

**IF THE WATERS**

# **WERE TO SHRUG**

**EXTRACTIVE VIOLENCE, ERASURE**

**AND THE POLITICS OF RESISTING IN**

**THE SETTLER COLONIAL PRESENT**



**DILLON OZUNA**  
**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE M.A. DEGREE**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY**  
**UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN**  
**FALL 2019**



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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is based on my multi-sited fieldwork (January–September 2018) surrounding an anti-pipeline resistance camp led by four indigenous women in southwest Louisiana opposing the new Bayou Bridge Pipeline; the southward extension of the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline that spurred mass protests at Standing Rock from mid-2016 to early-2017. The four women are of Diné and Cherokee, Sicangu Lakota (Sioux), Choctaw, and Houma descent respectively. The Bayou Bridge Pipeline, financed by banks such as Norway’s DnB, would transport crude oil to the black church community of St. James—an impoverished community long inundated with toxic pollution in one of the most densely industrialized regions in the Western Hemisphere, named Cancer Alley—for the manufacturing of plastics and various consumer commodities.

The women operate as allies to the black community of St. James and other Cancer Alley communities who are themselves stark opponents of the pipeline, highlighting solidarity across marginalized social groupings. The allies of these women that I lived among and studied hail from other indigenous communities across the country, while others that I lived among are non-indigenous sympathizers with politics that are primarily leftist-oriented or anarchistic. As such the combined politics of those that I studied are mainly anti-capitalist and anti-colonial.

Throughout the thesis, I explore the *politics of water* mobilized by activists—i.e. a politics focused on rights to clean-water as well as aimed at protecting surrounding environments that communities depend on—examining primarily how they employ their politics of water as a vehicle to resist what they perceive as settler-colonial processes of dispossession engendered by projects of the fossil fuel industry, the US government and the Louisiana government in the present.

I combine theories from resistance studies, social movement studies, environmental studies, political anthropology, linguistic anthropology, gender studies, kinship studies, indigenous studies and settler colonial studies, a sub-field of indigenous studies that analyzes phenomena pertaining to settler colonialism, to examine the mobilizations of these activists and the overarching power dynamics, i.e. the political corruption and the structural relations that promote the construction of this pipeline network, against which they employ various forms of resistance.

Using various news articles and the work of investigative journalists, I examine the discursive landscape surrounding the activists and this pipeline. Moreover, I use life-histories and lived-experiences from qualitative interview material, ethnographic scenarios and field-notes to examine the turmoil of the contemporary United States, the everyday lived-realities of activists here as low-income citizens, people of diverse ethnicities and women of diverse backgrounds in a society that since president Trump’s inauguration in 2017 has steadily become more alienating and hostile toward the intersecting social groupings of these activists. As the thesis explores, their lives are subject to diverse modes of oppression and domination connected to industrial projects and pollution. Any mistakes written in the thesis are my own.

Keywords: resistance; water; politics; environment; settler colonialism; indigenous; pollution; dispossession; anti-capitalism; anti-colonialism.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to begin here with a land acknowledgement of the territories that I lived on as a guest in the fieldsite. It is an emic practice among my interlocutors to acknowledge the original inhabitants of a place either still existing or who were violently dispossessed during the colonization period, and whose histories are largely erased in school textbooks in the United States and unacknowledged by the settler-majority population. The southwest Louisiana prairies that I lived on were once occupied by the indigenous Atakapa people, whose communities stretched from present-day Texas to Louisiana. The main tribes were largely decimated by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and of their contemporary descendants there are no remaining fluent speakers of the language. The southern swampland territories of the Atchafalaya that I frequented were once occupied by the Chitimacha people, one of the four federally recognized tribes in Louisiana besides the Coushatta, the Choctaw and the Tunica-Biloxi. These are among the many original peoples of the land, and the dispossessions and injustices against indigenous communities in the United States are still ongoing.

For six to eight months I had the undying privilege of living amongst some of the most organized, fiercest and dedicated collective of people who continually put their bodies on the line in their struggle for justice; for those who are denied access to clean water, for the right to defend their lands from incursive fossil fuel companies and who seek accountability from an affluent class of Americans that render poor communities of color disposable for their profit. Of the basic principles that these activists adhere to, one of prominence is *voluntary association*: whereby different individuals mobilize together on the basis of mutual interest, and here, in resisting the destruction of several communities in which they either live or to which they express solidarity and common struggle. As I attempt to explore in this thesis, the forces that they resist are not reducible to a single issue such as this pipeline; but rather attributable to the structural arrangements and coercive authority that permits the ongoing dispossessions of their communities.

To Cherri Foytlin, Anne White Hat, Monique Verdin, Sonya Bratlie and this stellar assembly of activists, the Movement Mothers and Trash Punks as they call themselves, I have the utmost gratitude for allowing me to live among you and to document your fight during this pipelines construction; sharing the confined spaces of cars, sharing meals, experiencing environments mostly unseen and hearing stories mostly unheard of by the world. By acknowledging the names of the women of the council, I am breaking anonymity here for the purpose of giving credit to those whose tireless environmental work I studied. Thank you for enduring any tedious interviews on my part and for the immense insight you all have provided along the way. A very special thank you to those activists in particular that I spent the most time with, for the humorous impressions of Rust and Marty from the television-series True Detective, based in Louisiana, for inviting me to experience activist culture behind the scenes as an unfamiliar researcher, for allowing me to join you to scavenge junkyards and roadsides, for the boat-trips, and for the daylong road-trips accompanied by rest-stop naps and the sharing of music. Thank you for the times around fire-pits, in meetings, motels, swimming in the bayous, getting devoured by bugs together and most of all seeing you all in your elements as hardcore activists, resisters and direct actionists.

To local Louisiana activists such as Travis London, and to the Standing Rock crew, the so-called Texas crew, the so-called Missouri and Midwest crew, the Rhode Island crew, the Westcoast crew, and all others who mobilized in Louisiana, I am forever honored to have met you and thank you for allowing me to share the spaces of court-rooms, direct actions and the wildest of landscapes. To the people of 350 and Louisiana Bucket Brigade

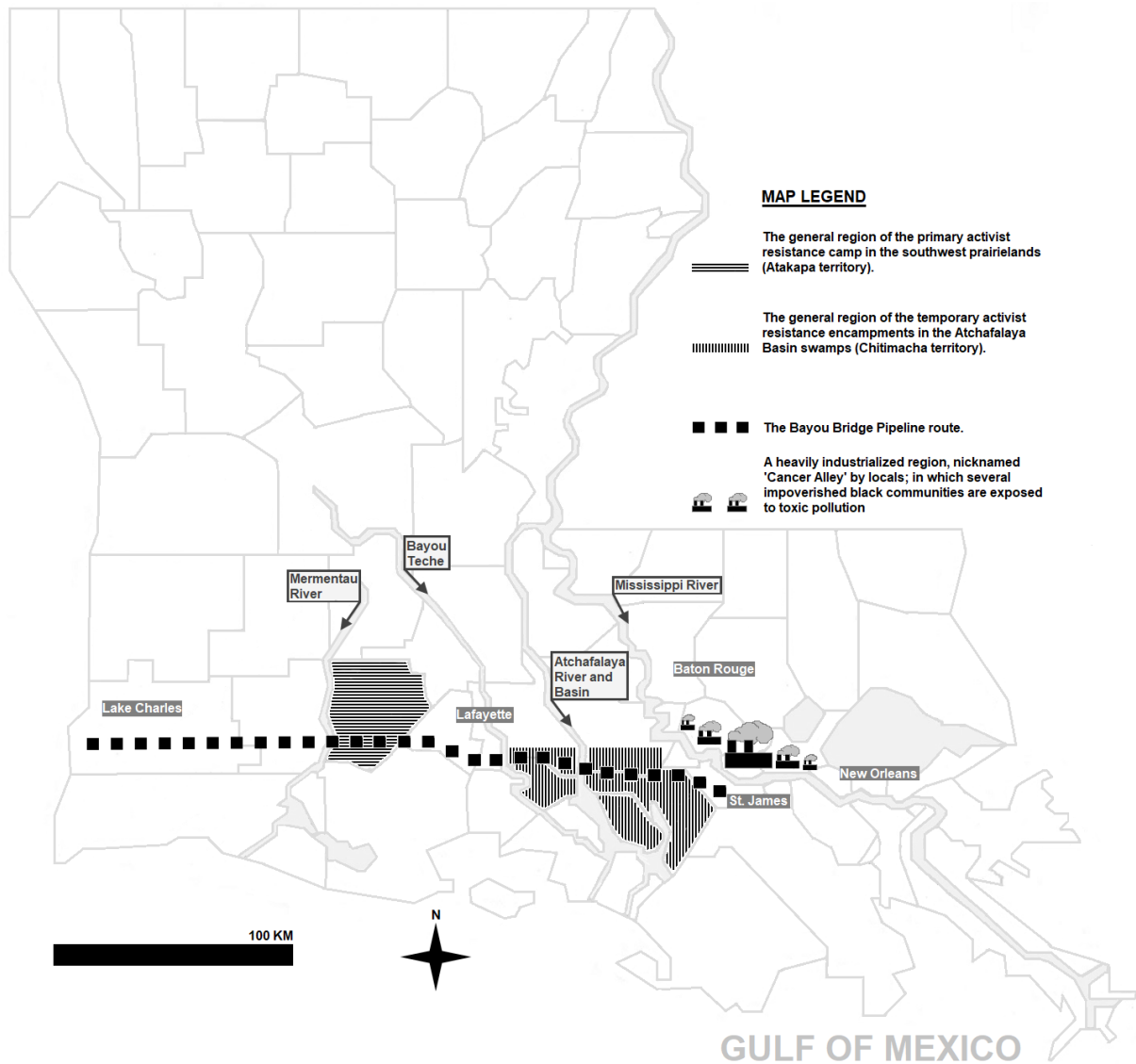
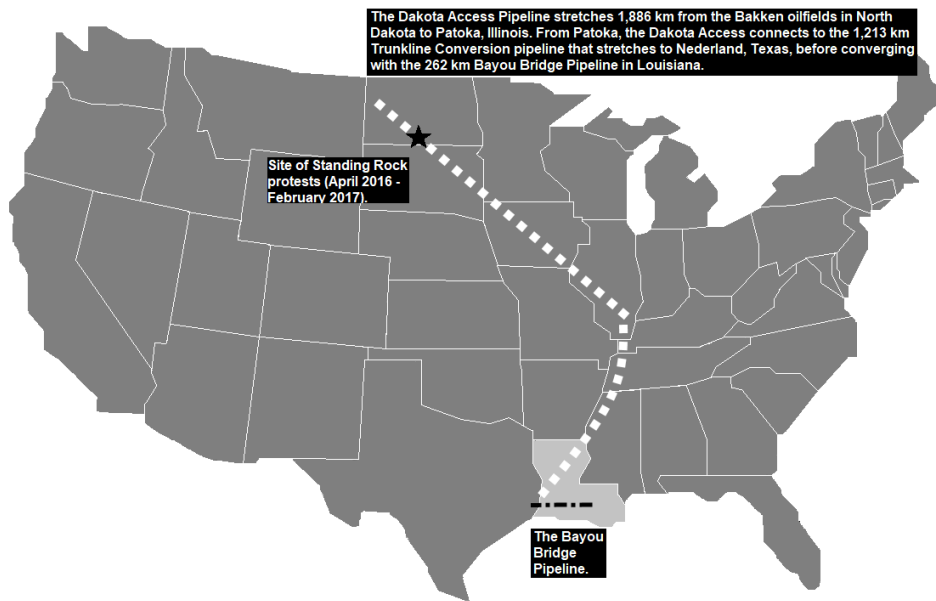
of the wider network, I thank you for allowing me to attend meetings and to share space with you in the beginning of the fieldwork and for the work you all continue to do. To Thom Davies, a fellow ethnographer that I met in the field-site and whose work I admire, I thank you for the advice during the fieldwork and for the work that you do.

To Nora, the person who listened, discussed, supported and pushed me beyond my limitations and who has been a rock in my life—who endured time spent apart while striving beyond your own limits at home with new responsibilities as a psychologist on the rise—I owe all and am forever proud to know you and of your accomplishments. Without you, this work would not at all have been possible. To family who lent me a vehicle long-term and a wonderful extended family that opened up their home to me in New Orleans in the beginning of my fieldwork, I thank you for the time shared together around dinner tables and in the city. To my parents who each supported this endeavor, I am indebted and thank you all. To New Orleans family living in Norway, I thank you for the moral support and I hope to shed light on issues in Louisiana and in the US that were perhaps unknown to you. To Joel and other friends back home, I thank you for the support.

To my first assigned advisor, professor Tone Bringa, whose work ethic and professionalism is a source of inspiration, I thank you for approving my research proposal in the fall of 2017 and for sending me off into the field with words of encouragement. To my later-assigned advisor, Kerry Ryan Chance, whose extraordinary work I admire and respect, I am extremely lucky for your guidance in the beginning of the fieldwork and I thank you for the skype meetings, for your mentoring that went into revisions of chapters, and for the overall support that helped shape this thesis. To Erik, Axel and Marte, I thank you all and I am deeply indebted to you for undergoing the grueling process of reading the earlier drafts that helped shaped this thesis. To Hilde Ellefsen, the student advisor at the Department of Social Anthropology, I am thankful for the tireless work that you do, for making sure that the students get the help that we need during the writing process and for helping me delay the initial deadline of the paper, to which I am indebted. A very special thank you to classmates who struggled in solidarity during the writing phase, to whom I am deeply indebted for the overall support and feedback during the writing phase and whose papers I am eager to read.

To the librarians at the University who suggested books and helped me find sources, I am indebted and I am thankful for the work that you do. To the Rakel Korsmo and Otto Korsmo study-fund from my adopted home community in the hill-country of eastern Norway, I thank you for the financial support for this fieldwork. To a childhood friend who passed on back in Norway during the last days of my fieldwork, who supported this endeavor and provided important words of encouragement whenever we would meet, I am ever thankful for the time spent together and I was deeply saddened by your passing. To an activist friend I met who passed on some months after the fieldwork, who gave their life to fighting pipelines and holding corporations accountable for their destruction of local environments, I am honored to have met you and for your work in the swamps and bayous of the Atchafalaya. I dedicate this work and the life-stories shared within it to you all and to those still fighting on the frontlines of environmental justice.

September 11<sup>th</sup> 2019, Bergen



Caption: Low-detail map design by author





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## CHAPTER 1

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## THE EXTRACTIVE RICH & RESISTANT POOR: INTRODUCTION

*“You blight the soil... and poison the rivers...  
 You raze the vegetation... till you cannot even feed your own kind...  
 And then... you boast of man’s triumph over nature...  
 Fools. If nature were to shrug... or to raise an eyebrow...  
 Then you should all be gone.”*

(Swamp Thing: Earth to Earth. Alan Moore 1986; in Di Liddo 2009:52).

The above excerpt is from Alan Moore’s *Swamp Thing*, a graphic novel about a being that protects the inhospitable swamps of coastal Louisiana. The being is a red-eyed, hulking, humanoid-shaped monster composed of roots and vegetative matter. It manipulates the growth of all surrounding nature—plants, roots, vines and trees, all dependent on water access—into monstrous limbs and weapons; animating non-human life with a formidable agency to ward off environmental threats, such as industrialist humans. In my field-site, the quotation decorated a wall as a poster in the living space of the activists that I lived with alongside other political posters, signifying a cultural connection to the Louisiana swamps and to the role of protecting its waters. Activists here received the title of ‘Water Protectors’ at Standing Rock, a name aligned with their politics of water. This project examines how these activists, of indigenous and non-indigenous backgrounds, construct a platform for resistance against industrial expansion that threatens to pollute the waters of local marginalized communities of color, i.e. their politics of water.<sup>1</sup>

The activists I lived with are resisting the construction of a controversial pipeline. Their aim is to stop its construction by shutting down worksites through direct action and protest, aside from lawsuits against the company; an ongoing struggle for clean-water access surrounding waterways that they depend on for everyday use in Louisiana and beyond the region. The primary topic of their protest is water but water may also be viewed as a hermeneutic to accentuate the fluid and non-static community of this modular group of activists, comprised of several different class, gender and ethnic backgrounds, mainly lower- and working class and of indigenous descent; many who come from interconnecting waterways across North America. Some lived in Louisiana for months or for longer periods. Their fluidity is further underlined by the banner of fluid identities that they mobilize under, through the inclusion and empowerment of e.g. transgender, queer, gender-nonconforming and non-binary persons. Moreover, ‘water’ also expresses the dualities of water, as a vital nucleus for life and as a harbinger for its more calamitous features: the devastating floods,

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<sup>1</sup> Politics of water, sometimes known as water or hydro politics, is a politics concerned with the availability of clean water sources for communities.

torrential rains, hurricanes and rising sea levels that supervene upon frequent off-shore oil spills, pipeline leaks and chemical disasters, in which Louisiana residents, including some of these activists, are further imperiled.

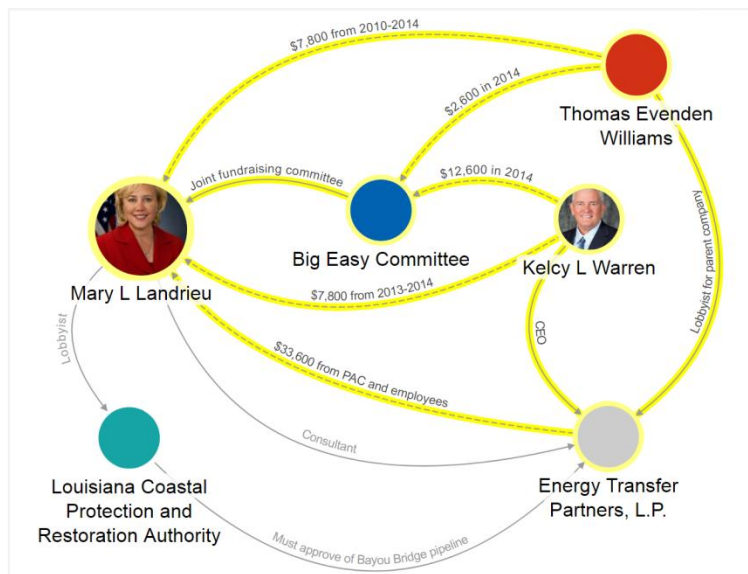
For the title of the thesis, I have altered one phrase from the excerpt, “if nature were to shrug”; substituting *nature* with *water* to align with the water-protector role of activists. The title *If The Waters Were To Shrug* speaks to the fluidity of activists and one of the most significant constituents of their biological being, water, of which all humans are comprised. Available freshwater makes up an estimated one-percent of the world’s water supplies, of which the United States holds seven-percent (Water Footprint 2018), and of which the average human body composition is fifty-percent. Activists emphasize waters life-giving qualities as a sacred source of vitality to which their lives are materially entangled. Thus the activists emblemize the waters that they protect. As lower and working class residents, when their lives and surrounding drinking waters are rendered disposable—used as industrial waste sites and for the unsafe transport of extracted resources—the US government facilitates their elimination. I examine the ways in which these activists of fluid and marginalized identities organize, network and resist a white American elite of corporate and state representatives, coalescing like a torrent or a flood. I highlight their smaller and larger forms of resistance and expressions of indifference to settler-government authority that, cumulatively, are analogous to the phrases “[if they were] to *shrug*... or to *raise an eyebrow*”, reminding those who impose modes of domination over them of their power when they amass. More notably, I explore the harsh dimensions of their social realities, their everyday politics and what events transpire when these activists mobilize to prevent the construction of environmentally harmful infrastructure lobbied for by fossil fuel companies in conjunction with the Louisiana state government and the Trump administration.



*Caption: A political poster distributed by activists, titled “Water Is Life” (Okwa Okchayo in local Choctaw language); depicting an indigenous-woman resisting the ‘black snake’, a common term for the pipeline; surrounded by cultural symbols of significance for the indigenous Houma people: palmetto leaves, pelicans and crawfish. Illustration: Jackie Fawn 2018*

BACKGROUND

From January to September 2018, I studied a resistance camp led by local indigenous women, named L'eau Est La Vie (Water is Life), who organize in solidarity with impoverished black Louisiana communities negatively affected by industrial pollution. These communities are fighting the southward extension of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), named the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, the route of which would span 262 km eastwards through rural Louisiana; from the prairielands of Lake Charles to the swamplands and impoverished riverside community of St. James. I learned about the camp while researching about the heavy-industrialized region in Louisiana, nicknamed "Cancer Alley", and thereafter by learning about the expansion of DAPL into the Gulf Coast from the Bakken Oil-fields of North Dakota. The transportation of crude oil to this region (an estimated 480,000 barrels a day) to be manufactured into single-use plastics and consumer commodities, as lobbied for by former Louisiana senator Mary Landrieu and company representatives, entails large profits for the Bayou Bridge's Texas-parent company (Energy Transfer Partners; CEO Kelcy Warren, Net Worth \$4.2 billion) and any shareholders involved. Among the 40 banks financing DAPL's extension, the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, is DnB (The Norwegian Bank).<sup>2</sup>

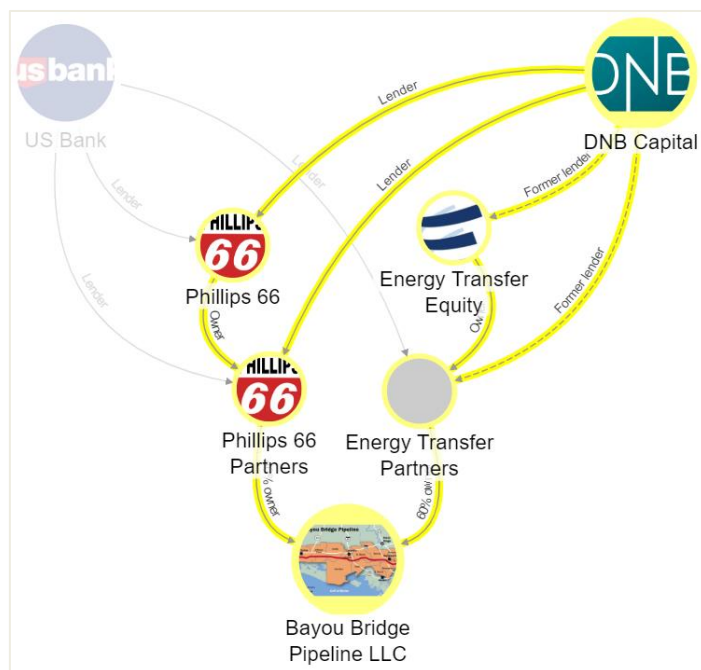


*Caption: Former senator Landrieu received more than \$1.7 million from the oil-and-gas industry during her 18 year tenure as a senator (1996-2014), including \$41,400 from Energy Transfer Partners. Landrieu now the holds the dual role of working as a paid consultant for Energy Transfer Partners as well as representing the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority—the governmental authority necessary for approving the pipeline—underlining this conflict of interest. Chart: Rob Galbraith 2018<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> According to documents obtained by investigative journalists, DnB is invested in the Bayou Bridge Pipeline through the financing of its 40% owner, the Phillips 66 company, with a total of \$285,000,000 (Energy Transfer is the 60% owner); despite divesting from the DAPL-project in 2017 following pressure from Sámi supporters of Standing Rock activists. Source: <https://public-accountability.org/report/the-power-behind-the-pipelines-bayou-bridge-pipeline/>

<sup>3</sup> Source for the map illustrating the conflicts of interest: [https://littlesis.org/maps/2742-mary-landrieu-s-bayou-bridge-conflicts-of-interest/?Landrieu is simultaneously working for Energy Transfer Partners and a key regulator.](https://littlesis.org/maps/2742-mary-landrieu-s-bayou-bridge-conflicts-of-interest/?Landrieu%20is%20simultaneously%20working%20for%20Energy%20Transfer%20Partners%20and%20a%20key%20regulator.)





Caption: Chart illustrating the intricate web of financing for the pipeline, including DnB of Norway, illustrating this Norwegian bank's role in financing the activities of the Bayou Bridge LLC company and projects harmful to communities of color: Rob Galbraith 2018<sup>4</sup>

## Eminent Domain for Private Gain

The simultaneous lobbying of a new anti-protest law in New Orleans in 2018, formerly named HB727, criminalizes anti-fossil fuel activists in Louisiana. The law was implemented by the national organization ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council) in 2018—a pro-privatization, pro-fossil fuel, anti-union gathering of lobbyists attended by Louisiana Governor Edwards as a lead-speaker—indicating corporate power over state politics.<sup>5</sup> The law prohibits even conspiring to protest fossil fuel infrastructure like this pipeline, termed “critical infrastructure”, penalizing activists with felony charges, five years in prison and up to \$10,000 in fines, as some of the activists I lived with are currently facing.<sup>6</sup> In the US, privately owned infrastructure such as the Bayou Bridge Pipeline are being appointed the protective status of “critical infrastructure” by laws such as the HB727, a status initially meant to protect public goods. By enshrining private capital with the protections of critical infrastructure, the state seizes private lands through the power of *eminent domain*, a

<sup>4</sup> Source for the map illustrating the involvement of banks such as DnB: [https://littlesis.org/maps/2732-banks-that-pulled-out-of-dakota-access-are-financing-bayou-bridge/?US\\_Bank\\_and\\_DNB\\_bowed\\_to\\_public\\_pressure\\_over\\_Dakota\\_Access\\_financing](https://littlesis.org/maps/2732-banks-that-pulled-out-of-dakota-access-are-financing-bayou-bridge/?US_Bank_and_DNB_bowed_to_public_pressure_over_Dakota_Access_financing)

<sup>5</sup> Edwards has also received around \$122,550 from the oil-and-gas industry for his political campaigns, including \$8,000 from Energy Transfer Partners (Bayou Bridge, DAPL). Source: <https://public-accountability.org/report/the-power-behind-the-pipelines-bayou-bridge-pipeline/>.

<sup>6</sup> The law is one of many lobbied for by fossil fuel proponents in 18 states. Excerpt from a Truthout news article: “If enacted, the law could potentially penalize people who never even set foot on one of its protected sites. Under the bill as written, simply discussing a possible trespass action could result in prison sentences of five years and fines up to \$10,000. Actually damaging pipeline infrastructure could lead to 15 years in jail, and it could lead to 20 years if the damage interrupts construction site operations or endangers human life.” Source: <https://truthout.org/articles/under-louisiana-bill-peaceful-protesters-could-face-20-years-in-prison/>.

governmental power used for converting private property to public use. In this case, and as the conflict of interests suggest, the power is being administered for private gain.

As Crosby and Monaghan (2018:73) write<sup>7</sup>: the banner of critical infrastructure is “an organizational mechanism of *the security state*”, i.e. a state apparatus in which fossil fuel companies and government agencies merge, “that redirects the vast resources of *the war on terror* toward a broad spectrum of domestic actors”, whereby anti-pipeline activists are framed as national security threats to “critical infrastructure” and policing agents—county, state and federal—serve an ideological partnership with the corporate world of extractive capitalism (ibid.). For instance, in various lawsuits against Standing Rock activists including one by a legal team representing *both* president Trump and Energy Transfer Partners (DAPL, Bayou Bridge), Standing Rock activists were labelled “eco-terrorists”, highlighting this framing of national threats and ideological redirecting of the US war-on-terror to domestic territory.<sup>8</sup> In Louisiana, the Center for Constitutional Rights released documents in 2018 illustrating the surveillance of pipeline-opponents by the Homeland Security agency under Governor Edwards in coordination with Energy Transfer Partners.<sup>9</sup> Besides racial histories still fermenting and a history of civil rights struggles, as explored in the thesis, the new law is one reason for why activists are heavily surveilled and policed by a conglomerate of private security firms, agencies such as Homeland Security, and on-duty/off-duty law enforcement (local and from the Department of Corrections) hired by the Bayou Bridge company.

From mid-2016 to early 2017, construction of the controversial pipeline, DAPL, provoked the largest mass of indigenous-led resistance in recent history, as thousands of indigenous peoples and non-indigenous supporters from across the US, and indeed the globe, fled to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, North Dakota, to protest in solidarity with the Standing Rock Lakota communities. For months, militarized police forces from five neighboring states mobilized in response alongside a private security firm, TigerSwan, and government agencies such as the FBI. The pipeline was briefly halted by then-President

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew Crosby is a coordinator with the Ontario Public Interest Research Group at Carleton University, and Jeffrey Monaghan is an assistant professor at the Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Carleton University. Their research covers the policing, governance and surveillance of indigenous activists in North America, primarily in Canada, and as a secondary source was suggested to me by my interlocutors.

<sup>8</sup> Excerpts from a DesmogBlog article: 1) “The “eco-terrorist” language mirrors that used by law enforcement and the public relations firms it and Energy Transfer Partners paid during the height of protests at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in Cannon Ball, North Dakota.” 2) “Kasowitz is a member of the legal team representing President Donald Trump in the ongoing congressional and special counsel investigation of his 2016 presidential campaign's alleged ties and potential collusion with Russian state actors.” Source: <https://www.desmogblog.com/2017/08/22/dakota-access-trump-greenpeace-racketeering>.

<sup>9</sup> Excerpt from CCR: “Louisiana Bucket Brigade and the Center for Constitutional Rights obtained the documents through a public records request to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality. The documents reveal a high level of access to and coordination between Energy Transfer Partners and government employees [...]. Since the Standing Rock camp opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota was disbanded last year, 56 bills that heighten the risk and criminal penalties of dissent have been introduced across 30 states. Many of these bills seek to frame protests as “riots” and activists as “terrorists” or “jihadists,” in attempts to criminalize protected free speech activity.” Source: <https://ccrjustice.org/home/press-center/press-releases/louisiana-public-officials-surveilled-anti-bayou-bridge-pipeline>.

Obama after the events at Standing Rock in early-winter 2017, albeit only following public pressure at the height of violent force by law enforcement against local residents and protestors; attack-dogs, rubber bullets, police raids and water cannons in below-freezing temperatures. UN representatives had investigated and claimed that the pipeline company and the US government had acted in violation of human rights.<sup>10</sup> Shortly after, the pipelines construction was re-approved by President Trump, who has received more than \$100,000 in donations from the DAPL/Bayou Bridge company's CEO.<sup>11</sup>

The pipelines route threatens the local indigenous Standing Rock Lakota's only source of drinking water, the Cannonball River (a tributary of the Missouri River), with the irreparable contamination of oil spills. More notably, the route violates the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty between the Standing Rock Lakota, a sovereign nation, and the US Government that grants the tribe certain water and territory rights, signifying the infringement of protective laws by pipeline-proponents.<sup>12</sup> The event at Standing Rock reawakened resistance to longstanding state repression and institutional racism against indigenous and civil rights movements. This made me ask, as the multi-faceted mobilization against DAPL now extended into Louisiana by locals, *what would resistance to the pipeline look like in this region?* Who were those involved? Why were they referred to in public discourse both as protestors and as eco-terrorists, at once spinning a non-threatening and a threatening image? What is the significance of water as a site of protest in Louisiana? Given that Louisiana law enforcement had travelled to Standing Rock in 2016 as well and that police were coordinating across state lines, what implications would this have for their response to activists in Louisiana?<sup>13</sup>

I arrived to Louisiana in early-January 2018 and borrowed a vehicle from a family member in the region. A vehicle was required, as the movement mobilizes along the pipeline route as well as in metropolitan cores like Baton Rouge and New Orleans for court hearings and activist meetings concerning the pipeline. I had contacted the leading local indigenous

<sup>10</sup> Excerpt from a UN news article: "The United States is using excessive force against protestors in North Dakota who are trying to stop an oil pipeline project that runs through land sacred to indigenous peoples, according to a United Nations human rights expert." Source: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2016/11/545392-un-experts-back-call-halt-pipeline-construction-north-dakota-citing-rights>.

<sup>11</sup> Excerpt from a 2016 Reuters news article: "The top executive at the company behind the embattled Dakota Access Pipeline has donated more than \$100,000 to Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump since June, according to campaign finance disclosure records." Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-trump-dakota-access/top-executive-behind-dakota-access-has-donated-more-than-100000-to-trump-idUSKCN12Q2P2>.

<sup>12</sup> Excerpt from a NewsMaven news article: "Standing Rock retains water rights from the 1851 Treaty and subsequent treaties. These water rights give the tribe jurisdiction over the Missouri River at the point of DAPL's proposed crossing." Source: <https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/the-supreme-law-of-the-land-standing-rock-and-the-dakota-access-pipeline-25phRkIJB0GmipEDLvPLPw/>.

<sup>13</sup> Quote: "According to a CCR press release, the center's request "also seeks to investigate larger connections among [St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office], Sheriff Champagne, Energy Transfer Partners (ETP), and TigerSwan LLC, in light of ETP's proposed Bayou Bridge Pipeline project in Louisiana." Source: <https://www.desmogblog.com/2018/12/28/st-charles-parish-louisiana-sheriff-pipeline-records-standing-rock>

woman organizing the resistance camp in November 2017, and she expressed that research was possible if I went through their application process. Coincidentally, I had arrived in time for the pipelines construction period, which means that the group I would follow were already in the process of attempting to stop it. I spent the first month and a half living in New Orleans and driving frequently to Baton Rouge, Louisiana's capitol, for public court hearings against the pipeline company by local residents of the movement and liberal non-profit organizations supporting them.

Then, I was accepted into the camp, about two-to-three hours Southwest of New Orleans. There I stumbled upon ecological anarchists and other radical environmental activists working in solidarity with the indigenous women leading the movement. Many of these activists, of lower- and working class backgrounds, lived periodically transient lives out of their cars and tents for months or for longer periods. This is when I moved into my car for the remaining six months of the fieldwork, as it was the most practical decision. How did this alliance between indigenous activists, anarchists and other non-indigenous allies come about? What political goals did they have in common, and what does resistance for them look like? And, what do their struggles tell us more broadly about the practices of resistance surrounding a politics of water in the contemporary United States?

## MAIN ARGUMENT AND THEMATIC FOCUS

My interlocutors navigate one of the most polluted geographies in the western hemisphere, an industrialized corridor termed Cancer Alley by locals, referring to the high rates of cancer prevalent here. It is the center of Cancer Alley where the Bayou Bridge Pipeline's proposed terminus lies in St. James. These activists also traverse some of the most ecologically fragile geographies, such as the Atchafalaya swamps; a national heritage site where the pipeline route crosses. For activists, in both landscapes, the contours of a settler colonial past seeps into the present: from plantation slavery households now appropriated by oil and gas companies for tourism and weddings, to local histories of indigenous communities wiped out by European settlers or forced from their original lands.

### Water Politics and Resisting in the Settler Colonial Present

Throughout the thesis, I trace the platform upon which activists here mobilize their politics of water and configure their forms of resistance to protect vital waterways. My argument is that these activists use their politics of water as a vehicle to dismantle prevalent settler values and systems in the US—Eurocentrism, Christianity, Heteropatriarchy, structural racism or the

ideology of Capitalism—that through material processes, indigenous and non-white Americans were colonized into. Their challenging of the power dynamics produced by these systems is what I refer to as *resisting in “the settler colonial present”*, in which they are constructing a new politics of water.

In anthropology, water politics is studied by Kerry Ryan Chance in South Africa’s post-apartheid shacklands (2018:46-47). Chance examines in part the history of water as a “backdrop to luxury consumption, a channel for indentured labor and colonial trade” (ibid.:47), and for the poor in the mid-1980’s, as the vital resource that shackland residents used to mobilize boycotts against the apartheid state. Andrea Muehlebach (2017) examines contemporary water activists in Italy who resist austerity measures and the privatization of their water utilities, juxtaposing their water’s sacrality and vitalism to “neoliberalism’s culture of death” (2017:20). Melanie Yazzie (2018) examines the late-20<sup>th</sup> century violence of Euro-American settlers toward indigenous Diné communities in the southwest. Coal and uranium extractive corporations brought with them “murder, harassment, exploitation, the plunder of water [...], forced relocation and the rape of land” (2018:33), whereby one resident noted how the Diné were treated as “a water resource colony of the master race (Euro-Americans)” (ibid.:32). Yazzie examines the contemporary anti-capitalist character of Diné political life, in their defense of their waters from the “death drive” of capitalist resource extraction (2018:29). In the context of my fieldsite, I examine water as a vital resource that the indigenous, black and poor are largely deprived of in the US and Louisiana; as a site of waste and disposability mirroring settler colonialisms violence of the regions past; exploring the anti-capitalist and anti-colonial character of resistance here.

I borrow Lorenzo Vercini’s term “the settler colonial present” (Vercini 2015; in Crosby & Monaghan 2018:6,25) to inform the everyday aspects of the lives of my interlocutors who conceptualize the contemporary landscape that they navigate as shaped unremittingly by settler expansion and its subsequent dispossessions of non-white bodies. The spaces activists create, like this camp, are decolonized lifeworld’s aimed at undoing the colonization process and challenging settler sovereignty and territoriality. In anthropology and settler colonial studies, and in reference to a secondary sources by interlocutors,<sup>14</sup> Patrick Wolfe (1999, 2006) posits that *settler colonialism*, as an invasion and genocidal project, must be understood as a structure rather than an event in history that reshapes structural relations to

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<sup>14</sup> Settler Colonial studies, predicated on Indigenous studies (Vercini 2017:7), is a subfield and response to the global spread of postcolonial studies that further contests the alleged “postcoloniality” of settler societies (ibid.). It is the study of settler colonial phenomena, some examples possibly being apartheid; slavery; segregation; the stealing of indigenous territories by the governments of Israel, Canada or Australia; the US border wall and immigration policies that assert Euro-American settler sovereignty; and the cultural normalization of material processes in which, depending on whom these processes affect, they appear “benign”.

render the elimination and stealing of rights from indigenous peoples as benign and uncontroversial in the eyes of the majority settler-population (Wolfe 1999, 2006, in Crosby & Monaghan 2018:9). For instance, in how impoverished indigenous communities are subjected to undesirable pollution in the US, while more affluent white communities thrive.

As Veracini notes, Wolfe's proclamation that 'settler invasion is a structure' (Wolfe 1999:163; in Veracini 2016:35) was an "invitation to look for settler colonialism in the ongoing subjection of indigenous peoples in settler societies" (ibid.), which I seek to examine concerning the US.<sup>15</sup> In addition to Wolfe's theoretical focus on indigenous peoples I suggest the freed slave community of St. James, as descendants of people coerced into colonized positions by European settlers and as political allies to the indigenous resisting the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. This is to analyze the power dynamics of a settler society in which I suggest settler colonialism as a structure affects descendants of several historically colonized and oppressed populations of color.

I will attempt to show how settler colonialism and its eliminatory logic takes place through ongoing material processes (e.g. environmental pollution of waters) by examining the state formation and the modern arrangements of the US as inherently settler colonial; blemished by its ineradicable underpinnings of white supremacy, Eurocentrism, genocide and its logic of elimination toward indigenous, brown and black bodies.

By exploring these eliminatory processes as ongoing I mean to show how these, as experienced by activists, are structural relations that persist into the present, wherein pipeline companies and fossil fuel advocates assume the role of settler-colonizers. My analysis may hold useful inroads to a different means of conceiving the violence of environmental pollution, the neoliberalisation of local waters,<sup>16</sup> the brutality of law enforcement and industrial expansion that as perceived by activists are inextricably tied to settler colonial structural relations.

## Extractive Violence and Erasure: Modes of Dispossession

In the thesis, I use the overarching lens of settler colonialism to interrogate the dispossessory processes intrinsic to extractive capitalism. *Extractive capitalism*, here, refers to a model of economic growth predicated on the extraction and transportation of natural resources, e.g.

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<sup>15</sup> *Settler colonialism*, as focused on "settlement and the creation of a new settler-majoritarian polity" (Crosby & Monaghan 2018:7), is distinct from *colonialism*, which "rests on how colonial powers approach the management of Indigenous Others, with emphasis on how colonial regimes extract wealth and manage majority populations [...]" (ibid.).

<sup>16</sup> Neoliberalism refers to a set of social and economic ideas that promote the privatization of public goods such as health-care, de-regulation of corporate activities and the withdrawal of the state's role in governance, the prevention of union organization, free market trade, and above all the use of the military, police and legal structures of the state to secure private property, primarily that of the wealthier classes (see David Harvey 2005 *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, pp.2-4. Published by: Oxford University Press).

crude oil (i.e. bitumen/unrefined petroleum) or tar sands oil (see Crosby & Monaghan 2018:17). I analyze this as an economic model applied in the most unregulated, exploitative and cost-efficient manner to maximize profit and that bargains with the lives of indigenous and other poverty-stricken communities of color. *Extractive violence*, I argue, takes the form of the processes of dispossession intrinsic to extractive capitalism, and the circumstances under which these dispossessions materialize: e.g. as enforced through the criminalization and policing of activists, or through the environmental ruination of communities over time.

The violence that ensues under these material processes are *slow*, per Rob Nixon's term, i.e. violence that unfolds over time until it erupts into oil spills or chemical disasters, or through intergenerational effects on health (see Nixon 2011:10-11); and *structural*, in line with sociologist Johan Gultang's term structural violence: such as systemic racism, settler colonialism and neoliberal governance, i.e. policies that promote rampant de-regulation and privatization, laying the foundation for environmental disasters to develop (ibid.). I analyze the combination of *slow* and *structural* forms of violence as *extractive violence* to conceptualize the structural forces my interlocutors are resisting, centrally, by placing their bodies in the path of construction along the pipeline route.

*Erasure* is an emic term amongst a few of my interlocutors, who use it to describe when societal elements or identities are concealed or forgotten.<sup>17</sup> Erasure is defined by linguistic anthropologists Judith Irvine and Susan Gal (2009) as "the process in which ideology", and here I posit the structure of settler colonialism or ideology of extractive capitalism, "renders some persons or activities invisible" (Irvine and Gal in Duranti 2009). For instance, when company representatives or lobbyists deny and conceal aspects of the true impacts of the fossil fuel industry's activities or human-induced exacerbation of climate change effects. Fossil fuel advocates de-legitimize public concerns with the promise of jobs, prosperity and growth, in line with Wolfe's definition of settler colonialism, whereby the environmental pollution and genocide of marginalized communities of color appears "benign" (Wolfe 1999, 2006, in Crosby & Monaghan 2018:9). It is not that the corporeal effects are rendered invisible, I argue, as oil spills and other disasters transpire in plain sight. Rather, as explored in the second half of chapter two, the top-down erasure of public concerns of marginalized communities of color in favor of profitable interests occurs through Big Oil's dominant voice in the media, public discourse, in electoral politics and culturally through the financing of cultural events as a form of public relations to construct a positive image of oil-

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<sup>17</sup> Example: When multiple expressions of womanhood, such as transgender or queer, are unacknowledged and unprotected by state laws rooted in Christian values that only recognize two genders or rather one form of womanhood.

and-gas companies. Extractive violence is a state-sanctioned form of violence, while erasure appears as the mechanism by which the state distances accountability.

Moreover, extractive violence resonates with what Marxist scholar David Harvey (2016) terms the neoliberal doctrine of *accumulation by dispossession*, i.e. organized dispossession in which private actors—be it the fossil fuel companies, private security hired for them, or politicians—accumulate wealth from the dispossession and disenfranchisement of marginalized populations (see 2016:264, 270). Extractive violence takes place around the targeting of civil unrest such as at Standing Rock by a coalition of federal agencies, local militarized police and private security under collusion with fossil fuel companies (see Crosby & Monaghan 2018:16-17). Meanwhile, police frame themselves as “virtuous agents of control”, corporations paint themselves as victims, while indigenous activists and their allies are portrayed as terror-threats against “critical infrastructure” (ibid.), another facet of erasure. In the thesis I explore forms of extractive violence and erasure through interactions with law enforcement, workers, locals, Eurocentric historical narratives and top-down discourse surrounding the activists and their identities to analyze a complex system of power dynamics, of which the resistance of activists is a conspicuous element.

## Resistance and Social Movement Theory

The anthropological study of resistance has centered on tactics or instruments readily accessible to the poor, what James C. Scott terms “weapons of the weak”. Scott (1985) argues that subordinate groups exist not as passive subjects, but possess the agency to engage in resisting the power of unjust authority (Scott 1985 in Lewellen 2003:115). For instance, everyday resistance in Malaysia appears as the humiliation of the rich by poor peasants through “malicious gossip” and “inventing derogatory nicknames” (ibid:117).

David Graeber (2009) explores the militant protests in 2003 of the anti-globalization movement at the Summit of the Americas, Quebec. Their resistance to global capitalist initiatives was marked physically and symbolically by the blockading of streets with radical anarchist carnivals and an abundance of puppets, costumes and marching bands, and by representing the world bank as a Giant Pig, using similar effigies mocking politicians as “corporate-control puppets” (2009:491-492). June Nash (2005) examines the indigenous resistance of Mayan communities in Chiapas, Mexico (see Nash 2005:179-183). Mayans here, alongside the Zapatista movement—a far-left militant group comprised mainly of indigenous peoples of the region—have since the 1990’s been at war with the Mexican federal government, occupying small plots of land for cultivation and resisting the onslaught of oil



explorers, cattle ranchers and developers enabled by neoliberal trade and domestic policies (ibid.). Throughout the paper, I will elucidate on the forms of resistance employed by my interlocutors, with resistance as the means by which they target institutions that promote inequity and oppressive power structures.

*Resistance* is a term much used by my interlocutors. They humiliate the rich and authority-figures in social media, somewhat synonymous to Scott's "weapons of the weak" (1985 in 2003:117). They occupy land and create autonomous zones in a non-violent manner, while attempting to block the construction of this oil pipeline. Moreover, they work to dismantle prevalent US social conventions such as glorifying police and state authority, for instance by humiliating police as corporate puppets in social media. For indigenous activists, the dimensions of resistance also materialize through the linguistic and cultural divesting of settler colonial sovereignty, territoriality and values as a means of resisting, otherwise known as *decolonization*. For instance, an interlocutor named Fuego, of indigenous Yaqui Cora descent (northwestern/central Mexico), notes: "Decolonizing gets easier with each generation. I was baptized as a child as an infant. My children will have a water ceremony instead", referring to the pan-indigenous ceremony of blessing waters in respective indigenous languages, most prevalent at Standing Rock. Fuego: "So every generation we get a little bit closer and closer to where we were at one point" (Interview), referring to total revitalization of respective indigenous cultural values and language.

More pertinently, the group's frontline strategy of resistance is *direct action*, which Graeber (2009) defines as "the insistence, when faced with structures of unjust authority, on acting as if one is already free" (2009:203), in which one does not solicit the approval of authorities. Direct action appears e.g. through the physical occupying of sites in the path of the Bayou Bridge Pipelines construction. Direct action is generally distinct from protest, although the two often overlap. Direct action is preceded by a *shrug of indifference* toward authority so to speak, with prior meditation of the legal consequences of disobeying laws; whereas protest is based in public forms of civil disobedience delimited by what authorities permit. As Graeber (2009:203) notes:

*The direct actionist does not just refuse to pay taxes to support a militarized school system, she combines with others to try to create a new school system that operates on different principles. She proceeds as she would if the state did not exist and leaves it to the state's representatives to decide whether to try to send armed men to stop her.*

Direct action can be everything from blocking a pipelines construction by locking oneself to machinery (e.g. excavators, bulldozers or drills), to helping communities in need e.g. with disaster-relief during storms, when the state fails to.

## IDENTITIES AND POLITICS: DEFINITIONS

While the camp represents a set of local perspectives from which I draw, *local* in this context is relative in that the fieldsite is multi-sited, extending along the Bayou Bridge and Dakota Access Pipeline routes. Activists are recruited mainly through movement networks from Standing Rock, and from ongoing opposition to the Keystone XL and the Line 3 tar sands pipelines in the Midwest. My interlocutors are local, non-local, indigenous and non-indigenous activists who share a complex set of converging political values. Some of them are leftist, while others identify as post-leftist anarchists which entails holding a critical stance to statist-leftist forms of politics, operating with a distrust to state-power and coercive authority of any form, e.g. law enforcement. Anarchist values are shared in the fieldsite by some indigenous and non-indigenous activists, but not everyone here identified explicitly as anarchists. To elaborate, an exchange of anarchist Do-It-Yourself literature called ‘zines’ on revolutionary practice exists between activists here, essentially their version of academic texts. Anthropologist David Graeber (2009) writes that the basic principles of anarchism are “self-organization, voluntary association, mutual aid, and opposition to all forms of coercive authority” (2009:211-212); which resonates with how all activists here operate. Anarchists are anti-authoritarian and target *unjust* hierarchies such as those borne under centralized state-power, or the past of plantation slavery. Anarchy literally translates from ancient Greek to *without rulers* (an-, + anarkhos).<sup>18</sup>

Others in the movement network are liberal democrats, who are either supportive of the movement or represent local non-profits (e.g. 350, Louisiana Bucket Brigade); and some local residents the group would receive support from are conservative republicans. Some of my interlocutors hail from and have familial ties to Indian reservations in the South Dakota plains, like Rosebud and Pine Ridge. Others hail from the Midwest Great Lakes, the Eastcoast and the Westcoast regions of the US.

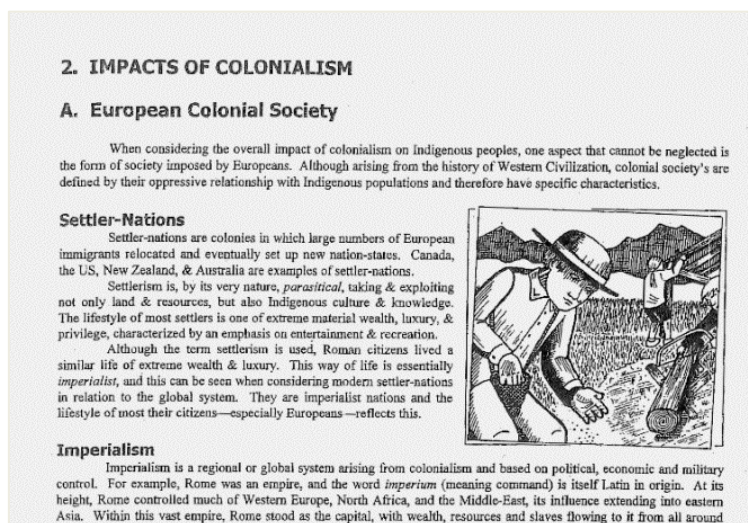
The identity of *indigenous* belongs to those who are descendants of the original people of the lands, and who were raised within indigenous circles and politically who work to retain indigenous culture, language and practices in a settler colonial society wherein the

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<sup>18</sup> Anarchism, or *anarchy*, is often used to describe a chaotic state rather than an organized community, when the unjust hierarchies sustained by governments, that engender war and genocide abroad as perceived by some of my interlocutors, illustrates chaos in a more systemic format.

dominant norms, even on the state-level, are Christian and Eurocentric. This mirrors Audra Simpsons (2014) work surrounding Mohawk communities in Canada, whom she argues operate by a ‘politics of refusal’, rejecting the Canadian settler colonial states recognition of “who they were, who they are, and what their rights are” (2014:107). Contrarily, for those non-indigenous in the fieldsite, they would refer to their ancestral identities like Irish or Norwegian, a means of decolonizing and challenging the settler colonial identity of US American.

Thus, *settlers* inhabit two disparate roles, either as accomplices to indigenous-led efforts of self-determination and water rights—accompliceship entailing criminalization for disavowing the eliminatory logic of benefitting from indigenous dispossession<sup>19</sup>—or as *colonizers*, a frequent term used by activists to describe belligerents such as Euro-American pipeline-company CEO’s, government representatives and their supporters. For indigenous activists, all Euro-Americans are regarded as settlers, in regards to the power imbalances between them and white Americans in a settler-majority society.



*Caption: A page from a zine distributed amongst activists, titled 'Colonization and Decolonization'; describing the US as one of several settler-nations. Published by Zig Zag 2006*

If in the text I refer to women or men of color, it is because that is how some identified rather than referring to a precise racial identity, which also functions to anonymize. If I refer to some interlocutors as non-indigenous, this is just to highlight them as trusted accomplices to the indigenous activists.

<sup>19</sup> Activists here discern between accomplices and allies in activism, though the two often overlap. An example that resonates in an article from Tolerance Magazine reads: “An ally will mostly engage in activism by standing with an individual or group in a marginalized community. An accomplice will focus more on dismantling the structures that oppress that individual or group” such as settler colonialism, “and such work will be directed by the stakeholders in the marginalized group.” Source: <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/ally-or-accomplice-the-language-of-activism>.

## Gendered and Non-Gendered Identities: Definitions

Here, I will define the gender identities within the group and explain why it is an important aspect of their political organizing. These definitions are mostly required for chapter three. Note that varying definitions exist, and that these identity-markers often overlap. The term **transgender** is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity is not that which they were assigned at birth, the opposite of which is **cisgender**, the gender one assumes at birth. One's gender, in that regard and more generally, is understood as not determined by one's reproductive organs. The term **queer** or **genderqueer** is used by many of those I met in the field who are not heterosexual or cisgender to express fluid identities, meaning that they embrace nonconformity to dominant cultural expectations of masculinity or femininity. Some of the people I met in the field are **non-binary**, meaning that they do not define themselves by what is called the gender-binary and its pronouns, i.e. *female/male* or *she/he*, but rather by the singular-pronoun of *they*. During meetings, to avoid *misgendering*, activists would announce their pronouns whilst introducing themselves; typically *she/her*, *he/him*, *they/them* or a loose combination of either; functioning to respect and memorize how each identifies.

The identity of **gender-nonconforming** relates to people who do not conform to dominant expectations of how their gender should behave. For instance, instead of the pronouns *he/him* or *she/her*, they might go by the singular pronoun *they/them* to express this. As such, if I were to name "them" in this thesis, I would use gender-neutral names like Possum or Swamp-Demon. Another prominent category for activists that I was introduced to is **Two-Spirit**, a term for indigenous peoples whose identities traditionally inhabit a blend of both male and female counterparts, existing for them as an alternative to non-indigenous labels of gay, lesbian or transgender categories.

In activist spaces like the one I lived in, similar to many colleges and universities in the US, inclusivity is practiced for people with these identities, either indigenous and non-indigenous. For activists, in the settler colonial society of the United States, rooted in Christian and heteronormative values and modes of categorizing, these aforementioned non-heteronormative identities are largely ostracized, discriminated against and historically face disproportionate criminalization. **Heteronormativity** refers to the belief that heterosexuality which is based in the gender binary (male, female) is the only legitimate gender identity, a value initially of settler colonial provenance.

## Entangled Political Circles

The activists that I lived with were all mobilized at Standing Rock as ‘Water Protectors’, i.e. advocates of the Water Is Life movement, a movement that while indigenous-led, also stretches to communities of e.g. Flint, Michigan and other impoverished geographies that are denied access to clean and safe water supplies. Their ages span between 20 years of age to 50 years of age. Some are lower- and working-class; and some come from homeless backgrounds. Some are teachers, reporters, war-veterans, and most have educated backgrounds. The activism of some interlocutors is traceable to the American Indian Movement, a pan-Native American advocacy group founded in 1968 that fights for indigenous civil rights and practices anti-imperialism and anti-racism. Other activists have been active at Occupy Wall Street in 2011, part of the anti-globalist movement, and Black Lives Matter, an international movement rooted in fighting systemic racism towards black citizens, chiefly focused on police accountability and abolition surrounding the killing of innocent black youth. The women of the camp-leadership also organize with the Poor Peoples Campaign, rooted in economic justice for impoverished black citizens and first organized by Martin Luther King. Some activists here hail from Earth First, a radical, diversely-knit environmental advocacy group, targeted by the FBI as eco-terrorists despite their non-violent tactics; and in some regards, the Anti-Fascist movement (Antifa), with political roots spanning to the second world war whereby the anti-fascists of the time actively resisted Nazi’s, which has moved towards opposing all forms of white supremacy. These are all overlapping circles of interethnic and interclass affairs, highlighting the complex heterogeneity of this group.

## ON METHODS AND ETHICS

In late-February 2018, I was accepted into camp. I believed ethically that this needed to be a participatory oriented research; to be on the ground, undergo the same risks and gain inside perspectives that otherwise go unseen publicly surrounding ecological and grassroots activism. I first took inspiration from *militant ethnography*, an engaged method employed by activist anthropologists, such as David Graeber or Jeffrey Juris within anti-globalization and anti-authoritarian networks (see Juris 2007:171; and Valenzuela-Fuentes 2018).

Over time, I employed an engaged form of participant observation. In any case, law enforcement did not discern between activists, journalists or researchers, whereby anyone present was considered as implicated in the group’s activities. The goal was to grasp how activists mobilize what they consider resistance to this pipeline. Operating on the ground

helped me to uncover the how and why of political practices, and the risks that they purposefully undertake, such as locking their bodies to equipment in the path of construction and subsequently undergoing daily harassments by police. My findings were that these are ordinary people who are either the most vulnerable to social inequality and environmental precarity as marginalized populations in the US, or for the non-indigenous, who are willing to risk arrest to express support for these populations.

To address some biases: I was largely unfamiliar with the extent and diversity of various gender identities before my fieldwork; of the means of mobilizing, such as direct action; and as a white non-indigenous male, of what it means to research in an indigenous led space. Despite this, I am a fervent supporter of the civil and constitutional rights of these activists and of indigenous sovereignty overall.<sup>20</sup> I created a secure system around the data-collection under such precarious circumstances with the risk of police raids. If the data were to fall into the hands of law enforcement, this would jeopardize any trust I had built. I waited for example until the last month of August 2018 to conduct qualitative interviews, with informed consent documented in paper-format, so that I was not holding on to the data throughout the entire fieldwork, which I believed would increase the risk of jeopardizing the work of my interlocutors.

I navigated around this by keeping a minimal background role when direct actions became more intense, such as driving for activists and only documenting in times of quiet in the absence of law enforcement. This method helped re-create ethnographic scenarios in the field-site, though at the expense of not being able to interview some people who were no longer present after August. The shortcomings of my engagement were time constraints, which also affected who I could interview and when I could take notes, as I was often on the road and putting my energy into a support-role. On the effects of my presence: if I were absent and they were minus one car and person, not much would have been different, to give a sense of how I navigated around keeping a minimal but engaged role.

I have taken precautions to protect the identities of those that I study when it comes to identifiable markers and social media, and places and names. This they already manage on their own, some of them who are used to taking precautionary measures. However, anonymization to the fullest extent is difficult concerning a group so heavily policed and surrounding the *only* anti-pipeline resistance movement in Louisiana, without erasing their

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<sup>20</sup> Civil rights are the rights of individuals to live free of repression and discrimination, something of great importance being undermined in the contemporary United States. Constitutional rights are the rights the particular constitution of your nation gives you, such as the freedom of speech. Indigenous sovereignty refers to the rights of indigenous peoples to govern their own communities and practice their own forms of recognition over the governance of settler sovereignty, such as the US government.

politics and identity markers related to those politics through full anonymity; a concern for some interlocutors. The question of not erasing identities entirely is an ethical one, for to conceal every identity marker whether it is based in politics, gender or ethnicity, is to erase a diverse group of fluid identities already dehumanized and homogenized by the power structures that they resist. This I attempt to balance, retaining parts of identity like gender or ethnicity markers, but still obscuring where they keep to by only addressing larger regions.

### Outline of Thesis

Chapter two introduces the fieldsite and the camp that I lived in. I will situate the camp in a history of the landscape through the lens of an indigenous and black oriented history of Louisiana—exploring the white supremacist underpinnings and processes of genocide and dispossessions against indigenous Americans intrinsic to the state formation of the US as a settler government—in order to inform how activists conceptualize a decolonized form of the US as *stolen land*, i.e. land stolen from its original inhabitants rather than as legitimate territory. I will do so while exploring what I call the linguistic modes of dissent of activists, e.g. resistance through the recognition of original indigenous territories rather than states, a form of dismantling settler sovereignty. I will then analyze how the settler colonial past and the violence of slavery reverberates into the present of extractive violence, and how the positive public relations narratives of fossil fuel companies mirror beliefs and narratives of historical settler colonial expansion and colonization, typically framed in a language of salvation. This chapter is less ethnographically focused and more aimed at contextualizing power dynamics and racial violence in the contemporary US for the following chapters.

Chapter three provides a comparative analysis of extractive industry man-camps surrounding pipeline construction, as colonized spaces, and the decolonized space of the camp that I lived in. I juxtapose the contrasts between fixed and fluid identities in the spaces and power imbalances between them in the broader society, arguing that activists use man-camps as embodiments of the oil industry and settler society to inform how they self-identify inter-subjectively with one another.

Chapter four argues that activists re-configure a fictive kinship based in social and political ties rather than blood-relation while mobilizing against the Bayou Bridge Pipeline; a form of survival while navigating the hardships of settler society as underprivileged peoples. I analyze mainly the everyday gestures activists perform for one another, and how this kinship materializes as a result of enduring high-stress situations collectively.

Chapter five examines how activists mobilize their politics of water against the extractive industry through histories of resistance to settler colonialism and its processes of dispossession, surrounding vital waterways in the region. This also explores how they create temporal connections to the landscape and how, as solidarity networks, their resistance becomes materially and historically inseparable; what I refer to as fluid entanglements.

Chapter six traces interactions with police to explore how activists form community modes of ungovernability, which are police-abolitionist habits that are self-governing, self-determined and rooted in voluntary association. They do so to resist the oppressive class hierarchies, common social conventions of governmentality in which police are viewed as virtuous protectors, and structural relations imposed by law enforcement such as the historical enforcement of slavery and the present violation of the civil rights of activists.

In the conclusion chapter, I summarize my findings in relation to the power dynamics between these activists and the projects of the US settler colonial government, such as this pipeline, and what their forms of resistance tell us about these dynamics.



## CHAPTER 2

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## LIVING ON STOLEN LAND

*The ceiling fans hummed above us in a bustling small-town diner, somewhere west of Lafayette in the sweltering heart of Louisiana. Outside, the afternoon sun swept over the concrete and asphalt like a slow, steady blowtorch. Inside, forks and knives clinked against dishware. Locals and travelers were savoring fried catfish, shrimp, crawfish, rice and red beans; all staple components of Southern Louisiana cuisine. Servers orbited the tables gracefully, clutching coffee pots and notepads. I had joined Maggie, one of the activists I had been living with for the past months, for an interview. After our orders were taken, she took a brief pause before reflecting on the cultural landscape of Louisiana and of the nuances beyond the Bayou Bridge Pipeline fight:*

*The oil-and-gas industry owns everything here. They own this state. They can buy out politicians, take your land, and buy your law enforcement. As such, that's intimidating. But everyone who lives here has got a family member who works in some way for the oil-and-gas industry. So, it's not only about intimidation... it's also that jobs are at stake. Or maybe British Petroleum (BP) sponsors your local baseball team. Maybe they gave a bunch of money so that your kid's school could get computers. It's like a really bizarre colonization of both the political landscape but also culturally of people's minds.*

*She underscores the political and cultural power of the industry, a seemingly colonizing and coercive force deeply entrenched in the daily lives of Louisiana residents. Some residents recognize the industry through employment, financial sponsorship or by the pro-fossil fuel narratives espoused by neoliberal politicians. Others know the industry through pipeline leaks, petrochemical disasters, toxic waste dumping, oil spills and the gentrification of marginalized communities.*

In Louisiana, it is difficult to discern between private lobbied-for interests and public interests. The fossil fuel industry has long had a foothold in shaping opinions on politics, health and development here. Early evidence is underlined in then-Governor Huey Long's (1928-1931) battle with the major company Standard Oil, who proposed tax increases to benefit local communities. Long was impeached following a successful campaign lobbied for by Standard Oil (see Markowitz & Rosner 2013:252). The industry's power is also apparent in that they offer the majority of jobs, meaning that many residents work for the same industry responsible for inundating their communities with toxic pollution (see Peterson 2016:342). Concerning the larger, tentacular entity nicknamed 'Big Oil' by activists, a conglomerate of oil-and-gas companies: in 1911, the federal government broke Standard Oil into individual American companies such as ExxonMobil, Chevron and Texaco (Misrach & Orff 2014:122-123). As multinational corporations, they elude accountability with crimes beyond that of environmental disasters. Anthropologist Michael Watts (2011) writes about the same companies that thrive in Louisiana, Chevron and Shell, and their authorizations of security

forces in the indigenous Ogoni territories of Nigeria to massacre local activists and direct actionists opposing their facilities in the 1990's (Watts 2011:50-51, 60-62). Regarding the 1991 military coup in Haiti, Professor Noam Chomsky (1999) writes of how the Bush and Clinton administrations “authorized the Texaco Oil Company”, a subsidiary of Chevron, “to supply the coup regime and its wealthy supporters” (1999:107), signifying an ideological kinship between the US government and oil companies. These are the immense, destructive forces that activists mobilize against in the present.

Here, I will introduce the field-site and the primary camp in the southwest prairies of Louisiana that I lived in.<sup>21</sup> I will situate the camp in a history of the landscape through the lens of an indigenous and black oriented history of Louisiana—marked by genocides, dispossessions, white supremacy and resistance to settler colonial institutions—in order to inform how activists here conceptualize the American landscape as shaped by these material and historical processes. This will allow me to explore the history at the backdrop of the pipelines, industrial expansion, and the state sanctioned processes of dispossession and repression in the present that activists mobilize their politics of water against. By dispossession I refer to the toxic pollution of marginalized communities of color, often resulting in forced relocation. By repression I mean the local, state and federal policing of resistant communities, such as at Standing Rock. Along with the history, I will examine what I refer to as linguistic modes of dissenting from settler sovereignty and territoriality, i.e. challenging the legitimacy of state and national borders under the US government—what they as indigenous alongside non-indigenous activists consider as land stolen through 500 years of settler conquest and invasion—and challenging settler-centric historical narratives as a form of resistance. I will analyze the pro-industry discourse, public relations (PR) manoeuvres and counter-narratives instrumentalized against activists by the Bayou Bridge company (Energy Transfer Partners), the Louisiana state government and other fossil fuel proponents as a means of *erasure*, i.e. the linguistic and ideological concealment of the negative byproducts of extractive capitalism and of the concerns of impoverished communities of color, like St. James, who for long have been inundated with toxic pollution by invasive petrochemical industry. I will furthermore explore a history of Cancer Alley and St. James as pivotal points of solidarity for this resistance camp and as the terminus of the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. My argument is that activists situate their resistant narratives, these linguistic modes of dissent, in a history of genocide, processes of dispossession, white supremacy and settler colonialism—

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<sup>21</sup> A definition that resonates with the non-violent resistance here is sociologist William Carroll's definition of radical resistance as: “thoughtful, critically alert action, activated by a careful reading of the situation, which has the potential to lead to a just outcome .” See Carroll, W. 2015 “What Radical Means in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Robust Radicalism” (Bailey & Gayle 2003:125; in Carroll 2015:1).

using resistance to pipelines and harmful industry as a vehicle for this—to dismantle and challenge the Eurocentric and white supremacist historical narratives of fossil fuel proponents, often of white elitist backgrounds. I will begin by introducing the resistance camp.

## L’EAU EST LA VIE: AMELIA AND LOUISE

The primary camp, named L’eau Est La Vie (Water is Life) in the local French language variance spoken across ethnic lines, is nestled in the rural prairies of southwest Louisiana. It is fenced off and surrounded by high-grass, oak trees, a creek and a pond. The camp is organized by a council of four local indigenous women, one of Diné and Cherokee descent; one of Sicangu Lakota descent; one of Choctaw descent and one of Houma descent.<sup>22</sup> Their representation of different descent groupings highlights inter-indigenous efforts to combat commonly held social and environmental issues. These are what an interlocutor named Finn terms “movement mothers”, i.e. marginalized women of color that organize movements and direct action from the frontlines of social and environmental issues in the US. Finn: “The reason that we have the resources that we have is because these four indigenous women are providing them” (Interview), i.e. through networking, crowdfunding and writing grants for activists (authors input). The two council members most present at camp were Amelia and Louise; one with roots in the American Indian Movement and one who has ten years of environmentalist experience and experience organizing with the Poor Peoples Campaign.



*Caption: Drone photo over the prairies. The vertical scar to the center-left is the pipeline route*

<sup>22</sup> Note: The membership number is also symbolic of the four cardinal directions prayed to by a majority of indigenous communities of the global north and global south.

There is a main barn-like structure made of sheet metal with amenities for cooking, storage, tools, medicine, a quaint library, non-illicit access to electricity and a hose for running water. Adjacent to this community structure is a slightly smaller structure with a roof and no walls, used for outdoor meetings. Another structure which was completed shortly after my departure is a bathhouse, built by a humble volunteer carpenter from New Orleans who once assisted re-building homes after Hurricane Katrina. A tree-line along the eastern border of the land shelters tents.

Before selling the land, its original owners aimed to farm crawfish, a mainstay of cultural export in this region besides sugarcane and rice and the dominant industry of fossil fuels. The property was purchased by the leading organizers with help from supporters for the purpose of occupying the space to alter the route of the Bayou Bridge pipeline in late-2017. This was achieved, meaning that the camps existence is a statement of resistance in and of itself in challenging the Bayou Bridge company and the states use of eminent domain, as residents were often not capable of fighting the company alone in court. Many residents who did not possess the legal support to challenge the company alone were assisted by the camp.

The camp exists as a safe space of empowerment and productivity for indigenous and non-indigenous people of color; victims of sexual assault; queer, trans, non-binary, two-spirit and gender-nonconforming activists; and as a drug and alcohol-free space for people struggling with addiction to maintain sobriety in. To understand why: for activists here, many of marginalized backgrounds, it is the strategical formation of a space of privilege for persons historically underprivileged and routinely criminalized by existing social institutions in the US.

The pipelines route in Louisiana—in addition to affecting the drinking water of the indigenous Houma community, Bayou Lafourche—negatively impacts fisher-folk and the historical black community of St. James established by freed slaves in the 1800’s, who in the past decades along with neighboring black communities have been subjected to pollution from petrochemical facilities, refineries, mining, waste sites and fracking. From camp, the purpose was to organize direct actions in solidarity with these communities; attempting to delay and stop the pipelines construction by shutting down worksites along the pipeline route in non-violent creative ways.<sup>23</sup> Besides direct actions, activists appeared in court for lawsuits and injunction hearings against the Bayou Bridge company.

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<sup>23</sup> "[D]irect action is the insistence, when faced with structures of unjust authority, on acting as if one is already free. One does not solicit the state. One does not even necessarily make a grand gesture of defiance. Insofar as one is capable, one proceeds as if the state does not exist" (Graeber 2009, 203).

Early in the fieldwork, activists conducted low-risk direct actions such as dressing up in crawfish costumes that symbolized solidarity with crawfish farmers of the region, or putting on small theatrical performances with political speeches. Activists dressed as evil pipeline company CEO's and crawfish people, depicting the Bayou Bridge CEO as a destructive force for the crawfish crops of the region. These were similar though microcosmic forms of resistance to those Graeber (2009) studied in Quebec during the 2003 anti-globalization protests, wherein militant activists blockaded roads with visual elements depicting politicians as corporate-control puppets (2009:491-492). Over time, the more seasoned activists of the group created auxiliary temporary encampments in the Atchafalaya Basin,<sup>24</sup> employing higher-risk direct actions further east from the primary camp. This entailed luring law enforcement out into the hostile swamp landscape, accessible only by boat; which provided some advantages for the group of seasoned environmentalists in making the job of policing more burdensome.

More life-threatening forms of direct action materialized as occupying trees or locking to excavators, bull-dozers and horizontal drills (for drilling the pipeline path under waterways) with bike-locks and chains, enduring police harassment and hours or days of exposure to heat, which I explore in the later chapters. The council would otherwise lead direct actions by performing indigenous prayer ceremonies to shut down work. These were calm, prayer-oriented ceremonies led by the council-woman of Sicangu Lakota descent and spoken in her native Lakota language; accompanied by the passing around to activists of an abalone sea-shell with burning sage, the smoke of which serves a cleansing purpose as it envelopes each body. This is a pan-indigenous exercise known as *smudging*, in which sage, a sacred herb for indigenous Americans, is used as a purifying incense to clear negative energy, while the shell as Henry explains in an interview is “to invoke the power of the deepest sea. As we cleanse ourselves, we combine forces of earth, air and water together.”

Setting up amenities and acquiring legal assistance from organizations like the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) was planned a year in advance, ahead of the violence that ensued at Standing Rock against the indigenous Lakota and allies.<sup>25</sup> The Lakota (Sioux) people are indigenous to the North American plains. Legal help is crucial in that following Standing Rock, legislation drafted by lobbyists in several states including Louisiana at the controversial ‘American Legislative Exchange Council’ (ALEC) has made it so that mere protesting of pipeline infrastructure such as the Bayou Bridge has transformed from

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<sup>24</sup> The Atchafalaya Basin is the largest wetland and swamp in North America, a fragile ecosystem subjected to a century of logging and fossil fuel development.

<sup>25</sup> The CCR is a New York-based non-profit legal advocacy organization that supports activists across the nation in achieving social justice.

misdemeanor charges to felony charges, an extreme means of deterrence against opposition to the fossil fuel industry.<sup>26</sup>

Concerning those here who are anarchists, their presence is not unknown to the South. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, anarchists from Texas were invited by a former Black Panthers member living in Algiers Point, New Orleans, to provide armed support; exemplifying the prevalence of white-nationalist hate-groups and also a longer history of leftist political mobilization in the region (see Crow 2018:58-60). After Katrina, in absence of police presence and their own racialized violence; armed white militias terrorized the black community here. Some killed unarmed black residents and bragged about it to the Danish media (ibid.). This presence of armed black community members and anarchist allies helped keep them at bay (ibid.). Similarly in my fieldsite, though unarmed and non-violent, anarchist activists were invited by these indigenous women to ward off undesirable infrastructure.

### Resisting Through Organizational Structure

Activists here organize horizontally, voluntarily, and in a decentralized fashion. The movement organizing is a form of resistance and means of demonstrating alternatives to the unjust hierarchies of “prevailing capitalist and neoliberal politics” (Wright 2016), as anthropologist Fiona Wright terms it surrounding the Occupy Movement. Activists had autonomy on the ground, but strategies were required to be discussed with the council women to navigate the potential local impacts. To clarify, those leading the group were not above the activists making orders in the field-site, but were instead by their side guiding and encouraging solution-oriented actions.<sup>27</sup>

As a small group of mostly familiars, they would organize meetings and decision-making flexibly through consensus-based democracy; whereby after brainstorming pre-consented rules, roles and strategies, they would vote, and if there was a minority opposition, they would debate until a plan everyone supported was concocted.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, anyone was allowed to disengage from the activities if wished. Consensus—defined by Graeber (2013:203) as creatively enlisting a diversity of perspectives as a resource—was an attempt to avoid anyone submitting to the will of others, in violation of anarchistic principles and

<sup>26</sup> Activists from camp made it a point to disrupt 2018’s ALEC in New Orleans where the Louisiana democratic governor was present to support ramping up penalties against so-called protestors. Excerpt from a news article on The Guardian: “Alec began its conference in New Orleans on Wednesday, bringing its usual agenda of pro-privatization, pro-fossil fuel and anti-union legislation in tow.” Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/aug/09/louisiana-john-bel-edwards-alec> [Put this in main text]

<sup>27</sup> Note: Hierarchical roles despite horizontal organizing did appear to materialize during direct actions, in that other roles such as police liaisons—voted-for negotiators between activists and police—were frequently given to white male activists rather than women of color activists, in that police are less prejudiced to the former. However, activists doing so were exploiting the external-hierarchies of the broader society in order to subvert the authority of police and the enforcement of the new anti-protest law (HB727), and more generally, the power of the white elitist lobbyists behind the law.

<sup>28</sup> Meetings, like direct actions, were accompanied by smudging to cleanse the space each day as it were.

voluntary organizing. However, this was time-constraining, and under tighter circumstances, e.g. when activists needed to deploy to auxiliary encampments for support during police raids, the consensus process was circumvented and roles (e.g. drivers, police negotiators) were assigned either to those present or most familiar. At meetings, or ‘morning circles’ by the activist’s terms, activists would otherwise volunteer for menial roles at camp like cleaning, gardening or procuring meals.

Akin to the roles Graeber describes during Occupy Wall Street (2013:221-222): activists who organize meetings here are referred to as ‘facilitators’, and this role was rotated on for each meeting to ensure that the same person was not making the decisions each time and to maintain gender balance. During a period of a few weeks in June, one activist was facilitating a majority of the meetings in short absence of other experienced activists, straining their own role and vital skills (e.g. boating), which illustrates the importance of rotation to assuage an otherwise heavy process and to avoid burn-out.

### On Greener Futures

Besides the purpose of resistance, the leading organizer Amelia comments on the lands future in an interview: “We’re turning it into a just transition space, where people can get away from storms. We’ll have supplies there for people who need them. Also, we’re gonna have a big garden for locals. We’re gonna raise chickens and everything. This will give the kids that may not have the opportunity to play outside to do so, and to find the source of where their food comes from.” Amelia’s mention of escaping storms is rooted in her and Louise’s organizing of disaster relief for Louisiana and Texas communities after hurricanes Harvey and Isaac, in addition to the 2016 floods in which her own home and thousands of others were destroyed.<sup>29</sup> Gardening here is a means of practicing food sovereignty, in this context providing local, independent and sustainable access to healthy food sources. This is similar to June Nash’s (2005) study of Zapatista’s who cultivate the land that they occupy to practice food sovereignty, a form of resistance to global capitalist trade (2005:179-183). Already during my fieldwork an experienced activist was tending to avocado trees, banana trees, watermelon vines, tomato and pepper plants, that all thrive in this tropical region.<sup>30</sup> Other sustainable sources of food were often acquired through dumpster-diving in surrounding towns, or by the

<sup>29</sup> This was a flood triggered by 2 days of what was termed ‘a thousand year rain’ that affected many communities across Louisiana. The area is otherwise prone to catastrophic floods of this type, and an increasing number the past years. Source: [https://www.nola.com/weather/2016/08/louisiana\\_flood\\_of\\_2016\\_result.html](https://www.nola.com/weather/2016/08/louisiana_flood_of_2016_result.html).

<sup>30</sup> Floods and hurricanes are a yearly threat to this region leaving marginalized communities most exposed. Source: <https://grist.org/article/one-year-after-the-great-flood-louisianas-most-vulnerable-cope-with-the-losses/>.



salvaging of fresh roadkill for meals like gumbo, a famous Louisiana stew. Occasionally neighbors would drop off fresh catfish or crawfish to show support.

In the early springtime, people at camp experienced fluctuating weather patterns. Some periods reached a low of 5 degrees Celsius, and others a high of 35 degrees Celsius. Activists would sometimes awaken to torrential rainfall lashing the fields, tornado weather with roaring winds, and fleeting strikes of lightning near tents; their imminence felt by vertigo, and abrupt disappearances by the chilling crackle of thunder.<sup>31</sup> Summer days were like a smoldering furnace, and merciless swarms of mosquitos would emerge in the humid nights to pierce away at exposed skin. Louise of the camp-council planted citronella bushes in the vicinity to help repel mosquitoes. Sometimes activists would shut the barn doors and burn sage to drive away the mosquitoes with smoke. Often activists in tents were subject to ants borrowing through the floor fabric, attracted to wet clothing. The Koasati communities that once neighbored the Atakapa were driven from site to site by ants in pre-colonial times, as well as rattlesnakes, to provide some image of deep-rooted wildlife patterns (see Kniffen, Gregory & Stokes 1987:107).

However, my impression of the landscape was also mystifying. After dusk, I would stroll out to the road by camp engulfed by fireflies to catch eye of deer, armadillos, or other critters roaming about. Coyotes would howl from afar. I could shine a headlamp across the field and hundreds of sapphire eyes belonging to spiders shimmered fitfully, like offbeat replicates of dying stars. The haunting silhouettes of barred owls penetrated the rising fog; a misty, gravestone-hued blanket. The closer to the creek one camped, the louder the unison humming of frogs and insects. Noises like splashing from small alligators played on the imagination. During the daytime, Blue Herons and Pink Spoonbills, large majestic birds, would soar over the land. The breeze carried the smell of surrounding crawfish crops, an ocean-like scent. Sometimes water moccasin snakes would silently ascend from the creek and rest by the activist's tents.

For a while, the space had a young cat that would keep snakes at bay. One morning she was found ill and unconscious. She passed away one April night after two activists rushed her to a nearby veterinary office. Shortly after, activists held a ceremony they called a "Night to howl", accompanied by a feast and stories of the cat around a fire-pit; which was ended with a unison howl to mourn her. In her absence, non-venomous Speckled King-Snakes kept rodents and venomous snakes at bay.

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<sup>31</sup> Between January and November 2018, Louisiana was the 2<sup>nd</sup> state with the most tornadoes reported at a total of 69. Source: <https://weather.com/storms/tornado/news/2018-11-05-tornado-reports-by-state-year-to-date>.

## Landscapes Bygone and Not So Bygone

The nearest cities, like Lafayette, are about a dozen miles away in each direction. The Interstate-10 highway is the fastest connecting route, and the main way of getting to Baton Rouge and New Orleans where the larger campaign against the pipeline stretches. Due to the heavy traffic of 18-wheelers, deadly accidents are frequent on this highway and there are hundreds of eyesore billboard advertisements ambulance-chasing attorneys, casinos and truck-stops for rest, such as a controversial truck-stop that markets a caged tiger as a tourist attraction.<sup>32</sup>

Concerning advertisements, this scene of heavy traffic between metropolitan cores is where drivers can catch the subtle promotion of the Bayou Bridge Pipeline depicting smiling workers on roughly ten billboards for about 60 miles. At first glance, the billboard appears benign, depicting smiling workers and bright colors. Between these visual elements on the I-10 route surrounding camp, one finds local drive-through stops selling cheap daiquiris in styrofoam cups one can consume while driving, and a plethora of local and multinational fast-food chains.



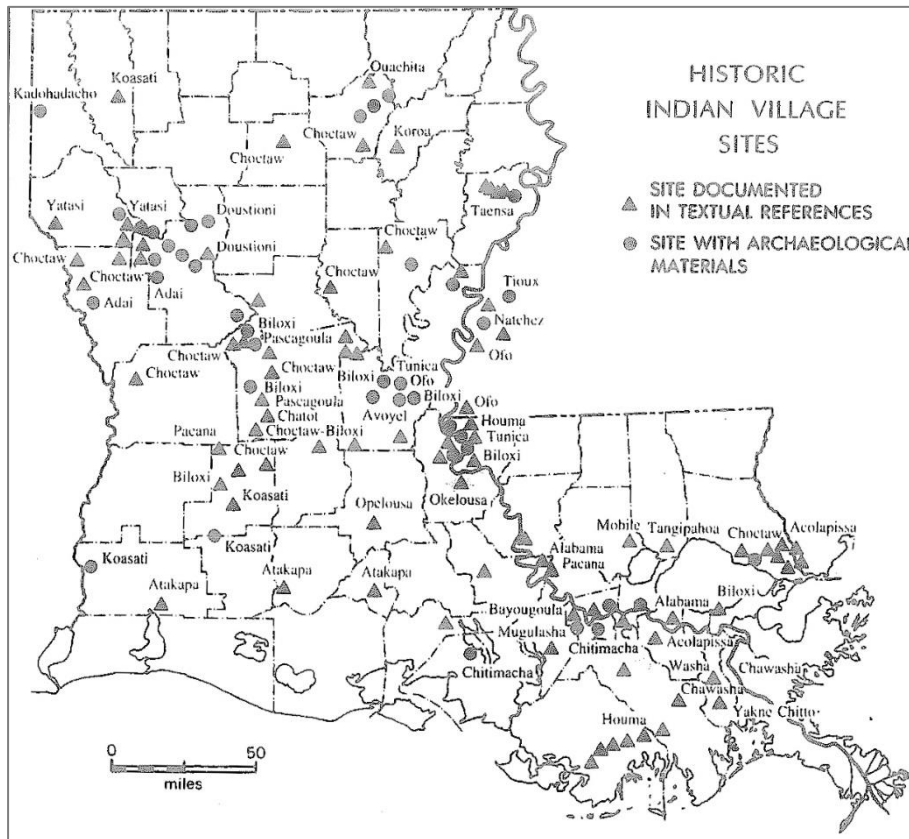
*Caption: One of the pipeline's promotional billboards outside of Baton Rouge. Note for chapter three where I discuss the make-up of pipeline workers: the corporate tokenization of ethnic identities here ignores the disproportionate employment of primarily white (out-of-state) workers*

Yet, so much of the historical and present is faded into obscurity in this hyper-commodified landscape. In 2018, Louisiana came second to Mississippi for the highest amount of residents living below the poverty line in the US (19.7%), with African Americans

<sup>32</sup> Excerpt: "Truck stop owner plans to pursue another tiger", in place of the first one that passed away. Source: [https://www.theadvocate.com/baton\\_rouge/news/communities/westside/article\\_46251bf8-b357-11e7-b2b6-afcbb7a5925b.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/westside/article_46251bf8-b357-11e7-b2b6-afcbb7a5925b.html).

at 33.1%, Latin Americans at 25.1%, Native Americans at 24.7%, Asian Americans at 15.9% and white Euro-Americans at 12.5% (Talk Poverty 2018). A common bumper-sticker to be found on cars reads: “Louisiana: third world and proud of it.”

Those that dwelt these prairielands are too rendered invisible, like its original inhabitants, the indigenous Atakapa peoples. Another reason I mention the last part is because it is an emic practice in the field-site to acknowledge and pay respects to a lands original people, whose communities encountered traumatic restructurings during the colonial period. By traumatic restructurings, I refer to forced migrations, loss of language, and for many of these communities, genocide and decimation. Activists would refer to the land of the primary camp as ‘Atakapa territory’, and the land of the temporary encampments in the Atchafalaya as ‘Chitimacha territory’; often at the beginning of meetings or upon entering territories for the first time.



*Caption: Map of pre-colonial sites of indigenous territories in Louisiana, with the Atakapa territory stretching from the bottom-left to the bottom-center, the general area where the primary resistance camp lies. The location of the Chitimacha toward the center-right approximates the area of the temporary encampments in the Atchafalaya. Obtained from Kniffen, Gregory & Stokes (1987:107)*

I will now explore an indigenous and black history of the landscape, to illustrate further how the US government and extractive projects are perceived by activists as rooted in the structure of settler colonialism. It is important to explore in order to decenter the

European-oriented narrative of history promulgated by people of settler Euro-American descent in power. For instance, this is exemplified in the Trump Administrations commemoration of Columbus on Columbus Day 2018, in which president Trump stated: “On Columbus Day, we commemorate the achievements of this skilled Italian explorer and recognize his courage, will power, and ambition—all values we cherish as Americans” (White House 2018). Historical sources that I use, like Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) and Howard Zinn (2007), were suggested to me by my interlocutors. Otherwise, I use sources such as Fred Kniffen (1987) and Gerald Horne (2003, 2014, 2018) to attempt to complement a history of the landscape in line with the political mobilization of my interlocutors. The selective focus on particular groups and historical dispossessions in North America is not to trivialize the nuances of oppressed ethnic identities, the indentured servitude of other past settlers such as the Irish,<sup>33</sup> or to reduce their histories. Instead I aim to give a sense of the forced migrations and genocidal projects against indigenous and black bodies engendered by settler colonial sovereignty and expansion.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF “AMERIKKKA”

The spelling of *AmeriKKKa* is emic to some of my interlocutors who criticize the nation’s broader white supremacist roots, typically in hashtags and communiqué’s on social media. The KKK aspect calls attention to the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist hate group born in the south.

In Louisiana, there is archeological evidence indicating that humans arrived fourteen thousand years before present (see Kniffen, Gregory & Stokes 1987:18). One pre-colonial site is Poverty Point that some archeologists argue was a ceremonial and trading center. I mention this to point toward original spaces of community and trading spanning millenniums before European conquest. More broadly, it is estimated that in the span of a century following the year-of-contact 1492 that 56 million indigenous peoples across the Americas were wiped out, i.e. over 90% of the existing populace (see Koch, Brierey, Maslin & Lewis 2019).

In 1492, the first victims of Columbus were the Taíno peoples, part of the Arawak peoples of the Caribbean (Zinn 2007:14). Besides disease contamination as a corrosive factor, the immediate devastation of the transatlantic slave trade began with Columbus’ soldiers rounding up 1,600 Taíno men, women, and children, and shipping the best 500 or more to

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<sup>33</sup> Indentured servitude in North America, as the Irish settling of the Thirteen British colonies in return for servitude to the British for fixed periods by contract, is not to be conflated with the violence of Chattel Slavery, the lifelong forced enslavement and exploitation of black and indigenous bodies by settler colonists.

Spain (Zinn 2007:14 *cf.* Dunbar-Ortiz 2014:23).<sup>34</sup> Aside for the purpose of labor, Columbus distributed women and children for sexual exploitation throughout the Spanish colonies (Zinn 2007:14). Taíno resistance to Columbus' legion was quelled through torture and terror as would be the case with other indigenous Americans; hunting them with dogs, "hanging them or burning them to death" (ibid.2007:14). As a result of the simultaneous mass-suicides and infanticides to save children from enslavement: within two years, half of the 250,000 Arawak peoples were annihilated and the bodies of those remaining were commodified (ibid.2007:14).<sup>35</sup>

### Alienation and Joint Uprisings

Of the "nearly 13 million Africans" violently dispossessed from their homelands between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, "forced to toil for the greater good of European and Euro-American powers" (Horne 2018:7), around five-percent were transported to North America and the Caribbean as chattel slaves (ibid.2018:8). Besides the mainland of Africa, African slaves were brought to the sugar-plantations of Louisiana from the already-established colonies of the Caribbean. For indigenous peoples of Louisiana, during the colonial period they were either kidnapped into institutionalized slavery or coerced to side with the competing Spanish, French and British colonists and partake in it for survival (see Kniffen, Gregory & Stokes 1987:63).

A third class of peoples besides colonists and black slaves existed in Louisiana, known as *gens de couleur libres*, or 'free people of color'; who were given semi-rights as people of mixed European and African or Native ancestry. Some were forced to become mercenaries and hunt escaped rebellious slaves, called 'maroons', in the watery swamplands (ibid.). Throughout the 1700's and 1800's, maroons were forced into exile in the hostile Louisiana swamps (e.g. outside of New Orleans and in the Atchafalaya), forming communities alongside indigenous of the region, exiled Acadians from southeastern Canada now known as Cajuns,<sup>36</sup> and other refugees and fugitives, to resist plantation slavery and settler colonial society.

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<sup>34</sup> Excerpt: "Of the hundreds of captives left over, "whoever wanted them could take as many as he pleased," one eyewitness, a Spanish colonist, Michele de Cuneo, wrote, "and this was done." Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2018/10/04/whose-history-matters-students-can-name-columbus-most-have-never-heard-taino-people?fbclid=IwAR1yEgIN2TCegAsQ2rbZxFwAy830Ln7xT161UfCx0m6-qh5vrUon1CGKeXA..>

<sup>35</sup> This can be situated in a present context with the prison industrial complex and the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment that facilitates what is virtually slave labor by prisoners. Currently, black citizens serving years in prison for minor drug offenses are often rendered invisible by US politicians who promulgate legalization of marijuana while leaving the expungement of prior and current minor offenses undiscussed.

<sup>36</sup> Acadians were exiled from Canada by the British between the years 1755 and 1764. While most of the Acadians were French settlers, some of them descended from the indigenous Wabanaki peoples of far-northeastern present-day US and far-southeastern present-day Canada.

Settlers sought to alienate the indigenous peoples and black slaves from each other to prevent joint rebellions (ibid.1987:79), and a natural coming of this was using black or indigenous slaves in settler-military forces against one another. As such, an indigenous history of the US intersects with that of African Americans. For instance, in the 1720's and 1750's, the French at New Orleans ordered black slaves to kill large numbers of the Chawasha peoples, the remaining of which some speculate escaped to join the Houma or Chitimacha (ibid.1987:79,93). Contrarily, militant resistance against settlers is evident in instances such as the Natchez revolt in 1729 (present-day Mississippi), where black slaves alongside indigenous Chickasaw massacred 250 settlers and brought others into captivity, an example of joint uprising that settler-colonists feared (see Horne 2014:76).

It was common for many smaller Louisiana indigenous communities such as “the Acolapissa, Mugulasha, Quinapisa and Tangipahoa”, finding themselves persecuted and in dwindling numbers to fuse with larger communities like the Houma (Kniffen, Gregory & Stokes 1987:83), though in the process they lost their own languages and specific connections to land. Consequently, there are only a few federally recognized indigenous nations of present-day Louisiana. Some indigenous peoples in the Louisiana colony detested and so abhorred slavery to the point that women would hang themselves to not become subject to it (ibid.1987:65). Communities such as the Chitimacha, Natchez and Connechi were some of those indigenous held as slaves alongside black slaves. Larger and more militant communities like the Choctaw, Caddo and Chickasaw were unmarred by slavery but were still subject to traumatic loss of language and culture through trading and co-habiting areas with Europeans (ibid.).

### 1776: The Settler State Formation

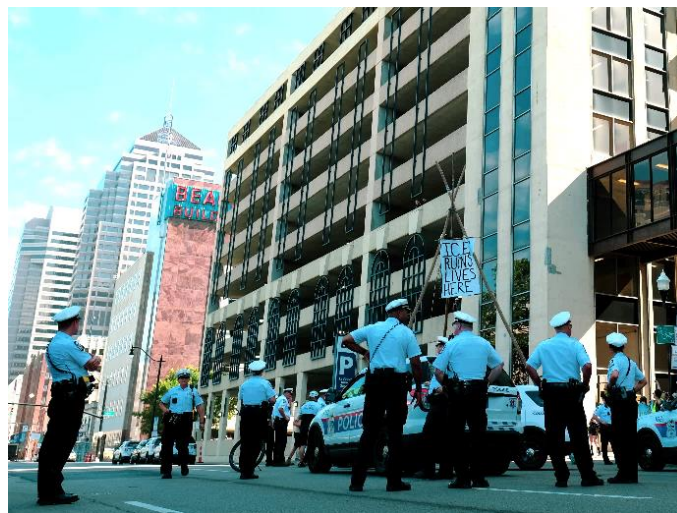
Historian Gerald Horne considers the precluding driving forces of the 1776 American revolution as rising slave revolts in Caribbean colonies (2014), the inevitable abolition of slavery by London throughout its colonies, and the conflicting wish of “the settlers—the colonists—to keep moving west, seizing the land of the Native Americans, stocking it with African slaves” (2003:126). Fearing the abolition of their right to enslave others and the prospect of slave rebellions reaching their shores, the founding fathers as slave-owners and early-capitalists revolted against the British, and founded the United States (2014).

According to Horne (2018): at the crux of this settler revolution, the creation of the original identity politics occurred—the original division of identities in the US with the category of “whiteness”—a pan-European alliance that crossed class lines and asserted the

nation-state ideology of white supremacy. European settlers became bound by a “petrified unity in reaction to the prospect of a slave rebellion”, or otherwise an inter-ethnic alliance “that would liquidate” white settlers (Horne 2018:24).<sup>37</sup> The alliance entailed the perpetuation of a racial caste system of sorts that held whiteness or identities that adopted white capitalist traits as favored. This superiority buttressed the justification of the US settler-governments pillaging of indigenous lands, such as with the Indian Removal Act signed by then-president Andrew Jackson in 1830 with the discovery of gold on Cherokee nation territory among other territories (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014:110).<sup>38</sup> The latter instigated the mass genocidal event known as the Trail of Tears, the forced diaspora of indigenous Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee and Seminole communities westward into federally administered reservations, during which thousands perished under harsh conditions.

For Amelia and Henry, when they would visit New Orleans: it became tradition to disseminate a photo of them to other activists directing the middle-finger at the infamous statue of Andrew Jackson in Jackson Square, attaching the hashtag *#Amerikkka* to the photo. This is a form of resistance to the common Euro-American glorification of proponents of ethnic cleansing (e.g. Jackson, or Columbus), and a potent signifier of how they situate themselves politically as indigenous activists in the history of the landscape.

Activists here frequent what anthropologists term ‘hashtag activism’, e.g. surrounding the shooting of an unarmed black teenager, Michael Brown, in Ferguson Missouri, giving birth to the Black Lives Matter hashtag and movement (Bonilla & Rosa 2015).



*Caption: I followed some of my interlocutors to Columbus, Ohio for a week, who were invited by American Indian Movement leaders to block vehicle access to an ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) facility detaining undocumented migrants*

<sup>37</sup> Note: Whiteness, here, is a relational identity premised upon the hierarchies under settler sovereignty and the system of slavery.

<sup>38</sup> Note: With the Trump Administrations plans to appropriate indigenous treaty land for mining, expansion of fossil fuel projects and hazardous waste-sites, the Indian Removal Act takes a new form in the present. See: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-tribes-insight-idUSKBN13U1B1>.



*Caption: (Ohio) A banner declaring ‘No Ban On Stolen Land’, criticizing Trumps draconian immigration policies of banning and caging indigenous Americans of the Global South, echoing past colonization processes.<sup>39</sup> The structure (top/center-right) is a high-risk direct action from which an indigenous-activist climber occupied for several hours. Similar direct actions occurred across the country against Trumps border wall enforcement and the splitting of indigenous families fleeing to the US by ICE. The relevance is that migrants are in part viewed as climate refugees by my interlocutors fleeing from climate-change induced conditions,<sup>40</sup> which the industrial activities of the Global North exacerbates*

Akin to how this online engagement “exposed and played with dominant media stereotypes and racist language and allowed for users to actively re-inscribe the meaning of the black body” (Wright 2016), otherwise cast as threatening by police; activists are, in a reversed fashion, actively re-inscribing the false benignity of Eurocentric historical narratives that whitewashes the oppressions of settler-colonizers.

Horne (2018) writes that the latest manifestation of this pan-European alliance is indicated by the results of the 2016 election (Horne 2018:24), similar to how “a comfortable majority of Euro-Americans voted across class lines for [the KKK-leader] and Nazi David Duke—for governor of Louisiana in 1991” (see Horne 2014:252). Arguably, by resisting the pipelines construction, activists here are symbolically resisting these settler colonial power dynamics, structurally embedded in the US state formation, as pipelines carry the very lifeblood of capitalism and of this nation.

Following the above historical trajectory, e.g. with the Indian Removal Act as an example of settler colonial appropriation of land and dispossession: what are now either state-owned territories in the US or private properties are perceived by my interlocutors as *stolen land* and stolen wealth from indigenous peoples of the region upon which the US as a white

<sup>39</sup> Example from an NBC news article: “Here, in McAllen, Texas, indigenous people (of the global south) fleeing violence and seeking asylum are, right now, locked in chain-link cages and lying on concrete floors, where the sound of frightened, crying kids and mothers and fathers fearing for their children is eerily audible if you just listen closely.” Source: <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/trump-s-immigration-policy-caging-indigenous-children-america-native-people-ncna1035451>.

<sup>40</sup> Example from a Scientific-American news article: “[R]esearchers in fields from geography to behavioral science increasingly have drawn a connection between global warming and mass migration—and a related rise in anti-immigrant nationalism in both Europe and the United States [...]. Not only is a wall an ineffective deterrent to illegal entry, they argue, but Trump’s rollback of carbon-fighting regulations could exacerbate mass migration in the Western Hemisphere and the world. “Basically it’s a Band-Aid on a cancer, because it’s really not solving the root problem,” said Elisabeth Vallet, a geographer from the University of Quebec, Montreal.” Source: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/trumps-border-wall-highlights-the-climate-migration-connection/>.



supremacist nation is anchored. Now, I will explore how settler Euro-American territoriality, sovereignty and memory is challenged by my interlocutors through language as a form of resistance.

### Un-settling Territorial Memory

The use of the adjective *so-called* is emic to some activists in the field-site, both indigenous and non-indigenous. Its use denotes a symbolic and linguistic dissent from recognition of settler colonial territoriality. A frequent use of ‘so-called’ can be found in radical, anonymous communiqué’s from activists here, such as in the Earth First Journal, an anarchist news source. An example: “People living in *so-called Louisiana* deserve better and it is time to put our bodies on the line. The HB727 bill”, the legislation that criminalizes protest of fossil fuel infrastructure with felony charges, “is meant to scare us from protecting what is sacred”, sacred being the eco-systems that activists like those I studied work to protect. “This is a peaceful protest against a violent company. We have to stop [the Bayou Bridge Pipeline]” (Earth First 2018). For the larger continent, the use of *Turtle Island*, a term with political roots in the American Indian Movement, is used interchangeably by activists here to substitute the names ‘US’ and ‘Canada’. Historically, Turtle Island is an umbrella term for the continental region deriving from the Anishnaabek peoples, one of the most widespread nations of aboriginal people in North America.<sup>41</sup>

The legitimacy of Euro-American territoriality is overall what is challenged here, I argue. This territoriality is inscribed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Christian settler belief of ‘Manifest Destiny’,<sup>42</sup> which promoted the westward expansion of settler-American sovereignty over indigenous territories as ‘gods will’. Manifest Destiny reverberates into the present beliefs of conservative Christians, exemplified with the White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders’ proclamation in January 2019 that: “[God] wanted Donald Trump”, an outspoken proponent of fossil fuel industry expansion; “to become president” (Morin 2019); which in one way can be understood as a call for the continuity of settler colonial sovereignty and expansion, with each pipeline constructed across indigenous territories. Related to manifest destiny, and how it also appears structurally embedded in the logic of extractive capitalism and modernity: Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) discusses a ‘darker side’ of modernity that needs to

<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the term ‘bioregion’ is widely used within the group I followed as a political and ecological alternative that transcends state-defined borders. For instance, the US/Canada Northwest blends together as Cascadia, to the East thereof stretching South from Canada to Texas are the Prairies, and to the Southeast is the Dixon region. Within these regions are smaller ecoregions and landforms. The landforms of Louisiana are comprised of floodplains, hills, blufflands, prairielands, swamps and coastal marshes (wetlands).

<sup>42</sup> Definition: “Manifest Destiny, a phrase coined in 1845, expressed the philosophy that drove 19th-century US territorial expansion. Manifest Destiny held that the United States was destined—by God, its advocates believed—to expand its dominion and spread democracy and capitalism across the entire North American continent.” Source: <https://www.history.com/topics/westward-expansion/manifest-destiny>.

be unmasked because it exists as “an embedded logic that enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernization, and being good for everyone” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015:487). The rhetorical language of “salvation, progress [...] and being good for everyone” (ibid.) is synonymous with the Bayou Bridge company’s messaging, while not specifically Christian-oriented, which is also relevant as the company is a major campaign donor to the Trump administration (Hampton 2016).

The company’s messaging in a promotional video, semantically in line with the cloak of “salvation” and “being good for everyone”, centers the good of plastics and various consumer products such as “shoes, cell-phones, make-up [...] and medicines” developed through the crude oil transported by their pipelines (see Energy Transfer 2017).<sup>43</sup> The positive connotations projected by the language strategically erases opposition and concerns of the impoverished community of St. James—whose very surrounding environments are devastated in the process of manufacturing these products—a form of extractive violence sustained by fossil fuel dependence. For instance, the controversial Formosa Sunshine petrochemical facility also being proposed for St. James besides the pipeline in question, would develop plastic bags and bottles (Rolfes 2018); adding concerns to a community already heavily inundated with pollution.

The Bayou Bridge company’s language also resonates with an interaction I had with a local. We were discussing the matter of the pipeline and its effect on communities stretching from North Dakota to Louisiana. Their response was: “It’s unfair, but it’s just *progress* and there’s no other way.” Sentiments of progress echo other talking points from proponents of extractive capitalism. For example, the op-eds of fossil fuel proponents refer to radical opposition to and sabotage of unfinished pipeline infrastructure as “A Fear of the Future” (Stevens 2017), i.e. future as depletion of carbon resources and progress, for those who would benefit at the expense of those inundated with pollution.

The immeasurable sabotage of people’s rights to clean water by corporations and lobbyists is not generally perceived by the US government as a magnitude of violence that far exceeds the use of direct action to protect local waterways and ecosystems.<sup>44</sup> The company narrates a moral authority on what violence is justified, between activists framed as national-

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<sup>43</sup> Excerpt from video: “[P]ipelines are the safest, environmentally cleanest, and least expensive way to transport the fuels in our communities”. The emphasis on ‘least expensive’ highlights the very logic of neo-liberalism, that of profit-maximization. For fossil fuel companies, when determining lowest property values and which residents have the least political power to challenge them, it is cheaper to sacrifice underprivileged communities than to subject richer often whiter suburban communities to the pollution of pipeline leaks and development of consumer products.

<sup>44</sup> Note: The strategic goal of their resistance in the field-site was to shut down work-sites as sites of capital for hours at a time, and not to commit property damage or sabotage. Shutting down work-sites did not entail targeting the workers, but rather the company’s means of wealth accumulation at the expense of marginalized communities.

threats and terrorists rather than defenders of their land and water<sup>45</sup>, and the aforementioned messaging of “salvation” by the company to divert attention away from the violence of industrial pollution.

To illustrate the more subtle violence against pipeline opponents, the Bayou Bridge company’s CEO states in an interview: “I think you’re talking about somebody who needs to be removed from the gene pool,” referring to indigenous activists fighting his pipeline infrastructure (DiChristopher 2018). The Bayou Bridge company holds the stance that pipelines are the safest way of transport, notwithstanding the re-routing of DAPL from a majority-white community north of the Standing Rock reservation following concerns of water contamination (see Buncombe 2016). The permissive genocide conveyed in the Bayou Bridge company CEO’s statement, of removing the indigenous activists “from the genepool”, is but one example of settler-American relations and attitudes toward indigenous peoples. The Bayou Bridge CEO’s comment is similar to Henry Kissinger’s comment on the removal of Micronesian peoples in the 1970’s for a US military base: “There are only ninety thousand people out there? Who gives a damn” (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014:226); highlighting a long-standing delegation of deserving and undeserving of land and water resources by settler adherents of modernity, industrial expansion and extractive capitalism.

The criminalization of protest by this company and Louisiana Governor Edwards, i.e. even public protest that aligns with ascribed boundaries of what the state deems admissible, rather than purposefully non-legal direct action, resonates with a notion one of my interlocutors appertained to with the term *plantation mentality*. This mentality is reflective of societal stratification into a ruling elite and a ruled class; which also mirrors how some Americans are socialized into the defeatist standpoint of “there is no other way”, regarding the challenging of existing hierarchies. Conceivably, Americans with these talking points are those who do not stand to lose regarding environmental risks of pipeline leaks. There is a gap in urgency rooted in class, racial and socioeconomic positions. Opposing the political power of ‘Big Oil’ is similar, but different, to what protesting segregation in the 1950’s with permission by those who once held it as legal might look like; due to the racial implications of who is being targeted by these pipelines and petrochemical industry, and the criminalization

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<sup>45</sup> Excerpt from an article on The Intercept revealing leaked documents of a private security firm hired by Energy Transfer Partners, TigerSwan, and the militant parlance used to describe Standing Rock protestors: “[T]he way TigerSwan discusses protesters as “terrorists,” their direct actions as “attacks,” and the camps as a “battlefield,” reveals how the protesters’ dissent was not only criminalized but treated as a national security threat.” <https://theintercept.com/2017/05/27/leaked-documents-reveal-security-firms-counterterrorism-tactics-at-standing-rock-to-defeat-pipeline-insurgencies/>

of non-violent protest with felony charges; functioning to quell opposition and to relegate marginalized communities of color to a ruled class.

In the US, resistance against pipelines and the ongoing destruction of indigenous communities is quelled through lawsuits, privatized law enforcement, and PR campaigns, i.e. by no means at the same degree of violence of chattel slavery discussed before or violence surrounding resource-extraction in the Global South. I will continue this discussion by exploring Cancer Alley, the heavily industrialized region which the pipeline would feed into. This is important to explore with regards to the historical black communities that reside here as descendants of freed slaves, sharing a common history as victims of settler-colonists alongside indigenous Americans, and to interrogate settler colonialism as an ongoing project.

## CANCER ALLEY

The resistance campaign against the Bayou Bridge Pipeline is not a single-issue engagement, as the region the pipeline would feed into sheds light on multiple issues. Freed slaves established communities in the late-1800's in the region of Cancer Alley, a roughly 140-km stretch of former-plantation landscapes between present-day Baton Rouge and New Orleans along the Mississippi River.



*Caption: (Left) ExxonMobil's oil refinery in Baton Rouge, the fifth largest in the US; (right) the Louisiana state capitol building, exhibiting the material entanglements of corporate-power and the state*

Those who live in these historic communities are subject to densely industrialized landscapes, with over 136 petrochemical facilities (Davies 2018:1541), hazardous waste sites, mining facilities and 7 oil refineries (ibid.). Cancer Alley residents live in “Fence-line” communities, i.e. marginalized communities fenced off from neighboring industry.

Due to a contingent abundance of “lax environmental and labor regulations, tax exemptions” and “prime riverside access for oceangoing ships, the same physical geography that had attracted antebellum planters three generations earlier” (Davies 2018:1541); many of

the existing plantation properties were purchased by petrochemical companies in the mid-twentieth century.

Thus, the violence of slavery intertwines with industrial pollution, as white corporate oligarchs succeed the slave-owners before them.<sup>46</sup> Residents here live in what anthropologist Kristina Peterson (2016:340-341) calls “sacrifice zones”, a term used by the US government during the cold war to designate sites for nuclear mining and waste dumping (see Lerner 2010:2-3), disproportionately targeting impoverished indigenous and other communities of color local to such sites.

Concerning Cancer Alley, extractive violence materializes as such by disproportionately targeting marginalized bodies within these remote areas with the byproducts of toxic pollution. Misrach and Orff (2014) trace some of the cancers, respiratory diseases, developmental/behavioral disorders (e.g. ADHD, learning disabilities) linked to prolonged exposure to known carcinogens in Cancer Alley (2014:154-155). Cancer of the bone marrow (Multiple Myeloma) and Leukemia are linked to benzene exposure; a common emission from industry here with carcinogenic properties and that bears the scent of permanent markers (*ibid.*). Cancers of the soft tissue and liver are linked to Vinyl Chloride emissions, a human carcinogen and ingredient for the manufacturing of plastic pipes and floor coverings (*ibid.*). Breast cancer is linked to exposure to ethylene oxide, a known carcinogen and ingredient in the manufacturing of carpet fibers and various plastics (*ibid.*). In 2003, the mortality rate for cancer in this region exceeded “the national mortality rate by 200 per cent” (Allen 2003:138), due to the combination of poor access to healthcare and that the most prevalent and lethal form of cancer here is lung cancer (*ibid.*).

Everything from pesticides, single-use plastics, home materials, clothing, fuels, food flavorings and bath-products are derived from the crude oil transported to petrochemical facilities here; underlining at once how deeply entangled petrochemicals are with the social fabric of Americans, and for the poor, the poisons of their laxly regulated manufacturing processes. It is not only a contamination of the air that transpires, but of the surrounding waters, soil and ecology; the consumption of which over time and scale increases exposure. Albertha Hasten (1950-2012), a prominent environmental leader and civil rights movement veteran of White Castle (Cancer Alley) most active during the 2000’s neoliberal Bush era, referred to this daily pollution as the “chemical abuse” of these local communities (Allen 2003:46).

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<sup>46</sup> *Oligarch*: a ruler in an *oligarchy*, which is a minority elite that has control over a country.

Many grassroots environmental leaders mobilized in Cancer Alley as victims of the 1980's Reagan era of neoliberalisation (e.g. rampant de-regulation and tax-exemptions). Some of the early movements were unable to sustain themselves as low-income communities without broader solidarity networks or were repressed by the upper-class socioeconomic power of fossil fuel proponents. Present movements are for example 'Concerned Citizens of St. John' of LaPlace (Cancer Alley), who are fighting the local Denka facility and over-exposure to Chloroprene emissions, a likely carcinogen;<sup>47</sup> and 'Rise St. James' led by local St. James activists Barbara Washington and Sharon Lavigne among others, fighting the construction of a Denka rubber factory and other projects the Bayou Bridge Pipeline would sustain.<sup>48</sup> In an interview (Dermansky 2018b), Lavigne states:

*Sometimes the air is so bad people don't want to go outside. We are waiting to be killed by cancer from all the pollution or by an explosion. If there is an industrial accident, there is no way out for us. We will not be silenced about the institutional racism, the environmental racism that is coursing through the river parishes. We are not just going to lie down and let the industrial plants kill us off.*

Past communities such as Morrisonville or the church community of Taft were so inundated with pollution over time that they were bought out, allowing a Dow Chemical facility to expand its operations. In Taft, only the sight of a cemetery remains to indicate some historical presence. Aside from this literal erasure of material landscape, a whitewashing of history occurs in the instance of plantation homes from the antebellum period sponsored by companies like Shell for tourism and weddings.<sup>49</sup> At these sites of middle-class tourism neighboring impoverished black communities such as Norco (Cancer Alley), the original slave-owners are highlighted as mere property owners and any mention of the black slaves that built or maintained the property are left as untold histories.

As Misrach and Orff (2014) argue: "While everyday neighborhoods like Taft have been largely obliterated, corporations donate funds to preserve stately plantation homes. Literally and figuratively, they elevate one history and sublimate another" (ibid.2014:165); a form of erasure mirroring the process of early colonization in how indigenous, black and non-

<sup>47</sup> Excerpt from news article: "This past year in Louisiana's St. John the Baptist Parish, a small group of residents began organizing their community to compel the state to protect them against an invisible menace: the air they breathe. Their parish, the Louisiana equivalent of a county, is situated in what's known as Cancer Alley, an industrial corridor between Baton Rouge and New Orleans that hosts more than 100 petrochemical factories." Source: <https://www.desmogblog.com/2018/01/04/concerned-citizens-st-john-louisiana-cancer-alley-pollution-fight>.

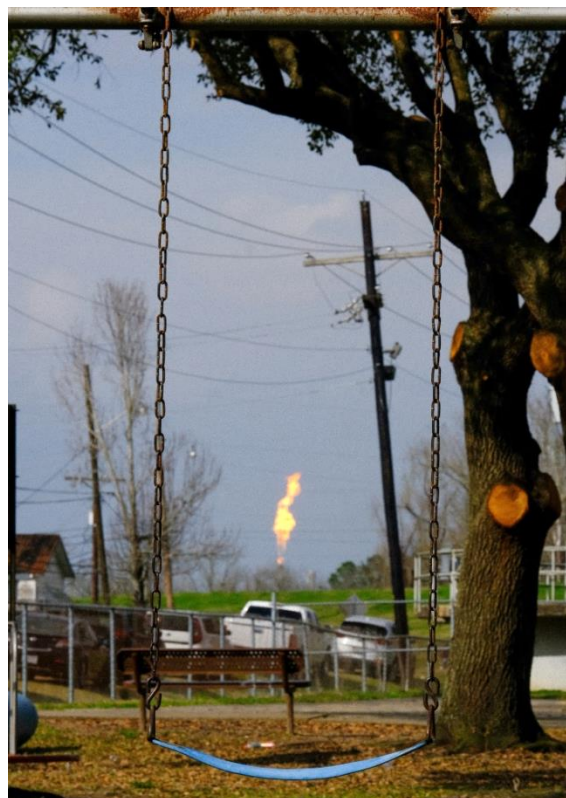
<sup>48</sup> Excerpt from news article: "St. James Parish's Sharon Lavigne and Barbara Washington, both fighting to prevent additional petrochemical plant construction near their homes, attended the Congressional Convening on Environmental Justice in Washington, D.C., on June 26." Source: [https://www.desmogblog.com/2019/07/08/louisiana-cancer-alley-environmental-justice-dc-tokyo?fbclid=IwAR1\\_qmcUbyMtQl42IJaQOQmqArZ59Fd-4vTgT1kka1sl-JFR8NOj9FZUlc](https://www.desmogblog.com/2019/07/08/louisiana-cancer-alley-environmental-justice-dc-tokyo?fbclid=IwAR1_qmcUbyMtQl42IJaQOQmqArZ59Fd-4vTgT1kka1sl-JFR8NOj9FZUlc).

<sup>49</sup> Example: the Ormond Plantation, near Norco, Louisiana, offers weddings and tours for mainly upper-middle class white Louisiana residents. Source: <https://www.plantation.com/about/>.

white Americans were assimilated into a Euro-American centered history, ascribing settlers with the role of noble leaders (e.g. Columbus) rather than as purveyors of genocidal projects.



*Caption: A gas-flare from the local Dow Chemical plant looming over the Holy Rosary Cemetery in Taft, Louisiana*



*Caption: A gas-flare from the Dow Chemical Plant in Plaquemine, Louisiana, looming over a community playground. The flare, that burns 24/7, can be seen from tens of miles away and is noticeable by its permanent marker scent from benzene emissions*

### St. James: The Production of Injury

A main focus of support for the camp is the community of St. James, wherein the Atchafalaya wetlands seep into and where the proposed terminus of the Bayou Bridge Pipeline/DAPL lies. Since 2014, this community has been designated by the St. James Parish (the Louisiana name for county) with the transitional name “*residential/future industrial*” site, despite its historical significance and local opposition (Ludwig 2019). This is a form of gentrification, i.e. the

transformation of an area which engenders forced relocation of a community local to it, further marginalizing them.

Davies (2018) explores qualitative interviews from elderly residents of St. James who recall a time where the local trees grew oranges, peaches, and plums. Fruit no longer grows, and residents have lost loved ones to deadly forms of cancer over the years (see 2018:1548).<sup>50</sup> In 2015 alone, “[o]ver 755,000 tons of air pollution was released in St. James Parish” as well as 38,200 pounds of chemical waste dumped into the water consisting of ammonia, zinc and nickel (ibid.2018:1544). Davies analyzes local experiences of pollution through Mbembe’s (2003; in 2018) framework of *necropolitics*, discerning a states right to kill and the exposing of a colonized populace to “the possibility of death” (ibid:1540). Using the example of plantations, “Mbembe theorized forms of violence that do not involve the outright killing of individuals but their slow biological degradation or wounding. He described how colonized bodies were “kept alive but in a *state of injury*”” (ibid.:1540:Mbembe 2003, 21). Conceivably, the slow killing of a colonized populace by a settler-elite industry is more stealthily concealed by PR-narratives, than the immediate spectacle of outright genocide.



*Caption: The St. James community (top-center, left of river) and Highway-18 (top-center) runs along the Mississippi river (top-center right). The Oil Tanks are the large, white cylinders. Toward the bottom-left is where access to highway-3127 is blocked off (out-of-view). Photo by an activist*

Evidence for these injurious circumstances is underlined with the St. James community’s only evacuation route, Highway-18. Any time this road is closed to quarantine petrochemical disasters, residents are left stranded in danger of heightened exposure.<sup>51</sup> One current environmental disaster on the rise as of recent in St. James is an unstable 200-foot high waste-pile wall containing the Mosaic Agrochemical Company’s 720 million gallons of

<sup>50</sup> The ‘Louisiana Chemical Association’, a conglomerate serving the interests of petrochemical companies, continues to challenge the moniker ‘cancer alley’ as a myth that harms local multinational industries despite the ongoing contamination of the air and waters black communities here have resided in proximity to for generations. Source: <http://www.lca.org/resources/chemical-connections/fighting-the-cancer-alley-myth>.

<sup>51</sup> Excerpt from a DesmogBlog news article: “Reduced to a single road into and out of the community, residents along the Mississippi River in St. James would have no way to evacuate in case of an explosion or other emergency stemming from a pipeline failure.” Source: <https://www.desmogblog.com/2018/05/08/bayou-bridge-pipeline-st-james-louisiana-evacuation-judge-ruling>.



radioactive process water.<sup>52</sup> The alternative is Highway-3127 running parallel to Highway-18. However, access to 3127 is blocked by oil tank farms and privatized land fenced off by multinational corporations; segregating the wealth-accumulation of white elitist Americans and impoverished black bodies.

In 2018, a main argument of residents here with support from the camp was the ultimatum that an escape route for disasters be built if the Bayou Bridge Pipeline was to be approved by locals. This was denied in court.<sup>53</sup> Another rising concern in St. James to date is the coming of the Formosa company's petrochemical facility to produce various plastics, a facility this Taiwanese company calls 'The Sunshine Project'; a name ostensibly bearing positive connotations, like the Bayou Bridge, to imply a positive presence.<sup>54</sup>

Since many Cancer Alley residents live below the poverty line, they have no option for relocation; although many people have been forcibly relocated. Relocation would also entail uprooting from the historical homeland their ancestors established as free peoples or have fought environmental and justice movements upon, just as indigenous American connections to their original homelands became ruptured through the material processes of settler colonialism.

Ethnic minorities are the majority of those put at risk and for this reason local activists and researchers argue that Cancer Alley faces 'environmental racism': "the [disproportionate] targeting of minority and low-income communities for undesirable facilities" (Rosenfeld & Feng 2011:61). Hochschild (2016) notes how racism in Louisiana "appears not simply in personal attitudes but in structural arrangements—as when polluting industries move closer to black neighborhoods than to white" (2016:147). Barbara Allen (2003) in her research discusses how companies here claim their decision-making as value-neutral, "not based on race", and how the sites of manufacturing and transportation are chosen for the cheap property values (Allen 2003:111). Yet, as Allen argues, these companies with an elitist-bias do not include how neighboring wealthy white landowners sell these acres of land into their discourse; an instance of white neighbors selling out and subjecting their black neighbors to

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<sup>52</sup> Excerpt from a news article in The Advocate: "Mosaic's waste byproduct at its Uncle Sam complex on the Mississippi River has been in existence and ever-growing since 1975. The now nearly 960-acre waste pile outside Convent contains gypsum, an unwanted byproduct from phosphate fertilizer production with trace radioactivity and limited ability to be recycled." Source: [https://www.theadvocate.com/baton\\_rouge/news/article\\_3cf05134-233a-11e9-aa0f-17aeb020318d.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/article_3cf05134-233a-11e9-aa0f-17aeb020318d.html).

<sup>53</sup> The campaign and the coalition has managed to delay the pipeline's construction deadline at least 8 months up until now, when a judge greenlighted its continued construction despite the companies environmental permit violations and illegal appropriation of private land: <https://www.courthousenews.com/louisiana-court-oks-pipeline-construction-in-wetlands/>

<sup>54</sup> The name may also just be referring to its proposed proximity to the nearby Sunshine Bridge. Excerpt from a DesmogBlog article: "The Baton Rouge Advocate reported that the complex would release considerable volumes of air pollutants, ranging from volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides (smog precursors) to formaldehyde and other carcinogens." Source: <https://www.desmogblog.com/2018/12/13/formosa-plastics-plant-st-james-parish-louisiana-environmental-racism>.

undesirable living-conditions (2003:112).<sup>55</sup> The structural arrangements of environmental racism and the industrial gentrification of Cancer Alley communities, as descendants of peoples placed in a colonized positions, mirror the territorial project of settler colonialism. For instance, as reflected by anthropologist Audra Simpson: “because “Indigenous” peoples are tied to the desired territories”, or here, impoverished black communities and their land, “they must be eliminated” (Wolfe 1999, 2006; Simpson 2014:19); whereby settler-colonizers here appear as incursive corporations, and elimination as toxic pollution and the gentrifying undertaking of predatory expansion, such as with Taft’s transformation.

As marginalized black populations, it is easier for the companies and politicians to whitewash narratives surrounding Cancer Alley. The voices and opposition of these communities are often ignored in the realm of neoliberal governance that de-valorizes human life over extractable resources, a process that public relations retains a pivotal role in as I will now analyze further.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS AS ERASURE

Merill Singer (2011) analyzes recurring public relations (PR) approaches of petrochemical companies in Cancer Alley, who frame themselves as a positive presence.<sup>56</sup> The PR-narratives are recurrent I argue in that oil and gas companies here often have shared business relations and must operate through the approval of the same centralized political structures, to appease shareholders and political allies. Typically these companies present themselves as “accountable, community conscious organizations and “good neighbors” that provide needed jobs, produce useful products and “develop the natural resources in a responsible manner”” (CF Industries 2010b; in Singer 2011:149);<sup>57</sup> working to conceal linguistically the insidious undercurrents of cancer and death consuming the landscape. The imagery of “good neighbors” runs parallel to the portrayal of settler figures such as Columbus or Andrew Jackson as noble leaders, both distancing accountability from the reality of ethnic cleansing.

Other means of presenting this image are more subtle in cities like New Orleans or Baton Rouge, through the financial sponsoring of massive football stadiums and popular

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<sup>55</sup> Excerpt: “The simple equation of cheap land and transportation as an excuse for disproportionately polluting minority and poor communities is not an innocent act based on an objective economic decision-making process” (Allen 2003:112).

<sup>56</sup> Note: I was told that a number of residents and activists in Cancer Alley have made public criticisms of Singer’s text, to shed light on a debate around it.

<sup>57</sup> These PR approaches are similar to BP Oil’s cover-up of the negative impacts of the Deepwater Horizon disaster of 2010, along Louisiana’s coastline. As Rob Nixon (2011) examines: BP Oil deployed military planes under cover of night to spray toxic dispersants to sink the oil; and softened the disasters imagery by photoshopping visual representations of the disaster while using the Coast Guard to bar “media from accessing the worst hit areas” (2011:273). The company’s usage of the name “Deepwater Horizon” rather than “BP Oil Spill” is itself a measure taken to distance from responsibility for the disaster, and some interlocutors who were involved in shedding light on the disaster use the latter term as most environmentalist circles do.

music festivals.<sup>58</sup> Financial sponsoring can be understood as an investment in PR, and the selling-point attempts to signal positive connotations surrounding the presence of Big Oil, in spite of disparities in actual contribution to communities due to rampant tax exemption.<sup>59</sup> Arguably, financial sponsoring of popular events is a process of conforming cultural celebration to the flow of capital (oil). This resonates with David Harvey's (2016) argument of how under capitalism, "A world of individuality and freedom [in the US] on the surface conceals a world of conformity and coercion underneath" (2016:60), characteristic to how public consent to the extractives industry's presence and naturalization of toxic pollution as a side-effect is socially engineered. The PR-narrative that Singer (2011) examines mirrors that of the Bayou Bridge company, whose narratives reference job creation and growth; pipeline safety over other modes of transportation of crude oil; and billboards depicting smiling pipeline workers.<sup>60</sup>

The company's narrative is devoid of any self-criticism, non-mentioning of altering the DAPL-route in North Dakota away from a majority-white, middle-class community to the Standing Rock Sioux waters and territory,<sup>61</sup> or any mention of 1,300 pipeline leaks statistically between 2010 and 2016 (Harrington 2016). Investigative reporters add statistics of Energy Transfer Partners (Bayou Bridge) pipelines leaking once every 11 days for 15 years (see Kelly 2018). Instead, the Bayou Bridge stresses the promise of jobs and growth.

### The Jobs and Growth Tagline

Jobs, economic growth and security are depicted by American oil-and-gas companies as a trade-off for any environmental risks, as sociologist Erik Kojola (2015) examines with the multinational Keystone XL tar sands pipeline, wherein patriotic and national interests are points the American public are appealed to with (2015:12). As Kojola notes, mentions of lobbying and conflicts of interests behind proposed pipelines are never addressed by proponents (2015:17). For TransCanada's Keystone XL, Kojola's findings were that it would not be a major source of jobs as claimed, "creating only 2,500 to 4,650 temporary construction jobs" (2015:13). For the Bayou Bridge Pipeline (BBP), research by the environmental organization 350 New Orleans delivers a similar argument of how: "BBP will

<sup>58</sup> Similar to how Shell sponsors weddings at plantation homes – Source: <https://www.shell.us/sustainability/shell-and-jazz-fest.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Example: Exxon's oil refinery in Baton Rouge, the twelfth largest in the world, has an estimated 700 million dollars in tax exemptions from the past twenty years. Source: <https://truthout.org/articles/louisiana-teachers-mobilize-against-exxonmobil-tax-exemption/>.

<sup>60</sup> Excerpt: "Bayou Bridge Pipeline: Creating Jobs and Income for Louisiana by Safely Moving Oil Between Existing Terminals". Source: <https://bayoubridge.com/>.

<sup>61</sup> Officials from the community of Bismarck state that the route was altered without a fight, and that they support the Lakota peoples at Standing Rock and their right to clean water. Source: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-12-01/bismarck-residents-got-dakota-access-pipeline-moved-without-fight>.

create only 12 permanent jobs and 2,500 temporary jobs that will go primarily to out-of-state workers” (see N.O. 350 2018).<sup>62</sup>

The glossing over of environmental risks by the corporate promise of jobs, and naturalization of toxic exposure, appear as two sides of the same coin. In an attempt to naturalize chemical emergencies, petrochemical representatives collaborated in the 1980’s to form the CAER (Community Awareness Emergency Response) (Singer 2011:149). Public service announcements through means of a cartoon turtle sponsored by the CAER routinely taught children in Pre-K until 2nd grade about how to “shelter in place” should an industrial emergency occur (Singer 2011:149). The emphasis on sheltering in place, i.e. going inside, ignores the “considerable disparities in housing” where an impoverished person’s home offers little to no shelter from toxic fumes, a reality for low-income residents of Cancer Alley (ibid.2011:150). As Singer asserts, “[The] underlying cultural function is the naturalization of the chemical industry in a world in which oil rigs and pelicans are routine features of the environment, and wise individual behavior is the best route to a safe and healthy life” (see 2011:149-150); otherwise a concealment of the genocidal corollaries of industrial infrastructure.

### “Good Science”: In White Supremacy’s Shadow

A commonplace defense of fossil fuels, often of an elitist bias, aligns fossil fuel expansion with the paradigmatic terminology of “safe” and “good”. This language is akin to Wolfe’s analysis of settler colonialism—challenging the legal definition of genocide as an *event*—instead arguing that it reshapes structural relations to make the elimination of indigenous peoples, e.g. with the DAPL route and other extractive projects, appear as “uncontroversial” (Wolfe 1999, 2006).<sup>63</sup> For example, on his monthly radio talk-show in June 2018, activists listened to Louisiana Governor Edwards’—who by trajectory of the state formation explored is a political descendant of settler colonialism, as a government representative—respond to criticism of neglecting the local opposition of St. James to the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, defending the pipelines function as based on “good science” (Fieldnotes). Additionally, conflicts of interest or lobbying were responded to, similar to Kojola’s analysis (2015:17).<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> A main argument for the Bayou Bridge company is the pipeline as “By Louisiana, For Louisiana”, conveying an overlap of a local jobs narrative. Early on I volunteered along with a group of others from an environmental non-profit to map out license plates at construction sites (January-February). Out of this, opponents of the pipeline found that at least 4/5 of license plates of workers were of out-of-state origins, with Texas being a front-runner. This would make sense as the pipeline is 60% owned by Energy Transfer Partners (Dallas) and 40% by Phillips 66 (Houston).

<sup>63</sup> Note: I add to Wolfe’s definition descendants of freed slaves in Louisiana, as peoples historically disenfranchised by settler colonists, in regards to the Bayou Bridge Pipeline.

<sup>64</sup> Example: Edwards had several undocumented meetings with former Senator Mary Landrieu as discovered by investigative reporters throughout 2017-2018, leading up to the pipelines construction. Concerning the conflict of interest, the former Senator is “[...] a paid

In Edwards’ rhetoric, industrial expansion—and the seizing of land through eminent domain for private profit, a somewhat more refined iteration of the Indian Removal Act—runs parallel to the “embedded logic (of modernity) that enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernization, and being good for everyone” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015:487). The language of salvation here aligns with Wolfe’s (Wolfe 1999, 2006) analysis of settler colonialism and its genocidal byproducts being framed as “benign” processes. The language of “good science”, arguably, is a blatant erasure of the violence against communities of color, such as St. James, that are injured over time through the material processes that develop these resources.

The circumstances under which the language is promulgated echoes the white supremacist underpinnings of the country’s state formation. For instance, with the signing of the Indian Removal Act (1830), an act of white settler colonists dispossessing indigenous from their lands to appropriate resources such as gold; or the Manifest Destiny belief (19<sup>th</sup> Century), an act of expanding white-settler sovereignty as gods will. Both relate to white-settlers enjoying structural advantages from the hegemonizing, colonizing and dispossessing of indigenous, black and non-white bodies.



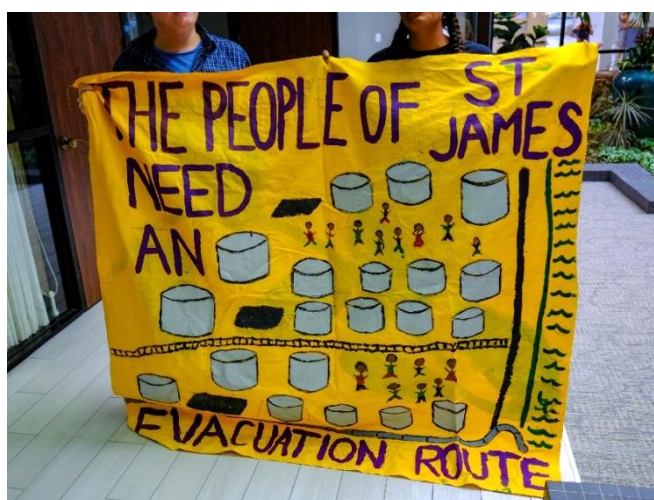
*Caption:  
Activists  
preparing a  
banner that  
reads  
“Governor  
Edwards, We  
Can’t Drink  
Oil”*

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consultant for Bayou Bridge and is also a lobbyist for the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, which provided a necessary approval for the pipeline. Landrieu has received more than \$41,000 in campaign donations from Energy Transfer Partners (DAPL, Bayou Bridge) and Phillips 66.” Source: <https://public-accountability.org/report/the-power-behind-the-pipelines-bayou-bridge-pipeline/>. Source on meeting: <https://ccrjustice.org/home/press-center/press-releases/louisiana-public-officials-surveilled-anti-bayou-bridge-pipeline>.



*Caption: Activists disrupting the governor's monthly radio show in July in Baton Rouge, being denied access to speak with him*



*Caption: (Baton Rouge) Activists holding a banner that reads "The People of St. James Need An Evacuation Route"*

Here there are two distinct white supremacies according to sociologist Dylan Rodriguez (2011): a “barbaric” (feudalist, enslaving)” type and “an emerging modern, civilized, reformist white supremacist national pedagogy” (Rodriguez in Jung 2011:64); the latter for instance by lifting colonizers such as Columbus as a noble explorers rather than a mass-murderers. Both represent the landscape of “Amerikkka” for my interlocutors and the concept of “stolen land”, or indeed, land that continues to be stolen through industrial expansion.

White supremacy is not only sustained by the most visible belligerents, such as past slave-owners or present far-right networks. It is a structure assisted by those who carelessly defend or normalize the atrocious arrangements of plantation slavery or environmental racism. Thus, I suggest, white supremacy and extractive violence in Louisiana wear the guise of legitimate governance; and words of “good science” cloak the thinly veiled stages of dispossessory projects.

## Chasing “Out-of-state Agitators”

The concerns of pipeline-opponents are furthermore erased by pro-fossil fuel platforms that describe opponents as mere “out-of-state agitators”, a term used with a discursive means-to-an-end.<sup>65</sup> The term holds white supremacist roots from the early-Civil Rights era (1954-1968), when Southern law enforcement would discredit African-American grievances with segregation as driven by *northern white radicals*; intersecting with the terms usage by law enforcement at Standing Rock, attempting to discredit the legitimate concerns of the affected local Lakota population (Milstein 2015:103 *cf.* Wong & Levin 2016).

The relational narratives are aimed at discrediting fossil fuel opponents and diverting attention away from the systemic promotion of inequity, infringement of free-speech and toxification of impoverished communities. Even more, what these talking points overlook is how those affected by ongoing or potential environmental pollution (this pipeline) exist as a marginalized populace, at the bottom of top-down power relations, and therefore invite voluntary help from most anyone who would risk the physical presence of solidarity. Through means of common discrediting narratives, one from the civil rights era and the other in the present, aimed at quelling resistance; the past of white supremacy and settler colonialism coalesces into the present political landscape that my interlocutors re-conceptualize as “Amerikka” and “stolen land”. Settler colonialism materializes in its present form with petrochemical companies that have not only engulfed the plantation-slavery landscape, but as I suggest, have also appropriated past structural arrangements and relations, a creeping eliminatory logic in the guise of salvation and progress, from which white-settler capitalists directly benefit.

In Louisiana, the luxury of cultural mainstays like football games and music festivals—and school computers as Maggie notes in the introduction—sponsored by fossil fuel companies like the Bayou Bridge company, are enjoyed mainly by middle-class Americans. Many of them are unaware of the human rights abuses in peripheral landscapes like Cancer Alley by the same sponsors. The sponsoring of these cultural mainstays are exploited, I argue, as corporate PR crutches that companies like Shell or Energy Transfer Partners (Bayou Bridge Pipeline) use to gloss over where widespread concerns of unethical business practices, conflicts of interest or the prevalence of extractive violence exist. I suggest

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<sup>65</sup> Example from a report by ‘Louisianians for Energy’, a corporate sponsored news source: “Simply put, the ongoing demonstrations against the Bayou Bridge Pipeline aren’t representative of the will of Louisiana residents. Rather, as these recent citations would suggest, *out-of-state agitators* who don’t understand or even care about the best interests of Louisiana or its residents are attempting to latch onto this project as an opportunity to promote their unrealistic anti-fossil fuel agenda.” Source: <https://louisianiansforenergy.org/out-of-state-protesters-target-bayou-bridge-pipeline/?fbclid=IwAR3v0iPkj3KJDoUOMYYKL4DqkkYJsAHWrSXdFQ9MwikrfSI98CH5JgiroM>.

that extractive violence as I have explored it is intrinsically settler colonial, in accordance with Wolfe's terms.<sup>66</sup>

## SUMMARY

In sum, activists here use resistance to pipelines and extractive capitalism as a vehicle for reinscribing Eurocentric historical narratives, and countering the modern forms of white supremacy as accentuated by the PR strategies of fossil fuel proponents and the structural arrangements of environmental racism. Activists situate themselves in a history of genocide and enslavement whereas, for example, local fossil fuel companies such as Shell sponsor local plantation homes for weddings, erasing in their narratives any trace of an 'inconvenient' violent history for white newly-weds and tourists.

Activists employ modes of linguistic dissent, such as "Amerikkka" or the concept of "stolen land" to resist settler US government sovereignty; perceived by activists as an illegitimate state apparatus with a point-of-departure established on stolen land, stolen wealth (e.g. gold, oil) and stolen bodies (slavery). Activists pay respects to those indigenous the land was stolen from through land acknowledgements in the territories that they navigate, a form of keeping the historical memory of dispossessions alive in a society where settlers such as Columbus or Andrew Jackson, are honored as noble men rather than as purveyors of genocidal projects. In chapter three, I will examine how activists use 'man-camps', worker encampments for the Bayou Bridge Pipeline and DAPL, to contrast how they self-identify as gendered and social opposites. I will explore how activists mobilize to bring attention to violence against local indigenous woman surrounding pipeline projects, connecting to chapter two as a gendered perspective on environmental pollution and settler colonialism.

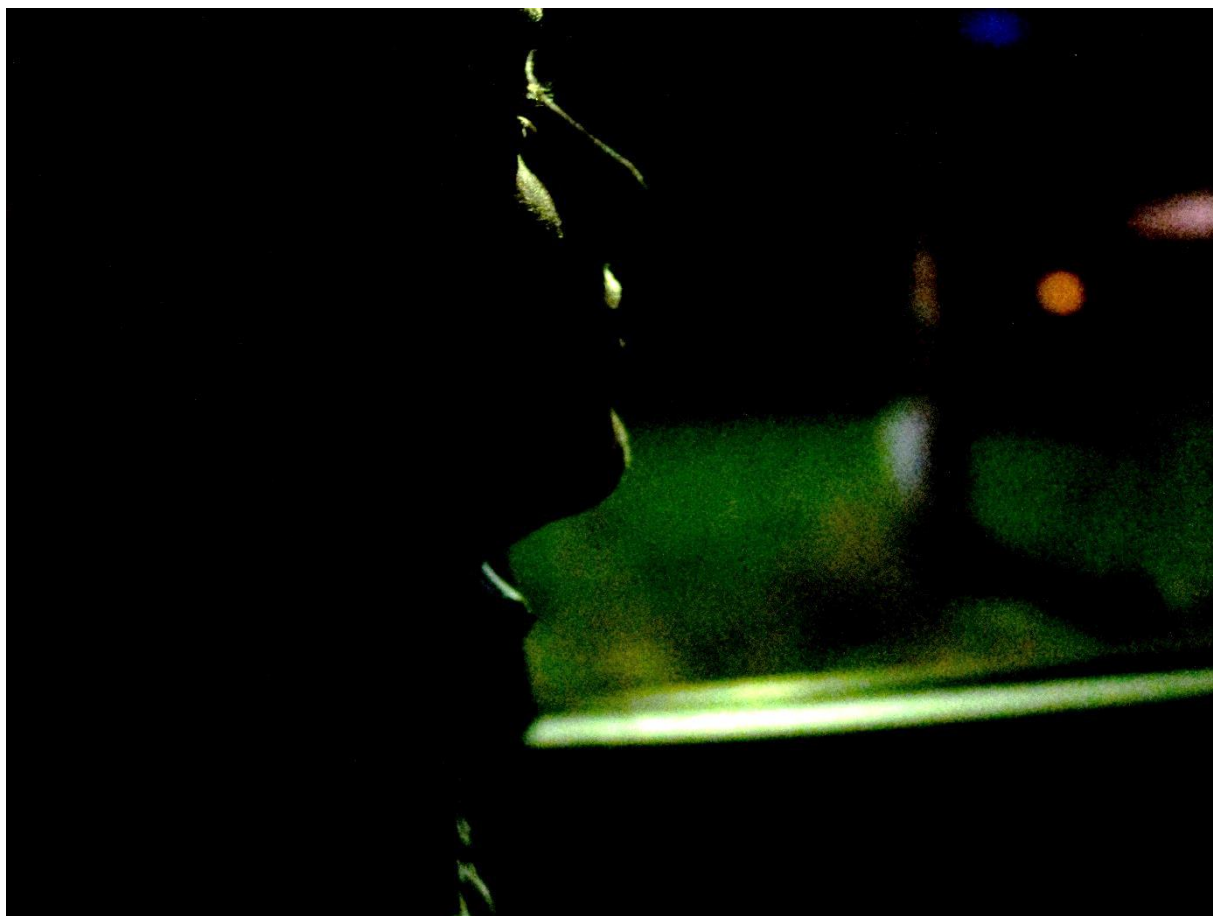
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<sup>66</sup> Headline as example: "Energy Transfer Partners agrees to multi-year deal with New Orleans Saints", i.e. to sponsor the cherished local NFL team of Louisiana, another form of framing industrial presence as benign. Source: <https://www.neworleanssaints.com/news/energy-transfer-partners-agree-to-multi-year-deal-with-the-new-orleans-saints>.



## CHAPTER 3

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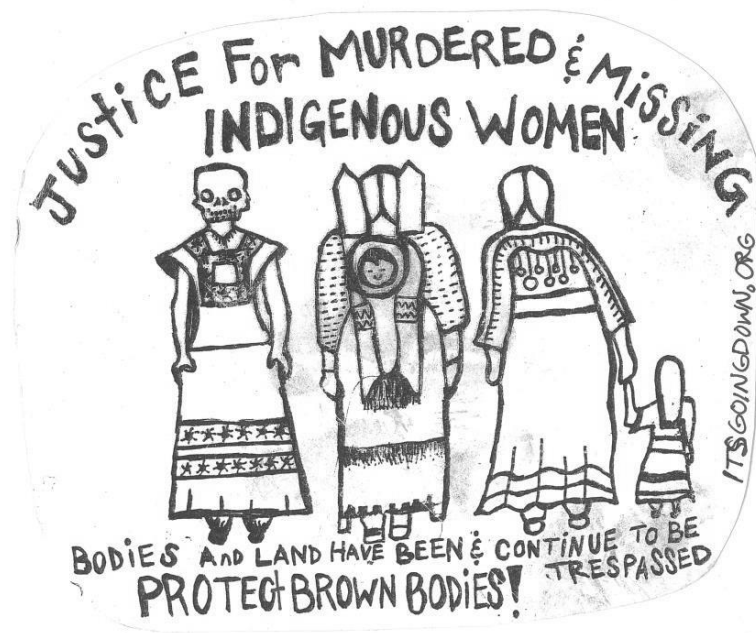
## PATRIARCHY & THE GENDER OF PIPELINES

*I accompanied Theia and Bree to scout the pipeline route in Louisiana's Southwest prairielands. Theia is a queer, transgender, woman of color anarchist; and Bree is a queer, white anarchist woman. Their presence signifies the strategic inclusion of women across marginalized identities by the resistance camp as an acknowledgement of common power struggles in the US and to counter structural inequalities. Scouting is a clandestine activity aimed at documenting potential construction sites to shutdown work on, and construction was still in its early phase at the time. It was an early spring day. We were driving down a dirt road surrounded by windswept prairies, with a trail of dust billowing behind. Theia spotted a distressed horse in a remote open field. The horse had caught its leg in a mound of barbed-wire fence, moved aside for the Bayou Bridge Pipelines route. She slowed down and grabbed some pliers from the backseat. Then she calmed the creature, clipped the wire, whereupon the horse galloped away. Theia contemplated who or what else would be impacted by the pipeline. It was then that she introduced me to the presence of 'man-camps' surrounding pipeline projects; spaces of transient, out-of-state male pipeline workers. She told me, associating man-camps with a ubiquitous, hyper-masculine culture: "The language that pipeline companies and workers use reflects this male-centered, extractive mentality. Like 'fertile land': land full of natural resources that they see only as something to dominate, leaving only 'barren land' in their wake. This pipeline-culture comes from the outside and it rapes and pillages the earth and its women", referring to indigenous women of color that she holds an affinity to and the conjoint usage of gendered and environmental vernacular by fossil fuel proponents.<sup>67</sup>*

According to activists, due to the transient status of man-camp workers hired by out-of-state companies such as the Bayou Bridge company, they hold no relation to the local communities that they work in, affecting the quality of their labor among more serious issues like an increase in sexual violence against local indigenous women that occurs around man-camps (see Firelight 2017). Violence of this sort typically occurs in the northern United States and in Canada. Relevantly, a camp council woman notes in an interview: "There are a lot of horrific things that happen around man-camps, at home in South Dakota and elsewhere", she mentions as she is originally from the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. "A lot of indigenous women end up missing or murdered along those pipelines. So besides fighting this pipeline, we also work within that context of recognizing that phenomenon, and the riff-raff of the industry that comes along with these pipelines." What she is referring to is an epidemic known as 'Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women' in the US and Canada, centrally, surrounding fossil fuel extraction and the concurrent influx of transient, white male worker communities.

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<sup>67</sup> The quote is re-created from my field-notes and from an interview with Theia.



Caption: An awareness sticker for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women distributed by activists

This discussion illuminates two diverging cultures, the first being ‘man-camps’, a term also used by the fossil fuel industry, which are temporary-housings for predominantly white male oil industry workers. Activists here maintain that man-camps, as spaces of toxic masculinity, hold a reputation of inflicting sexual violence upon local indigenous American women and their communities. *Toxic masculinity* here refers to a culture that promotes misogyny, sexual assault, domination-driven behavior, xenophobia, homophobia and substance abuse; that de-valorizes women and their roles and rights within a society; interlocking behavioral modes which, in line with activists here, is largely characteristic to dominant heteropatriarchal norms in the US. Heteropatriarchy, interchangeably termed *patriarchy* by activists, pertains to a socio-political system based in settler colonial norms wherein heterosexual men hold authority while women and LGBTQ+ persons are largely excluded from power. The other culture lies within the indigenous-led resistance camp that I lived in, organized as a safe-space, i.e. a space free of threats or discrimination against indigenous, black, non-binary, gender-nonconforming, two-spirit, queer, transgender persons, other persons of color and survivors of sexual violence; as identities otherwise targeted by discrimination and violence in the US. The camp is also meant to function as a space of empowerment in an otherwise disempowering society for them.

Concerning wider trends of patriarchy in US, women’s abortion-rights are prohibited in 43 states, except under life-threatening circumstances (Guttmacher 2019). LGBTQ+ protective rights are non-existent in over 30 states, with violence against queer and

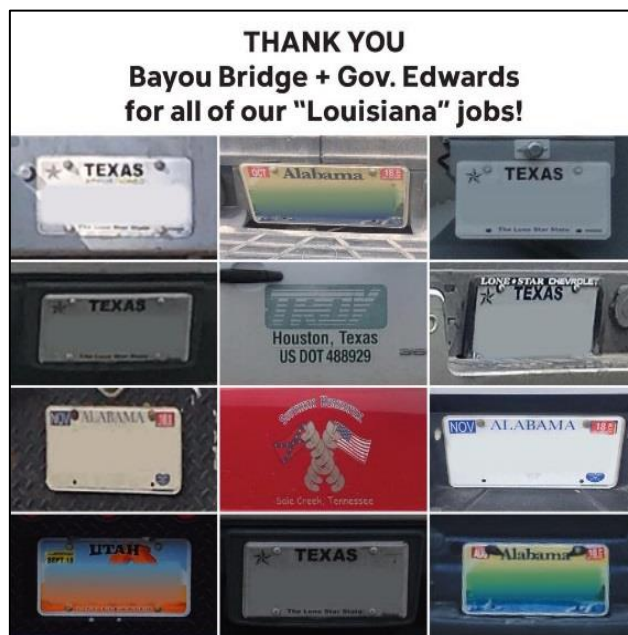
transgender people on the rise in the US since the 2016 presidential election (Higgins-Dunn 2019). Transgender persons were recently banned from the military by the Trump administration, of which there are 8,980 active duty transgender people (see Zurcher 2019). The non-existence of rights and the recent ban illustrates a hostile politics of alienation against non-heteronormative identities, i.e. identities that do not adhere to gender-binary norms. These statistics reflect intersecting concerns of oppressive power relations imposed upon my interlocutors and many others in the US—in the settler colonial present—some of them as women from different marginalized backgrounds.

My argument is that activists use ‘man-camps’—as embodiments of the oil industry and the segregating structures of the US as a settler colonial society—to inform how they self-identify inter-subjectively with one another; ‘intersubjectively’ meaning the sharing of particular values, and ‘self-identify’ relating to e.g. gender or politics. For instance, hyper-masculine spaces of workers that colonize landscapes and bodies, as according to activists, in contradistinction to women-led activist spaces working to decolonize destructive settler colonial modes of relating to gender and the environment. My analysis calls attention to a gendered perspective on environmental pollution and settler colonialism. A limitation of my analysis is that extreme violence did not transpire in Louisiana surrounding the Bayou Bridge Pipeline and its workers. Therefore, the discussion is more broadly about the reputation of man-camps, and how the Bayou Bridge company and the oil industry is inextricably tied to this violence in that it materializes in the isolated northern territories of the US where the crude oil transported by the Bayou Bridge Pipeline is extracted from. I will begin by introducing man-camps.

## THE SPECTER OF MAN-CAMPS

Man-camps house out-of-state male workers who perform extraction jobs in oil-fields or pipeline construction (NWAC 2010). Their temporary housings consist of RV’s, trailers or dormitory-like structures. Concerning the demographics of the oil-and-gas industry in the US, e.g. fracking, mining and pipeline construction: in 2017, male workers comprised 74.5% of the industry with an average salary of \$117.292 as opposed to the average salary of \$88.679 for women in the industry (Data USA 2017), which suggests disparities in salary and gender representation. In 2011, the median salary of pipeline workers specifically was at \$60.340, with average wages at \$28.39 an hour (Hamel 2011), an otherwise high salary in the US. Regarding ethnic representation, in 2018, white males made up 85.5% of the industry workforce in the US, with African American men at 5.4% and Latino men as the remaining

percentage (BLS 2018). In Louisiana, those workers the activists encountered reflected the above statistics of primarily white male workers. Workers were not targets of protest or direct action by activists here. Instead, the goal was to shut down worksites, targeting the Bayou Bridge company's means of wealth-accumulation. As aforementioned, activists highlight the phenomenon of 'Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women' as a component of their mobilizing a politics of water and resisting pipelines, which I will explore more in-depth ahead.



*Caption: License plates with origins indicative of out-of-state workers. Photos and meme by activists*

## Extraction and Sexual Violence

In North America, indigenous women from many distinct communities go missing, are found dead, or are exploited through sex trafficking as vulnerable and preyed-upon populations alongside migrants. The Firelight Group (2017) sheds light on sexual violence surrounding extractive projects, what I argue here is a gendered facet of extractive violence: "There are linear relationships between the highly paid shadow populations at industrial camps, the hyper-masculine culture, and a rise in crime, sexual violence, and trafficking of Indigenous women" (Firelight 2017:22). For instance, within a small Canadian town, "law enforcement data showed a 38% increase in sexual assaults" during the construction phase of fossil fuel infrastructure (ibid.).

Across the border, there are commonalities in the US with sexual, alcohol- and drug-related violence in 'boomtowns', i.e. geographies rich in fossil fuels. Surrounding the mid-2000's boom in the North Dakota Bakken Oil-fields, from where the Bayou Bridge Pipeline transports crude oil, signifying a spatial link; documentarian Michelle Latimer (2018)

explores the experiences of women from the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, home to the indigenous Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation. These women note everything from the daily harassments by transient pipeline workers to knowledge or lived-experience of sexual assault and rape (Brown 2018). Latimer states: “The men’s deep pockets”, referring to their high wages, “boredom, exhausting work hours, and lack of romantic partners make them prime customers for traffickers of sex and drugs” (ibid.). The transformation of Fort Berthold into what resembles an oil colony, is akin to the violent transformation of Diné communities in Arizona into a water colony as studied by Yazzie (2018:32).

### Human Trafficking and Rape-Culture

Pipeline and oil-field workers are drawn to boomtowns to profit from areas rich in fossil fuels, often within and around indigenous territories. Law professor Rick Rudell’s (2014) research examines how crime offenders and gangs are drawn to man-camp communities in Montana to profit off of its male-residents by selling narcotics, and otherwise to the presence of human trafficking (see 2014:10). Rudell highlights the strain on local law enforcement in North Dakota and Montana, highlighting a rise in crime linked to the oil-boom and the influx in population with the arrival of tens-of-thousands of temporary workers (see 2014:5).

The social fabric of long-term community members are also affected, as Rudell suggests, by an increase in alcohol-related traffic fatalities, showing an 81% increase between 2006 and 2011 in North Dakota (ibid.:5), and with domestic violence influenced by the introduction of drugs and alcohol and the contaminating-culture of man-camps (ibid.:6).<sup>68</sup> Moreover, in 2013, North Dakota’s Uniform Crime Report showed a 17% increase in rape-cases within these oil-rich communities to 243 cases reported in 2012 (Morin 2017). What these statistics suggest is that a culture of gender- and racialized violence connected to the presence of the oil-industry saturates isolated and impoverished communities, such as Fort Berthold. The culture is what Theia distinguishes as a ‘pipeline-culture’ inherent to settler colonial values that devalorize the roles of the environment and of women.

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<sup>68</sup> A ‘meme’ posted on an indigenous political meme page illustrates efforts of indigenous communities in the US to battle domestic violence. It reads: “Indigenous men: stand up to your family, friends, your “bros” who you know are abusers and who hurt others. Dismantle toxic masculinity. Dismantle rape culture. Dismantle colonized patriarchy. Indigenous women are medicine [...]” Here, toxic masculinity, rape culture and patriarchy are perceived as systems inherent to settler colonialism and on the micro level, with man-camps imposed upon indigenous communities.

## To Exploit and Abandon

The pipeline-culture that Theia asserts leaves “barren land” is also tantamount to what anthropologist Michael Watts (2011) terms an “exploit-and-abandon culture” (see 2011:52-53) surrounding resource extraction. Watts examines the Nigerian town of Oloibiri. The Shell-BP company arrived in the mid-20 century, building man-camps, access to electricity, water and a new road for foreign workers (ibid. 2011:52). Once the oil was drained and transported away by pipelines, the population had dropped from 10,000 to under 1,000. There was “no [more] running water, no electricity, no roads” (ibid.), and the surrounding waters had been “heavily dredged, canalized and polluted”, rendering the environment uninhabitable (ibid.2011:53).

In the US, Latimer (Brown 2018) reflects on the political response to indigenous activists battling the sexual violence endemic to industry man-camps and industrial pollution: “When people see native people fighting to keep lands free of this kind of ‘progress,’” referring to ‘progress’ as how the industry and policymakers frame fossil fuel development, “they say, ‘Oh the Indians are off trying to save the earth again,’ but it’s more than that. [...] Who has to deal with the aftermath? [It’s] the people that call that land their home” (ibid.). The last sentiment refers to the damage inflicted upon indigenous communities *during* extractive projects with alcohol- and drug related crimes and above all the sexual violence; and *after* the resources are drained and the man-camps leave, such as in the context of Oloibiri (Watts 2011). Man-camps, perceived as the embodiment of the oil-industry by my interlocutors along with the reputational violence I have explored are accompanied by a two-fold pollution of the social and environmental landscapes. Activists envisage the sight of barren land, death and depleted resources as characteristic to the ideology of extractive capitalism; whereas conceivably, the gaze of extractive adherents perceives profit and the free-flow of capital, and will use any means to bypass the consent of local communities. I will explore the overlap of nationalism and the oil-industry as related to this discussion.

## Gender and Ideological Enemies

Here, I will explore disparities within statist threat narratives surrounding leftist activists and far-right movements, to illustrate the patriarchal, racial and political biases of fossil fuel proponents in the creation of domestic terror threats. “Resistance against pipelines is resistance to capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy”, Maggie notes in an interview, referring to the potent intersection of these systems and ideologies in the US; the ubiquitous

de-valorization of the environment, of indigenous and communities of color, and of women's and LGBTQ+ rights. Maggie: "In Louisiana, you can't avoid resisting any of those things while resisting pipelines. They're inseparable." For activists, the wealth accumulated from fossil fuels and pipelines is inextricable from the dispossessions of communities of color or from the increase in sexual violence that surfaces around this industry, as that wealth is accumulated by rich, white men in power as descendants of European settlers, often of the conservative right.<sup>69</sup>

The ideological relationship between fossil fuel development and US nationalism, more precisely, the nationalism of the settler-majority, is closely-knit.<sup>70</sup> In anthropology, Ann Stoler (1995:134-135) argues that nationalism is animated by "a moral terror" defining which identities are "*immoral*" and "*unpatriotic*"; here I refer to the banning of transgender peoples from the military, or the designating of leftist and indigenous activists as *national-threats*. What the aforementioned statistics of LGBTQ+ and women's rights illustrate are which identities as according to e.g. gender and class are cast as ideological enemies of the state, also illustrating technologies of sex with the blocking of abortion rights. Pertinently, sociologist Michael Loadenthal (2013:93) contrasts the US governments biased framing of leftist environmental activists (e.g. of Earth First) as (*eco*)terrorists<sup>71</sup>—who campaign ethically without casualty—to 145 far-right ideologically motivated homicides between 1990-2010 (anti-abortion/neo-Nazi/skinhead/white supremacist/militia), including Timothy McVeigh's 1995 bombing, minimized with the nomenclature of *extremists* (ibid.). "[T]he antiabortion movement alone has killed eight people, been involved in the attempted murder of 17, and carried out 41 bombings, 175 acts of arson (and 100 attempts), 663 bioterrorism threats, 420 death threats, four kidnappings and 524 incidents of stalking (NAF 2011) [...]. [Yet] the State has held tight to the "eco-terrorist" terminology, while failing to coin symmetrical labels such as racial-terrorist, militia-terrorist or anti-abortion terrorist" (Loadenthal 2013:94).<sup>72</sup> Loadenthal notes: "The most obvious answer to this illogic is that the

<sup>69</sup> An example is the Bayou Bridge Pipeline company's CEO, who donated \$100,000 to Trump as a presidential candidate in 2016, working in favor of pipeline-expansion. Excerpt from a Reuters news article: "The top executive at the company behind the embattled Dakota Access Pipeline has donated more than \$100,000 to Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump since June, according to campaign finance disclosure records." Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-trump-dakota-access/top-executive-behind-dakota-access-has-donated-more-than-100000-to-trump-idUSKCN12Q2P2>

<sup>70</sup> Example from a Slate news article: "The Department of Energy (under the Trump Administration) Is Now Calling Fossil Fuels 'Molecules of Freedom'", illustrating the US governments nationalistic relationship to fossil fuels. Source: <https://slate.com/business/2019/05/freedom-gas-molecules-of-freedom-department-of-energy.html>

<sup>71</sup> Loadenthal analyzes this in the context of the post 9/11 "Green Scare", which entailed a wave of arrests against environmental activists, who were framed by the FBI as top-priority domestic terror threats. The "Green Scare" is similar to the "Red Scare" of the mid twentieth century in the US, in which communist and leftist movements were framed as domestic threats by the US government, often subject to counterintelligence surveillance (COINTELPRO).

<sup>72</sup> Example from a 2008 Fox News article: «For nearly seven years, the nation has turned its terror focus on Al Qaeda and the hunt for Usama bin Laden. But there is a domestic terror threat that federal officials still consider priority No. 1 — eco-terrorism.» Source: <https://www.foxnews.com/story/fbi-eco-terrorism-remains-no-1-domestic-terror-threat>.



State's attention is due to the manner in which such movements actualise dissent" (ibid.93), e.g. the targeting of pipeline company's means-of-accumulation, tied to political representatives of the Trump administration, "and the hegemonic ideologies that they challenge" (2013:93); here, I refer to extractive capitalism and synchronously, the white supremacist and patriarchal underpinnings of dominant settler norms in the US, their convergence a result of activists targeting the wealth-accumulation of the conservative right. For instance, anti-abortion and white-supremacist motivated homicides do not affect white conservative men in power, many who enable these ideological standings; while indeed the targeting of crude oil capital that pollutes impoverished communities of color does.<sup>73</sup>

The systems of patriarchy, capitalism and white supremacy coincide for activists with questions of pipelines and man-camps in that these encountered forms of material violence are bridged by the same power dynamics. The same government representatives rushing to approve permits for pipeline development, influenced by fossil fuel lobbyists,<sup>74</sup> are the same criminalizing women's rights over their bodies, defining which gender, ethnic and class identities deserve legal protection, in accordance to the status quo norms of settler colonial society such as fixed-gender identities and heteropatriarchy. I will now provide some examples from the fieldwork of the prevalence of toxic masculinity surrounding the oil-industry.

### Spaces of Misogyny

A sense of misogyny prevails in the pipeline-culture that my interlocutors are at odds with. Bumper stickers for purchase at gas-stations or on passing vehicles read: "PROUD OILFIELD WIFE", or "I FISH, SHE BITCHES." The prevalence of this culture is also traceable on anonymous social media pages, such as 'Pipeliners against Protestors' (2,6k followers); a pro-fossil fuel platform that targets anti-pipeline activists. One post responds to complaints of followers wives reporting behavior on the page: "This is the last post I will ever make addressing what we all can agree are some seriously bored, drama filled, need to get back in the kitchen housewives."

<sup>73</sup> Excerpt from a The Hill news article: "A Republican state senator from Nebraska on Sunday accused the GOP of helping to enable white supremacy. "The Republican Party is enabling white supremacy in our country," state Sen. John McCollister (R) tweeted. McCollister's comments come after two mass shootings, in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, shocked the country over the weekend and left at least 29 people dead." Source: <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/456181-gop-state-lawmaker-says-republican-party-is-enabling-white-supremacy-in>

<sup>74</sup> Example from an article headline: "Trump signs orders making it harder to block pipelines in US. Trump's orders direct the EPA to change a part of the US clean water law to speed up gas, coal and oil projects" – Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/trump-sign-orders-making-harder-block-pipelines-190410151631267.html>.

Additionally, the enablement of toxic behavior is ascribable to repressive legislation that legalizes driving over protestors<sup>75</sup>, and comment sections of news-websites covering the pipeline protestors that feature inciting statements such as: “Just drive over these fuckers! It’s legal in other states!”, referring to anti-pipeline activists. Additionally, on the first non-violent direct action I attended with the group in March, I took note of reactions from pipeline workers as activists here shut down work, led by an indigenous prayer ceremony; a peaceful, spoken-word ceremony often accompanied by song, where activists gather in a circle. In the background while two leading women of the camp were praying, Bayou Bridge workers commented: “What’s that? I don’t understand shit of what you’re saying” referring to a prayer spoken aloud in Lakota language; “Listen to that bitch!” referring to the woman praying; and “They touch my machine, I’m gonna fucking kill ‘em!”

However, Amelia (camp council-member) identifies a nuanced side to this culture in an interview: “There’s definitely this weird macho, crazy thing around oil industry workers. There’s this sense of toxic masculinity that pervades those spaces and that makes it so... I don’t know. It’s similar to military people, you know?” Here she compares industry workers to men employed in the military, as a lot of fossil fuel workers have a military-background. Besides the pervasive sense of toxic masculinity, she reflects on their realities: “Both groups are some of the most marginalized people. They come home and kill themselves, or they have horrible things happen to them and don’t live as long”, here underlining a grim reality for these men.

Mobilizing non-local activists in a region so dominated by what is perceived as an entirely sexist and racist culture surrounding the oil industry was otherwise a challenge. On this, Amelia says: “I believe that winning these kinds of things in the south are so much more important because all the oil goes through here. The companies go through the Gulf of Mexico. So, if you stop pipelines here, then you could potentially stop mountain-top removal”, a controversial form of coal-mining. “If you stop it here, you could stop Tar Sands Oil extraction”, a controversial form of extracting oil in Canada and the US, the oil of which is transported by the Keystone XL among other pipelines into the Gulf Coast. “This is your one-stop shot. Some people consider it a lost cause in a republican-dominated region. And I get that. It has been a challenge to get folks to care about south Louisiana where it’s 90% Trump country, KKK and Nazi’s... and where people love oil and their oil-field wives. But in

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<sup>75</sup> Excerpt from a news article: “[A] bill introduced last month in the North Dakota legislature could make the obstacles to protest even more formidable. The bill, still in committee, would make it legal for drivers to run over protesters who are standing in a roadway, clearing drivers of any liability, as long as their action was “unintentional.”” – Source: <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-bills-protest-criminal-20170201-story.html>.

order to affect real justice... I mean raw, down and dirty to the root kind of justice that really makes long-lasting change... you have to go to uncomfortable places”, here reflecting on what activists needed to be prepared to encounter in Louisiana. All man-camp or oil workers are not perceived monolithically as rapists, misogynists, racists or homophobes by activists. Rather, by metonymy, man-camps appear as surrogates for the settler colonial society, that are permitted by the settler-majority government who attempt like colonists of the past to colonize and dominate land and indigenous bodies. For further nuance, I will analyze an example of curious industry-workers visiting camp.

### “Soon It Will All Be Empty”: An Interaction

I joined Bree to talk to a curious neighbor one afternoon who was accompanied by out-of-state family from the coal-mining industry. Bree: “Some men came to the front gate on an ATV (all-terrain vehicle). They were drinking beers and wanted to know what we were doing. One of the men worked for an oil company and one in coal extraction” (Interview). They asked why helicopters would sometimes hover over the resistance camp, and we told them that these were mainly Homeland Security helicopters surveilling activists (authors input). Bree: “We talked to them about the Bayou Bridge Pipeline specifically. When the man who worked in oil found out that some people were only getting paid \$10 per yard to have the pipeline go through their properties (by market value),” or that private properties were being seized through eminent domain (authors input), “he said: “Wow. I work in the oil-field and everything but if they ever wanted to put it through my yard like that, I would get my gun out and shoot somebody.”

The neighbors response taps into a sentiment of anger felt over abuse of the state-governments authority. Bree continued and discussed the depletion of oil as a finite resource. The coalminer responded: “So what you’re saying is that they’re building this permanent infrastructure (the pipeline) to use up what little is left?” Bree: “Exactly. We need to transition to a more sustainable living, and to stop exploiting vital ecosystems just so a few oil-billionaires can get richer” (Fieldnotes). The Coal-miner answered Bree: “I guess it’s just like this beer. Soon it will all be empty”, he said unworriedly, sipping the remaining drops while the neighbor was absorbed in thought. These nuances do not negate the prevalence of misogyny and sexual violence surrounding man-camps. Rather, the encounter suggests that both the existence of such violence and a middle-ground for understanding exists between activists and industry workers to various extents, although the main sympathizer at the gate was a concerned community member rather than a Bayou Bridge worker. I will now examine

the resistance camp I lived in as a space with values that diverge from man-camps and the male-dominated fossil fuel industry, by analyzing Bree's life-history. This also concerns exploring why activist spaces like the one I lived in are formed to address sexual violence, homophobia, transphobia and racism, by centering and empowering the voices of those who are targets of these in the broader society.

### “AS FLUID AS WATER”: BREE

Bree is a queer-femme, anarchist, intersectional feminist who was recruited via friends of the activist network. Many queer women among these activists identify as ‘femme’. Femme-identified persons do not dress or act feminine as according to male-defined standards of beauty or being, e.g. by leaving underarm and leg hair unshaven to resist these standards. Being queer or femme also means dissenting from heteronormative identity categories (the male/female binary) and the social expectations of these, such as serving the interests of men, which activists perceive as idiosyncratic to dominant settler-norms in the US. Being an intersectional feminist means identifying the different avenues of social and political discrimination (e.g. class, race, sexuality, disability) and how they overlap with gender; e.g. the layers of discrimination and violence that indigenous women of color or queer, transgender, women of color may endure in their lives. The theory of *intersectionality* was developed by African American feminist and civil rights activist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Bree, like Theia, holds a political affinity for indigenous women of color like Amelia and Louise. She works to challenge these avenues of discrimination by supporting spaces, like this camp, led by women of color. Bree's life-history from her interview outlines her political and identity-based belongings, which I will analyze in relation to the rest of the activists:

*I have always been floating across land that is not mine, the child of a settler. I was raised by a group of lesbian women, two of whom are my mothers. Our society told me to be silent as a young girl from a queer family. In my mind, gender and sexuality were as fluid as water. As I got older and started making friends that had straight, nuclear families, this idea came crashing down on me and seemed like a distant dream. My beautiful queer family became something I could only talk about at home. In my teenage years, I started questioning my own sexuality, the silence around my family, and most importantly I began to understand the impact that heteropatriarchy had on me my entire life.*

Bree underscores the negative impact of heteropatriarchy during her early years as a queer-woman. Here, heteropatriarchy materialized as a silencing authority in society, in a

similar vein to that of the aforementioned pipeline-proponents promoting the relegation of women to kitchen housewives stripped of power. Concerning Bree's settler-background: among these activists, non-indigenous allies who are descendants of settlers and who mobilize in solidarity with indigenous activists conceive the material and historical landscape upon which the US is founded as illegitimate; as land *stolen* from its original inhabitants, referring back to a thread in chapter two; which the notion "land that is not mine" highlights. The notion illustrates a praxis of decolonization that coincides with a politics of water in resistance by these activists, i.e. the protection of vital waterways. This praxis entails unlearning the structural logic that renders the environmental and cultural elimination of indigenous communities through industrial expansion as uncontroversial. The modes-of-being and everyday politics of activists contrasts starkly with the extractive industry and man-camps, representative for activists of a homogenized society of fixed-identities, the binary of male and female, versus communities like this camp that mobilize under a banner of fluid identities.

According to activists, pipeline companies and man-camps conduct themselves as though they are entitled to the land and its resources at the expense of indigenous still present whose communities are ravaged socially and environmentally. As such, man-camps through this decolonized lens are distinguished as colonizers and as existential threats to the waterways impoverished communities rely on. According to activists, these men and fossil fuel companies arrive to exploit the land and its resources, abandoning it save for any other possible options of profiting from its exploitation.

Non-indigenous activists, such as Bree, support indigenous efforts of self-determination, i.e. the process by which indigenous communities govern themselves rather than abiding by settler colonial hegemony. The notion of self-determination is important for anarchists like Bree or Theia in expressing solidarity with indigenous and marginalized communities. In line with this solidarity, author Maia Ramnath argues that *decolonization* is the highest form of anarchism (2011:15), here, related to dismantling unjust structural arrangements, and class, gender and racial hierarchies of settler colonial origin. As Graeber (2013) argues, anarchists envision a world of free-association "where humans only enter those kinds of relations with one another that would not have to be enforced by the constant threat of violence" (2013:186), e.g. how in opposing relations with an industrial-presence that entails the threat of pollution, activists are criminalized and are confronted by police forces. Enforced relations of dominance also takes the brutish cultural form of the misogyny discussed before, such as representing women heteronormatively as belonging in kitchens.

Elsewhere in her interview, Bree states: “My two mothers raised me to resist authority at all costs and to respect the earth that provides everything for us”, signifying her affinity for the environment and vital waterways and how her values are at odds with the exploit-and-abandon culture pertaining to the oil industry. She adds, on her anti-authoritarian politics: “I hate cops and corporations and have chosen this uncomfortable lifestyle of fighting systemic capitalism.” Bree’s attitude towards police resonates somewhat with Graeber’s assertion that police enforce “structural inequalities like racism and sexism” (2013:187-188). These structural inequalities appear as the disproportionate targeting and policing of criminalized communities, like the violent police raids against New York LGBTQ+ communities in the 1960’s, enforcing anti-gay legislation.<sup>76</sup> There are many different indigenous-led camps across North America, which leads to this analysis of why activists organize camps like the one I lived in; as a space of empowerment for marginalized identities, and more specifically here: queer, transgender, and indigenous identities and as a safe space for women who have experienced sexual violence.

### Resisting the Hegemony of Settler Sexuality

Concerning the intersection of indigenous and LGBTQ+ rights in the US, and for why the activists I lived with create these safe spaces: fluid forms of queer and transgender identities were prevalent among a myriad of indigenous communities in North America before the traumatic restructurings of colonization. Many indigenous activists, such as the leadership of the camp in Louisiana, work to rebuild these relations and to re-normalize queerness in indigenous community spaces.<sup>77</sup> Non-heteronormative identities were punished socially by Christian settlers throughout North America in different contexts, underlining the detrimental role of European settlers in restructuring gender and cultural norms.<sup>78</sup> Scott Lauria Morgensen (2011) examines settler colonialism as a form of biopolitics, citing Foucault’s concept, or specifically what he calls the *hegemony of settler sexuality* (2011:34).

Aside from brute force, missionary churches and boarding schools in mid-nineteenth century Canada targeted kinship relations “that appeared non-heteronormative as a way of

<sup>76</sup> The raids sparked the Stonewall Riots in 1969, organized by Marsha P. Johnson, a black, transgender woman of color, laying ground for the global LGBTQ+ pride movement.

<sup>77</sup> An example is: Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) an indigenous Mississauga (Anishinaabe) scholar, discusses Alex Wilson’s work in her indigenous Cree community and its normalization of queerness. Wilson says: “Traditionally, two-spirit people”, i.e. the pan-indigenous term that expresses indigenous forms of transgender and queer identities, “were simply part of the entire community. As we reclaim our identity with this name, we are returning to our communities” (Simpson 2017:123), i.e. reclaiming indigenous non-heteronormative expressions of gender. This relates to how indigenous-led, indigenous-inclusive and queer/transgender-inclusive activist spaces like the one I lived in are reclaiming connections to non-heteronormative forms of community, signifying solidarity across identities.

<sup>78</sup> An example is conquistador Vasco Núñez de Balboa’s expedition to Panama in 1513: “On reportedly finding [about forty indigenous men] dressed in womens apparel or living in sexual relationships, Balboa threw them out to be eaten alive by his dogs” (Lauria Morgensen 2011:36).

maintaining colonial control” (2011:35). Author Leanne Simpson (2017) examines how sexualized, physical and emotional violence against queer indigenous children in these residential schools amplified “with the more a child expressed variance from the strict colonial gender binary” (2017:125). Relevantly, anthropologist Audra Simpson posits that queer indigenous bodies, in the settler colonial present (authors input), threatens settler sovereignty in North America (Audra Simpson in Leanne Simpson 2017:17); a sovereignty that I posit is also threatened by the reclamation and re-normalization of queerness in indigenous spaces, and the mobilization of fluid identities across intersecting oppressed identities. In encountering differential access to power in settler society, as indigenous and activists of fluid identities with left-leaning politics, activists respond by forming these spaces led by women of multiple backgrounds and by targeting the enshrined capital, these pipelines, of those that disempower them. Concerning resistance theory, the creation of a space that recognizes and is led by diverse expressions of womanhood is in line with one of Graeber’s definitions of direct action, that “The direct actionist does not just refuse to pay taxes to support a militarized school system, she combines with others to try to create a new school system that operates on different principles” (2009:203), in this case operating by principles of decolonization.

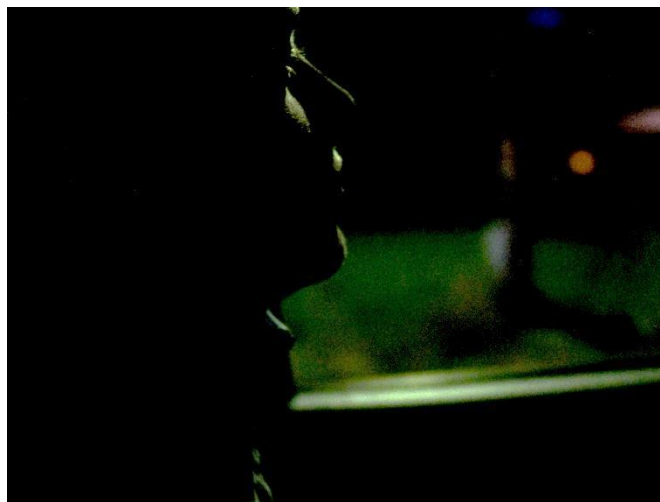
### Smashing the Patriarchy

Sometimes I would join Theia and Bree to scavenge materials from roadsides and junkyards for objects to shut down construction-sites with, e.g. by blocking access ways. On one occasion, Theia, Bree and other femme persons modified steel barrels and pipes with power tools into objects that resembled large pots. The pots were filled with concrete to make removal of bodies more difficult. Two white liberal volunteer women from New Orleans dressed as crawfish and locked their bodies to the inside of the barrels, displaying solidarity with crawfish-farmers of the region opposing the pipeline. Symbolically, they were to be ‘boiled’ as crawfish.

This situation is what my interlocutors would call femme-led direct actions; which for them functions as a form of empowerment in resisting pipelines, oil as capital, and the male- and patriarchal power structures at the backdrop of these; e.g. the Trump Administration’s blocking of abortion rights, political ostracization of LGBTQ+ citizens and expansion of the fossil fuel industry. Direct actions of this sort were laborious. Besides the construction and fitting, the concrete-filled barrels typically required five people to load and unload from truck-beds, and activists would deploy long before sunrise.

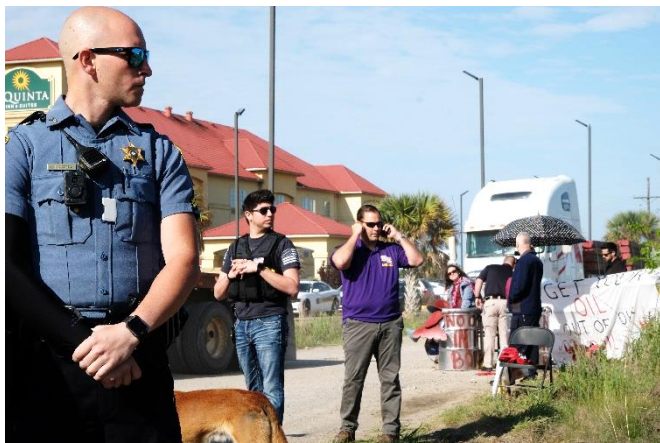


*Caption: Activists constructing devices to lock bodies to*



*Caption: An activist peering out the passenger window en route to an action. The darkness was hallowed, a protective veil under which they deployed. At sunrise, they would pass around coffee and cigarettes on the easement (the construction route). Then they would flee and share the sunsets; a calm amidst the storm before they performed this perilous dance anew*

Due to the difficulty of removal, barrels and the people in them could stay in place for 5 hours or more before police managed to open access to construction sites again. Empowerment also held a class-based disposition at this direct action, with the symbolic ‘sacrifice’ of middle-class liberal women voluntarily putting their bodies on the line, as coordinated by lower-class anarchist women of marginalized backgrounds.



*Caption: Police response to the same direct action with barrel devices*





*Caption: Bayou Bridge Pipeline welders during another direct action in early spring. Often, such as here, male workers would cat-call femme activists*

After some months, Bree departed from Louisiana with Theia to organize the ‘Two-Spirit, Transgender and Women’s Action Camp’, a direct action camp aimed at resisting the Line 3 pipeline in Minnesota in which cisgender heterosexual men were not allowed.<sup>79</sup> That last detail concerns not so much the exclusion of men, as it does challenging the structural exclusions of e.g. queer- and transgender women in the US by systemic patriarchy; a form of intersectional organizing and one version of what activists refer to as “smashing the patriarchy”, i.e. challenging the perceived dominant socio-political system of American society. The ‘Two-Spirit, Transgender and Women’s Action Camp’ is distinguishable from the camp in Louisiana in that only screened or vouched for men are allowed in the Louisiana camp as a space led by indigenous women, while no men whatsoever can enter the former.

As forms of ‘smashing the patriarchy’, both examples of these camps reflect a social and spatial organizing unlike that of man-camps and the settler-society that for activists man-camps personify. In targeting pipelines, patriarchy as an abstract concept corporealizes into tangible material—these vessels from which the crude-oil capital of affluent male colonizers stream, cheapening movement and scale to maximize profit—whereby the resistance of indigenous women and femme-activists transcends symbolic forms.

## SUMMARY

In sum, the structural exclusions and alienation of patriarchy, a substructure of settler colonialism, permeates and affects the lives of both indigenous and non-indigenous activists. For activists, patriarchy is a toxic culture to unlearn and to dismantle. Its modes of behavior in the US materialize within households, on the level of local community, in state-form whereby

<sup>79</sup> Two-Spirit is the gender category assigned by indigenous peoples to their forms of queer and transgender identities, or gender variance otherwise, replacing the controversial colonial category of ‘berdache’ once used by anthropologists. The indigenous anthropologist Beatrice Medicine, of Sisasapa Lakota descent, was one of the leading people to challenge the use of ‘berdache’, a colonial term initially used in Europe to condemn Middle Eastern men as racial enemies of Christian civilization, and spent most of her work on LGBTQ+ community issues.

the rights of women and LGBTQ+ communities are starkly undermined in the US, and with the presence of oil-industry man-camps. As aforementioned, the fossil fuel industry that activists are resisting the presence of is male-dominated with gender-based disparities in wage, and as characteristic to the hyper-masculine culture of man-camps, there exists a valid threat of sexual violence against indigenous women.

Man-camps are used as the basis for which activists self-identify, as social and political opposites. Activists appear as protectors of land and water, while invading oil-company representatives epitomize social and environmental polluters. The distinctions and nuances surrounding man-camps and activists is that activists here mobilize under an assembly of fluid identities that express several forms of womanhood and masculinity. The settler colonial society that man-camps and the oil-industry originate from artificially imposes fixed-identities and protective rights defined solely by the gender-binary. The inclusivity practiced by camps like the one that I lived in is a material response to the exclusionary politics of the US government—its Christian, Eurocentric, settler colonial values—a form of decolonizing community. In the next chapter, I will explore how a kinship derived from social and political ties is configured between activists resisting pipelines.

## CHAPTER 4

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## DISSENTING KINSHIP

*The activists often behaved as a family unit. This behavior was evident during transgressions in the temporary swamp encampments. One summer day, a local fan-boat operator for the company threatened activists with a shotgun and assaulted one activist by striking him in the forehead with the butt of the gun. Amelia recalls in an interview: “He came with his gun we were all like “NO SIR!” We went full auntie on his ass”, referring to how the group assembled around him to intimidate and ward off the danger non-violently. Louise also recalls: “I just felt like a mama bear. They tried fucking with our people and yeah.” The terms “auntie”, “mama bear” and “our people” in relation to the group signify a performance of fictive kinship for people otherwise not related by blood. The response to the transgression resonates with anthropologists Whitehouse and Lanmans’ (2014) analysis of psychological (or fictive) kinship created between war veterans. The example of fending off Donald Jr. suggests bonding amongst activists who perform “costly altruistic action” for one another over time, as Whitehouse and Lanman terms it, a demonstrable behavior of which is displaying “the same defensive reactions as [...] an attack on one’s [biological] kin” (Whitehouse & Lanman 2014:676).*

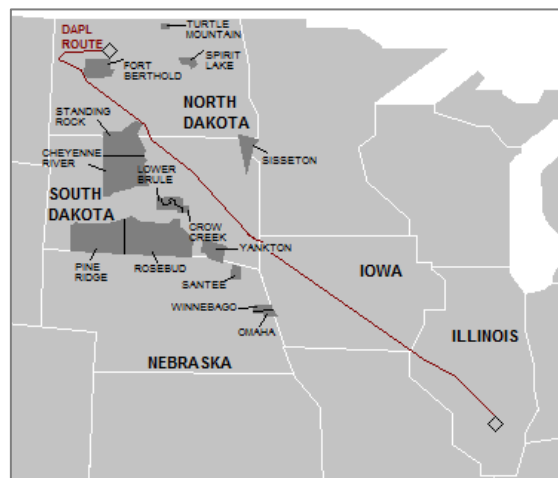
In Louisiana, oil saturates the social imaginaries of its residents and of the activists that I lived with. Oil is an agent and actor of sorts, a transformative power around which people mobilize and that messily binds kin in a myriad of ways. For some, oil denotes danger. It shapes trajectories of conflicts, like resistance to the Bayou Bridge Pipeline and the danger of oil spills contaminating waterways.

Here I will discuss the production of fictive kin that occurs on the frontlines of anti-pipeline resistance, wherein pipelines for my interlocutors are perceived as appendages of the fossil fuel industry and settler-majority government that they mobilize against. *Frontlines* is a term that my interlocutors use to describe non-static spaces at the forefronts of struggles; non-static in the sense that they frequent the primary camp in the Southwest prairielands, but in that they also created multiple temporary encampments along the pipeline route in the Atchafalaya swamps. My argument is that *fictive kinship* is constructed across identities by my interlocutors on the activist level, i.e. kinship that is not consanguineal through blood ties nor affinal by marriage, but instead that is social and political. I will explore how kinship in this manner exists between my interlocutors, how they substitute blood-related kinship with solidarity, and how this kinship came as a result of the need to survive the society in which they are criminalized and alienated. Moreover, I will explore how a kinship of *place* exists between some activists and the frontlines of environmental resistance.

## “BE A GOOD ANCESTOR”: HENRY

Henry is an indigenous Oglala Lakota (Sioux) activist and teacher from Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota. “On my mom’s side, my family are activists and warriors, and on my father’s side...through him I’m probably considered an activist for about five generations” (Interview). Henry underscores activism and resistance as what he feels is an innate character to his family-line. The symbolic dimensions of resistance for Henry and other indigenous activists was augmented by a slogan they would operate by, to *be a good ancestor*; in which they honor past ancestors and act upon how they would like to be remembered as future ancestors, as protectors of their waters.

Henry was an organizer at Standing Rock alongside other Lakota (Sioux) relatives as he calls them, signifying kinship across community lines, where he conducted trainings in non-violent direct action for indigenous and non-indigenous activists.<sup>80</sup> The Oglala are one of the seven subgroups of Lakota people of the North American plains, and he and other indigenous interlocutors would express cultural kinship between them and other indigenous communities, as they are all the original inhabitants of the larger region and many share a history of resisting settler-colonial forces.



*Caption: Low-detail map of Plains Reservations and DAPL route by author*

Referring to Henry’s mention of descending from warriors: according to author Vic Glover (2004) of Pine Ridge, the Oglala are infamous for their “fierce warrior-culture” (2004:106). Historical Oglala figures like Crazy Horse or Sitting Bull led battles alongside other Lakota communities against invading settler forces (see Glover 2004:106), most notably in 1876 against General Custer who was sent by then-president Jackson to annihilate Lakota communities living on territory rich with gold. Custer’s forces were defeated and killed (see Dunbar-Ortiz 2014:151-152). Resonating with the thread of women’s empowerment in

<sup>80</sup> Direct action of this sort concerns locking down to construction equipment and constructing blockades against riot police.

chapter three, Lakota activists I met would stress the historical warrior roles of indigenous women and how they are often rendered invisible by a patriarchal gaze in history books that emphasize leading male-figures. For instance, I was told by activists that the Lakota warrior ‘Moving Robe Woman’ was the one to slay Custer.<sup>81</sup>

### From the Plains to the Bayous

Louisiana was once a colony under France, spanning from the south-coast all the way up to Canada across the territories of Henry’s ancestors, before US state-borders were established. Henry journeyed to Louisiana to support local activists fighting the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, DAPL’s extension. The borderless nodes between oil-field’s and industry, these pipelines that stretch thousands of miles like monstrous blood-veins, they forcibly connect people from vastly different communities, like the plains of South Dakota and the swamps of Louisiana; fostering the potential for kin-making around conflicts. Before extending to Louisiana, in early 2016 the resistance at Standing Rock was initiated by a Cheyenne Lakota youth-group (One Mind Youth Movement) from the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation (South Dakota), seeking to empower other indigenous youth across reservations and save them through community-based activism from a suicide-wave hitting the reservations.<sup>82</sup> Reservations are areas defined by anthropologist Audra Simpson (2014) as spaces of “Indigenous pacification, containment and demobilization” (2014:127), plagued with drinking, drugs and high rates of suicide as a result of the historical material processes by the US settler-government that continue to pauperize its inhabitants. Indigenous communities were violently scattered in diaspora and forced into these spaces by the US government across in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Pertinently, Wolfe (2006) considers settler colonialisms relationship to genocide, in which concurrent to “frontier homicide” and the pacifying function of reservations, its other eliminatory logics has manifested as “child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools” (2006:388) under settler-governments such as Australia, United States and Canada. The youth group notes in an interview how something more than their anti-pipeline activism occurred: “[T]he belief that a group of lost people from scattered nations could still find kinship”,<sup>83</sup> highlighting the re-discovery of

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<sup>81</sup> Note: This is connected to the tragedy at Wounded Knee 14 years later. On the cold winter morning of December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1890, US soldiers mounted two machine guns on the hillside of Wounded Knee Creek near Pine Ridge and opened fire, massacring a crowd of three-hundred unarmed Lakota, mostly women and children (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014:155). It was for some soldiers of an act of vengeance for Custers defeat (ibid.), and those who committed this atrocity were awarded Medals of Honor.

<sup>82</sup> This same youth group visited the camp in Louisiana, using their experience and skills to organize direct actions for a period in the summertime.

<sup>83</sup> Excerpt from the source, a news article in the New York Times: “Last April, Charger, White Eyes and a few One Mind teenagers and mentors helped establish a tiny “prayer camp” just off the Dakota Access route, on the north end of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. Over the next six months that camp grew into an improbable movement that united conservative farmers with the old radicals of the

shared kinship through indigenous-led resistance against this pipeline and the attempts to reverse the fragmentizing processes of colonization.<sup>84</sup>

Henry adds: “I was born in it, this line of work”, i.e. activism and direct action organizing. “Even when I ran from it for school or for a career” referring to his career as a teacher, “... I always ended up finding myself back into it” (Interview). At times he would recall the adrenaline rush of riot lines and facing off militarized police in the icy Siberian-like cold of winter at Standing Rock. He carries injuries from police brutality on his body like battle scars. At Standing Rock, he and many others wrote letters for next of kin just in case the worst happened, as the threat of death was always a factor in the cold and under the precariousness produced by frequent police raids and anti-terror mobilizations of state agents.

Since Standing Rock, he says: “I’ve been homeless. So that’s two years. I sleep on people’s floors... I sleep in people’s basements... I sleep on people’s couches and sometimes if I’m invited to speak at events, or travelling, people put me up in hotel rooms and that’s kinda nice. Yeah, it’s not the most stable existence.” After Standing Rock his license for teaching was suspended due to his activism, indicating the real risks undertaken by activists in fighting pipelines. In the field-site, he lived for months out of his car on the frontlines at L’eau Est La Vie and on the road along the pipeline route.

### Lives on “Standby”

There were a few times that I would join Henry on standby in hazy, highway-side motel rooms during the summer. Henry had locked down to machinery earlier in the summer and was arrested by Iberville Parish officers. From then on, he took important low-key roles. “Standby” meant stationing near the swamp encampments in places like Baton Rouge as dispatch for support for the people resisting the pipeline in it, staying ready to deploy and evacuate them if there were police raids or medical emergencies, e.g. snake bites or bodily injuries. Standby also meant the time one had to do menial tasks like laundry and the laundry of those in the swamps as a form of solidarity. These were banal, domestic chores activists rotated on, performing them in solidarity for one another like a family of fictive kin, i.e. kin based on social ties, but authentic nonetheless as an interdependency exists, whereby those in the swamp placed their lives in the hands of those on standby. Maggie, who was reporting

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American Indian Movement; urban environmentalists with the traditional chiefs of hundreds of tribes. As Donald Trump pushes forward with the Keystone XL and Dakota Access, he will face a movement emboldened by a victory on Dec. 4, 2016, when the Department of the Army denied an easement for the Dakota Access Pipeline and directed the Army Corps to consider an alternate route.” Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/31/magazine/the-youth-group-that-launched-a-movement-at-standing-rock.html>.

<sup>84</sup> Note: It is another reason for why the camp in Louisiana is drug-free, for those from communities plagued by addiction to maintain sobriety, substituting life-threatening vices with resistance against deep-seated societal and environmental issues in which they as marginalized populations have a stake.

from the swamp encampments says in an interview: “You knew that those are the only people for miles that will have your back. So that’s intense. That’s the only people you have, and what that does is that it kind of makes it seem like it’s “us against the world””, illustrating a sentiment of bonds crystallized between activists mobilizing against this pipeline.



*Caption: One of the laundromats activists would frequent*

Motel rooms sometimes also functioned as a place of *kinning*, to use anthropologist Signe Howell’s term (2009), wherein kinship is produced through the sharing of food. Every one or two weeks, activists here would rent a room to take turns showering, and feast together after a trying day while sharing stories or watching television. If they were lucky, they would acquire local cuisine like bags of crawfish, boiled with corncobs, mushrooms and potatoes; an important family meal for locals of the region.

Similar to how anthropologist Mary Weismantel (1995) analyzes food shared over time as a substance in place of blood-relations in which one is kinned into a group: the peeling away and devouring of crawfish like the hard-earned bounties of their labor arguably functions this way (Weismantel 1995; in Howell 2009:467).



*Caption: Activists sharing a bag of crawfish at a motel*



## Carceral Bonds and Kinship

When activists were arrested, Henry and others on standby would deal with bail-bonds businesses as a component of their support role. Bail-bond businesses are businesses in proximity to prisons that offer loans for the price that it takes to release an arrested person, often a percentage of e.g. 10% of 1000 dollars or 5000 dollars in the field-site.

Sociologist Alice Goffman (2014) defines the bail-system as a short-term bank for criminalized persons (2014:95). Henry says: “We’ve dealt with bail-bondsfolk who bring their bounty hunters with them as they do the bail” (Interview), sometimes where the bounty hunter is family with or married to the bailbonds-person. Bounty hunters hunt down loanee’s who do not repay and arrest them. “And we’ve dealt with bail-bondsfolk who are relatives of the judges and sheriffs”, the last type identifying kinship between persons within these private businesses and persons of authority within the legal system.



*Caption: A local 24-hour bail-bond service*

If Henry buttered them up as he would say, the process of releasing arrestees could go much faster as these bail-bondspersons had familial ties within the law. The latter he refers to as “comical characters that like talk to you on the headset while chopping up vegetables and flirt around a bit”, meaning that striking up conversations in a reciprocal fashion could make things smoother. Henry: “It’s just a transactional relationship, with a little bit of friendliness sometimes”, highlighting the reciprocity. Sometimes arrested activists would get to know people on the inside of prison, stuck there for even minor crimes, and help relay messages to family or friends who could help them *make bail*, i.e. pay for their freedom.

Goffman (2014) writes how for legally precarious and marginalized people, bail represents “no small portion of their income” (2014:47). This means that their freedom, lifted for what in reality are insignificant crimes such as marijuana possession, has a price that arrestees are often unable to pay. While a predatory system for monetizing on the freedom of

people, Henry and others here use the bail-system to their advantage. Reaching out to prisoners on the inside is solidarity expressed by my interlocutors with other unjustly criminalized individuals, yet solidarity itself can perhaps be understood as a form of fictive kinship, whereby anti-pipeline activists aid people who are seemingly strangers in that their criminalized status binds them empathetically.

### Drive, Upload and Repeat

To raise the money for bail, Henry and others required media-content (photos, videos) for crowdfunding, whereby people of a wider network of indigenous activists fighting pipelines elsewhere in the US, or supporter's in Louisiana and elsewhere, chip in with whatever they can. He notes regarding networking across resistance spaces and with bail-bondspersons how "about 95% of movement work is relation-building" (Fieldnotes). Relation-building and the work of activists occurred strenuously across several spatialities and temporalities: on standby within the fast-paced, hyper-commodified landscape outside of the Atchafalaya swamps, to the slow-paced yet treacherous landscape within the swamps. Henry would drive in-and-out of the swamps to pick up media-content from activists who had pictures or videos of arrests, or to pick up and drop off visiting journalists who subsequently would spread visibility around the resistance. Daily logistics were demanding as one had to drive an hour-long journey into the Atchafalaya Basin; a rural, southern gothic expanse, teeming with life shrouded by foliage and waters, with back roads that often twisted like ruthless vines; and shaded by towering bald cypress and other hardwood trees draped in Spanish moss. Other times Henry waited patiently for hours at times for the boat with activists to show up. Waiting for the boat also meant keeping an eye out for local police or off-duty officers hired by the company, a looming presence around the activists.

Then, activists had to drive that distance out again seeking a decent wifi-connection to upload and disseminate media-content with, as they had no phone signal in the Atchafalaya.<sup>85</sup> These are the lengths Henry and others went to for fellow activists as fictive kin, a family of resistance formed around an oil-based conflict along the Dakota Access Pipeline route into Louisiana. What went on in the swamps was strenuous it and of itself, and I will explore examples ethnographically re-created from Henry's perspective and from the times I was on the ground in the swamp.

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<sup>85</sup> As an interlocutor Bree notes in an interview, simultaneously expressing a love for the Atchafalaya or what the group simply called "the basin": "It was magical and frightening to be in the Basin at night, even just driving through it with no phone reception."

## The Art of “Holding Space”

One day in August I was stuck in traffic with Henry just outside of Baton Rouge. The roads flooded over from a crushing torrential downpour. We were on our way to pick up journalists from the New Orleans airport, wanting to report on the activists. Henry received a message that one of the swamp encampments, one with a “sky-pod”, was being raided by police. Henry explained in an interview: “A sky-pod is a specific type of tree-sit”. Tree-sits are platforms suspended high in trees, here roughly ten meters high, typically in the path of pipeline construction (authors input). Activists occupy these ‘sits’ for extended periods, sometimes weeks or months; usually supplied with food, water, sealed-buckets and jugs for all of their needs. Activists who do so are trained to climb, and are equipped with climbing ropes, helmets, carabiners (steel rings) and harnesses. This activity is what my interlocutors otherwise refer to as “holding space”, i.e. occupying a space such as this tree-sit, enduring hostile conditions and putting one’s body on the line to hinder construction. Support-ropes are usually tied to other trees, so if these trees were to be cut, it would risk the life of the activists. However, Henry adds: “This particular tree-sit is not in the direct path of the pipelines construction, but adjacent to it.” This *sky-pod* was connected to the pipeline itself, submerged in water, whereby on a few nights before the activist who mounted it dived into the snake-laden waters to tie the support rope around the pipeline. The land the sky-pod was raised on belongs to a private landowner who had not granted the pipeline company consent to construct on their property,<sup>86</sup> who furthermore gave written permission for the activists to occupy it to resist the pipeline.



*Caption: The sky-pod before the police raid, tethered to the Bayou Bridge pipeline (left), protected by a blue tarp*

<sup>86</sup> Note: The private property had not been acquired legally through the power of eminent domain by the state either, meaning that the pipeline company was trespassing.



*Caption: The sky-pod from behind the hill, with the pipeline beyond it, showing the full height of about 9-meters. Here, an activist is resting against a cypress tree*



*Caption: A different tree-sit raised by activists a month earlier, depicting what tree-sits in the path of the pipeline's construction look like. The symbol in the word 'NO' is a medicine wheel; a sacred symbol for indigenous Americans, representative of the four directions prayed to across communities*

Henry continues, concerning the police raid: “Three of our people were surrounded by these ‘rent-a-goons’” (Interview), as he terms them, i.e. Department of Corrections officers hired by the pipeline company. These activists were on the waterways distracting law enforcement from the tree-sits (authors input), “operating on what are called ‘navigable waterways’ in Louisiana, meaning that they are legal to be on. Our water protectors were surrounded in their kayaks by fan-boats. The rent-a-goons removed them from their kayaks, detained and handcuffed them and then dragged them against their will onto the easement” (Henry). The new law, formerly named HB727, prohibits anyone being within roughly 7.6 meters of the pipelines route. If the police then dragged the activists on the easement, they could say that they had reason to arrest and felonize these activists.

Danger was always imminent in the swamps. Activists would crouch in the poison ivy, mire and bushes among wild hogs, snakes and other swamp-creatures, on the look-out for workers and cops whose presence was marked by the boisterous roaring of fan-boats.<sup>87</sup> Louise, who was often on the ground here, says: “I think what I fear in the swamps are the cops” (Interview), referring to the precariousness of dealing with police in such a rugged and remote area. Louise says: “But, I’m not new to it. I’ve been in southern Mexico with the Zapatistas, taking humanitarian aid out into the Northern zone. There it was for real like the wild west, getting shot at and stuff.” Louise’s mention of past work on other “frontlines”, spaces of political struggle, illustrates lived experiences that she incorporates into her work in Louisiana.



*Caption: A fan-boat operator preparing to escort police into the swamps*

The precarious circumstances in the swamp mirror anthropologist Michael Taussig’s (1992) research in ‘The Nervous System’. His analysis concerns Colombian political

<sup>87</sup> Note: Locals had told activists that they were not fond of fan-boats due to their disruptive presence.

dissidents who would duck from the sound of a motorcycle, as they were often assassinated in drive-by shootings. Their reality was “in a constant state of emergency” wherein dissidents responded like a nervous system or a body, to what they knew to be a foreboding noise (see 1992:13, 27), similar to the fan-boats. For my interlocutors, they were at the mercy of the swamps hidden dangers, often without phone-reception, pursued by police known to abuse authority. Holding space also meant being isolated on the island where their tree-sit was situated, having to preserve boat fuel, food and water. To tie this into the theme of kinship: these activists, some who were until recently complete strangers, were all mobilized to resist this crude oil infrastructure, risking life and blood for each other and manifesting solidarity in place of biological relations.

Henry likens the frontline situation of enduring life on standby, life on the road, networking through media, living in the trees, and in the swamps co-habiting with poison ivy, snakes, alligators and law enforcement, to the cultural functions of specific indigenous ceremonies:

*Sacrifice of the self is necessary. Standing Rock straight up would not have happened if it wasn't of a people who weren't of ceremony and Sundance.<sup>88</sup> Ceremony was one of the things that left people spiritually awed. I wasn't particularly one of them being a former Sundancer. I have more respect for the ceremonies and appreciation of their cultural function.*

*[There's this] ceremony where you're alone for four days and nights. Its name in English transliterates to 'crying for a dream'. You just stand there on the hill enduring the elements. It's meant to help you align your purpose in the world, to change the direction of your life just simply by enduring this intense ceremony. There's also the Sundance where we give up our flesh and we dance for days without water. You dance until the skin of your feet split. You sing until your tongue is thick in your mouth.*

Henry notes the cultural function of building endurance and purpose through ceremony, in this case related to the lifestyle of resistance. The sacrifice or decentering of self is the giving of his time to what he refers to as “our people”, or this group of fictive kin; but more importantly sacrificing ones time to fight harmful infrastructure. For the collective

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<sup>88</sup> Sundance in particular is a longstanding pan-indigenous form of ceremony. Sundance, among other indigenous practices, was criminalized by the US and Canadian governments until the 1970's; a part of the forced assimilation of North American indigenous peoples into the majority-European cultural practices. Thus, practicing it today is a form of resistance in and of itself. Henry adds: “There are tribes who have never had the sundance who have it now because it was brought to them. There are other ones who've had it for hundreds of years and some who say they've had it for thousands. And if you look at it, at every single sundance you'll probably find a Lakota person there. Cause we go everywhere, we do everything”, he laughs. “Every single resistance fight I've ever been part of had Lakota people in it. And it's just the way of things. Lakota people show up, we're not the ones who stay at home.” (Interview).

activists putting their bodies on the line, ceremony takes a different form, one that entails enduring the elements and holding space concertedly against antagonists.

Leia, a visiting indigenous activist, recalls affectionately in an interview the holding of space: “Bambi (another activist) was running around like a damned deer! They (singular) were camouflaged and moved like a shadow amongst the trees, hiding from the cops. I distracted the police. This foreman was walking around completely unaware.”<sup>89</sup> Bambi like a few others is an experienced boats-person. The police were searching for them (singular), as their arrest would impede the groups mobility (authors input). Leia: “Bambi poked their head up out of the bushes and they and the foreman kind of startled each other by the changed presence... then they just bounced and disappeared into the forest, graceful like a deer! That’s our Rougarou [laughter].” A Rougarou (Roo-ga-roo) is the local Cajun variant of a werewolf-like creature, initially told by southern Louisiana parents as a cautionary tale to children of what awaits them if they misbehave. Contrarily, Leia and others would attribute the Rougarou’s imagined rebellious *being* to some people of the group. Bambi had a machete meant for clearing bushes and for self-defense against snakes, alarming the foreman and prompting him to shout for the police. Leia: “The cops asked “You know anything about anybody running around swinging a machete?”, I said: “Nah, it’s just us here!”” This account gives a sense of the community among activists as frontline accomplices.

In the interim of holding space or remaining diligently on standby, activists are putting their lives in each other’s hands, a gesture one typically performs for family; risking blood and substituting blood-related kinship with solidarity. Ahead, I will explore a different aspect of kinship, as connection to the *frontlines* as a place. It is along the lines of what anthropologist Signe Howell (2009:468) analyzes as a process of *kinning*, in which the doxic premise of “biological connectedness” as the only authentic kinship is challenged.<sup>90</sup>

#### “WHEN I’M ON THE FRONTLINES”: THEIA

Theia is a queer, transgender, anarchist woman of color from the East-Coast. “I come from a lower-class background and I have no connection to any blood relatives, or “family” anymore. I haven’t for a long time” (Interview). Some activists in the field-site like Theia have lost connections to their original families. In place of that, she and others refer to activists they have long-standing friendships with as chosen family.

<sup>89</sup> A foreman is a construction worker who supervises other workers.

<sup>90</sup> Howell examines this in relation to adoptive family practices.

She holds the integral role of training activists for climbing, building tree-sits, radio-communication and operating boats, which she teaches in workshops. Referring back to chapter two and their organizational structure; the teaching of skills is so that activists are able to take on several roles in rotation. Her experience in direct action organizing is rooted in Occupy Wall Street (2011), New York, a leftist anti-capitalist movement. Theia: “A lot of us figured out what it was like to be houseless there or were already houseless and just continued down that road.” Like Henry or others, Theia has lived in extended periods of *houselessness* to be an activist. She emphasizes the word ‘houseless’ rather than ‘homeless’, signifying no absence of ‘home’ in resistance campaigns. Occupy like Standing Rock lasted for several months, and activists were constantly under threat of police brutality.

She notes some experiences of state-sanctioned violence at Occupy: “[T]he brutality of the NYPD during Occupy Wall Street is still by far the most horrid, fucking atrocious... display of violence and repression that I have ever been a part of or received in my life, besides Standing Rock” (Interview). Anthropologist David Graeber (2013), an active figure at Occupy, writes on how activists here held out against the New York City Police who utilized “calculated acts of terrorism involving batons and pepper spray” (2013:54), beating “occupiers, journalists and random passersby’s” into the pavement to create fear around documentation (2013:133-134). Most notably, the NYPD employed the tactic of “sexual attacks on [leftist] women protestors”, i.e. violent groping, in an attempt to provoke retaliation (2013:139). What I mean by sharing these past accounts of violence is to illustrate the long-term mental trauma produced by state-sanctioned violence and systemic repression for activists like Theia; the attitudes toward law enforcement by my interlocutors, shaped by lived-experience of the violence Graeber writes of; and the implications of a kinship to place that materializes for Theia and other activists. To elucidate, a major risk for activists like Theia is post-traumatic stress disorder. She explains:

*[Therapy] helped me get to a place where I’m able to manage. But I still have anxiety and nightmares almost six out of seven nights a week. There’s a saying that a lot of veterans say, but veterans aren’t the only ones with PTSD or CPTSD (Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).<sup>91</sup> They say: “When I go to sleep, I go to war.”*

*But ironically, the place CPTSD feels like a superpower more than anywhere else... is when I’m on the frontlines. When I’m in high-pressure, high-stress situations—where my head is*

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<sup>91</sup> Definition: CPTSD refers to a form of PTSD that develops from repeated traumatic events over months or years, rather than from a single event as PTSD.



*operating all the time. When I'm not there, I'm going crazy—and when I am there, I feel at home.*

Theia explains how she feels *at home* on the frontlines, like the camp in Louisiana or Occupy, signifying a fictive kinship to place; resonating with anthropologist Howells (2009:472) analysis of adopted children being *kinned* into the cultural settings and places of adoptive families through rituals like birthdays and national holidays. The rituals here are substituted by direct action over time, tree-sitting, shutting down construction, sharing decompressive circumstances together such as sharing food and high-stress situations such as evading police or being arrested.

### Resistance as a Home

In anthropology, Whitehouse and Lanman (2014:677) write of how shared “dysphoric experiences” that produce trauma(s), with the example of frontline warfare, subsequently produce psychological (i.e. fictive) kinships between those who experience it. Here, these are activists who share experiences of riot lines, evading police forces and surviving the perils of the local environments they work to protect. Some of the social and political phenotypes that activists discern kin by manifest as the battle-worn markings subsequent to resisting state-sanctioned violence—bodily injuries, CPTSD or the struggles of homelessness—and by the blood that they risk for one another in solidarity, a cohesive in place of blood ties.

Theia: “After Occupy all my friends ended up in Texas fighting a pipeline” (Interview), illustrating the shift of how a network of activists became mobilized around conflicts concerning fossil fuels as political kin, leading up to fighting a different pipeline at Standing Rock, and then in Louisiana. This illustrates how activists follow each other into different frontlines, such as the anti-pipeline camp in Louisiana. Amid resisting unjust authority and arbitrary laws, activists discover purpose, and as Howell describes *kinning*, a “[m]eaningful belonging in the present” (1995:470), with the present being the frontlines of this pipeline resistance camp. The sentiments of shared purpose and meaningful belonging over time becomes what Howell terms “the reproduction of continuity” (ibid.), anchored in kinned relations between persons and place(s) in the absence of shared flesh and blood. Relevant to Theia’s and Henry’s story and engagement in anti-pipeline resistance, anthropologist Mary Weismantel (1995:687) writes that: “poor and marginalized communities have to create strong, flexible kinship systems in order to survive”, which I argue is the case here with the fictive kinship produced between activists. Activists here dissent from the

biological dimensions of the settler-based model of the nuclear family, and establish kinship bonds on the political and social level to survive the hardships of a society in which they are criminalized.

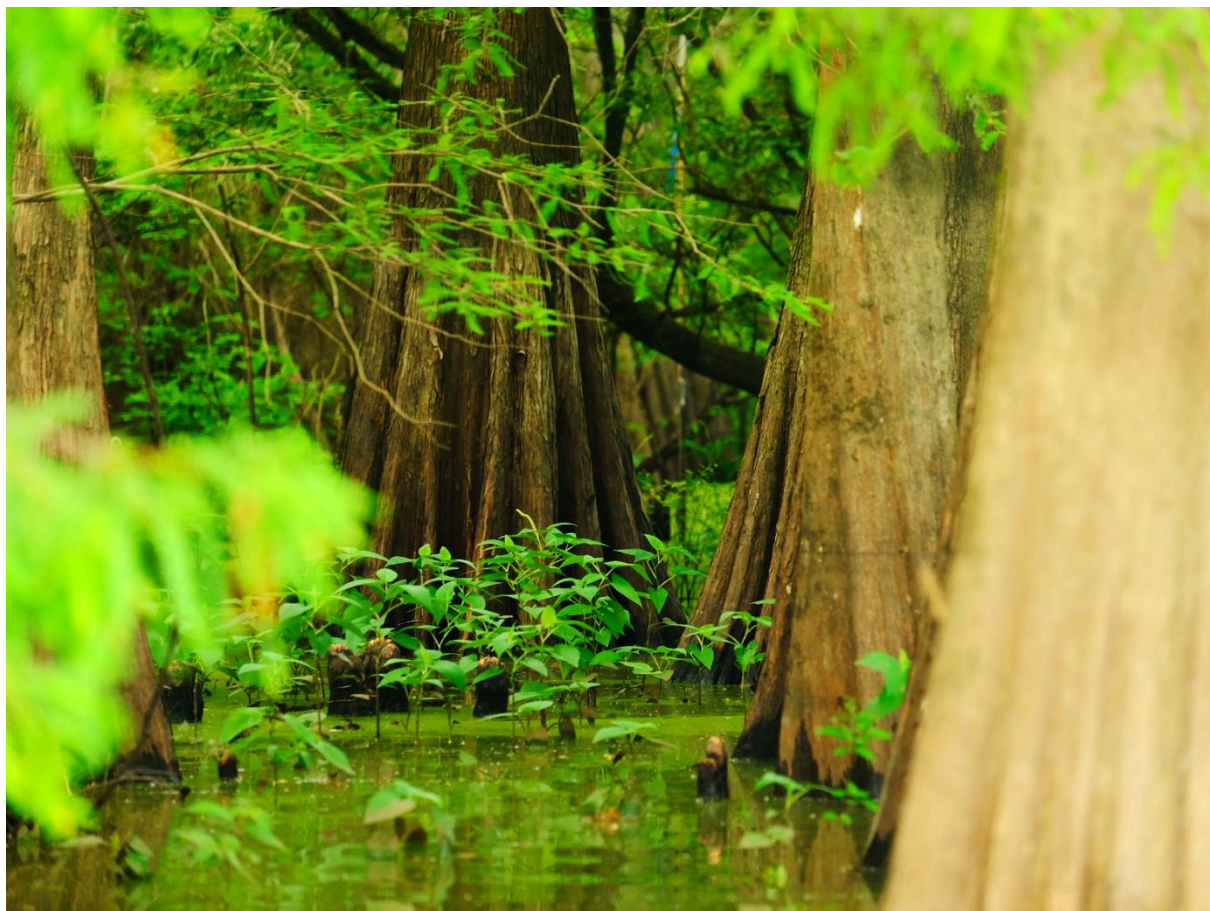
These frontlines appear as an undesirable environment from my descriptions. However, why activists would voluntarily expose themselves to the many possible antagonisms here is that the *frontlines*, like this camp, become one of the few places in the US wherein these activists find belonging. To refer back to chapter three's discussion, there is less chance for discrimination against transgender or queer people of color within these frontline resistance spaces, as opposed to the wider settler-society in which they are alienated by the existing institutions. Activists here find empowerment in place of a society largely indifferent to issues like oil spills, indigenous rights, or the hardships of poverty.

## SUMMARY

Here, I have attempted to analyze the forms of fictive kinship produced between activists in the field-site, and kinship surrounding connection to place, i.e. place as the frontlines and this camp as one such frontline. What is important to draw from here is that fictive kinship is produced as a means of survival for these activists, and exists otherwise as a consequence of solidarity and of sharing space together under high-risk circumstances over an extended period of time, in place of any biological relations. The terms of endearment by the indigenous women council of the camp and Henry, such as "auntie", "mama bear" and "our people", underline the use of kinship terms by activists here, and the gestures of enduring perils within and external to the swamp, and performing seemingly banal chores for one another, illustrate how a fictive kinship exists between these activists. In the next chapter, I will examine how activists construct temporal anchors to the landscape by evoking histories of resistance to settler colonialism in the Louisiana swamps, which will also explore how their networks become intimately entangled along the interconnecting waterways from which they mobilize their politics of water.

## CHAPTER 5

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## THE FLUID ENTANGLEMENTS OF RESISTANCE

*Activists would sometimes share stories of local waterways inscribed with death. Amelia of the council often shared a story about the Mermentau river, one of the water-bodies that the Bayou Bridge Pipeline would cross. The story goes, in short: a slave-ship had arrived at the Mermentau in the 1800's across the Atlantic. Unaware that slave-transportation was at that time illegal and punishable by death, the ship's captain abandoned over 200 hundred starved Africans dispossessed from their original lands on a marsh ridge in the Mermentau to die. Due to their skeletal remains, the area is known locally as 'Skull Island'; a name that conveys the imprint of death upon this waterway. Activists would also evoke a history of resistance to oppressive settler colonial institutions, through mentions of the historical freed slaves and indigenous peoples called Maroons that lived as communities in the perilous swamps of Louisiana to resist plantation slavery.*

The sharing of these histories and the symbolic and literal impressions of resistance and death upon the landscape in Louisiana, signifies a temporal connection for these activists to the interplay of past and historical material processes of dispossession, from which they construct a 'politics of water' and animate their resistance. Politics of water refers to politics mobilized to protect vital waterways against a politics of disposability by the state and the fossil fuel industry. By dispossession, I refer to the history of violence against indigenous and black bodies by settlers, and in contemporary times, forced exposure of descendant communities to toxic pollution through industrial gentrification of their surroundings. By resistance, I mean the literal act of hindering construction of this pipeline and industrial expansion by occupying trees in the path of construction among other strategies, and through that the symbolic act of resisting the structural relations of settler colonialism, of which this pipeline is treated as an extension to by activists. My argument is that—besides emphasizing the materiality of water as a vital source of life—activists mobilize their politics of water through histories of resistance to settler colonialism in North America, surrounding vital waterways, and create temporal and political anchors of belonging to the land.

Dispossession, here, further resonates with David Harvey's term "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2005 in Urry 2016:113): the neoliberal doctrine of accumulating wealth from the injury of marginalized communities, e.g., following disasters or by the stealing of indigenous rights. The doctrine is exemplified under the new anti-protest law which criminalizes anti-fossil fuel activists in Louisiana. By attempting to deter activists from resisting environmentally harmful infrastructure, the state is ensuring the continued sacrifice of pauperized communities in Cancer Alley—a reproduction of settler colonial class hierarchies, demarcating the racialized poor and the affluent rich—in which, as Achille Mbembe theorizes, state sovereignty is expressed as the capacity to determine "who is

disposable and who is not” (2003:27). The influence of private interests on state politics is also evident in the Bayou Bridge company’s employment of off-duty state and local police to surveil and repress activists in Louisiana.<sup>92</sup> Activists here mobilize to protect the vital nucleus of all biological life which they are denied as persons from marginalized and lower-class backgrounds: drinking waters disproportionately polluted by industry and governmental neglect across the US.

Here, I will explore the landscape surrounding the activists through the historical lens of marronage in Louisiana, as a history of resistance to settler colonialism. I will also highlight the mortal dangers of the Atchafalaya swamps and its waters to not downplay the hostile reality of living in the landscape. I will examine the significance of water for activists from the Midwest and Westcoast regions of the US. Moreover, I will analyze the ways in which settler colonial violence shapes and reverberates into the present of extractive violence; i.e. the two-fold violence of neoliberal governance that promotes e.g. deregulatory policies and the expansion of fossil fuel projects, and the subsequent environmental disasters.

## ANTI-COLONIAL RESISTANCE AND MARRONAGE

*“At night when we travel by boat, it’s usually foggy. There are spikes in the fog shaped like people. They radiate in the moonlight and in our lamps. It sort of feels like... passing through the spirits of those who used to roam here.” – Re-created quote*

One night in spring we became stranded on the waters of the Bayou Chene, which connects to the Atchafalaya River. This was before temporary encampments had been established in the swamps, when activists were documenting construction. The engine had died, and the waters current flowed against us. We had forgotten the ores. Someone jumped into the water to tug the boat, emerging with leeches. Then we attempted to push forward with long branches from the densely vegetated shoreline. Then our hands grasped the jagged, rusted underbelly of a barge, a massive freight ship, to chivy the boat around it.

A text-message delayed by intermittent cell service came through from Amelia: “Be careful! The snakes strike blindly at night!” She alerted two boat-savvy femme-activists who were two hours away, Hailstorm and Cypress (nicknames), to evacuate us. They brought Kayaks and ores, and at three in the morning, we exited upstream.

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<sup>92</sup> Headline: “This Louisiana Parish (county) Allowed a Quarter of Its Sheriff’s Deputies To Work Security for a Pipeline.” Source: <http://inthesetimes.com/article/21933/louisiana-energy-transfer-pipeline-bayou-bridge-hub-private-security>.



*Caption: Activists stranded on the Bayou Chene*

The above example illustrates the life-threatening circumstances activists would sometimes find themselves in during such clandestine activities as organizing against this pipeline. While water is at the core of their politics, the bewildering bayou waters they were working to protect, with its shrouded fangs and claws, also denotes danger as much as a vital source of life; containing various fish, crustaceans and other forms of subsistence. When scouting for potential sites to halt construction with tree-sits in the Atchafalaya, interlocutors would mention how maroons used to roam the swamps they traversed.<sup>93</sup> Amelia notes in an interview the connection felt to the Atchafalaya swamps and the swamps of the region:

*The history of the swamps...as a place of resistance...there's just no other. There are many untold stories there, like the maroon communities or indigenous peoples escaping the Trail of Tears. The swamps had such a high level of protection. They've always been a spot for resistance, and we feel connected to it in that way.*

Amelia underlines the symbolic and historical gravity of resistance in the swamps and the sense of protection that activists felt here, despite its perils. She mentions maroons, and the historical series of forced dispossessions of indigenous Americans from their lands called the Trail of Tears (1831-1877); under which thousands from the Cherokee, Muscogee, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole groups perished. The presence of maroons and the dead was sensed by some activists with spikes in the rising fog at night that they would pass through on the boat; an alluring eeriness only swelled by the amber glowing eyes of alligators,

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<sup>93</sup> Tree-sits are platforms that activists occupy, perched high atop trees in the path of the pipelines route.

radiating from their headlamps. The eyes, a calm fire on the water's surface, illuminated the swamps rebellious and untamed features. Through words of acknowledgement and reverence, the defiant swamp spirits were conjured for activists; setting the moonlit fog ablaze with dark memories forsaken.

To elucidate, maroons were escaped slaves that alongside indigenous of the region; exiled Acadians from Eastern Canada (Cajuns); refugees and fugitives; formed communities in the hostile settings of the Louisiana swamps to escape settler colonial society. They were often hunted by slave patrols, the roots of law enforcement. Activists would acknowledge the history of maroons not to perform marronage or to romanticize the harsh dimensions of the maroon's reality. Rather, activists sympathized with maroons as criminalized and disenfranchised peoples of the past, I argue, as activists here are themselves criminalized. Activists were acknowledging a temporal connection to the landscape in enduring the same hostile environment under which maroons resisted plantation slavery, a precursor structure to the extractive violence of the fossil fuel industry that now dominates the landscape.

Modular groups of maroons lived in the swampy borderlands of plantations and towns up and down the Mississippi River. Sylviane Diouf (2014:92) points to records from 1771 of six maroons arrested in plantation fields in what was then Attakapas County, the heart of which is present-day St. Martinville near Bayou Teche and the Atchafalaya River, in proximity to the formation of resistance spaces against the Bayou Bridge Pipeline in my field-site. The most well-documented group of maroons were the *Bas De Fleuve* (Lower River) maroons on the outskirts of New Orleans, organized by the escaped slave San Malo. These swamplands along Lake Borgne were occupied from 1773-1784 (Douglas 2014). San Malo was captured and lynched by New Orleans authorities, in a brutal display of sovereign power. In the 1830's another resistance leader, Bras Coupé, thrived in the cypress swamps near New Orleans (see Wagner:69-70). For three years Bras Coupé eluded authorities alongside other escaped slaves and sympathetic white accomplices, robbing plantations and other predatory institutions of the time.

Here, I have explored historical and temporal connections to the landscape evoked by activists, a means of paying respect to past resistant communities. By establishing encampments to block this pipeline, activists are symbolically resisting the alienating institutions of contemporary capitalist and settler colonial society that permits the dispossessions of indigenous and black communities through industrial gentrification. Now, I will discuss polluted waterways in the present around which activists mobilize their resistance.

## Death On The Shorelines

Other than historical landmarks like ‘Skull Island’, death pervades the wounded landscapes and waters of present-day Louisiana in other menacing forms. Chemical disasters, pipeline leaks, waste dumping and oil spills are frequent in and around the Mississippi river, the waterway along which impoverished black communities like St. James as descendants of freed slaves reside.



*Caption: The Mississippi River by Taft, Louisiana. What resembles a city beyond the barge is actually a cluster of petrochemical facilities in Norco, Louisiana*

Their communities are overburdened by the sheer volume of industry-related cancer deaths, which activists argue the Bayou Bridge Pipeline would exacerbate through the oil that would be transported there. Spills in the Gulf of Mexico, where the Mississippi river merges, are commonplace. Rob Nixon (2011) criticizes the serial incompetence of companies like British Petroleum (BP) and neoliberal politicians that argue how whenever a spill occurs in the Gulf, microbes will simply eat the oil and nature will take its course (see 2011:21-22). This argument, aimed at naturalizing man-made disasters, ignores the onslaught of oceanic dead zones—a result of these spills—exacerbated by ravenous microbes that deprive larger organisms of oxygen. Dead zones on the Gulf are also produced by runoff from agricultural fertilizers, manufactured in Louisiana by companies like Monsanto (see Misrach & Orff 2014:189). Moreover, as anthropologist Katrina Peterson (2016) examines, the BP oil spill of 2010 left behind a black mass the size of Rhode Island after 1.84 million gallons of toxic chemicals were sprayed by the company to disperse the oil (2016:341-342).



## Disposable Bodies

Coastal residents experience a dual-effect with their very homes descending into the ocean from rising sea levels and land subsidence, a result of climate change effects and erosion from a century of industry-made canals, and neoliberal policymaking that de-regulated offshore drilling (Peterson 2016:342). Death surrounding the waters is outlined by skeleton trees in the wetlands along the coast; pale and bone-like from saltwater intrusion (ibid:343). The wetlands destroyed by the industry, initially functioning as a secure buffer to the devastating effects of hurricanes, leave coastal residents vulnerable. The destruction of these vital buffer-zones and the subjection of Cancer Alley residents to toxic pollution reflects Mbembe's (2003) theorization of state sovereignty—and here, of a corporate and settler colonial state—as expressed by the capacity to determine “who is disposable and who is not” (2003:27). Arguably, the class-based production of disposable bodies, landscapes and waters by the state is outlined by the demarcations between the settler colonial rich and impoverished communities of color; in which the latter's lives are cheapened and sacrificed for the profit of the oil industry.

I joined activists for a day on the coast in April. Our eyes surveyed dozens of oil platforms on the ocean's horizon. We walked along the beach, observing the ebb and flow of foamy waters and rainbow-colored oil sheens, spotting dolphin carcasses washed ashore. In 2015, researchers gathered evidence linking the widespread deaths of dolphins on the Gulf Coast to the impacts of the BP Oil spill, even five years later (Venn-Watson; Colegrove; Litz; Kinsel; Terio; Saliki; Rowles 2015). Families would pass on open-roof jeeps with mounted confederate flags. Confederate flags accentuate the history of southern citizens that fought the federal government to preserve slavery during the civil war; a prevalent form of white supremacy in the south, often defended as a celebration of heritage and state sovereignty. The families offered rides, perplexed that anyone would walk on the sand. As I tried to imagine the oil spill of 2010, the complacency of beachgoers and the scenery was reminiscent of anthropologist Merrill Singer's (see 2011:149) thoughts on how black-smothered pelicans and manmade chemical disasters are so thoroughly naturalized in the Louisiana psyche. As remnants of a settler colonial past—political symbols that seep into the present—these flags that for many like the activists I lived with are representative of the plantation slavery period, resembling the Swastika or other white supremacist emblems. The corpses of non-human victims of extractive capitalism, dolphins and other sea-ecology, are ferried to land in a similar manner; marking the symbolic and literal convergence of settler colonial and

extractive violence; the political past of the American south and the present modulations of this past.



*Caption: A dolphin washed ashore on the beach*



*Caption: Beachgoers on the Louisiana coast. The tiny specks on the horizon are offshore oil-platforms*

Amelia says in an interview: “I have kids, and I became an activist after the BP oil spill in 2010, when I realized how fragile life was”, referring to the pelicans and sea-creatures she witnessed suffocated and dying in black mounds of oil, “[...] and that I had a role in protecting it. I couldn’t imagine if saving this for the next generation wasn’t what we were supposed to do here... what on earth were we doing? Was I really being a good mom if I was letting their legacy be destroyed so thoughtlessly and wastefully?” Amelia underscores here the politics of water she mobilizes in her activism to resist projects harmful to waterways vital to local communities in Louisiana and beyond; beginning with the controversial BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, and leading up to resisting the Dakota Access Pipeline and in Louisiana, the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. To illustrate the wider network of non-local activists who mobilize in solidarity with the communities in Louisiana, I will explore Finn’s case.

## “PEOPLE OF THE GREAT LAKES”: FINN

Finn comes from a small community with waters that for years have been poisoned by lead and copper, illustrating the ongoing issues of water pollution in the US. “My region is ground zero for most things. In Detroit, there’s mass water shutoffs. In Flint, there’s lead poisoning in the waters. We fight pipelines there like Enbridge’s Line 6 which affects the Kalamazoo River. We also fight Energy Transfer Partners (DAPL, Bayou Bridge) and their Rover Pipeline which destroyed our wetlands. The fight in Louisiana is very similar.” Here he highlights why he is mobilized to protect waterways and advocate clean water access in his local community and in Louisiana, mentioning issues related to infrastructural neglect by the government and pipeline projects that threaten local communities in the Midwest.

Finn met Amelia some years prior when she came to support the community of Flint, Michigan during the onset of the water crisis (2014). Finn: “The people of the Gulf (Louisiana) have always shown solidarity with people of the Great Lakes. I don’t think she realizes how her *being*, as a person, impacted me. It truly marked this journey I’ve taken in ecological resistance” (Interview), highlighting the intersubjective creation of solidarity networks along these intersecting waterways. Chance (2018) analyzes how water acts as a “political conductor”, in the context of South African shackland residents who mobilized used water to boycott commodity exchange with the apartheid state (2018:46). The Great Lakes of the north intersect with the Mississippi River through canals, similar to how activists build networks. As such, these water-veins are the political conductors and connecting nodes between activists; the fluid pillar of life from which their social and political networks become intimately entangled, and around which they mobilize. These ‘fluid entanglements’ are also delineated by the temporal connections that activists construct to the landscape and waters; in which past historical processes of dispossession congeal with the present of pipelines, industry and marginalized communities rendered disposable.

In Louisiana, Finn resided frequently in the swamp encampments in the Atchafalaya Basin. His feet were often sore whenever our paths crossed: “There’s poison ivy everywhere in the swamps, and I’d get cuts from cypress knees from us running from the cops.” Cypress knees are the hard, cone-shaped, upward growing roots of cypress trees. Still, he was not discouraged by his occasional wounds: “One side of my family is Roma. That family was part of the Eastern European Romani resistance against the Holocaust and other states of fascism that occurred. On my mother’s side, I’m Irish. My grandfather opposed British colonization of Ireland. When he came to the US, he became a union organizer. So, my bloodlines are rooted in resistance like that. I have this background of resistance that I carry, but also just from

being exposed to people who carry resistance in their own ways... people that had everything taken from them by the powers that be”, referring to activists of marginalized backgrounds deprived of clean-water access. Finn recalls instances of solidarity by Atchafalaya locals: “A handful of Acadians (Cajuns) out here bring us bags of catfish and crawfish. This other guy helps us in emergencies. One day, we called him when we have a couple of people trapped on the swamp-island while the police were raiding our spots. He left church to help us! Just jumped in his boat and went and rescued our people” (Interview), illustrating the role of locals in aiding activists resist the Bayou Bridge Pipeline.

Finn’s example highlights how activists in the field-site, indigenous and non-indigenous to North America, mobilize their politics of water as a platform to resist the settler colonial sovereignty of the US government—e.g. by recognizing their original ancestry—other than the concrete forms of resistance to pipelines. As anthropologist Andrea Muehlebach (2017) examines surrounding local water activists in Italy: activists for her and in my context juxtapose water’s vitalism and as a source of life to “neoliberalism’s culture of death” (2017:20). In Louisiana’s context, this culture is evident with the disposability of the water of the poor and of the poor themselves by the government; through the naturalization of disasters and dispossessions; and through free-speech infringement by criminalizing activists. Now, I will explore the accounts of two activists with medical training and their experience of the swamps.

## A FUNERAL FOR THE TREES: LEIA AND FUEGO

Leia was present at Standing Rock to treat activists and facilitate first-aid assistance during the DAPL protests. Now, Fuego, her son, accompanied her to Louisiana as an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) in training. She is of Yaqui and Chichimeca descent, and Fuego is of Yaqui and Cora descent, peoples indigenous to northwestern and central Mexico. Their presence demonstrates interregional indigenous solidarity. As Muehlebach argues: the dynamics of solidarity for activists are “inseparably material and historical” (2017b:100); here, I refer to a common struggle against processes of dispossession inherent to the colonization period in North America. Leia: “In the swamp, I felt such a deep connection with the living bayou. When we arrived to where the tree-sitters were”, i.e. activists occupying trees, “and I saw all of the tall cypress trees cut down around them, it hurt on a visceral level. Knowing how these tree systems and their roots are connected to each other like a community and that holds the waterways. I was spiritually wounded.” The manner in which she conceptualizes the trees mirrors that of the modular networks of resistance along the rivers,

lakes and coasts; communities connected by common struggles in which the government deems their rights and waterways disposable. The swamp has a lush forest of bald-cypress trees that thrive from the bayou waters. Most trees are over 200 years old, and old growth trees that were thousands of years old were lost to logging during and after the colonial period. In the swamp, they stood prepared for first-aid assistance while security, workers with chainsaws and police shuffled around attempting to remove the activists from the trees. They would sing loudly for the waters, and “for those elder trees that they were cutting down. It felt very empowering and I felt that the Bayou around us could appreciate it” (Leia).

Besides checking vital signs, intervening for wounds like Finn’s, training for pepper-spray or snake-bite treatment; they would flood the swamp-island with their songs, describing it as a medicine in and of itself. Their presence was crucial for many activists of impoverished backgrounds, who due to socioeconomic circumstances are deprived of access to basic healthcare in the US. As we discovered while coordinating emergency plans, hospitals were an hour’s drive every direction, notwithstanding the one hour boat-trip. On the ground, they held off against verbal transgressions by workers and police from the St. Martin Parish Sheriff’s Department.

Fuego: “Construction workers one morning were laughing at what they called a bunch of “jungle people” in the trees, how they could scare us by pulling out their guns and we’d run like “rats”.” The language is similar to anthropologist Didier Fassin’s (2013) ethnography of anti-crime squads in France who would racialize black residents, utilizing prejudiced terms like “jungle” and “savages” (ibid.52). Discrimination, the threat of violence and parlance mirroring the settler colonial past was further evoked by police overheard discussing how black Americans used to be lynched in these trees, and the convenience of the activists already being suspended in the trees. Fuego: “It made me think of how their ancestors brought the rats, the plagues, the diseases”, referring to the mass epidemics brought by European contact, and the connotations of inferiority evoked in the language of the workers. Fuego: “We had no fear. We were a people of medicine. I chose to show them, and sing as loud as I could. As one of the police officers was leaving, she said: “Thank you, it was really nice to hear your music.” I told her...with a pain in my gut...it’s really hard to be thanked for this. It’s like thanking someone for saying a prayer at a funeral”, referring to the destruction of the local environment and the larger implications of communities like St. James that would remain devastated with toxic pollution with this pipelines construction.

## SUMMARY

Each activist carries intimate ties to water through stories of the material and historical dispossessions and resistance along these waterways; the now of industrial toxification and expropriation of minority rights to water as characteristic to neoliberal governance; and the fluid networks constructed across the region through the politics of water and temporal connections underpinning their activism. The networks reach from Standing Rock, the Great Lakes, and from other communities across the region, into Louisiana. Settler colonialism looms over the present political landscape with the criminalization of indigenous activists and allies, mobilizing against a politics of disposability imposed upon St. James and neighboring communities in Cancer Alley, in absence of informed consent for the pipeline from a state governed by corporate interests.

## CHAPTER 6

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## POLICING UNGOVERNABLE BODIES

*An intoxicated group of men rolled up to the camp's gate one evening in June. There had been many confrontations at the gate before; drive-by's with spotlights shining in at night, shouting, honking, vandalism, and police harassment. The pipeline was being constructed across the street this month, and usually except for today there was an intermittent presence of police stationed outside the camp to deter activists from entering the worksites, to surveil their comings and goings and occasionally to harass them. Amelia of the camp-council recalls: "These men were drunk and drove up on four-wheelers. They were out front tormenting our people, being assholes. Friends including an organizer from St. James were present with their kids. They were calling a black mother here very bad words. It's kinda common here. But the mother defended herself. She was like "Fuck off!" I would never tell another person of color or woman what they should or shouldn't do to defend themselves when it comes to racism or white supremacy" (Interview). The men at the gate had firearms at their side. This provoked some activists present to grab tools as potential melee weapons, to scare the men away and help the guests defend their children. The men eventually left before the confrontation escalated, but another visitor at the camp was disturbed. Amelia: "There was this white liberal woman visiting from up North somewhere. And she was nice!" The grabbing of melee weapons for defense upset the visiting woman. She told the others to just ignore the men at the gate until they go away, and to "call the cops" (authors input); a common response for Americans to any social disturbances. Amelia: "Maybe she didn't understand. Historically, the cops aren't our friends here. Honestly, they're probably her friends, but they're definitely not my friends, as a person of color. I know these cops and there's white supremacy and nazi-business permeating all through that."*

The incident illustrates the political demarcations between the liberal visitor and more radical leftist activists, as marked by the divergent approaches to the situation. Relations to police differ for those involved in this context, between the lived-experience of police brutality and community repression internalized by my interlocutors, and for the liberal middle-class visitor, for internalizing the typical image of American police as virtuous protectors. According to activists, American police typically do not serve in favor of people of color and of impoverished backgrounds.

To refer back to the thread of police encounters throughout the previous chapters, the work of activists is always inseparable from the class-based power relations imposed upon them, whereby policing agents enforce these relations. In Louisiana, red and blue lights mesmerize the asphalted canvas of long-stretching highways at night. A higher percentage of the populace are imprisoned more than anywhere in the world, with a rate of roughly 700 per 100.000 Louisiana residents, primarily people of color.<sup>94</sup> Police and security patrol the fence-

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<sup>94</sup> Note: However, Louisiana fell slightly behind Oklahoma in 2018, and for now no longer holds the status of highest incarceration rate in the world. Excerpt from a news article: "After spending years as the prison capital of the world, a new report indicates that Louisiana has finally shed this shameful title thanks to the historic package of criminal justice reforms passed last year. According to the Prison Policy Initiative,



line communities of Cancer Alley, guarding the privatized industrial landscapes.

Neoliberalism imbues the land with an iron-fist, whereby police enforce laws lobbied for by fossil fuel-proponents, such as the HB727 (formerly named) that felonizes pipeline opponents.<sup>95</sup>

For activists, police secure the extractive processes that precipitate a world ever on the brink of ecological desolation; from the calamity of oil spills devastating vital waterways, to the lung-blistering and deathly chemical plumes of Cancer Alley. Police are anathema to activists, appearing as class-traitors, facilitators of wealth inequality, and enforcers of arbitrary laws serving corporate interest. Here, I will explore some interactions between local police hired by the Bayou Bridge company and activists. I will analyze everyday symbolic and behavioral forms of resistance toward police by activists; whereby the term ‘police’ for them encompasses all local, state and federal agents of control.

My argument is that activists form community modes of *ungovernability*—i.e. habits that are self-governing, self-determined and rooted in voluntary association—to challenge the oppressive class hierarchies, cultural governmentality and structural relations imposed by law enforcement. These class hierarchies appear as the artificial authority police are given over ordinary citizens. By cultural governmentality I mean for example the visitors responsive action to call the police, a common social convention among US citizens. By structural relations, I mean arrangements for instance distinguishable by the targeting of communities such as St. James with toxic pollution and the enforcing of laws to quell resistance.

I will trace these modes of ungovernability through interactions between activists and police, and through their forms of resistance with their language, conduct and bodies toward police as agents of control and repression. The discussion is relevant to how activists mobilize under a politics of water in that for activists, law enforcement act as appendages to the fossil fuel industry by securing the pollution of marginalized communities in Louisiana such as St. James, and at Standing Rock, the Standing Rock Sioux’s water supply. I will first explore a brief history of the policing in the region, in relation to the settler colonial roots that my interlocutors associate with law enforcement.

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Louisiana’s incarceration rate is now the second highest in the nation, below that of Oklahoma.” Source: <https://www.aclu.org/blog/criminal-law-reform/louisiana-no-longer-worlds-prison-capital-heres-whats-next>.

<sup>95</sup> Excerpt from a news article: “Pam Spees, a senior staff attorney for the Center for Constitutional Rights who is representing groups opposed to the Bayou Bridge project, said the situation raises important concerns about whose interests are being protected. “If there is a financial interest on the part of state employees to serve these private companies, who’s looking out for normal, everyday citizens and residents and landowners and others who want to protest?”” Source: <https://theintercept.com/2018/08/22/recent-arrests-under-new-anti-protest-law-spotlight-risks-that-off-duty-cops-pose-to-pipeline-opponents/>.

## FROM PLANTATIONS TO PRISON-CELLS

Crime historian Gary Potter (Waxman 2018) traces the roots of policing in the southern US to private slave patrols, tasked with hunting escaped slaves (maroons) and preventing revolts, to preserve the slavery system business. In 1865, the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment was passed, marking the end of the Civil War and the institution of chattel slavery (Pellow 2018:87). In the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, slavery shifted from antebellum-plantations to the prison industrial complex and fossil fuel extraction.

Southern states passed so-called Black Codes allowing police in the south to arrest newly freed African Americans for alleged and petty offences, such as “vagrancy”, i.e. homelessness (2018:88). A majority of those arrested could not afford to pay the fines levied against them—reflecting my analysis of the bail-system in chapter four—and were leased out as forced-laborers to perform life-threatening coal mining and fossil fuel extraction jobs for private companies (ibid.).<sup>96</sup> Jim Crow laws overtook the principles of Black Codes, laws which southern police officers used to brutally enforce a segregated society legally, until 1965.



*Caption: A statue commemorating black activists of the Civil Rights Movement during the segregation era in Birmingham, Alabama; who faced police beatings, attack dogs, high powered watercannons and church-bombings by local white supremacist groups*

### Broken Windows and Modern-day Slavery

In the present, unpaid prison-labor is highly prevalent in Texas and Georgia where inmates manufacture products for companies such as Victoria’s Secret and Starbucks (Layton 2019).

<sup>96</sup> Angela Davis, renowned scholar, police abolitionist and activist, underlines this brutal history of exploitation at the foundation of her home city Birmingham, Alabama, a region known for coal and steel. “It is only recently that I have learned that the black miners and steelworkers I knew during my childhood inherited their place in Birmingham’s industrial development from black convicts forced to do this work” (Davis in Pellow 2018:89).

At the Louisiana State Penitentiary, nicknamed Angola after the former slave plantation upon which it stands, inmates harvest wheat, corn and cotton at as low as 4 cents an hour, under circumstances starkly resembling plantation slavery (Sawyer 2017). In 2019, 50 prisoners out of 5,000 are serving time at Angola for crimes that they did not commit and due to harsh sentencing laws for minor crimes such as drug possession, or now illustrated by newly proposed arbitrary protest laws, Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the world (Layton 2019). Harsh laws reflect ‘Broken Windows Policing’, what anthropologist Didier Fassin (2013) defines as a questionable practice of policing that emerged in the US in the 1990’s predicated on heavy enforcement against minor “crimes”, such as panhandling or breaking the windows of an already abandoned vehicle; an attempt to hinder the materialization of more major crimes (Fassin 2013:51,241). Broken Windows is criticized for wrongly pinpointing the cause of increased crime as minor crimes (homelessness, littering), while ignoring deeper systemic factors such as unequal distribution of wealth and the dispossession of lower-class minorities under late-stage capitalism.

The single greatest factor behind the rise of mass incarceration against communities of color is the “racially discriminatory war on drugs”, beginning in the 1970’s. Despite a statistically equal consumption of drugs by white communities, black Americans are four times more likely to be arrested (Pellow 2018:80).<sup>97</sup> On the disproportionate targeting of communities of color with mass incarceration, Ashley Nellis (2016) points to a 67.8% black prison population in Louisiana, whereas the total population of African Americans in the state are at 32%.

As such, pipelines and prisons appear for my interlocutors as impersonal features of neoliberal governance. People of color are disproportionately targeted for minor non-crimes and coerced into unpaid labor—producing consumer products derived from plastics and other crude oil based materials—illustrating the predatory corporate means of profit maximization and the congealment of private interests; from oil-extraction, to prison labor, to store shelves. With laws such as the HB727, anti-pipeline activists are policed for defending their communities from harmful infrastructure, whereby local and state law enforcement serve private interests, acting as antagonists of activists defending land from pipelines.

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<sup>97</sup> This is a longstanding issue that Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) among others recently highlighted in addressing how white investors are reaping profits from selling legal marijuana while minorities that disproportionately spent decades in prison for sentences based on selling marijuana are left without retribution. Source of an example: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/ocasio-cortez-diverity-cannabis-industry\\_n\\_5c676fcee4b05c889d1f6cfc](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/ocasio-cortez-diverity-cannabis-industry_n_5c676fcee4b05c889d1f6cfc).

## ALL COPS ARE BASTARDS

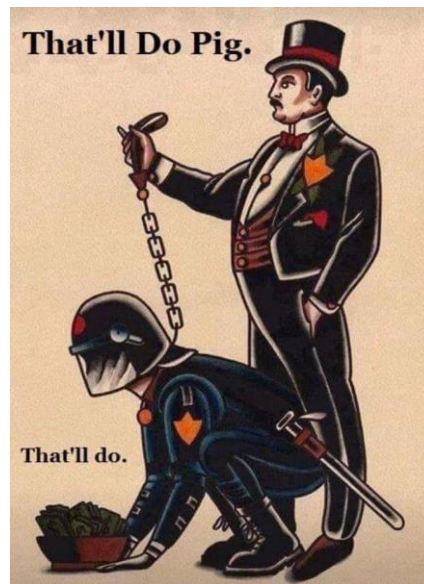
The slogan A.C.A.B (All Cops Are Bastards) is emic to some of my interlocutors. The slogan is a banner activists mobilize under, traceable in political imagery and forms of resistance such as graffiti, internet memes or anonymous zines that promote resisting the culture of policing—signified for instance by the liberal visitors initial reaction to call the police—and overall protesting unethical activities surrounding policing. Behavior by activists akin to A.C.A.B also materializes e.g. by not addressing police hierarchically with the formalities *Yes Sir* or *Yes Ma'am*, a means of resisting the authoritarian nature and heteronormative classification underpinning the titles. The slogan is predicated on that while some individual cops may be good people, the impersonal institution of policing enforces arbitrary laws that criminalize vulnerable groups like non-white citizens or groups such as undocumented migrants. This renders the characteristics of anyone serving this insidious system as ‘bastardous’.



*Caption: A queer activist in the field-site rearranged this local signs lettering to read “GAY S&M”, “A.C.A.B”, and “NO Bayou Bridge Pipeline”; protesting the heteronormativity of American society with the playful slogan “gay sadomasochism”. The political slogan of A.C.A.B, which in line with “GAY S&M” symbolically refers to cops as ‘bootlickers’; while “No Bayou Bridge Pipeline” protests the pipeline itself*

In part, police are perceived by activists as promoting the corporate enslavement of black Americans in the present, mirroring the slavery economy of the plantation period and the ‘AmeriKKKa’ that they know, as examined in chapter two. Thus the institution of policing is attributed a reputational moral corruption on a systemic level by activists. Anthropologist Didier Fassin (2013) studies the word *bastards* in an opposite manner, whereby the French police speak with a “martial vocabulary”, employing racially derogatory words like ‘bastards’ or ‘monkeys’ in the contexts of social cleansing or eradication of black French citizens (see 2013:41,99). Contrastingly, cops for my interlocutors are ‘pigs’, ‘class traitors’, ‘bootlickers’ or ‘fascists’.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Definition: The term ‘bootlickers’ is colloquial activist slang for servile individuals who operate under a hostile hierarchy serving the interests of the affluent-class above them, including proponents of law enforcement; who willingly ‘lick the boots’ of their masters so to speak.



*Caption: A meme from an anonymous anarchist facebook page called 'Bootlicking ≠ Patriotism', depicting a cop as a corporate functionary. The page ascribes patriotic conduct to the act of 'licking boots'. Memes such as this are shared as an everyday form of resistance for activists, in line with Scott's (1985) term "weapons of the weak" (1985 in Lewellen 2003:115)*

For my interlocutors, *bastards* narrate morality in such a way that criminalizes political dissidents, ecological activists, and marginalized people of color. Aside from the term 'bastard': Theia, due to experiences with police targeting her as a woman of color, assigns the term 'Gestapo' to police, the historical state-police of Nazi Germany. One day, Theia was searching for her vehicle in a Wal-Mart parking lot after running errands with friends of the group. She was racially profiled by two patrol officers suspecting her to be a car thief. When she refused to identify herself, a disobeying of orders signifying a form of resistance, she was held in prison for three days before other activists convinced her that they needed her out. Theia recalls in an interview: "I thought it was important to fight the police on that and I kind of snapped. It was just the wrong day to fucking pull that kind of Gestapo shit where I show them my papers", mirroring how Nazis would ask for papers from citizens, or how ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) operates at the Mexican border. Theia: "When you don't give your ID to cops, they place you in prison. That's some Gestapo shit." Theia's act of defiance to authority in this situation of imbalanced power relations—an implicit emergence of the culture of A.C.A.B—mirrors the refusal of activists to call the police in the example from the introduction.

Calling the police is akin to the more culturally ingrained form of policing in America, whereby local law enforcement encourage citizens to "report any suspicious behavior"; a social convention advertised on walls in most public spaces (e.g. restaurants). Activists in the field-site received workshops and legal help by attorneys who advised not to speak with cops or share any information with cops; as police are permitted to lie in extracting any incriminating information.

If I am under arrest, please tell me. If I am not under arrest, I wish to freely go on my way. In either case, I refuse to consent to any search of my person, my effects and my property, my premises or the location of my arrest.

I wish to remain silent and demand to have my attorney present during any questioning, lineup or search.

If you ignore my exercise of these rights or attempt to obtain a waiver of such rights, then I want to talk to my attorney before any conversation with any law enforcement agent, especially concerning the subject of waiver. I exercise these rights as guaranteed under the constitution of the United States.

AM I BEING DETAINED?

WHY? WHAT IS YOUR REASONABLE / ARTICULABLE SUSPICION?

I DO NOT CONSENT TO THIS SEARCH.

I'M INVOKING MY RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT.

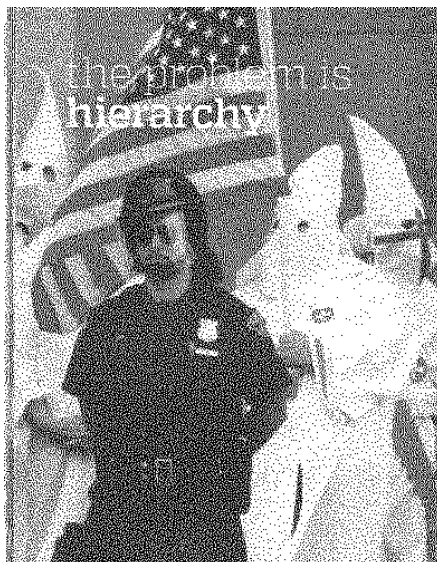
I WANT A LAWYER.

CIVIL LIBERTIES DEFENSE CENTER  
WWW.CLDC.ORG

Caption: Script cards for police interactions distributed to activists by the Civil Liberties Defense Center, a non-profit focused on defending civil rights

DON'T  
TALK  
TO THE  
POLICE

Caption: Front-page of an anarchist zine distributed at camp, titled 'Don't Talk To Police'. SproutDistro 2017



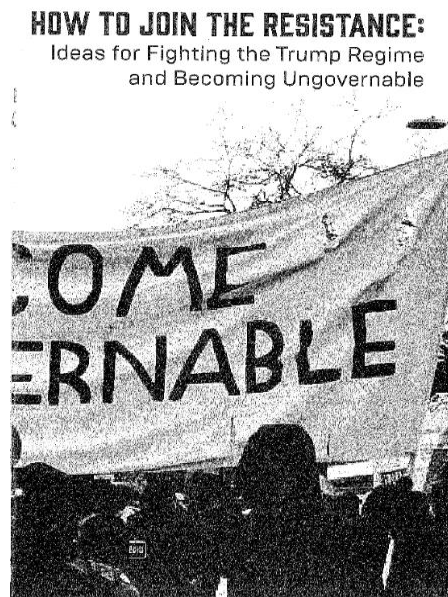
There are many different mechanisms for imposing inequality. Some depend on a centralized apparatus, like the court system. Others can function more informally, like good ol' boy networks and gender roles...

Some of these mechanisms have been almost completely discredited. Few still believe in the divine right of kings, though for centuries no other basis for society was even thinkable. Others are still so deeply ingrained that we cannot imagine life without them. Who can picture a world without property rights? Yet all of these are social constructs; they are real, but not inevitable. The existence of landlords and CEOs is no more natural, necessary, or beneficial than the existence of emperors.

All of these mechanisms developed together, reinforcing each other. The history of racism, for example, is inextricable from the history of capitalism; neither one is conceivable without colonization, slavery, or the color lines that divided workers and still determine who fills the world's prisons and shantytowns. Likewise, without the infrastructure of the state and the other hierarchies of our society, individual bigotry could never enforce systemic white supremacy. That a Black President can preside over these structures only stabilizes them; it is the exception that justifies the rule.

To put it another way: as long as there are police, who do you think they will harass? As long as there are prisons, who do you think will fill them? As long as there is poverty, who do you think will be poor? It is naive to believe we could achieve equality in a society based on hierarchy. You can shuffle the cards, but it's still the same deck.

Caption: Page from an anarchist zine distributed at camp titled "To change everything: An anarchist appeal", depicting police guarding KKK members at a rally. The zine is about employing anarchist habits in everyday life and dismantling oppressive hierarchies. CrimethInc 2019



*Caption: An anarchist zine with the common slogan “become ungovernable”, encouraging activists to foster everyday ungovernable community habits and resist repressive policies implemented by the Trump administration. ‘It’s Going Down’ 2019*

### To Profile and Colonize

Relevant to Theia’s encounter with racial profiling, a common occurrence in the field-site surrounding activists, I will attempt to analyze the concept of racial profiling and systemic racism intrinsic to American policing through a colonial lens, or rather settler colonial lens, as the basis for why police appear as ‘bastards’ for my interlocutors. In France, Fassin (2013) examines the colonial nature of policing black French citizens through Georges Balandier’s lens of the “colonial situation” (2013:44). Policing in this manner can be understood beyond the individualizing aspects of racist behavior from police, and instead on the historical and political surface. Fassin argues, distinguishing the “situation” and the “colonial”: the ““situation” [points] to the historical and political aspects”; while the ““colonial” [specifies] the conditions in which the situation [is] expressed” (2013:44). The “situation”, Fassin asserts, is necessary to understand policing in France. Here, I apply the same to Louisiana, as a former French colony (years 1682-1762/1801-1803) and a settler colonial territory under the US government.

The “colonial” is expressed by violent language evoked against activists of color in chapter five, with the workers employing the terms “jungle people” and “rats” or officers of the St. Martin Parish Sheriff Department’s evoking the violence of lynching. The “colonial” is also expressed by the “situation” of Louisiana’s mass incarceration of black residents and residents of color, commodifying inmate bodies for labor in a manner that resembles plantation slavery.

Another expression of the colonial is to be found with an uncovering by investigative reporters of thousands of US law enforcement workers belonging to closed internet forums for white nationalists, including the membership of a prison guard from Louisiana’s State Penitentiary (Angola) to 56 far-right extremist groups such as one titled “Ban the NAACP”.<sup>99</sup> In the US, it is common for individual cops to be blamed for racist behavior rather than to promote accountability on an institutional level. Micol Seigel (2017), a professor of history, argues that the ‘racial profiling’ concept only holds the individual officer accountable, that “improper police practice [could simply] be reformed, leaving policing intact” (2017:476), and that liberal histories of the US police fail to extend any critique of the systemic racism inherent to the state formation (2017:477), the historical “situation” in this context, as according to the state formation explored in chapter two.

Similarly, political scientist Naomi Murakawa (in Camp 2016:161) asserts that “there is no such thing as racial profiling”, for this would suggest that there could be *colorblind policing*, which there has never been. Like profiling, Murakawa defines *police brutality* as a hollow term, arguing that *all* encounters with police transpire under the threat of brutality (ibid.2016:161).



*Caption: A young white officer of the St. Martin Parish Sheriff’s Department clutching his firearm, while an activist woman of color was on her way to retrieve her ID from her car. Police found the group of activists leaving a restaurant after a direct action in the Atchafalaya Basin, asking for ID’s and warning activists to steer away from construction sites*

<sup>99</sup> The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) is a civil rights organization in the US, formed in 1909 by W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary White Ovington and Moorfield Storey, formed to advance African American rights. An excerpt from the source of this uncovering reads: “Hundreds of active-duty and retired law enforcement officers from across the United States are members of Confederate, anti-Islam, misogynistic or anti-government militia groups on Facebook, a Reveal investigation has found. [...] Reveal from The Center for Investigative Reporting discovered, they also read and contribute to groups such as “White Lives Matter” and “DEATH TO ISLAM UNDERCOVER.”” <https://www.revealnews.org/article/inside-hate-groups-on-facebook-police-officers-trade-racist-memes-conspiracy-theories-and-islamophobia/>.



Stripped of these individualizing factors, Murakawa (2016) argues that the racialized and colonial violence (or rather settler colonial) of policing appears as the very logic of policing and of the state, and here I argue, the state of Louisiana—“the logics of regulating the poor, of segregating, containing, and disciplining poor people of color, and quite often using them as a revenue source” (ibid.)—the latter concerning unpaid prison labor for corporations.

A line from the same page of the zine ‘To Change Everything’ resonates with the views of activists: “The history of racism is inextricable from the history of capitalism: neither one is conceivable without colonization, slavery, or the color lines that divided workers and still determine who fills the world’s prisons and shantytowns” (2019). Systemic racism is evident first with the historical and material colonization and disenfranchisement of black, indigenous and non-white Americans, and then with the governments disproportionate targeting of these marginalized communities with discriminatory laws, toxic pollution (e.g. DAPL and the Bayou Bridge Pipeline) and the past and present relegation of their bodies to unpaid labor force. For nuance, all policing agents are not simply ‘bastards’, ‘racists’, ‘slave patrols’, violent settlers or servants of rich oil CEO’s. Yet, since policing agents enforce the laws of their time—slavery, segregation, the Indian Removal Act, the expropriation of indigenous territories (eminent domain), and laws that protect crude oil for the manufacturing of plastics—activists perceive all policing agents as proxies for systemic racism, settler colonialism and the structural inequalities produced by neoliberal capitalism.



*Caption: A Lakota activist woman patrolling blockades at Standing Rock during the DAPL protests (2016-2017), illustrating the more militarized imagery of police that activists here are accustomed to. From fall 2016 to winter 2017, policing agents from five neighboring states of North Dakota administered water-cannons, attack dogs, rubber bullets, pepper-spray attacks and camp raids to harass and intimidate activists blocking construction of the DAPL pipeline from Indigenous Lakota territory. The original caption for the image reads “Defend The Sacred.” Another caption of this image on a social media post I found reads “Settler colonialism in one picture.” Photo by Ryan Vizzions 2016*

## THE LENS AS COUNTERPOWER: MAGGIE

Here, I will explore past and present lived-experiences of an activist with law enforcement in Louisiana. Maggie is a reporter and a longtime friend of activists here. There is a tension between policing and independent reporting, as police do not respond kindly when police brutality is documented. Amelia and Maggie reported from the Black Lives Matter protests surrounding the controversial 2016 homicide of a black man, 37-year old Alton Sterling, by Baton Rouge police officers in Louisiana. She recalls police marching in the streets with riot gear and gas masks, like shadowy figures of an imperial guard.

Maggie: “Those cops wanted to kill us (in 2016). There was this elderly black man who was coming from church. They ran towards him, making him run away. Then they pounded him into the ground. I took pictures, and the cops didn’t like that. Then they started marching down the street again, and I took pictures of them tackling other people. For a couple of blocks they would run, and then they would all line up. They eventually caught up and tackled me as well.” This lived-experience partly illustrates the threatening imagery of police internalized by activists. Documenting police encounters is a form of resistance by activists here in and of itself, in challenging the common imagery of police as ‘virtuous protectors’ that US law enforcement promulgates. Besides concrete encounters with police, policing agents were always lingering around activists, sometimes as phantasms; from Homeland Security helicopters to Department of Corrections officers temporarily employed by the Bayou Bridge company in cars with black-tinted windows.

One evening in the early springtime, Maggie was alone interviewing people along the pipeline route west of camp: “I was coming back to my car, and this undercover car comes like straight at me,” referring to an early encounter with officers hired by the company. “They got out with their hands on their guns. It said ‘Police’ on their shirts. They asked me a million times what I was doing, why I was there, who I was, who sent me. I asked like three times, and I said “if you would give me your ID I’ll give you mine.” While Maggie was being interrogated, she did not answer questions. Instead, she interrogated the officers, a confrontive behavior not typical of Americans when encountering police and one that signifies challenging authority and exercising ‘ungovernability’ in a sense.



*Caption: A homeland security helicopter that would often hover above camp surveilling the activities of activists*



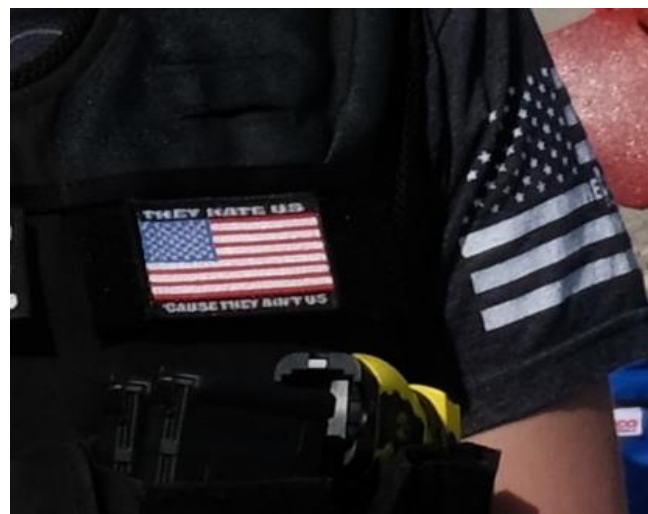
*Caption: From a direct action in 2018. The discovery that these were Department of Corrections officers employed by the company and Homeland Security Helicopters was made by investigative journalists.<sup>100</sup>*

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<sup>100</sup> Excerpt from a news article: “Shortly after the controversial Bayou Bridge pipeline received its final major permit to begin construction in Louisiana (January 2018), the head of the state’s Homeland Security office forwarded seemingly benign details on the activities of an environmentalist group opposing the pipeline to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, the State Police, and the National Guard. The FBI also received a copy.” Source: <https://theintercept.com/2018/03/01/louisiana-bayou-bridge-pipeline-protest/>.



*Caption: Common patriotic symbols advertised by local Louisiana police, here from a direct action in Calcasieu Parish in April 2018. 'Relentless Defender' (left) is a pro-Trump police apparel brand*



*Caption: The text reads 'They Hate Us Cause They Ain't Us', illustrating patriotic and conservative sympathies prevalent among southern police. The other flag (right) is a 'Blue Lives Matter' symbol, a controversial counter-movement to the 'Black Lives Matter' movement that attempts to assign a 'blue' racial identity to cops, calling opposition to police a 'hate crime'. This symbol could be traced locally as yard signs or posters supporting local law enforcement, illustrating the wider cultural support of police*

Maggie: “They wouldn’t identify themselves,” illustrating the dodgy presence of what activists later discovered were state agents hired by the Bayou Bridge company. “Finally they left.” These circumstances of women activists being harassed when they were out alone doing errands or reporting—mirroring somewhat the misogynistic culture of industry workers explored in chapter three—occurred several times during my fieldwork, the other instances with Amelia and Theia. I will now examine how policing agents contribute to the PR-imagery of fossil fuel companies.

### “Disseminators of Doubt”

Alongside Amelia, Maggie reported from the 2010 BP Oil Spill: “That’s when I started looking more deeply at what I do now, environmental justice issues... where industry will come in and just railroad communities to get whatever they want.” She recalls watching television at a friend’s house after the BP disaster. “They had a news conference. This lady from NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) was saying “All the oils

gone! It's a miracle!" We had no clue what she was talking about. We had just come in from our oil-covered boat. We saw oil-smothered dolphins, turtles... all this dying wildlife. There were fishermen who were sick. That really motivated me to start telling their stories, these people on the frontlines were really actually suffering. Meanwhile, the people who make the decisions for the population in general... their reports and actions were steered by corporate money."

On the corporate manipulation of narrative, Maggie says: "BP had all kinds of commercials and bought all the local news outlets new vans and equipment. They had some serious PR-firms out of DC and lobbying groups." The physical barring of independent media from accessing the most overwhelmed areas was carried out by the Coast Guard, another branch of policing agents (see Nixon 2011:273). The distortions of reality promulgated by a complicit media is part of what Robert Nixon terms "an army of doubt-disseminators" (2011:39), wherein a coalition of "Big Oil, Big Coal and Big Tobacco" work alongside lobbyists, politicians, right-wing media, fake facebook-citizens groups, business-friendly researchers, and law enforcement to engineer doubt surrounding topics like climate change, environmental disasters or the risks of smoking (ibid.).<sup>101</sup> Relevant to the Bayou Bridge Pipeline: investigative journalist Robert Galbraith uncovered the extensive activities of TigerSwan, a security firm comprised of military-veterans hired by Energy Transfer Partners at Standing Rock that employed counter-terror tactics, e.g. aerial surveillance, stalking protestors of Middle-Eastern descent and inserting infiltrators in resistance camps. Galbraith writes "the firm [is] behind a recent online astroturf campaign meant to generate grassroots support for the (Bayou Bridge) and undermine opposition through phony YouTube videos" (Galbraith 2018), illustrating the wider campaign of information distortion that the Bayou Bridge company utilizes.<sup>102</sup> I will now examine how local police took upon the role of doubt dissemination in the fieldsite.

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<sup>101</sup> Note: The strangest example of doubt-dissemination during my fieldwork was the hiring of paid-actors by the Louisiana energy company, Entergy, to fill a town-hall meeting in New Orleans and show support for their proposed gas-plant, leaving no space for concerned citizens. This gas-plant is a facility that would negatively impact a marginalized Vietnamese community of New Orleans, another issue that activists of the coalition mobilized against. Headline: "The New Orleans City Council will seek \$5 million in fines from Entergy New Orleans to sanction the company for its use of paid actors at public hearings related to its proposed power plant in New Orleans East." - [https://www.theadvocate.com/new\\_orleans/news/article\\_26cf222c-dc5e-11e8-b39b-57eda49cf4bd.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/new_orleans/news/article_26cf222c-dc5e-11e8-b39b-57eda49cf4bd.html)

<sup>102</sup> Excerpt from a news article on NewsMaven: "[At Standing Rock], we knew that these counter intelligence and movement disruption tactics were being used," said Dallas Goldtooth, the Keep It in the Ground organizer for the Indigenous Environmental Network, in a statement on Facebook. "Our devices would stop working for periods of time, hard drives would be cleared of information and footage, and from time to time camp security would identify infiltrators inside the camp who were working for Energy Transfer Partners." Source: <https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/tigerswan-counter-terrorism-and-nodapl-10-astonishing-revelations-Os8qb5NeQUaPZKAkoe0cQA/>.

## The Emblem of Trash

An example of how police, in this case the St. Martin Parish Sheriffs Department, and fossil fuel proponents attempt to discredit activists opposing the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, mirrors anthropologist Jason De León's (2015) ethnography on migrants that cross the Sonoran desert into the US. Arizona migration opponents and law enforcement create PR campaigns around the "trash" that migrants allegedly leave behind while crossing (2015:170), bearing discriminatory connotations that migrants *trash* the country.<sup>103</sup> For my interlocutors as activists rather than migrants, police raided encampments in the Atchafalaya swamp in early-autumn, tearing apart tents and confiscating equipment, despite activists having written permission by the landowners to defend the still un-appropriated land (eminent domain) from the pipeline company, in which the company was trespassing. After the raids, activists could not re-enter the swamps without risking additional felony charges. In one instance when they attempted to return, two of their boats were capsized by a larger police-boat speeding by and circling the activists on the Bayou Chene.<sup>104</sup> The St. Martin Parish Sheriff's department returned after activists were driven away to create a Facebook PR-campaign on what police claimed was trash left behind; highlighting personal belongings, buckets and life-vests.

The police campaign referred to the activists as "out-of-state protestors",<sup>105</sup> a term that as explored in chapter two holds roots in the discrediting of the civil rights activism of black communities in the 1960's by police (see Milstein 2015:103). A fact-checker website named GAIN ("Grow America's Fossil Fuel Infrastructure Now"), which describes itself as a fact-checker in "an era of fake news", a common message employed against Trump opponents, disseminated the story to defend the St. Martin Sheriff's Department (GAIN 2018).

The example of citizens of a pro-Trump conservative platform defending law enforcement illustrates the common American sentiment that casts police as virtuous protectors, though this is not mutually exclusive to Trump proponents. GAIN is another iteration of what Nixon (2011) terms "*disseminators of doubt*" (2011:39). This example illustrates how law enforcement and fossil fuel proponents retaliate against pipeline-opponents, arguably against reports of local police, in addition to Department of Corrections probation and parole officers, working for the pipeline company.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>103</sup> De León examines how these are artifacts with stories rather than trash; left behind by migrants who died while crossing or who lightened their load during the hostile journey through the Sonoran desert.

<sup>104</sup> Note: This actually aired on national television, as a TV news crew was present with activists and documented the transgression.

<sup>105</sup> Excerpt from the police departments post: "Since July, several out of state protestors have been residing in the Atchafalaya Basin area of St. Martin Parish in connection with the Bayou Bridge Pipeline project. More recently, they took up encampment in an area known as Bee Bayou. The alleged mantra of this group of protestors is that they are "water protectors" and are trying to preserve the waterways, terrain, and wildlife."

<sup>106</sup> Excerpt from a news article on The Intercept: "Ken Pastorick, communications director for the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, told The Intercept that the department's director authorized the officers to work on behalf of the Bayou Bridge pipeline as a



*Caption: A 'Water is Life' banner and a life-vest, belonging to activists. St. Martin Parish Sheriff's Department 2018*

Activists flipped the derogatory symbolism of trash by other means, adopting the collective name *Trash Punks* that they were given at a direct action in early spring. There, activists overheard officers signalling for back-up: “We’ve got a bunch of trash punks!” The humor of the statement lingered for activists, who had a proclivity to scavenge junkyards for direct action materials, who were clad in mud-crust boots, their clothing tattered and drenched in sweat; resembling lowly, hardworking proletarians. Activists adopted the name *Trash Punks* to lift trash as a force denoting the ungovernability of their bodies; their imposed lower- and working class configurations to that of police as class-traitors who prey upon the poor; and as *matter-out-of-place* that defies the purity of a plantation-like settler-society in which there are ruled and ruling. Meanwhile, police were ascribing an impure emblem to activists, akin to Mary Douglas’s ‘Purity and Danger’ (1966); appearing as unruly bodies of political agency endangering the order and purity of class hierarchies, in which the rights of the bourgeoisie and affluent upper-class that can simply purchase legislation to quell resistance reign supreme. However, the pejorative imagery of imputed to activists by police, of activists *trashing the landscape*, also functioned to redirect attention from the more substantial threats of leaks and industrial pollution, in favor of the industry employers of law enforcement here.<sup>107</sup>

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form of “extra-duty employment.” “They have the ability to enforce the law in Louisiana even when off-duty and working extra-duty security details,” he said.” Source: <https://theintercept.com/2018/08/22/recent-arrests-under-new-anti-protest-law-spotlight-risks-that-off-duty-cops-pose-to-pipeline-opponents/>

<sup>107</sup> Note: Activists successfully returned to the swamps not long after and gathered their belongings, despite being blocked in earlier attempts to do so.

Ahead, I will examine a direct action in the Atchafalaya swamps, illustrating activists utilizing bodily forms of resistance during an interaction with the Iberville Parish Sheriff's Department.

## A VEHICULAR BLOCKADE IN JULY

An interlocutor recalls: "We spent daaaaays answering craigslist ads for a junker-car we could choke road-access where they were drilling for the pipeline. We had limited money. We ended up with this old van that we modified for a lock-down that would get us from A to B. Then the day came. The sun was just peaking at six in the morning. We drove up the access road (the construction site road) and spotted a sheriff's car and security at the entrance. And we drove right past them! We reached the choke-point, got out, and hurried." A 'choke-point' is a site where access to an area can be cut off by a direct action blockade (authors input). Two activists locked down at this blockade. The interlocutor: "One of us locked down in the back of the car outside, the other in the front inside."<sup>108</sup> Homemade lock devices forged from steel pipes were deployed, in which the pipe is placed in an area such as the steering wheel and both hands of the person locking down reach in from each side and lock together with handcuffs and a release trigger only accessible from the inside.

The interlocutor: "Not more than a minute later the police officer gets out and looks around all baffled. He walks up to us. By the time they even realized we had done all this, we had already locked down within less than a half hour [laughter]. We overheard the security guard and officer arguing, pointing blame. The officer was busy organizing donuts into different boxes for the workers." The detail of Iberville Parish officers preparing donuts to distribute to workers illustrates a nuanced and less threatening image of local police the activists would encounter; and the detail of the officer and security guard bickering is told as a form of resistance itself, i.e. a tale of humiliating those who otherwise wield authority over citizens and demand to be taken seriously. This account illustrates the nuances of encounters with militarized police, officers hired by the company, and rural officers otherwise.

The interlocutor: "The temperature was soaring, and my friend needed to unlock." The temperature reached 40 degrees Celsius, which was only amplified by the humidity (authors input). The Interlocutor: "I supported her. She was arrested first. And myself... I discovered a hole in my camel bag of water. So, for five hours I didn't have water and the heat got more intense. The cops wouldn't let anyone get me water. Then this sheriff parked his truck right

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<sup>108</sup> Definition: The act of 'locking down' demands locking one's body in such a way that it is difficult for authorities to remove without the activists unlocking themselves willingly.



up to my face. I heard him assuring the workers that the air-conditioning unit pours out heat from the outside of his car. You know... pain compliance.” Pain compliance is a police method of administering painful stimulus to control subjects (authors input). The interlocutor: “Eventually, I blacked out! They had to get an ambulance out there. Felt like my body was doing its own resistance,” here referring to how a limp body is more difficult for authorities to carry away. To clarify, the pain compliance method of the Iberville Parish sheriff put the activist’s life in danger due to the already soaring temperatures. The example also illustrates the more perilous measures activists take to resist authority. The interlocutor: “While all of that was going on, since we were choking that road, the workers tried making another road. When they did that, they destroyed the neighbor’s yard and flooded it with mud.” The flooding of an Atchafalaya resident’s yard, using storytelling as a form of resistance, is told by activists as humiliating circumstances for the Bayou Bridge company.

### On Becoming Ungovernable

Concerning bodily forms of resistance by activists, e.g. locking down, blacking out, going limp, humiliating authority: Sherry Ortner’s analysis of protestants way of being in the world is somewhat applicable. Ortner (2005) analyzes protestants subjectivity as stemming from a complex of feelings and fears. Having one’s fate pre-destined or the threat of damnation is “the ultimate source of religious anxiety”, while ‘intense worldly activity’ that expresses obeying god and self-control is the solution for protestants (2005:37). In a reversed fashion, giving power to oppressive authority, having one’s fate governed by unjust laws appear as ultimate sources of anxiety for activists. Thus, direct action and resistance as the ‘intense worldly activity’ (2005) of activists holds cathartic dimensions; a means of exercising power and producing ungovernable bodies, i.e. defying a society overwhelmingly governed by arbitrary laws and subordinating social conventions.

In the interstices between their bleak realities, their grander acts of direct action and their microcosmic modes of resistance; activists are releasing themselves from the shackles of inequitable laws and social taboos in a society that glorifies law enforcement. They do so not temporarily or unconsciously like anthropologist Aihwa Ong’s (1987) women of a Malaysian factory, to refer to resistance studies, in which Malay women frequent spirit possessions to resist the capitalist power and patriarchy of non-Malay bosses. Rather, activists act upon the world intentionally through a multi-tiered resistance; weighing back against the capitalist modes of domination of the state and the oil industry that, as perceived colonizers of land and bodies, impose colonized states of governability.

In reality, activists are driven to place themselves in vulnerable and life-threatening positions outside of the domain of legality, since legality here is delineated by laws that criminalize protest and while failing to protect life-giving waterways as critical infrastructure. Activists cope with the harsh dimensions of wealth inequality and extractive violence through the humoristic distancing of memes, stories, slogans and political imagery that humiliates law enforcement or by making the task of policing more undesirable. The temporary privatization of off-duty police by the pipeline company exemplifies how private interests such as the Bayou Bridge Pipeline are put above the safety of Louisiana residents. Thus for the failures of electoral politics and in absence of policies and law enforcement that serve marginalized populations, and since laws can be purchased by a white elite, activists form ungovernable habits; operating outside of laws that prey upon the poor and shield the wealth-accumulation of the affluent class, such as this pipeline.

## SUMMARY

In sum, activists employ these community modes of ungovernability to challenge the cultural governmentality and structural relations imposed by policing agents of various ranks and departments. Ungovernability materializes through everyday forms of resistance, such as the slogan A.C.A.B in political imagery, as well as in its behavioral format of approaching all policing agents as ‘bastards’; disobeying the orders of policing agents, a form of challenging the oppressive class hierarchy that places officers above everyday citizens; documenting police to hold their actions accountable; and bodily resistance such as locking down. The cultural governmentality of policing appears through the social conventions encouraged by police, such as that citizens should rely on police to handle all dangerous situations instead of forming strong communities that would render top-down policing obsolete. The structural relations police enforce appear as the facilitation of environmental racism, such as the targeted pollution of St. James, in service of corporate interests.

## CONCLUSION

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## RESISTING IN THE SETTLER COLONIAL PRESENT

As of June 2019, the Bayou Bridge Pipeline is claimed to have commenced commercial operations after several dozen direct actions, temporary court-ordered injunctions against the company, and vehement opposition from Louisiana residents along the route; despite the conflicts of interests and overall the detrimental implications of this pipeline network.<sup>109</sup> Activists are still challenging the company in court for wrongful arrests by hired police officers and the gross infringement of civil and constitutional rights by laws felonizing protest. They are actively working to stop new petrochemical facilities in St. James, such as the Formosa Sunshine plastics facility, which the Bayou Bridge Pipeline would supply with crude oil.

Through the work of activists since Standing Rock, the Bayou Bridge Pipeline was delayed a year, allegedly costing the company billions; successfully changing their conditions by stopping DAPL, until president Trump's re-approval and plans to expand pipeline infrastructure in 2017.<sup>110</sup> In Louisiana, the route which initially was to cross the primary camp was altered, a feat actualised by an intricate solidarity network of activists and legal advocates. However, these lower-class activists of L'eau Est La Vie were the *only* residents able to resist the power of eminent domain, signifying the magnitude of coordinated efforts required to resist corporate interests in Louisiana. In an interview, Amelia reflects on why activist mobilization across the country has been stretched thin since Standing Rock:

*After Trump came in... he flipped the tables on purpose. I think that was the plan, following the shock doctrine. He fucked with people who were migrating... he fucked with muslims... he fucked with... you know what I mean? Everybody has had to just really be on the offensive on all these really different spaces. Humanity is really just on kind of a low right now. I don't think we've hit that rock bottom yet. But there are a lot of different places where good-hearted people are needed to fight and stand up for justice. So, I can see where and why a lot of people are being drawn away to these other fights.*

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<sup>109</sup> In a possible effort to appease shareholders, Energy Transfer Partners made the announcement of commercial operations in March 2019. However, activists documented ongoing construction of pump-stations along the route, meaning that the pipeline was not yet operational until the summer. Excerpt from a March 2019 article in the Times Picayune: "The Bayou Bridge Pipeline is now complete and slated to begin transporting oil between Texas and St. James Parish next week, the companies that own the controversial project have announced." Source: [https://www.nola.com/news/environment/article\\_6d2b011b-8887-5712-809d-280410ebb64c.html](https://www.nola.com/news/environment/article_6d2b011b-8887-5712-809d-280410ebb64c.html)

<sup>110</sup> Excerpt from a 2018 EcoWatch news article: "Roughly four years ago, [Energy Transfer Partners](#) (ETP) filed a federal application to build a 1,172 mile oil pipeline from North Dakota's Bakken shale across the U.S. to Illinois at a projected cost of \$3.8 billion. Before that application was filed, on Sept. 30, 2014, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe met with ETP to express concerns about the Dakota Access pipeline (DAPL) and fears of water contamination. Though the company, now known as Energy Transfer, had re-routed a river crossing to protect the state capital of Bismarck against oil spills, it apparently turned a deaf ear to the Tribe's objections." Source: <https://www.ecowatch.com/energy-transfer-dapl-banks-losses-2622357775.html>.

In the introduction chapter of this thesis I argued that my interlocutors use their politics of water and resistance to the Bayou Bridge Pipeline as a vehicle to dismantle prevalent structures, norms and systems of perceived settler colonial provenance in the US: heteropatriarchy, heteronormativity, institutional (or environmental) racism, Eurocentrism and the ideology of (extractive) capitalism, what I refer to as *resisting “in the settler colonial present”*, applying Veracini’s term (Veracini 2015) to the context of indigenous-led resistance in Louisiana. Settler colonialism in this manner appears a structure, per Wolfe’s positing (1999, 2006). The eliminatory logic of settler colonialism, I suggest, appears in structural arrangements, such as altering the DAPL route from a white majority community in Bismarck, North Dakota, to Standing Rock; violating treaty laws that grant protection to Lakota indigenous nation sovereignty. These structural arrangements are further evidenced by projects of settler-defined sovereignty such as the border wall, or projects of fossil fuel expansion undermining the rights to clean-water of indigenous and other impoverished communities of color such as St. James, reproducing settler colonial class hierarchies placing white oligarchs above the poor.

I have traced the power dynamics of this *present* by analyzing *extractive violence* and *erasure*—the neoliberal policies, capital-accumulation, conflicts of interest, public relations, cultural sponsorship of affluent white fossil fuel proponents—in relation to the forms of resistance activists deploy, another element of these dynamics. If the violence of the settler colonial *past* is marked by plantation slavery, a once normalized institution from which white settlers benefitted from the subordination of black and brown bodies; then the *present* of extractive violence, I suggest, is marked by the same racialized aspects concerning the privileged positions of those benefitting from the targeting of lower-class communities of color with extractive projects. The political belongings are shaped and deeply affected by the violence that materializes from these alienating systems and norms.

I have argued that the injustices of environmental pollution are rooted in deeper systemic logics and structural arrangements, referring to Wolfe’s (1999, 2006) definition of settler colonialism as a prevalent structure that renders the deliberate elimination of indigenous peoples and other commonly oppressed people of color as “uncontroversial” for the majority population, i.e. the settler-majority. For this reason, activists mobilize a *new* politics of water, predicated not solely on the protection of vital waterways from harmful infrastructure, but in dismantling and providing alternatives to what they experience as harmful dominant Euro-American class-based systems and norms; which I suggest are the underpinnings of the phenomenon of environmental racism and polluted waterways, in which

these injustices inhabit longstanding structural arrangements by settler-colonizers. The mobilization under the banner of fluid identities and the formation of decolonized spaces such as this resistance camp are prime empirical examples of these alternatives that activists demonstrate.

In chapter two, I contextualized the history of the landscape for the succeeding chapters. I argued that activists navigate their surrounding landscapes with the concepts of “Stolen Land” or “AmeriKKKa”, exploring these as what I refer to as *linguistic modes of dissent*; their resisting of settler sovereignty and the dominant narratives of European settlers, marked by insidious undercurrents of white supremacy, expansion and genocide. I analyzed forms of extractive violence and erasure with the discussion of Cancer Alley and St. James, the region of impoverished black communities that the Bayou Bridge Pipeline would feed into for the manufacturing of plastics and consumer commodities. I argued, analyzing the white supremacist and class-based aspects of environmental pollution, that erasure materializes through public relation attempts to normalize and frame industrial expansion as “benign” and “uncontroversial” endeavors, akin to the settler belief of e.g. Manifest Destiny.

In chapter three, I analyzed how industry ‘man-camps’ as hyper-masculine spaces exist as perceived moral, social and political opposites to activists. Activists mobilize under the banner of fluid identities while industry man-camps epitomize the broader settler-society, wherein fixed-identities based in the gender-binary are recognized and ascribed protective rights. I analyzed the gendered dimensions of extractive violence, with the sexual violence surrounding man-camps in the Bakken Oil Fields from where the DAPL-infrastructure transports crude oil. I examined the gendered aspects of the creation of ideological threats by the US government and fossil fuel proponents, whereby non-violent leftist eco-terrorist spaces led by indigenous women are framed as top-priority terror threats, above far-right white supremacist or anti-abortionist movements with casualties; illustrating the broader structures activist women of intersecting backgrounds resist.

In chapter four, I analyzed how activists of marginalized backgrounds configure kinship on the social and political level, which otherwise manifests as a result of enduring the hardships of poverty and criminalization of activism. This kinship, integral to the glue of their resistance, is also a form of survival among activists as marginalized peoples from communities scattered by colonization. As people marginalized and alienated by settler-majority values—such as the historical and present eliminatory logic of dispossessing indigenous communities—they form strong social and political bonds while resisting fossil fuel expansion.

In chapter five, I analyzed how activists mobilize their politics of water against the extractive industry through histories of resistance to settler colonialism and its processes of dispossession, surrounding vital waterways in the region. This also explores how they create temporal connections to the landscape and how, as solidarity networks, they become materially and historically inseparable; what I refer to as *fluid entanglements*. This is further evidence of their inter-ethnic efforts and positionality of opposing settler colonialism as a structure in the present.

In chapter six, I examined interactions between activists and police to illustrate how activists form community habits of ungovernability. I argue that they produce so-called *ungovernable bodies* to resist oppressive settler-colonial class hierarchies, common social conventions of governmentality in which police are depicted as virtuous protectors, and structural relations imposed by law enforcement such as forms of modern slavery and environmental destruction. Using their politics of water and resistance as a vehicle to achieve this, I argue that this is further evidence of activists dismantling norms and hierarchies of settler colonial provenance.

## SHAPING A NEW POLITICS OF WATER

In conceiving the land around them as shaped by ongoing dispossessions against indigenous, black, brown and non-heteronormative bodies—a result of industrial expansion and in extension the politics of the settler-majority government—indigenous activists alongside their allies are not experiencing the violence of a *post*-colonial or post-racial society. They navigate a dismal landscape absent of social equilibrium, of systems and values pertaining to a white-settler majority: capitalism, heteropatriarchy, environmental racism, white supremacy. Aside from direct action against pipelines, activists challenge norms predicated on settler-colonial hierarchies, in which European-descendants and their adherents continue to pillage and enjoy luxury from processes dispossessory to indigenous communities and other communities of color; lethal operations cloaked in words of salvation, progress and patriotism.

Gas-flares loom ominously over the fence-line neighborhoods of Cancer Alley; cancerous plumes from industrial columns suffocate their airways. Oil-spills toxify the waterways from which activists draw life and work to protect, such as the Cannonball River, the Great Lakes, the Bayou Lafourche, the Atchafalaya, the Mississippi or the Gulf. Impoverished rural communities such as St. James are surrounded by industry and are provided no evacuation route in the event of industrial and natural disasters. Activists and their allies are further imperiled as impoverished residents due to a widespread in-access to

healthcare in the US, requiring solidarity networks to survive the hardships and structural alienations of settler-society. Activists such as Henry have lost employment from defending their communities from DAPL, and activists such as Theia and many others are wounded from the traumas of enduring police brutality and discrimination, whereby legislation and police protect the interests of wealthy oligarchs.

Yet, amidst the harsh dimensions of their realities and of a society in turmoil, activists are carving new political trajectories through the landscape, like the unruly currents of a river. They mobilize a politics of water based in disavowing settler-norms which they perceive as causative of these eliminatory processes; congealing across intersecting waterways and temporalities, to refer back to chapter five. This politics of water diverges from previously studied forms (Chance 2018; Muehlebach 2017; Yazzie 2018) due to the complexities and heterogeneity of political circles involved. It is due to state-sanctioned repression and common belligerents of unjust authority, such as the settler-majority government under the Trump administration, that L'eau Est La Vie and their network centers on issues ranging from the protective rights of the environment, of indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, the freedom and safety of global south migrants, the civil rights of black Americans and the protective rights of LGBTQ+ communities and women of several backgrounds.

Concretely, activists here are resisting the structural arrangements of white oligarch's, in which environmental racism and settler colonialism take tangible forms as infrastructure, by forming their own arrangements of spaces led by women of color and empowering of people from marginalized backgrounds. In mobilizing under the interethnic and interclass banners of fluid identities alongside two-spirit, queer, transgender, and femme allies; the ungovernability of indigenous and anarchistic self-determination; decolonization and the undoing of settler norms; and the leadership of movement mothers; I argue that activists have constructed a new politics of water outlined by anti-capitalist and anti-colonial modes of resisting the ventures of the US government and the oil industry, the conjoined apparatus that enshrines extractive resources with the protective status of "critical infrastructure" while contaminating the waters of the poor.

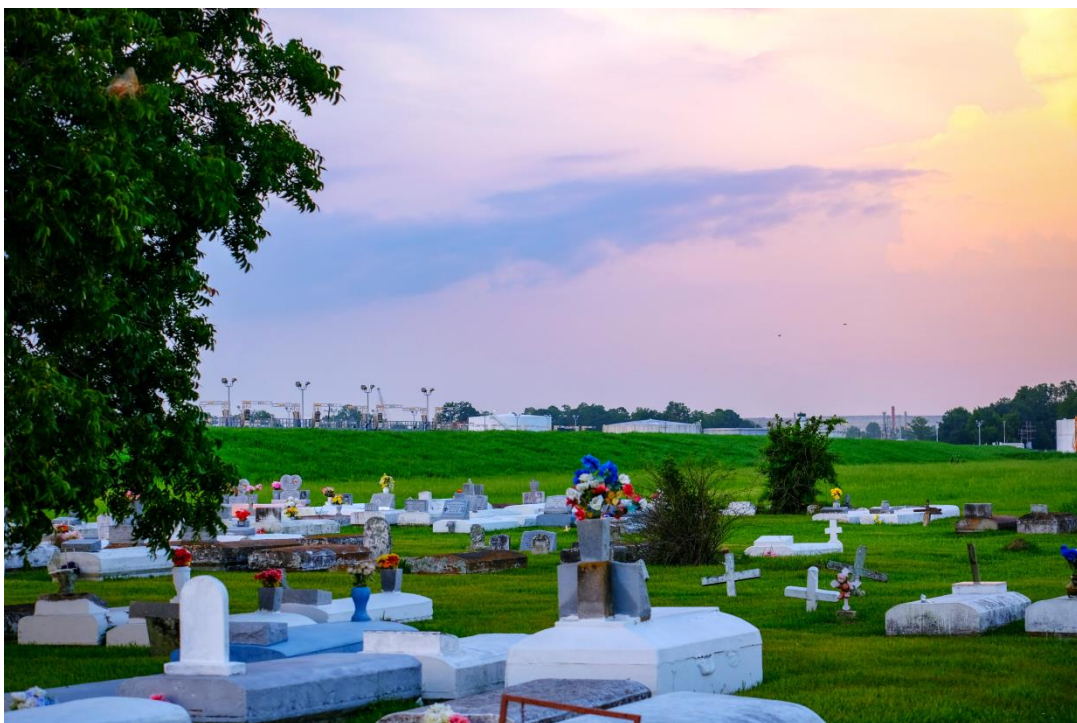


## PORTRAITS OF THE FIELDSITE

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*Caption: Weathered crude oil storage tanks fenced off on privatized land, adjacent to the St. James neighborhood of Burton Lane; the precise region of the Bayou Bridge Pipelines terminus where its oil will be exported to local industry*



*Caption: A neighborhood cemetery by Burton Lane (St. James) surrounded by industry. The distant grey hill to the center-right is an unstable waste-pile wall containing 720 million gallons of trace radioactive process water for the Mosaic Agrochemical company*



*Caption: Excess pieces of pipe for the Bayou Bridge Pipeline in the southwest prairielands, west of L'eau Est La Vie*



*Caption: An activist in the Atchafalaya looking at the sky-pod tree-sit, a day before the first police raids occurred*



*Caption: Two activists blocking a construction vehicle in the Atchafalaya*



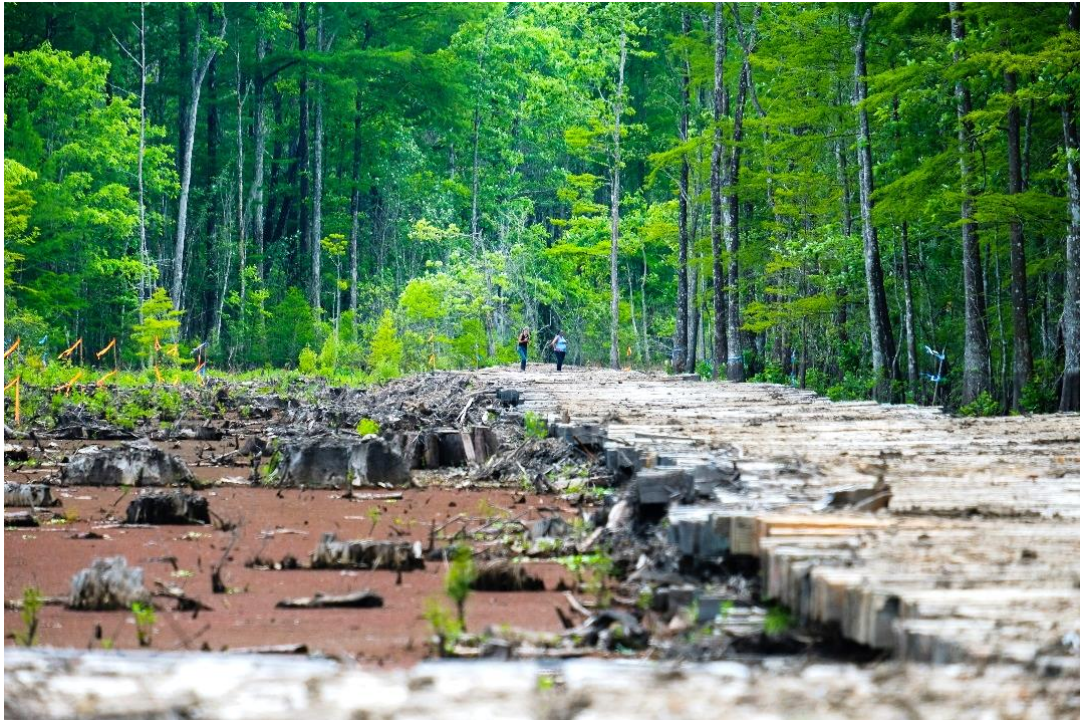
*Caption: Various equipment articles belonging to activists, at one of the temporary encampments in the Atchafalaya Basin*



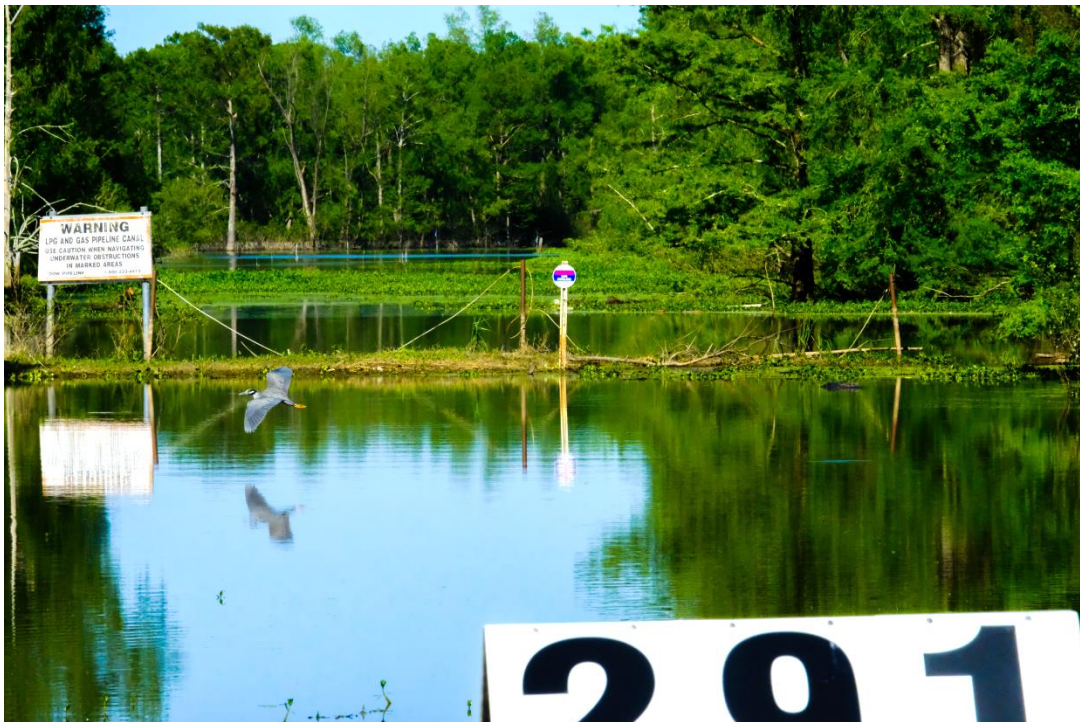
*Caption: Columns of Bald-Cypress trees near the encampments in the Atchafalaya*



*Caption: The eyes of an alligator peering from the waters of the Bayou Chene*



*Caption: Activists walking down an easement in the Atchafalaya, surveying construction and the stumps of once giant Bald-Cypress trees cut for the Bayou Bridge Pipeline route*



*Caption: Swamp-ecology along the Bayou Bridge Pipeline route and old Liquefied Petroleum Gas pipeline routes in the Atchafalaya. Here, a blue heron flies to the center-left while an adult alligator floats to the center-right*



*Caption: A L'eau Est La Vie council woman in the Atchafalaya raising an abalone shell with sage, performing the ceremony of smudging in support as Bayou Bridge workers cut trees near activists occupying trees in the path of the pipeline route, endangering the lives of activists with this form of intimidation. Photo by an activist*



*Caption: One of the early Direct Actions in April. Here, an activist is wearing a variant of a crawfish costume in a political theater meant to distract the workers*



*Caption: An activist taking an early morning coffee atop a structure at camp*



*Caption: Various art banners gifted to L'eau Est La Vie by activists across the country*



*Caption: Activists taking a day off on the Gulf Coast during a quiet period, here, enjoying lawn-chairs in a beach dumpster after dumpster-diving for goods*



*Caption: Activists enjoying a fire on an empty Gulf Coast beach, with the Milky Way rising in the background*





*Caption: The Milky Way galactic center rising above L'eau Est La Vie*



*Caption: A storm approaching one of the "Standby" locations outside of the Atchafalaya*



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