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The Solidarity Manifesto: A New Network for Future Change

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THE SOLIDARITY MANIFESTO: A NEW NETWORK FOR FUTURE CHANGE

by

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ABSTRACT

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Colonialism is a scheme of standpoint; colonizer versus colonized, West versus East, good versus bad. When put in the foreground, the value of what we see heavily relies on our perspective and knowledge. When learning to dissect, deconstruct, and decolonize spaces, we need to start utilizing decolonial thought as an historical tool rather than a true depiction of reality. Decolonizing spaces and recognizing Western colonization practices means challenging the normative structures in colonial history, thus breaking the cycle of oppression through building community and fostering solidarity. Drawing on theories exploring access to public spheres, representation, protection, permanence, cultural displacement and the creation of cross-cultural ecosystems, this study gives special highlight to the (dis)connection between global policy processes and local initiatives through a decolonial feminist lens. Prescribing the need for decolonial discourses in helping bridge the gap between the literary and physical spaces that inform decision-making bodies today, this thesis places emphasis on Françoise Vergès' *A Decolonial Feminism* and *A Feminist Theory of Violence: A Decolonial Perspective* to inform solidarity-centered approaches to future change in policy making. Through a decolonial case study analysis of the Italian occupation of Libya, the exclusive power of language, and observations of NGO work at the United Nations, and by proposing the Solidarity Model based on accountability and representation, the aim of this study is to deconstruct current systems and their discourses to explore future international networks based on human solidarity.

This manifesto is dedicated to all the comrades out there fighting the good fight.
Keep ruffling feathers and creating spaces to amplify our voices.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: ACTIVISM IS SOLIDARITY

"The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." *-Audre Lorde*

At the center of intersectionality is perspective. Identity shapes who we are and our byproducts: our thoughts. This thesis will recount main trends in colonial history and its evermore present permanence in today's public policy: the unbreakable cycles of oppression, institutionalized violence, and selective memory are all byproducts of colonialism. Led by the desire to conquer others, colonization dehumanizes and estranges people from feeling human solidarity. By uprooting Indigenous ways of living, humanity has lost alternative approaches to the human struggle. Ones that are not rooted in war and violence, but a sense of community and universal wellbeing. Several scholars have approached the topic of international solidarity either directly or indirectly, but none have ever connected the lines of local solidarity-based action and larger networks. This thesis thus aims to identify and deconstruct colonial discourses, attitudes, and dynamics still present in today's international policies and attempts to provide an alternative approach to form regional and international networks based on the framework of inter-community solidarity.

In order to deconstruct patterns of modern colonialism in policy-making, it must be made clear that capitalism is placed at the antithesis of *inter-community solidarity,* and actively goes against the dignity of what I call *community-cultural roots.* As a direct product of colonial systems, capitalism creates a norm that to care for others is a luxury most can't afford, it places monetary value on human lives and consequently makes interpersonal relationships economic

transactions. Many international and regional organizations operate on a system of providing aid in exchange for economic returns–or what they like to call *sustainability*. There is an overwhelming discrepancy in UN-led sustainability efforts and achieving true sustainable livelihoods. The current system excuses the presence of debt colonialism as a new form of neo-colonialism especially present in the "Global South" and its unbreakable dependence on its former colonizers. Through the Solidarity Model, informed by decolonial theories, I emphasize the need to uproot colonialism and imperialism through mass solidarity, accountability, and representation.

Adopting decolonial frameworks to achieve a sustainable future is possible, but it requires an entire revisitation of the processes by which policy is made. Too many conversations are happening behind closed doors; these are crucial discussions about the future wellbeing of the othered, the subaltern, and the marginalized. Although change is being made, only true progress will be possible when we amplify silenced voices and make public discourse truly accessible to all. Through the Solidarity Model that I am proposing, a new framework of approaching policy-making is introduced. One that takes into consideration issues of representation and selective visibility, protection and memory, permanence and disappearance. One that prescribes new networks of action and accountability anchored in solidarity. I frame solidarity as the solution to the myriad of problems that plague current global institutions: Colonization, racism, accessibility, accountability, sexism, capitalism, representation, and all the geographies of such. I see the need to uproot colonialism and imperialism through mass solidarity.

The overarching goals of this project are to (1) provide an overview of colonial and imperial legacies to deconstruct the cycle of legitimization that is perpetuated in present

institutionalized spaces; (2) examine the use of language as a tool to discriminate against marginalized groups, and in particular analyze the use of public spaces in relation to permanence, protection, displacement, and activism; and, (3) apply a framework of solidarity as a space and network based main trends of personal observations of NGO advocacy work at the United Nations.

ON ACTIVISM

I have been waiting for a kairotic moment to write something meaningful. A manifesto. I have been kept up by the overwhelming query of how I can create access to institutional privilege and power. As an activist and feminist, writing a manifesto was one way I found to transcend institutional and genre norms. This manifesto is a personal response to the constraints of the Ivory tower, which presents itself in my daily life through many forms: the academy, the United Nations, the patriarchal capitalist system, or more generally the constraints of everyday life. All these are relevant to this manifesto and my experiences as a young, Queer woman, but the one I want to start with is the U.S. academy. I wish there were more accepted formats to express our academic work. I have been thinking a lot about my inability to fit the academy's perfect box, the norm that in order to be credible and recognized we must bow down to academic constraints and cite pre-approved sources, funneling our original thoughts into peer-reviewed journals funded by the same pockets that keep college campuses segregated. I found solace in the words of bell hooks: "The university and the classroom began to feel more like a prison, a place of punishment and confinement rather than a place of promise and possibility."[1]

I write as a person situated in the "Global North" and experiencing the privileges of my current geography but coming from a space and vision of solidarity with communities in

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[1] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 4.

struggle. I am a displaced Italian woman, who is neither *home* nor abroad, who is grappling with the constraints of the systems she finds herself in whilst learning her identity as a scholar and activist. I write to tell my story, and the story of the effects of my people's quest to colonize those erased from the white-washed history they like to teach us in schools. I write to use my privilege as a young white woman from a middle-class family to amplify the voices of those that are most affected by the capitalist and patriarchal ramifications of continued colonialism in institutions. I write as an activist in the hope of starting conversations that will create changes in the structural fabrics of policies and give access to representation for the silenced, the unheard, and the most affected.

To write about resistance is a form of activism. Activism is accountability. Activism is being able to use my privilege to create space for those who were oppressed out of theirs. Activism is being able to address my own forms of oppression from the capitalist system. Activist work goes beyond the self. Activism is continuing to resist even when you feel like you do not have the energy to. Activism is family and community; it is caring for other beings. Activism is solidarity.

ON DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGIES

To critique is to help build. Addressing issues beyond the binaries while supporting and uplifting the voices of the marginalized, the vulnerable and the invisible is helping to build accountability. The multiple intersections of oppression or privilege that we experience place accessibility at the heart of decolonization. In order to decolonize methodologies, we must first change the rhetorical ecologies that shape the intersecting epistemological systems forming our life experiences. As Foucault framed the *episteme* as what allows a discourse to function, we

should dissect our rhetorical epistemologies–or the discourses we legitimize–in their ecological networks.

In increasing representation and accessibility, we must center the epistemological experiences of marginalized communities.[2] We need to recognize the Western scientific system's grasp on thinking, developing, and implementing policies that mostly affect the othered, the subaltern, and the marginalized. Instead, we must uphold Indigenous epistemologies[3] and understand that we are working from a place that is counter to culture. We are working to reestablish the way culture is built and fostered. I argue that colonization never ended in the way it was first conceived, it just transformed to permeate most public policies with continued colonial discourses. We therefore need comprehensive strategies to decolonize methodologies and to frame the dissection of systemic and structural discrimination.

I frame permanence, based on Verges' discussion on protection, as access to visibility. Being highly context-based, permanence is hard to define or quantify. However, based on my experiences as an activist and a researcher, increased permanence (visibility) is positively correlated to solidarity through different mediums. My definition of solidarity is the collective; people uniting for a common purpose—usually driven by the common struggle—to dismantle institutional complicity. In viewing solidarity as an organizing force through the collective, we can also appreciate the uniting effort of many *community-cultural roots*. In moving away from exclusionary and subordinating terminology like "formerly-colonized"—sparsely used for contextual accuracy through this manifesto—, I refer to community groups with shared cultural values, Indigenous communities, civil society, grassroots, and the othered, the subaltern, and the

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[2] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," *Signs* vol. 28 n.2 (2003), 513.
[3] Ibid., 511.

marginalized at large, as *community-cultural roots*. I recognize the term "formerly-colonized" as inherently problematic, and advocate for its reframing. In recognizing the ways we intervene in written and spoken language, and how we engage as active bystanders in the use of language through different mediums, we can frame solidarity as the glue of organizing for *community-cultural roots.*

ON SOLIDARITY

Language matters. I am not the first nor last person to say so, but in the context of breaking the cycle of victimization and subordination of the othered, the subaltern, and the marginalized, we must pay close attention to the use of specific language. Throughout this manifesto, I point out the discrepancies in the words we legitimize as 'decolonial' and the exclusionary power they continue to have in public policies. In developing a human-centered framework of solidarity, I consulted many traditional and new literary theories, case studies, poetry, and art. I explored the inherent biases in present and past literature on postcolonial and decolonial studies. The framework I am proposing has its roots in studies I have conducted and endless literature reviews. Without the need to write out an academy-recognized traditional literature review, I concluded that traditional theories embody literacy normativity, and therefore steal solidarity from people. We must rewrite and recreate solidarity, anchored in the principles of the right to rest, the right to dignity, the right to pleasure, the right to organize. Institutions actively work to keep these principles from being included in public policies. The only way to counter this ignorance is through the power of community.

I advocate for action and accountability anchored in solidarity. I have experienced first-hand how discussions at the United Nations (UN) tend to be esoteric. There's a systemic blockage in enacting the much-discussed changes. But who better to change the system than the

system itself? Having witnessed the exclusion and limits of civil society, and the voice-binding restrictions present under Chatham House Rules, I noticed that there is very limited and selective access to these conversations. There is a certain pragmatism needed when working to dismantle structures from within, especially when talking about a well-established, -funded, -supported international institution such as the United Nations. Through this project, I am proposing a new perspective and outlook at how we discuss, advise, and create policies centering accountability and representation. We need new tools to fix old problems because, clearly, the old tools are not working. Feminist decolonial theory advocates to dismantle the leadership patriarchy, that in this case manifests itself in the UN system. We must reject development for development's sake and recognize that the most marginalized are the hardest to reach. There is no undoing colonization, but acknowledging the continued legacies and being held accountable to empower countries to be truly independent. The rise of masculinization of society (militarization, polarization, etc.) along with the enlargement of carceral and punishment systems across the globe pose a threat to the implementation of feminist decolonialism in activism, public policy, and change across the board. Through this manifesto, I propose a model based on *inter-community solidarity* as a way to increase representation and implement accountability.

CHAPTER II

TURNING DISCOURSE INTO ACTION: A DECOLONIAL CASE STUDY OF THE

ITALIAN OCCUPATION OF LIBYA

"It is not a question of connecting elements in a systemic and ultimately abstract way, but of making the effort to see if, and what, links exist." -Françoise Vergès

GOING BACK TO GO FORWARD

As we start deconstructing colonization and rewriting decolonization, we must frame solidarity as our driving force. Solidarity means accountability. Based on the analysis of the occupation of Libya as a case study and the inter-theory dialogue on deconstructing the past and present colonial system, this chapter argues that policy is used as a form of imposing continued colonial control, and marginalized populations in the "Global South" will never be freed of oppression until the countries in the "Global North" show true solidarity and are held accountable for their cultural slaughters.

Decolonial theory advocates for the multidimensionality of experiences. Transitioning to achieving decolonial frameworks and ending the cycle of dependency is possible only through meaningful change. Françoise Vergès in *A Decolonial Feminism, A Feminist Theory of Violence: A Decolonial Perspective,* and Cesaire's *Resolutely Black: Conversations with Françoise Vergès* deconstructs systemic norms and colonial legacies to inform solidarity-centered approaches to future change in policy making. Vergès advocates for dismantling colonialism, capitalism, racism, imperialism, and all the systems that created cultural superiority, Eurocentrism, white supremacy, and built prisons.

When juxtaposed in conversation with Michel Foucault, Franz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire, and Edward Said, and in conjunction with a case study on the colonization of Libya, I find that Vergès' argument on how racial capitalism, imperialism and colonial occupation inevitably produce gendered violence with the complicity of the state showing that the colonial space was and is an enclave of false protection and violent inaction. The colonizer state power over the land controlled the means of living of the *community-cultural roots* populations. Their life—and death—was completely determined and at the mercy of the colonial powers and settlers. The necropolitics of colonialism, or as studied by Achille Mbembe, the political and social system by which some are allowed to live and some must die, are seen through every colonial structure, policy, and initiative across the board.[4] As Françoise Vergès intersects the aftermath of colonialism in the invisible bodies of the care economy with other structural and systemic violence, the cycle of colonial trauma can be seen in the current state of former colonies. In *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya,* Claudio G. Segrè examines the processes and reasons by which the Italian colonization of Libya came about.

The colonial permeates my daily life through different Ivory Towers, namely the U.S. academy and the place I am demographically required to call *home*. As Rachele Borghi describes, "The colonial power matrix is European, capitalist, militant, white, Christian, patriarchal, heterosexual and it [finds] its operating center in the nation-state."[5] The colonial using race to determine social hierarchies and continued violence is but merely a cog in the wheel of capitalism. In deconstructing the privilege around and within me, I needed to understand where the colonial roots of my privilege lie. I did a deep nose dive into history books that spoke my same language with no luck finding a connection between their narratives and

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[4] Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics.*
[5] Rachele Borghi, *Decolonialita' e Privilegio,* 86.

what I knew was missing. It was up to me to build the bridges between dominant and true historical narratives.

According to mainstream accounts of the history of Italian colonies, Italy first occupied Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, the two regions that later became known as Libya, in 1911. It was an Italian colony from 1912 until 1947, was under British and French occupation from 1943 to 1951, and finally gained independence in 1951. The terms of Libyan independence are still murky today because of the continued Italian and French investments and influence in the region. Claudio Segrè opens his book, *Fourth Shore,* by saying that Italy never really reached a true "colonial consciousness."[6] Italy's approach to its colonies was different from other European powers that began occupying parts of Africa beginning in the 19th century. Because Italians joined the *Scramble for Africa* later than other European colonizers, the conditions of the lands they occupied were not meant for the benefits they had hoped to reap. The colonization of Libya resembled that of Eritrea generating debates on whether Italian colonization was led by capitalism or demographics. Italian colonies in Africa were originally planned to be the place to send Southern emigrants, who were mainly farmers—classified as "unemployed and landless families who emigrated from Italy."[7] The settlements ranged from small to large farms, and pastoral estates.[8] This Italian emigration to Libya was State-encouraged to rid the mainland of unemployment and political dissidents.[9] And, as explained by Segrè, both the Liberal and subsequent Fascist governments hoped "that colonies could provide at least a partial solution to Italy's emigration problem."[10]

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[6] Claudio G. Segrè, *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya,* 3.
[7] Ibid., 89.
[8] Antonio Gramsci, *La Scuola è Vita*, 44.
[9] Ibid.*,* 139-140.
[10] Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, 4.

When contextualizing issues of colonial legacies and accountability, we can refer to Gramsci's words: "Such social forces exist only in words, but not in actions, as affirmation not implementation."[11] Antonio Gramsci saw people as historical creations.[12] He points to history as an act of liberation from privilege and prejudice but highlights the hypocrisy of the continued existence of elitist spaces.[13] In his *Scritti giovanili (Early Writings)* he narrates his own views and experiences on the academy as being exclusive to the elites. It is then clear that the classist and racist rhetorics that informed social hierarchies imposed in the colonies were present in Italy before the first Italian settlers reached Libya's shores.

After the occupations of Eritrea, Somalia, and attempted invasion of Ethiopia, Libya was seen by the Fascist government as "la terra promessa" (*the promised land*).[14] Italy claimed a *right* to Libya due to its Roman occupation legacy, the chosen Italian settlers presumed to *civilize* the Arabs of Libya.[15] A rhetoric common to the quest for colonization: that to civilize the Indigenous populations. Fascist Italy claimed its entrance in the colonial race was to solve the demographic problem and to boost its national honor.[16] Segrè commented that, "Like any other colonial power, the Italian were eager—indeed, still are eager today—to justify their methods of creating the public domain for colonization."[17] The first Italian colonization of Eritrea failed because it "lacked energetic state financing and Fascist leadership".[18] Some of the developmental and project-based troubles experienced by the Italians in Eritrea eventually made their way into

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[11] Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, 86.
[12] Gramsci, *La Scuola è Vita*, 16.
[13] Ibid*.,* 19.
[14] Ibid., 23.
[15] Ibid., 26.
[16] Ibid., 11.
[17] Ibid., 50.
[18] Ibid*.,* 5.

Libya, which turned out to be another failed "attempt by the Italians to establish an emigrant's paradise in Africa."[19] Even if idealized by Mussolini as a solution to Italy's emigration problem,[20] the prospects of Libya were not the strongest.[21]

As he is writing during the time of Italian colonization of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Libya, Gramsci's insights are helpful in framing the onset of the Italian colonialist and capitalist quest in Africa. Indeed, he believed that through the critique of capitalist society, a unitary consciousness of the proletariat could be formed. Critique is therefore culture.[22] In the context of both 1900s Italy and today, school is a place to learn and adapt to the social order. In his *Quaderni dal Carcere (Prison Notebooks)*, he frames schools, just like prisons and other institutions, as systems to determine people's place in society.[23] The school and its teachings fight against folklore –taking over *community-cultural roots* and common spaces.[24] The cultural tradition to learn Greek and Latin in Italy, for example, is aimed at gaining an increased consciousness of the self.[25] To compare Latin and Italian is to gain more awareness about two civilizations that preceded the modern one, thus building an historical self-identity—but every word portrays a different image that takes on different meanings depending on time and society in each of the two languages.[26] Language in itself is a hierarchical system used as much in colonial models as in present policies.

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[19] Gramsci, *La Scuola è Vita,* 15.

[20] Ibid., 59.

[21] Ibid., 26.

[22] Ibid., 18-19.

[23] Ibid., 70-71.

[24] Ibid., 69.

[25] Ibid., 74-75.

[26] Ibid., 74.

Compared to the first attempt at colonization in Eritrea made by the Liberals, the Fascist occupation of Libya was much more ingrained in nationalist ideals and pushed forth by a hierarchical system that ensured Italian supremacy in the colonies. "In theory as well as in practice, of course, the Italians were to remain supreme in the colony. In their legal status, for instance, the Libyans in 1939, were relegated to second-class citizenship."[27] After Mussolini's 1937 pledge to reward the Libyans who helped in Ethiopia, a new class with special citizenship was formed, and it was determined by the military rank held by formerly-colonized people. The goal of this—as seen in other colonial models—was to "create an elite citizenship sympathetic to the Italians."[28]

Segrè cites Corradini: "Only when the spirit of emigration had been converted to the spirit of colonialism and imperialism would the Italians be a great people."[29] The identifiable nationalist drive that characterized most colonialisms was the impetus for Italian expansion in Africa. Following the examples of France and Britain, Fascist Italy formulated its own colonial program. However, the Italians recognized that, "Force and repression alone were not a sufficient basis for the colony's development. Politics and economics had to work hand-in-hand."[30] The Fascist colony model followed three steps: (1) occupying and claiming territory, (2) building homes and infrastructure for new village inhabitants, and (3) moving new colonists into the Europeanized villages.[31]

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[27] Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, 104.
[28] Ibid., 104.
[29] Ibid., 18.
[30] Ibid., 47.
[31] Ibid., 61.

In the early 20th century, the image of Libya started being portrayed as a fertile land full of promise by both Italian and French authors.[32] At the same time, talks about political and economic interdependence between Europe and Africa started surfacing among French circles. "Intensive colonization impinged upon the heady world of geopolitics in which Italy had her special mission, side by side with France and England, to develop 'Eurafrica'."[33] It was clear that France had its interests in Libya as well, but for the Italians, whose colonial track record greatly suffered compared to that of the French, "Libya was expected to play a key role in both Fascism's plans for Mediterranean hegemony and the regime's internal social policies."[34] Needless to say, these plans failed as they were originally envisioned.

Ever since the country's independence and the 1950 UN resolution in Libya,[35] which was assumed to end all foreign colonial occupation in the country, the impacts of the colonial legacies left on the *community-cultural roots* populations are still felt today. Considering the colonial blueprint of rehousing Italian migrants in Libya and elevating their social status among the Indigenous populations inevitably caused alterations to the Libyan social system and introduced white supremacy and institutionalized violence. Not to mention, giving a higher social status to the Libyans who served the colonial agenda in Ethiopia caused an internal selection on who is worthy of being protected by the empire (state) and who is not. It was the culturally-imposed whiteness that was breaking community and solidarity among the formerly-colonized people, and deepening social tensions.

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[32] Segrè, *Fourth Shore,* 24-25.
[33] Ibid., 94.
[34] Ibid., 62.
[35] Ibid., 155.

In taking a trauma informed approach to discovering untold histories, we can clearly see that the post-independence internal tensions and conflicts in Libya were determined by the pre- and post- colonization state of French-Italian relations in the region. According to Di Maio, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Italy has had geostrategic interests in helping stabilize the region in recent years. In their article on Italy's continued influence in Libya, Karim Mezran and Alissa Pavia state that, "Italy is also one of the only countries to maintain a strong presence on the ground even before the ousting of Qaddafi, but especially in the last few years during the civil war's intensification."[36] Moreover, Italy has been the only country out of the former colonizers to keep their embassy open post-independence while the U.S. and France did not—the fact that Italy maintained an open connection re-established its influence in the region and placed Italy as the gateway between Libya and partnerships with the European Union.[37] The 2008 Treaty of Benghazi between former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and Dictator Muammar Qaddafi solidified Italy as a "credible partner for Libya."[38] There have been talks that Italy would lead the development of a transnational highway from Tunisia to Egypt, passing through Libya.[39] This speaks to the race to invest in *post-colonial* African development projects between economic conglomerates, namely China, Russia, the European Union, and the U.S., as well as global corporations. Further showing that colonial legacies continued to impact the public and foreign policies of both the colonizing and colonized countries.

Both France and Italy have had interest in maintaining their sphere of influence in the region. On one hand, Italy's oil company, Eni, having investments in Libya shows how

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[36] Karim Mezran and Alissa Pavia, "Italy found its way back into Libya," atlanticcouncil.org.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Karim Mezran and Federica Saini Fasanotti, "France must recognize its role in Libya's plight", atlanticcouncil.org.
[39] Mezran and Pavia, "Italy found its way back into Libya."

dependent the former Italian colony is on its colonizer. Being the gateway to wealthy European partnerships, Italy is once again in the paternalistic position to *civilize* Libya and introduce it to the developed world. There are many maps speaking to the inseverable connection between Libya and its former colonizer, but specific maps show that there are direct pipelines connecting the Libyan city of Melliah to Sicilian Gela.

Tied to a permanent reminder of their present colonial dependency, the oil pipeline not only destroys Libya's land and climate but also perpetuates the problem of debt colonialism that many "Global South" nations are facing today. On the other hand, France's 1940s occupation of the Fezzan region for economic and strategic reasons and its military interventions on many occasions only heightened the internal conflict. Karim Mezran and Federica Saini Fasanotti's article treats the French involvement in the revolts in Benghazi as further deepening the conflict, showing that what France had hoped to achieve—to gain more influence in Libya by controlling the outcome of the revolution—only exacerbated the social unrest.

Whether because of its nationalist pride tied to the colonies or its competition with Italy over Libya, France had a hard time admitting defeat and eventually withdrew its troops in 2012 just to return in 2014 to support "its most important defense-industry client" the United Arab Emirates and their sponsored warlord Khalifa Haftar, "a former Gadhafi-era general who defected in the late 1980s" and leader of the Libyan National Army (LNA).[40] This is where France really showed how badly it wanted to be the new neocolonialist power to dominate Libya and its hypocrisy in doing so. In the words of Mezran and Fassanotti, "While Paris's official policy supported the United Nations-led negotiations over Libya and the Government of National Accord (GNA) that resulted from them, France's real policy on the ground was of total and full

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[40] Mezran and Pavia, "Italy found its way back into Libya."

support for Haftar's forces."[41] France supported Haftar's regime militarily, but Macron also recognized Haftar's legitimacy despite his poor human rights record in later years.

More than a decade later, there are still active debates on who should bear the weight of responsibility for the current war and refugee exodus in Libya. According to Youssef Tobi's article, "Italy argues that France poorly managed the post-revolution moment in 2011 and is by extension responsible for the current chaos. But France rejects the Italian government's narrative, and snipes at Italy's current far-right government coalition."[42] France has focused on using Turkey as a scapegoat for the conflict in Libya, saying it's hindering peace negotiations and resolutions in the region. However, by many Libyans, France is seen as the one escalating the conflict, standing by while Haftar's forces stormed the capital, Tripoli, and beyond. Not to mention the involvement of other imperialist nations, such as the United States with Muammar Gaddafi, escalating tensions and deepening the internal conflict.

REWRITING DECOLONIZATION

Based on their clear continued destructive involvement in Libya, both Italy and France are still actively trying to keep their colonial legacies alive. During the 77th session of the General Assembly in September 2022, both former Prime Minister Mario Draghi and President of France, Emmanuel Macron, spoke on international solidarity and renewed Italy's commitment to COVID recovery and providing aid to Ukraine.[43] Italy "acted without delay, together with the other member countries of the European Union, with its NATO and G7 allies, and with all partners who, like us, believe in a rule-based international system and multilateralism," said

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[41] Mezran and Fasanotti, "France must recognize its role in Libya's plight."
[42] Youssef Tobi, "Libya and France: A Revival of 'Napoleonism'?", rusi.org.
[43] UNRIC Italia, "H.E. Mr. Mario Draghi, President of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Italy, Addresses Unga 77."

Draghi.[44] He stated that Italy, among other countries in the European Union, has been hosting

many refugees from the Ukrainian conflict. However, Italy has historically had very exclusive

policies regarding refugees especially those from the Global South, demonstrating how

whiteness—even in the face of global crises—is still a prominent determinant of protection.

Draghi continued, "Italy is the largest contributor of Blue Helmets among European countries, he

stated, with the military deployed in five missions in the Mediterranean, Africa and Asia, and is

well aware that migration is a global phenomenon, and must be addressed as such."[45] Since then,

with the current rise in Italian Fascist nationalism with the rise to power of Georgia Meloni, Italy

has since cracked down on hosting Libyan refugees, creating a discrepancy between Italy's

diplomatic face and their actions on paper.

President Emmanuel Macron also renewed France's pledge to support aid in Ukraine

during his General Assembly speech. He acknowledged all the people that fought for France's

freedom in the two World Wars and through the years. He stated: "Let us not forget that debt."[46]

He then proceeded to call out the nations who have not sided with the war in Ukraine and

accused them of being complicit to a new imperialism.[47] Again, France's hypocritical discourses

continue, as the country has been extremely active in upholding colonial legacies both militarily

and economically in the Global South. The discrepancy between promised and tangible

accountability is what keeps most of the world's othered, subaltern, and marginalized invisible.

The *discourses* of colonialism brought forth by Michel Foucault, Franz Fanon, Albert

Memmi, Aimé Césaire, and Edward Said in conversation with Françoise Vergès make

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[44]ONU Italia, "UNGA77: Draghi Addresses the General Assembly, 'Helping Ukraine Was the Right and Only Choice.'"

[45] Mezran and Fasanotti, "France must recognize its role in Libya's plight", atlanticcouncil.org.

[46] United Nations, "France | General Assembly of the United Nations."

[47] Ibid.

compelling cases for true future decolonial legacies. In *A Decolonial Feminism,* Françoise Vergès urges us to see issues affecting the othered, the subaltern, and the marginalized as multidimensional—not hierarchical or intersectional—as they all should be prioritized in their own issue areas. Vergès differentiates between colonization and colonialism. Colonization is an event, colonialism "is a…total social movement whose perpetuation is explained by the persistence of social formation resulting from this order."[48] As a direct after product and driving force of present colonialism, "capitalism inevitably creates invisible work and invisible lives."[49] In analyzing the continued presence of Italy and France in Libya, the scapegoating discourses both countries used to wash their hands clean of their destructive impact in the colonies perpetuates colonialist rhetoric in present systems of policy-making. It "preserves [their] innocence"[50] by ignoring the connection between capitalism, sexism, and racism. Indeed, Vergès states that, "France is literally the creation of its colonial empire, and the North a creation of the South…[but] no text on political issues, whether in philosophy, economy, or sociology, is interested in these remnants of the French colonial empire."[51]

Because language—both written through official documents and reports, and spoken through colonial discourses—dictates permanence, the experiences of formerly-colonized populations were almost never recorded in writing. If they were, then they would be legitimized as worthy as the European experiences. Therefore, as in the case of the portrayal of Libya, many Europeans tended to exaggerate what they had found, claimed, and civilized. In the context of today, Vergès states: "This division between a humanity considered entitled to protection and

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[48] United Nations, "France | General Assembly of the United Nations," 15.

[49] Ibid., 2.

[50] Ibid., 9.

[51] Ibid..

those (almost by nature) excluded from it to me remains a tangible division that structures the social world."[52] Edward Said, in *Orientalism,* also explores the idea of the use of writing in upholding the colonial discourse of who is civilized and who isn't, and the Euro centrist criteria that determine who lives and who dies.[53]

In Libya, the formerly-colonized *bodies* who gave back to the Italian empire were awarded a social status close to the Italian settlers, but they were never allowed to reach true equality. "The link between racialization and invisibilization"[54] is what allows the current racist and patriarchal laws of protection in most of the colonizing nations. In legitimizing colonial spaces, we engage in violent inaction, we justify the invisible bodies created by capitalism. As colonizing nations replaced their physical presence in the colonies with economic chokeholds, capital became the new colonizer. Colonialism—and its inherent systems of capitalism, racism, sexism, and imperialism—is placed at the antithesis of solidarity. Colonialism still thrives because of invisibility: The "distinctions between who has the right to protection and who does not,"[55] determines their social status, just like in the colonies.

The struggle of the invisible is rarely noticed in society. The "figures of sovereignty whose central project is not the struggle for autonomy but the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations."[56] The intersectionalities of disability justice, feminism, and community activism highlight the severe lack of representation of certain communities in the public space. It is no coincidence when

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[52] Vergès, *A Decolonial Feminism*, 25.
[53] Edward Said, *Orientalism.*
[54] Vergès, *A Feminist Theory of Violence: A Decolonial Perspective,* 90-91.
[55] Ibid., 33.
[56] Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 14.

Vergès states that "the public space is not neutral."[57] Mbembe also speaks to the rise of 'modern terror', which can be understood as the employment of systemic violence in the context of the colonizing control of bodies through fear. Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, necro-empowerment, and hyperconsumerism still exists in France,[58] and in Europe as a whole. Colonizing nations thrive on upholding systems that create disposable lives and disposable bodies. These invisible bodies are usually racialized people, and therefore are not seen as complete people by the state.[59] "The systematic destruction of the living"[60] allows them to make empty promises and not be held accountable for colonial reparations.

In an interview with Françoise Vergès, Aimé Césaire recounts: "Reparation is a matter of interpretation…I don't really like the term 'reparation'. It implies that repairing the matter is possible…I think Europeans have a responsibility towards us, as they do to all the less fortunate, but especially to us for all the misfortune they themselves caused."[61] The case of Libya and Draghi and Macron's statements at the United Nations are a prime example of the disregard to repair colonial wrongdoings. Instead, it is easier for these nations to mask their solidarity and fill their words with empty promises. By upholding capitalism and keeping colonialism alive, European powers resort to controlling bodies through fear.[62] They do this by embedding the politics of danger to their public policies and social models. The prison is an example of this. The "prison was described as one of the structures of colonialism and racism, and the justice system as an auxiliary of colonial power."[63] The idea of Foucault's panopticon and the social

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[57] Vergès, *A Feminist Theory of Violence*, 54.
[58] Ibid., 19-20.
[59] Vergès, *A Feminist Theory of Violence,* 93.
[60] Ibid., 11.
[61] Aime Cesaire, *Resolutely Black*: *Conversations with Francoise Verge*, 17-19.
[62] Verges, *A Feminist Theory of Violence*, 53-54.
[63] Ibid., 63.

systems associated with it speaks to Vergès idea that those deemed not worthy of protection by the state will always be stuck in the cycle of institutionalized violence, upheld by the prison system.

Vergès speaks on Foucault's idea that the prison "exacerbates the perception of danger."[64] To explain how "the law is not neutral; it is the emanation of the patriarchal and capitalist State,"[65] Vergès draws heavily from Foucault's idea of inherently historical knowledge as power and as a way to gain power. As an historian, Michel Foucault devotes much of his research to studying the evolution of the human experience through the formation of ideas as power structures. Central to his studies are perception and the belief that reality is not what you see but how you see it. Foucault emphasizes the existence of the man-made constraints that inhabit our minds and inevitably influence our decision-making. In *Order of Thing*s, he gave great attention to the *episteme*. He stated, "In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice."[66] According to Foucault, epistemes are ways of thinking. They evolve according to human patterns; epistemes are the key to human knowledge. With epistemes, Foucault implies that knowledge is not static, and neither is the history it is derived from. As Foucault explains, everything is dictated by the reality we shape. In his lecture on governmentality, he touches on the historical reality of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He states that the historical reality of Europe's competition among states never ended, it transformed from gaining more land for the king to dominating areas outside of their physical boundaries, like colonization. What he calls the "balance of Europe" was present

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[64] Verges, *A Feminist Theory of Violence,* 67.
[65] Ibid.*,* 70.
[66] Michele Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Science*, 168.

in past centuries as well as today.[67] Ultimately, Foucault introduces the state as "the regulatory

idea of governmental reason".[68] This, tied to his theory of Raison d'état—implying "open time

and a multiple spatiality"—,[69] provides a new outlook on the European drive to colonize.

From the standpoint that human development is driven by knowledge, Foucault gives

spotlight to the subconscious way that humans form orderly structures. The order of such

structures is influenced by resemblance and language, which in turn determine the pattern of

repetition and association that unconsciously creates structures. It is completely fair to say that

Foucault's inward-looking approach to the human mind, behaviors, and experience can help shed

light on the use of language to dominate. Foucault introduces the idea that we are all in prison all

the time; a mental prison that keeps us disciplined. He focuses on prisons and their structures

because they were the very first true disciplinary institutions, based on which others were created

(schools, hospitals, factories, offices, etc.). He pushes the idea that to live is to be disciplined. A

Foucauldian view puts forth the assumption that, as humans functioning in public areas, we are

conditioned to stay disciplined because we think we are being watched and always controlled.

Foucault refers to the structure of a prison as a panopticon. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault

explained that in a panopticon, power belongs to whoever sits in the "tower", and it is enforced

through surveillance.[70] This, to him, is how power structures work, by establishing a

"disciplinary society."[71] When thinking of ways this theory could affect our attitudes towards

explaining coloniality, seeing the panopticon as a colonial structure is not so farfetched. The

Foucauldian panopticon can be applied to the global by exporting the idea of docile bodies to the

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[67] Michele Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-78*, 384.
[68] Ibid., 376.
[69] Ibid., 379.
[70] Michele Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 200.
[71] Ibid., 209.

state level. In his governmentality lecture, Foucault states that, "The state is what commands governmental reason, that is to say, it is that which means one can govern rationally according to necessity; it is the function of intelligibility of the state in relation to reality, and it is that which makes it rational, necessary, to govern."[72] In other words, Foucault pushes for greater emphasis on the role of the state in creating and managing realities. Power dynamics are both created within the *community-cultural roots* members by way of disciplinary conditioning and performed through them as a result of the blurred lines between state action and reality.

Vergès urges us to "stop turning to a system—one that claims to save us—that is organized to exclude, lock up, kill."[73] Just like Albert Memmi discussed how formerly-colonized people were removed from the rewritten history of the colonizers,[74] we inherently legitimize the capitalist, racist, sexist, and imperialist system of colonialism because that is all we know. In *The Colonizer and the Colonizer*, Memmi writes, "He endeavors to falsify history, he rewrites laws, he would extinguish memories. Anything to succeed in transforming his usurpation into legitimacy."[75] The state therefore has the power to appropriate colonial experiences, rewrite them, and "inflict death."[76] It is no mistake when Memmi describes colonialism as "one variety of fascism."[77] This can be used to specifically explain the Fascist-led impulses to conquer African countries perceived by them as weak.

In his sequel book, *Decolonization and the Decolonized,* Memmi discussed how institutionalized violence can only be changed if humans change the violence within them. Other

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[72] Foucault, *Security Territory and Population*, 376.
[73] Vergès, *A Feminist Theory of Violence*, 84
[74] Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.
[75] Ibid., 52.
[76] Ibid., 59.
[77] Ibid., 63.

theorists like Césaire and Fanon also maintained that true decolonization is not possible without violence.[78] As Vergès explained, "[colonial] violence is economic and social, psychological and cultural…It deeply affects human interactions and intergenerational solidarity."[79] Moreover, "added to this systemic violence is the violence of organized poverty and fabricated vulnerability."[80] Today, this cycle of violence is yet to be broken. In Libya, the social unrest and civil war heightened by the continued colonial legacies of Italy, France, and Britain has caused one of the largest refugee crises in the past century.

The unaccountability in the discourses maintained by Italy and France is reflected in their anti-refugee, racist, and patriarchal domestic policies. In this case, Vergès' sustains the idea that "racial bodies are socio-historic bodies."[81] These invisible, racialized, and socio-historic bodies are care workers, unmarried mothers, and all those deemed 'unhealthy' by the state's public policies. Historically, healthy bodies—who were exclusively white—were the determinants of universal policies. This meant that the rest, the marginalized, the disabled, the colored, were inevitably racialized and oppressed by the same system they were expected to invisibly sustain. We must go back in our own historical pasts to move forward in a collective way. Just as I attempt to deconstruct Western postcolonial theories to make sense of modern decolonial theory, we need to take advantage of the "European geographical centrality",[82] as advocated by Said in *Culture and Imperialism,* to extend networks of solidarity through our activism and break the cycle of institutionalized violence. We need new, revised tools to fix century old problems.

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[78] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* & Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism.*

[79] Vergès, *A Feminist Theory of Violence*, 89.

[80] Vergès, *A Feminist Theory of Violence*, 59.

[81] Ibid., 91.

[82] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* 59.

CHAPTER III

FROM CONTROLLED TO CONTROLLING: SHIFTING THE POWER

DICHOTOMIES OF LANGUAGE

"My power will never depend on the feudal fealty of the other half of humanity" - Virginie Despentes

THE GEOGRAPHY OF MEMORY

Colonialism at its roots is driven by geography, or as Said framed it, the desire to conquer.[83] Remembering Françoise Vergès' distinction between colonialism and colonization, colonialism is a game of standpoint; colonizer versus colonized, West versus East, good versus bad. When put in the foreground, the value of what we see heavily relies on our perspective and knowledge. Geographer J.B. Harley introduces maps as social constructs. In a Foucauldian sense, maps are structures of power and they shape what knowledge we acquire. Harley expands on this by stating, "An analogy is to what happens to data in the cartographer's workshop and what happens to people in the disciplinary institutions—described by Foucault: in both cases a process of normalization occurs."[84] Power was both exerted on and exercised with cartography, furthering the binary distinctions between the good and the bad, the colonizer and the colonized, the public and the subaltern. Seeing maps as social structures allows us to apply Derrida's theory to deconstruct maps. Starting from the assumption that, in the West, maps were used to maintain state power, we must recognize the process of normalization that occurs as a result of the

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[83] Said, *Orientalism*.
[84] J. B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map", in *Cartographica* 26, n. 2, 1989.

authority of maps. Harley frames "the map is a silent arbiter of power."[85] While learning to dissect, deconstruct, and decolonize maps, we need to start utilizing cartography as an historical tool rather than a true depiction of reality. Decolonizing spaces and recognizing Western colonization practices means challenging the normative structures in colonial history, thus breaking the cycle of oppression through building community and fostering solidarity.

A question inspired by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* is: who controlled the *man* who made the maps? We must reimagine geography to deconstruct continued colonialism and root community in collective efforts to address oppressive struggles. Maps have historically been used for strategic political purposes; for segregation, for political disarmament, to establish citizenship and define the identity of cultural subjects. In "A Geography of Memory: A Psychology of Place," Oliva M. Espin explores the social construction of memory. She believes that knowing your identity is *remembering* how you were and who you are.[86] Women have long been bodies in an androcentric geography. "As British psychologist Stephanie Taylor (2010) states in her studies of narratives of identity and place, changes in those areas have particularly impacted women in contemporary society; therefore, the burden of creating an identity is greater for women than for men."[87] The narratives framing a world to please the male gaze make Queer and women's identity creation an exhausting feat. Narrating memory and memory work to create intersectional autobiographical memories is needed to bring to light the invisibility of Queer and women's bodies in historical and present geographies of struggle, resistance, and abolition.

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[85] Harley, "Deconstructing the Map."
[86] Olivia Espin, "A Geography of Memory: A Psychology of Place," 30.
[87] Ibid., 37.

The power relations of language in present policies determining the access to housing, healthcare, and education are rooted in the legacy of language relations from the colonies. As Espin states, "Learning the language of the host society implies learning one's place in the structures of social inequality."[88] It is the same structural oppression system that was used in the colonies. On this, Cesaire's question on reparations is evermore present: how can you give reparations to countries you have so viciously flipped inside out? How can you keep apologizing for your *wrongdoings* in the colonizer's language? Colonial reparations have turned out and continue to be political ploys to uphold the continued colonizer's good reputation. It is actually more a game of creating the illusion of solidarity or reform than an actual compensation and acknowledging responsibility. Back to Espin: "Memories appear to be loaded in favor of the language in which the experience took place."[89] All displaced people have in the end are memories. In most of what academics and institutions call *decolonized* or *developing* nations, the hodgepodge between the Indigenous ethnic culture and imposed settler culture is what causes most internal tensions in former colonial states: bloody civil wars, recurring coup d'etats, and violent secession movements.

Linguistic and cultural displacement is a form of systemic and cartographic violence. In analyzing geographies of oppression and colonial cartographies, it should be the center of our focus to uncover the blank spaces in memory and the intelligibility of collective memories: the spaces that determine language and identity loss for displaced people. On identity and memory creation, Karima Lazali introduces the LRP apparatus (Language, Religion, Politics) in which she proposes the idea that, psychologically and as a result of life experiences, individuals who

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[88] Espin, "A Geography of Memory", 47.
[89] Ibid., 45.

experienced colonial trauma do not differentiate between their social and internal constraints.[90]

Lazali theorizes that this LRP apparatus converges with the state-sanctioned fear brought on by

colonialism, accumulating in the legitimization of hierarchies and social status. She emphasizes

colonial terror as the force needed to perpetuate and foster colonialism and create trauma in

itself. Terror is deeply embedded in the ability of the state to blur the lines of agency, distorting

the "spiritual, civil, and social functions"[91] of marginalized bodies in public spaces.

Displacement is therefore a particular event during the Anthropocene that produces

trauma; it creates a double movement to solve and heal the trauma it generates. Playing on these

dualisms stemming from the Anthropocene, I argue that as more and more people are displaced

each day; we can no longer rely on physical spaces as spaces of cultural productions. As our ties

to the land wither with the increased instability of natural resources depleted by human

development, we will be left with only human sentiments like solidarity to form cultural links

with each other and the land. There are issues related to climate change and displacement that the

natural sciences could never aim to solve. I define the Anthropocene as the space—literary,

scientific, of infrastructure, or policy space—of development to reinforce the cultural superiority

of humans as superior to all that is related to nature.[92] In other words, I see the Anthropocene as

the space of human-centered approaches that drive the exploitative and abusive development on

Earth's land. On the other hand, I define ecology as the multidimensional space of analysis of the

relationships between living beings (nature to humans, animals to nature, nature to nature, etc.).[93]

It is important to contextualize ecology as a lens through which we see local, national, and

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[90] Karima Lazali, *Colonial Trauma: A Study of the Psychic and Political Consequences of Colonial Oppression in Algeria* (2021)*,* xv.

[91] Lazali, *Colonial Trauma,* 22.

[92] Tobias Boes, and Kate Marshall, "Writing the Anthropocene: An Introduction," in *The Minnesota Review* Vol. 83 (2014): 60-72.

[93] Astrid Ulloa, *The ecological native: indigenous peoples' movements and eco-governmentality in Colombia.* London: Routledge, 2005.

international policies being created. Ecology is inherently decolonial as it aims to dismantle power structures that keep nature—and all those connected to it—subordinate and othered as something to exploit for human benefit. Ecology serves as a basis for sustainability and sustainable thinking which informs this study.

Jurgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere explores the exclusive representation in public discourse. I referred to this work in relation to Nancy Fraser's later analysis and introduction of the counter-public sphere in examining who is part of public conversations, who gets a voice, and who makes decisions for the commons. In relation to the concept of public sphere and counter-public spheres, I explored the idea of selectiveness. In particular, why we are so selective in our solidarity. Now, selectiveness can apply to a variety of other human behaviors. For instance, we can notice public policies and discourses are often selective in action, representation, visibility, empathy, resilience, dignity, and equality, just to name a few. I focus on the spatial scope of solidarity as the realm of human emotion that can aid in reducing selectiveness in the way we engage in Anthropocentric behaviors. Some Anthropocentric behaviors I later identify are rapid development of cities, creation of urban slums, the urban-rural divide, and the gap in accessibility to resources, basic needs, and human rights. Stemming from colonialism, Indigenous thought has always and still is heavily othered across the board in policy-making, as well as in economic and social spaces.

Indigenous thought is seen as, therefore, subaltern and counter public. *Community-cultural roots* are repeatedly marginalized and left out of public decisions about their own wellbeing and dignity as humans. The current global public sphere of the United Nations—and other international organizations alike—is dominated by Anthropocentric discourses inevitably othering indigeneity as embracing and fully embodying the power of nature. When nature is

something to be exploited, little to no attention is paid to those who are part of it. The Anthropocentric rapid development has brought urbanization to almost take over *community-cultural roots* lifestyles, and especially Indigenous ways of living—completely taking over the land, the resources, the waterways, and the overall means for people to survive. This has triggered the creation of hybrid cultures and has redefined what it means to be *community-cultural roots*—for many, no longer being able to embrace locality and closeness with nature.

Public spheres and cosmopolitanism form these spaces of selectiveness, so I asked myself: How can a biocentric or even ecocentric relationship with nature change this selectiveness? Decolonial theory advocates for multidimensionality. In the transition to decolonial frameworks, I based my understanding of this on Vergès' *A Decolonial Feminism*, which urges us to see issues affecting the marginalized as multidimensional—not hierarchical or intersectional—as they all should be prioritized in their own issue areas. This helps us to see the underlying connections between all issues othering the subaltern.

Habermas defined the public sphere as 'private persons' that gather to discuss issues of 'public or common interest'.[94] Nancy Fraser later explained that, "The public sphere, in short, is not the state; it is rather the informally mobilized body of non-governmental discursive opinion that can serve as counterweight to the state."[95] The idea of a public sphere, as originally formulated by Habermas, severely excluded any individual who did not fit the status quo. This included women, as Fraser pointed out, but even more so all other minority groups that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak later identified as the subaltern. Spivak defines subaltern as the people and groups politically, economically, and socially excluded from the benefits of the hegemonic

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[94] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of bourgeois Society*, 398.
[95] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere. A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", 504.

power structures. She argues that to justly include the subaltern into conversations on local, national and global levels we must take an approach from below: learning from below, training from below, and understanding history from below.[96] When evaluating the effectiveness of public spheres, we must evaluate the repercussions on the othered it created. Habermas' idea of the select few—although supposedly including all—allowed the acceptance of a culture centered around the status quo. This translates to today's upper class holding the majority of liquid currencies and resources, while most people in almost every country experience poverty. Indeed, the public sphere today has not much changed since Habermas' first view of it. It is still exclusionary, inaccessible, segregated, and violent for those that continue to not have a place in it.

As the general force perpetuating subalternity, capitalism and its rapid development of cities, creation of urban slums, the urban-rural divide, and the gap in accessibility to resources, basic needs, and human rights is what creates forces like cosmopolitanism. Pnima Werbner defines cosmopolitanism—more specifically vernacular cosmopolitanism—as a force that brings together notions of locality and globalization under the expansion of rapid urbanization and development.[97] It is important to frame urbanization as a force that feeds into displacement. As mentioned previously, displacement does not necessarily entail physical movement due to extreme environmental disasters but can also entail emotional displacement due to the eradication of culture and ways of living. Many modern urbanization projects actively displace cultural traditions tied to the land they overtake. Many *community-cultural roots* populations, through continued colonization, have lost their vernacular cultures through language displacement. They have lost the meaning of the actions they performed to heal and feel one with

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[96] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the subaltern speak?* (1985), 231.
[97] Pnima Werbner, "Understanding Vernacular Cosmopolitanism," in *Anthropology News* 47 (2006), 11.

the land—their actions lost linguistic value, and therefore are no longer culturally relevant in the capitalist system. Through gentrification, book bans, colonizer language education, and many other forms of systemic violence, we can see here how capitalism continues to destroy the very cultural values that are the only viable way forward to ensure human survival.

The urbanization and cosmopolitanization of cities have blurred the lines between what is home and what is displacement. Although in the same physical location, home can quickly turn into a foreign place. Many Indigenous communities throughout Latin America, and particularly in Argentina, have suffered from the sudden displacement of their roots as a direct side effect of Western development practices. They have suffered from what cultural studies academics call a process of hybridization—the creation of hybrid cultures that combine Indigenous roots with urban living. As Cornejo-Polar explains, the advent of the metropolis eradicated the native both physically and in socio-political and literary spaces. In elaborating on this disparity present once again between the local Indigenous culture and the globalized society, he states: "Affirming Latin American literature as a coherent structure implies a legitimate broadening, something that challenges the distorted interpretation of our literature as a simple agent of Western literature; this system is now seen as false, and ultimately insufficient."[98] Where heterogeneity meets Indigenous thought is a point where we can observe the conjunction between two juxtaposed cultures: the *community-cultural roots* and the colonial/postcolonial. The effects of colonialism can be seen through literature about Latin American societies today fully dependent on capitalist structures and under-development, showing this duality of local/global, Indigenous/transnational binaries that form and perpetuate cosmopolitanism as a constant reminder of the dangers of capitalist cultural erasure.

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[98] Cornejo-Polar, "Indigenist and Heterogenous Literatures: Their Double Sociocultural Statue," in *Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*, 15.

To further draw on the idea of solidarity as a space and network, we must first examine what has tied *Westeners* to their land. We must first refer to Benedict Anderson's concept of nationalism and national identity and understand what he means by 'nation'. A nation, according to Anderson, is "an imagined political community–and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[99] But what is the extent of these imagined spaces and what forms these imagined national boundaries? Anderson stated, "Nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time."[100] The 'anomaly' of nationalism and its imagined spaces is a sticky one.[101] One of the ways nationalism is fostered is through both written and spoken language. Anderson discusses "languages-of-power" in relation to how vernacular languages gained legitimacy and authority.[102] He uses the specific example of Latin, and how it quickly became the written language of the Christendom.[103] Anderson also points out the life cycle of national elements like language and the always-present element of fatality—specifically the fatality of culture. These concepts, tied to what characterizes nationalism, offer a solid springboard to start thinking of nationalism as no longer tied to physical spaces. At the same time, nationhood is an outdated concept. Anthropocentric displacement has been redefining what we consider to be what ties us to land—what if "nations" are no longer so easily defined? We must start thinking of alternatives to foster the same sense of community not only transnationally, but especially trans-communally. We must be more imaginative in creating new spaces where sentiments like nationalism no longer is a function of the state, but of the people instead. We need a new approach to creating spaces of multidimensionality where the same human sentiments—love for

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[99] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 256.
[100] Ibid., 254.
[101] Ibid., 255.
[102] Ibid., 261.
[103] Ibid., 260.

community and kin—can still be fostered, but instead of in relation to physical spaces, through a network of human connections. This is where I advocate for a shift from inter-national to *inter-community* solidarity.

Social movements bring to light the dangers of the public space for the subaltern. They are the force addressing the invisible spaces in public policy. The continued invisibility of the blank spaces in our present leads us to question what we are ignoring and why are we keeping them as blank spaces. As Espin states, "The ways in which [we] understand and narrate [our] experiences are profoundly tied to the cultures and languages of both the old and new communities."[104] Through past and continued colonization and cultural displacement, people were stripped of cultural lineage and memories. The state thrives on the dependency on forgetting. As Lazali points out, this is especially present in fratricide, which is always ready to erupt in any democratic society.[105] In other words, any democracy is a pendulum between civil war and a good democratic environment. What determines *democracy* today? In its original Greek meaning, *democracy* meant "power to the people."[106] However, there is much selectivity and exclusivity in determining who really has the power and who does not. *Democracy* is often used as a synonym of consent, although it rarely considers the struggle of the othered, the subaltern, and the marginalized. The politics of knowledge—or the racist frameworks that allow for the appropriation of Indigenous knowledge, while negating people of color's knowledge—is what keeps spaces invisible, segregated, and inaccessible. The intersections of knowledge bring to light the politics of institutional memory in relation to cultural geography. In emphasizing

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[104] Espin, "A Geography of Memory", 46.
[105] Lazali, *Colonial Trauma*, 173-193.
[106] "Democracy - Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People", https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/democracy#:~:text=The%20word%20democracy%20comes%20from,the%20will%20of%20the%20people

cultural knowledge and memory, we can trace a direct relationship between Indigenous thought and language to overthrow the systemic oppression of the body.

LANGUAGE AS PROTECTION

I hate describing people as *victims*. Why do we always frame people in the context of the capitalist human struggle as *victims* of the patriarchy, *victims* of corporate expansion, *victims* of institutional racism, *victims* of language, *victims* of systems we as humans created? As bodies with agency, people are more than the struggles they face, they are lived experiences and the voices of history. As we talk about people and their stories, we must think deeply about whose stories we are telling and most importantly how we are telling them. Privilege is innate, not irreparable. In being aware of our present discursive colonization,[107] we must intensify our understanding of systemic violence, how it upholds colonialism, and who it excludes through its binary language.

We don't know the names of all those who lost and continue to lose their lives to colonial violence. Their permanence is inherently tied to their protection, or lack thereof. The violence enacted by and through colonialism continues to be embedded in *community-cultural roots* culture for several generations. Those who are protected are permanent, and those who are not disappear into historical revisions of the white settlers. The micropolitics of daily life, as discussed by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, are determined by language, and in turn determine protection and permanence. These micropolitics are the series of microaggressions and obstacles to daily survival the othered, the subaltern, and the marginalized face as a result of their lack of protection. Françoise Vergès advocates for the need to depatriarchize the politics of protection. Stemming from colonialism and upheld through normalized violence, protection is legitimized

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[107] Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes."

through language, and inherently connected to human dignity. Who deserves protection? Who is

worth protecting? And how is protection, or the lack thereof, determined?

In *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembe explores how current systems and policies determine

who deserves to live and who, by default, dies. In Vergès' words, "Who has the right to

protection and who does not,"[108] is determined by the undying capitalist grasp on the lives of

those most affected by systemic oppression. Staying true to its impasse nature, the current

patriarchal system thrives on the continuity of division. It determines the permanence of the

continued colonialism on the body, through means of geography, control, power, occupation,

discrimination, and exclusion. The assimilating effects of globalization make a hard case for the

protection and permanence of the othered, the subaltern, and the marginalized. To protect secular

and Indigenous language is to protect the identity of those not meant to be permanent (visible).

The centrifugal forces of the state thrive on precedent and continuity. The discourses that uphold

continued colonial legacies are multiplied, while those that challenge them discarded. As Vergès

explains, we lack the language to describe and discuss any form of violence that is not already

institutionalized.[109]

In using exclusive language, the state and its accomplices perpetuate and legitimize the

microaggressions that drive public policies. Describing someone as *colonized* or *formerly-*

colonized is continuing to subjugate them to second-class citizenship. *Vulnerable* populations,

insecurity, *hazardous, colonized, disabled, homeless*. Or even merely describing things as

dangerous inherently signifies more police and surveillance, and less protection. We often do not

talk about the discourses of gender-based violence and how language perpetuates the masculinist

occupation of public spaces. In *King Kong Theory*, Virginie Despentes states, "Women have

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[108] Vergès, *A Feminist Theory of Violenc*e, 33.
[109] Ibid., 15.

endured not only the history of men, like men, but their own specific oppression. Of staggering brutality."[110] She spotlights activist Camille Paglia, who concluded that rape happens because women are out in a space that isn't theirs.[111] An evermore present legacy of colonialism, sexist discourses and language in public policy are a staggering example of the misogynist need to control women's bodies. This continued colonization of the body is a tale as old as time. The burqa and niqab bans in France, the hijab laws in Iran, the male guardianship in Saudi Arabia, the arranged marriages in India, the FGM[112] in Somalia, the child marriages in Sudan, the abortion bans in the United States. As Despentes frames it, "Rape is civil war."[113] A violence that is not only physically inflicted on millions of people across the world at staggering rates but is also enacted through the discursive colonization of public policy. Despentes continues, "It is the power exerted over us that is violent, that power to decide what is and is not dignified."[114] Indeed, Queer and women's bodies have never ceased to be politicized.

There are so many histories of resistance and struggle that are lost in translation.[115] Vergès raises one of the most valid questions when it comes to translating spaces of oppression: how is it possible for us to translate race? And in turn, how can we translate solidarity across cultures? Race is inherently cultural, and the ways it is contextualized may feed into the same violent cycles that still keep it as a determinant of protection and dignity. In recounting invisible histories we must be aware of the linguistic processes that recolonize populations and communities around the world. As explained by Mohanty, "The terms *Western* and *Third World* retain a political and explanatory value in a world that appropriates and assimilates

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[110] Virginie Despentes, *King Kong Theory*, 133.
[111] Ibid., 35-36.
[112] Female genital mutilation.
[113] Despentes, 44.
[114] Ibid., 79.
[115] Verges, *Resolutely Black*, vi.

multiculturalism and 'difference' through commodification and consumption."[116] Gustavo

Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash explore how *Third World/South* and *First World/North* are terms

that represent social minorities and social majorities. Similarly, Arif Dirlik points to the

outdatedness of the *Third World* terminology, arguing that the Global South has potential to

dominate the global order. These works show the effects of the power dichotomies of language

in the way we perceive communities. It is rare that the term *Third World* is used to refer to

populations and communities not defined as *vulnerable*. Both cultural and institutional

conversations continue to be permeated with the question of how they are *vulnerable*, but never

why they are and remain *vulnerable*. It is a question of intentionally leaving uncomfortable

realities unaddressed, and it ultimately boils down to accountability. The state's grasp on public

discursive spaces limits the ability of impacted communities to advocate and work outside of

their pre-established spaces of public presence. The scam of free speech allows the state to

control what is being said and where it is being said under the unwavering flag of democracy. As

Despentes puts it, "A government that sets itself up as an all-powerful mother is a fascist

government."[117]

As expressive as language is framed to be, it is an astonishingly politicized tool to

perpetuate oppression. According to Jacques Derrida, language is both what upholds systems of

oppression and what is needed to dismantle them. "To reverse the resident hierarchy, only to

displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed. Deconstruction

in a nutshell."[118] In deconstructing language, we can dismantle the traditions upheld through

language that give power to institutions. John Caputo, a scholar of Derrida's, further states, "The

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[116] Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," 505.
[117] Despentes, *King Kong Theory*, 20.
[118] Jacques Derrida, *On Grammatology*, xxvii.

very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need—do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy."[119] Derrida stands up to the notion of community that is built up by the nation-state to contain. A military-like community, not an organic community.[120] A state sanctioned status quo community is the means by which the state keeps Indigenous and *radical* thoughts marginalized. Therefore, in deconstructing the language that upholds systems and constructed communities, we must identify the patterns of linguistic legitimization that allow for their existence in the first place.

In acknowledging the creative nature of language, we must not forget the social construction of our discourses and how colonial legacies are evermore present in the linguistic determination of social protection. Noam Chomsky's theory of language acquisition prescribes that there are no overly developed rules for language learning, what we know about language and how we use it are inherent to our biological nature as humans. This poses an interesting challenge when analyzing the ways in which language is constructed to further oppressive agendas. In repeating colonial language, we ritualize specific colonial memories. Chomsky points to the fact that there is barely any repetition in our spoken language.[121] However, it is exactly through repetition that colonial historiographies and epistemologies are furthered. Despentes argues that this "dichotomy is traced directly on the female body, like borders on a map of Africa: taking no account of the realities of the topography, only the interests of the

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[119] John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: Conversations with Jacques Derrida,* 31.
[120] John D. Caputo, "A Community without Truth: Derrida and the Impossible Community," in *Research in Phenomenology* 26 (1996): 25–37.
[121] Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures,* 96.

occupying powers."[122] Likewise, language enacts colonization on the body, rescinding agency, and limiting expression. This web of control has a ripple effect from bodies to communities, therefore allowing the state to dominate public discourses.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis states that language determines the perception of reality. In a critique, Khalid Shakir Hussein sustains that there is no point in discinding the duality of language and thought, as they come from the same thread.[123] If thought is influenced by society, then is language and its derived culture malleable? Culture can be regarded as regulated maps of meaning. These maps are constituted by crisscrossing discourses through which objects and practices acquire significance. Culture is a snapshot of the play of discursive practices within a given time and space. As explained by Charles Barker, it can be understood as a map that temporarily freezes 'meaning-in-motion'.[124] Language's malleability is what enables the state to manipulate its narratives and rhetorics. In shaping realities and perceptions, language can be used as a tool to exclude, segregate, and abuse–as it can be seen in the most intimate expression of kin and community being family and the notion of home. As Espin puts it, "Home is a powerful place" in determining cultural identity.[125] The breakage in continuity while creating identities is caused by denationalization in terms of displacement, which in turn causes the loss of home. And with it, the state's commercialization of the microaggressive terminology of *homelessness*. In being categorized as *homeless,* an individual is not only unhoused, but they are also identified as missing community, being pushed to the margins of society while being given no supports. The weight of language in determining the rights to life, housing, and healthcare has a domino effect throughout global, national, and local policies. The current human rights *democratic* system

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[122] Despentes, *King Kong Theory,* 76.
[123] Khalid Shakir Hussein, "The Rise and Fall of Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis" (2020).
[124] Charles Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice,* 121.
[125] Espin, 37.

relies on precedent and pre-approved narratives with little to no room for new ideas and changes. Thus, *democracy* uses language to perpetuate its systems of inequality through capitalist institutions.

In enacting systemic change, we should think of the power hierarchies created by and within language. In reinforcing the intrinsic patriarchal and capitalist meanings of words, we reinforce the narratives that uphold systems of continued oppression, violence, and colonialism. As Cesaire prescribes, "Unity has to be reimagined, it has to be built."[126] In developing a new approach to helping one another, an approach rooted in solidarity, we must introduce deconstructive bottom-up approaches to advocacy for public policy. We must create spaces for new voices. The voices of the most affected. We must advocate for a narrative change of increased representation. We must be "united in solidarity."[127]

CREATING SPACES OF ACTIVISM

In deconstructing narratives and the language that keeps them alive, we need to be inventive in introducing new ways to flip the script. As witnesses and activists, we are automatically rhetors. Rhetoric has been historically used as a tool of persuasion. Indeed, traditional rhetoric is driven by superiority and the quest to control others, their agency and their bodies. Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin introduce invitational rhetoric as a response to the inhumane constraints of traditional rhetoric. They state, "Invitational rhetoric is an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination."[128] In other words, theirs is a "non-hierarchical, nonjudgemental, nonadversarial

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[126] Cesaire, *Resolutely Black*, 40.
[127] Ibid., 13.
[128] Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric", in *Communication Monographs* vol. 62 (1995), 5.

framework."[129] One similar to Françoise Vergès' proposed decolonial theory. Both the works of Foss and Griffin and Vergès –whether explicitly or implicitly–counter traditional rhetoric's exclusionary power in determining what kinds of bodies (the able-bodies) are allowed full representation in public discourse, and in turn in policy-making.

In the manifestations of activism, it is not uncommon to run into forms of rhetorical exclusion. As activists, we should be intentional. The language we choose to advocate with, the spaces we choose to create, and the rhetorics we choose to line our actions with need to follow a certain degree of intentionality that organizes community accessibility and knowledge. Change does not happen by talking about policies or possibilities, it starts in spaces of literary and social movements. As an activist, poet, writer, Black, lesbian, feminist, woman warrior, Audre Lorde was one of the leading organizers in the liberation and civil rights movements. In analyzing the power of poetry in social movements, we can turn to Audre Lorde's poetry as encouraging youth mobilization, community-oriented learning, and above all multidimensional solidarity. Creating spaces of activism and resistance—while navigating censorship and book banning—within and outside of institutions requires incorporating community activism through poetry as a response to the digitally-fueled neoliberalism that permeates every system we inhabit. Activism is spreading the word, and Audre Lorde does just that.

The works of Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, bell hooks, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Fred Hampton, Assata Shakur, and too many more are segregated within the academy to majority-humanities courses. As Sara Ahmed explained during a guest lecture at Utah State University, we are assigned a place in history and that is how colonialism and its grasp on exclusionary policies continues to live on. We must incorporate actively

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[129] Foss and Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion", 5.

changing the stories told by stolen histories as our everyday acts of resistance. One way of navigating the mostly institution-backed suppression of specific words and narratives is through poetry, and in particular resistance and ecological poetry. Poetry that fosters collective action and resistance movements.

Treating matters of motherhood, nature, systemic violence, citizenship, oppression, and more, Audre Lorde's poetry can be seen as embodying both ecological and invitational rhetorics. In most poems she relates blackness to the Earth, to restore a history that was stolen, the original connection to the land. The intersections of blackness and nature are most felt in her book of resistance poetry, *Coal,* but principal to my discussion of Lorde's feminist rhetorical activism will be her poem "Power" from a subsequent poetry book, *Black Unicorn.*[130] Here is an excerpt:

<div align="center">

The difference between poetry and rhetoric
is being ready to kill
yourself
instead of your children.

…
I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds
and a dead child dragging his shattered black
face off the edge of my sleep
blood from his punctured cheeks and shoulders
is the only liquid for miles
and my stomach
churns at the imagined taste while
my mouth splits into dry lips
without loyalty or reason
thirsting for the wetness of his blood
as it sinks into the whiteness
of the desert where I am lost
without imagery or magic
trying to make power out of hatred and destruction
trying to heal my dying son with kisses
only the sun will bleach his bones quicker.
…

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[130] Audre Lorde, *Black Unicorn,* 108.

> But unless I learn to use
> the difference between poetry and rhetoric
> my power too will run corrupt as poisonous mold
> or lie limp and useless as an unconnected wire

In "Power" Audre Lorde focuses her political work and activism on discussing police brutality against children. Throughout the poem—and as seen in the excerpts above—she incorporates self-examination and her struggles with self-acceptance as a poet and activism. Lorde emphasizes her grappling with the meaning of poetry and rhetoric, as separate and united entities that create narratives. In the second stanza, she starts *narrating* the story of a Black child dying of gunshot wounds into the "whiteness of the desert". She points to the boy's blackness as the reason for his death, and the desert as the silence of justification surrounding police brutality.

As the images of the gunshot wounds and the boy's desolate death disrupt her sleep, she is reminded of the violent rhetoric of the desert that herself and other Black mothers, authors, and children live in. A desert of no protection from police brutality and surveillance. In the third stanza (not shown above) she moves the scene to the New York killing of another young Black boy by a police officer, who despite the tape evidence, is allowed to continue his state-justified killings. As Lorde grapples with her role as a poet and activist, she is reminded of the exclusionary power of traditional rhetoric, and the importance of telling stories of police violence. State-sanctioned police brutality is protected through the narratives that censor its roots in colonial hierarchies and cultural hegemonies. In navigating the use of literature, specifically poems and novels, and their disciplinary and discursive power, we must champion the works of authors like Audre Lorde in understanding the take-back power of writing as activism. Author of *The Novel and the Police,* D.A. Miller states, "Whenever the novel censures policing power, it has already reinvented it, in the very practice of novelistic representation."[131] The classic novel,

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[131] D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police,* 20.

and literature as a whole, thus becomes a space of exclusively institutional memory. Indeed,

D.A. Miller finds literature as one of the best examples of disciplinary power, as it usually relies

on subjectivity to employ a literary hegemony that places subjects under social surveillance.[132]

Through activist poems like those of Audre Lorde, the cycle of legitimacy is challenged.

In one of her other poems titled "Paperweight" collected in *Coal*, Lorde writes:

"All the poems I have ever written / are historical reviews of some now-absorbed country / a

small judgment / hawking and coughing them up / I have ejected them not unlike children. / Now

my throat is clear / and perhaps I shall speak again."[133] Here, once again, she narrates the

liberating yet taxing act of creating poetry as resistance. Navigating censorship through imagery

while rewriting stolen narratives. Poetry condemning the invisible genocide caused by the police

state is what creates the fabric of social movements. In taking back the narrative of protection

through resistance, and creating feminist, invitational, activist rhetorics through poetry, Audre

Lorde and many more before and after her have used their voice to grant access to new

knowledge and histories. Their activism is therefore access work.[134] As Vergès states:

"Combating violence…without taking into account the militarization of protection, the

construction of dangerous classes and races, legitimizing recourse to evermore surveillance and

control by private companies subcontracted by the State, or by the State itself, is to be complicit

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[132] Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, 18.

[133] Lorde, *Coal,* 49.

[134] Digital spaces like social media are the place where protests are organized, and wrongful murders are being addressed. It is intimidating to think that we are both contributing to and being influenced by the two-faced machine that is social media. Many rhetoric and cultural studies authors have been deeply questioning how our digital participation is monopolized by the large corporations that own everything we see on our screens. At the same time, activists have been taking advantage of such space to amplify their voice. An extension of our bodies, technology has become our new physical space. Digital spaces have been at the forefront of activist activity because of their increased access to visibility and representation for *community-cultural roots*. Artivists especially have been exploring ways to connect their physical exhibits to digital spaces. Many artivist demonstrations against institutional complicity of the UN happen right around the headquarters building, usually during Commissions or official sessions. The ability of artivists—through digital platforms–to amplify their pieces globally allow artivism to function as a form of solidarity and collective unity.

in the prevalence of violence as protection."[135] Following the example of Audre Lorde and through poetry as a means to recount collective action and history, we can address the colonial phantoms, their violent narratives, and how they permeate systems with exclusionary access to protection and permanence.

Audre Lorde challenges the necropolitics of using language as narrative to resist and break the cycle of neutrality. In an extremely organic way, Lorde is able to embed lived activism while pleading her case of needed sisterhood (solidarity) and remembrance. In her poem, "Touring", she writes: "I leave poems behind me / dropping them live dark seeds / that I will never harvest / that I will never mourn / if they are destroyed / they pay for a gift / I have not accepted. / Coming in and out of cities / untouched by their magic / I think without feeling / this is what men do / who try for some connection / and fail / and leave / five dollars on the table."[136] In this case and in other poems from *Coal* and *The Black Unicorn*, she writes "I" to refer to the collective. A collective experience embodied through her subjectiveness as a radical poet.

In evoking imagery and sensation, Lorde's poetry touches the human spirit despite demographic. As Kaisa Ilmonen argues, "Lorde's poetical knowledge as situated knowledge, as a partial perspective, challenges white feminists to understand, negotiate, and dialogize with perspectives not personally embodied."[137] Lorde's is an attempt to get people to enact change, and uncovering and recovering silenced stories. Not only is her poetry as activism a call to action to telling unheard stories in opposition to dominant narratives, and taking back power through creating uncomfortable conversations, but also to unite people in solidarity for a common cause. That to dismantle systems that fracture sisterhood, inhibit inter-community solidarity, and make

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[135] Vergès, *A Feminist Theory of Violence*, 28.
[136] Lorde, *Black Unicorn,* 36-37.
[137] Kaisa Ilmonen, "Identity politics revisited: On Audre Lorde, intersectionality, and mobilizing writing styles," in *European Journal of Women's Studies,* 16.

human dignity a luxury exclusive to the one percent. Historically unheard people need the solidarity of those with innate privilege. Central to future change is and will be enabling community-roots warriors' access to spaces of privilege, thus dismantling them from within.

CODA

Where the physical and discursive uses of language meet are the myriad of activist spaces on digital platforms. Rachel Presley frames artivism as a decolonial methodology.[138] I tend to agree with her definition. When reading the article on Indigenous feminist artivism and decoloniality, I understood the importance of connecting art with activism. I firmly believe that all visual expressions of the human experience deserve to be called art. It all comes down to storytelling and our role as listeners. How we absorb artistic expressions is highly subjective, yet we get to experience–even if just for a moment–the experiences of the artist. The role of activism in advocating for human rights and social justice is deeply rooted in decoloniality, and the ultimate desire to dismantle the colonial power structures that still keep the othered marginalized today. Presley explains: "In order to work against entrenched traditions of 'positional superiority' (Said, 1978), there is an urgent need to explore alternate modernities and to globalize, internationalize, "cosmopolitanize, and indigenize our commitments to intersectional resistance (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014)."[139] What these scholars, and many others, point to is that this "coloniality of power"[140]–through development, globalization, and cosmopolitanism– perpetuates structures and oppressive practices of the settler state, upholding and perpetuating abuse on certain groups and communities.

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[138] Rachel Presley, "Embodied Liminality and Gendered State Violence: Artivist Expressions in the MMIW Movement," in *Journal of International Women's Studies* 21, no. 7 (October, 2020): 91.
[139] Ibid., 93.
[140] Ibid., 92.

Further exploring the role of artivism in social movements today, we must turn to
Presley's definition of artivism "as the use of artistic expression towards political activism,
provides a particularly robust lens to evaluate alternative utilities affecting social change."[141] In
following artivism as a social movement in and of itself, while at the same time mobilizing other
movements, we must recognize its unique position in fostering educational awareness and
enabling social change. Presley elaborates on this, by stating:

> "We must examine the interconnectedness between art and activism as decolonial
> theory building intersects with feminist artefact-making. Doing so continues to
> promote decolonial thinking across cultural agencies and invites new perspectives
> about the ways in which art may "reclaim, express and define personal and political
> histories, challenge conventional Western notions of dichotomous sexed
> subjectivity, and open out the relationships of please/knowledge, word/flesh, and
> space/time to new ways of thinking against the grain" (Meskimmon, 2003, p.
> 1). The personal is, indeed, intimately political."[142]

Drawing on what other scholars have explored before, Presley draws on the idea of the
personal as inherently political–it is perhaps the ultimate expression of the political. Similarly,
art is the utmost expression of human activity. We see how art is inherently personal, thus
political. We need art to combat colonial systems and oppression, and we do so by acting within
the cultural politics of artivism.[143] Presley cites an example of this in Canada: "MMIW artivist
practices are deeply attuned to (re)writing the Indigenous body through hybrid codes of aesthetic
subversion."[144] Artists are rewriting their own story through art. They are storytellers expressing
their lived experiences through mediums everyone has access to.

In her theory of "embodied liminality", Presley sees liminality "not as a transitionary
event, but rather a structural condition; a resonant metaphor for perpetual precarity."[145] This

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[141] Presley, "Embodied Liminality and Gendered State Violence", 93.
[142] Ibid., 93.
[143] Ibid., 94.
[144] Ibid., 95.
[145]Ibid., 95.

made me relate her article to my own research on spaces of human emotion. Presley states: "artivism represents the public struggle between the lived and imagined, between the aesthetic representations of what is and the aesthetic imaginations of what could be."[146] This tug of war between the difference in legitimization of physical and imagined spaces can end with art, and in particular with artivism. Artivism creates an instant link between spaces of human emotion and spaces of human experience. An example of this can be seen in Presley's approach to liminality, borderlands, or the concept of Third Space where the body–the physical space for the imaginary space of the personal–is seen as a space of resistance.[147]

Drawing on the link between physical and imagined spaces, we can confidently say that artivism creates a space of human expression where agents from all groups can have an equal voice and equal access to a platform to share their story. This is where digital activism through art becomes a trans-communal and trans-collective practice. Activism is the collective in action, solidarity is the collective in feeling. To enact true change through activism, you need solidarity. I would like to build on artivism as a space and see poetry as a space of youth artivism. To frame the role and agency of youth in the context of human rights, social justice, and even social development, I turned to Sandoval and Latorre's article on Chicana/o Artivism, and in particular the section "Who Are Digital Youth?" They state: "...youth has also emerged as a category defined by a particular consciousness characterized, in part, by its rejection of established mores imposed by older generations and by a persistent need or desire for innovation and renewal."[148] We are constantly reminded of the intentional marginalization of youth voices in policy-making or any public arena. Young people are constantly trampled over to make room for the same

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[146] Presley, "Embodied Liminality and Gendered State Violence," 94.
[147] Ibid., 99.
[148] Chela Sandoval, and Guisela Latorre, "Chicana/o Artivism: Judy Baca's Digital Work with Youth of Color," in *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media.* Cambridge: (The MIT Press, 2008): 86.

counter-progressive "adults". I recognize now more than ever the need to uplift youth voices not only in intentional spaces but also across spaces where youth is intentionally marginalized.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOLIDARITY MODEL

"A feminism without and beyond borders is necessary to address the injustices of global capitalism." - Chandra Talpade Mohanty

We do not usually hear about narratives of the power of *community-cultural roots*, or the power of collective organizing. Because of the perpetuation of oppression in the current institutional system of foreign aid and humanitarian intervention, countries in the "Global South" are perpetually exploited and kept in an inescapable cycle of violence and inequality. They are given no means to escape the oppression/oppressed complex rooted in colonialism itself. This is a paradox of capitalism; human solidarity stops when it becomes unprofitable to the country rendering aid. The do-goodism of the UN, its embodiment of the white savior complex, and the violence in the neutrality of its written language, is failing the populations for which it was originally founded. I started reading and studying decolonial and feminist theory in my undergraduate courses years ago, when I first started realizing how much control institutional language—whether written or spoken— had on my body and the bodies of others. I have always been drawn to finding ways to implement feminist and decolonial solutions to public policy, but I am just recently figuring out how. In my activism, I work with NGO and grassroots groups to increase their visibility within the UN system. I work with social media outlets, in person advocacy campaigns, and educational forums, focusing on increasing awareness on the effects of continued colonialism on the livelihoods of women, youth, and Queer people. My research in the past two years has revolved around exploring how community and resistance is fostered by and

through solidarity. I have observed first-hand the organizing power of working groups, NGO committees, and civil society coalitions in increasing the collective access, representation, and visibility of and through *community-cultural roots*. Through collective organizing, processes like activism and artivism can have a ripple impact on influencing public policies.

My identity as an activist or my hope for solidarity: I am not sure which came first. When I first started thinking about solidarity, I began to envision a space where the physical met the imaginary through solidarity spaces. What happens if we begin mapping solidarity as a space, as a city, as a network? This could find groundbreaking future applications in social development initiatives, and in uplifting youth and civil society voices in policy-making processes. So, can human sentiments be tied to physical spaces? Through a process of personal awakening and identity shaping driving my quest to answer this agonizing question, I analyzed power structures and understood the importance of deconstructing the politics of colonialism. Being complacent with the Western representation of continued colonial identities and narratives not only perpetuates a cycle of dependency and oppression, but also prevents the legitimization of what was before colonialism.

Solidarity spaces form as a result of physical representation of human solidarity in specific places. The study of the means through which colonial discourses continue to be perpetuated pointed me towards thinking of solidarity as a space, where community-driven action solidifies into local initiatives to bridge collective struggles. Sentiments of responsibility, commitment, and solidarity foster a place of being-in community with others, thus creating spaces not dictated by political or economic gains, but spaces simply driven by a multidimensional, horizontal, sentiment of achieving a collective wellbeing.

Capitalism is inevitably placed at the antithesis of solidarity. As Michael Parenti explains, "The essence of capitalism is to turn nature into commodities and commodities into capital. The live green earth is transformed into dead gold bricks, with luxury items for the few and toxic slag heaps for the many."[149] He explains that capitalism is transactional, therefore inhibiting solidarity. A solution to capitalist, colonial, patriarchal power structures is participatory policy making. More sentiments of solidarity in policy-making have been showing up in the context of the European Union and European policies. EUROCITIES represents a network of more than two-hundred cities from thirty-eight countries.[150] The multidimensional partnership of European cities through EUROCITIES is aimed at fostering community, solidarity, and citizenship. When juxtaposed with the lightning development of cities and the intersectional issues of globalized citizenships, the work of EUROCITIES served as both an inspiration and a challenge for my radical feminist view of solidarity spaces.

In designing people-centered spaces and enriching collective identities revolving around European cities and their citizens, EUROCITIES advocates for establishing meaningful connections to better respond to human crises. They also believe that, "cities must be included directly in European decision making and should be in direct receipt of European funds."[151] The intersection between receiving aid and providing resources is narrated by institutions as encouraged and mostly successful. However, it does not take much but directing our gaze to development initiatives in the "Global South" to see that there is no international aid with no strings attached. The transactional nature of global relationships often informs the tone of exchanges and partnerships in all levels of policy-making.

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[149] Michael Parenti, *Against Empire,* 97.
[150] Eurocities, https://eurocities.eu/about-us/
[151] Ibid.

As part of its mission of encouraging collaboration among European cities, the EUROCITIES network launched a program called "Solidarity Cities" in 2018.[152] Their aim was to create a new medium of collaboration between EUROCITIES, the European Commission, and member states to better address the refugee situation in Europe. "Solidarity Cities" is a network of mayors from different European cities that have pledged to commit to the program's cause: fostering solidarity among cities' citizens and welcoming refugees to create spaces of equal opportunity for all. The mayors of Milan, Florence, Lyon Metropole, Nicosia, Berlin, Athens, Amsterdam, Ljubljana, Barcelona, among others, all pledged to support EUROCITIES' cause through the "Solidarity Cities" program. Despite the lack of significant action being taken by cities in this program, the mere existence of these types of conversations about *inter-community solidarity* leaves room for hope.

Between the need for accountability and increased representation is where I see the need and possibility for the convergence of physical and imagined spaces in human sentiments of solidarity. If we have models like "Solidarity Cities" making their way into large scale policy-making processes, then we can definitely move towards thinking of human sentiments like solidarity as spaces in our everyday lives. But participation is not so easy to access. Only the select few at the top have a paternalistic grasp on the order and organization of disciplined bodies that operate within our classes and institutions. In advocating for systemic change to increase representation, we need to start by being informed, knowing the language, and being part of the dialogue. We need to be ready and equipped to participate in policy-making processes.

The lack of representation is rooted in a stolen history–a myth–in which only the names of the white settlers appear. In navigating the web of obstacles to access representation, we need

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[152] "Solidarity Cities," Solidarity Cities EU, https://solidaritycities.eu

to make space for solidarity.[153] As discussed in Chapter 1, in pointing out the legitimization of physical representations as true depictions of reality, both poststructuralist and decolonial scholars advocate for a deconstruction of power structures which can be applied to effectively decolonize spaces with the lens of solidarity. In pushing for increased representation, I have had the ability to collaborate and observe the work of a few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and NGO groups that advocate at the United Nations. I have observed that most NGOs have the goal of using their gained influence to create spaces for the othered, the subaltern, and the marginalized. In building the ability for community-roots groups to speak and develop their advocacy, we can contextualize NGOs as a gateway to representation.

The United Nations (UN) is an outdated institution, and in order for it to serve its original purpose, it must go through a process of dismantling power relations from within. The layers of inaccessibility, censorship, and precarity within the UN system are what hinder the holistic representation of the most affected by global crises. In bridging the gap of the myriads of the UN's failed missions, NGOs focus on education, advocacy, and action. Many community-roots projects focus on dismantling the white, patriarchal, gender apartheid systems through local action. Queer and women's bodies are rarely understood, so creating spaces for education are fundamental to share critical understanding and critical analysis on the relationship between bodies and their agency. Some activists have recently been advocating for the change from gender sensitive to gender transformative. These aspects of misogynist oppression manifest themselves in a lack of bodily autonomy for the state's disciplined bodies. However, the response to regulating women's bodies inevitably becomes reactionary, and putting people in oppressive categories only emphasizes the real fracture of the state, which continues to be upheld

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[153] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 109.

through blind support and false legitimacy. It is at the junction of the state's weakened regime and continued oppression that we should push for accountability, countering the state's centrifugal forces with collective pushback.

But, how do we implement accountability? The imperialist and capitalist grasp of the state is especially present when it comes to the control over women's bodies. A tale that continues to manifest across borders, the state's need to regulate women's behavior has its colonial roots in the transactional and misogynist nature of imperialist systems. Care workers, laborers, sex workers, business owners, office workers, educators. If we want to survive, we all have to sell our bodies to capitalism, one way or another. When it comes to accountability, it is hard to pin-point the source of the collective human struggle. It is a multidimensional system of oppression that can only be countered with a multidimensional approach of solidarity.

Engaging in social participation through graffiti art, civic league meetings, activism, spreading awareness, educating the community, and being open to changes of mentality, just to name a few, are ways to begin challenging the Ivory Towers in our daily lives. The state's perpetuated false narratives are a reminder that language matters. I was shocked to learn that the word 'climate change' must not be used in any official UN reports. The institutional UN system is plagued by bureaucratic precedents. This means that in submitting anything written, including requests for oral statements (that have to be pre-approved and edited if needed), civil society must comply with the UN's "accepted language". Posing a massive barrier to accessibility, civil society is left drowning in the grand *public* sphere that is the United Nations. For this reason, social participation is of utmost importance for civil society to gain back power and fight for representation. Through solidarity as a framework, I am proposing a new eco-social approach to dismantle the current structures that keep masses of people at the bottom and the one percent at

the top. The overturning of decision making from top-down to bottom-up is an uncomfortable conversation for the ones at the top, but a necessary one for policy change. After all, policies are by nature conversations.

The operational network of geographies of solidarity can be seen populating the canvas through different spaces—spaces of dependence, oppression, forced assimilation, and education. Geographers refer to the 'Geography of Solidarity' as the study of spaces where community is built on a common desire to enrich the experiences of all and create a truly equal community. Other scholars studying solidarity describe these spaces as the physical manifestation of the collective struggles against oppression, injustice, or inequality. Relating to the model of "Solidarity Cities" in Europe[154]—spaces where all are welcome and can enjoy equal rights and access to services—, the possibility of the application of a similar model to explain social movements and a need for systemic change is clear. Based on past and ongoing research on these spaces, I visualize the building of solidarity networks as a triquetra. An Indigenous symbol of unknown origin, the triquetra represents a never-ending flow of synergies and bond between elements.

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[154] "Solidarity Cities," Solidarity Cities EU, https://solidaritycities.eu

Figure 1: The Solidarity Model as a triquetra

The Solidarity Model I am proposing frames representation, accountability, and solidarity as the driving force behind social action and social change. Placed in the inner circle, these three aspects of human sentiment for change serve as the foundation of the model. Language, care, and resistance populate the three-pointed structure surrounding the inner circle. These, as described throughout this manifesto, are the fabric of social movements and collective action, and are more powerful combined than on their own. In taking back the power that is exerted through language, following the activist example of Audre Lorde and many before and after her, we can start creating a network of solidarity based on care reciprocity.[155] Care is a form of resistance. In resisting the anti-collective, community-disconnecting, solidarity-inhibiting nature of global capitalism, we must frame care as the driving force of policy change. Language, care, and resistance are therefore needed to implement representation, accountability, and solidarity as the backbone of advocacy for policy action moving forward.

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[155] Adam Hubrig, "We Move Together: Reckoning with Disability Justice" in *Community Literacy Studies.*

Language, care, and resistance are three organic ways to channel a new vision of power. In exploring spaces of human connection, both with nature and among humans themselves, I began analyzing the Anthropocene as a space of literary and social movements. I asked myself: How do agents' behaviors and representation change when the balance is shifted? We cannot deny that our current system is Anthropocentric, but we need to gradually incorporate biocentric and ecocentric policies to move towards a more sustainable future. I advocate for the need of an inclusive way forward that sees action as non-selective and embraced through a space or even a larger network of human solidarity. If we begin seeing the three approaches—anthropocentric, biocentric, and ecocentric—to human or social development as spaces of human interaction and betterment instead of solely economic approaches, we can start more meaningfully incorporating true sustainability in policies that guarantee access to dignity and wellbeing for all. Again, making equality non-selective. If we begin envisioning these three approaches as almost complimentary, we can start building networks within and across our communities to begin implementing eco-informed initiatives locally, nationally, and globally. Based on this, I formulated a few points I think are necessary in order to move ahead in the right direction and enact meaningful change:

(1) True inclusion of *community-cultural roots* voices. This is very uncommon to come by in policy-making processes today. *Community-cultural roots* voices are still heavily underrepresented, and even based on my few first-hand observations, they are intentionally kept out of the conversations about their own wellbeing. For these reasons, it is important that one of the first steps towards a future of sustainable thinking is the intentional inclusion of *community-cultural roots* voices.

(2) Organic approach to environmental policies. We need to take what Vergès advocated for as the best way forward, a multidimensional approach to environmental change. We can no longer afford to prioritize instances of displacement in a hierarchical manner. Giving preferential treatment to physical displacement, although seemingly more important and pressing, furtherly marginalizes *community-cultural roots* communities that often suffer from cultural and linguistic displacement. A major part of displacement brought on by the Anthropocene involves no moving at all. Many get displaced in their way of living, speaking, and manifesting their culture without ever having to move. In these cases more than ever, we need a strong network of solidarity that takes into account a holistic and multidimensional approach to Anthropocentric displacement.

(3) Accountability not based on selectiveness. The Anthropocene has taught us to be selective, competitive, and to think of life as a race based on how many other living beings we can put down to prevail. Emphasizing the concept of selectiveness, sustainability means to be non-selective and approach the future taking into account the privileged system that has been worsening the inequalities between those in power and the othered, the subaltern, and the marginalized. We need not be selective on indigeneity, and instead use our platforms—whatever these may be, just like Audre Lorde's activist rhetorics—to elevate *community-cultural roots* voices, and most importantly Indigenous thought as the best viable option to heal our fractured collective.

(4) Acknowledging spaces of power and resistance. Social movements are generally driven by a sense of strong communalism and art. As art takes on many forms—poetry, music, dancing—social movements themselves come in different forms. As I explored the parallel between activist poetry and social movements, there is an imminent need to acknowledge the struggle of displaced individuals. We need to start seeing social movements as spaces of taking

back power and resistance, in line with allowing them to continue to be spaces of advocacy and agency. In this study, I attempted to frame social action as the future of policy-making. Solidarity is a space of cultural production, revolving around the needs of the people—usually the othered, the subaltern, and the marginalized—and need to be at the forefront of policy-making negotiations.

(5) Amplifying the voices of civil society and representation in policy-making. The previous five points would not be sustainable without addressing the issue of representation across the three levels of policy-making taking place at the local, national, and global levels. Despite the many improvements, especially at the local and national levels, misrepresentation of *community-cultural roots* voices in particular still has to be addressed in many spaces. Part of the challenges *community-cultural roots* people face is that they are often represented by faith-based NGOs who have their own agendas and further Western thought. It is therefore extremely important to uplift the voices and words within social groups to global levels, as usually they have the most unfiltered voices—this is what is needed to ensure inclusive representation.

(6) Avoiding jargon and increasing accessibility. Jargon needs to be accessible and evolving. Within institutions, the use of jargon and its need to simplify and understand it overrides the ability for other people to speak their truth. When thinking about the impact of words, we should ask ourselves: Who am I using this language for? Am I using it for myself or for someone else? Using jargon is using exclusionary power. The United Nations system is permeated with jargon and linguistic selectiveness. The barriers to access *free speech* are endless and at the mercy of those in power—the member states—, the same ones that can dictate who gets to be seen and heard. Therefore, in avoiding jargon and making the language of policies

accessible, we can increase accessibility and representation. Thus, opening platforms for the othered, the subaltern, and the marginalized to speak their so far unheard voices.

Circling back to the idea of solidarity as a space, we can envision collective sentiments as ecosystems, as spaces themselves. This multidimensional interlocking of spaces related to human sentiments and behaviors can start forming our understanding of both the impacts of the Anthropocene on our daily lives and environments but also how we can help each other find meaningful solutions forward. We can start to visualize a network, based on solidarity, and including a realm of sustainable solutions in combating the myriad of threats brought on by the Anthropocentric inclination of capitalist institutions. We must not forget that the Anthropocene is a mentality more than it is a physical manifestation. The Anthropocentric mentality brought on by capitalism has exacerbated conditions of displacement, both physical and cultural/linguistic. The ramifications of cultural displacement inevitably feed into issues of representation and inclusion. As the destructive and soon irreversible effects of the Anthropocene are becoming more and more evident in social and policy-making spaces alike. Adopting a decolonial framework that incorporates all the issues explored above is imperative to ensure a livable future for all.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: THE CASE FOR SOLIDARITY

"Collectivism is a throughline across generations, peoples, and mobilizations—undervalued and unrecognized but key to freedom-making." -Angela Davis, Gina Dent, Erica Meiners, Beth Richie

When moving from inter-national to *inter-community solidarity*, we must frame collective action as multidimensional taking into consideration accessibility, accountability, and representation. Retracing the history of my colonial roots helped me understand my privilege as a white, Queer, young woman when approaching issues that make certain races, classes, and identities othered, subaltern, and marginalized. In opening my perspective to critical feminist and decolonial works, I quickly understood the power of words, and the exclusionary yet radical power of language as a whole. I argue that decolonial narratives are essential to counter mainstream capitalist discourses that keep continued colonialism alive. Through the Solidarity Model I introduce in this manifesto, my hope is to create a framework not based on data or data analysis, but a human-centered approach taking into consideration the intersections of social participation through art and activism in influencing public policies. The United Nations is a system whose influence and power must be recentered. Those in the leadership roles of Secretary General, President of the General Assembly, President of the Economic and Social Council, Directors of UN Agencies, Heads of Delegations, and others in positions of influence should be the listeners, and the ones most affected should be the speakers. It is only when this dichotomy is flipped that we can start envisioning a true system change driven by solidarity. I am the first to say that this approach may be far-fetched if humanity does not recenter its purpose to providing

dignity and wellbeing for all, and especially the most affected. My proposal is one of hope and

solidarity with communities most in struggle. It is only through the collective that we will

achieve true solidarity.

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Old Dominion University, Graduate Program in International Studies (GPIS) Graduate Research
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Positions

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