

Racial Ecologies

EDITED BY
Leilani Nishime and
Kim D. Hester Williams

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giovanni singleton, "Day 49," from the collection *Ascension* (Denver: Counterpath, 2012), reprinted by permission of the author.

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FOREWORD

RACIAL ECOLOGIES

A View from Ethnic Studies

CURTIS MAREZ

During the historic dot-com bubble, that period of explosive growth and enormous profits in the technology industry that began around 1995 and burst in 2001, I taught at the University of California, Santa Cruz, situated between the strawberry fields of Watsonville and Silicon Valley. At a time of shrinking state investments in public education and as part of his aspiration to globalize the humanities, our dean advised faculty to seek patrons by researching and writing hagiographies of the new high-tech elite. By contrast, the working-class students of color in my large undergraduate lecture course on US popular culture pressed me to research the Homies.

The last few decades have witnessed an explosion of collectible plastic figurines for sale, and leading the way have been the Homies, a popular line of small, plastic figurines representing the largely Chicanx inhabitants of an imaginary barrio somewhere near Silicon Valley. These finely detailed and painted figures of various barrio types, with names like Smiley, Shy Girl, and Spooky, were widely sold in gumball machines, at swap meets, on eBay, and on the Homies official website. Each of the almost two hundred figures has a name and a brief biography, and over one hundred million of them have been sold. Their creator, David Gonzales, developed the Homies merchandising empire in his office in Oakland, California, and he has based many of the figures on people from his hometown of San Jose, the diverse metropolis next to Silicon Valley.

The small brown dolls represent suggestive, iconic responses to the Silicon Valley financial bubble and the euphoric fantasies of technological and environmental progress that have accompanied it. The Homies invite us to reconsider the ways in which ideas and fantasies about high tech have

emerged from material conditions of production that depend on poisoning people and their environments. Collectively, the figurines make up a particular neighborhood. The Homies' universe is a world-building project that indirectly references the toxic forms of segregation and uneven development that have accompanied high-tech industries. Silicon Valley, for example, is characterized by the contrast between the exclusive neighborhoods of the wealthy and the working-class barrios, many situated near Superfund sites created by the high-tech industry's dumping of toxic waste. The Homies thus represent the seeming intractability of spatial segregation, inequality, and environmental racism in Silicon Valley, an interpretation supported by Gonzales's new line of zombie Homies, which suggest the conditions of living death experienced by so many in the area.¹

As representations of the low-wage workers of color in and around Silicon Valley, the Homies draw attention to the historic toxicities of labor segregation. The dot-com bubble depended on an expansion of low-wage jobs and the employment mainly of migrant women in Silicon Valley, the US-Mexico border region, and other parts of the world, particularly China. Many low-wage jobs in semiconductor factories and other high-tech manufacturing facilities place workers at risk of exposure to highly toxic chemicals. Since the Cold War, high-tech companies in Silicon Valley have been aggressively opposed to organized labor, becoming what David Bacon has called "laboratories for developing personnel-management techniques for maintaining a union-free environment." As a result, tech companies in the Valley remain largely nonunionized, and low-paid workers have few options but to accept the risks of illness, disability, and premature death from toxic chemical exposure. As David Naguib Pellow and Lisa Sun-Hee Park argue in *The Silicon Valley of Dreams*, these risks extend to the even more precariously situated workers in the "periphery jobs in printed circuit board, printer, and cable assembly, including home-based piecework and prison labor," disposable workers performing dangerous tasks.²

In response to some of the inequalities in Silicon Valley, low-wage immigrant workers have begun to organize unions and environmental organizations. Examples include the successful organization of janitorial workers at Apple and other companies. Environmental justice organizations, such as the Santa Clara Center for Occupational Safety and Health and the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, have fought to protect workers from exposure to industrial toxins.³

In this regard, the high-tech industry in Silicon Valley echoes the agricultural industry it partly succeeded. For those who profit, and for consumers

who buy into it, the growth of the Silicon Valley high-tech economy has sustained an optimistic ideology of progress through technology. The promoters of the dot-com bubble projected that the high-tech economy would transcend many of the limitations of the industrial age. Silicon Valley companies claimed that theirs was a "clean, postindustrial, post-smokestack" enterprise representing progress over not only heavy industry but also the region's agricultural and canning industries.⁴ As Pellow and Park point out, however, both farm workers and high-tech workers are vulnerable to toxic chemical exposures. Thus struggles over environmental racism in Silicon Valley share common ground with movements to organize farm workers, particularly the efforts by Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers, who were also active in support of Silicon Valley janitors.

The Homies would be at home in the pages that follow. Drawing on themes and methods familiar from critical ethnic studies, the contributors to *Racial Ecologies* persuasively demonstrate that environmental concerns are intertwined with differences of race, indigeneity, class, gender, and nation.

In the preface to a special issue of *American Quarterly* edited by Clyde Woods on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, I asked, "What is a disaster? To what extent is disaster 'exceptional,' and to what extent is it the norm? Does the term refer only to the moment when the levees broke, or does it also signify the political economic context that preceded the hurricane and the government response?"⁵ As the contributors to this volume suggest, and as recent indigenous opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline reminds us, ecological disasters are historic and ongoing features of colonialism, capitalist resource extraction, and racialized and gendered labor exploitation, from Puerto Rico to New Zealand and beyond.

Racial Ecologies also suggests that, assumptions of environmental progress notwithstanding, some of the most rapacious forms of resource extraction are occurring in the present. Revising Marx's concept of "primitive accumulation," which frames resource plundering as part of the prehistory of capitalism, David Harvey instead uses the term "accumulation through dispossession" to describe the ways in which environmental theft and degradation are persistent features of capitalism across time and space.⁶ The contributors to this volume foreground ongoing antiracist, anticolonial struggles over the extraction of resources such as coal, natural gas, and oil. Indeed, this book suggests that different energy industries have historically mediated between settler colonialism and what Cedric Robinson famously theorized as racial capitalism.⁷

Racial Ecologies further reminds us that labor exploitation is an environmental issue. Historically, all sorts of racialized and gendered workers—slaves, indentured servants, farm workers, prisoners, and factory workers—have been exposed to toxins and subjected to environmental degradations. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo-American settlers in what is now the US Southwest appropriated and despoiled Native land while attacking indigenous ecological epistemologies and practices and substituting settler modes of property and land use. Or, to revise George Lipsitz's famous concept, settlers developed a sort of possessive investment in white ecology.⁸ Settler-colonial land appropriations made Indian labor vulnerable to exploitation. From about 1850 to 1870, during the formative period of the modern oil industry that Southern California settlers built on indigenous land and resources, the downtown Los Angeles plaza was the site of Indian slave auctions, where displaced indigenous peoples who had been arrested as vagrants were auctioned to the highest bidder as indentured servants. (Indian slavery occurred within the lifetimes of many of the early twentieth-century oil barons, not to mention the first producers and viewers of Hollywood Westerns.)⁹

Settler colonialism, environmental destruction, and racialized labor exploitation also come together in the Israeli occupation of Gaza, which displaces Palestinians from their land, poisons Palestinian water, destroys Palestinian agriculture, and situates Palestinians as migrant farm workers.¹⁰ Most of the farm workers, including many children, in the occupied territories are undocumented Palestinians.¹¹ It is estimated that ten thousand Palestinians work the fields in the Jordan Valley year-round, and an additional twenty thousand work there during the date and grape harvests. Palestinian farm workers labor without union representation or protection from occupational hazards, including exposure to pesticides banned in Europe. And about 11 percent of Palestinian farm workers work on settlement land that originally belonged to their families.¹²

Different chapters in *Racial Ecologies* analyze related intersections of environmental violence and labor exploitation in agricultural fields, factories, and computer assembly plants. At the same time, this volume brings into relief indigenous, racialized, and gendered ecological ideas and practices that are often at odds with—and rendered invisible within—mainstream environmental movements and perspectives. African slaves, for example, emerge as fugitives in colonialist representations of the landscape, modeling relationships between the natural and the social that are opaque to European Enlightenment thinking. Moving from the philosophical to the

practical, other authors examine gardening among Africans and the African diaspora, from Johannesburg to Detroit, as a means of antiracist, anticolonial survival, while still others examine creative environmental coalitions and strategies developed by working-class people of color.

An important theme in *Racial Ecologies* is the everydayness of ecological destruction and its consequences for food, water, and air. This is particularly true with regard to climate change, whose effects can sometimes be difficult to perceive and appreciate in the flow of everyday experience. Min Hyoung Song's chapter examines how climate change "alters experiences of the everyday," tapping into a pervasive but ill-defined "feeling of unease and a creeping sense that the relationship between humans and things is changing."

The everydayness of racial ecologies recalls a foundational concept in cultural studies: Raymond Williams's definition of culture as a whole way of life, including the vernacular cultural work of surviving and resisting ecological destruction, through gardening, singing, drumming, protests, and art. Many of the chapters here further suggest the significance of cultural studies as a critical optic that makes imaginative connections among peoples, places, and struggles.

The volume concludes with a group of chapters that discover critical insights for understanding racial ecologies in examples of speculative culture. Elsewhere, Julie Sze has written that "environmental activists, writers, critics and artists engage pollution across space and time using imagination and cultural ideas. . . . Imagination is a key resource in responding to environmental problems."¹³ The provocative readings of speculative literature and film in this volume support and extend Sze's view that speculative fictions provide vital resources for understanding the scale of environmental problems.

NOTES

- 1 Curtis Marez, *Farmworker Futurism: Speculative Technologies of Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 172–77.
- 2 David Naguib Pellow and Lisa Sun-Hee Park, *The Silicon Valley of Dreams: Environmental Injustice, Immigrant Workers, and the High-Tech Global Economy* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 85.
- 3 David Bacon, "The New Face of Union Busting," *Stories and Photographs by David Bacon*, 1999, <http://dbacon.igc.org/Unions/ozubusto.htm>; Pellow and Park, *The Silicon Valley of Dreams*.
- 4 Pellow and Park, *The Silicon Valley of Dreams*, 18.
- 5 Curtis Marez, "What Is a Disaster?," in "In The Wake of Hurricane Katrina," special issue of *American Quarterly* 61:3 (September 2009), x.

- 6 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 7 Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
- 8 For Lipsitz's theorization of "the possessive investment in whiteness," see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).
- 9 Curtis Marez, "Looking beyond Property: Native Americans and Photography," *Rikkyo American Studies* 29 (March 2007): 9–28.
- 10 Saree Makdisi, "Outsides," *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 15–93.
- 11 "Ripe for Abuse: Palestinian Child Labor in Israeli Agricultural Settlements in the West Bank," Human Rights Watch, April 13, 2015, www.hrw.org/report/2015/04/13/ripe-abuse/palestinian-child-labor-israeli-agricultural-settlements-west-bank.
- 12 Ouessale El Assimi, "Palestinian and Migrant Agricultural Workers in Isreal and the Settlements, February 2011, www.agricultures-migrations.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/20140226_PalestinianMigrantAgriculturalWorkersInIsraelSettlementsOuessale.pdf.
- 13 Julie Sze, "Scale," in *Keywords for Environmental Studies*, ed. Joni Adamson, William A. Gleason, and David N. Pellow (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 179.

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CHAPTER ONE

"WE ARE THE LAND, AND THE LAND IS US"

*Indigenous Land, Lives, and Embodied
Ecologies in the Twenty-First Century*

DIAN MILLION

On April 1st, 2016, tribal citizens of the Standing Rock Lakota Nation and ally Lakota, Nakota, & Dakota citizens, under the group name "Chante tin'sa kINANZI Po," founded a Spirit Camp along the proposed route of the bakken oil pipeline, Dakota Access. The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), owned by Energy Transfer Partners, L.P., is proposed to transport 450,000 barrels per day of bakken crude oil (which is fracked and highly volatile) from the lands of North Dakota to Patoka, Illinois.

STATEMENT, CAMP OF THE SACRED STONES, 2016

The death of a traditional food system is the death of a nation . . . physically and culturally. We can and must protect and restore practices that can make us healthy and well as indigenous people.

SECOND GLOBAL CONSULTATION ON THE RIGHT TO
FOOD AND FOOD SECURITY FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES,
NICARAGUA, SEPTEMBER 7-9, 2006

i loved the fish
and now the fish are scarce here
i think i must believe it will better further north
at home whatever place you cannot bear to see stripped not
always somewhere else
what is left is sacred no reason is enough
no one can tell me this will not be about the water my

frantic love
laughs out loud
tells them not to spray paint their lawns green

DIAN MILLION

THE Standing Rock Lakota's 2016 effort to protect the Mni Sose, the Missouri River, from the Dakota Access Pipeline rallied Indigenous peoples and myriad ecological warriors of different stripes worldwide. In many ways, Standing Rock presents us with a heretofore unimagined assemblage in solidarity to protect water, the source of life on this planet. The Lakota people led with a powerful prayer of hope. As the winter of 2016 set in with unprecedented blizzard conditions, Donald Trump, a New York real estate baron, was elected president of the United States, and Energy Transfer Partners, the Dakota Access pipeline's corporate sponsors, prevailed. The subsequent drilling beneath the Missouri River (at Lake Oahe) was an act of rape, a violence that ignored Standing Rock's long-embodied sovereignty in that Lakota place. The amount of militarized police mobilized against the allied Lakota Water Protectors to "finish the job" testifies loudly to the ongoing matrix of uneven power relations between the United States and the Lakota. These are relations that Standing Rock has negotiated and struggled with for over a century.¹

Now, in late December 2017, the United States is again poised to invade an Indigenous place, Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit (the sacred place where life begins), as it is known in Gwich'in Athabaskan, and in English as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). The porcupine caribou calving grounds that have sustained a way of life for millennia are about to go under the knife, casually sacrificed as an add-on to a tax bill that few have read. Again, this move is about oil, and need, and places that are not imaginable to most of the citizens of the United States (and Canada).

Any appeal in this moment to liberal "human" rights for the Indigenous can never bring the entirety of the Gwich'in or Standing Rock people's full relations to entities like rivers, air, land, and other beings into its logic. A just inclusion of the nonhuman in this place already exists under Lakota law that far exceeds any "rights"-based appeal for states to be better actors. Thus, at Standing Rock, the Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota obeyed their own sacred law, their ages-old responsibilities that they do not shirk. These Indigenous

laws are often in direct opposition to national and international laws, whose primary responsibility is to protect the "property" of global enterprise and a settler imperative of emptying sacred places of Indigenous relations. This is settler colonialism as it is lived in our Indigenous places now, in this moment. The stepped-up intensity of our Indigenous-led resistance movements—Standing Rock, Idle No More in Canada, and the Gwich'in's defense of Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit—should be understood as decision points, moments when we, as inhabitants, victims, and recipients of benefits wrought by the destruction of our own conditions for life on this planet, might do something different. It is critical that we imagine a future for more than "just us."

In this chapter, I join in conversation with others who foreground our lives lived, in different locations, ones that come from our racialized, gendered, and class experiences of ecological life and death in the presence of globalized capital. I seek first to acknowledge our relations as we come together, in this collection, rather than to just identify differences. At the same time, I believe that there is great worth in learning from the interstices, rivulets, and streams that represent meetings and differences that our peoples' histories and different economic, political, and cultural positions give us. The Indigenous peoples of this continent hold up a difference that is not fully captured by the matrix of race and "ecology." I enter the conversation titled "Racial Ecologies" by problematizing its terms. This chapter seeks to present Indigenous experience in its ability to complicate what we imagine as "justice" if we cannot imagine our relations. I first examine the myth of our Indigenous absence but racialized presence in the heart of capitalism. I then turn to the land, to argue for what Indigenism means where it can be read, not through any pristine or primordial lens, but in its worth as a different matrix of values. I do so that we might ask harder questions about what "ecology" is to any equitable, safe, or healthy lives we might desire. I end with a discussion of the relations of Indigenous survivance and presence in an Arctic "last frontier." Imagined as a great empty space, the Arctic is actually the site of one of the oldest ongoing struggles in North America.

HUBS

One increasingly antithetical split created in our minds is that there is an "urban" and a "rural." What exactly do these terms mean? In the 2016 US presidential election, that split was imagined by one political party as a racial and class divide, between "multicultural" and "educated" white urban

dwellers and poor rural uneducated "whites." We should be suspicious of this oversimplification.

In the configurations of race, class, and gender that map the megacities that now cover huge swaths of the United States, Indigenous peoples are disappeared. In the statistics that account for the racial and economic fabric of the United States, the racialization of American Indian and Alaska Native peoples disappears them. These cities rose in the ashes of Indigenous places and gained their prosperity from capitalizing on the same abundance that nourished our economies for thousands of years. These megacities, the "urban," now serve as hubs for a capitalism that operates transnationally and globally. These are places that are served up as imaginary nodes of progress, cited as epitomes of "freedom" for a mobile "creative" class.

In 2002, Richard Florida, the economist author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, graphically illustrated five major cities, with their "creative" classes surrounded by poorer, suburban "service" classes, and with small pockets of "working class" residents in their peripheries. These "class" geographies reflect the intensity of financial centers, surrounded by those there to service them while being pushed to the periphery, unable to live in the intensified gentrification created by housing-market values and shifting racial codes.² This core embedded in these inner cities represent "creative class" jobs and housing that are 73.8 percent white.³ The racial and multicultural are mostly accounted for in "service class" jobs, which they are often pushed into once white suburbs are transformed by immigration, while any "working class" thins.

In the United States and Canada, capitalist interests have sought to represent their labor policies as benign among peoples pushed into diaspora. Capitalism in North America presents in the establishment of *multicultural* democracies that have promised equity, progress, and opportunity for all. This benign reading of capitalism has become eclipsed in the twenty-first century as the facts of capital's voracious needs and the violence of resource wars have now pushed myriad peoples into the realities of established settler-colonial xenophobia.

The Indigenous peoples of the North American continent are not represented in these megacities (even when they are greatly present) because they are associated with another narrative, that of "frontiers" and of a past rather than a future. Indigenous peoples, characterized as the primitive past, anchor the narratives of progress that built these megacities on their lands, cities that disappear their difference within the hierarchies that keep our capitalist relations in place. Indigenous peoples are very present in these cities and the environments that they are also a part of. A US Census report

states that "in 2010, the majority of the American Indian and Alaska Native alone-or-in-combination population (78 percent) lived outside of American Indian and Alaska Native areas." In this same report much is made of race: "Nearly half of the American Indian and Alaska Native population reported multiple races."⁴ The US Census produces a "rationalized" statement of the nation-state's biopolitical interest in the management of its "populations." In the above assessment, the United States declares that the population deemed "American Indian and Alaskan Native" statistically exceeds a state expectation of its place and composition. It is a "population" that exceeds the boundaries of its colonization and its racialization. When the myriad peoples of Turtle Island were colonized, they were rationalized, singularly reduced to a race, "Indian," putting a numerical quantity on their bountiful multiplicity.

The implication of this constant numerical assessment of the assimilation of Indigenous peoples reveals an ardent hope. The nation-state (the United States, in this case) dutifully accounts for the moment when such people are no longer numerically significant; until the moment when no "pure" population defined by the original "contracts" of their status exists. At that time, "Indians" pass into the general population with "other" mixed, minoritized, and racialized populations without claims to treaties and sovereignties. In the face of this rational epistemology, those who attempt to live on as Indigenous often report the affective weight of being an ontological and moral challenge to the dominant order. In this setting, the relations that inform the fight for the Mni Sose at Standing Rock and for the Arctic seem absent, or unrecognizable. In urban settings Indigenous peoples suffer from the same kinds of "environmental" disasters that have become familiar to many. We suffer from the failure of systems that serve capital but not people who are insignificant to it, from the fate of those whose labor is not needed, or who are no longer legible—the homeless, the addicted, and the old. These great hubs of capitalist life have relations and a "lifestyle" that is now so ascendant that we might mistake it as a natural force. Yet, these lives we live, however nourished or abandoned by capitalist infrastructure, are actually lives with profound relations.

What are these relations? How do they make us? Glen Sean Coulthard (Yellow Knives Dine) reminds of these relations in his *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* in his Indigenous reading of Marx: "[A] mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express

their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce [it]."⁵

The modes of life that capitalism produces are profoundly anchored by hierarchies of race, class, and gender. They present as places of great excitement, great extremes of income and consumption, and the capitalist *vie joyeuse* for some. Yet, these are increasingly "urban," cities within cities that are themselves only nodes in great streams of capitalist activity that stretch across our worlds. As sociologist and geographer Deborah Cowen points out, our cities are now shaped by their roles in the three great flows of capital: production, consumption, and distribution.⁶ The wars that nations like the United States now fight are primarily those in protection of these flows, those of data, of goods or energy. The outsized presence of a state and corporatized (and militarized) police force in protection of the Black Snake at Mni Sose, the Missouri River, makes more sense when you understand the needs of global capital to protect these infrastructures, these flows, capitalism's bloodstreams.

These homes and hubs of capital are always undergoing renovation, reorganized for the goods and labors that are capitalism's business. Aaron Bady reminds us that "bourgeois reformers never *solve* the problems created by capitalism, because they cannot address the root causes; since you can't just kill the poor, the next best thing is to move 'blighted' populations elsewhere, out of sight and out of mind. To 'revitalize' a city center, therefore, is to make room for capital development by moving unwanted and unproductive (and uncaptialized) people elsewhere."⁷ In Richard Florida's initial argument, the active players are a creative class of biotech, dot.com, and financial innovators seemingly detached from the land/resource production of an earlier, more voracious era. I would argue that these "creative" financiers and entrepreneurs are more dependent on the resources being extracted from the land now than in the past, and increasingly detached from any knowledge of their dependency. I believe that most of us cannot name the relations that we are profoundly a part of when we live in these hives of capitalist relations that we denote as urban. I want to just bring to the fore that capitalisms do indeed produce "ways of life." But I would not differentiate these by geography from something called the "land." Any divide between these "geographies" is now oversimplified in an assessment of the United States as the pinnacle of neoliberal globalism as urban and rural: the rich urban elites versus the primarily poor rural white family forgotten by capital.

These great city-state nodes of capitalist urbanism are juxtaposed to places that continue to provide the United States with an imaginary that retains status as "the Real America." These are places with frontier values,

whose people's hard work and moral standards are what is needed to be "made great again." Rural areas are not barren; nor are they frontiers, although the nostalgia for a "virgin frontier" lives on deeply in the white desire to be armed and landed. Moreover, they have never been solely "white," not in history and not in the present, in regions that have known global settler immigration for two to three centuries.

The actual relations of land need to be clarified, and I begin this discussion with Standing Rock, itself, a place of long relations. The Lakota, a society that preceded the United States and the state of North Dakota by millennia, are presences that forever confound and question the imaginaries of the formation and legitimacy of the United States. For the United States, the Lakota always exist in "the barrens," where rural white America demands a replaying of "the Indian Wars" every time the nation moves to take resources from Indian lands. These barrens are places where a pipeline route can be moved so as not to endanger settler capitalist water sources. Indigenous places are often imagined as isolated empty places, disposable, or usable places subordinate to national need. Indigenous peoples are not isolated, in a past, outside of capital, or without capitalist relations: we are central to them. We get past some kinds of "geographical" differences when we foreground other relations: the relations revealed, for instance, between the necessity and desire for life and clean water in African American communities in Flint, Michigan, juxtaposed with these needs in Standing Rock.⁸

THE "LAND"

When we enter the imaginary of the "pristine" or the "ecological" sans a human hand, we enter a dangerous illusion about "land." Scott Lauria Morgenson mused on this feature of settler colonialism: "'Empty land' reminds us that the ontology of settler colonialism has been premised on its own boundlessness: always capable of projecting another horizon over which it might establish and incorporate a newest frontier."⁹ The ideology of unbridled Western progress resides in the worship of development. "Development," even when debunked, underpins numerous assumptions about what non-Western epistemologies, ways of knowing, have to inform the present. We lose any sight of another set of relations, other values, when we discuss Indigenous peoples in multicultural discourses as minority populations in hierarchies of race. We lose the point of justice when we reduce the Indigenous to an appeal to liberal justice systems based on an additive formula for rights. I posit that environmental racism and environmental justice may have important overlapping interests with Indigenous interests, but we

cannot go forward without acknowledging their profound difference. There is a shift in relations between working from the perspective of Indigenism to working against environmental racism and for environmental justice. Here I want to take these differences, differences in epistemologies (ways of knowing) and ontologies (ways of being) into account.

The premise of a different knowledge organizing human life undergirds Indigenous relations in place. As Peter Morin (Tahltan) writes in "This Is What Happens When We Perform the Memory of the Land," *the land is us, it is in us*, in memory and resonance with living generations lived in close relation with places.¹⁰ The difference between Western epistemological "land" as an environment and ecology and Indigenous place as relations with responsibility is a critical philosophical difference. Indigenous peoples' lifeways as ancient nations are different ontological and material interpretations of life that question and offer alternative imaginaries outside capitalism. The myriad Indigenous peoples who continue today practicing their heritage knowledge as daily, lived action, performed in ongoing relation with place, have ways of governing that perform what "ecology" implies. While none of these peoples are "outside" capitalism after hundreds of years of entanglement, they continue to act on principles and values that hold up different ideas about what might be lived. Their "modes of production," as Coulthard observes above, produce a different way of life, even when they have been severely disrupted.

Settler colonialism is evoked here when we position land as the primary desire of colonizing Western nation-states, a desire that forever seeks the death and disappearance of the Indigenous peoples who hold and who remain in deep relations with places.¹¹ Indigenous feminist theories illuminate statements and acts grounded in epistemologies representing more than "environmentally friendly" ways of being. These theories represent counterknowledge to capitalism itself. The Indigenous do not uniformly seek equality with nation-states, nor their recognition. Indigenism in practice often seeks to challenge capitalist ways of life for a futurity. As Sami feminist theorist Rauna Kuokkanen notes, "Indigenous peoples' struggle for self-determination, therefore, is also a struggle to exist as a collective in the future, which implies being able to decide about and have control over that future as a people."¹² This quest for autonomy rather than "equality" within capitalism's democracies marks an important difference. The ways of life that Indigenism practices are not inherent in Indigenous peoples' DNA but the result of myriad centuries of relations with places. Altered and sometimes compromised, these ways of life, "cultures," continue to serve up values that

need to be understood as alternative imaginaries that once existed all over the world.

Indigenous women are often foregrounded in these struggles for our values. Capitalism is a gendered hierarchy and violence against Indigenous women; this dominating characteristic of our lives in capitalism is not a just a by-product of settler colonialism, but one of its operating logics. In Indigenous societies, Kuokkanen reminds us, "Indigenous women play a crucial role in envisioning models of autonomy that do not merely replicate patriarchal, hierarchical structures that often reproduce the marginalization and subjugation of sections of society . . . [they] play a crucial role in maintaining and cultivating practices, systems, and bodies of knowledge, values, languages, modes of learning."¹³ The outsize presence in this generation and past generations of women leaders in Indigenous resistance is not by chance. In each case, the leadership of LaDonna Brave Bull Allard and Faith Spotted Eagle among the Lakotas, and so many others, ground these movements. In the remainder of this chapter I ground myself to speak as one of myriad Northern peoples. As Natives, Alaskan Natives, or First Nations, we are reduced into the Western colonial imagination of an "Arctic" or "subarctic." As homelands, our names are many and varied. Dena, Inuit, Inupiaq, Unangan, and more are experiences of beauty in a scale of life and being that arrests the human mind from imagining itself as omnipresent. When confronted by what Standing Rock really means to me in this moment of personal, social, and political readjustment and recalibration, I want to go home in this chapter, because that is where my care is visceral.

The "Arctic" is a place where the capitalist nations imagine a world most alien from their own idea of a good life. These are places that the United States and Canada did not originally see as permanent homes for their citizens but only as places of extraction, of animals for fur, and of ores and oil. These places are now closely centered in the US and Canadian militarized need for security aroused by two twentieth-century wars and the rapidly melting ice that separates North America from Russia and Asia. We become the poster children for "climate change," more recently darkly characterized by Katherine McKittrick in a Twitter post as "ecocides of racial capitalism" (@demonicground, December 1, 2016). Our homes in circumpolar lands across the top of the globe have continuously been reimagined as a perpetual "last frontier." What is meant by this perpetual "last frontier" status of our Indigenous homelands in the North? In the crosshairs of Jodi Byrd's "transits of empire" for three centuries, Indigenous lives in the Arctic have not been lived in isolation but in a frenzy of global capitalism.¹⁴

HUNGER

I believe your nation might wish to see us, not as a relic from the past, but as a way of life, a system of values by which you may survive in the future. This we are willing to share.

PHILIP BLAKE (DENE FORT MCPHERSON)

Sandra Gologergen and Wilfred Miklahook, residents of Savoonga, stand together with Wilfred's arm encircling Sandra's small shoulders. Resolutely looking into the photographer's camera, they smile, capturing this moment in their lives. Behind them, their Yupik community goes about its business. Savoonga is one of two communities on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea, 2,100 miles from Seattle and 37 miles from the Chukchi Peninsula of Russia. Interviewed for the National Public Radio (NPR) program *The Salt* by Clare Leschin-Hoar about Alaska's food insecurity, Sandra Gologergen speaks about the changes that have altered her relations to her people's food. In NPR's story, Savoonga residents do not speak only for their own experience; they become a proxy for a food crisis across the Arctic. NPR's story is related to hundreds of news stories now popping up in US and Canadian media outlets highlighting the warming of the Arctic. These St. Lawrence Island Yupik stand as a symbol for a multitude of changes in the Arctic, surfacing in the consciousness of the mainland United States, Canada, and the rest of the world as climate change. The interdependent relations between the land, the sky, and the animals that Savoonga once knew are changing faster than anyone anticipated.

Leschin-Hoar reported that Alaska's food insecurity rate averages around 14.4 percent, only a sliver above the US national average. The difference is how directly Alaskan Native peoples rely on their traditional foods, 295-plus pounds per person a year. At the same time, both distance from commercial grocery outlets and the price of shipping and fuel make replacing this diet in their home communities difficult, a serious problem with no easy answers. Food flown in from urban centers costs well above what these families can afford and is of notoriously poor nutritional quality. This "hunger" is deeper than it looks.¹⁵

Leschin-Hoar points to Savoonga's precarious relations with the capitalist food infrastructure, the chain of supply that feeds other places and peoples—or doesn't. Yet, Leschin-Hoar's NPR story ignores the full complexity of what the failure of the ice means in another set of relations. In Savoonga, a failure of old Yupik relations with ice and animals hastens the necessity of contemplating how to adapt to a rapidly melting homeland. The

Yupik's direct relations with the land, sea, and other life-forms, so at the level of obscurity in the capitalist imagination, have always meant more to them than a job that pays money that buys food. Food, in the sense that Sandra Gologergen speaks of it here, means something more that NPR doesn't fully articulate.

"Food," in an Indigenous sense, always evokes something larger than the direct consumption relations that the Indigenous have with animals, waters, and beings that give us life. "Food" necessarily evokes and produces cultures, economies, languages, kinships, reciprocal relations, and responsibilities that form a way of acting toward something larger than our individual human bodies and lives. For instance, there is no way to speak to a "Yupik culture" that does not evoke larger Yupik relations with and to the places that present generations inherited from the many hundreds of generations before them. These generations and their deep knowledge represent more than ten thousand years of experience with places and the changes that occur in those relations. Marie Battiste (Mi'kmaq) and James Sakej Henderson (Choctaw) have written that "place" is an "expression of the vibrant relationships between people, their ecosystems, and other living beings and spirits that share their lands. . . . All aspects of knowledge are interrelated and cannot be separated from the traditional territories of the people concerned."¹⁶ Indigenous place is infinitely more than geographical location. It is in every sense holistic, where all entities are bound in relations that interactively form societies, human and nonhuman. St. Lawrence Island is, in every Indigenous sense of the word, an Indigenous "place."

The 2002 study by Carol Jolles and Yupik elder and resident Elinor Mikaghaq Oozeva, *Faith, Food and Family in a Yupik Whaling Community*, chronicled life in Savoonga and Gambell (sister communities on St. Lawrence Island) as late as the early 1990s. Savoonga and Gambell were already experiencing rapid change then, but food wasn't the dire issue that it has now become. "Food" had a prominent place: "Food was obviously important. . . . The kinds of food consumed by a Gambell family and the manner in which food is served are considered to be the heart of being Yupik." While both communities had adapted Christianity to their needs in the same way that they had adapted technology, it was clear that an older order they practice was at the heart of their identity. In Gambell, the entire year and the community's social structure emerged from their relations with whales. As Jolles, who knew the community from 1987 on, observed, "Nowhere is that sense of identity, purpose, and distinctive order so evident as in the experience and tradition of sea mammal hunting, especially the hunt for *aghveq*, the great bowhead whale." The community's life was ordered by the hunt. The account

given by Jolles and Yupik elder advisor Elinor Oozeva is compelling: "Children's games, courting activity, menstruation, pregnancy, maintenance of the land, and entry onto the land were regulated either partially or entirely by their relationship to hunting. Family celebrations, healing the sick, exchange [in marriage]—all were articulated with the hunt."¹⁷ These are relations with place and "environment" that are hardly imaginable in Westernized lives. In every sense of the word *environment*, then, the lands, waters (and ice) where these intimate interactions between people and marine life occurred over countless generations formed society, governance, and responsible relations among all present.

Glen Coulthard quotes a famous Dakota scholar, Vine Deloria Jr.: "[A] fundamental difference is one of great philosophical importance. American Indians hold their lands—places—as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind."¹⁸ Thus, Savoonga is not endangered by a food shortage, where "food" is an interchangeable substance without relations, an abstract. The St. Lawrence Island peoples face an epistemological minefield in the years ahead as an order of life changes, with the changes to all their relations in their place. There is a rapidly changing environment that will alter many basic tenets of Northern life forever, and subsistence hunting in particular. The hunger families are reporting is real.

Yet, St. Lawrence Island, even as Elinor Oozeva gave her account of her people's close-knit relations, had already lived in the midst of profound change for centuries. The lives of its people do not anchor any narrative about the inevitable march of progress and their transformations from some imagined pristine life. These Yupik, along with other Alaskan Natives, have already lived through several iterations of capitalist infrastructural invasions—enslavement, numerous "resource" extraction activities, and then as the center of a military logistics buildup that made them the first line of defense against a Soviet missile strike and turned one island into a nuclear testing site.¹⁹ Along with numerous places in Alaska, St. Lawrence Island was a military site during and after World War II. After the war, the military abandoned many of these places, leaving dangerous chemicals in Inuit, Yupik, and Alaskan Native hunting and gathering places. It was Annie Alowa, a Savoonga elder and midwife, who sought attention to and research of the problem after she noticed high numbers of miscarriages and birth defects occurring in her community. Her findings sparked a United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues report in 2012 reporting the acute levels of toxic chemicals found on St. Lawrence and beyond.²⁰

The Arctic is not and never has been *Terra Nullis* or the West's "last frontier": it is a crossroads and heart of Indigenous nations and their lifeways. What Westerners may mean by "last frontier" is that as a place, a frontier, it is imagined as "empty": it becomes an empty signifier, a place perpetually reimagined for different Western interests. In part, this is Patrick Wolfe's settler colonialism: a "land," while not wholly imagined as a permanent home for settlers (as yet), is imagined as a process, a frontier of perpetual settler extraction. In the American Southwest these Indigenous places have been imagined as "national sacrifice areas." The metamorphoses of different capitalist energy interests that have been undertaken in our Indigenous midst are the ecology of change in the North. Radical changes to our old relations are not recent. Indigenous lifeways must be examined as enduring rather than just precarious.

If the Arctic has long been touted as the last frontier in North America, our histories bear the marks of what this frontier means as "structure," as an ongoing process rather than as an "event." As a structure, "frontier" means the ongoing opening, abandonment, and reopening of extraction and transient exploitation of our lives and our places without Native consent. Settler colonialism's interests in such "rural" or imagined "open" spaces are never naive or disinterested. To ignore so-called flyover places in the geography of our present politics is to ignore the significant control of lands and resources basic to the capitalist economic need to consolidate its powers. To represent these places as "underdeveloped," or merely as a disgruntled domain of right and alt-right white settlers who assert their "God-given" rights to land, guns, and employment, is to make an egregious misreading of what land and capital interests actually are in North America. The interests in these places, both in the United States and Canada, increasingly demand local white settler control (or conservative multicultural cooperation) to exploit resources at the same time they would like to disappear Native ways of life. The rural United States and interior Canadian provinces are home both to nation-states' energy preserves and the Indigenous peoples that often bar access. The cities are interdependent with, never separate from, these places.

The stakes seem different when we do not understand Indigenism within its own relations. Our environmental and racial justice demands are made depending on our ability to reform capitalisms whose relations serve a deep axiom: the "survival of the fittest." This axiom is often attributed to "nature." These are not the only relations possible with "environments." The "survival of the fittest" never existed except in Darwin's mistaken humancentric,

Eurocentric nineteenth-century theory of life's relations as a mirror of nineteenth-century capitalism—a mistake that could be rendered only by a capitalist mind. Indigenism writ large knows that there are other readings of what our relations might be, other values that could be held, that must come into the conversations that inform all our struggles, that we must include—not to admonish, but to suggest.

In a scene from the 2004 film *Oil on Ice*, then-senator Frank Murkowski (R-Alaska) holds up a large, blank piece of white paper in a 2002 Senate hearing on the fate of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. “This is what it looks like about nine months of the year,” he said.²¹ Murkowski’s depiction erases Iizhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit’s relations to the planet, to the Gwich’in, to us all. This is a blindness that is far beyond the blank piece of paper the senator imagines. It is a world in which he cannot recognize any relations, where there are no relations that exist for him in a place he cannot imagine. It always comes back to the matter of relations. Now, in 2017, it is Frank Murkowski’s daughter, Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), who engineers the inclusion of oil-drilling incursions in ANWR into the Republicans’ grand tax scheme, now being celebrated in Washington, DC. Gwich’in elder Sarah James, a forty-year veteran of the fight for the caribou calving grounds central to her people’s way of life, articulates the stakes of what the opening of ANWR means to her people: “We are the ones who have everything to lose.”²² Our loss is most certainly not the Gwich’in’s alone. Who and what are your relations?

NOTES

- 1 See Audra Simpson and collective’s outstanding online syllabus and activist open forum site “#StandingRockSyllabus,” <https://nycstandswithstandingrock.wordpress.com/standingrocksyllabus>, accessed August 9, 2017.
- 2 Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).
- 3 Richard Florida, “The Racial Divide in the Creative Economy,” *City Lab*, 2016.
- 4 Norris, Vines, and Hoeftel. “American Indian and Alaska Native Population,” 1.
- 5 Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2014, 65.
- 6 Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2014.
- 7 Aaron Bady, “None of You,” *Zunguzungu: The New Inquiry*, November 28, 2016, <https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/none-of-you>.
- 8 Stephanie Latty, Megan Scribe, Alena Peters, and Anthony Morgan, “Not Enough Human: At the Scenes of Indigenous and Black Dispossession,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2 (2016): 143.

- 9 Scott Lauria Morgensen, “Theorising Gender, Sexuality and Settler Colonialism: An Introduction,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 2 (2012): 2.
- 10 Peter Morin, “This Is What Happens When We Perform the Memory of the Land,” in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2016).
- 11 Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006).
- 12 Rauna Kuokkanen, “The Politics of Form and Alternative Autonomies: Indigenous Women, Subsistence Economies, and the Gift Paradigm,” *Globalization Working Papers*, McMasters University (2007), 1.
- 13 Ibid., 2.
- 14 Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
- 15 Clare Leschin-Hoar, “In Alaska’s Remote Towns, Climate Change Is Already Leaving Many Hungry,” *The Salt*, National Public Radio, July 27, 2016.
- 16 Maria Battiste and James Sakej Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage* (Saskatoon: Purie, 2000), 20.
- 17 Carol Zane Jolles and Elinor Mikaghaq Oozeva, *Faith, Food, and Family in a Yupik Whaling Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 41, 289, 292.
- 18 Quoted in Glen Coulthard, “Place against Empire: Understanding Indigenous Anti-colonialism,” *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 79.
- 19 See Jennifer Sepez, Christina Package, Patricia Malcolm, and Amanda Poole, “Unalaska, Alaska: Memory and Denial in the Globalization of the Aleutian Landscape,” *Polar Geography* 30, nos. 3–4 (September 2007): 195. Also see Dorothy Miriam Jones, *A Century of Servitude: Pribilof Aleuts under U.S. Rule* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980). Also see Dean Kohlhoff, *Amchitka and the Bomb: Nuclear Testing in Alaska* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).
- 20 Andrea Carmen and Viola Waghiyi, “Indigenous Women and Environmental Violence: A Rights-Based Approach Addressing Impacts of Environmental Contamination on Indigenous Women, Girls and Future Generations,” paper presented at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Expert Group Meeting, “Combating Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls,” United Nations Headquarters, New York, January 2012.
- 21 *Oil on Ice*, directed by Dale Djerassi and Bo Boudart (Oley, PA: Bullfrog Films, 2004).
- 22 Sarah James, “We Are the Ones Who Have Everything to Lose,” in *Arctic Voices: Resistance at the Tipping Point*, ed. Subhankar Banerjee (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012).

DENORMALIZING EMBODIED TOXICITY

The Case of Kettleman City

JULIE SZE

THIS chapter examines the connections between race, gender, and environment by focusing on one contentious moment in a larger case study of Kettleman City in California's Central Valley. Kettleman City is a small and predominantly Latino farmworker community that faces much industrial, air, and other environmental pollution. It is the site of the largest commercial hazardous-waste facility west of the Mississippi. Over the last decade, Kettleman City has been the focus of tremendous media and policy attention, following a cluster of births of babies with cleft palates and other birth defects. I examine Kettleman City in historical, racial, and spatial contexts to better understand how racial, gender, and spatial politics are connected in ways that make the causes of negative health impacts nearly impossible to prove, thus leading to the status quo, where racially disproportionate environmental and health impacts seem inevitable and naturalized.

Environmental and reproductive injustices are intimately interconnected. Here I examine the power of racialized images of motherhood and child-birth in the activist organizing strategy, specifically in counterweight to the highly technical knowledge about toxic exposures used by regulatory agencies and polluters. In her groundbreaking book, Stacey Alaimo argues that "the human is always the very stuff of the messy, contingent, emergent mix of the material world. . . . The body is enmeshed in social and material systems and systems of domination that are enacted in individual and community bodies, cultural representations, and modes of knowing and thinking."¹ She calls the messy mix of human bodies embedded with one other, with non-human creatures, and with physical landscapes *trans-corporeality*.

This chapter expands Alaimo's notion of trans-corporeality—the intermixing of humans and social systems with systems of political domination—with respect to racial ecologies. Looking at media coverage and at statements of residents from a listening session sponsored by the US Environmental Protection Agency, I argue that the Kettleman City cleft-palate controversy represents a meeting of reproductive and environmental justice in a racially specific manifestation of trans-corporeality. More than a new illustration of Alaimo's concept, the Kettleman City case is a salient example of racial ecologies because the controversy makes visible what is “normal,” accepted, and political in the Central Valley. The activist politics of race, gender, and toxic exposure are constructed through the frame of motherhood and birth defects, which relies, in complicated ways, on normative ideologies of bodily health, even as activists challenge the social and economic structures that deny the bodily health of these women of color and their babies. The politics of gender and motherhood are mobilized by environmental justice activists in the context of anti-immigrant and antinatalist politics in California and beyond, in contrast to attempts by polluters and the state to reject the complex arguments about the cumulative impact of pollution that are advanced by activists.

In her study of controversies over pesticide drift, the sociologist Jill Harrison examines activism, policy, science, and the seeming paradox that pesticide poisoning is both pervasive and invisible. She opens with one of the high-profile cases in Earlimart, a small farmworker town in the Central Valley, where over 170 Spanish-speaking residents experienced nausea, respiratory distress, burning eyes and lungs, and dizziness because of a pesticide-drift incident. The emergency response personnel, who didn't speak Spanish, brought the most severely affected residents to the school, stripped them publicly, and sprayed them with hoses. An investigation revealed that metam sodium, a soil fumigant (and known carcinogen) was to blame.

Harrison shows how the pesticide industry and the state environmental regulatory agency offer a narrative that characterizes incidents like the Earlimart exposure as “accidental” and “exceptional.” She argues that pesticide drift illustrates how the workings of “raw power” shift the burden of pesticide pollution to the bodies of the most marginalized and vulnerable residents.² Her articulation of raw power, and the pervasive and invisible normalization of environmental abuse of the most vulnerable populations, is directly relevant to the stories of the individuals and communities in Kettleman City.

The cleft-palate controversy demonstrates how a normalized state of pervasive environmental pollution and social inequality may be exposed and

used by activists in ways that trigger attention from the state. Images of birth defects in babies powerfully communicate the effects of toxic exposures and bodily pollution on the most innocent and vulnerable victims. In Kettleman City, as in Earlimart, the raw power of environmental pollution, like racism, is met by community resistance.

The geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines racism as the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.³ Pervasive and historical patterns of pollution exposure, toxic contamination, and environmental destruction are not accidental but rather embedded in systems of exploitation. These patterns are exacerbated by neoliberalism, which idealizes market, capital, and consumer subjectivities over communitarian notions of belonging or justice. Farmworker activism and the Kettleman City case are powerful examples of the environmental justice critique of separation: separation between bodies and environmental pollution, between labor and environmental issues, and between race, gender, and environmentalism. Here environmentalism is constructed as both the problem and the activism against racialized trans-corporeality. Attention to the complex relationship between race, class, gender, and environmental exposures, particularly with respect to motherhood, is a core component of antitoxics, environmental, and environmental justice activism.

GENDERED, RACIALIZED, AND ACTIVIST HISTORIES OF KETTLEMAN CITY

Since 2007, ten babies in Kettleman City have been born with deformities (chiefly cleft palates). Three died. The State of California initially withheld information about the number of cases; the data were garnered from the birth defects monitoring program run by the California Department of Public Health.⁴ Community activism attracted media and government attention, including a study conducted by the Department of Public Health and the Environmental Protection Agency ordered by the governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and statements of concern from both of California's US senators, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer.⁵

Kettleman City has 1,500 residents, of whom 97 percent are Latino. Most are farmworkers. The average annual per capita income of the town is \$7,300. The town is surrounded by agricultural fields and exposed to pollutants from runoff. Its drinking water has elevated levels of natural arsenic and benzene from the municipal wells.⁶ It is also the recipient of sewage sludge from the city of Los Angeles.⁷ In addition, residents are constantly

exposed to diesel emissions from passing trucks on Interstate 5 and Highway 41 and airborne emissions from benzene and old oilfield operations. Residents report high rates of asthma, cancer, and miscarriages.⁸

Because the water is contaminated, residents buy costly water from a source half an hour's drive away. The situation is by no means unique.⁹ Water samples from other Central Valley farm towns, such as Visalia, test positive for nitrates from fertilizers and cow manure from large dairy-farming operations. These samples also contain dibromochloropropane, a pesticide banned in 1977.

The Kettleman City cleft-palate cluster was identified in a health survey conducted by community and environmental groups. Local activism over the nearby hazardous-waste facility in 1982 is considered to be one of the foundations of the national environmental justice movement.¹⁰ The landfill is owned and operated by a multinational corporation, Chemical Waste Management, Inc. (Chem Waste). It takes in over four hundred tons per year of hazardous waste, asbestos, pesticides, petroleum, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).¹¹ The company has been fined more than \$2 million over twenty-eight years for violations such as the mishandling of PCBs, and most recently for not following proper quality-control procedures.¹²

In 2009, Chem Waste applied for a permit to expand, which was granted by the Kings County Board of Supervisors. Greenaction and El Pueblo para el Aire y Agua Limpio/People for Clean Air and Water filed a lawsuit to block the expansion.¹³

The cleft-palate controversy cannot be separated from the history of development and the social inequalities and racialized pattern of land use in the Central Valley. This is a society highly stratified by race, class, and immigration status. The land use and economic structure of the Valley render poorer and more vulnerable residents subject to greater pollution exposure. The social and environmental conditions of the Central Valley—the highest rates of air pollution in the country, high risks from water contamination, carceral landscapes, high poverty, high mortgage foreclosure rates, and low educational attainment—are not accidental but rather structural.¹⁴

California's Central Valley region is particularly vulnerable to environmental pollution because of its status as the most productive agricultural region in the world. The region represents 2 percent of the nation's farmland but is the site of the application of 25 percent of the nation's pesticides. According to Harrison, 90 percent of these aerially applied pesticides are liable to drift from the intended sites of application to other areas, including residential areas.

These injustices have not gone unremarked. The region is also home to a long and radical tradition of labor activism, dating back to the early twentieth century, and personified by Larry Itliong, a Filipino American, and Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, Mexican Americans who led the United Farm Workers union in the 1960s. Much of the early activism for farmworker protection was focused on the effects of pesticides on maternal and fetal health.¹⁵ In 1969 the California Rural Legal Assistance program (CRLA) and its general counsel, Ralph Abascal, filed a lawsuit on behalf of six farm workers who were exposed to DDT. Five of the six were nursing mothers: this was significant because DDT accumulates in breast milk. That lawsuit led to a ban on DDT.

Abascal and CRLA continued the struggle to protect farm workers from pesticide exposure, joining in a successful lawsuit twenty years later against the Environmental Protection Agency that led to an agreement to ban about 85 percent of the pesticides then in use. Yet the health effects of pesticide exposure on farmworkers and on developing fetuses still persist fifty years later.

Motherhood has long been a central component of environmental and antitoxics activism in the United States. In 1978, Lois Gibbs, a working-class white woman, discovered that her son's school in the neighborhood of Love Canal in upstate New York was built on top of a toxic waste dump. She was a leader in the successful effort to evacuate Love Canal, and her activism helped spur regulatory change at the US Environmental Protection Agency. The Love Canal protest helped to catalyze broad concern about exposure to toxics in the home, rather than in industrial workplaces. In the Central Valley, however, this distinction does not always hold, because in many poor Central Valley communities, homes are sited close to industrial agriculture. This lack of clear boundaries and separation is simultaneously a powerful metaphor for the lack of meaningful boundaries between mother and child during pregnancy. Likewise, attempts to protect developing fetuses from industrial pollutants are futile when their mothers are exposed to pesticides both at work in the fields and at home.¹⁶

Much of the public discourse around Gibbs focused on her identity as a mother and contributed to the perception that environmental activism was motivated by household exposures and threats to children's health. She was criticized in the press as a "hysterical housewife." This label has had continuing resonance. In 1984, a leaked report funded by the California Waste Management Board, called the Cerrell Report, noted that "one occupational classification has consistently demonstrated itself as a strong

indicator of opposition to the siting of noxious facilities, especially nuclear power plants—housewives.”¹⁷

The sociologist Tracy Perkins describes the gendered social construction of Lois Gibbs’s experience as the traditional women’s environmental justice narrative in which “apolitical women personally experience an environmental problem that launches them into a life of activism to protect the health of their families.”¹⁸ Perkins suggests that elements of this narrative conflate gender and motherhood: women are framed primarily as reproductive beings and assumed to see threats to their children as their most urgent political concerns. This gendered narrative of politicization, which focuses largely on white women, ignores the historical realities and complicated race and class politics at Love Canal and elsewhere. Perkins argues that this gendered narrative does not accurately depict the majority of the women she interviewed in her study of women organizers in the Central Valley, many of whom had become politically active through education, farmworker justice, and poverty issues.

However, the Kettleman City case complicates Perkins’s findings, in part because the attitudes of women of color to motherhood and national belonging are different from those of white women.¹⁹ The focus on connections between reproductive health and environmental justice is an example of a gendered relationship to race, place, and bodies. This relationship is not reductionist, biologically determined, or static. Kettleman City activists signify a return to the earliest roots of farmworker and environmental justice activism, shaped by concerns with social and political forces that disproportionately harm particular bodies—those of working-class women of color and their unborn children.

The Kettleman City case shows that discourses and experiences of motherhood, environmental exposures, and protection vary with class, citizenship, and geographic and social location. Whereas white middle-class mothers are seen as innocent and their children deserving of (environmental) protection from the state, working-class women of color and their children—particularly immigrants without legal citizenship—meet with different assumptions. Their insistence on their right to their experience of motherhood is not predicated on personal factors and biology (i.e., having a baby) as much as on placing that experience within a critique of racialized exposures from pollution that shape that experience. Last, their racialized trans-corporeality is not exceptional but exemplifies an important strand of environmental and reproductive justice activism.

REPRODUCTIVE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

In the past decade, environmental justice research has begun to take gender much more seriously as a category of analysis, focusing on the ways in which pregnant and lactating women’s exposure to pollution makes toxic exposures and their health effects visible.²⁰ Miscarriages and birth defects are highly visible examples of the connection between reproductive and environmental injustice.²¹

Other examples of reproductive and environmental injustice in the United States are the occupational hazards faced by immigrant woman workers in computer and garment factories before this production largely moved out of the United States in the 1990s.²² Occupational exposures include particular harms to the reproductive and nervous systems, which trigger elevated rates of miscarriages. Such exposures are not limited to large industries: recent media coverage of the reproductive effects of working in nail salons, where many workers are Asian immigrant women, show the pervasiveness of these problems. In response, community-based organizations and health professionals have designed programs to reduce such exposures.²³

These examples of toxic exposures exemplify the racialized and gendered ways in which trans-corporeality is lived and experienced. While trans-corporeality is a broad *condition* of contemporary life (and a factor in premature death), the economic and environmental reality experienced by women of color and indigenous women cause them to suffer disproportionate burdens from global environmental pollution. The question here is not whether or how these populations “choose” the conditions of their life and labor. Rather, the racialized dimensions of trans-corporeality inevitably impose these burdens on their bodies, with reproductive consequences that lay bare the brutalities of the current economic and environmental system and histories of domination and violence.

In all these cases, arguments about reproductive and environmental justice are made in a context of anti-immigrant politics, anxieties about globalization, and the exodus of manufacturing jobs to other countries. These stories are part of a long history of the degradation of the bodies and environments of indigenous populations. Antinatalist attitudes toward indigenous and immigrant women create a context in which the health of their babies is always already politicized. Not only is the health of their children already precarious because of occupational exposures and particular pathways of bioaccumulation of toxic pollutants, but their children’s very right to exist is challenged by anti-immigrant social movements and by long

histories of settler-colonial states that have vigorously policed the health and reproductive life chances of women of color. Laura Briggs documents what she calls an expansive “reproductive politics” from feminism and racial justice traditions, in contrast to the reproductive politics advanced by business interests and government agencies. In one salient example, she details how “protection” from lead poisoning by an automobile battery manufacturer was the justification for excluding women (including those past reproductive age) from well-paid union jobs.²⁴ Defenders of mainstream environmentalism have also been complicit in these injustices. In the 1990s, a strand of the mainstream environmental movement conflated anti-immigration and population anxieties, arguing that immigrants to the United States use more of the planet’s resources than they would in their sending countries and that they would contribute to overpopulation. This anti-immigration strand in mainstream environmentalism has a long history, starting with its connections to the eugenics movement. In tracing this history, Sarah Jaquette Ray suggests that environmentalist discourses draw on normative notions of body, wholeness, and health.²⁵ Her framework of “ecological othering” is useful, particularly when read alongside Julie Avril Minich’s *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico* (2014). In her account of how corporeal images are used to depict national belonging, Minich argues that cultural representations conceptualize political community through images of disability, drawing on artwork, and literature from writers like Arturo Islas Jr., Cherrié Moraga, and Felicia Luna Lemus.²⁶

It would be possible to argue that the Kettleman City mothers are relying on the old tropes of virtuous motherhood that have historically shaped mainstream environmental discourse. Their focus on birth defects can also be read as a troubling privileging of normative and idealized healthy bodies and a return to Ray’s notion of disgust as a central mode of environmental politics, in which she challenges the normative ideology of healthy bodies as environmentally clean and virtuous. However, racialized trans-corporeality takes gendered, racialized, and disability studies critiques into account, simultaneously and intersectionally. The problem is not disgust and shame focused on babies with birth defects but the social, economic and environmental system that normalizes pollution exposure and whose effects are manifested in particularly visible fashion through human reproduction.

Recent activism around the Kettleman City cleft-palate cluster is a salient example of the relationship between race, gender, and labor—in both senses

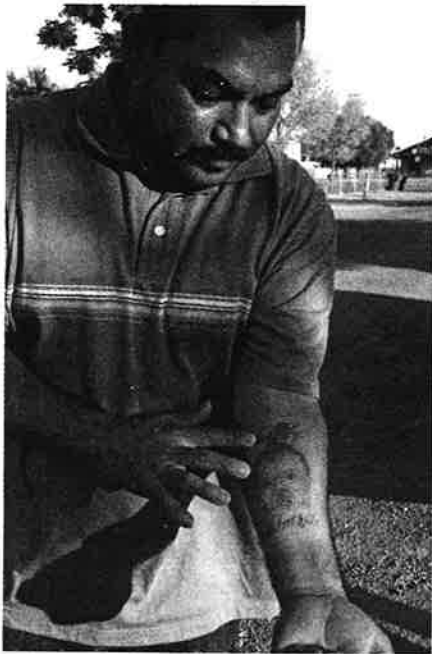
of the word—and between reproductive and environmental justice. The official study that was commissioned to investigate the cluster asked mothers to attempt to figure out the causes of the cleft palate and other birth defects, including enlarged heads, allergies, seizures, and defects in the corpus callosum.²⁷ The mothers (and their allies) objected to the framing of their personal exposures and behaviors as likely causes. Their testimony deflected focus away from individual factors and toward systemic ones such as outdoor pollution exposure, either from air or water. In the words of Maricela Alatorre, “You want to know if we ever smoked cigarettes or took drugs. . . . I’m telling you that if the dump is allowed to expand, we’ll suffer more damage and illness. Why? Because we are poor and Hispanic. The people who issue those permits don’t care about us getting sick from it because all they think about is money.”²⁸

These mothers conjoin their personal trauma with concrete political demands. At a listening session convened in Kettleman City with a number of agency representatives and elected officials, one mother, Daria Hernandez Lorenzo, said, “I’m here because my baby was born like this with his little face deformed and I ask you to not issue any more permits until an investigation is done.”²⁹ This insistence on political critique and a focus on pollution as a cause of their personal tragedies are persistent. In the words of Magdalena Romero, the mother of America (one of the children who died), “Kettleman City to them is just a pigsty, but we are human beings and we have rights.”³⁰

For these mothers, and occasionally fathers, the visibility of the cleft palate and other birth defects is central to the way they stake political claims. Activists bring photos of their babies to political protests.³¹ America’s father tattooed a picture of his deceased child on his arm.

The prominent use of visual images is a key feature of environmental activism and, consciously or not, reprises the thalidomide controversy of the 1960s.³² The images of damaged babies and cleft palates have visceral effects: they are self-consciously intended as a powerful political message. The pictures of the babies represent everything from personal anguish to political outrage. Centralizing these images serves to hold corporate polluters, and the social and environmental systems that support them, accountable for the harm.

Although the centrality of visual images and storytelling to activism assumes a close relationship between the image and the truth, scholars recognize that interpretation of these images and stories may be deeply contested. This tension was exemplified in the listening session in Kettleman



Alejandro Alvarez shows his tattoo in memory of his baby daughter, Kettleman City, California, July 18, 2009. Photo by Tracy Perkins.

City. According to one participant, Angela Borroyo, "Once upon a time, Kettleman City hills was pretty, beautiful green, clean air, everything was beautiful. . . . Right now, there's no business, everything's dead, everyone's sick. . . . Before, there were no allergies, Valley Fever. . . . It's not about a job, it's not about money, it's about life and babies." Borroyo paints a verbal picture of a landscape transformed by industrial siting. She outlines a stark choice between profits and health, and she argues that babies and human lives outweigh economic development.

Although the claim here is not explicitly racialized, Borroyo's assertion of the right to have babies, and of residents to live on their own terms in Kettleman City, is *itself* a racialized claim of politics and belonging. Others dispute this characterization on the basis of their own positionality and experience. One older, white community member, who lost her own child in 1958, commented, "We've always had Valley Fever [a damaging fungal infection endemic in the Central Valley] . . . It's not just Kettleman City, and it's not you against us. It's not brown against white, or black against white, or purple against green. It is people."³³

RACIAL TRANS-CORPOREALITY AS CUMULATIVE IMPACT

Racialized trans-corporeality is both intimately connected to and an extension of the racial dimensions of global production and exploitation. Racialized motherhood and claims to bodily health in Kettleman City are not a simple reprise of virtuous motherhood but rather a radical claim to community and belonging. This section focuses on how racial trans-corporeality functions in addition to problem diagnosis, but in solution and theory building and knowledge production, in what is known in public health terms as "cumulative impact analysis." Traditional risk-exposure analysis looks at single sources, not the cumulative and interacting effects of multiple exposures. In other words, racial trans-corporeality and cumulative impact analysis connect things often seen as distinct (race, gender, and ecology in the former and different pollution exposures in the latter). This making of connections is a political stance as well, as a form of intersectionality.

As a result of community activism and media attention, the governor of California ordered the state Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Department of Public Health (CDPH) to conduct an investigation of the reported birth defects and the Kettleman City environment.³⁴ The study ruled out the toxic waste dump as a cause.³⁵ It found that "although the overall investigation found high levels of pollutants in the air, water and soil of Kettleman City, the comprehensive investigation did not find a specific cause or environmental exposure among the mothers that would explain the increase in the number of children born with birth defects in Kettleman City."³⁶ In essence, health investigators found the town's pollution levels to be on a par with those of similar communities elsewhere.³⁷ There was nothing unique about Kettleman City that could link the polluted air and landscape to the cleft-palate births.

Community activists blasted the study and, by extension, conventional measures of investigatory health research. According to Maricela Alatorre, a local activist and resident, the study involved no testing of blood or human tissue for pesticides.³⁸ She commented: "We're very, very disappointed. The state left us with a monster on the loose in town, and we don't know where it will strike next."³⁹

The disappointment and fury the community members felt were not surprising. As scholars of environmental justice and public health have noted, traditional scientific practice is often at odds with community-based claims. Mainstream research methods require a high threshold of statistical significance, a large data set, and reproducible results. It is very

hard by these measures to establish a causal link between environmental pollution and health effects.

In response, some public health scholars have developed tools and methodologies for assessing the cumulative impact of environmental and other hazards. The idea is that "racial or ethnic minority groups and low-income communities have poorer health outcomes than others [and are] more frequently exposed to multiple environmental hazards and social stressors, including poverty, poor housing quality, and social inequality."⁴⁰ Cumulative impact analysis recognizes multiple hazards and stressors with synergistic effects. Thus, individual biological susceptibility and social vulnerability to illness and birth defects are connected.

Cumulative impact research attends to social, health, and environmental vulnerabilities. It places community members at the center when setting research agendas, asking relevant questions, and collecting data. Working with environmental justice activists in Kettleman City and elsewhere in the Central Valley, public health and social science scholars have developed integrative methodologies that combine multiple factors: a cumulative environmental hazards index (CEHI), a social vulnerability index (SVI), and a health index (HI). Together these indexes form what some have called a cumulative environmental vulnerability assessment.⁴¹ This form of assessment addresses the major shortcomings in the CDPH and EPA study on Kettleman City by reframing definitions of harm and vulnerability.

Cumulative impact research attempts to translate the elevated risk, the synergistic effects, and the interlocking effects of political, economic and ecological systems into terms that public health and regulatory agencies understand and can act on. This task is challenging and highly political. Racialized trans-corporeality is a starting point for activism as it moves into changing terrains of knowledge production.

CONCLUSION

In 2014, the California Department of Toxic Substances Control granted a ten-year permit for the landfill expansion in Kettleman City, promising residents, "You are safe."⁴² Community members then filed administrative complaints of racial discrimination in the approval.⁴³ In August 2016, the state Department of Toxic Substances Control and the EPA announced an agreement with two environmental groups that ended the civil rights complaint. The state said it will take environmental justice factors into account when reviewing Chemical Waste Management's pending application to

renew its operating permit and in reviewing any expansion application submitted within three years. The agreement also provided funds to improve public health and environmental quality in Kettleman City.⁴⁴ In addition, the Kings County Board of Supervisors approved a health survey to study the links between an area landfill and birth defects and disease, although some residents remain skeptical about the study, which is based on surveys funded by the polluting facility.⁴⁵

The activism in Kettleman City was one important moment in an ongoing struggle for environmental and reproductive justice. Although the activists never used the terms *racialized trans-corporeality* or *racial ecologies*, these concepts can advance our understanding of environmental justice theory and social movement building. It connects the Kettleman City case to other examples of pollution that hit women of color and indigenous women particularly hard. The goal of environmental justice activists in Kettleman City and throughout the Central Valley is to *denormalize* existing environmental and social conditions of injustice and pollution by naming, showing, and highlighting conditions of racial trans-corporeality, and to bend the raw power of exploitation—environmental and otherwise—into new social and material realities.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

HUMANIZING ANIMALS

Talking about Second Chances, Horses, and Prisoners

ERICA TOM

THE horse stood still. He was a chestnut thoroughbred, a gelding with streaks of fly spray beneath his eyes, gleaming where the man had wiped his face. The prisoner, a Latino man, gave another light tug on the lead rope. He paused, as if flipping back through mental notes on his horsemanship lessons—he was new to the Second Chances Horse Program. He moved to the other side of the horse and asked him to move forward again, but the gelding wouldn't budge.

I watched the prisoner and the chestnut gelding. The man kept looking into the horse's eyes, searching for an answer. Why wouldn't he go back to the pasture? Did the horse not understand what he was asking? An experienced horsewoman, I looked the length of the horse, thinking perhaps that he was favoring a hoof or injured in some way. Then I looked down. I smiled and spoke sideways to the instructor. "He's *reeelaxed*."

"Hm?" He turned. "Oh." He paused. "*Ha*, yeah."

The horse's penis was dropped, erect, and he was whacking it against his stomach. Engorged, it made only the slightest noise under the rustle of leaves and the tractor in the distance. *Thwack, thwack, thwack*. The horse started ejaculating, his penis wobbling up and down and side to side, spraying, as he finally began to walk. The prisoner hadn't seemed to notice: it often takes time for humans to learn to read the entire equine body, instead of focusing on the face. He walked the gelding down the road, taking off his halter and securing the pasture gate. He patted him softly on the cheek. The horse nuzzled the man's hand briefly before flipping his head at the flies and turning to join the herd.