens who are incommensurable with Indigeneity. As Debord comments, "Formerly one only conspired against an established order. Today, *conspiring in its favor* is a new and flourishing profession." He adds, "Under spectacular domination people conspire to maintain it, and to guarantee what it alone would call its well-being. This conspiracy *is a part* of its very functioning."[106] To play cowboy is to behave "whitely" and to embrace those habits and dispositions that reproduce racial hierarchy and white privilege even if "not all white people are whitely and not all whitely people are white."[107]

The cowboy is a powerful symbol of regional identity because, as historian Tamara Palmoer Seiler points out, it enables Albertans to "evoke their regional identity as mavericks of Confederation."[108] Since the 19th century, the state apparatus has seldom acknowledged the role of cowboys in Canadian history, tending instead to celebrate the Mountie who represented the peaceful administration of law and negotiated resolution of conflict.[109] Although the continental forces of the ranching industry drove cowboys north across the 49th parallel, the cowboy existed outside of Canada's imagined community. To worship cowboys north of the 49th when the myth of the frontier so clearly links cowboys to American mythology undercuts nationalist efforts to distinguish Canadian culture from U.S. culture. This resistance to national narratives has resonated with Albertans who have resented those federal policies that have impinged upon deregulation and undermined free-spirited competition and disadvantaged the resource-wealthy province. Petro-imperialism is a special brand of "capitalist imperialism" that Harvey describes as a "contradictory fusion of 'the politics of state and empire'" wherein distinct territorial and capitalistic logics of power intertwine in complex and sometimes contradictory ways.[110] Corporate entities and states become indistinguishable as their economic interests and activities overlap, resulting in states acting on behalf of corporations, and corporate entities hiring private security forces to control and suppress resistance. This "new imperialism" resonates with an Arendtian understanding of imperialism as the first stage of the political rule of the bourgeoisie who achieved economic pre-eminence without aspiring political rule, and initiated a politics of expansion for expansion's sake.[111] While imperialism remains a project linked to the command of a territory and the capacity to mobilize resources, it has its origins in business speculation and the permanent broadening of industrial production and economic transaction

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[106] Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle,* trans. Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1990 [1988]), 74.

[107] Clare Land, *Decolonizing Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of Indigenous Struggles* (London: Zed Books, 2015), 121.

[108] Tamara Palmer Seiler, "Riding Broncs and Taming Contradictions: Reflections on the Uses of the Cowboy in the Calgary Stampede," *Icon, Brand, Myth: The Calgary Stampede*, ed. Max Foran, (Athabasca: Athabasca University Press, 2008), 193.

[109] Ibid, 184.

[110] David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 26.

[111] Hannah Arendt, *Imperialism: Part Two of the Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: A Harvest Book, 1948), v.

rather than politics.[112] It occurs when the growth of the capitalist economy comes up against the nation-state, and national borders limit the possibilities of industrial development and economic expansion. A new transnational capitalist class of financiers, CEOs, and rentiers, who typically do not aspire towards government, wield influence at home and abroad by dominating cultural and political life through their money power, and ensuring that the state and its politicians did not interfere in their capacity to accumulate and build an architecture within which they could gather the wealth of the world unto themselves.

The cowboy reflects the ideals of freedom outside the constraints of society, and an open frontier consistent with free-market capitalism which tends to be suspicious of remote authority. In the US frontier tradition, the law moved west with Easterners who carried with them the legacy of the American Revolutionary War, which instilled in people the democratic right and duty to take back control of the law, and enforce their own code of honor when authorities prove incompetent.[113] Canada has no such vigilante tradition as British law was imposed on the Canadian West by the North West Mounted Police prior to settlement. So it is logical that those who would reap the riches of Alberta's natural resources would identify with the American myth, which emphasizes individualism, fortitude, and perseverance in the face of adversity be it one's vulnerability to the natural environment (whether personal or financial such as investment in oil exploration), or one's ability to march on despite new sociopolitical obstacles to navigate and overcome (such as carbon taxes, environmental impact assessments, legal precedents for First Nations' land claims, international trade agreements, and fluctuating markets). Moreover, the myth enables white-collar workers to see themselves as cowboys and rugged individualists, like those mavericks represented in dime novels and Hollywood pictures, rather than as corporate bureaucrats subject to governmental regulation.

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[112] Ibid, 5. When asked about what is, more precisely, "new" about this new imperialism, Harvey states: "There are two things … some of this is a reversion of … events that happened at the end of the 19th century by the British Empire: taking away resources, destroying Indians' indigenous industries and supplanting them…it is sort of repetition of what happened …The big distinction is that, apart from Iraq, it has generally not involved colonial occupation. It uses the power of the economy, the power of international institutions, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund … the United States has worked that way through the colonial kind of problem, rather than going through direct occupation as the British, French and other imperial regimes. David Harvey, "A Conversation with David Harvey," *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture* 5, no. 1 (2006): 2-3.

[113] John Jennings, *The Cowboy Legend: Owen Wister's* Virginian *and the Canadian-American Frontier* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2015), 13.

Fig. 5. A billboard advertisement for the Stampede in Calgary. Photo from Canadian Design Resource.

The "festive time" of the Stampede signifies a time for reveling in being crude: the taboos and constraints of everyday life are lifted, and marginally illegal activity is accepted.[114] A massive downtown pub crawl takes over the city, and pop-up drinking and dancing tents named "Cowboys," "Ranchman's," "Wildhorse Saloon," and "Nashville North" accommodate thousands of thirsty city slickers turned cowboys and cowgirls who wish to act out their Western fantasies and "become part of the legend."[115] Rebecca Solnit writes that the fantasy of the Western "enshrines the self-conscious desire to be unself-consciously masculine."[116] She is right insofar as the frontier—real and constructed—is particularly hostile to women and queer folk. When cowboys are crude, women's bodies become the terrain of fantasy, masculine ambition, and conquest in the dancehalls of the Stampede (where oil companies sponsor parties costing upwards of $400,000 in boom periods).[117] When attractive women mount the mechanical bulls of these bars, I have often seen the operator slow down the ride, allowing gawking spectators to ogle at the girl until she is finally defeated and thrown off, sometimes flashing her underwear if she is wearing a dress. Stories of sexual harassment and sexual assault have become so common at the Stampede that in 2015 a group of local Calgarians connected with the Calgary Sexual Health Centre to create a campaign for consent called #SafeStampede.

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[114] Bakhtin, 7.

[115] This invitation is displayed throughout the Cowboy's tent and in their promotional material.

[116] Rebecca Solnit, "The Postmodern Old West, or the Precession of Cowboys and Indians," *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscape for Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 31.

[117] Carrie Tait, "Slumping Economy Puts Dent in Calgary Stampede Flair," *Globe and Mail*, 1 July 2016, accessed 9 January 2018, www.theglobeandmail.com/news/alberta/slumping-economy-puts-dent-in-calgary-stampede-flair/article30731906/.

Maurya Wickstrom's description of "performing consumers" in her work on global capital and its theatrical seductions is helpful for further understanding how "playing cowboy" services the petroleum industry. Wickstrom argues that although the experience of being transformed into something other than ourselves might be an intensely pleasurable experience, corporations that create immersive environments "turn us into affective, embodied theatrical laborers on their behalf."[118] We loan corporations the "phenomenological resources of our bodies" when we play out these fictions, making them appear in three dimensions, as if they were real, and allowing them to feel real even when we know they are really made up.[119] Stampeding is a form of the immaterial labor that Wickstrom, quoting Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, describes as part of the "emergence of an apparatus that supersedes all prior forms of sovereignty and smooths the way for the 'realization of the world market.'"[120] Playing cowboy equates to individuals actively embracing and re-inscribing the frontier's hierarchies and values through their bodies. The celebration of the cowboy through embodied enactments becomes a primary resource for petro-imperialism to be maintained and produced.

Petro-Sponsorship and the Performative Dynamics of Consent

Early in its history, the Calgary Stampede's Board of Governors consisted of local businessmen, farmers, and ranchers. As Alberta's oil and gas industry took off in the late 1940s when a major crude oil reserve was found in Leduc, Alberta, oil executives and white-collar workers from related investment and engineering firms joined the Board of Directors, and took over managing the spectacle, adapting it to suit their needs.[121] This resulted most explicitly in an oil show at the Stampede from 1966 to 1977 featuring a 41-meter-tall derrick-like steel tower with a rig drilling 2,100 meters below Stampede Park and topped with a natural gas flare. Exhibits on exploration, transportation, pipelines and processing procedures were also showcased to educate the public about the industry.

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[118] Maurya Wickstrom, *Performing Consumers: Global Capital and Its Theatrical Seductions* (London: Routledge, 2006), 4.

[119] Ibid, 2.

[120] Ibid, 5.

[121] The first reports of oil in southern Alberta were in 1886, but inefficient drilling methods, significant costs, and low yield hampered operations. In May 1914, oil was found in Turner Valley (about 40 miles from Calgary) and spawned a stock market frenzy. The oil boom was short-lived as the outbreak of World War I dried up capital. The euphoria of boom time struck again when a second major crude oil reserve was found in Leduc in 1947.

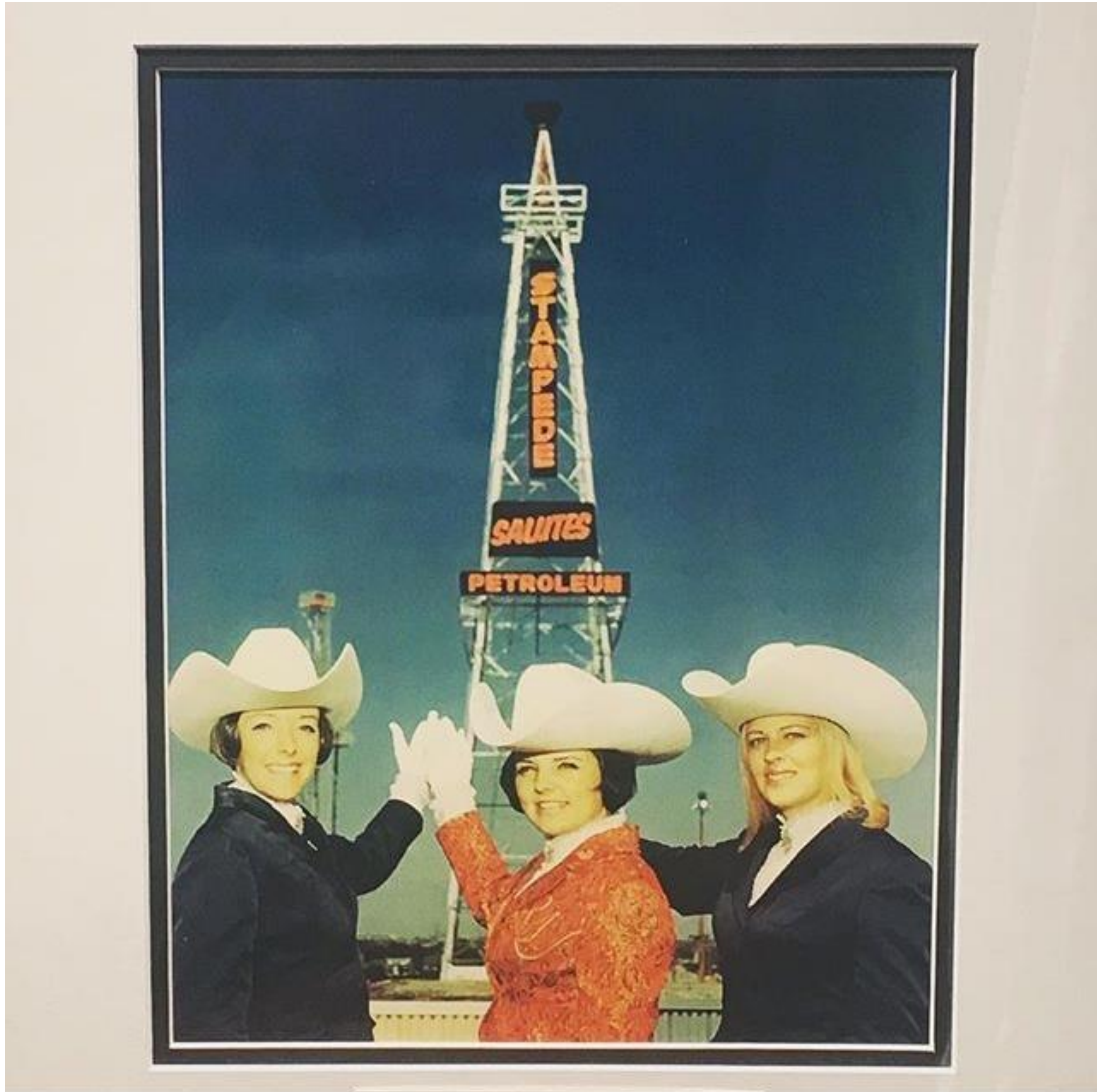

Fig. 6. The 1966 Stampede Rodeo Queen and Princesses salute Alberta petroleum exploration at the Canadian Petroleum Exposition. Image by the Stampede Queen's Alumni Committee.

Describing the effects of the oil boom on Calgary, Alberta historian Max Foran comments: "By 1965, about half of Calgary's workforce owed their jobs to oil and gas, and Calgary had become inextricably dependent on a single industry."[122] The jobs, growth, and civic contributions have created a nearly sacred image of the oil industry in Calgary, and the belief that "whatever is good for oil corporations is good for us."[123] Today, Calgary is home to the head office of nearly every major oil and natural gas company in the country, major pipeline operators, drilling companies, energy-related engineering firms, and trade associations. ENMAX, Atco, Cenovus Energy, Encana, Flour, Plains Midstream Canada, Repsol, TransCanada, and Worley Parsons Resources & Energy are all sponsors of the Stampede. Partnerships between the Stampede Exhibition Company and oil companies have helped the Stampede upgrade facilities. For example, in 2003, Canadian Oil Sands Limited gifted $3 million to the Calgary Stampede to support the development of a 30-acre, inner-city

[122] Ibid, 158.
[123] Chuck Reasons and Rachel Carson, *Stampede City. Power and Politics in the West* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1984), 25.

park alongside the Elbow River. Marcel Coutu, then president and chief executive of Canadian Oil Sands Limited, which is the largest partner in the Syncrude oilsands project, said the donation is a good fit because the oil and gas industry shares similar Western values with the Stampede: "The Stampede is really about the spirit of the West, entrepreneurialism, a can-do attitude, and it's exactly what Syncrude is."[124] Sponsorship generates positive brand associations through big oil's performed commitment to community. Mel Evans has shown how oil companies like British Petroleum have sought out associations with prestigious cultural institutions to "artwash" their brands and perform the role of "Corporate Citizen." She argues this association with cultural institutions helps oil corporations to maintain the "social license to operate" despite the ever-accumulating social and environmental catastrophes from oil excavation, transportation, and refinement. Cultural sponsorship is a survival strategy for a precarious industry: "To survive an international onslaught of criticism and anger following a crisis, oil companies must first develop a relationship with the core values, experiences, and highest held beliefs of a culture."[125] Sometimes corporate sponsorship backfires with protests of art exhibitions backed by unsavory corporations. This was the case during the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary when Shell Canada sponsored *The Spirit Sings*, an exhibit of Native artifacts at the Glenbow Museum, at a time when Shell was involved in a dispute with the Lubicon Lake Cree Indian Nation, a small Cree community in the far north of Alberta, about the right to drill on their land.[126] This kind of faux pas has not been the case with the Stampede.

Rather than shy away from the contentious public issue of the dispossession of First Nations through oil extraction and pipeline development, in recent years, oil companies have sponsored the part of the Stampede that features First Nations culture and performance: Indian Village.[127] Since 1912, members of the five nations of Treaty 7—Kainai, Tsuut'ina, Stoney Nakoda, Siksika, and Piikani—have been invited to set up teepees in what has been called "Indian Village" for the past 107 years, and what will be known as "Elbow River Camp" from the 2019 Stampede onwards.[128] Teepee owners and their families live onsite

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[124] Anthony Capkun, "Canadian Oil Sands Donates $3 million to Calgary Stampede," *Resource Engineering & Maintenance Magazine,* 30 May 2013, accessed 4 January 2019, https://www.rem-mag.com/business/canadian-oil-sands-donates-$3-million-to-calgary-stampede

[125] Mel Evans, *Artwash: Big Oil and the Arts* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 70.

[126] After protests by the Lubicon Lake Nation, and a call to encourage people to respond to the exhibition, a number of museums and private owners boycotted the exhibit and sent letters of protest to the Glenbow Museum and the Alberta and Canadian governments. Outside the museum, 150 individuals protested; and in front of the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Rebecca Belmore, an Anishinaabe artist, staged "Artifact #671B"—which involved her sitting on the ground for two hours on a day when the temperature remained below -20º C, in solidarity with the Lubicon Cree Nation. See Susan Bennett, "Calgary (1988): A Cultural Olympiad *avant la letter*," *Public* 53 (2016): 131–39.

[127] There have been other public relations efforts to try to maintain the reputation of the oil industry in Calgary during the 2015 recession that resulted from falling oil prices and included an estimated 40,000 jobs lost in the energy sector. One such campaign was Cenovus Energy Inc.'s sponsorship of Family Day at the 2017 Stampede. Cenovus provided free entrance to all families who arrived before noon, and it offered a pancake breakfast to the first 25,000 guests. Vicky Reid, director of community affairs at Cenovus, described the gesture as "a gift from us to the community." Referring to the financial toll of the 2015 oil slump, Reid remarked: "We know as well as anyone that the last couple of years have been difficult, and this was a way for us to give back to the community and give families an opportunity to go to the Stampede who might not otherwise get to go." Wil Andruschak, "Cenovus Broadens Stampede Support," *Calgary Herald*, 27 June 2017, accessed 2 June 2018, www.calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com/newsroom/focus-on-leadership-convention-centre-focuses-on-growth-3/.

[128] Treaty 7 was signed on 22 September 1877 between representatives of Queen Victoria and the chiefs of the five First Nations at Blackfoot Crossing in what is today southern Alberta. Treaty 7 is one of 11 numbered treaties between First Nations and the Crown signed between 1871 and 1921. In this agreement, the Blackfoot surrendered 50,000 square miles of hunting grounds extending from the Cypress Hills west to the Rocky Mountains, and from the International Border north to the boundary of Treaty Six, to the Canadian government

during the duration of the festival and take turns opening their teepee to the public for viewings of family artifacts and answering questions about Indigenous culture. Since 2016, Indian Village has been situated in ENMAX Park, a 16-acre green space along the Elbow River, separated by water from the rest of the Stampede spectacle. ENMAX Park is owned by ENMAX Corporation and connects to the 650-metre-long Cenovus Legacy Trail (owned by Cenovus Energy Ltd.) that weaves along the Elbow River and narrates the story of the area's western heritage through interpretive signage. The Cenovus Trail connects to the Trans Canada Trail, a national trail designed to connect Canadians across thirteen provinces and territories, and accepts funding from TransCanada Corporation, owner of the controversial Keystone XL pipeline. In promotional material online and handed out at the 2017 and 2018 Stampedes, Indian Village is marketed as being "presented by Obsidian Energy," formerly Penn West Petroleum Ltd., a mid-sized Canadian oil and natural gas production company based in Calgary.[129] That no fewer than four major energy corporations that profit from resource extraction in Indigenous territories have name rights to Indian Village and the paths that traverse through it is deeply disturbing in a political landscape in which pipelines are being pushed through unceded lands without consent. This was most recently demonstrated in January 2019 when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police entered a fortified checkpoint built by members of the Unist'ot'en clan of the Wet'suwet'en Nation that was meant to control access to their traditional territories, and arrested 14 people who refused to comply with a recent court order to dismantle the checkpoint, which would effectively clear a route for the Coastal Gaslink natural gas pipeline project (owned by TransCanada Corporation).[130]

Each time I visited Indian Village in the past three years, I have found the green space refreshingly less crowded and quieter than the carnival on the other side of the bridge. Indigenous and non-Indigenous people rest on picnic benches shaded by red umbrellas with ENMAX branded on them. Children of all ethnicities play in the grass between the 26 teepees, 30 to 40 feet tall and magnificently assembled in a large circle. Each teepee displays a unique and colorful design that came to its original owner in a spirit dream. Inside are extraordinary displays: tanned hides, boned tunics and vests, and leather jackets adorned in exquisite beading; moccasins, gloves, belts, and knives; drums and arrows, pipes and Hudson Bay blankets; buffalo horns and headdresses. These precious artifacts are typically placed on buffalo hides that rim the circumference of the teepee. In the center of some teepees I have seen local plants and fruits—choke cherries, rhubarb, saskatoon berries, apples, sage and sweet grass—neatly displayed in bowls and baskets. I have also met teepee owners, and their friends and family members who are beading or preparing meats as visitors peruse the displays and take photos.

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in exchange for reserves that were set up based on an allocation of one square mile for every five people in a tribe, as well as annuity payments and provisions. Hugh A. Dempsey, *The Great Blackfoot Treaties* (Vancouver: Heritage House, 2015), 115-17.

[129] The company rebranded in 2017 after a multiyear accounting fraud in which nearly 300 million Canadian dollars were misclassified to reduce reported operating costs and make oil extractive activities appear more profitable and efficient, and more than half of the company's workforce was terminated. Jonathan Stempel, "Two Ex-Penn West Executives Must Face U.S. SEC Fraud Charges." *Reuters*, 11 June 2018, accessed 11 June 2018, www.reuters.com/article/us-sec-obsidian-energy/two-ex-penn-west-executives-must-face-u-s-sec-fraud-charges-idUSKBN1J721D.

[130] The Royal Canadian Mounted Police action in January 2019 appears to be a violation of Article 10 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states "Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return." United Nations, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: resolution/ adopted by the General Assembly*, 2 October 2007, A/RES/61/295, accessed 27 January 2019, https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

Fig. 7. Elbow River Camp has been a feature of the Calgary Stampede since its inception in 1912, providing visitors an opportunity to learn about the traditions and cultures of the five nations of Treaty 7. Families representing the Kainai, Tsuui'ina, Stoney Nakoda, Siksika, and Piikani First Nations reside in the tipis for the event's duration. Each one has a unique design on the outside and beadwork, traditional clothing, and artifacts displayed inside. This teepee is owned by Eddie and Marilyn Holloway (Stoney Nakoda). Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards.

Teepee owners with whom I have spoken have expressed great pride in carrying on the tradition of setting up teepees at Indian Village, as did their fathers and grandfathers, and showcasing their culture and ways of life.[131] The Stampede played an important role in sustaining cultural practices in an era when the Department of Indian Affairs was determined to obliterate the customs and cultures of First Peoples. In 1912, when the Stampede began, it was one of a few places in Canada where First Nations peoples could assemble, speak their languages, and practice their cultures openly with their children.[132] They rode in the parade in their traditional attire, provided entertainment with their pony races, social dances, and athletic events, and visited friends from other reserves. It also gave First Nations people an opportunity to leave their reserves, which at the time required permission from a government-appointed Indian agent. In an interview, Gerald Sitting Eagle, the nephew of Ben Calf Robe, one of the original teepee owners, described Indian Village as a positive space for Indigenous people to gather and celebrate their culture and ways of life, "As children, we looked forward to it. All year it was residential school, and then you'd go home and come straight up here."[133] Sitting Eagle also indicated that the Stampede remains a time in which traditional knowledge is passed on to younger generations, like how to tan hides, cut meat, and make bannock and utensils.

Indian Village provides a unique educational experience in which history is narrated by Blackfoot interpreters. During a Pow Wow I attended in 2016, the emcee introduced the five tribes of Treaty 7 and described where each tribe is located, taught the audience how to say several Blackfoot words, and described the significance of each dance: the grass dance was used traditionally to help flatten the tall grasses when nations would move to set up a new camp; and the jingle dress dance, for which the bells attached to the girls' dresses were thought to capture medicines, was a prayer to ask the ancestors for help in healing. The traditional dances performed in the Pow Wow, like the traditional storytelling, flag raising and lowering ceremonies, teepee raising demonstrations, and meat-cutting competitions allow First Nations peoples opportunities to share their history and their traditional culture. Noran Calf Robe speaks positively of Indian Village's offerings, "I like the non-native people learning the true ways of our people and our traditions, no more Hollywood Indian stuff. Learn the true stuff from us."[134]

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[131] When one of the Calgary Stampede teepee owners decides to retire, he passes on the teepee to another family member, usually a son, in a teepee ceremony.

[132] Weadick appealed to allies in the federal cabinet to ensure First Nations people would not be discouraged from attending the Stampede. During the six-day event in 1912, an estimated 1800 First Nations people attended, and Tom Three Persons, from the Blood Reserve, won the bucking horse championship. The Department of Indian Affairs was concerned that participation would undermine the policy of assimilation but sought out ways to get around law passed in 1914 that made participation in fairs and parades illegal without the permission of local Indian agents. See Hugh A. Dempsey, "The Indians and the Stampede," in *Icon, Brand, Myth: The Calgary Stampede*, ed. Max Foran (Athabasca: Athabasca University Press, 2008), 47-72.

[133] Gerald Sitting Eagle in Yolande Cole, "First Nations Prepare to Showcase Culture at New Calgary Stampede Site," *Calgary Herald*, 6 July 2016, accessed 6 January 2019, https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/first-nations-prepare-to-showcase-culture-at-new-calgary-stampede-site.

[134] Noran Calf Robe in Carly Weasel Child, "New Indian Village Debuts at 104th Edition of the Stampede," *Aitsiniki*, July 2016, accessed 8 January 2019, http://siksikanation.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/July-2016-Aitsiniki.pdf.

Fig. 8. Visitors are invited to watch in daily Pow Wow competitions in Elbow River Camp (formerly Indian Village). All dance competitors are invited to participate in an intertribal dance featuring dancers from all nations and tribes. Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards.

As multidimensional, and multi-sensorial encounters, the performances of Blackfoot cultural practices in Indian Village have the potential to contest flattened stereotypes of Indigeneity that persist in the media and educate settlers about the cultural practices of local tribes, rehumanizing them which might in turn inspire greater respect for Blackfoot ways of being past and present. The familiar sighting of dancers preparing for the afternoon powwow—making final adjustments to their costumes, receiving assistance braiding their hair, dressing in regalia---productively blur the lines between "backstage" and "frontstage" in a Goffmanesque fashion, troubling stereotypes about primitiveness that provides a conceptual frame through which settlers imagine Native people. But despite these positive aspects of Indian Village, none of the performances of traditional Blackfoot culture I have witnessed in Indian Village appear to foreground sovereignty or consent. In the time I have spent in Indian Village I have never heard conversation about key issues negatively affecting First Nations way of life: the opioid epidemic devastating members of the community; hardships from poverty; intergenerational trauma stemming from residential school experiences; the loss of missing and murdered Indigenous women; nor the disproportionately high rates of incarceration affecting Indigenous people in Canada. These subjects are absent from the representation of Native life in Indian Village. Even though Indigenous people in Canada maintain the longest running political movement in the postcolonial nation, as Audra Simpson points out, these politics are not manifest at the Stampede.[135]

I am concerned, too, about the absence of protocol within a space owned by Obsidian Energy, ENMAX Corporation, Cenovus Energy Ltd., and TransCanada Corporation. Although signs outside the teepees ask visitors to "Please treat the teepees with respect," no protocol is established between teepee owner and tourist; no treaty made between guest and

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[135] Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States (Durham: D*uke University Press, 2014), 19.

host. I am not required to introduce myself, specify where I come from, name my ancestors, or present an offering when I enter a teepee. As the gift of welcome is proffered without clarification of what is expected in return, it fails to signal sovereign control over the rules of the space, the authority under which such rules are enforced, or remind guests they are guests and disrupt a colonial hierarchy. As settlers and visitors are invited to "explore Indian Village," as advertised on a handbill distributed to me on site in 2017, and enter these spaces at their will, they gain access without individually asking for consent. Such invitations, I think, foster more "welcome feelings," and allow "imagined intimacy" between colonizer and colonized, eroding the distinction between conquest and consent through affective bonds.[136] Settlers move "innocently" without giving up power or privilege, or even demonstrating humility, when consent on Indigenous lands is presumed. Crude optimism brews when powerful local oil corporations, who already own the land upon which one is standing, convincingly, if deleteriously demonstrate their commitment to the protection and maintenance of land through urban beautification, and the effects of private management yields community-centered spaces and the showcase of Blackfoot culture.

The display of Blackfoot culture in Indian Village misguidedly suggests settler colonial society backed by extractive industries do not effectively endeavor to "eliminate" natives to expropriate the land, but to create and sustain the conditions under which such communities thrive.[137] Indian Village produces a vision of the world in which "cowboys and Indians" peacefully co-exist, in which neither the genocidal logic of elimination nor the violence of assimilation appears to have occurred. This display results in what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes as a "politically primitive" story:

> if Canada has any colonial baggage, it is also firmly in the past; and that while some unfortunate things might have happened, again in the past, it is time to put that aside and start a new relationship where we are now; that is, with Canada having full and unchallenged jurisdiction over the land within its borders; that is, in this new relationship, we will not be talking about land, and we will certainly not be talking about land restitution.[138]

Such a story does not require settler spectators or visitors to reorient their placement or interrogate their desire to celebrate frontier life on Indigenous land; it perpetuates an illusion in which important Indigenous legal and political issues such as land claims disappear, and it allows settlers to engage with Indigenous people *as* spectators who enjoy looking at Indigenous people and art, rather than as actors participating in the reproduction of colonial politics and relations.[139] Moreover, Indian Village stages a world in which we still live in separate camps. Such a vision of the world runs counter to Dwayne Donald's vision of decolonization in Canada. In his article about the possibilities of decolonial education at Fort Edmonton Park (a former fur trading fort), Donald writes, "I am convinced that

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[136] Idria Imada developed the term "imagined intimacy" in her study of aloha as an imperial repertoire between the United States and Hawa'ii that enabled Americans to cast their relationship as benevolent and affectionate, benign and consensual without disrupting a colonial hierarchy. Idria Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the U.S. Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 11.

[137] In this way, Indian Village aligns with Glen Sean Coulthard's claim that since the 1960s, colonial power has modified its reproduction to work through a set of discourses and practices that emphasize recognition and accommodation of Indigenous difference rather than the use of coercive techniques and policies of elimination. Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

[138] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 42.

[139] On settler subjectivity and spectacles of Indigenous culture in Canada, see Natalie J.K. Baloy, "Our Home(s) and/on Native Land: Spectacular Re-Visions and Refusals at Vancouver's 2010 Winter Olympic Games," *Streetnotes* 25 (2016).

decolonization in the Canadian context can only occur when Aboriginal peoples and Canadians face each other across historic divides, deconstruct their shared past, and engage critically with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together."[140] Although unmediated encounters between Blackfoot people, settlers, visitors, and arrivants in Indian Village have the potential to challenge racist ideas, juxtapose mythic perspectives with historical information about the colonial history of the land, and maybe even foster a renewed openness to the possibility of broader and deeper understandings that can traverse perceived cultural divides, it does so at the expense of present land-based struggles which ultimately enable settler colonialism and petro-imperialism to continue.

The Stampede's Main Events

Although Indian Village is an important part of the Stampede's past and present, the rodeo and the chuckwagon races are the central features of the Stampede, and the performances that transmit frontier fantasies to the broadest audience. In the rodeo and chuckwagon races, cowboys and cowgirls act out the taming of the West, fostering a tone of adventure and excitement about the frontier that obscures its brutal realities. The Stampede's main events help to sustain a crudely optimistic worldview by normalizing risk as a basic factor of frontier life and by cultivating a thirst for speed.

The Stampede rodeo is highly theatrical. All of a sudden, an empty outdoor arena explodes with movement and color as the livestock brand of the Calgary Stampede, ignites into flames out of the arena dirt. As fireworks burst in the infield, sixteen young women, carrying the flags of the sponsors of the Stampede, gallop around the paneled arena, and a booming announcer's voice welcomes all to the "Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth!" Next, the Stampede Queen and Princesses gallop the periphery of the arena on their palomino and black horses, regally waving to the crowd, following them are three young men from Siksika Nation, who let out war cries as they speed past surprised and delighted spectators on their painted ponies. A loud rock guitar musical cue signals to the crowd that the next group deserves respect and admiration, and we cheer even more loudly to welcome the rodeo competitors, described by the announcer as the "greatest horsemen and women in all of the world today," as they rush to the center of the arena on foot. From the height of the grandstand, four cowboys in western hats, chaps, and spurs drop down guide wires to the center of the arena where they remove their western hats to sing the Canadian and American national anthems.

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[140] Dwayne Trevor Donald, "Forts, Curriculum, and Indigenous Métissage: Imagining Decolonization of Aboriginal-Canadian Relations in Educational Contexts," *First Nations Perspectives* 2, no. 1 (2009): 5.

Fig. 9. Leading rodeo competitors are flown in from the top of the grandstand to the arena at the start of every afternoon's rodeo. Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards

Amidst the chaos of the scene, the cowboy arrives, like a deus ex machina, pays his respects, and gets to work. The Stampede rodeo is comprised of the conventional list of rodeo events: bareback bronc riding, tie-down roping, saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, ladies' barrel racing, and bull riding. In the stock events (bareback riding, saddle bronc riding, and bull riding), animals are individually moved from holding pens behind the arena and loaded into bucking chutes, equipped with rigging by stockmen, and mounted by the cowboy who has drawn their name. In the bareback event, a cowboy attempts to stay mounted atop an unsaddled bucking bronc for eight seconds. Once the stockmen have strapped the bareback rig around the ribcage of the bronc and positioned the flank strap, the bareback rider slides over the chute onto the bronc, and secures his rosined gloved hand in the leather handle (called a "bareback rigging") cinched around the bronc's withers. When the cowboy feels secure, he nods for his team to jerk tight the flank strap and open the gate, and the bronc, angered by the bucking strap around his flank, wheels out of the chute, slams his front legs into the ground, and kicks as high and as hard as he is able. The cowboy triumphantly holds his other arm into the air, counteracting the shock of being whipped back and forth. He rolls the spurs of his boots from the shoulders of the bronc back towards its flanks in rhythm with the bucks, often almost appearing to lie with his back flat against the back of the animal. Finally, the eight second horn blows, and the cowboy either jumps off, or is "picked up" by one of two mounted horsemen in the arena, who assist the competitors at this stage, and clear the arena. The event is similar to saddle bronc riding, a classic rodeo event that is a descendent of bronc-busting on ranches, where cowboys use a saddle and balance with a "buck rein," a halter rope in one hand attached to a halter on the bronc's head. Both events dramatize the spectacle of a man attempting to physically dominate an animal eight to ten times his weight.

Tie-down roping, steer wrestling, and barrel racing are timed-events that feature horses at advanced stages of training. In these events, the success of the cowboy or cowgirl depends upon the horse's "brokenness" and performance. Tie-down roping replicates the experience of catching and restraining calves on an open range for branding or medical treatment. At the south end of the Stampede arena, a cowboy backs his horse into a three-sided box, and swings his lariat to adjust the size of the loop. When he nods, a calf is pushed out of a chute, and the cowboy and his horse burst after the calf at full speed. He swings his rope above his head once, and then throws his loop. The lasso encircles the calf's neck, and the cowboy dallies the rope onto his saddle horn, tying the calf to his horse. His horse slides to a stop and jerks the calf to a standstill. The horse keeps the right amount of pressure on the rope by backing up, neither choking the calf nor letting it loose, as the cowboy leaps off the right side of his horse, runs to the calf, grabs its flank and nose, and throws it to the ground. He ties three of its legs together with a "piggin' string," and waves his hands up in the air, signaling to stop the clock which is timing the event. Each horse and rider partner know exactly what the other is going to do, and they are able to precisely perform their role as they adjust to the calf. The horse continues to control the calf for the cowboy even when it has no rider on its back.

Steer wrestling similarly demonstrates tremendous teamwork between horse and rider. A steer wrestler and a mounted "hazer" pursue a steer out of the chute. The hazer rides alongside the running steer to keep him in line while the wrestler slides off the right side of the saddle, grabs one of the steer's horns and his muzzle, digs his heels in the ground, and pulls the steer down by twisting his neck until the animal gives in and falls to the dirt. Winning competitors can wrestle their steer—weighing up to 700 pounds—in less than five seconds, but they are only able to catch their steer if their horse springs straight out of the box and veers left so that the cowboy's feet can drop to the ground. Ladies' barrel racing also demonstrates the importance of a fast, well-trained horse. As it is the only rodeo event at the Stampede in which women compete, the cowgirls and their charging thoroughbreds tend to solicit great encouragement from the audience. When it is their time to run, they steer their horses around three 45-gallon oil-drum barrels arranged in a cloverleaf pattern at full speed and fly towards "home" in less than seventeen seconds.

The Stampede rodeo culminates in bull riding, in which a cowboy circles a plaited rope around the girth of a 2000 lbs. Brahma bull, mounts and locks his hand in a braided handhold, and attempts to stay on the bull's back for eight seconds as the bull bucks and spins with extraordinary power and agility. Unlike horses, there is no possibility of a bull becoming a willing friend or partner. When a cowboy dismounts or is thrown off, bulls ruthlessly attempt to stomp, injure, or even kill the rider. On televised footage, and on the big area screen, cowboys are shown behind the chutes, jumping up and down and beating their chests to "amp" themselves up and overcoming their fear of pain of injury before strapping themselves to this beast. The force of the first jump of an animal out of the chute has been compared to that of whiplash in an average car accident, and once out of the chute, contestants suffer from strained ligaments, pulled muscles, bone chips, and shoulder separations, to say nothing of what happens when they are on the ground with an angry bull.[141] Rodeo announcers often comment on cowboys' injuries when they visibly limp "off stage," and disappear behind the chutes, drawing attention to the cowboy's perseverance and toughness even when he is "busted up," and normalizing the harm of competing with nature in these contests.

[141] Kristine Fredriksson, *American Rodeo: From Buffalo Bill to Big Business* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1985), 121.

Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence argues the bull's reproductive capacity and strength render him a source of admiration for those who exalt masculinity. Rather than vanquishing the bull's male force, the bull rider tries to equal it and oppose it with his own. This is highlighted by the high degree of autonomy given to the bull. Bull riders utilize very little rigging equipment or restraining gear—nothing touches the bull's head or is placed between the rider and the animal's back.[142] It is contest between man and beast. The scoring system is quantitative and qualitative: the rider must remain mounted for eight seconds, and then he may receive up to 50 points for his riding and up to 50 points on the quality of the animal's performance. In other words, the cowboy who proves his supremacy by riding the fiercest animal is rewarded. As Atwood points out, this dynamic resonates with Richard Slotkin's reading of the American myth of the frontier as a story in which the conqueror absorbs the energy of the conquered: the cowboy gains power by taming nature; the more violent the struggle, the greater the invigoration.[143] The privileging of violent struggle and extractive relationships is alarming, but perhaps not surprisingly, in the contemporary Albertan context where "corporate cowboys" in downtown skyscrapers who quickly manage to make nature work for them, are similarly rewarded with immense cash prizes.

Fig. 10. Having been stepped on by a bull, a cowboy is taken out of the arena on stretcher. Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards.

[142] Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, *Rodeo: An Anthropologist Looks at the Wild and the Tame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 189.

[143] Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 160.

The theme of invigoration and vitality from the struggles of the frontier is crudely optimistic. The fact that each bronc, calf, steer, and bull trots, or lopes his or her way out of the arena, freed of the cowboy's saddle, rigging, rope, and flank strap, is also meaningful, suggesting there is another performance occurring, a performance of restraint. The crowd particularly enjoys when a bull refuses to exit the arena after he had thrown a cowboy in the dirt and opts instead to lower his head and paw up dirt, signaling he is ready to fight. His aggressive demeanor affirms he has not been tamed or refined; he remained a wild and formidable threat to the cowboy. In an atmosphere of crude optimism, this feature of the rodeo performance indicates not only that there remains work for the cowboy to do another day, but that the rodeo cowboy respects the limits of nature, always stopping short of doing irreparable damage to the animal. Through the anthropocentric performance of rodeo, the cowboy demonstrates he is not only physically superior, able to outthink, outmaneuver, and "conquer" the animal in a one-on-one contest, he is morally superior. If the rodeo cowboy becomes too aggressive and engages in unnecessary roughness in his treatment of animals, he is penalized, jeopardizing his own chances of success. So as much as the Stampede rodeo dramatizes the cowboy's exciting life on the frontier, and the risk one must be willing to undertake to reap its riches, the performance of restraint suggests that the "regeneration" of fortune, spirit, and power *through violence* has ecological limits, and provides assurance that crude optimism is not simply arrogance, however fallacious that may be.[144]

The chuckwagon race, which is part of the evening entertainment, differently dramatizes the riskiness of the race across the frontier towards financial gain. Each night at the Stampede, thirty-six chuckwagons race over nine heats, vying for almost $90,000 each day and a chance to win $100,000, the championship title, and a bronze championship trophy (sponsored by ATCO, a major Alberta energy provider) on "Showdown Sunday." In each heat, four outfits— each consisting of four horses hitched to a 1,300-pound wagon with a canvas canopy called a chuckwagon— race to be the fastest team around the race track without penalty. The drivers (all of whom are men), sit on a hard bench with a tight spring for bounce, and guide their teams of sleek thoroughbreds to the right side of their starting barrel and try to hold their horses, amped with fear and excitement, still until the horn to signal the start of the race sounds. At the Stampede, each outfit is accompanied by two outriders who begin the race unmounted. One outrider holds the reins of the front horses on his team, trying to still the fussing horses and avoid a false start. The second outrider, positioned at the back of the team, prepares to throw a (now plastic) stove into his wagon. When the Klaxon blows, all the teams take off in a flurry of legs and canvas, harness and dust, and cut a figure 8 pattern around their respective two barrels before taking a lane on the racetrack in a counter-clockwise direction. The outriders, having completed their on ground tasks, leap onto the backs of their horses, and race behind their teams, striving to finish within 150 feet of their wagon to avoid penalty.

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[144] Slotkin argues that in each stage of the development of the myth of the frontier, from its use to explain and justify the establishment of the American colonies, to accounts of the rapid economic growth of the U.S. and emergence as a powerful nation-state, the achievement of "progress" played through a scenario with three phases: separation from the originating "metropolis" so that the values of civility can be purged, temporary regression to a more primitive or "natural state," and finally, "regeneration through violence." Slotkin, 1992: 10-12.

Fig. 11. Chuckwagon racing at the Calgary Stampede. Photo by Kimberly Skye Richards.

With four wagons, twenty-four horses, and twelve men, milling between eight carefully staggered white barrels, chuckwagon racing is an incredible spectacle for those who revere natural power and fast money. Watching the chuckwagon race, whether from the grandstand or standing on the tarmac, is an exhilarating experience. When the horn blasts, and the horses charge, the feeling in the crowd is electric. We cheer loudly for our favorite team to maneuver around the symbolic obstacles of the frontier and surge past its competitors. The Calgary Stampede is the pre-eminent chuckwagon racing competition. It began in 1923 when the Stampede joined with the exhibition. Weadick was determined to provide the crowd with thrilling events, so he put out a challenge to surrounding ranches to bring their horses to the Stampede and participate in the first-ever chuckwagon race. Since then, the risk of racing wagons, like those used in Western Canada from the 1860s-1900s as mobile kitchens and rest stations for cowboys working on cattle drives, has become one of the features of the Stampede.[145]

Despite efforts to design lighter rigs and increase safety efforts, the event remains extremely dangerous. During the ten days of races in 2018, a wagon flipped in the air as it hit a barrel and the driver spilled onto the ground, narrowly managing to roll out of the way of the galloping hooves and heavy wagon wheels. In another race, a driver tipped out of his

[145] Aritha van Herk, “The Half a Mile of Heaven’s Gate,” in *Icon, Brand, Myth: The Calgary Stampede*, ed. Max Foran (Athabasca: Athabasca University Press, 2008), 240.

wagon and was run over by his rig, incurring a broken scapula and T-5 vertebrae chip. Spectacular accidents also occurred when horses tripped over each other or suffered heart attacks or running injuries. In these cases, a crew runs to the scene of the accident and erects a dark tarp to prevent the audience from directly gazing upon the distressed animal thrashing on the ground before it is removed from the field. Since 1986, 74 horses have had to be euthanized after being injured in the chuckwagon races.[146]

Perceived cruelty to animals has been an issue since the Stampede's inception. Recently, animal rights activists have taken to holding candlelight vigils for those animal victims which have lost their lives for entertainment and sport. These protesters use the slogan, "Death…it's a Stampede thing," and erect cardboard tombstones for chuckwagon horses and calves. Sage Pullen McIntosh, of the Calgary Humane Society, says the group "opposes the use of animals for any form of entertainment in which they are placed at risk of suffering due to undue stress, pain, injury, or death."[147] These complaints are essentially complaints against extractivist thinking (the reduction of life into a resource). However, when McIntosh says that the best way to ensure animal welfare is to work with the Stampede rather than protest it (e.g. through random monitoring of the Stampede grounds to ensure Alberta's Animal Protection Act is being respected), she undermines this stance because horse racing, in any form, is a risky endeavor with the potential to result in animal injury or death. The Vancouver Humane Society takes a firmer approach and petitioned CBC Sports to stop televised covering "spectacles of animal abuse" at the Calgary Stampede, citing both the chuckwagon races and tie-down roping. Peter Fricker, the society's communications director argued, "As Canada's national broadcaster, the CBC should not be portraying an activity that is cruel to animals as a sport. It's very clear that the animals used at the Calgary Stampede rodeo are subject to fear, pain and stress." If CBC were to end its coverage, it would be a major signal to the Stampede and to the Canadian public that this is no longer an acceptable form of entertainment, but Trevor Pilling, head of programming for CBC Sports, maintains that the Stampede's organizers are committed to the highest standards of animal care. Participants tend to assert that complaints of animal abuse are examples of ignorance or misguided sentimentalism. When chuckwagon drivers are interviewed about their horses, they often describe them as "part of the family." For example, when driver BJ Carey had to put down a horse due to a racing injury incurred at the Stampede, he teared up on local media as he commented, "It's a tragedy …. We look after these animals like they're our children."[148] They take pride in giving their horses—who are often unsuccessful racehorses—a lease on life when they may have been canned for dog food if they had not been brought into chuckwagon racing.

Although injuries attained during chuckwagon racing are understood as accidents, they are a predictable plot point, and many actors have clear roles and scripts prepared for when such an event occurs. If chuckwagon racing generates a frenzy of excitement around speed and frontier races for capital accumulation, what social messaging occurs when an accident happens? In his study of violence and the sacred, René Girard argues that rituals of sacrifice are useful because they can "trick violence into spending itself on victims whose deaths will provoke no reprisals."[149] Richard Schechner similarly claims the enactment of

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[146] Vancouver Humane Society, "Animal Deaths at the Calgary Stampede Rodeo and Chuckwagon Races," July 15 2018, accessed 28 January 2019. http://www.vancouverhumanesociety.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Deaths-at-the-Calgary-Stampede-1986-to-July-2018.pdf

[147] Quoted in Robson Fletcher, "Calgary Stampede Touts New Chuckwagon Safety Measures After 4 Horses Died in 2015," *CBC,* 7 July 2016, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/calgary-stampede-chuckwagon-rodeo-safety-2016-1.3668708.

[148] Ibid.

[149] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred,* trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 36.

ritual death—whether the victim is actually or theatrically killed—wards off a more terrifying violence by accentuating distinctions between the victim (here a horse) and the rest of the society (humans living under the threat of self-annihilation in fossil-fueled modernity).[150] When an accident occurs during the chuckwagon races at the Stampede, it feels like twenty-five thousand witnesses are collectively holding their breaths. Unlike rituals of sacrifice, no one wants to see a majestic and powerful horse euthanized—within Western culture, horses are individualized as sentient beings, understood to be innocent creatures, willing servants, dependable companions, and gentle partners. But participating in the spectacle and paying the additional fee to attend the chuckwagon races implies consent to the potentiality, legality, and ethicality of this tragedy.

On those occasions when I have been in the crowd when an accident occurred, I have been most impressed by the performance of rapid response. Paramedics and veterinarians rush to the injured parties, catch the unhitched and frightened horses, and attend to the fallen man. The announcer narrates what is happening, and reassures the audience, "We've got the operation under control." He declares, "Everything's going to be alright ... we've got the very best paramedic crew, and excellent veterinary services. When things like this happen, we just let them go ahead and do what they do best," and he directs the audience to take a deep breath, close their eyes, and say a little prayer for the injured parties. His narrative scripts the response to the accident as a performance of regaining dominance over the natural world: of controlling the unexpected, of overcoming the violence of the frontier. It is a performance of getting back to normal. This spectacle, which simultaneously conceals and reveals the social anxiety around the violence of the frontier, has an anaesthetizing effect: it reassures the crowd that when crisis occurs, it will be redressed; it does *not*, however, call into question the structures that enable such violence to occur in the first place. The social sanctioning of chuckwagon racing contributes to the formation of a "habitus" of violence, and the acceptability, even the banality of the violence of frontier races for capital accumulation. Chuckwagon racing manufactures substitute victims through which pity and fear can be purged and settler innocence renewed.

Of course, as an act of surrogacy, the threat of vengeance here is not the wrath of the horse nation, but transformations within the natural world in the forms of global warming and climate change: brutal winters, scorching summers, overwhelming floods that accompany global warming and changing climates. Girard's reflections on violence help to underscore the consequences of performance being used as a tool for the legitimization of human control over the contingent and the natural. He observes, "if unappeased, violence will accumulate until it overflows its confines and floods the surrounding areas."[151]

> Inevitably the moment comes when violence can only be countered by more violence. Whether we fail or succeed in our effort to subdue it, the real victor is always violence itself. The *mimetic* attributes of violence are extraordinary—sometimes direct and positive, at other times indirect and negative. The more men strive to curb their violent impulses, the more these impulses seem to prosper. The very weapons used to combat violence are turned against their users. Violence is like a raging fire that feeds on the very objects intended to smother its flames.[152]

Chuckwagon racing at the Calgary Stampede helps us to understand the complex ways in which cultural industries may be entwined with, or implicated in, the expansion and endurance of fossil capital and petro-imperialism rendering it difficult to transition away from a fossil-fueled society. It illuminates that we can, and indeed must, engage performances of violence as we grapple with the consequences past, present, future of the Capitalocene, and

[150] Schechner, 234.
[151] Girard, 10.
[152] Ibid, 31.

disentangle the legitimizing narratives, structures of feeling, embodied behaviors, and cultural practices that produce Capitalocene anesthetics and allow slow death and slow violence to become ordinary.

The ecological consequences of the release of carbon into the atmosphere and global warming became especially apparent when, in the month leading to the 2013 Stampede, a terrific flood swept through the Bow River basin, and the city of Calgary declared a state of emergency as residents from more than 20 neighborhoods—roughly 110,000 people—were told to abandon their homes and flee for higher ground. Just as the community began to help families and businesses with flood recovery, Bob Thompson, President and Chairman of the Calgary Stampede Board of Governors, confirmed at a press conference that the Stampede would go on, "Come hell or high water," and the city needed to direct resources to prepare the downtown and the grounds for their annual display of western hospitality despite venues standing under two and a half meters of water, no public transportation into downtown, and the infield of the chuckwagon track and rodeo arena completely submerged.[153] The civic labor performed in the wake of the flood became *the* flood story, and producing the Stampede became a resource for overcoming the disaster. The labor expended to ensure that the Stampede would take place draws attention to the importance of performance practices for communities overcoming climatic and other disasters. A promotional video released a few months after the flood emphasizes the communal efforts to "defeat" the flood:

> Cancel Stampede and the flood waters have won. The show goes on and the city's character is proven one more time. As the water receded, a community spirit began to rise. And together we came armed with shovels and tools, mops and machinery. Powered by people, our community reached out arms of steel. Their hydraulics pushed us forward. The sound of reconstruction a battle cry throughout our neighborhoods. Through hell or high water we will overcome.[154]

The frontier narrative of humankind pitted against nature, overcoming nature's destructive force through physical labor, came to script the actions of subjects, and provide a model for resolution. The narrative that the flood waters of 2013 could not wash away the spirit of the city indicates the social significance of the Stampede. While it is positive to see a community come together in a moment of strife, and commit to cultural programming against the odds, it became especially clear that Calgary is stuck in a "bad script" of tough cowboys conquering nature, a harbinger for future action that will likely not bode well.[155]

Calgary's commitment to its annual Wild West festival despite climate crisis is produce a kind of cognitive dissonance Naomi Klein describes as "part of being alive in this jarring moment in history."[156] The cultural and economic entanglement of the petroleum industry and cultural industries demonstrates how petro-imperialism colonizes social life beyond the arena of production proper, and expanding into leisure time, family activities, and civil society in general. Moreover, the Stampede illustrates how petro-imperialism shifts and adapts to meet its insatiable need for land and resources, and how crude optimism settles us into passivity, persisting even when a flood is exacerbated by climate chaos and global warming resulting from the release of carbon dioxide into the air due, in no small part, to the burning of fossil fuels. Our nihilistic attachment to fossil fuel extraction and consumption is

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[153] CBC News, "Calgary Stampede To Go on 'Come Hell or High Water,'" *CBC News*, 24 June 2013, accessed 27 January 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/calgary-stampede-to-go-on-come-hell-or-high-water-1.1338657

[154] Calgary Stampede, "We're Greatest Together," produced by Corkscrew Media, 18 October 2013, YouTube, accessed 23 July 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgw06p4jeh8.

[155] Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's Dirty War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 299.

[156] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007), 3.

"ultradeep," to borrow LeMenager's metaphor for our attachments to oil and the forms of life and culture it makes possible; it will require a significant disruption to release us from that dependency least we be headed towards collapse.[157] Certainly, if Alberta is to transition away from oil, it will require changing everything, not just how the economy functions, but also the stories we tell, and the traditions we enact.

[157] LeMenager, 3.

Chapter 2. Water Protectors and the Performative Politics of #NoDAPL

"I used to tell people when I was young who asked, 'What do you Indians want?' 'The right to be left alone to live.' Now I don't see that as an option. Now we must do our best to live and show the rest of the world how to live." – Ladonna Brave Bull Allard[158]

"The #NoDAPL anti-colonial struggle is profoundly anti-capitalist. It is the frontline. It is the future." —Nick Estes[159]

The celebration of frontier life, and the affective production of crude optimism, is hardly limited to the spectacle of the Calgary Stampede, or the particularities of Alberta's oil and gas industry. One might think of the mantra "Drill Baby, Drill," chanted at political rallies across the United States during the 2008 Vice Presidential campaign of Sarah Palin as the mustering of crudely optimistic excitement about U.S. oil reserves—a feat Palin pledged would bolster national security and economic prosperity. The infectiousness of crude optimism, and the desire to create new extractive zones despite increasing awareness about the violence experienced by frontline communities, the riskiness of transporting oil to market via rail or pipeline, and the atmospheric effects of burning fossil fuels means that we are very much in need a dose of medicine to heal us from our social addiction to oil. Non-Indigenous people in countries such as Canada and the United States increasingly recognize that Indigenous land and treaty rights present some of the most robust tools and powerful barriers to prevent ecological crisis, and they are joining coalitions of what Naomi Klein has called "rights-rich-but-cash-poor people teaming up with (relatively) cash-rich-but-rights-poor people" in environmental struggles.[160] Indigenous models of anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism represent the most resilient alternative moral visions to corporate capitalism, neoliberal markets and ideologies, and settler colonial systems. Nick Estes, an enrolled member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe writes, "Countering settler colonialism's own physical infrastructure—trade routes, railroads, dams, and oil pipelines—is the infrastructure of Indigenous resistance, its ideas and practices of solidarity."[161] This is also why Ladonna Brave Bull Allard, the tribal historian for the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, remarks, "We must do our best to live and show the rest of the world how to live."

The gathering of water protectors and land defenders at the Standing Rock reservation, to halt the development of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) in 2016, provides a powerful example of Indigenous-led activism to prevent the development of the infrastructure of petro-imperialism. DAPL was designed to daily transport up to 570,000 barrels of crude oil from the Bakken shale in western North Dakota (where the development of fracking had released billions of gallons of oil) to southern Illinois for refining—before being shipped to the Gulf Coast where it could be dispatched to valuable consumer markets. The $3.8 billion, 1,172 mile long pipeline was originally routed to cross the Missouri River north of Bismarck, North Dakota (the population of which is 92.4 percent white), but in September 2014, the route was moved south of the North Dakota capital to less than a mile north of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe's reservation so that the danger of water

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[158] LaDonna Brave Bull Allard in Divided Films, "Mni Wiconi: The Stand at Standing Rock," November 14, 2016, YouTube, accessed May 5, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FDuqYld8C8.

[159] Nick Estes, "Fighting for Our Lives: #NoDAPL in Historical Context," *The Red Nation*, December 16, 2016, accessed January 4, 2019, https://therednation.org/2016/09/18/fighting-for-our-lives-nodapl-in-context/

[160] Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2015), 382.

[161] Nick Estes, *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (London: Verso: 2019), 254.

contamination was outsourced to the Native nation.[162] The pipeline would cross beneath Lake Sakakewea, Lake Oahe, and Mni Sose (the Missouri River), the main source of water for the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, as well as 18 million people living downstream. The story of Standing Rock is so timeworn it is banal: it is the story of the violent acquisition of land and dispossession of Native life, the continuation of nineteenth-century wars of extermination, the classic settler colonial scenario in which Native people are seen as impediments to progress and must be eliminated.[163]

The development of pipelines connecting sites of extraction to refineries and export ports is not spectacular in itself; pipelines are developed because access to easy oil is generally understood to be necessary for U.S. (and Canadian) economic stability.[164] But for many, the construction of DAPL through sacred Indigenous territories, and the imminent contamination of waters that comes with pipeline transportation, amounted to an ecological crisis, and demanded an embodied response to halt the development of the pipeline. 10,000-15,000 water protectors and land defenders representing 300 languages and 300 governments, assembled in solidarity with their Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota kin at Oceti Sakowin Camp north of the Hunkpapa Oyate (the Standing Rock Sioux Indian Reservation), disrupting the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and land. Non-Indigenous water protectors from across Turtle Island and the world joined the prayer camps, including celebrities Shailene Woodley, Mark Ruffalo, and Black Eyed Peas' member Taboo, activists Erin Brockovich, Jesse Jackson, and leaders of #BlackLivesMatter and Code Pink. Together they posed a challenge, in corporeal terms, to the legitimacy of the state and its authority to privatize and extract from Indigenous land, and they demonstrated non-extractive ways of life animated by Lakota commitments and centuries-old traditions of resistance to settler colonialism. As Kyle Powys Whyte summarizes: "DAPL is not about the breakdown of consultative relations or disagreement over safety but settler colonial injustice from U.S. disrespect of treaty promises in the 19th century to environmental sustainability and climate change in the 21st century."[165]

In general terms, water protectors and land defenders can be described as those who use their bodies to defend and protect the land and water from ecological damage by standing

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[162] "QuickFacts, Bismarck City, North Dakota," United States Census Bureau, 2015, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/bismarckcitynorthdakota/RHI125217.

[163] I am evoking Patrick Wolfe's argument that settler colonialism relies on the "organizing principle" of elimination to access territory. Settler colonialism "destroys to replace," which is why spatial removal, mass killings, and biocultural assimilation occur. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388. Nick Estes and Jaskiran Dillon have pointed out it is not surprising the main police force, the Morton County sheriff's department, brutalized the water protectors given the police force descends from the Cavalry General George Armstrong Custer, and continues his efforts to clear the plains for development. Custer was stationed at Fort Lincoln (present-day Mandan, North Dakota, the county seat of Morton County) to ensure the construction of a transcontinental railroad through Oceti Sakowin territory. He ordered the hanging of thirty-eight Dakota men as punishment for the 1862 Dakota Uprising, which remains the largest mass execution in U.S. history. From the Fort, Custer led several expeditions into He Sapa, the Black Hills, in search of gold. His last sortie to the Little Bighorn Mountains in 1876 aimed to wipe out a Native camp numbering in the thousands. On June 25, 1876, Custer's Cavalry met its demise at the hands of a Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Oceti Sakowin confederacy at the Battle of Greasy Grass. Jaskiran Dillon and Nick Estes, "Introduction: Standing Rock, #NoDAPL, and Mni Wiconi," *Cultural Anthropology*, December 22, 2016, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1007-introduction-standing-rock-nodapl-and-mni-wiconi

[164] On how the management and manipulation of financial crises is deployed as a means of gaining access to Indigenous lands and resources, see Sandy Grande and Naadli (Todd Ormiston), "Neoliberal Globalization as Settler Colonialism the Re-Mix: Centering Indigenous Resistance and Resurgence," *Beyond Colonialism, Development and Globalization: Social Movements and Critical Perspectives,* eds. Dominique Caquette and Dip Kapoor (London: Zed Books, 2016), especially 254-55.

[165] Kyle Powys Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene," *Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities,* ed. Ursula Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann (London: Routledge, 2017), 158.

in the way of the machinery of development—be it plows or police. I approach water protection—grounded within ecologically-informed political epistemologies understood, articulated, and enacted by Indigenous artists and activists—as an expression of sovereignty, and an anticolonial ethical and political practice best understood through its performative dimensions. I detail how acts of water protection like those enacted at Standing Rock in 2016 are distinct from other forms of protest and public demonstration that work through spectacle to make their political intervention. This distinction is important because the mischaracterization of water protectors as protestors in the mainstream media contributes to the production of a false consciousness in the service of petro-imperialism's colonizing agenda. Moreover, the use of protest to describe Indigenous expressive culture can reinforce the policing of Indigenous bodies.

While the mischaracterization of water protectors in the media have a deleterious effect, the call to "Stand with Standing Rock," and take on the labor of water protection and land defense, challenges settlers and non-Indigenous people to confront their complicity in petro-imperialism and the dispossession of Indigenous inhabitants of the lands, sacred sites, and waters, and disrupt the lines of their affiliation and alliance. Later in the chapter, I re-source the public archive of water protection available on Facebook created by members of the #NoDAPL struggle, and I look to the representations of water protectors and the prayer camps established at Standing Rock by two Indigenous artists and image creators: the photographer Josué Rivas (Mexica/Otomi), who lived at Sacred Stone Camp for seven months, and the artist collective Winter Count who produced a short film, "We Are in Crisis," as a response to their time spent at Standing Rock, and as a tribute to the water protectors. I argue that these representations of the #NoDAPL movement disrupt the narrative of Indigenous political action as irrational terrorism, foster the development of a petro-political consciousness, and establish water protection as an issue of common concern, crafting the contours of the political field itself by extrapolating subjects from previous forms of attachment. All the while, they highlight the importance of Indigenous resurgence premised on grounded normativity for insuring the continuation of Indigenous peoples and challenging the crudely optimistic settler colonial present.

PROTECTORS NOT PROTESTORS AND THE IRRESISTIBLE IMAGES OF #NoDAPL

In performance scholarship, public demonstrations are typically understood to work politically in one or more of the following ways: by collectively expressing dissent on a specific issue in order to influence the state, other elites, and the larger public, or to embarrass the state and put mass opposition to state policy on the public record; by expressing the strength of the movement, both for internal confidence-building and a general warning for opponents; by recruiting new members to grow the movement; by defining the collective identity for the group, subculture, or movement and build cohesion; or by convening the movement for targeted direct action.[166] Even when demonstrations are enacted by precarious populations, the political intervention relies not only on the assembly of bodies and their choreographies, but by the creation of images of the event that can be disseminated through news channels and social media networks to vast audiences, and serve as evidence of public consensus on a controversial issue.[167] This amounts to the centering of spectacle within performance studies scholarship on protest.

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[166] Larry M. Bogad, *Tactical Performance: The Theory and Practice of Serious Play* (London: Routledge, 2016), 89.

[167] My use of the term "precarious" is informed by Judith Butler's work on precarious life in which precariousness "designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing

Larry M. Bogad's study of tactical performance, which he describes as "the use of performance techniques, tactics, and aesthetics in social-movement campaigns," is exemplary of this trend.[168] According to Bogad, social movements increasingly rely on satire, irony, and spectacular absurdity to attract press coverage and create "irresistible images."

> With cable news' constant hunger for compelling content, and the internet's connectivity, social movements now have broader access to global audiences. However, that audience is increasingly fragmented and overwhelmed by a flood of images and an intensification of the society of spectacle. In this context, social movements must work diligently and intelligently to create irresistible images that will grip the imaginations of the population, to achieve direct or indirect impact on policy and possibility.[169]

Bogad describes "irresistible images" as images so compelling, beautiful, troubling, strange, or surprising that even one's ideological opponents are compelled to reproduce them.[170] He argues such images can intervene in social movement struggles by disrupting, if even temporarily, the "hegemonologue" of common neoliberal ideology articulated in cable news stations and newspapers that tend to depict protestors as violent, dangerous, or hostile, and tend to favor the criminalization of dissent to predatory and unrestricted global capitalism.[171] Creative actions, spectacular pranks, and guerrilla theatre that produce irresistible images can help activists win "the battle of the story" (and communicate the intention of the resistance) rather than "the story of the battle" (which occurs when actions escalate, windows break, police intervene, and protestors are beaten) which tends to circulate an unsympathetic view of the social movement.[172]

Although water protectors organizing against DAPL used social media and news outlets to spread awareness about the issue, change some minds, and recruit support, what was happening *visually* with the bodies was not the point. Certainly, water protectors use their bodies to "speak," politically, through coordinated actions (in the Butlerian sense, performativity is not only speech, but the demands of bodily action, gesture, movement, congregation, persistence, and exposure to possible violence excluded from conventional definitions of the political).[173] But what is most important about acts of water protection is that they are embodied practices based in "grounded normativity"—ethical frameworks rooted in and (re)generated by "place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge."[174] "Grounded normativity" is the term used by radical resurgence scholars Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) to describe intimate, spiritual, emotional, and physical relationships to land as the base of Indigenous political and economic systems, and the determinant of procedure and practices of living.[175] Grounded normativity generates Indigenous intelligence systems and

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social and economic networks of support more than others, and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death." Precariousness is differentially distributed and it "characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence, to street or domestic violence, or other forms not enacted by states but for which the juridical instruments of states fail to provide sufficient protection or redress." Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 33-34.

[168] Bogad, 1-2.

[169] Ibid, 18.

[170] Ibid, 133.

[171] Ibid, 33.

[172] Ibid, 29.

[173] Butler, 75.

[174] Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 13.

[175] Coulthard; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

conceptualization of nationhood and governmentality. Since colonialism is essentially the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their grounded normativities, grounded normativity is essentially what the struggles against colonial occupation, displacement, disconnection, and ecological crisis are about. This is why Ladonna Brave Bull Allard equates digging through sacred sites with genocide:

> These sites must be protected, or our world will end, it is that simple. Our young people have a right to know who they are. They have a right to language, to culture, to tradition. The way they learn these things is through connection to our lands and our history.[176]

Spectacle is antithetical to the networked relationships rooted in grounded normativity that are premised on reciprocity and renewal. As Sandy Grande (Quechua) writes,

> Spectacle is contingent upon the radical reification of self, an overvaluing of the present, and rupturing of relationality, it becomes the perfect theater for producing anchorless (neoliberal) subjects whose every desire is increasingly structured by capital. As it forecloses relationality by normalizing disconnection, it effects an erasure of Indigenous peoples who continue to define themselves through relationship—to land, to history, to ancestors, to all our relations.[177]

When water protectors engage their full presence—their bodies, hearts, minds, and spirits—to prevent colonialism from further strangulating grounded normativity, they are refusing to sever relations with their other-than-human relatives, and they are reinvigorating Indigenous intelligence systems and preserving the possibilities for resurgence and Indigenous politics to occur. Radical resurgence, premised on grounded normativity, is constructive as well as resistant. For Simpson, it is "the primary mechanism for our decolonial presence," "the primary political intervention of our times," and "the mechanism our Ancestors engaged in to continuously rebirth the world."[178] Neither it, nor Indigenous sovereignty, need be spectacular to be forceful.

In a widely circulated article in *The Guardian*, Iyuskin American Horse wrote, "We are not protestors. We are protectors. We are peacefully defending our land and our ways of life."[179] He was making three performative utterances meant to be understood as statements of truth, and he was rejecting the authority of the colonizer to set the terms of engagement. Nevertheless, mainstream media reporters continued to characterize the events transpiring as protests in headlines like "Standing Rock Protestors Face Down the Government"; "Tension Between Police and Standing Rock Protestors Reaches Boiling Point"; and "Dakota Pipeline Protestors Plan Last Stand."[180] The naming of those bodies assembled at Cannonball River as "protestors," is an issue of political recognition and self-determination. Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson defines political recognition in its simplest terms as "to be seen by another *as one wants to be seen.*"[181] She adds, this regard is not merely for the "sanctity of the self; it is to appear politically in formal and official forms, to have rights that protect you from harm,

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[176] LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, "Why the Founder of Standing Rock Sioux Camp Can't Forget the Whitestone Massacre," *Yes! Magazine*, September 3, 2016.
[177] Sandy Grande, "Refusing the Settler Society of the Spectacle," in *Handbook of Indigenous Education,* edited by E.A. McKinley and L.T. Smith (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2018), 3-4.
[178] Leanne Simpson, 21.
[179] Iyuskin American Horse, "'We Are Protectors, Not Protestors': Why I'm Fighting the North Dakota Pipeline," *The Guardian,* August 18, 2016, accessed December 15, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/aug/18/north-dakota-pipeline-activists-bakken-oil-fields
[180] Just as troubling is the use of this language in Bikem Ekberzade's *Standing Rock: Creed, Oil and the Lakota's Struggle for Justice* (2018), one of the first books addressing the #NoDAPL movement.
[181] Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 23.

that provide you access to resources, or that protect certain resources."[182] When the mainstream media fits the assembly of water protectors into a template of protest that's culturally legible to their mainstream, non-Indigenous readers, they fail to engage the event in a culturally sensitive way even if they are sympathetic to the goals of preventing DAPL, or are at least the ecological consequences of its development.

When Indigenous epistemologies premised on principles of reciprocity and respectful coexistence are embodied, they expose the illegitimacy of dispossession and the colonial logics of petro-imperialism. This is why water protectors were mischaracterized as "protestors" in the mainstream media: popular negative associations with protest became a means through which to control the public perception of the camps and maintain the construction of Indigenousness as different and oppositional to the interests of the American public. Even when protest is understood as a "colonized term for standing up for what's right," as one water protector describes it, water protection is more importantly about (re-)establishing a network of sustaining relationships and enacting a responsibility based on ethical relationality.[183]

The misrecognition of water protection as protestors is linked to the settler society of spectacle which projects the liberal settler state as the epitome of progress. In her study on the role of spectacle in the solidification of the settler state, Sandy Grande (Quechua) examines the coverage of Indigenous peoples at Standing Rock, and in the prayer camps, to assess contemporary depictions of Native people in the mainstream media. Drawing on reports by the Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), a U.S.-based media watchdog group, challenging corporate media bias, spin, and misinformation, Grande points out the water protectors at Standing Rock were only rendered visible *through* spectacle:

> As of September 2016, of the three major broadcast new networks, only CBS had filed a story on Standing Rock. Moreover, the story aired at 4 a.m. and was actually a re-reporting of a 48-word NPR story. FAIR also noted that while NPR's original version featured Amy Goodman's footage of an unprovoked attack on the protectors, CBS chose to exclude it. That is, until and outside of the widely-circulated images of armored vehicles, riot police, water cannons, war bonnets, teepees and painted ponies, the Lakota peoples hardly existed, virtually erased from public consciousness.[184]

Where mainstream media failed (including an initial media blackout), independent media like Unicorn Riot, Anti-Media, and AJ+ relentlessly covered the events, but Grande also assessing the relentless livestream coverage of the spectacular attacks created confusion about the level of the violence at the camps. Grande makes the astute observation covering the period from the beginning of the encampment in April 2016 to the moment the Army Corps of Engineers announced the (temporary) denial of the easement, mainstream media essentially covered three (spectacular) events: (1) the police use of water cannons on protectors in subfreezing temperatures (November 20, 2016); (2) the arrival of thousands of U.S. military veterans in support of the water protectors (December 2, 2016); and (3) the "victory" celebrations following the Army Corps of Engineers announcement (December 4, 2016).[185]

News programs across the world carried scenes of the "pipeline showdown" at Standing Rock on the night of November 20, 2016 during which seventeen water protectors standing against the development of the Dakota Access Pipeline were hospitalized, and scores more were injured. In such footage, the warriors are yelling. Awakened, enraged in the thick of the night, they stand in formation between razed wire fences, cloaked in black

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[182] Ibid, 23.
[183] "We Are Land Protectors, Not Protesters," *BuzzFeed Video,* September 9, 2016, accessed January 4, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSE4cH95qlc
[184] Grande, 3.
[185] Ibid, 10.

jackets, wrapped in plastic bags. Some wear goggles or face masks to shield their eyes and faces from tear gas or pepper spray. Some hold up cell phone cameras to document the grave scene unfolding. Panicked and outraged, water protectors report the blobby masses of the police standing across the fence, "just fired at us! They're firing at us!" The drum beats the earth's heartbeat, "BOOMBOOMBOOM" and punctuates the chant, "water is life, water is life." The uneasy tension of adrenaline and fatigue is detectable in their voices. The chant persists, the words propel the bodies that convey them. Water protectors hold their ground, awaiting blasts of water from fire hoses to be weaponized against them. Someone lifts a girl onto his shoulders. She makes the peace sign with her right hand as she awaits the police drenching her in freezing water. A body recoils as it is hit at close range. Floodlights and flashlights illuminate tear gas hanging in the air. Some of the crowd scatter, disoriented, choking, throwing up, struggling to breathe as the pepper spray chokes their throats and lungs. Some fall in the tall grasses, some are hit with rubber bullets. "They just shot him?! For speaking!" Medics try to provide relief to those injured in the grass as the nearby sound "Pop! Pop! Pop!" confirms they are being targeted with tear gas and pepper spray. Small fires spark. An elder pronounces, "You're hurting my people," and a water protector gasps, "I can't breathe."

Some reach the physical limits of their resilience. Some raise their fists in the gestural sign of solidarity of the 1960s power movements; some yell, enraged, "You have shields, we have the lids of plastic bins! We have nothing!" They scatter in the tall grasses separating one from another. Another line assembles further back to watch the violent spectacle unfold. A speaker tries to amplify his voice through the disembodied projection of a megaphone, "You are destroying the planet. … Go home." "We'll never be defeated!" another cries. The face of a woman is singled out by the cameras, her cheeks and nose flushed from chemical exposure or the freezing temperature, her eyes the eyes of a person who has witnessed too much violence. Frozen tears from being pepper sprayed in close range cling on her face. "It takes you a long time to recovery," she states. "Everyone is just trying to help each other out and survive because we're not going anywhere. We're still fighting. We're still here. We're cold, we're shaking, we're wet, we're in pain, but we're still here."[186]

This image is irresistible to the media—the filming of the police actions exposes state-sponsored violence as well as the fight over freedom of assembly. In contrast to this spectacular news story, Sandy Grande observes "the non-spectacular reality was that the overwhelming majority of the time at the Oceti Sakowin encampment was spent in prayer, cooking, training, eating, laughing, building, teaching, working, washing, cleaning, singing, listening, reading, and tending."[187] The relative absence of representations of these practices, and the naming of water protectors as protestors is neither unrelated nor coincidental; both are used in service of quelling resistance, justifying conquest, and reaffirming racist ideas of "angry Indians" and (eco)terrorists to increase the antagonism between Native people and those whose goal is elimination.[188] For example, at a North Dakota news conference on September 3, 2016, following the bulldozing of a section of the pipeline route the Standing

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[186] Sara Lafleur-Vetter and Jonathan Klett, "Police Blast Standing Rock Protesters with Water Cannon and Rubber Bullets-Video," *The Guardian*, November 21, 2016, accessed December 12, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2016/nov/21/dakota-access-pipeline-standing-rock-water-cannon-video

[187] Grande, 4.

[188] Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson addresses the marginalization of Indigenous anger and explains that when anger is described as just upset or just angry, Indigenous peoples are once again bracketed off as "just" and "unjustified," and their negative affect is mischaracterized as a racialized attachment to "mere bitterness" or resentment. Dylan Robinson, "Enchantment's Irreconcilable Connection: Listening to Anger, Being Idle No More." *Performance Studies in Canada*, eds. Laura Levin and Marlis Schweitzer (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 216.

Rock Sioux tribe had identified as sacred ground containing graves, sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier of Morton County, who led the law enforcement response, said, "Any suggestion that today's event was a peaceful protest is false." He claimed he had received reports of weapons and gunshots around the demonstration, and that demonstrators were getting ready to throw pipe bombs at the line of officers standing at the construction site. Reports of pipe bombs was a misinterpretation of the calls of demonstrators to get out their wooden *chanupa* pipes and pass them through the crowd.[189] This confusion lead Kirchmeier to declare "the aggression and violence displayed here today is unlawful and should not be repeated," which prompted North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple to declare a state of emergency, deploy the National Guard, and invoke powers under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) that are normally used only during natural disasters.[190] Eventually, the camp was encircled by law enforcement, surrounded by hundreds of miles of wire and road blocks, and subject to 24-hour aerial surveillance, displaying how the political economy in which petro-imperialism is a part is *not* the modern state trying to expel violence from the social order, but is produced hand-in-hand with militarism, empire, and corporate capitalism.[191]

Of central concern is how water protectors and land defenders were made to appear as a threat, and the police and private security were made to look like they were defending the interests of the American people, their property, and by extension the investments into their future prosperity. To produce this image, the Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) hired a private security contractor to assist law enforcement to infiltrate the camps and plant false reports on social media, comparing water protectors to jihadist insurgents, and claiming the movement was an "ideologically driven insurgency with a strong religious component." And efforts to portray the assembly of water protectors as "out-of-state agitators who have an agenda of causing fear, terror, and economic devastation" came to justify the exaggerated use of force.[192] The *Intercept* reports the security personnel frequently referred to water protectors as "terrorists," planned prayer actions as "attacks," and the camps as a "battlefield."[193] On a website about "misconceptions" of DAPL, ETP states the interests of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe "have been overtaken by politically-motivated, anti-fossil fuel protestors who are using this issue as a cover for their often violent and extremist efforts to cause disruption." They claim, "the majority of protestors are not there to protect water, as they claim, but are actually extremists opposed to any and all use of fossil fuels," and state, "They have provoked multiple dangerous and criminal confrontations with law enforcement, and caused significant damage to property, which have led local agencies to ask for extra federal

[189] Ceremonial pipes that have the most sacred element of the Plains religion.
[190] Leann Eckroth, "Protestors Break Through Fence Line At Alternate Construction Site," *Bismarck Tribune*, September 3, 2016, accessed January 5, 2019, https://bismarcktribune.com/news/local/protesters-break-through-fence-line-at-alternate-construction-site/article_31dfd79f-e065-540b-b99b-2fed90fbdd67.html; Jack Healy, "Occupying the Prairie: Tensions Rise as Tribes Move to Block a Pipeline," *The New York Times,* August 23, 2016, accessed January 5, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/24/us/occupying-the-prairie-tensions-rise-as-tribes-move-to-block-a-pipeline.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fus&action=click&contentCollection=us®ion=rank&module=inline&version=highlights&contentPlacement=6&pgtype=sectionfront
[191] The trauma of this militarization is linked to the fact the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation was originally established as a prisoner of war camp to confine and contain the renowned Lakota leader Tatanka Iyotake, Sitting Bull, and his people, the Hunkpapa Oyate, and the fact that in 1890, the police assassinated Sitting Bull for refusing to surrender.
[192] Kyle Kirchmeier quoted in Sam Levin, "Over 120 Arrested at North Dakota Pipeline Protests, Including Journalists," *The Guardian*, October 25, 2016, accessed May 1, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/25/north-dakota-oil-pipeline-protest-arrests-journalists-filmmakers
[193] Quoted in Estes, 251. Estes also points out the tactics and strategies the state developed during the U.S. Indian Wars would inform U.S. counterinsurgency operations abroad, such as the creation of war fronts via the imaginary of the frontier.

help."[194] Although the Geneva Gas Protocol of 1925 prevents chemical weapons to be used in warfare (like the water laced with pepper spray projected from the water cannons), they are permitted for domestic policing where the rules of "civilized war" are suspended.[195]

Given the settler colonial logic of elimination, Indigenous presence is always an intervention. It proves the continual existence of nations and peoples who were supposed to have disappeared (or been erased), and it upends the colonial fantasy of the land as an empty place for development and resource extraction, bringing the legitimacy of the state and state-sanctioned petro-imperialism into question. Simpson emphasizes this point in her discussion of Indigenous survivance and resurgence:

> Our presence is our weapon, and this is visible to me at every protest, every mobilization, every time a Two Spirit person gifts us with dance at our powwows, every time we speak our truths, every time we embody Indigenous life. It is visible to me in the Unist'ot'en camp, in the hearts of Moosehide Tanners against Fascism in Denendeh, in the work of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, in the forty years of mobilization against mercury contamination and deforestation at Grassy Narrows First Nation, in Elsipogtog, Kanehsatà:ke, Listuguj, and of course in the phenomenal mobilization against the Dakota Access pipeline in Standing Rock, North Dakota, by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the Oceti Sakowin (The Great Sioux Nation). It is visible to me when we refuse to replicate transphobia and anti-Blackness in our territories. It is our Ancestors working to ensure we exist as Indigenous peoples, as they have always done.[196]

The kinds of Indigenous presence and constellations of resistance to colonialism that Simpson is describing are not premised on spectacle. Instead, the assembly of water protectors at Standing Rock resonates with the forms of political power that Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou identify as being available to subjugated actors to wrest legitimacy from existing state apparatuses, and to resist the conditions of precarity in our times of neoliberal governmentality and state-sanctioned erasure.[197] Water protectors exercise a right to existence by enacting a "plural form of performativity" like those who assembled in mass numbers during the winter months of in Tahrir Square, in the streets for Women's Marches, in Occupy encampments, Black Lives Matter demonstrations, and Idle No More events. Butler emphasizes that plural forms of performative politics like assemblies serve an especially important function in the contemporary neoliberal contexts in which "there is a war on the idea of interdependency," and subjects are exposed to "ravaging insecurity and the sense of a damaged future" because they demonstrate persistence, affirm shared social threats, and enact plural forms of coexistence that constitute opposing ethical and social

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[194] Energy Transfer Partners, "Addressing Misconceptions about the Dakota Access Pipeline," *Dakota Access Pipeline Facts,* 2018, accessed January 8, 2019, https://daplpipelinefacts.com/.

[195] State-related enforcement costs surpassed $20 million, with agencies such as the Corrections Department and Transportation Department using money from their own budgets with the intent of repaying it later. Morton County has paid another $2.5 million in costs not covered by the state (mostly for personnel). Governor Jack Dalrymple issued an emergency declaration in August to cover law enforcement expenses related to the protests. Blake Nicholson, "Dakota Access Protest Policing Costs Exceed $22M," *The Seattle Times*, January 10, 2017, accessed January 5, 2019, https://www.seattletimes.com/business/dakota-access-protest-policing-costs-exceed-22m/ On the "acts of war" that was experienced during mass arrests, see Sam Levin, "Dakota Access Pipeline Protests: UN Group Investigates Human Rights Abuses," *The Guardian*, October 31, 2016, accessed January 5, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/31/dakota-access-pipeline-protest-investigation-human-rights-abuses

[196] Leanne Simpson, 6. "Survivance" is Anishinaabwe author Gerald Vizenor's term combining "survival" and "resistance." It is explained and used throughout his *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

[197] Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (London: Polity, 2013).

attachments.[198] Butler writes performative politics takes place when people count themselves, "not only enumerating who they are, but 'appearing' in some way, exercising in that way a 'right' (extralegal, to be sure) to existence."[199] The rights which water protectors are exercising are not guaranteed by the laws of the United States, or abstract notions of "the right to have rights" (in fact, they are being actively contested by the state and its military force). Their performative force is rooted in a different set of laws and relationships altogether—those based in Lakota intelligence systems and grounded normativities.

Fig. 12. Water protectors stand in prayer and create a road blockade at Standing Rock. November 2016. Photo by Josué Rivas.

Water protection is about more than the assertion of a right, it is the enactment of a responsibility. This notion of responsibility has deeper routes than the liberal conception of justice as equality that constitutes the horizon of Butler's formulation (for Butler, "the struggle against, or the resistance to, precarity, has to be based on the demand that lives should be treated equally and that they should be equally livable").[200] The ethical responsibility of water protection is encapsulated in the popular #NoDAPL refrain, "Water is Life," a translation of the precolonial Lakota slogan *Mni Wiconi.* Nick Estes explains that Mni Wiconi more accurately translates to "water is alive," meaning that waters like the Mni Sose are nonhuman relatives, animate and agent entities, and thus protecting her is part of enacting kinship, a practice of Wotakuye, the idea of "being a good relative."[201] According to Estes, the ultimate goal for the Oceti Sakowin (a tribal republic spread over the Dakotas, Minnesota, Kansas, and Nebraska) was quite simple, "One must obey kinship rules; one must

[198] Butler, 67.
[199] Ibid, 101.
[200] Ibid, 67.
[201] Dhillon and Estes, n.p.

be a good relative."[202] Protecting the Mni Sose was an occasion to practice being a good relative and preserve water-based customs, stories, and ceremonies.

This point is worth emphasizing: water protectors are acting on behalf of a more binding relationship than crude optimism; the call to "Stand with Standing Rock" and protect the water, is a call to protect life itself. Our dependence on water entangles us with all other life, and it renders us vulnerable to forces larger than ourselves. This vulnerability yields an ethical relationship and responsibility not reducible to national belonging, or communitarian affiliation, and creates the conditions for new allegiances that shift colonially-embedded epistemologies of propertied human subjectivity, possessive individualism, and sovereignty. When water is threatened, I am threatened. As LaDonna Brave Bull Allard conveys, "We are the river, and the river is us. We have no choice but to stand up."[203]

THE PERFORMATIVE POLITICS OF ENDURING INDIGENEITY

Fig. 13. The spirit of the prayer camps, Cannonball River, N.D. November 2016. Photo by Josué Rivas.

When the thousands of water protectors who assembled to protect the lands and waters around Standing Rock enduring armed soldiers and riot police brandishing batons, mace, concussion grenades, and water cannons, they were showing that settler colonialism has failed to do what it was supposed to do—eliminate Indigenous people, take all their land, and absorb them into a white, property-owning body politic. Their presence, even in peaceful prayer, generated terror because economic stability is premised on dispossession. The prayer camps established at Standing Rock started with One Mind Youth, a group of youth leaders organizing out of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe in South Dakota, who have been dealing

[202] Estes, 15.
[203] Allard.

with the impact of colonial violence on Native American youth. One Mind Youth was designed to combat the suicide epidemic of Native American teenagers and young adults, and to detract from the social pressure to drink or use drugs.[204] After the U.S. State Department denied the Keystone XL permission to cross the U.S.-Canadian border in November 2015 (a pipeline that would cut under the Cheyenne River, just upstream of the reservation that bears its name), Takota Iron Eyes and her teenage friends turned their attention to organizing against the approved construction of DAPL near the neighboring Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. The youth believed the Dakota pipelines were not only a threat to their drinking water, but also a harbinger of the larger environmental crisis their generation would inherit.[205] In March 2016, concerned citizens of the Standing Rock Sioux requested help from other Sioux reservations to halt or obstruct construction of the pipeline. Members of One Mind Youth proposed setting up a small prayer camp modelled by the ones raised against the Keystone XL pipeline, and the tribal council agreed.[206] In April 2016, they established Iŋyaŋ Wakháŋagapi Othí (Sacred Stone Camp) in a protected ravine beside the Cannonball River just off the DAPL route on the north end of the Standing Rock reservation. They had a few former Keystone activists, and they lit the sacred fire. The camp was lived "in ceremony": all things were done with the intention of maintaining purity: water ceremonies were enacted, the sacred fire fed, meals eaten with prayer, a spirit plate provided for the ancestors; and alcohol and drugs forbidden. The anti-pipeline struggle was also the battle against addiction, abuse, and expendability.

Over six months, the youth reawakened their brothers and sisters, and the camp grew through requests for support in person and on social media under the hashtags #NoDAPL, #WaterisLife, and #RezpectOurWaters, planting the seeds of a petro-political consciousness. After the founding of Sacred Stone in April 2016, the message needed to be spread. Bobbi Jean Three Legs and a group of about thirty youth who had been trained in long-distance running from early childhood to carry messages began "water-runs" to raise awareness. Before the Europeans brought horses, the tribes of Oceti Sakowin would convey messages by sending runners who had been trained to shoulder the responsibility of carrying messages word-for-word as those messages were conveyed to them. Drawing on this training, the youth undertook epic physical journeys and ran 500 miles from Sacred Stone Camp to the district office of the Army Corps of Engineers in Omaha, Nebraska to deliver a letter asking them to deny the DAPL the authority to cross the Missouri River. Within days, the Army Corps representative agreed to meet with members of the tribe. Instead of calling off the run, the youth insisted on going ahead, as they believed it could bring together young people from all the Sioux reservations. They ran a further 2,000 miles, across twenty-eight days to Washington, D.C. to deliver 140,000 petition signatures to the Army Corps of Engineers, asking them to deny the permit for the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline through the Missouri River. The run passed through as many reservations as possible, so the youth could stop, connect with other Indigenous communities along the way, and educate people in person. Bobbi Jean Three Legs reflected, "Sometimes I'd get really personal with them, just kinda help them understand more. I always went back further generations, with my

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[204] Native American teenagers and young adults are one and a half times more likely to commit suicide than the national average. Saul Elbein, "The Youth Group that Launched a Movement at Standing Rock," *The New York Times*, January 31, 2017, accessed January 12, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/31/magazine/the-youth-group-that-launched-a-movement-at-standing-rock.html

[205] Ibid.

[206] Groups like the Indigenous Environmental Network (I.E.N.) helped set up a camp on the Cheyenne River Reservation, where activists prayed and taught the surrounding communities about civil disobedience. I.E.N. had helped train members of One Mind as organizers by sending them to Washington and to Australia to network with other aboriginal climate activists.

grandmothers' generation all the way up to my generation, and everything that we all went through."[207] Here, as in the Sacred Camp, the running gave youth a sense of purpose, and a group of people from scattered nations found kinship by talking about their experiences.

Fig. 14. Rezpect Our Waters, August 3, 2016. Photo from Rezpect Our Waters Facebook page.

The youth embarked on the runs because other strategies to stop the pipeline were unsuccessful. The legal frameworks of treaty making, consultation, impact assessments, and court appeals set up by the settler state for Indigenous political expression effectively provided the state and the Energy Transfer Partners the ethical justifications to develop a pipeline across sacred burial grounds and sites of ceremony, destroy libraries of knowledge, trample plant and animal habitat, disrupt networks of relationship, as well as threaten the availability of good water. Standing Rock is a prime example of how the colonial logics of law render (petro)imperial agendas legal, despite their negative repercussions for Native life. The Standing Rock Sioux tribe attempted several political strategies to stop the development of DAPL. In 2012, along with the other tribes of Oceti Sakowin, they passed a resolution to oppose the Keystone XL pipeline and any other pipelines crossing the boundaries of their land.[208] Although the pipeline would not technically cross the territory of the reservation, the Lakota tribe were alarmed it would cross sacred territory and burial grounds, and that any oil leakage would contaminate the waters. They started articulating their concerns in 2014, and invoked the Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868 to substantiate their claim.[209] Tribal

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[207] Quoted in Bikem Ekberzade, *Standing Rock: Creed, Oil and the Lakota's Struggle for Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 49.

[208] Talli Nauman, "Native Sun News: Sioux Nation Takes Stand on Keystone XL," *Native Sun News*, February 24, 2012, accessed January 8, 2019, https://www.indianz.com/News/2012/004715.asp

[209] Amy Dalrymple, "Audio: Tribe Objected to Pipeline Nearly 2 Years Before Lawsuit," *The Bismarck Tribune,* November 30, 2016, accessed January 8, 2019, https://bismarcktribune.com/news/state-and-regional/audio-tribe-objected-to-pipeline-nearly-years-before-lawsuit/article_51f94b8b-1284-5da9-92ec-7638347fe066.html In 1851, the U.S. negotiated with Sioux leaders that 134 million acres of land in what are now the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, and Nebraska would belong to the Sioux. This included the land beneath the DAPL pipeline and the Missouri River. In order to accommodate settlers moving west, the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 reduced the Indigenous land base to 25 million acres, forcing the Sioux tribe to sever more of their relationships to places that mattered to their cultures, economies, and political

leaders also argued they were not adequately consulted during the permitting process—a requirement under federal law pertaining to the Doctrine of Discovery.[210] Members of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe were concerned an oil leak, or a spill, would impact the waters they rely upon for drinking. They opposed the conclusions of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers who conducted a limited review of the route and claimed they expected no significant impact.[211] When efforts to work through the courts in the United States were unsuccessful, Chairman Dave Archambault II, appeared before the United Nations Human Rights Council to call upon member states to condemn the destruction of sacred places and support the Indigenous nation's efforts to ensure their sovereign rights were respected. Although Archambault's appeal to the United Nations Human Rights Council contributed to the growing social support of the #NoDAPL movement, these parties, and the human rights system, did not have the political power to stop DAPL construction.[212]

It is not surprising the legal claims of the Standing Rock Sioux were not recognized for those laws were never intended to guarantee quality of life to the First Peoples. As Coulthard attests, efforts by Indigenous peoples to gain recognition of rights under the already existing terms of the settler colonial state "promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialism, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples have

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systems. These treaties have been repeatedly violated by the United States government, starting with many nations never receiving payment guaranteed to them. When gold was discovered in the Black Hills in 1876, Colonial Custer attacked the Sioux, which culminated in the Battle of Greasy Grass (Little Bighorn) and led to the Black Hills Act (also known as "the Agreement of 1877," the "Sell or Starve Act," and the Indian Appropriations Act of 1876) which cut off government rations until Oceti Sakowin ceased hostilities and ceded the Black Hills. In the Black Hills Act of 1877, the Black Hills were illegally ceded, and the present-day reservation system was created. The initial territory was broken into six smaller reservations, liquidating the Great Sioux Reservation. However, the original treaties were never nullified. A Supreme Court ruling in 1980 found the Black Hills had been unfairly seized from the Sioux. The U.S. government was ordered to compensate the Sioux for this, but the Sioux nations refused financial compensation and pursued ownership of the land itself. The tribes' refusal to accept financial compensation in the 1980s meant that they could still invoke the Fort Laramie Treaties in more recent land title disputes. See "#StandingRockSyllabus," 2016, accessed May 7, 2019, https://nycstandswithstandingrock.wordpress.com/standingrocksyllabus/

[210] The Doctrine of Discovery states a federal agency considering the approval of a construction project must consult with Native nations as sovereign nations when they attach religious and cultural significance to a historic property regardless of its location.

[211] The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is the federal agency managing the easement next to the Missouri River. In March and April 2016, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of the Interior (DOI), and the Advisor Council on Historic Preservation asked the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a formal Environmental Impact Assessment and issue an Environmental Impact Statement because of the pipeline's proximity to the tribe's water sources. The EPA recommended the Army Corps revise its Environmental Assessment and open a second public comment period (regarding environmental justice and emergency response actions to spills and/or leaks). In April 2016, the Army Corps of Engineers organized a hearing to discuss the easement where they encountered nearly unanimous opposition from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the Yankton Sioux Tribe. Nevertheless, in July 2016, they approved three highly contentious easements, and began construction by treating the pipeline as a series of small construction sites. The Standing Rock Sioux sued the Army Corps of Engineers, alleging the agency violated the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Yet, as Kyle Whyte Powys summarizes, "the ways these laws and policies are constructed makes it difficult for any tribe to really have a voice and to participate in equal or fair terms with parties such as pipeline builders and U.S. agencies (e.g. the US Army Corps of Engineers)." Kyle Whyte Powys, "The Dakota Access Pipeline, Environmental Injustice and U.S. Colonialism," *Red Ink—An International Journal of Indigenous Literature, Arts and Humanities* 19, no. 1 (2017): 154–69.

[212] A coalition of more than 1,200 archaeologists, museum directors, and historians, including many from the Smithsonian Museums and the Association of Academic Museums and Galleries, denounced the destruction of Native American artefacts. Oliver Milman, "Archeologists Denounce Dakota Access Pipeline for Destroying Artefacts," *The Guardian*, September 22, 2016, accessed January 5, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/sep/22/archeologists-denounce-dakota-access-pipeline-artifacts

historically sought to transcend."[213] The youth's relay runs can be understood as a rejection of the state's recognition-oriented politics; they are an expression of sovereignty. Anne Spice (Tlingit) accurately articulates the claim being expressed by the young water protectors when she writes, "The Oceti Sakowin are exercising a right long denied by colonial settler states—the right to say no. No to the pipeline, no to the poison, no to the vacuous political theater of reconciliation."[214] While this refusal would seem to interrupt the normal progression of relations between settler state and Indigenous nations, they are actually continuations of hundreds of years of Indigenous resistance against the trespass of settlers, dams, and pipelines.[215] It is the opposite of consent via the state's duty to consult, "refusal marks the point of a limit having been reached: *we refuse to continue on this way*."[216]

Writing about the lasting impact or "accumulation" of slow violence and environmental contamination, Estes points out "there is another kind of accumulation, one that is not always spectacular, or instantaneous, but that nonetheless makes the endgame of elimination an impossibility: the tradition of Indigenous resistance." This accumulation, he writes, "is a radical consciousness and political practice, deeply embedded in history and place, and cannot be simply overturned by colonial fiat or by inundation with water. It cannot be killed. It endures the long game of colonial occupation."[217] This "radical consciousness" is especially apparent in a YouTube video of the Oceti Sakowin youth and allies' run to Washington, D.C., shared under the name "Rezpect Our Water" on a Facebook page of the same name. The video shows Angela Ashley, Macaulay Brown, Montgomry Brown, Tariq Brown Otter, Alice Brown Otter, William Cameron, Jasilyn Charger, Daniel Grasshope, Love Hopkins, Tantaka Lone Eagle, Adam Kills Alive, Lawrence Lind III, Emilie Little Dog, Tara Marrowbone, Ronaye Moran, Jordan Sam, Jaime Sam, Dennis Sand, Trey Skunk, Wilma Steele, Bobbi Jean Three Legs, Christopher Walton, Joseph White Eyes, Cehuglata Win Hopkins, and Anna Lee Yellow Hammer running to the sounds of the Bearhead sisters singing, and the drum of the song, "Stadium Pow Wow" by A Tribe Called Red.[218] Their feet rhythmically pound the paved highway to a backdrop of wheat fields and blue open skies, slowly and steadily traversing the vast territory. The cluster is variously adorned in brightly-colored shirts, athletic shorts, droopy sweat pants, sports jerseys, sneakers and running shoes. A lead vehicle clears the way, and several following vehicles trail them. When these runners grow tired, other runners, travelling in the vehicles, take to the pavement. In a second video, bare chested boys glisten in sweat on a dirt road surrounded by lush, green trees and vegetation, clearly having journeyed well beyond the plains As they propel themselves forward, they chant in a call and response, "We run [we run], for our people [for our people],

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[213] Coulthard, 3.
[214] Anne Spice, "Interrupting Industrial and Academic Extraction on Native Land," *Cultural Anthropology*, December 22, 2016, accessed January 8, 2019, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1021-interrupting-industrial-and-academic-extraction-on-native-land
[215] Standing Rock is a geography and a community with a long history which is why it is important not to reify Standing Rock as a hashtag, logo, or icon. Sandy Grande asserts, "from Ghost Dances (1800s) to the occupation of Wounded Knee (1973), [Standing Rock] has served as a site of collective, anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist Indigenous resistance and, that time and again, the *Oceti Sakowin* have stood on the front lines, protecting against the forces of US imperialism. Lost to the compressed space of spectacular time is the architecture of settler violence—Red Cloud's War (1866-1868); the War for the Black Hills (1876); the Indian Appropriations Act (1877); Wounded Knee (1890); the Dawes Allotment Act (1887); the Flood Control Act (1944); the Indian Relocation Act (1956)—and the multi-layered history that provides the context for what should have been the one and only NoDAPL headline—"Unceasing Settler Violence Masquerading as Democracy Continues to Dispossess Native Peoples." Grande, 4.
[216] Audra Simpson, 16.
[217] Estes, 167.
[218] Rezpect Our Water, "Oceti Sakowin Youth & Allies/ Relay Run to Washington D.C.," *YouTube*, July 18, 2018, accessed May 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ei4nKWxiG-M

for our nation [for our nation], for our water [for our water], for life [for life], and for our brothers and sisters [for our brothers and our sisters."[219] These bodies that have been deemed disposable are carrying messages. In the video, one runner comments, "I'm running to send a message across America and to the world to let them know we do not want the Dakota Access Pipeline built through our lands." A second states, "I'm here to protect our land and water." A third, a girl attests, "I'm running to send a message that our Lakota voices need to be heard." These bodies are means to assert "we are still here," and challenge the settler fantasy of Indigenous docility, pacification, containment, and demobilization. And they regenerate Indigenous political practices.

In a Butlerian sense, the coordinated runs to Omaha and Washington "signif[y] in excess of what is said, and the mode of signification is a concentrated bodily enactment."[220] They precede speech as performative acts even as they express "enduring Indigeneity," a phrase J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (Kanaka Maoli) uses to emphasize that Indigeneity itself is enduring—that the "operative logic of settler colonialism may be to 'eliminate the Native,'" but Indigenous people exist, resist, and persist, *and* to point out that "settler colonialism is a structure that endures Indigeneity, as it holds out against it."[221] They are enacting "the right to have rights," which as Hannah Arendt famously theorized, precedes any political institution that might codify or guarantee that right, and comes into being when it is exercised in concert or alliance by those who are excluded, or otherwise discriminated against within the nation-state. Through the runs, the youth demonstrate the endurance of Indigenous people despite centuries of efforts to eliminate them.

But unlike public assemblies in urban centers, where there are bystanders, buildings, and plenty of media, or even in Butler's study where the space of politics is most often the street or the square, most of the actions in this extractive frontier drama occurred on backcountry roads where there are not independent witnesses. For the water protectors running to Washington, the point was not to produce a spectacle of indigeneity, but to exercise sovereignty and the free movement of Indigenous bodies across the land, nurturing a petro-political consciousness along the way. We miss something of the point if we fail to see that the state's territorial control is being disrupted. I turn to the work of Josué Rivas and Winter Count to lift up those occasions when the official frame is dismantled by rival images, and where an acknowledgement of land and disconnection sets off an implacable division in society, resulting in so many people in resistance, and so varied a gathering, they overwhelm the colonial frame in which they are supposed to be contained.

JOSUÉ RIVAS AND THE PRACTICES OF EVERYDAY CAMP LIFE

Representing the non-spectacular reality of water protection and land defense is important for connecting the past and the present of Indigenous resistance, and pushing beyond what Sandy Grande calls "the cult of the immediate," which imperils our long-term ecological thinking.[222] While the mainstream media was attracted to images of direct actions that focused on the "clash" between the resistors and the militant police force, seldom was the social life of the prayer camps established at Standing Rock represented despite the fact that at their peak, they formed the tenth-largest city in North Dakota. Mexica/ Otomi photographer Josué Rivas was invited by his uncle, a medicine man from Standing Rock

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[219] Rezpect Our Water, "We Run," *YouTube*, August1, 2016, accessed May 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rdDrwaI1PcI

[220] Butler, 8.

[221] J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "A Structure, Not an Event": Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity," *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016): n.p.

[222] Grande, 13.

reservation, to come to Standing Rock to document the opposition. He lived in the Oceti Sakowin camp from August 2016 to February 2017, photographing the people assembled there. His 10,000 images constitute an extraordinary archive of the repertoires of water protectors: setting up tents, teepees and trailers, preparing food, constructing toilets and systems for sharing space, telling stories, designing an educational system, connecting knowledge keepers (like medical personnel and lawyers) with those in need, and tending to sick, injured, young, and elderly. If being a water protector meant living in camp, refusing to go home and refusing to disappear, it also meant providing nourishment, replenishment, and comradery by singing, storytelling, listening, laughing, crying, and praying.

The stakes were high for representation of water protectors, but so too was the possibility for creating powerful and meaningful images of Indigenous peoples' sense of belonging through public assembly. In his TEDTalk, Rivas said the following:

> The movement transcended opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline and it became an opportunity for Indigenous people to reclaim our identity, and to really enter the mainstream consciousness in a different way, much different than we had been represented in photographs before like by Edward Curtis. Standing Rock was personal to us, so we invest ourselves fully day in and day out.[223]

Rivas' photographs counter the visual tropes of protest photography by showing the strength and sacrifices of resistance, the hardships of living in makeshift settlements, and the joys of living in community. Rivas adds, "My images presented a side of the story often overlooked and misunderstood by the non-native journalists. These photos honor and celebrate the resilience of the water protectors and focus on the prayer instead of controversy. They depict less of the conflict with the police and more of the power of the historical movement."[224]

For example, a photograph of Nantinki Young from Santee, South Dakota shows the love and labor involved in preparing food. Adorned in beaded necklaces, bracelets, and earrings, she uses a long ladle to stir a large pot of steaming stew within a society of makers. Rivas honours the spirit of the resistance by creating images of the camp's daily life, and the agency of *not* moving, but claiming a right to stay in place, refuse to be displaced, vanished, or erased from the landscape by creating images of individuals building community-based infrastructure in preparation for winter, and of native children laughing and playing with their mothers and a reluctant pony. He also created images of people in pain and distress, standing in the freezing Missouri River, and being sprayed with water cannons and suffering violence at the hands of the police. All of these images work to disrupt the normative negative assumptions and simplifications of First Peoples' political action as "just anger" without just cause, or (eco)terrorism, and they stand in stark opposition to the aggressive practices of the police protecting the interests and assets of the Energy Transfer Partners.[225] As Estes remarks within the context of the society of spectacle, in which the media dominates, "[i]t is not always with weapons that warriors wage their struggle."[226]

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[223] Josué Rivas, "Standing Rock: The Power of Telling Our Own Story," TEDxRapidCity, June 2017, accessed March 4, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyfyqX4raCk

[224] Ibid. Rivas' approach to documenting is rooted in protocol learned through ceremony. He describes his process as "non-extractive" in that it is not about "taking" a photo, or "shooting" a subject, but about creating images with the subject who guides the impressions that can be formed. Rivas also worked in the media tent, helping to educate journalists about appropriate behavior in camp.

[225] Robinson, 231. Robinson draws on Pauline Wakeham's discussion of the emptying out and proliferation of the meanings of "terror" since the turn of the millennium which enables private media, governments, and policing services to collapse diverse practices from violence that threatens civilian safety to counterhegemonic resistance in the form of public protest "into one homogenized category of threats that needs to be eradicated." Pauline Wakeham, "Reconciling 'Terror'": Managing Indigenous Resistance in the Age of Apology," *American Indian Quarterly* 2012 (7): 1-33.

[226] Estes, 25.

Fig. 15. Nantinki Young supporting the camp by preparing meals to provide strength and energy. Photo by Josué Rivas.

Rivas shows how documenting and creating art is water protection.[227] The representation of peaceful people gathered in assembly is important as a means of predicting present and future behavior. The frontline action of Standing Rock entailed sitting and standing together in prayer, walking, drumming, and singing. Water protectors read what was happening, organized, and embodied their rebuttal. To rephrase Susan Leigh Foster, the practices of water protection are "techniques of the bodies that must be learned."[228] They are not just "a script that the protestor learns to execute, these are, rather, actions that both require and provide strong commitment and, once practiced, slowly change the world in which they occur."[229] Although Foster's use of the term "protest" does not translate well here, her description of the individual learning how to act collectively is fitting. Allies who travelled to Standing Rock were expected to educate themselves about the Seven Lakota Values—prayer, respect, compassion, honesty, generosity, humility, and wisdom— and "act accordingly." They must respect and center Indigenous values, adopt local standards of behavior, accept femme leadership, and "get checked" when they make mistakes or don't understand.[230] Every person participating in an action was required to attend non-violent direct action training sessions about how they should react to, and endure, violence from their opposition and protect the vulnerable- the women, elderly, and Native people.[231] Mark Tilsen,

[227] Rivas.
[228] Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 395-412.
[229] Ibid, 408.
[230] "Standing Rock Resources," *Omni Commons*, November 23, 2016, https://omnicommons.org/wiki/Standing_Rock_Resources.
[231] Additionally, materials for people thinking about going to Standing Rock were prepared and shared online to ensure individuals would best contribute by going in person or doing support work from home. They outline "good reasons to go" and "not good enough reasons," ask people to interrogate their intentions, and emphasize the need for every person in camp to pull their weight and contribute in substantial ways. The document was updated in October when the main camp moved further north, closer to a major highway, and law enforcement made it clear that anyone at the new camp was risking arrest. It emphasized the need for people who are willing

an Ogala poet and teacher at Pine Ridge, led most direct action trainings, and explained the camp principles to the new arrivals almost every day.

> Scrawled on whiteboards and hand-painted signs, the principles are simple:
> We are protectors.
> We are peaceful and prayerful.
> "Isms" have no place here.
> Here we all stand together.
> We are non-violent. We are proud to stand, no masks.
> Respect locals.
> No weapons or what could be construed as a weapon.
> Property damage does not get us closer to our goal.
> All campers must get an orientation.
> Direct action training is required for everyone taking action.
> We keep each other accountable to these principles.
> This is a ceremony—act accordingly.
> Prayer and ceremonies are not permitted to be recorded.

These principles constitute an ethics of cohabitation upon which a politics of alliance can rest. Training sessions were necessary because water protection is a "team" performance—to borrow Erving Goffman's description in his study of the presentation of self in everyday life—when "a set of individuals whose intimate co-operation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained."[232] Training sessions were important not only for "belief in the part one is to play"—belief that the actor actually possesses the attributes he or she appears to possess—but because "the performer must act with expressive responsibility, since many minor, inadvertent acts happen to be well designed to convey impressions inappropriate at the time."[233] If a water protector became agitated by the police, he or she would be held responsible for any "unmeant gestures" that discredit his or her own performance, as well as jeopardize the team's performance.[234] Water protection, especially on the frontlines, required "disciplined performers" who were able to "suppress his emotional response to his private problems, to his teammates when they make mistakes, and to the audience when they induce untoward affection of hostility in him."[235] This intellectual and emotional investment in water protection amounts to a "dramaturgical discipline" the performer must enact when he or she is immersed in the activity. As in the case of water protectors at Standing Rock, the performance is not just about the character of a performer, "it often happens that the performance serves mainly to express the characteristics of the task that is performed and not the characteristics of the performer."[236]

As we can see with the water protectors using their bodies to counter force with another kind and quality of force, the body is the instrument for making political claims (and

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to commit civil disobedience to stop the pipeline, and be arrested, media to document police conduct and the water protectors' peaceful prayer and resistance, lawyers to join the legal support team and be observers of police conduct, skilled medical workers, and people to help with the physical labor of preparing for the winter. "Come Correct to Standing Rock," Standing Rock Solidarity Training, *Facebook,* November 4, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/standingrocksolidaritytraining/videos/923667224404021/; Malia Hulleman and Johnny Misheff, "So You Want to Come to Standing Rock," Standing Rock Solidarity Training. *Facebook* video file, November 22, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/standingrocksolidaritytraining/posts/939807356123341?__tn__=K-R; "If You're Thinking About Going to Standing Rock," *Wiki Commons*, https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2bTevUnl8OZeGdBVThDeGFHM3VlYWpwU194Uk51U2FjOHNN/view;

[232] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Anchor Books, 1959), 104.
[233] Ibid, 208.
[234] Ibid, 208.
[235] Ibid, 216-17.
[236] Ibid, 77.

the precondition for all future political claims, as Butler would remind us: "none of us acts without the conditions to act, even though sometimes we act to install and preserve those very conditions.")[237] But while performance was central to Indigenous resistance and resurgence, extraordinary performances of enduring Indigeneity were produced within the extractive frontier drama at Standing Rock, spectacle was not.

STANDING WITH STANDING ROCK: SOLIDARITY AND THE POLITICS OF PLURAL PERFORMATIVE ACTION

While the performative forces of Indigenous resistance to oil spectacles should now be clear, there remains a question around the possibility of coalition building and the transformation of colonially-embedded epistemologies of propertied human subjectivity, possessive individualism, and sovereignty. Histories of dispossession in colonial contexts complicate Butler's account of the performative politics of assembly wherein she emphasizes "[the act] is neither my act nor yours, but something that happens by virtue of the relation between us, arising from that relation, equivocating between the I and the we, seeking at once to preserve and disseminate the generative value of that equivocation, an active and deliberated sustained relation, a collaboration distinct from hallucinatory merging or confusing."[238] Her thinking about plural performativity is informed by Hannah Arendt's argument that political action takes place on the condition that the body appear and happens "between" bodies. How the plurality acts depends on who enters into this plurality, who does not, and how such matters are decided.[239] Clare Land explains in her study of supporters of Indigenous struggles, "[t]he contradictions inherent in relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the context of struggles for land rights, sovereignty and community control are particularly stark because people are positioned in opposition: as colonized and colonizer; as dispossessed and beneficiary; as community members or not."[240] So in situations such as at Standing Rock where settlers and arrivants assembled and participated in prayer and water protection, how are we to understand the political claims being enacted? If we can understand bodies in assembly as speaking politically, what are non-Native bodies doing, in political terms, when they "Stand with Standing Rock"? What claims are being made, and through what powers are they made?

By now it should be clear that becoming a water protector requires a more corporeal engagement with the issue than the declaration "I Stand with Standing Rock" in hashtag activism, and other forms of activism at a distance, such as divestment movements from banks financing the pipeline, or the call to "check into" Standing Rock on Facebook to confuse the agents of petro-imperialism using surveillance strategies.[241] This slogan also indicated a preferred corporeal form of resistance. On a Facebook video posted on July 27, 2016, the day after the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approved the final land easements and water crossing to allow the pipeline to go forward, LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux, tribal historian, and owner of the land the Sacred Stone Camp rests on, issued a call for action:

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[237] Butler, 16.
[238] Ibid, 9.
[239] Ibid, 77.
[240] Clare Land, *Decolonizing Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of Indigenous Struggles* (London: Zed Books, 2015), 9.
[241] More than one million people checked into Facebook to the Standing Rock reservation in response to a viral post claiming that doing so would help water protectors from police surveillance. Sam Levin and Nicky Woolf, "A Million People 'Check in' at Standing Rock on Facebook to Support Dakota Pipeline Protestors," November 1, 2016, accessed March 9, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/31/north-dakota-access-pipeline-protest-mass-facebook-check-in

> We must fight with every inch of our lives now. The battle has just begun. We need to all stand together. We need to all pray together. We need to do our best to fight this demon. To fight the black snake. I'm asking everyone to stand up. I'm asking everyone to go to their sacred places and pray. I'm asking everyone to make their battle cries. I'm asking everyone to do their best. This is not a time for egos, and petty differences. It's a time for the people to stand together. It's a time to fight something greater than ourselves. It's time to protect the future of our grandchildren. It's time to stand up. I will stand up. I will stand to protect the water, the land. I am asking each of you to come stand with us at Sacred Stone Camp. I am asking you to stand … with everyone who is coming together to stop the black snake. Please, please stand together.[242]

Allard's statement uncovers the ways we are called to participate in extractive frontier dramas and act on our ethical beliefs. Her call is an expansive invitation to her home and the land she stewards. The "we" she invokes is unlimited ("I'm asking *everyone* to stand up").[243] Her call to action is inclusive: "I don't care if you're blue, purple, or orange, I don't care how you pray or what you pray to, you come stand with me and you're welcome."[244] In evoking the language of warfare, and positing standing together and praying together, she proposes direct action to fight the development of the pipeline. There is no ambivalence about what is to be done ("We *must* fight"; "We *need* to all stand together"), and it is clear how bodies are to respond and engage in an ethical process (the verb "to stand" is stated no less than nine times). Standing with Standing Rock is not a metaphor. These invitations and calls to support Standing Rock solicit response in ways that are not satisfied until one becomes a water protector, and takes on the established role, exposing oneself to injury.

The first point to make is that when non-Native allies become water protectors, they are withdrawing their support from the government claiming to act in their name. A particularly potent example of this occurred in early December 2016, when 2000 U.S. veterans joined the frontlines at Standing Rock and stood off against the police force tasked with dispersing the demonstrators. One veteran, Sean Kristopher Tremblay, explained, "I'm going to Standing Rock to defend water rights. It's time for us veterans to stand up for our own soil." His travel companion Sam Deering added, "In this country and in the press, there is a lot of focus on threats abroad, but when you have companies just ransacking the environment, and abusing people, it falls right in line with domestic enemies, someone who is . . . not serving the American people."[245] Trembly and Deering speak to a sense of duty and obligation to country and fellow Americans that draws on a nationalist affiliation. They uphold the claim the land belongs to the American people (not Native American nations) even as they withdraw their support and consent for the policies and agendas of the government of that nation-state. They say "no" to the development of environmentally-risky infrastructure, lack of permits or consultations with tribal communities, and use of police brutality to quell resistance. And they undermine the rationale for militarization and expose how only some of "the people" are deemed defensible. Their petro-political consciousness does not reconcile all grievances, or foreclose the possibility of future conflict, but these surprising water protectors redeployed their skills to alleviate some pressure, and to defend

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[242] Sacred Stone Camp, "Urgent Callout to Defend the Water and Stop Dakota Access Pipeline," *Facebook*, July 27, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/CampOfTheSacredStone/videos/1747785488843815/

[243] The implied corporeal act of standing with Standing Rock is also apparent in Iyuskin American Horse's invitation to the readers of *The Guardian,* "We invite you to stand with us in defiance of the black snake." American Horse.

[244] LaDonna Brave Bull Allard quoted in Ekberzade, 173.

[245] "Veterans Standing Up for Standing Rock," *CBC News*, December 3, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOLu3N_TeVM.

those who were rendered disposable. They called the legitimacy of the regime into question, and they disrupted the "illusory moral grounds" like the belief the Standing Rock tribe violated the rule or law, or simply failed to engage in U.S. legal and policy processes.[246]

The second point to make is that when settlers and non-Indigenous people learn to act as good relatives, build relationships, and respond to the call to defend the land and protect the water, they undermine the legitimacy of the settler colonial system because they are acting according to the authority of a different law, or interpretation of treaty than the one that has legally sanctioned development to occur. Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi) and Kathleen Dean Moore assert that "once people accept with heart and mind that land is our teacher, our mother, our garden, our pharmacy, our church, our cradle and our grave, it becomes unthinkable to destroy it. This vision threatens the industrial worldview more than anything else."[247] When settlers and non-Indigenous water protectors emerge, acting like relatives, to halt petro-imperialism, they destroy the "us" and "them" identity thought of colonial culture. The binary cannot be sustained when non-Indigenous people see their interests and vulnerabilities linked with those of Indigenous people, and they take responsibility for the lives and futures of one another despite our different histories, experiences, and positions. We can understand the solidarity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people at Standing Rock, then, as an ethics and politics premised on an acknowledgment of land and on recognition of the shared threat of petro-imperialism (including unrestrained capitalism, state authoritarianism, and environmental meltdown).

The three-minute narrative video, "We Are in Crisis," produced at Standing Rock by Winter Count, a collective of artists of Indigenous ancestry including Cannupa Hanska Luger, Dylan Mclaughlin, Ginger Dunnill, Merritt Johnson, and Nicholas Galanin, is itself a land acknowledgement. It endeavors to foster respect for the land and waters which I see as being helpful for nurturing a petro-political consciousness in the wake of the NoDAPL movement. Drawing from the Lakota practice of winter counts which consist of an oral accounting and the documentation of what happened during a year with a pictograph on a hide, the group creates art in response to resistance in places under the threat of extractive industries.[248] "We Are in Crisis" is composed of film footage captured by drone and a story warning against greed and hunger and how those desires lead us to manipulate each other at the expense of plant and animal life. It is a land acknowledgement and record of the resistance organized at Standing Rock. The group describes it as a "gratitude film"—an offering to the water protectors, the land and the water with the aim of cultivating gratitude and respect for water, land, the interdependence of living things on earth. The video begins with the projection of the definition of "crisis" against a black screen.

crisis /'kri-sēz\

a.: the point in the course of a serious disease as which a decisive change occurs, leading either to recovery or death.

b.: the change itself.

Above the beating of drums and squawk of seagulls recorded in the camps at Standing Rock, a male voice tells a story as imagery captured by aerial drones of vast swaths of North Dakota's dry land and short grasses sweep the screen and traverse a fenced composite of oil

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[246] Kyle Powys Whyte, "On Resilient Parasitisms, or Why I'm Skeptical of Indigenous/ Settler Reconciliation," *Journal of Global Ethics* 14.2 (2018): 282.

[247] Kimmerer and Moore.

[248] Dylan McClaughlin, "Rooted: Land, Relationship, and Artistic Practice," Workshop, Culture Shift, Albuquerque Convention Center, 2 November 2018. Winter Count's mission is to work towards "cultivating awareness, respect, honour and protection for land and water, for all the living that that have lived here, and for all the living things to come." On Lakota winter counts, see James R. Walker, Lakota Society, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 113.

derricks, pumping methodically beside a pool of water, oil tankers, trucks, and power boxes, penetrating the earth's crust. "I want to tell you a story," he begins.

> A being was born out of the anxiety of separation/ It is a fearful creature that we have nourished/ We nursed it/ Oil and iron and blood/ Let it feast upon our battlefields/ It grew powerful in the shadow of our wars/ And it learned to crawl, aided by combustion engines/ The beast became cunning and started a revolution of industry/ Its arms grew and reached out of the killing fields, where its belly remained and found refuge in all our arms./ It brought us many wonders, gifts, and promises of leisure/ It had taught us to grow idle and complacent, stripped us of our natural intelligence/ It convinced us we were special and severant/ That the earth was here for our taking/ It created the idea of void in us- an idea that could never be filled/ It lied and said we were created in its image, and that we must consume as it consumes in order to survive.

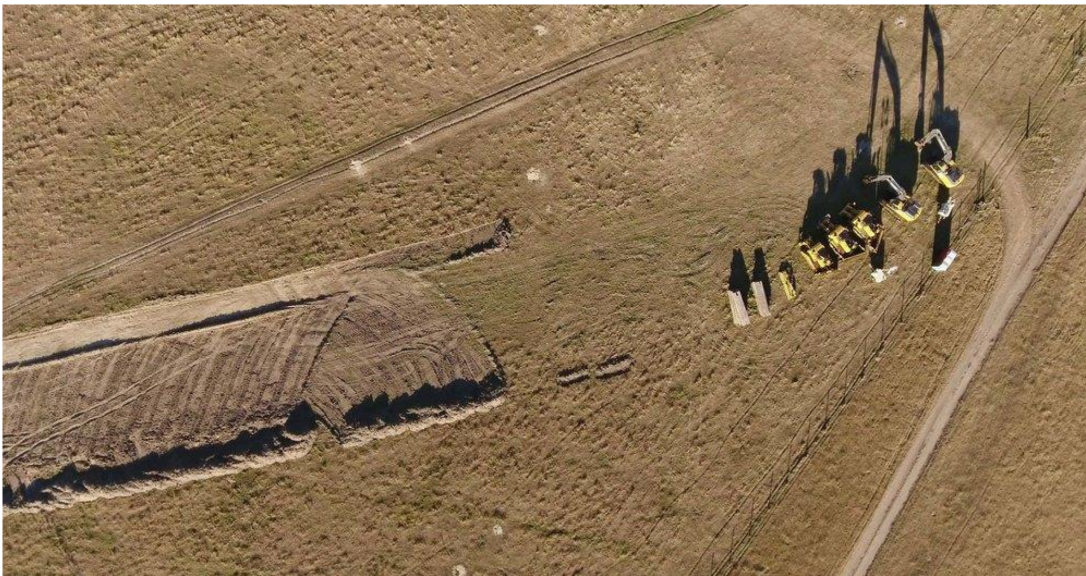

Fig. 16. Drone footage of DAPL development near Standing Rock reservation created by Dylan McLaughlin and used in the film "We Are in Crisis."

The drones surveil hilltops scared by industrial development and sacred territory ploughed by huge machinery. "We are in crisis" states the narrator. "The monster" born of the lies of technological progress is met by another being who takes shape through the mingled voices of human, drum, and water. A woman singing is introduced as the drone camera follows the gleaming curves of the rivers.

> Our ears strained to hear the song our hearts had always felt/ The melody wrings out from a voice that was here all along in a language we all understand/ It is hard to remember the sound of our mother's heartbeat through embryotic fluid, but that is the first sound we ever heard/ Amplified by water, the song sings to all living beings, we are not alone./ Every living thing is preceded by the offering of water back to the earth/ And then we are born./ And so we open our eyes to see the song unfold through hilltops and valleys/ Along river basins and shorelines/ Across the crest of ocean waves and textures on tree trunks./ The song slides through desert sands and ocean peaks; it speaks without sound so loud that we know we must belong./ Each and every one of us is built to carry water./We are vessels to hold and share/ To protect and keep safe/ We are in crisis.

The film decenters humans to show the imprint of humans on the land in the roads, fences, dams, containers, and machinery. The video tracks lines: telephone lines, road lines, water lines, tree lines, railway lines, pipelines. Rows of grasses and bush, strips of agricultural land, across telephone wires, past a water powerplant. The symmetrical shapes and manufactured hues of infrastructural compounds contrast cows moving slowly across the terrain. Finally, the drone flies over Sacred Stone Camp, showing scattered tepees, vehicles, pathways, turquoise Portapotties, and tents established on the banks of a river. The words, "No Dakota Access Pipeline," complete the film.

Fig. 17. Screenshot from "We Are in Crisis" of the prayer camps at Standing Rock, 2016.

Made by members of Winter Count in response to spending time at Standing Rock, the film emphasizes the geos of the geopolitical, and tells the story of how we arrived at this political struggle. The drone footage across hilltops and valleys, along river basis and shorelines is jarring. As a military-industrial technology designed to survey, surveil, target, and kill, the drone's aerial view—recontextualized through the addition of song and story—offers a potent reflection on the devastation colonization has caused on land and people. The vantage point positions us to see the impact of recent infrastructure projects on land, or what Winter Count would consider the material effects of the monster inside of us that entices us to take more. The "we" to whom the video refers is to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people severed from the earth in the wake of colonialism and industrialization. This disconnection has allowed "*us* to grow idle and complacent," to build our world to fit us, rather than adapt to fit our world. Disconnected from the earth, we justify an extractive relationship to it and ever-expanding consumption, individualism, capitalism, and social inequality. Cannupa Hanska Luger (Mandan Hidatasa Arikara-Lakota) described in interview, the film is about acknowledging "there is something deeper inside of us that needs healing because otherwise like any addict, we'll just shift to something else."[249] We need to stop the "pipeline in our hearts" that has convinced us of our dependency and our comforts being tied to the destruction of land. The film suggests that being in crisis can be positive if it awakens us to the need for change. It offers water as that which yields the power to reconnect us. Crisis emerges as a time of alliance among people; it is both "the point in the course of a serious death. . . , leading either to recovery or death," and "the change itself."

Direct actions at Standing Rock similarly included efforts to inspire reflective work. On social media, Luger (who was born at the Standing Rock Sioux reservation) invited folks who claimed to Stand with Standing Rock to create reflective mirror shields to protect water

[249] Ginger Dunnill, "Multidisciplinary Artist Cannupa Hanska Luger Talks Standing Rock ND, Episode 57," *Broken Boxes* podcast, December 21, 2016, http://www.cannupahanska.com/wintercount/

protectors on the frontline.[250] The mirror shields were inexpensive and only required a jigsaw, a 600-pound test paracord, a clean cloth, mirror adhesive foil, drill gun, and a Masonite board. Made of foil, they were symbolic shields, a point of reflection more than protection. Luger was inspired by the tactical performance of female activists in the Ukraine who carried mirrors from their bathrooms and into the street to show riot policemen what they looked like. He explains, "I wanted to create a reflective wall that would help separate the police officers from the protective line that was separating the police officers from the people in prayer." He had studied the tactics of the police filmed by water protectors with camera phones and drones and shared on social media, and observed that the police would push, spray with pepper spray, and intimidate the frontline with their body armor and weapons. The show of force would cause the frontline of water protectors to panic out of fear of being pepper sprayed, and they would fall back, and retreat, and the cops would justify words like riot because they saw panic. Luger reflects, "We needed a wall to help separate the two forces, but I didn't want to create a wall of separation. I thought what would be more incredible is a wall that would unify the two fronts because whether they like it or not, we're standing up to protect our water. … and their water. Their children's water. They are with us and I wanted them to see that."[251] Reflecting back the pipeline personnel security, police forces, and national guard, the mirrors were a vessel for rehumanizing the opposition and appealing to their humanity. They were a choreographed effort to wake up a consciousness by seeing oneself in literal relation to the land and waters, and by recognizing one's own prospects for a livable life are linked with everyone else's.

These examples of showing up and standing for Standing Rock put livable life at the forefront of politics. Acts of water protection imagine ways out of colonial domination through their commitments to taking care of a shared ecosystem and supporting each other "so each can live free."[252] In a co-written article, leading environmentalist thinkers Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi) and Kathleen Dean Moore foreground that Standing Rock (and resource protection struggles) offer us a choice:

> Everyone can join the people of Standing Rock and say *No*. No more wrecked land. No more oil spills. No more poisoned wells. We don't have to surrender the well-being of communities to the profit of a few. We can say *Yes*. Yes, we are all in this together. Yes, we can all stand on moral ground. Yes, we can all be protectors of the water and protectors of the silently watching future. The blockade on the highway is an invitation to remember and reclaim who we might be — just and joyous humans on a bountiful Earth. Right here, between the barricades, we are offered a choice.[253]

This does not mean that one overcomes or unburdens oneself from relationships deeply rooted in colonialism, but it reorients us to our common needs and vulnerabilities. Standing Rock shows us how Indigenous art and praxis works to unsettle the colonial identification with and attachment to land, rise from our own places into unison, and offer decolonizing tools to reshape and alter the anthropocentric framings of life on the frontier. Even when controversial pipelines are completed (as DAPL was in April 2017 under President Donald Trump's executive order), the significance of what happened at Standing Rock far exceeds debates about the adequacy of the Energy Transfer Partner's safety standards, or the Army Corps of Engineers' discharge of its consultative duties.[254] The oil frontier became a

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[250] Razelle Benally, "How to Build Mirror Shields for Standing Rock Water Protectors," November 13, 2016, Vimeo, accessed April 17, 2019, https://vimeo.com/191394747
[251] Dunnill.
[252] Leanne Simpson, 231.
[253] Kimmerer and Moore.
[254] Trump's 2015 financial disclosure to the Federal Election Committee revealed he had invested heavily in Energy Transfer Partners and Phillips 66, a spinoff of ConocoPhillips which would have a 25% stake in DAPL

"resurgent geography" that reconnected Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples with the land and waters as well as each other: "this place capaciously welcomed the excluded, while also centering the core of an Indigenous lifeworld—relationality."[255] It became a site for shifting power back by creating the conditions for the reattachment of minds, bodies, and spirits to land and water.

once completed. Additionally, Energy Transfer Partners' Chief Executive Officer Kelcy Warren had invested heavily in Trump's campaign. Ekberzade 6.
[255] Estes, 253.

Chapter 3. Remembering Saro-Wiwa and the Danger of Petro-Political Critique

The extractive frontier dramas enacted in Calgary and at Standing Rock are intricately connected to specific contexts of settler colonialism, white propertied subjectivity, and white supremacy. I turn to the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria to illustrate how spectacle and extractive frontier dramas work in a political arena where coloniality has taken a very different form, producing a fragmented state designed to serve the economic and administrative needs of the West. Doing so allows me to provide an example of how Ken Saro-Wiwa, a writer deeply invested in the petro-political struggle, deploys his craft with the intent to transform pre-existing patterns of domination in the form of ethnic conflicts, and to reshape the public politics surrounding oil in surprising ways. Some of these approaches contrast the cultural formations previously discussed, thereby emphasizing the diversity of anticolonial responses to the ecological crises exacerbated by petro-imperialism. They illuminate how colonial structures and patterns of domination continue to shape the social, political, and cultural dynamics of oil frontiers and the art produced in and about them.

In his reflections on the society of spectacle Guy Debord writes, "In this world which is so respectful of economic necessities, no one really knows the real cost of anything which is produced. In fact, the major part of the real cost is never calculated; and the rest is kept secret."[256] Debord's description of the mystification around production appropriately describes the oil industry in which the social, cultural, and environmental costs of extraction and production are either not calculated, kept secret, or justified as the cost of progress. Such mystification around the production relates to what petro-scholars have described as "petro-magic"—oil's seemingly universal promise of wealth without work, and progress without the passage of time— and the "seeing-is-believing" ontology that Andrew Apter describes as occurring in Nigeria in the late 1970s when "oil replaced labor as the basis of national development, producing a deficit of value and an excess of wealth, or a paradoxical profit as loss." [257] Petro-magic is formed through signs of progress and development like new sports stadiums, highways, and palatial hotels, as well as the erection of statues and organization of fantastic spectacles that work to explain the sudden wealth and unprecedented prosperity of the petro-state, such as FESTAC 77, the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, a "spectacle of opulence," that presented Nigeria as a major oil producer on the international scene.[258] In newly postcolonial nations like Nigeria, suddenly "awash in petrodollars," petro-magic can be understood as a state production (its materialization and expression), or an "imagineered" performance of state that works to explain sudden wealth and justify the violence of petroleum extraction.[259] Petro-magic is also, as Jennifer Wenzel points out, "one of the forms that petro-violence takes; its illusions of sweet surplus can, for a

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[256] Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1998 [1988]), 56.

[257] "Petro-magic" is Michael Watts's paraphrase of the argument that anthropologist Fernando Coronil makes in *The Magical State* wherein he argues "oil's power to awaken fantasies enables state leaders to fashion political life into a dazzling spectacle of national progress through 'tricks of prestidigitation.'" Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 2; Michael Watts, *Petro-Violence: Some Thoughts on Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1999), 7; Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 201.

[258] Apter 2; 22.

[259] Michael Watts, "The Shock of Modernity: Petroleum, Protest and Fast Capitalism in an Industrializing Society," *Reworking Modernity: Capitalism and Symbolic Discontent,* ed. A. Pred and Michael Watts (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 26; Margaret Werry, *The Tourist State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), x.

time, mask the harm that petroleum extraction does to humans and nonhuman nature, turning each into instruments of violence against the other."[260]

Contra petro-magic and its spectacular state-making powers, Wenzel coins the term "petro-magic-realism" to describe a fantastic literary mode that pierces such illusions and renders visible the lies of petro-magic by drawing attention to the devastating material effects of oil production.[261] In literature, petro-magic-realism is an important medium for laying bare the contradictions of Nigerian nationhood and (re)imagining national community, especially as it posits oil enclaves and sites of extraction as peripheral and politically marginal regions as central to the petro-state and the national project of (petro)modernity. But as significant as a national literature can be, television is a more popular medium that works to demystify the enchantment of petro-magic, and it suits the literary and political education of the people. I examine the hugely popular television series *Basi and Company* (1985-1990), a situation comedy written and produced by the famed Ogoni writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941-1995). To date *Basi and Company* has received very little critical attention despite having been viewed regularly by more than thirty million people in Nigeria at the height of its popularity (almost one-third of the populous nation), as well as being syndicated in many other African countries.[262] *Basi and Company* exemplifies Saro-Wiwa's ideas about the responsibility of a writer in politics— a responsibility that differs from writing a national literature that would be recognized for its literary merits and capacity to elevate the nation. In the last television interview he conducted, Saro-Wiwa commented, "In this country [England], writers write to entertain, they raise questions of individual existence … but for a Nigerian writer in my position you can't go into that. Literature has to be combative. You cannot have art for art's sake. This art must do something to transform the lives of a community, of a nation."[263] Disguised as a silly amusement, *Basi and Company* enabled Saro-Wiwa to address the inequities of the existing social order based on incomplete decolonization, and to represent the bottled-up anger of a generation alienated, excluded, and impoverished from the promise of petro-modernity.

Saro-Wiwa became internationally recognizing for broadcasting the plight of the Ogoni people, suffering from the social and environmental costs of oil extraction in the Niger Delta region of southeast Nigeria.[264] Across his artistic and political endeavors, Saro-Wiwa

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[260] Jennifer Wenzel, "Petro-Magic-Realism Revisited: Unimagining and Reimagining the Niger Delta," *Oil Culture*, eds. Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2014), 214.

[261] Jennifer Wenzel, "Petro-Magic-Realism: Towards a Political Ecology of Nigerian Literature," *Postcolonial Studies* 9.4 (2006): 449-64; Wenzel, "Petro-Magic-Revisited," 211.

[262] James Brooke, "30 Million Nigerians are Laughing at Themselves," *New York Times*, July 24, 1987, accessed 10 March 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/1987/07/24/world/enugu-journal-30-million-nigerians-are-laughing-at-themselves.html I suspect this is because of the tendency within postcolonial studies to identify a national literature, akin to the great writers Chinua Achebe and Amos Tutuola, and even a younger Saro-Wiwa, whose novel *Sozaboy* (1969) about the Nigerian Civil War, received international aplomb. Scholarship on *Basi* such as Jacqueline Bardolph's "Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Basi and Company:* Voices from Folk Talk to Television Comedy to Short Stories" (1996) and Elaine Saint-André Utudjian's "Ken Saro-Wiwa's Stifled Voices" (1996) focus on how the figure of Basi transitions between the various *Basi* plays and books.

[263] Ken Saro-Wiwa, in *Writers Under Siege: Voices of Freedom from Around the World*, ed. Lucy Popescu, Carole Jones-Seymour, and Tom Stoppard (New York Press, 2007), xxviii. Ken Wiwa is even more emphatic about his father's style: "With Ken Saro-Wiwa, you barely get a personal introduction to the writer before he starts dragging you all over his political territory, pointing out the landmarks and signposts on his road to Damascus … It was politics, politics, politics." Ken Wiwa, *In the Shadow of a Saint: A Son's Journey to Understand His Father's Legacy* (South Royalton: Steerfroth Press, 2001), 150.

[264] Particularly damaging strategies of extraction were used in the Niger Delta to save transnational companies like Shell money. Wastewater was dumped directly into rivers, streams, and the sea, and canals from the ocean were dug in ways that turned freshwater sources salty. Pipelines were left exposed and unmaintained, contributing to thousands of spills, and gas was flared which sends the gas into the atmosphere in great pillars of polluting fire. According to Naomi Klein, an Exxon Valdez-worth of oil has spilled into the delta every year for

sought to fundamentally transform the relations between oil companies, the state, and the people, altering who exercised control over natural resources in a country that depended on oil for 80% of its government revenues and 95% of its foreign exchange earnings.[265] In the early 1990s, Saro-Wiwa led the Movement of the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and presented *The Ogoni Bill of Rights* to the federal government in an effort to gain political and economic autonomy of Ogoniland for the Ogoni people. *The Ogoni Bill of Rights* demanded greater participation in the affairs of the federal republic, the right to self-determine the uses of the natural resources in their territory, once rich plateau soil with fresh water streams, seas brimmed with fish, forests with an abundance of animals and hard woods, now polluted and contaminated by oil spills and toxic gas flares.[266] MOSOP threatened mass action if their demand for $6 billion of reparations and reallocated revenues for forty years of oil exploitation was not met, and when their demands were dismissed by Nigeria's military government, an estimated 300,000 Ogoni staged a historic rally and march against Shell's "ecological wars." The Nigerian military government responded by sending troops to the region, and by declaring the disruption of oil production would be considered treasonous and be punishable by death. A youth wing of MOSOP radicalized and began to sabotage pipelines and oil installations, and violence escalated, eventually causing Shell to pull out of the region—one of the most significant achievements of grassroots environmental activism anywhere in the world.[267] When three conservative Ogoni chiefs who had reneged their support of MOSOP were killed in May 1994, the government seized Saro-Wiwa and eight of his associates on charges of incitement to murder, and they were sentenced and executed by General Sani Abacha on November 10, 1995. As Wole Soyinka notes, Saro-Wiwa's fate "had long been sealed," and the decision to execute him and eight companions equated to removing the pivotal figure of opposition around which a united Delta front could emerge.[268]

More than twenty years after his untimely death, Saro-Wiwa is still lauded a "hero for our times," an icon of human rights and environmental activism, and described as having led "the most effective protest campaign against the activities of a transnational oil company the world has yet seen."[269] Despite an impressive body of scholarship about Saro-Wiwa's political contributions, commonalities across his artistic work and political activism have received less attention. In the words of Scott Pegg, there is a tendency among scholars to compartmentalize Saro-Wiwa's work into "discrete pieces that can be analyzed separately—

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about fifty years, poisoning fish, animals, and humans. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2015), 305.

[265] United Nations Environmental Program, *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* (Nairobi: United Nations Environmental Program, 2011), 20.

[266] In 2011, The UN Environment Program (UNEP) released an environmental assessment of oil pollution in the Niger Delta, and the effects of fifty years of oil extraction to the land, water, and air. The report recommended to Shell and the government of Nigeria the urgency of clean-up, estimating that it could take 25-30 years and cost $1 billion. Shell paid for the survey, but in 2014, Amnesty International, Platform, and Friends of the Earth revealed that the government and company had failed to carry out the emergency recommendations, and that fish ponds are still polluted with oil and the Ogoni people were still drinking from wells contaminated with benzene, a known carcinogen, at levels over 900 times above the World Health Organization guidelines.

[267] Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 307.

[268] Wole Soyinka, *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 152. One of the witnesses during the trial in October 1995 confessed he, like other witnesses, had been offered bribes of 300 pounds by Shell to make statements incriminating Saro-Wiwa. Paul Lewis, "In Nigeria's Oil Wars, Shell Denies it Had a Role," *New York Times*, 13 February 1996.

[269] Victoria Brittain, "Ken Saro-Wiwa: A Hero For Our Times," *Race & Class* 56, no. 3 (2015): 5-17; Scott Pegg, "Introduction: On the 20th Anniversary of the Death of Ken Saro-Wiwa," *The Extractive Industries and Society* 2, no. 4 (2015): 607.

poetry, short stories, novels, journalism, activism, and the like."[270] And yet, Saro-Wiwa's son, Ken Wiwa, concisely summarizes that for his father, everything "was for one purpose: to secure justice for our people. His books, the properties, the businesses—everything was subservient to this hopes and ambitions for our people."[271] Given Saro-Wiwa's commitment to activism, and his status as a spokesperson for the Ogoni tribe, it is relevant to consider why did Saro-Wiwa dedicate his time and energy to writing the popular television series that did not directly represent the struggles of Ogoniland? How did *Basi and Company* contribute to the development of a petro-political consciousness in Nigeria at large? And how are tensions resulting from the fragmentation and divisiveness of postcolonial states negotiated within art working to nurture a petro-political consciousness?

I read *Basi and Company* as part of Saro-Wiwa's project of cultivating a national imaginary out of the fragmented state—one that would accept all ethnic groups in Nigeria as equal partners in the country. Although it seems a contradiction that Saro-Wiwa preached for a unified Nigerian society while working to preserve his ethnic group's identity, Saro-Wiwa's vision of Nigeria was one where each ethnic group could be culturally independent and still share equally in the political and economic project of Nigeria. At the time, the Ogoni were subsidizing Nigeria with the oil pumped out of their land, and in the process destroying the environment to such a degree the Ogoni way of life could not survive. Although oil fueled the original idea of postcolonial Nigeria, in the post-independence period, Watts argues there was no sense of national fantasy or imagining at the local level, and that the amplification of states worked against the creation of an imagined community of the sort Benedict Anderson saw as synonymous with nationalism, rather, there was an "un-imagining", or deconstruction of a sense of national community, especially as the "petro-promise" was never channeled back to oil-producing regions.[272] The fact that "most Nigerians are poorer today than they were in the late colonial period" despite billions of petro-naira flowing through the state's coffers produces a situation of disillusionment with a shared national project.[273] Writing for television, Saro-Wiwa was able to reach a broad audience beyond those who would read his literature, or attend a performance of one of his plays, to take on the work of developing a popular national consciousness. In his anticolonial liberation theory, Frantz Fanon emphasizes the importance of elevating the minds of the people through a political education:

> It means driving home to the masses that everything depends on them, that if we stagnate the fault is theirs, and that if we progress, they too are responsible, that there is no demiurge, no illustrious man taking responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people and the magic lies in their hands and their hands alone.[274]

Saro-Wiwa understood that national liberation must be grounded in political ecology, and so in Nigeria, the emergence of a national consciousness entailed the development of a petro-political consciousness that would critique the visual culture of petro-magic.[275] Television also became a mechanism for redressing the issue that "African governments can ignore

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[270] Scott Pegg, "Ken Saro-Wiwa: Assessing Multiple Legacies of a Literary Interventionist," *Third World Quarterly* 21 (2000): 702. Saro-Wiwa wrote and published four novels, two radio plays, a volume of poetry, two books of short stories, three book-length non-fiction works, two volumes of drama, a historical book on folklore, and nine children's books.

[271] Wiwa, xix.

[272] Michael Watts, "Sweet and Sour," *Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta*, ed. Michael Watts (Brooklyn: PowerHouse Books, 2008), 47. On the "unimagining" of Nigeria's national community, also see Wenzel, "Petro-magic-realism revisited," 211-12.

[273] Watts, "Sweet and Sour," 44.

[274] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 138.

[275] Here I'm thinking with Fanon's analysis of the postcolonial situation in which he claims, "if we really want to safeguard our countries from regression, paralysis, or collapse, we must rapidly switch from a national consciousness to a social and political consciousness." Fanon, 142-43.

writers, taking comfort in the fact that only few can read and write, and that those who read find little time for the luxury of literary consumption beyond the need to pass examinations based on set texts."[276] Having written and published several plays earlier in his career, Saro-Wiwa re-deployed the tools of the theatre to a medium that could reach much of the population to foster a popular petro-political consciousness concerned with the underlying economic and political forces behind Nigeria's political ecology of oil.[277] I read episodes in the series to illustrate how Saro-Wiwa satirizes Nigerian society overdosed on crude optimism and attempts to develop "crude pessimism"—a pessimistic attitude towards fossil extraction, pipeline development, and the culture of petro-excess, that does not see the fossil-fueled economy and petro-politicized regime will lead postcolonial states to the best of all possible worlds. Crude pessimism is grounded in an awareness of the violence of the political economy of oil that destroys the productive base and does not translate into greater quality of life for most of the population.

POSTCOLONIAL PETROCULTURE IN NIGERIA

Before conducting a more detailed analysis of *Basi and Company*, a larger question regarding postcolonial petroculture emerges: what is the relationship between cultivating a petro-political consciousness —one that would address the Ogoni struggle for resource sovereignty and the authority to control the disposition of natural resources in Ogoniland—and postcolonial strategies of "decolonizing the mind"? In response to the growing subfield of postcolonial ecocriticism, Jennifer Wenzel points out that the claim the environment has only belatedly emerged in postcolonial thought with interventions by writers like Susie O'Brien and Rob Nixon assumes a version of the postcolonial tradition that is cut off, and even at odds with, anti-colonial liberation praxis. She points out that while postcolonial high theory, in its late 20th-century ascendancy, largely disavowed nature along with nationalism, earlier anti-colonial writers like Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Amílcar Cabral understood colonialism as including, among other things, the theft of nature and ruination of lifeworlds.[278] Similarly, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o recognized the defeat of imperialism and neo-colonialism, and Africa's "real progress and development," would entail "the liberation of natural and human resources and the entire productive forces of the nation."[279] Like Saro-Wiwa and Fanon, Ngũgĩ understood "[e]conomic and political control can never be complete

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[276] Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 55.

[277] Several of Saro-Wiwa's plays are published in his *Four Farcical Plays* (Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1989). It is worth pointing out that Saro-Wiwa has received relatively little attention within theatre and performance studies. He was amongst the "second generation" of Nigerian playwrights, who were writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and whose horizons differed substantially from predecessors like Wole Soyinka because, in the words of Sandra L. Richards, "Independence had already become an empty, bitter slogan." Richards identifies the second generation of playwrights as numbering less than a dozen, and including Wale Ogunyemi, Kole Omotoso, Femi Osofisan, Sonny Oti, Ola Rotimi, Zulu Sofola, Bode Sowande, and Kalu Uka. These playwrights were university educated, received a practical introduction to theatre in the late 1960s through exposure to the Orisun Theatre television series produced by the University of Ibadan School of Drama Acting Company, and, for the most part, were also directors who utilized their positions as university instructors to produce their work. Although Richards does not include Saro-Wiwa within the generation of playwrights writing at this time, Saro-Wiwa was faced with the "necessity of confronting the betrayal of aspirations and pervasive squandering of human and material resources that accompanied independence." Sandra L. Richards, "Nigerian Independence Onstage: Responses from 'Second Generation' Playwrights," *Theatre Journal* 39, no. 2: 215-27.

[278] Jennifer Wenzel in Lucy Potter, "Postcolonial Resources, Pedagogical Resistance: An Energy-driven Interview with Professor Jennifer Wenzel," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 53, no. 3 (2017): 381. See also, Jennifer Wenzel, "Reading Fanon Reading Nature," in *What Postcolonial Theory Doesn't Say,* eds. Ziad Elmarsafy, Anna Bernard and Stuart Murray (London: Routledge, 2015). 185-201.

[279] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey), 1986), 103.

without mental control."[280] He argued that the biggest weapon wielded, and unleashed by imperialism daily against the collective defiance of the people, is the cultural annihilation of a people and eradication of their "belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves."[281] Undervaluing Indigenous culture, all the while elevating the language of the colonizer, led to despair, despondency, and doubt about moral righteousness of the struggle:

> Amidst this wasteland which [colonialism] has created, imperialism presents itself as the cure and demands that the dependent sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: "Theft is holy." Indeed, this refrain sums up the new creed of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie in many "independent" African states.[282]

For Ngũgĩ, the revitalization of Indigenous language is the most important weapon in anti-imperial struggle.[283] In the context of Indigenous resurgence, *Basi and Company* would not seem to be particularly helpful. And yet, the frontier potential of Ogoniland reveal the importance of cultivating a popular petro-political consciousness that works to dismantle identity categories imposed and reified during colonization.

As a unified territory, Nigeria was created in 1914 through the amalgamation of Britain's colonial possessions in the region. The Federation of Nigeria was granted independence on October 1, 1960, amidst the movement towards decolonization sweeping the continent. As large amounts of high-quality oil reserves had been discovered in 1958, Nigeria was considered one of sub-Saharan Africa's most promising postcolonial states; the potential for development seemed boundless for a nation born into "natural" wealth.[284] Even amongst the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta, there was hope that oil would secure their economic development, prosperity, and political clout within the emergent federalism.[285] Yet the territorial borders that marked Nigerian society under colonial rule remained in place at independence, and ethnic discord amongst the groups incorporated into the nation divided it and impaired the evolution of a stable political system.[286]

The British created a system in which the only legitimate access to resources and rent were organized along ethnic lines.[287] When Nigeria was established as a centrally-governed federal state, it was split into three regions, each dominated by a majority ethnic group: the Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the west, and Igbos in the east (and south). More than three hundred other ethnic minorities made up the rest of the population. There were few years of harmony between the states as the three semi-autonomous regions competed for power at the center, creating three political parties founded on platforms that capitalized on ethnic affiliation. By the mid-1960s, optimism about decolonization had begun to crumble as the growing participatory options for the population weakened the postcolonial democracy. A deepening rift between the north and southern regions led to the creation of an independent Biafra (a land rich with oil) and gave rise to the Nigerian civil war (1967-70). During the war,

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[280] Ibid, 16.
[281] Ibid, 3. Fanon similarly writes, "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today." Fanon, 210.
[282] Ngũgĩ, 3.
[283] Ibid, 3.
[284] Laase Heerten and A. Dirk Moses, "The Nigeria-Biafra War: Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, no. 2 (2014): 172.
[285] See Ukoha Ukiwo, "Empire of Commodities," *Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta*, ed. Michael Watts (Brooklyn: PowerHouse Books, 2008), 73.
[286] Heerten and Moses, 172.
[287] Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (Lagos: Saros International Publishing, 1992), 22. Nigeria was, as British historian Lord Malcolm Hailey described in 1955, "perhaps the most artificial of the many administrative units created in the course of European occupation of Africa." Quoted in ibid, 19.

the delta minorities, including the Ogoni, were corralled into Biafra against their will, and scapegoated as saboteurs, used as cannon fodder, or evacuated to concentration camps and refugee centers where many starved to death. Saro-Wiwa estimated thirty thousand Ogoni people (over 10% of the ethnic population) died.[288] After Biafra surrendered, and the war ended, micro-minorities such as the Ogoni who were living within oil producing areas, who had been absorbed into a Nigeria created by the British, and who had never ceded their sovereignty or been conquered, were fed up with being subjected to internal colonialism and indirect rule by the Igbo majority. They claimed that they were not being given a fair share of the oil revenues. Although Nigeria had quickly become one of the biggest oil producers in the world, most of the Nigerian population, and especially the ethnic minorities of the Delta region where the oil was being extracted, were not benefitting from production.

Nigeria's centralized state consolidated control of the country through oil rents and revenues acquired from companies like Shell-BP, Elf, Agip, and Chevron. It promoted relatively little domestic production and derived little wealth from domestic labor or commodity production. After the Biafran defeat in 1970, Nigeria's three regions were replaced by twelve states, and later by thirty-six states. As the number of states increased, the ethnic majorities won more states, and a greater proportion of the revenues. This action consigned oil-producing minorities to virtual, if not literal extinction. This was true of the Ogoni in the newly-formed Rivers State, where the majority Ijaws were, according to Saro-Wiwa, "more interested in their own welfare than establishing a fair and just state."[289] Federal revenues were diverted to the Ijaw majority at the expense of basic amenities and utilities, such as clean water, usable roads, or even pay for their doctors and teachers. As production increased, the Ogoni realized that promises of development and economic prosperity were empty lies. Rather than jobs, profits, or other benefits, the industry brought oil pollution from gas flare-offs, and the contamination of water and farmland with seepage and spills caused a situation of no fishing, food production, or portable water in an area that brimmed with fish, fresh water streams, rich plateau soil, and a forest abundant with animals and hard-wood trees prior to the discovery of oil.[290] The government justified the expropriation of land and private property through a series of laws of eminent domain, compensating the loss of land rights only in an ad hoc basis, and irregularly remunerating communities when pipelines running through village centers and family compounds exploded and caused casualties.[291]

As the state captured oil rents through statutory monopolies over mineral exploitation (having converted oil into a national resource), it became the broker of virtually all business. Dependency on the central government increased and established a pattern of patronage in business and politics that allocated licenses and revenues in exchange for kickbacks and

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[288] On this figure, Apter comments that "Whether the figures are biased or exact hardly matters, for it is clear that in the ethnic politics of Nigerian federalism, the Ogoni were universally despised and had nowhere to turn." Apter, 263.

[289] While Shell-BP had struck oil in Ogoniland in 1958 in the village of Dere, production had been curtailed during the Biafran war. Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria*, 89; Apter, 265.

[290] Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria*, 11. Saro-Wiwa writes, "If you go to Kokoro, Kegbara Dere, Ebubu, Yorla, Lekuma (Afran) and other oil fields, you will see gas burning noisily. These fires have been burning 24 hours a day, 365 days a year since 1958. They have been pouring dangerous gases such as carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, methane and soot into the air. Living near them is like being at the end of one million exhaust pipes from lorries. The noise and heat which they emit are equally poisonous. The soot goes into the air and comes down as what is called 'acid rain'. […] Thus, all the water which the Ogoni people drink as well as the air they breathe has been poisoned. […] The most cruel action of the oil companies, especially Shell, which has almost 99 per cent of the mining concession in Ogoni, is the greedy seizure of land. For Shell, agricultural land, residential land, forests, sacred land, all mean one thing: available land for the extraction of oil. Everything on top of the land, --men, trees, plants and animals—has to be killed off." Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Second Letter to Ogoni Youth* (Port Harcourt: Saros International, 1993), 3-7.

[291] Watts, "Oil Frontiers," 198.

loyalty.[292] The federal government ignored the deleterious activities of the oil companies and stole the riches of the "black gold" mined from the land, swindling local communities of wealth.[293] Watts describes the Nigerian situation as one in which "[p]etrowealth has been squandered, stolen, and channeled to largely political, as opposed to productive ends":

> Over 80 percent of oil revenues accrue to 1 percent of the population. According to former World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz, around $300 billion of oil revenues accrued since 1960 have simply 'gone missing.' Between 1970 and 2000, the number of income poor grew from 19 million to a staggering 90 million. Over the last decade, GDP per capita and life expectancy have, according to World Bank estimates, both fallen. Oil, in sum, has lubricated—it is a medium for—a catastrophic failure of secular national development.[294]

Local and state governments grew dependent on a system of allocation dominated by the ethnic majorities and susceptible to cronyism and corruption. Although communities directly affected by oil infrastructure were to receive "community benefits" (rent), oil companies made alliances and cut deals with powerful chiefs, and corruption operated with impunity.[295]

Petro-wealth exacerbated common issues of postcolonial development, such as the apathy and "unpreparedness of the elite" who took over power post-independence. Frantz Fanon points out that although the national bourgeoisie possess economic clout, they lack practical ties with the people, and thus resort to ethnic politics which impairs national development, and enables certain populations to grow wealthy while others sink into underdevelopment and poverty.[296] The post-independence era repeats the colonial past because the economic channels created by the colonial regime ensure the riches of the soil flow out of the postcolony, the new elites "organize the loot of whatever resources exist," and the middle class's merely "bookish acquaintance with the actual and potential resources of their country's soil and mineral deposits" keeps the nation tied to an export economy despite their demands "that all resources are shared."[297] Here, as in the last chapter, decolonization demands a new kind of economy based on an alternative valuation of natural resources.

In *Basi and Company*, Saro-Wiwa crafts characters swept up in the ridiculousness of an economy in which money is not gained through labor and hard work, but through the accumulation and redistribution of oil revenues in taxes and rents. Unlike much Nigerian television aired at the time, *Basi and Company* did not make fun of ethnic minorities; in fact, it is unclear where most of the characters come from as they prefer to be known as Lagosian. *Basi and Company* did not dramatize the geography of the oil frontier nor did it say anything about the Ogoni people or the rivers and streams that provide them water for bathing, drinking, fishing, and spiritual sustenance.[298] As much as Saro-Wiwa's agenda was ethnically-motivated, he understood ethnic politics contributed to the impasse to thought and imagination which bound Nigeria to petro-imperialism. Before a debate about resource control based in indigenous claims-making could become politically viable, a more general perception of a shared struggle needed to emerge, especially given Nigeria is one of the most

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[292] Apter, 264.

[293] In Ogoniland, few households had electricity, there was only one doctor per 100,000 people, child mortality rates were the highest in nation, unemployment was at 85 percent, 80 percent of the population was illiterate, and close to half of Ogoni youth left region in search of work. Michael Watts, "Violent Environments: Petroleum Conflict and the Political Ecology of Rule in the Niger Delta," *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, and Social Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 287.

[294] Watts, "Oil Frontiers," 198.

[295] Ibid, 198-99.

[296] Fanon, 97.

[297] Ibid, 100; 37; 121; 38.

[298] Saro-Wiwa later writes about these relationships in *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (1992) to explain the self-determination movement developing in Ogoniland.

ethnically and linguistically diverse countries in the world, and the general contempt for the Ogoni people who were most affected by petro-development.[299]

BROADCASTING BASI AND COMPANY

Based on his most popular play *The Transistor Radio*, *Basi and Company* dramatizes the get-rich-quick mentality of Nigerians in the 1980s (following the oil boom of the 1970s), and it provides insights into the national health of Nigeria.[300] Basi (played by Albert Egbe from 1985-1987 and Zulu Adigwe from 1988-1990) is a young man who dreams of becoming a millionaire. He typically sports a red t-shirt with his personal motto— "To be a millionaire, think like a millionaire"—emblazoned upon his chest. More than ten years earlier, Basi arrived in Lagos and moved into a room in a boardinghouse owned by Madam the Madam (played by Aso Ikpo-Douglas), a successful businesswoman who flaunts expensive clothes, jewels, and membership in the fictitious American Dollar Club with its famous motto, "Cash is Power." Instead of looking for a job, Basi seeks out get-rich-quick schemes, like peddling real estate on the moon, rigging the state lottery, getting on payrolls as a ghost worker, and tricking the wealthy members of the community for illusory goods and services. As a self-proclaimed "millionaire on the make," who has learned the art of surviving in a society held hostage by its skewered values, Basi believes, "You've got to be clever and smart in Lagos if you must live." As he says in one show, "You need brains to bargain in the market. Brains to avoid the policeman on the prowl for bribes; brains to outwit the con man on the trail for a fast deal. Yes, you need brains all the time."[301] Through their various money-making schemes, Basi and his friends expose the hypocrisies of Nigerian life, and the selfishness and greed of people who acquired millions without working for it. At the end of each half-hour show, Basi's scheme fails, and once again, he is feuding with Madam to whom he owes rent.

In the author's note to the short story companion version, Saro-Wiwa creates a genealogy of the sitcom by aligning it with West African folk tales and village storytelling traditions as a "ready-made precursor" to the television sitcom.[302] He recalls sitting in a circle of children on moonlight nights in a village listening to a skilled narrator tell tales of Koru the tortoise and the Yoruba mythological deity of Eshu, and learning moral lessons from these stories.[303] Masked in buffoonery and slapstick comedy, *Basi and Company* (like most folk tales) appeared politically negligible, but commented on the society from which it emerged, and instructed viewers of social ills. In the introduction to the published scripts, Saro-Wiwa comments, "I have used it to excoriate Nigerian society at the moment," especially rich Nigerians of the political class who have the "Basi" complex, which equates to "hustling con men."[304] Uzorma Onungwa, who directed the series, remarked, "We are trying to teach Nigerians that working hard really plays—not lazing around."[305] Basi never transcends his trickster role, even when he occasionally succeeds in his schemes; the characters do not

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[299] Andrew Apter writes, "the majority of Nigerians did not really care about the tiny, relatively isolated 'tribe' of folk considered scarcely human, happy to be fishing their mangrove creeks and planting their gardens, cut off from the modern world." Apter, 259.

[300] *The Transistor Radio* began as a review sketch at the University of Ibadan in 1964, and was later adapted into a stage play, a radio play (broadcast by the BBC in 1972, having won a prize in that year's BBC African Theatre Competition), as well as the best prize as a stage play at the Nigerian Festival of the Arts in 1972. It was one of the most performed plays (by students) in Nigeria in the 1970s and 80s, and it was also broadcast in Norway and the former Yugoslavia. Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Four Farcical Plays* (Lagos: Saros International Publishers, 1989), 7. (1987): 215, 216.

[301] Ibid, 19-20.

[302] James Hodapp, "A Serious Television Trickster: Ken Saro-Wiwa's Political and Artistic Legacy in *Basi and Company*," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 54, no. 4 (2018): 507.

[303] Saro-Wiwa, *Four Television Plays*, i.

[304] Quoted in Brooke.

[305] Ibid.

develop through story arcs between episodes, so the show repeats the "swindler swindled" comic motif, and the next episodes starts with life unchanged from money stolen or lessons learned.[306] Basi and Alali begin, once again, destitute, and in pursuit of a get-rich-quick scheme. As James Hodapp argues, Basi's strong resistance to change "evokes the trickster of folk tales who must remain static to continue to expose the shortcomings of society. If Basi succeeded in breaking out of his limiting trickster role, he would no longer be able to expose the hypocrisy of the system that both encourages such shortsightedness and never allows him to succeed."[307]

Submerged within *Basi and Company* is a critique of the government's failure to invest petro-wealth productively in the wider economy and to provide basic social infrastructure for the people. The recurring complaint of Basi's companion, Alali, "I'm hungry, Mr. B," launches Basi again and again, into hatching a scheme to make cash. Poverty looms over every interaction, and Alali stands for a starving, unsatisfied generation. This situation is at the heart of Saro-Wiwa's play, *The Transistor Radio,* which inspired the series. In the episode by the same name, the action begins in Basi's hovel in Lagos, which contains a single room with a bed, clothes-hanger, food cupboard on top of which is a kerosene stove, two single cushioned seats and a low, narrow center-table. Basi is in bed snoring, and Alali (played by Tekena Harry-Macdonald) enters, looks at him stealthily and, thinking Basi, is asleep, rummages for food in the cupboard. Despite trekking to the Island in search of work each day, and submitting applications into each ministry, Alali has had no success securing employment and is desperately hungry. Basi takes no responsibility for Alali's hunger and threatens to cut his fingers off.

Basi: Next time you lay your hands on anything of mine, I'll show you what metal I'm made of. I can't sleep anymore with you around. . . . Ingratitude has been in your heart from the first day I picked you up from Iddo Motor Park.

Alali: I'm not ungrateful, Basi. But what d'you expect me to do when I come back hungry and wet from the motor park? I can't sleep on an empty stomach.[308]

Basi's response to Alali's condition—"You can't have a full stomach everyday of your life. No one does"—reveals the normalization of insecurity and the absence of social support. The normative idea of citizens working for the betterment of society and being rewarded for their contribution does not operate in Lagos. Basi claims he has been "banned for life from every Ministry, every company office town."[309] As a result of unemployment, he was thrown out by his landlady and roamed the city for ten years. He recounts that when he finally found a job as a messenger in an office, he was fired two weeks later "[f]or getting the job."[310] Confounded, Alali retorts, "That's not a good reason," but Basi has relinquished faith in the idea of "good reason." He suggests his issue was in looking for work at all, because no one works here, "Why I could name a hundred people in this city who make millions each year for doing nothing. Absolutely nothing."[311] Even those Lagosians who appear to be rich are "all regular brokers, frauds and fakes," not truly rich men.[312] Basi does not champion an entrepreneurial modality supported by ideologies of individual responsibility to maximize

[306] Chris Dunton claims the comic motif of "the swindler swindled" is one of the most familiar—and most appreciated—motifs in Nigerian English-language theatre. Chris Dunton, "*Dream of Sologa, Eneka,* and *The Supreme Commander*: The Theater of Ken Saro Wiwa," in *Ken Saro-Wiwa: Writer and Political Activist*, ed. Craig W. McLuckie and Aubrey McPhail (London: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 202.
[307] Hodapp, 507.
[308] Saro-Wiwa, *Four Farcical Plays*, 11.
[309] Ibid, 13.
[310] Ibid, 13.
[311] Ibid, 13.
[312] Ibid, 16.

one's own market value, but he encourages Alali to embrace the spirit of the time, and "Be a fraud yourself, man."[313]

Basi remains optimistic in this world of instant wealth, where seemingly anyone can become wealthy without effort or hard work. As in Saro-Wiwa's earlier plays, this amounts in a critique of those who do not direct criticism against those in power, or agitate for change because they are certain that their situation will change.[314]

> With a job, without a job, this is the place of hope. The future lies here, man. I tell you, we'll make it here, suddenly without warning. And then our lives will be transformed. This room will become a palace, we'll own planes . . . to be a millionaire, think like a millionaire! … There may be hunger, but after the hunger, there are the bright lights, money and music, and who said we couldn't have part of it?[315]

The absurdity of his convictions amounts to a critique of those who have faith in progress without work, and who believe they will receive what they are due. The allures of Lagos's instant and spectacular petro-fueled modernity seduce Basi, yet the irony of the situation is that despite its glamourous offerings, there are many young, capable workers like Alali unable to find employment, and who are subsequently hungry.

When Alali laments about his inability to find work, and contemplates killing himself, Basi directs him to go to Carter Bridge and hurl himself into the waters in broad daylight so that someone will see him, rescue him, take him to court, and send him to prison where he would receive three square meals a day.[316] He informs Alali that the last man who had unsuccessfully made a life for himself in Lagos jumped off the Carter Bridge. He didn't end up in prison; the police rescued him and took him to court where a rich man gave him a job, and today "he drives a car, owns houses, has three or four wives and will soon be a Governor."[317] Alali represents a generation of alienated, unemployed and impoverished youth unable to fulfill norms of personal advancement through work. His condition is akin to those youth from the Delta who became frustrated with the government's failure to deliver development, forged insurgent groups, and deployed armed struggle against the state and oil companies, but Alali becomes neither resentful nor revolutionary.

Within this illogical society, Basi supposes one must simply believe they will become rich, and he suggests survival is a matter of psychology:

> Alali: D'you think I'll ever become rich?
> Basi: Sure, man. You'll be rich. You'll own one half of the houses in Lagos. Your cars will fill the roads, your planes the airports and your yachts the high seas. Oh, you'll be so rich, there won't be enough banks to hold your money.
> Alali: Really?
> Basi: You've got to believe it. I believe it. I'll be rich. You'll be rich. We'll swim in golden pools, ride our own planes, sleep on wide, soft beds, marry several wives. Oh, Alali, by the time I'm done, this city will be too small for us.[318]

Basi and Alali act like Basi is a millionaire, and Alali, pretending to be Basi's servant, serves him morning tea, and then fish and wine. This play, and the mere idea of eating a heavy meal of fish and wine, is Basi's "trick" to living on an empty stomach, but it has made Basi hungry

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[313] Ibid, 16.
[314] For example, in *The Drama of Sologa* (1966), a dramatization of the key scenes of Gabrial Okara's *The Voice,* written at Nigeria's independence, Saro-Wiwa's adaptation emphasized the role of the complacent who inadvertently collaborates with members of the dictatorial regime and "dance[s] as the drum dictates." Dunton, 208.
[315] Saro-Wiwa, *Four Farcical Plays*, 31.
[316] Ibid, 15.
[317] Ibid, 16.
[318] Ibid, 20.

again. Just as Basi reassures Alali that "Lady Luck will come knocking at your door when you least expect her," the two men hear the voice of Mr. Saros (played by Josco, a local beer salesman), offering a chance to win a prize if "you are a Saros man."[319] Luckily, Madam had left her empty bottle of Saros beer in Basi's room when she came by to collect rent, and the empty bottle is worth exchange for a transistor radio. Alali sees this as an opportunity to quickly sell the radio for money for food, but Basi first wants to enjoy some music. They fight over the radio until Josco enters and announces he is a Licensing Officer here to ensure that all radios are licensed as per government regulations. As Basi and Alali do not have a license, Josco threatens to charge them five naira, or take them to court. Alali gives Josco his one naira, and Josco takes it and the radio. Josco is just about to set off when Basi declares he has been working undercover and is a sergeant of the Criminal Investigation Department. In a quick reversal, Basi threatens to take Josco to the police station for taking a bribe and trying to steal a radio. Josco begs for mercy, pleading that he is supporting his mother-in-law and her family, and has no money. In light of his pitiable plight, Basi announces he will not arrest him, but demands Josco issue Alali a radio license and give him back his naira note. Having thought they had outsmarted Josco and gained a radio license, Alali discovers Josco was a fake licensing officer, their license is fake, and Josco returned a fake naira note in place of his genuine one.

Alali announces that what happened tonight opened his eyes; although he is no longer contemplating jumping from Carter Bridge, he is "looking forward to a happier life…. Tonight I've begun to see . . . the wretchedness of our life. The hunger, the joblessness, but above all, the meaninglessness of our situation. So, I'm going back home."[320] Alali is disenchanted with Lagos, having discovered it was not the city of possibility or enjoyment he had been promised, but an exhausting and unrewarding place of frauds and fakes. Saro-Wiwa maintains the idea of rural innocence in Alali's desire to flee from the difficulties and frustrations of living in the city, but even though Alali appears to have made up his mind, he finds he cannot go away, he is sucked into opportunism, "There's something seems to be asking me to stay on. I don't understand it all."[321] Just as Basi and Alali say their goodbyes, a voice outside calls, "Nigerpools! Nigerpools! Win a million naira on Nigerpools!" and Basi, enthused with the prospect of a million naira, invites Alali to go to the Island. Alali agrees, captivated once again with the fantasy of becoming a millionaire solely through luck.[322]

Through the Basi stories, Saro-Wiwa dramatizes the daily hustle of "the jobless and the nameless" and their suffering and sorrow amidst the promises of prosperity, revealing the fantasies of petro-modernity through farce, and making those who believe them laughable through its slapstick style. We might think of Alali alongside Sara Ahmed's discussion of Fanon in which she poses "The wretched of the earth expose the wretchedness of the earth."[323] Although this "wretched" does not direct his anger and hatred toward the world, Saro-Wiwa sets up this ridiculous scenario for critique in which "[t]he recognition of the wretched is revolutionary," if and when it "involves recognition that wretchedness is not an inevitable consequence of being a certain way but is an effect of the occupation and violence of the colonizer."[324] Misfortune and unhappiness are caused by colonization and its afterlives.

In *Basi and Company*, Saro-Wiwa does not elucidate the cause of suffering, which is, for Ahmed, "the revolutionary cause." Instead, Saro-Wiwa puts on display the false

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[319] Ibid, 22.
[320] Ibid, 30.
[321] Ibid, 12.
[322] Ibid, 31.
[323] Sarah Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Duke UP, 2010), 168.
[324] Ibid, 168.

consciousness which sustains suffering, and "allows the cause to 'cause' suffering."[325] Through the perspective of the underclass that hardly has enough money for food, and is constantly on the run from wealthy landlords, *Basi and Company* exposes the absurdity of the narratives of fortune premised on the petro-promises the state promulgated. This optimism about postcolonial Nigeria's oil economy resonated with Ryszard Kapuściński's description of the false promise of oil in the context of Iran wherein "[o]il creates the illusion of a completely changed life, life without work, life for free. […] The concept of oil expresses perfectly the eternal human dream of wealth achieved through lucky accident […] In this sense oil is a fairy tale and every bit a lie. Oil fills us with such arrogance that we begin believing we can easily overcome such unyielding obstacles as time."[326]

Basi's optimism about his fortune yet to come is also part of the problem that Saro-Wiwa is staging. Basi attempts to condition Alali to feel content as a protection from misery. This is troubling because, as Ahmed indicates in her study of the promise of happiness, one of the problems of happiness is the problem of making people love their servitude, liking what they have, being conditioned to like your condition.[327] Happiness, she points out, is not the same thing as getting what you desire, or deserve, "it is about holding things together, and giving up desiring what you do not have, and cannot get."[328] So when Basi remains happy, and tries to make Alali happy, Basi is preventing Alali from staying proximate to unhappiness, which is the mechanism for the revolutionary to radicalize. As Alali neither remains affected by his unhappiness, nor redirects his misery into a purpose, he remains stuck in his same position.

Saro-Wiwa's critique of the ongoing existence of injustice in the postcolony is perhaps most apparent in the 1987 episode "Dead Men Don't Bite," which also begins with Alali complaining, "Mr. B, I'm hungry." Basi decides to ask Madam to lend them some money for breakfast, but she refuses to give him even a meagre three naira even though she knows he has not eaten in three days. She is going to a burial ceremony that afternoon and plans to spend her briefcase of cash there. Outraged, Basi cries, "Why spend all this money on the dead when the living are hungry?!" He pushes Madam to admit that she didn't give the deceased any money when she was living, to which Madam replies, "She was responsible for herself then." Now that she's dead, the members of the American Dollar Club are responsible for giving her a fitting funeral. When Basi pleads for help, Madam promises to give him a fitting burial if she finds him dead of hunger. In the next scene, Alali reads an obituary in the newspaper that indicates Basi's great uncle is dead. With three wives and progeny all over the world, the duo think he must be rich. Basi plans to ask Dandi, a local bartender, for a loan for the burial, and use that money to buy some food. Like Madam, Dandi agrees to give Basi a burial carnival, but refuses to loan him money. In the next scene, a telegram comes for Alali, disclosing that Mr. B was killed in a motor accident on his trip to bury his grand uncle. Alali cries so loudly that Madam hears the noise and learns the news. Soon, all the members of the community—Dandy, Josco, Madam, and Segi—are mourning what they assume is Basi's death. As they begin to make plans for his funeral, Dandy and Madam compete over who will contribute the most money and win the distinction of "chief mourner." They become more interested in trying to outdo the other and make Basi's burial ceremony the talk of the town than in remembering Basi. At the burial ceremony, Basi—who has been resting on his mattress, pretending to be a corpse—reveals he is alive. He chastises Madam and the others for their cruelty, claiming "what you give in death, I claim in life." He refuses to give Madam

[325] Ibid, 168.
[326] Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of Shahs*, trans. William R. Brand and Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brand (San Diego: Harcourt Brand Jovanovich, 1985), 35.
[327] Ahmed, 2.
[328] Ibid, 192.

her 2000 naira back (a sum equivalent to a year's salary for many), and throws everyone but Alali out of his room, finally laughing at his success, "To be a millionaire, think like a millionaire."

Fig. 18. Screenshot from "Dead Men Don't Bite." Basi pretends he is a corpse as Segi, Madam, Alali, and Dandy each try to perform the role of chief mourner.

This episode, like the last, reveals the social ills of the disassociation with the nation's productive base, and an economy in which it is better to be dead than alive. It also reveals the shallowness of the ethical system created by contemporary politics, and it critiques the newly wealthy members of Nigerian society who are uncharitable towards those lacking necessities, and who spend their money wastefully, showing off their wealth, rather than investing it, or caring for each other. Neighbors swindle each other for their own good fortune. In another episode called "The Machine," Basi and Alali veil an empty box with a thin sheet and promise instant wealth creation. They attempt to accrue cash for loaning the machine to their neighbors because creating money literally out of nothing did not sound unreasonable in the boom era. Saro-Wiwa's critique is not merely about greed fueled by selfishness, but the specificity of the oil boom in Nigeria, and its immediate aftermath where success is disconnected from hard work, and the nation's economic trajectory is based on Basi-like schemes like the theft of public funds, money laundering, and bribery, and greed, cronyism, and corruption proliferate at the expense of social stability and protections typically guaranteed by the state.

Basi and Company is not about imagining what is possible, but it was a preface to a political moment about opening possibilities for those who are unhappy or crudely pessimistic. It is premised on the belief that Nigerians are not disturbed enough that the promises of wealth and prosperity that would come after independence did not, and will not, come with the existing economy and its culture of permanent rent-seeking. Saro-Wiwa does not imagine and stage alternatives to the system of global capitalism, nor does it stage any radical or revolutionary figures; however, it makes the system, and the political ecology of Nigeria, laughable, and its reproduction ridiculous. Of course, consciousness does not simply turn people into revolutionaries, but as Ahmed writes, "a failure of consciousness, a false consciousness about the world, is what blocks other possible worlds, as a blockage that makes possibles impossible, such that possibles are lost before they can be lived,

experienced, or imagined."[329] This consciousness is imperative for stopping the reproduction of the present, which is unsustainable:

> To become revolutionary would seem to require a belief in the possibility of revolution. To become revolutionary would also seem to require a belief that a revolution is necessary. In other words, you would agree that what exists is something against which we should revolt.[330]

As the oil economy was imploding and collapsing, and the illusory basis of the bonanza was becoming ever-more apparent, Saro-Wiwa was revealing how the signs of wealth and development in the urban center were increasingly estranged from their referents, and the national bourgeoisie was annexing the wealth of the frontier for their gain. As William Boyd writes, "What was wrong with Basi and his chums was wrong with Nigeria: none of them wanted to work, and they all acted as though the world owed them a living; if that couldn't be acquired by fair means foul ones would do just as well. "This was soap opera as a form of civil education."[331] James Hodapp argues that the fact the Nigerian government not only allowed *Basi* to air, but in fact praised it, is a testament to Saro-Wiwa's ability "to oscillate between critique and frivolity, assuring the government that criticisms of Nigerian attitudes were not criticism of the government."[332] Despite staging the failures of the national economy, law enforcement, and public servants, representatives of the government even praised *Basi* for its moralizing.[333] The basic goal was to bring crude pessimism and a petro-political consciousness into being, to render visible the social, cultural, and spiritual costs of the transportation of this resource to market, and cultivate a desire that the proceeds from oil money should be used for the collective prosperity so that all Nigerians are able to live a livable life, including the Ogoni people alienated from their resources and rights because of ethnic domination perpetuated by those in power at the federal level.

REMEMBERING SARO-WIWA

When *Basi and Company* ended in 1990, Saro-Wiwa returned to Ogoniland and shortly thereafter wrote the Ogoni Bill of Rights and his book *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, and organized his people in a nonviolent struggle to regain their economic and political rights and keep their cultural identity. Despite considerable efforts, Saro-Wiwa had little success raising international awareness about the Ogoni struggle from official government quarters in Great Britain or Holland. Saro-Wiwa did find sympathetic ears in international NGOs like Amnesty International and PEN who were engaged in fighting environmental degradation and ethnic marginalization around the world. These international connections became important when Saro-Wiwa was subject to the farcical mimesis of juridical proceedings in which the military tribunal denied him legal counsel and sentenced

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[329] Ibid, 165.
[330] Ibid, 172.
[331] William Boyd, "Introduction," *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary,* by Ken Saro-Wiwa (London: Penguin Books, 1995), viii.
[332] Hodapp, 509. This is especially impressive as Saro-Wiwa's play *Eneka*, which addresses deepening poverty under the corrupt and exploitative rule of a provincial chief, was sufficiently provocative to lead the then military governor of Rivers State, A.P. Diete-Spiff to disband the troupe when he attended a production of the play as the guest of honor when it was produced in Port Harcourt in 1971. Dunton, 204.
[333] Brooke reports that "[s]ince 1984, the Government has battled to raise national moral standards through a campaign called the 'War Against Indiscipline.' Nigeria's military government hailed the moral message of *Basi*, especially its use of standard English. Many Nigerians say their command of the English language has slipped since Nigeria gained independence, and scores on the English part of college entrance examinations have dropped. Many blame the common use of pidgin English on television programs watched by Nigerian children. 'Children sit glued to the television, with bad English poured down them for four hours a day. They end up with substandard English,' said Roy Jibromah, marketing manager for Saros International (Saro-Wiwa's production company)."

him to execution. As Saro-Wiwa predicted, his death became a global media event, represented in papers with established genres of obituaries, opinion pieces, and editorials, amplifying the struggle of the Ogoni people worldwide. The United Nations condemned the act, and Nigeria was suspended from the Association of Commonwealth Nations. As Rob Nixon acutely summarizes, Saro-Wiwa was invested with a mythic quality, and transformed into a martyr.

> The Nigerian junta took this very mortal and internationally obscure activist, gave him a stage trial, and turned him through execution into a martyr. They thus amplified his cause and –as happened with martyrs—simplified it in his favor. Saro-Wiwa instantly became larger and longer than life. The word flashed around Lagos and Port Harcourt that he had refused to die, that it had taken five hangings to kill him. As a final precaution against his posthumous revenge, the regime stationed armed guards at the cemetery. They had orders to shoot anyone seen approaching the grave to pay homage or claim relics.[334]

In the wake of his death, numerous performative works—plays, commemorations, conceptual art projects—emerged and extended Saro-Wiwa's efforts to nurture a petro-political consciousness abroad.

In 2005, on the tenth-anniversary of Saro-Wiwa's death, the London-based organization Remember Saro-Wiwa (now a part of Platform) sponsored a competition with the British Arts Council, Amnesty International, and Greenpeace to create a "living memorial" to Saro-Wiwa to challenge people to remember the Ogoni, and how Western modernity is connected to sites of mineral extraction.[335] The winning entry was created by the Rivers State, Nigerian-born, and London-based artist Sokani Douglas Camp. Her memorial is a life-size steel bus called "the Battle Bus" which features the names of the Ogoni Nine who were hanged on November 10, 1995. Saro-Wiwa's quote, "I accuse the oil companies of practicing genocide against the Ogoni" is carved in all capital letters on three sides of the bus, and gold oil drums. The bus was unveiled outside the Guardian's offices in central London before its tour to British historical sites linked to the slave trade such as Liverpool, Birmingham, and Bristol. The barrels were played by African musicians as part of a live music event in London on the twelfth anniversary of the execution.

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[334] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 121.

[335] According to their website, Platform "believes in social and ecological justice, and consensus-based decision-making. We live in a world where excessive corporate and state power reinforces oppression. In solidarity with communities and movements, we work to confront undemocratic, abusive and ecologically destructive activities of corporations and governments. As a London-based organization, we recognize the need to challenge our city, its institutions, and companies to take responsibility for the colonial past and present the forms the basis for much of its wealth and power." Platform London, "Values Statement." https://platformlondon.org/values-statement/

FIG. 19. The Remember Saro-Wiwa bus. Photo by Platform London.

In interview, Camp explains the bus acts “as a pollutant, a carrier of supplies and information, and as a metaphor for Saro-Wiwa’s activism.”[336]

> Since Ken Saro-Wiwa’s death, things have not got better in the Delta. The unrest over oil has spread through the oil-producing states and now threatens to divide the country… What a help it would be to people in the Delta to know that others in the world care. […] I constructed a bus because I wanted a mighty vehicle to tour the streets of London and to be noticed, rather like the campaigning “Battle Bus” in an election […]. It is ironic that it is a fuel-guzzling object, coming from a country without MOT for vehicles […]. I wanted something familiar but interpreted in a third world way. Can we have a lorry commemorating a campaigner against oil exploitation? Things are never black and white and intuitively I think Ken would like the irony of this because oil brought about his death, but it is also playing a part in educating the world about the Ogoni peoples [sic] flight and the other peoples of the Niger Delta.[337]

Camp’s Battle Bus functioned as a mobile platform for educating people about the ongoing struggle of the Ogoni, and to generate public outrage and pressure on Shell to clean up the Niger Delta. In 2015, Platform send the Battle Bus back to Ogoniland as an act of solidarity. However, the Nigerian Customs seized the Bus, and despite direct instruction from the Nigerian National Assembly, and national and international outcry, the bus has remained seized—evidence that the development of a petro-political consciousness is still seen to be extremely threatening to the state.[338]

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[336] Paul Arendt, “Say It with Buses,” *The Guardian,* 9 November 2006.
[337] Camp quoted in Platform London, “Remember Saro-Wiwa, in ‘Land, Art—A Cultural Ecology Handbook,’” Platform London, December 12, 2016, accessed May 14, 2019, https://platformlondon.org/p-article/remember-saro-wiwa-in-land-art-a-cultural-ecology-handbook/
[338] Platform London, “Action Saro-Wiwa,” Platform London, 2018, accessed May 14, 2019, https://platformlondon.org/asw/

In November 2005, on the tenth anniversary of Saro-Wiwa's death, events in at least twenty-eight countries were held around the world to commemorate his life and activism.[339] In London, the Remember Saro-Wiwa campaign, which consists of a coalition of activist groups, staged two weeks of events, including readings of his work, panel discussions, a silent vigil outside the London office of the Shell Oil Company, and a memorial service. In Toronto, PEN Canada and the Ken Saro-Wiwa Foundation collaborated with Canadian celebrities Rohinton Mistry, journalist and author Linda McQuaig, and dub poet and actress d'bi. Young to perform readings of his work, as well as stage a short play written by the writer while he was still imprisoned, awaiting the outcome of his trial, which includes a character named Saro-Wiwa.[340] "On the Death of Ken Saro Wiwa" was adapted by Nigerian novelist Helon Habila from Saro-Wiwa's prison notes written a few days before his execution, and smuggled out to PEN.[341]

The play begins in Saro-Wiwa's house in Port Harcourt where Saro-Wiwa is asleep in his bed. He is awakened by two armed soldiers and an officer who barge through the door. The officer informs Saro-Wiwa he is under arrest, and he must record a confession to the murder of the Ogoni chiefs on camera for the Military Governor. Saro-Wiwa demands a lawyer, but the Officer refuses, and announces Saro-Wiwa will be forced to confess, after which he will be tried, found guilty for murder, and sentenced.[342] From there, for more than five minutes, the action consists of the soldiers beating up Ken who pleads, "I have nothing to confess to. I have done nothing wrong," while the Officer video records the action on camera.[343] Scene two takes place the next day in a courtroom with Ken in the docks. The officer is now wearing a Judge's wig and sits behind a table as one soldier stands guard, holding a rifle, and the other acts as a clerk and reads the charge of inciting the murder of four Ogoni chiefs. Images of a desolate, oil slicked landscape, gas flares, oil rigs, and dead animals covered in oil are projected onto the backdrop. Ken confesses the following:

> I confess to being a witness to the ruthless exploitation of the Ogoni land by the international oil companies. I confess to being a witness to the systematic degradation, since 1958, of our ancestral environment, the death of our beautiful rivers and seas, of our fishes and wild animals. I confess to being a witness to families being subjected to starvation and loss of hope because they can't farm the land anymore. I confess to being the President of MOSOP—Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People. I confess to being a witness to the ruthless murder of Ogoni people by the Nigerian government because they dare to protest this rape, this genocide. But I do not confess to murder. I confess to touring the land, and educating the people on their rights, and making them see the only way to free themselves, and this entire country from the

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[339] Guy Dixon, "Performances Recall Ken Saro-Wiwa," *The Globe and Mail,* November 10, 2005, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/performances-recall-ken-saro-wiwa/article20429955/

[340] Adinoyi Ojo Onukaba's play *The Killing Swamp* (2009) imagines the last hours of Saro-Wiwa's life. In a commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of Saro-Wiwa's execution, in November 2010, the play was staged in Abuja by Arojah Royal Theatre, as well as at Terra Kulture during the 2010 Lagos Book and Arts Fair, and in April 2014 in Abuja at the French Institute of Nigeria. It was also among the three short listed plays for the 2010 LNG $50,000 prize. The play is an imaginative dramatization of the final hours of Saro-Wiwa's life (including his execution) and is aimed at remembering Saro-Wiwa in the hope that such acts of state murder would not re-occur in the future.

[341] Habila won the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2001 for his short story, *Love Poems*, and the Commonwealth Prize for Best First Book (African Region) in 2003 with *Oil on Water*, which depicts the corruption of the oil companies, and exploitation and ruin of the Niger Delta. PEN Canada generously granted me access to the script, which is titled "The Trials of Ken Saro-Wiwa (or Saro-Wiwa's Ghost)" on its front page, but "On the Death of Ken Saro Wiwa" in copyright. It is also published in *Camouflage: Best of Contemporary Nigerian Writings*, eds. Nduka Otiono and Diego Okenyodo (Yenagoa: Treasure Books, 2006).

[342] Habila, "On the Death of Ken Saro Wiwa," 2.

[343] Ibid, 3.

> rapacious yoke of our rulers and their foreign allies is to act as one, to express themselves, to demand proper payment and rent from the oil companies. If this is a crime, then I confess to it, but I do not confess to murder. I grieve for the death of the four Ogoni Chiefs, some of them were my in-laws, all of them were my brothers, I loved them, and I hoped to fight with them for the same cause, but they took a different course from the popular one. I do not confess to their murder.[344]

Ken's confession angers the judge, and he sentences him to death. Ken responds by performing a poem that announces prison is not "the leaking roof," "measly rations," or "emptiness of day" in a damp cell, but the corruption of Nigerian society: "It is the lies that have been drummed/ Into our ears for one generation/ It is the security agent running amok/ Executing callous calamitous orders/ In exchange for a wretched meal a day/ The magistrate writing into his book/ Punishment he knows is undeserved/ The moral decrepitude/ Mental ineptitude/ Cowardice masking as obedience/ Lurking in our denigrated souls."[345]

The final scene takes place in Ken's dimly lit prison cell. Ken is seated on a mattress on the floor with a bowed head, his clothes are "tattered and grimy, but his spirit is still unbroken."[346] The distant sound of an Ekoni drum rouses Ken as it comes closer, and at last the drummer appears: "*He is tall and gangly, dressed in ragged Nigerian Army camouflage uniform, his bones shooting out of holes in his uniform, his huge brown teeth projecting from his huge lips. He carries a rifle over one shoulder*."[347] The figure points his gun at Ken, and informs him his name is "General Jeno Saidu."[348] Jeno Saidu reveals all that remains of the Ogoni is Saro-Wiwa. He boasts he was ordered by the Military High Command to pursue a "scorched earth policy," shoot indiscriminately at the Ogoni people, kill the goats, chicken, plantain, and yam, starve those that weren't shot, and destroy all evidence of the villages so business can continue. Saro-Wiwa Ken takes out his pen to write down the confession. Jeno Saidu reveals Saro-Wiwa is already dead, having died on the 10th of November by hanging. After Ken died, he persisted "as an inspiration in the people's minds. The Military High Command and the Oil Executives decided to take the fight into the people's minds. That's why I came here."[349] Thinking that what is happening is now "in the people's minds," Ken moves for his pen again. Jeno Saidu reveals that Saro-Wiwa was supposed to die when he was accused of killing the four chiefs, and he paid for the witness who swore Saro-Wiwa incited the youth. Ken and Jeno Saidu continue their frank conversation:

> Ken: But why? All I wanted was what was right. These oil companies observe Environmental Safety Procedures in other countries, they compensate the communities from whom they extract minerals - all I wanted was for them to do the same thing here.
>
> Saidu: Ah, Ken. Don't be so naive. Environmental Impact Studies and the like are for developed countries, white people, not for us. Our leaders just want to make sure they get their own share. And so when you dared to oppose the 500 million dollar gas pipeline project that was to pass through the Ogoni territory, and when you turned down that bribe from the Italian Oil Executive, when you mobilised the Ogoni people through your organisation MOSOP to insist on the Environmental Impact Assessment report - that day you became a marked man.[350]

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[344] Ibid, 4-5.
[345] Ibid, 5-6.
[346] Ibid, 7.
[347] Ibid, 7.
[348] Ibid, 7.
[349] Ibid, 8.
[350] Ibid, 10.

Geno Saidu reports that on the day Saro-Wiwa died, there was jubilation at Government House in Port Harcourt: the head of state sent a message of congratulations to the governor, and all members of the Security Task Force involved in his arrest and torture were promoted and awarded bonuses. As all of Saro-Wiwa's relatives had been driven into exile and were thus unable to claim the body, the Commander of the Task Force was given the contract for Saro-Wiwa's burial. To maximize profit, a cheap coffin only five feet long and one foot wide was made. Saro-Wiwa's body was buried upright as all Ogoni territory had been bought by the oil companies, and they didn't want to waste any of it. Saro-Wiwa is sobered by this idea of his legacy, and orders Jeno Saidu to leave. The play closes with Saro-Wiwa speaking directly to the audience: "whether I live or not is immaterial**.** It is enough to know that there are people who commit time and money to the cause ... and if they do not succeed today, they will succeed tomorrow. I know one day soon the grass will grow again, the birds will fly again, the fishes will swim the seas again, and this pen will write again."[351]

"On the Death of Ken Saro-Wiwa" is not a simple commemoration of the man, but an educational play about Saro-Wiwa's life and cause. Scene one's long, choreographed beating of Saro-Wiwa impresses upon the audience the vulnerability of the body, and Saro-Wiwa's endurance. The materialization of genocide in Jeno Saidu, as a figure who finds pleasure in torturing others, moves away from a realist conception to make explicit the genocidal consequences of petro-imperialism. But, as Jeno Saidu is dressed in a ragged camouflage uniform of the Nigeran Army with bones shooting out of holes, it is clear he has not benefitted from this violence, exposing the contradictions between those with power and those who are agents of the state. Jeno Saidu's fear of Saro-Wiwa's pen supports the claims of writers like Rob Nixon who have argued that the force of Saro-Wiwa derives from his writing, like Ken's poetic description about the ordinary experience of imprisonment through "the lies that have been drummed into our ears," the desperate actions and denigrated soul of a men governed by hunger, and the cowardice of those in power who are aware of the undeservedness of the punishment he extols. The obscure temporality of scene three, in which Saro-Wiwa is in a liminal space between life and death, emphasizes his point that "whether I live or not is immaterial. It is enough to know that there are people who commit time and money to the cause… and if they do not succeed today, they will succeed tomorrow."[352] The play plays on the temporality of petro-political consciousness—there is nothing to be done to save Saro-Wiwa, but he awaits a justice yet to come for the Ogoni people, for whom it is not yet too late.

Both Camp and Habila keep Saro-Wiwa alive in the people's minds and engage his story to expose the real costs of petro-imperialism in sites where the Indigenous people who resist are named eco-terrorists and enemies of the state, and subject to military violence, or worse. By mobilizing the stories of the extractive resource frontier, they, too, take on the work of cultivating a petro-political consciousness and advocating for a less oppressive and less exploitative world through artistic interventions. The question, then, is if a crudely pessimistic public will go on spectating the extractive frontier drama, or will they become active witnesses who work to end and redress the violence of extractivism and petro-imperialism?

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[351] Ibid, 11.

[352] Saro-Wiwa in his prophetic short story "African Kills Her Sun," which takes the form of a letter written by a prisoner on the night before his public execution. Ken Saro-Wiwa, "African Kills Her Sun," *Under African Skies: Modern African Stories,* ed. C.D. Larson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998 [1987]), 210-221.

Coda. Charting New Frontiers

"There is no greater task today than to develop a critique of violence adequate to our deeply unjust, inequitable, and violent times. Only then might we grasp the magnitude and depths of suffering endured on a daily basis by many of the world's citizens. Only then might we move beyond the conceit of a neoliberal project, which has normalized violence such that its worst manifestations become part of our cultural 'pastimes.' And only then might we reignite a radical imagination that is capable of diagnosing the violence of the present in such a manner that we have the confidence to rethink the meaning of global citizenship in the twenty-first century."—Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux[353]

There are many yet-underexplored ways to think through performance from a petrocritical perspective: from the celebration of speed, power, and automobility at NASCAR races, monster truck rallies and aviation shows, to the plastic playgrounds and fantasylands of Disneyworld, to the spectacles of petro-prosperity at the Calgary Stampede and Louvre Abu Dhabi, to the rising number of marches, protests, and interventions that seek to halt the development of pipelines across unceded territories in the Americas, or to disrupt the "artwashing" of spaces like the Tate Galleries and British Museum. Petro-modernity is spectacular, and there is much work that performance scholars can do to analyse performances through which petrocultures operate, and the social and environmental consequences of the logics they produce, uphold, and circulate.[354] In *Crude Stages of the Frontier*, I draw on a tradition of research that recognizes spectacle as a constitutive element of performative societies to advance a critique of petro-imperial violence. I approach oil spectacles as central to maintaining the fictions of frontier life, enabling the progression of petro-imperialism, deeply unjust, inequitable, and violent norms of life, and by obstructing eco-activism and the transition to an ecologically sustainable and socially just future. Although Guy Debord was not thinking in ecological terms when he returned in the late 1980s to theorizing the society of the spectacle, he accurately predicted the society of the spectacle has continued to advance, and "it is under such conditions that the next stage of social conflict will necessarily be played out."[355]

My study focuses on oil frontiers because they represent some of the most important places in the world today—they function in conceptual and practical terms as "theatres of war" on which the battle over the world's most valuable commodity, and the wealth and power it confers, are waged. Oil frontiers are "contact zones" between those with immense power, and those whose lives are lived in situations of injustice and are forced to move politically as a result. It is not surprising that oil frontiers become "epicentres of violence" (to borrow Achille Mbembe's term).[356] Conflicts over oil frontiers escalate as existing oil provinces near depletion, leaving only fossil fuels trapped in high risk and hard-to-reach places, or in shale and bitumen reserves which can only be extracted at great cost. A new wave of colonial and imperial dispossession occurs when litigations reign over who owns the land, and on what basis that ownership is legitimized. Yet, the social and environmental damage wrought by oil development and transportation has inspired remarkable political

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[353] Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux, *Disposable Futures: The Seduction of Violence in the Age of Spectacle* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2015), 4.

[354] For example, an anthology on petro-plays could span John McGrath's *The Cheviot, The Stag, and the Black Black Oil* (Scotland), J.P. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt* and Lydia Adetunji's *Fixer* (Nigeria), Ella Hickson's *Oil* (Great Britain), and Sebastian Archibald, Kevin Loring, and Quelemia Sparing's *Pipeline Project* (Canada).

[355] Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle,* translated by Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1990 [1988]), 4.

[356] Achille Mbembe, "At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2001): 280.

performances by Indigenous actors and allies who dramatize the precariousness of life, experiences of slow and fasts violence, and urgency of political performance on oil frontiers. Resultantly, the oil frontier, like the "extractive zone," is a staging ground for rival ecological imaginaries. It is a site where "submerged perspectives"—material alternatives to the destructive path of petro-imperialism proposed and proliferated by Indigenous artists, activists, movements, and theorists sometimes hidden beneath the surface from normative (spectacular) modes of apprehension —can be lifted up to contest colonized views of history and the conviction that some places and peoples can be depleted, poisoned, or otherwise sacrificed for the "greater" purposes of nation-building and economic progress.

While I focus on oil frontiers because the sense of "crisis" is so pronounced there, it is important to note there are also stimulating political performances opposing iterations of petro-imperialism in sites of financial clout like London and New York geographically distant from the frontier, but nonetheless connected vis-à-vis economic channels. Art-activist collectives like Not an Alternative, BP or Not BP, and Liberate Tate urge major cultural institutions to stop allowing corporate sponsorship by Big Oil corporations and investors. In addition to staging performance interventions in sites like the British Museum, the Tate Galleries, the Houston Natural History Museum, and the Royal Shakespeare Company, sometimes these groups circulate petitions, such as the Natural History Museum's "Open Letter to Museums," which was signed by fifty scientists, and called for U.S. museums to divest from accepting sponsorship from fossil fuel corporations. Their performative and political strategies of "institutional liberation" move beyond earlier forms of institutional critique by disavowing cultural normalization of corporate power and its nefarious sway over public institutions, and by moving toward the emancipation of such spaces from petro-capitalist influence, social and economic injustice, and anti-democratic rule.[357] As T.J. Demos, Mel Evans, and Susan Bennett have each articulated, petro-sponsorship of arts and cultural institutions is not only an issue of divestment, it is about the colonization of the mind.[358] Further research could be conducted to illuminate the ways petro-sponsored arts events maintain levels of climate change doubt and uncertainty sufficient to guarantee inaction, and impede the populous from acting as if they are in a crisis. As, well, additional research could illuminate the multitudinous and diverse ways that art-activists disrupt these events and petro-imperial logics operating through them by staging performative interventions.

I selected case studies on three different oil frontiers that represent varied dramaturgies of spectacle to enable me to model several approaches to analyzing petro-imperialism and performative responses to it. In Chapter 1, I illustrate how the production of crude optimism through the performance of frontier life at the Calgary Stampede manufactures consent to petro-imperialism, normalizes the violence of the frontier, and contributes to the production of an "ecological false consciousness." The immersive spectacle of the extractive frontier drama affirms the ideologies and values of a powerful group of elites associated with the petroleum industry. The *jouissance* of the event conditions us to make sense of an increasingly turbulent present, accept the risk of our ecologically destructive forms of production, and reify the hegemony of white hetero-patriarchal settler colonialism. My study of the Calgary Stampede illustrates how attending to the expediency of performance can advance an understanding of how petro-imperialism is normalized, and crude optimism is produced, circulated, and celebrated, recruiting new celebrants through

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[357] T. J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 109.

[358] Demos; Mel Evans, *Artwash: Big Oil and the Arts* (London: Pluto Press, 2015); Susan Bennett. "Sponsoring Shakespeare," *Shakespeare's Cultural Capital: His Economic Impact from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Dominic Shellard and Siobhan Keenan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 163-79.

spectacular display of anthropocentrism and development. It represents the frontier myth as a repertoire of violence through which the forms and actual practices of violence find their (invented) origins and are celebrated on a monumental scale, and it shows how oil spectacles build group cohesion against anyone who might stand in the way of petro-imperialism, and how they obstruct the transition to an ecologically sustainable and socially just economy. Theatre and performance scholars ought to bring to light other "Anthropocene (an)aesthetics"—aesthetic practices that anaesthetize populations to environmental destruction—that stymy efforts to tackle climate change, allow extractivism to continue, and constitute the ways we are "learning to die in the Anthropocene."[359] Similarly, by interrogating additional ways that spectacle and other performance practices produce "crude optimism," performance scholars can contribute to understanding the social impasses that inhibit energy transition. Only when we understand how existing notions of the "good life" are linked to fossil-fuel consumption can we start to disentangle ourselves from this "destructive attachment."[360]

My studies of water protectors at Standing Rock and Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni plight illustrate why it is important for performance scholars to attend to performative critiques and refusals of petro-imperialism that present non-economistic perspectives as they enact decolonial forms of politics that are essential to ecological sustainability. In chapter two and three, I feature the work of Indigenous and anti-colonial artists, scholars, and activists who interrupt those colonial and imperial systems of thought and power that prevent spectators from seeing their collective interests and power, and work to foster the development of a "petro-political consciousness" premised on ecologically sustainable decolonial relationships. Artists and artist collectives like Josué Rivas, Winter Count, Cannupa Hanska Luger, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Platform London, Sokani Douglas Camp, and Helon Habila nurture awareness of the negative social and environmental costs of a political economy (and political ecology) of oil. They illuminate the necessity of seeing oneself in relationship not only with other humans, but in complex webs of interconnections with lands, waters, and all the creatures that inhabit these terrains. And they draw attention to the dominant structures of apprehension that obscure "slow violence" by producing imaginative responses to the insidious forms of violence, unfolding environmental catastrophes, and "long dyings" that occur gradually and out of sight across time and space.[361] They attest to Rob Nixon's observation, "if the neoliberal era has intensified assaults on resources, it has also intensified resistance, whether through isolated site-specific struggles or through activism that has reached across national boundaries in an effort to build translocal alliances."[362]

These case studies illuminate important possibilities for performatively producing sustainable alternatives to petro-imperialism premised on an understanding "we are in crisis" even though climate crises—exacerbated by the burning of fossil fuels and the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere—will affect us differently on the basis of our race, class,

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[359] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Visualizing the Anthropocene," *Public Culture* 26, no. 2 (2014), 220; Roy Scanton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2015). Visual scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff describes how an Anthropocene aesthetic developed within the Euro-American art canon that depicted the transformation of the biosphere and aestheticized anthropogenic destruction. For example, the smog of industrial pollution was viewed as a sign of the vitality of the modern metropole rather than a sign of the degradation of air. Such representations, he argues, allowed agents of the Anthropocene "to move on, to see nothing, and keep circulating commodities, despite the destruction to the biosphere."

[360] See Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum and Culture in the American Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11.

[361] See Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 5.

[362] Ibid, 4.

ethnicity, gender, and geographic position. "We" are in crisis because fossil-fueled modernity equates to a "risk society" in which risky decisions originate in peacetime in centres of rationality and prosperity, and self-endangerment (in the form of global warming and climate catastrophe) that accompanies the unchecked expansion of industrial societies is tacitly accepted as the dark side of progress.[363] Ulrich Beck encapsulates the global implications of fossil-fueled modernity when he writes,

> Unlike the risks of early industry society, contemporary nuclear, chemical, ecological, and biological threats are (1) not limitable, either socially or temporally; (2) not accountable according to the prevailing rules of causality, guilt, and liability; and (3) neither compensable nor insurable. [. . .] The ecological issue, considered politically and sociologically, focuses at heart on a *systematic, legalized violation of fundamental civil rights*—the citizen's right to life and freedom from bodily harm. This violation is not going on incidentally, accidentally, or individually, but in broad daylight, as part of the development of industry, prosperity, and technical rationality, in the glore of the mass media and in an alert democracy of citizens' groups. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the protectors of the constitution violate their trust when they permit ecologically self-destructive types of production.

Our subjugation to a global fossil-fueled economy re-animates the core postcolonial claim that colonialism impoverishes us all not only those Indigenous subjects, racial and ethnic minorities, and other subjugated classes, demonstrating that a materialist, politically-engaged postcolonial critique is more indispensable than ever. The conviction that "we are in crisis" has a powerful interpolating force as I demonstrated in my study of water protectors, calling subjects into formation and reformulation in ways that disrupt other categories of identity.

Addressing ecological crisis requires us to overcome ideologies of individual responsibility propagated by the neoliberal order and refuse economic reductionism in our politics. Indigenous knowledge premised in grounded normativities form the basis of alternative, decolonial ways of doing things based in deep reciprocity and intimate interconnection, spiraling across time and space. Writing about Indigenous resurgence, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes, "I didn't need to look for catastrophe or crisis-based stories to learn how to rebuild. The Nishnabeeg conceptualizations of life I found were cycles of creative energies, continual processes that bring forth more life and more creation and more thinking. These are the systems that we need to re-create."[364] This is especially true now that a climate threshold has been crossed, and the geophysical impact of human activity registers at the level of Earth systems. Naming the Anthropocene is a performative political act, announcing we are living in a geologic epoch determined by the detritus, movement, and actions of humans. Naming the Capitalocene similarly signifies that extractivist, capitalist production has resulted in human-induced climate change on such a scale and to such a degree, it can be mapped within geological time. And it attributes responsibility to those populations in the Global North with access to fossil fuels and capital. Decolonization and decarbonization must globalize and conjure a politics predicated on global ecological citizenship (one that also recognizes nonhuman actants like carbon dioxide as amongst the most powerful entities today).

The artists and activists I have studied, and the traditions of anti- and de-colonial thought I have engaged present varied possibilities for "decolonizing the mind" and resisting petro-imperialism through performative actions and practices based on the specific histories, situations, and systems of colonialism from which they are lived. They remind us, as Oglala

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[363] Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society,* translated by Mark A. Ritter (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1995), 2; 8.

[364] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 24.

Lakota poet and water protector Mark Tilson reminded me at an event featuring Indigenous organizers protecting land, "we are not people standing up for nature, we are nature standing up for itself."[365] Although these different strategies sometimes forward incommensurate political formations in the quest for environmental justice (consider Saro-Wiwa's ethnic politics versus the globalizing call to "Stand with Standing Rock"), they testify to the need for more ecological and energy-conscious critiques to postcolonial studies, and new forms of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist thinking. Moreover, they signify the need for more comparative decolonial scholarship. As Jodi Byrd, citizen of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma, writes, "Given that postcolonial theory and American Indian studies arose within the academy almost simultaneously and that both fields are concerned with the ramifications of colonial legacies, it is still notable how little the two fields have been in conversation."[366]

If we consider, again, Thunberg's call for "acting in a crisis," we might deem it the goal of a petro-political consciousness. Acting in a crisis is a form of political action practiced by those who have developed an anxiety about losing the future—a feat contingent on recognizing the future *can* be lost, and that we will lose that future if we don't think of it as something that can be lost.[367] The emergence of a petro-political consciousness can constitute an "event" in Alain Badiou's understanding of the term as something extraordinary that punches a hole in a situation and the constituted order of knowledge, expectation, and historical horizon.[368] It requires that "I must completely rework my way of living my situation."[369] Sometimes this means acting *un*reasonably. In an expression of gratitude to climate strikers, Rebecca Solnit writes, "Thank you so much for being unreasonable. That is, if reasonable means playing by the rules, and the rules are presumed to be guidelines for what is and is not possible."[370] Here, being "unreasonable," and acting in a crisis, means not listening, stopping, letting dreams shrink, or accepting the inevitability of petro-imperialism and climate disaster. This work is not easy as repudiating crude optimism means challenging conventional notions of happiness produced in petro-modernity. And as Sara Ahmed notes, "To point out the emptying of the world by overdevelopment is to be a killjoy, getting in the way of a future enjoyment."[371] So let there be more killjoys working to disentangle the legitimizing narratives, structures of feeling, embodied behaviors, and cultural practices that allow violent and racialized acts of dispossession, extractivism, and coloniality to become, *and to remain*, thinkable. Only then might we get around the impasse to thought and imagination that binds us to the unsustainable futures of petrocultures, and "ignite a radical imagination capable of diagnosing the violence of the present in such a manner that we have the confidence to rethink the meaning of global citizenship in the twenty-first century."[372]

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[365] Mark Tilsen, "Visionaries: Indigenous Organizers Protecting Land," symposium at Catalyst Project, San Francisco, February 24, 2019.
[366] Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xxxii. Coulthard's engagement with Frantz Fanon in *Red Skins White Masks* is an important exception.
[367] Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 183.
[368] Alan Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprising*, translated by Gregory Elliott (Verso, 2012).
[369] Alan Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2001), 41.
[370] Rebecca Solnit, "Thank You, Climate Strikers. Your Action Matters and Your Power Will Be Felt," *The Guardian*, March 15, 2019, accessed March 25 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/15/climate-strikers-letter-thank-you?fbclid=IwAR3x96JzV2V3kiNqjoQf-bSfJXjd5H4Dp5vy6ca5hTrjtNLO1jdy1sX5xiU
[371] Ahmed, 176.
[372] Evans and Giroux, 4.

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