

People's Conference for Palestine Report Unsettled Grounded Normativity or "Somebody Give Benjamin Kapron a Flamethrower"

by Katya Chylova

by ozhaawashko-animikinini

Four months ago I attended the People's Conference for Palestine. Organized by the Palestinian Youth Movement, Answer Coalition, The People's Forum, National SJP, and International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network to name only a few, this conference stood toe to toe with eight months of renewed Israeli aggression visited upon the Palestinian people and several lifetimes of suppression and misrepresentation of the Palestinian cause in the west. It was a gale of fresh air, then, to step into the atrium of the conference center (named the Reed Badwan atrium for this event) and see massive Palestinian flags hanging over a bustling crowd of comrades in kuffiyehs. A prayer room was set apart from the noise of the conference, where Muslim, Jewish, and Christian comrades were able to pray side by side. The work of Palestinian visual artists and informational placards lined the atrium. The various conference rooms on either side of the atrium were emblazoned with the names of martyrs for the cause; Refaat Alareer, Khader Adnan, Walid Daqqa, Shireen Abu Akleh.

At the central vendor fair in the Reed Badwan atrium I was able to chat with comrades from all corners of the country: members of PSL, Code Pink, Action for Cuba among other organizations; members of the Palestinian diaspora, many carrying the memories of martyred loved ones; students new to the movement who had tasted revolution at their first encampment or rally and were burning to know what was next. Representing Keweenaw Socialists, I handed out issues of our quarterly to other organizers whose eyes widened at the news of the cause being supported in such remote places as the Upper Peninsula. It wasn't long before my arms ached beneath a growing pile of literature detailing the countless groups, ideas, pedagogies, and modalities of action that had finally brought us here to downtown Detroit. This central space would continue to celebrate the diversity of the movement and provide opportunities for its various paths to cross. However, it was clear in the eyes of everyone there that we did not come here merely to cross paths, but to merge them.

At the conference's opening keynote and plenary, emcee and PYM organizer Mohammed Nabulsi laid out the weekend's aim: "This conference will allow us to reflect on our strengths and weaknesses, on our achievements and failures. It will allow us to develop greater political cohesion and understanding across the movement... This conference is an opportunity for us to consolidate and concretize what our resistance will look like, develop shared vision and understanding of what our role must be." Growing fervor for the Palestinian cause in the west, characterized by the student encampments and social media pushes for BDS had achieved much for the movement in the months leading up to the conference. The great influx of interest, however, had led to some decentralization of Palestinian voices and moments of intense and effective action without clear direction or follow through (the "digitine" movement surrounding this year's met gala being a prime example). For a movement with powerful adversaries like the united states' government and media, such moments of distraction or disunity could be the difference between another victory over the imperialist leviathan and another Gazan refugee camp crushed while our backs are turned. Many hearts have been softened by the voice of the Palestinian people, but the conference made it abundantly clear that it is now time to listen closely to what those voices are demanding and respond as one.

In the various plenaries and panels offered over the weekend, the Palestinian narrative and the voices of those who have been fighting for Palestinian liberation since long before October 7th were central. The plenaries, all of which are available for viewing on the BreakThrough News YouTube channel, offered comprehensive but detailed overviews of the 76 year-long war on Palestine, the connection between Zionism and US imperialism, the history of

the Palestinian movement in north america, the student Intifada, Palestine's place at the front of an international struggle for liberation, and more. These plenaries are, in my opinion, required listening for those new to the cause. Hearing from revolutionaries who have fought ceaselessly through the first and second Intifadas, who endured Israeli prison like Wissam Rafeedie, who prevailed over Israel's genocidal aims through the prison movement and semen smuggling like Sanaa Daqqa, was a sobering reminder of what the Palestinian people have endured over the last century, but also a hopeful reminder of their continued strength and resilience.

The Palestinian voice and its call for unified action among its supporters was echoed and expanded upon in the smaller panels. In a panel on alternative education, revolutionary pedagogy, education that is dialectic, fluid, and holds collective actualization over the individual was offered as an alternative to the capital-fueled industry of western higher education. Jewish activists gathered for a panel to discuss the history of Jewish anti-zionist activism (a history as old as zionism itself) and their role in anti-zionist organizing, reaffirming Palestinian leadership and condemning zionist, right-wing instrumentalization of Jewish people. The analytical framework of the conference was consistent across the three days - the struggle for Palestine is a struggle against imperialism and imperialism is everyone's problem. In each panel the larger message was never lost; in uniting for Palestine, we are uniting against great evils that impact us all.

On the final day of the conference, we stood in Walid Daqqa hall listening to Walid Daqqa's widow, Sanaa, discuss the prison movement while their daughter, Milad, colored beside her. About midway through the talk, I opened my phone to see a breaking news update from Raffah. A child's body, no head, being frantically shaken by a screaming man before the camera. I looked around the room to see more faces pale as the news flashed onto the conference jumbotron: Israel had enacted a drone strike on a refugee camp, burning dozens alive as they slept in their tents. The talk was quietly wrapped up and the conference was paused momentarily, allowing organizers to regroup and respond to the horrors that were unfolding before our eyes. Small groups huddled in the rain outside the conference venue, I watched comrades try to light cigarettes with shaking hands.

Following the break, we gathered for the final plenary and comments. Nadya Tannous of the PYM opened the talk in no uncertain terms: "This panel...is talking about what is next. To strike at the heart of empire. We have all attended panels elsewhere that talk about the central importance of solidarity between our causes and our communities...but on this panel we want to talk about not just how we stand with one another in solidarity, but how we fight together." The speakers delivered their comments to a room full of thousands of people who were grieving, angry, tired, but above all unified in their understanding of the speakers' message: each and every person on this planet has a share in the struggle against imperialism. The empire has its eyes on Palestine now, but it forgets that it is surrounded and far outnumbered. The people are not helpless and the people will win. The closing statement of the conference can be read here, but it ended with what I think is the most important iteration of the conference's message, a section of a poem by Ghassan Khanafani: "Imperialism has laid its body over the world, the head in Eastern Asia, the heart in the Middle East, its arteries reaching Africa and Latin America. Wherever you strike it, you damage it, and you serve the World Revolution."

What, then, are the marching orders I bring back here to the Keweenaw Peninsula from the leadership in the struggle for Palestinian liberation? The

In July of 2016, a grad student at York University submitted a paper (possibly his Master's Thesis) with the title *Cacophonous Settler Grounded Normativity: Interrelativity with the More-Than-Human World as a Path for Decolonial Transformation*. Benjamin Kapron is a settler student of the Indigenous theorists that developed Grounded Normativity (which we will expand on later), and in a little over a hundred pages he laid out his thoughts for more appropriate and more effective settler engagement in decolonization. Kapron notes that although "adhering to settler grounded normativity does not, itself, transform the settler/Indigenous relationship; it does not decolonize," he sees settler grounded normativity as "predominantly a path for becoming 'post-settler,'" as a tool or tactic to help stop imagining a "settler future."

After a thorough review of this paper (definitely longer than seven and a half minutes) we have to say there's very little to criticize in Kapron's work. It's even tempting to say that the only noticeable problem with the work is that it doesn't go far enough. Kapron explicitly states that settler grounded normativity (as he describes it) "is not a path to decolonization in the sense of a strategy to challenge the settler state". So let's get to work on building one that can do just that. If Ben Kapron's *Cacophonous Settler Grounded Normativity* is a fire under one or more settler structures, this article is looking to pour gasoline on that fire. For some reason most of the gasoline on hand is of some French ultra-left variety.

Dear Settler, before you can learn to step out from underneath the settler state and cast its burning ruins into the sea, you have to be able to see just how deeply embedded in it you are, how embedded it is *in you*. To talk of the ways that capitalism and Empire mobilize identities (white, Christian, man/woman, middle class, American) to shape us into willing subjects, into participating in our own exploitation - that would only be the beginning. Capitalism's hooks go much deeper than identity, much deeper than "psychology." As if the microplastics in my fucking gray matter weren't too on the nose of a metaphor already, there is now a physical, a neurological component to the control that capitalism and Empire can exert over us. Billions of dollars are spent learning how to shift us into different emotional states, into deadening our reactions to certain kinds of stimulus but responding more intensely to others, into defining and valorizing particular ways of framing what we experience, and therefore how we understand it.

There are two concepts, two figures of humanity under late capitalism that we must borrow from the French-Italian collective *Tiqqun* (the Bloom and the Young-Girl), as well as another that must be fabricated on the spot out of already existing parts (the Fodder). Much has been written about the Bloom, but only a little will be written here. It's needed mostly as a stepping stone for understanding the real stars of the show. Bloom is almost anyone, but also no one, no-thing. Bloom is a concept for understanding what has happened to human subjectivity under Capitalism. The Bloom is somewhat miserable, possibly more isolated than words can describe, even when surrounded by friends and family. Bloom is an empty vortex, a maelstrom of indifference. The Bloom is at least somewhat aware of its alienation, but spends a great deal of its time trying to avoid that feeling. Bloom is not a distinct human subject, all of us carry at least a little Bloom, but some of us are more defined by it than others. If capitalism is an eldritch horror of flesh, claws, and tentacles grasping parasitically on the surface of the Earth, Bloom is somewhere along the surface of that horror. It is "on the edge" of capitalism and Empire but still firmly a part of them - as a subject Bloom is difficult for the forces of capital to change

very drastically, but not impossible. The real terror is what's happening closer to the center of those systems, as well as what lies beneath them along the surface of the Earth.

The Young-Girl as a concept is perhaps poorly named, but not named without reason. Young, "because adolescence is the period of time with none but a consumptive relation to civil society," and Girl, "because it is the sphere of reproduction," over which women still reign, "that must be colonized" by Capital. The Young-Girl is a Bloom which has been sharpened into one of capitalism's finest weapons. It is the product of a civilization that has permitted generations of children to be the targets of an increasingly ravenous and unforgiving market - permitted capitalism to begin to shape our development before we had even an inkling of self-awareness. "The Young Girl is not always young and, increasingly, not even a girl. She is but the figure of total integration into a disintegrating social whole." The Young-Girl is an omen of disaster, at once a tyrant but a tyrant we would give almost anything to serve. She is the figure of permissive authority which Foucault tried to warn us of at length. The Young-Girl wants nothing for herself (nothing that she can articulate anyways), beyond to increase her own power, her own value, through the sale or consumption of her own body. The Young-Girl is not simply a figure, a "metaphor" for people adapted to living within capitalism, it is a core part of the infrastructure of Empire. Not only is it Human-Capital embodied, the commodity which makes all other commodities possible, it has a specific role to play in the maintenance of Empire: the assimilation of other bodies into more Young-Girls, assimilation into that dreadful smugness of the Unthinking Majority. The Young-Girl may be the figure of assimilation into the logic of the market, but she excels at helping everyone around her to assimilate into all of the structures of colonialism, White Supremacy, and cisheteropatriarchy. The Young-Girl will set upon a Bloom like God shaping Man in his own image, "because the Young-Girl is the living presence of everything that, humanely, wants our death. She is not only the purest product of the Spectacle, she is the plastic proof of our love for it. It is through her that we ourselves pursue our own perdition."

Every uncritically-White-person and every uncritical-settler is thus a Young-Girl, assuming it has not already stepped forward to assert itself as a goddamn fascist. It's your well-to-do uncle who compelled his daughter not to use her privilege to become a doctor in support of some impoverished country, which would have "wasted her potential". It's your grandmother who tried desperately to see you raised as a Catholic. It's your father who married a cop, and your grandfather that worked himself to death. The Young-Girl is any businessman that has successfully schmoozed up to his superiors and convinced them of his virility in business, who has some knack for convincing clients to part with their money for the promise of making more. It is a settler political party that can wash its sins in the river of "harm reduction," seducing some countless millions of settlers into forgetting the structural role they play in settler-colonial domination. The Young-Girl is the compulsion to live as if one were not aging, to live as if time were not passing. It is the insistence that "just trying to live one's life" should offer some kind of absolution while the planet is being burned for profit.

Tiqqun sketches out at least one more figure of Empire but does not necessarily name it as a concept. What we call the Fodder is none other than the Necropolitical Subject: the one who is excluded, whose death is of little to no consequence. Herman and Chomsky's "Unworthy Victim." The Palestinian, and

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also the vast majority of all people living outside the Imperial Core countries. But not you, Dear Bloom. You're actually not permitted to die, and a considerable amount of resources are dedicated to preventing you from meeting an untimely death - at least not until the invisible hand has had a fair bit of time to determine that you really are just too difficult to exploit. Then you too might be permitted to become Fodder.

With these figures of the Bloom, the Young-Girl, and the Fodder in hand, we should now have much less trouble understanding the gravity of our situation: "The present production apparatus is therefore, on the one hand, a gigantic machine for psychic and physical mobilization...a sorting machine that allocates survival to compliant subjectivities and rejects all 'problem individuals.'"

Given a bit more work, we may soon see a way to put an end to settler/Indigenous relations and begin to create something new. But some readers may want to take a break here and go check out the article on how voting isn't harm reduction if they haven't already, or on the infrastructures of White settler perception. Because this next part isn't fun to write and it's probably even less fun for some of you to read. Before we can move back into describing what Grounded Normativity and its settler variations are and could be, we need to make one more thing absolutely clear. Despite the Fodder's Being-Toward-Death, it too still has a specific function.

The Fodder, much like the Young-Girl, is much more than mere metaphor. These two sides of the same coin marked ASSIMILATE or ANNIHILATE are critical infrastructure to Empire, and we must sabotage every attempt at perpetuating them. Empire cannot function without the ability to hold people in conditions likely to cause their death, and to use the threat of similar treatment to mobilize countless others into serving it. This is not something you can remove by voting, or passing a law: it exists outside of written law in a space known as the State of Exception, but is also held and re-expressed physically in the bodies of settlers. The State of Exception is nothing less than the suspension of the normal rule of law, a suspension which the settler state (and liberal democracy in general) has always depended on, and a suspension that the state (and its comprador news media) is free to invoke because it has supreme authority in deciding what is and is not an emergency.

The continued production of human subjects as new Fodder for Empire has been allowed to persist thus far because settler bodies have been shaped by centuries of repetition to uphold this practice. Some settlers find joy in the Necropolitical, they support with their whole chest the liquidation of some Other in the name of "a right to self-defense." But Empire doesn't need every settler's enthusiastic consent. From others all it requires is indifference and inaction. Enmity and apathy are not just feelings the settler is frequently submerged in but are also fuel and lubricant for a social machine that feeds on mass-death.

This Necropolitical drive, this pathological insistence that (settler) life can only come at the expense of another, at the expense of the Native, the Palestinian, the immigrant at the border wall, the protester, the homeless - this is the heartbeat of settler civilization. "There is no 'clash of civilizations'. There is a clinically dead civilization kept alive by all sorts of life-support machines that spread a peculiar plague into the atmosphere...any strictly social contestation that refuses to see what we're facing is not the crisis of a society but the extinction of a civilization becomes an accomplice in its perpetuation...To decide for the death of civilization, then to work out how it will happen: only decision will rid us of the corpse."

This drumbeat of death will not stop until you snuff it out: until you differentiate yourself from settlers by physically putting yourselves between the settler state and its Fodder, again and again, until the machinery has been stressed to its limit. "When power is in the gutter, it's enough to walk over it." In the words of Mario Savio who once uttered the very illiberal solution to university education being run as a business: "There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the

people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!"

The part where we finally talk about what Grounded Normativity is:

Kapron takes Glen Coulthard's definition for Grounded Normativity from what may be its original inception in Red Skin, White Masks: "The theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism, including Indigenous anticapitalism, is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around the question of land - a struggle not only for land in the material sense, but also deeply informed by what the land as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in non-dominating and non-exploitative terms."

Kapron intends to establish a settler counterpart to Grounded Normativity, and begins with a three part framework for what he believes is necessary to make the concept more accessible and understood:

- 1) Humans are interrelated with a more-than-human world
- 2) Interrelationality demands that humans develop ethical-relationships with others
- 3) These ethical relationships can be learned and enacted through engagement with the more than-human-world

He notes that Indigenous theorists tend to take the second part as somewhat for granted. Rather than to grow up raised with an understanding of the interconnectedness of the world, to be a settler is to be raised with a relation to land and the world that is unrecognizable from this, and to embody this difference in everyday life. In the words of some of the same authors quoted so heavily further above: "What has congealed as an environment is a relationship to the world based on management, which is to say on estrangement." The settler is "half-asleep and always ready to close its eyes on the war that rages all around it." Settler Grounded Normativity is a project by settlers for the purpose of one day abolishing the settler, and giving birth to a new (and at the same time old) kind of human.

A considerable portion of this project is spent theorizing what it actually means to re-establish ethical relations with the more-than-human world, with not only nonhuman animals but with plants, water, earth, and sky. Kapron cites heavily a work called Thinking through animals : identity, difference, indistinction. We will summarize quickly the three kinds of ethics considered here as well as the direction Ben himself decides to go:

Identity:

Seeing animals as deserving ethical consideration where they are shown to possess "logos" (rationality, and the capacities for language, consciousness, and subjectivity which may follow)

Difference:

Extending ethical relations onto animals by nature of them being an Other. Capable of critiquing identity theories of ethics but not necessarily of disrupting human/nonhuman relations. Each animal's "Otherness" is typically flattened into a singular, homogeneous difference, making it difficult to actually attend to each being's particular needs.

Indistinction:

The most promising school of thought that Kapron borrows from this work. Built on the understanding that human and nonhuman animals are not as fundamentally different as some of us would like to believe. This is the first conception for ethical relations that could actually disrupt the existing human/animal false dichotomy and force us to consider revolutionary ways of living with our nonhuman kin.

Cacophony:

But Indistinction proves to be still not enough for Kapron. An ethics grounded in indistinction risks erasing certain differences that we cannot afford to forget yet, including the way (settler) humans have constructed an anthropocentric hierarchy over all other forms of life. Kapron borrows and further develops the concept of cacophony because it encourages a diversity of tactics and allows us to hold space for the understanding that some of us are more responsible for upholding white/settler domination than others. Cacophony also points to an important point that Ben Kapron seems to share with some of the French ultra-left theorists: that "revolutionary movements do not spread by contamination but by resonance."

Ben Kapron stresses that settlers are simply not capable of developing their own form of grounded normativity without engaging more with Indigenous ways of knowing, not in a vacuum or from a book but alongside actual Indigenous Peoples.

And while it is important to note that settlers need ethical relations with Indigenous People, settlers also cannot permit themselves to become dependent on Indigenous People for every decision. Settler grounded normativity has to be a creative process, because it is the foundation for self-creation into something that one day will no longer be called "settler." One of the long term goals of settler grounded normativity is to produce a new collective of humans who no longer maintain a strict separation between the sphere of nature that we "use" to support our own life and the sphere of nature which we hold as sacred. It is a decision not just to believe that water is life, or that the land as a system of relations is alive. It is a commitment to turn those beliefs into daily action. To be gentle with plants and animals, to look everywhere for new ways to live alongside them as our relatives and not as our subjects, to be able to look at a pill-bug or a worm as a striving, living being no less deserving of respect than ourselves.

If you have enough background knowledge and already have relationships with people Indigenous to the lands you live in, you could start practicing Kapron's vision for settler grounded normativity right now. But to establish a form of settler grounded normativity that is capable of directly challenging the settler state and associated settler structures? This "unsettled" grounded normativity will require you to "put your bodies upon the gears, and upon the wheels" of the settler state. A truly "unsettled" grounded normativity would seek to encourage a cacophony of voices not only for the building of non-dominating and non-hierarchical relations, but also to actively tear apart systems which harm the interconnectedness that we now hold sacred.

Excerpts from "Voting is Not Harm Reduction"

by An Indigenous Perspective

When proclamations are made that "voting is harm reduction," it's never clear how less harm is actually calculated. Do we compare how many millions of undocumented Indigenous Peoples have been deported? Do we add up what political party conducted more drone strikes? Or who, had the highest military budget? Do we factor in pipelines, mines, dams, sacred sites desecration? Do we balance incarceration rates? Do we compare sexual violence statistics? Is it in the massive budgets of politicians who spend hundreds of millions of dollars competing for votes?

Though there are some political distinctions between the two prominent parties in the so-called U.S., they all pledge their allegiance to the same flag. Red or blue, they're both still stripes on a rag waving over stolen lands that comprise a country built by stolen lives.

We don't dismiss the reality that, on the scale of U.S. settler colonial violence, even the slightest degree of harm can mean life or death for those most vulnerable. What we assert here is that the entire notion of "voting as harm reduction" obscures and perpetuates settler-colonial violence, there is nothing "less harmful" about it, and there are more effective ways to intervene in its violences.

At some point the left in the so-called U.S. realized that convincing people to rally behind a "lesser evil" was a losing strategy. The term "harm reduction" was appropriated to reframe efforts to justify their participation and coerce others to engage in the theater of what is called "democracy" in the U.S.

Harm reduction was established in the 1980s as a public health strategy for people dealing with substance use issues who struggle with abstinence. According to the Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC) the principles of harm reduction establish that the identified behavior is "part of life" so they "choose not to ignore or condemn but to minimize harmful effects" and work towards breaking social stigmas towards "safer use." The HRC also states that, "there is no universal definition of or formula for implementing harm reduction." Overall, harm reduction focuses on reducing adverse impacts associated with harmful behaviors.

The proposition of "harm reduction" in the context of voting means something entirely different from those organizing to address substance use issues. The assertion is that "since this political system isn't going away, we'll support politicians and laws that may do less harm."

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conference was historic and an absolutely necessary exercise in and demonstration of unity. The revolution, however, will not happen in conference rooms at big city centers. It won't need catering or commercial accommodations. The front of our war with empire is in Palestine, but the fight is everywhere, in what we eat, what we buy, how we teach our children, how we spend our time. "Wherever you strike it, you damage it." Taking back your time from empire-tied employers and using it to nurture skills that build your community is a blow to the empire. Relieving yourself, bit by bit, of your dependence on money is a blow to the empire. These steps may be painful, but each one moves all of us closer to liberation.

The idea of a ballot being capable of reducing the harm in a system rooted in colonial domination and exploitation, white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, and capitalism is an extraordinary exaggeration. There is no person whose lives aren't impacted everyday by these systems of oppression, but instead of coded reformism and coercive "get out the vote" campaigns towards a "safer" form of settler colonialism, we're asking "what is the real and tragic harm and danger associated with perpetuating colonial power and what can be done to end it?"

Voting as practiced under U.S. "democracy" is the process with which people (excluding youth under the age of 18, convicted felons, those the state deems "mentally incompetent," and undocumented folk including permanent legal residents), are coerced to choose narrowly prescribed rules and rulers. The anarchist collective Crimethinc observes, "Voting consolidates the power of a whole society in the hands of a few politicians." When this process is conducted under colonial authority, there is no option but political death for Indigenous Peoples. In other words, voting can never be a survival strategy under colonial rule. It's a strategy of defeat and victimhood that protracts the suffering and historical harm induced by ongoing settler colonialism. And while the harm reduction sentiment may be sincere, even hard won marginal reforms gained through popular support can be just as easily reversed by the stroke of a politician's pen. If voting is the democratic participation in our own oppression, voting as harm reduction is a politics that keeps us at the [mercy of our oppressors](#).

Since the idea of U.S. "democracy" is majority rule, barring an extreme population surge, Indigenous voters will always be at the mercy "of good intentioned" political allies. Consolidating the Native vote into a voting bloc that aligns with whatever settler party, politician, or law that appears to do less harm isn't a strategy to exercise political power, it's Stockholm syndrome.

The Native vote also seeks to produce Native politicians. And what better way to assimilate rule then with a familiar face? The strategy of voting Indigenous Peoples into a colonial power structure is not an act of decolonization, it's a fulfillment of it. We have a history of our people being used against us by colonial forces, particularly with assimilated Indigenous Peoples acting as "Indian Scouts" to aid the enemy's military. In only one recorded instance, Ndee (Cibicue Apache) Army Scouts mutinied against the U.S. when they were asked to fight their own people. Three of the Ndee scouts were executed as a result.

No matter what you are led to believe by any politician seeking office, at the end of the day they are sworn to uphold an oath to the very system that was designed to destroy us and our ways of life. The oath for members of Congress states, "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter: So help me God."

Even if we assume that their cultural values and intentions are in line with those of the people, it is rare that politicians are not tied to a string of funders. As soon as they get elected they are also faced with unrelenting special interest lobbying groups that have millions and millions of dollars behind them and, even if they have stated the best intentions, are inevitably outnumbered by their political peers.

Today we have candidates that were elected making promises to stop the mass scale kidnapping and murdering of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people and what do they propose? They

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don't indict the resource colonizers destroying our lands whose very industry is precipitating this crisis of human trafficking and extreme gender violence. They don't propose ending capitalism and resource colonialism. They propose laws and more cops with more power to enforce those laws in our communities, so although we have an epidemic of police violence and murders against our peoples, Indigenous politicians address one violent crisis by making another one worse for our people. It's the fulfillment of the assimilationist cultural genocide of "killing the Indian to save the man." With that vote, the willful participation and sanctioning of the violence of this system, you kill the Indian and become "the man."

Tribal, local, and regional politics are situated in the same colonial arrangement that benefits the ruling class: politicians are concerned with rules and ruling, police and military enforce, judges imprison. Regardless of who and on what scale, no politician can ever represent Indigenous lifeways within the context of a political system established by colonialism.

A less harmful form of colonial occupation is fantasy. The process of colonial undoing will not occur by voting. You cannot decolonize the ballot.

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Fundacion Victor Jara

by K.G. Jack Muzzy

FUNDACTION VICTOR JARA
Huerfanos 2146 Plaza Brazil
Santiago, Chile

March 16, 2023

Dear Compañeros,

Forty-seven years ago, in 1976, I was a National Maritime Union, AFL-CIO, merchant mariner and an unlicensed crewmember of United States Lines M/V Pioneer Crusader that carried U.S. military cargo to Santiago, Chile. I wanted to honor those who had been imprisoned, tortured, and executed inside the National Stadium in 1973. Today I think again of Victor Jara's last poem—and what instead could have been accomplished by Unidad Popular, UP, opposed to the fascist military dictatorship supported by the U.S. and headed by General Augusto Pinochet— Estadio Chile:

*There are five thousand of us here.
In this small part of the city.
Five thousand.*

*How many of us are there in all
In the cities and in all the country?
Here we are, ten thousand hands
Who plant the seeds and keep the factories
running. So much humanity,
hungry, cold, panicked, in pain,
Under moral duress, terrified out of their
minds!*

*Six of ours lost themselves
In the space of the stars.
One man dead, one man beaten worse than I
ever thought
It was possible to beat a human being.
The other four wanted to free themselves of
all their fear.
One jumped into the void.
Another beat his head against the wall.
But all had the fixed look of death in their
eyes.*

*What fear is provoked by the face of fascism!
They carry out their plans with the utmost
precision, not giving a damn about
anything.*

*For them, blood is a medal.
Killing is an act of heroism.
My God, is this the world You created?
Is this the product of Your seven days of
wonders and labour?*

*In these four walls, there is nothing but a
number that does not move forward.
That, gradually, will grow to want death.
But my conscience suddenly awakens me
And I see this tide without a pulse
And I see the pulse of the machines
And the soldiers, showing their matronly
faces, full of tenderness.*

*And Mexico, Cuba, and the world?
Let them cry out of this ignominy!
We are ten thousand fewer hands that do
not produce.*

*How many of us are there throughout our
homeland?*

*The blood of our comrade the President
pulses with more strength than bombs and
machine guns.*

*And so, too, will our fist again beat.
Song, how hard it is sing you when I have to
sing in fear!*

*Fear like that in which I live, and from which
I am dying, fear.
Of seeing myself amidst so much, and so
many endless moments*

*In which silence and outcry are the targets
of this song.
What have never seen before, what I have
felt and what I feel now
Will make the moment break out...¹*

I was one of a generation of North American New Leftists who saw themselves connected to the worldwide movement for Socialism. The ascension of the Popular Unity coalition and the election of Salvador Allende in 1970 in Chile was watched carefully by my generation. The repression of democratically elected President Allende resulting in the overthrow of the Popular Unity government paralleled an era of political repression by the FBI and law enforcement agencies inside the U.S.

I am one voice and do not intend to speak for my generation —1960s, 1970s, 1980s— of left political activists and revolutionaries. I, as many of my generation, came to political consciousness as the Irish revolutionary and socialist James Connelly described: "Until the movement is marked by the joyous, defiant, singing of revolutionary songs, it lacks one of the most distinctive marks of a popular revolutionary movement, it is the dogma of a few, and not the faith of the multitude."² The emergence of the New (American) Song Movement —Nueva Canción— propelled by Victor Jara took many of my generation and me along: side by side, stride by stride, arm in arm, in solidarity and in the struggle for an equitable, just, and sustainable land.

I dedicate "Lest We Forget, Lest We Forgive, A Personal Remembrance" to commemorate the life and spirit of Victor Jara and all victims of the CIA sponsored Chilean coup d'état of September 11, 1973, and to all victims of U.S. Democracy across the Southern Cone of South America 1975 – 1985.

In Solidarity,

K.G. Jack Muzzy
U.S.A.
2023

Lest We Forget – Lest We Forgive – A Personal Remembrance

September 11, 2024, will mark 51 years—over a half century to date—since the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende was overthrown.³

To victims of the CIA sponsored Chilean coup d'état September 11, 1973⁴:

Harbor Grudge

a crossing along a southern horse latitude—

as twilight falls
stern hopping noise
suspended pungent heat
subsiding stagnant air fill your lungs
screw churning black pigmented swirling white water
woe the hour of vengeance the stadium's cadavers beseech
a single glow of man-made light now joins my life to the land of your deaths
to still unearthed graves I heard your mothers demanding their children ship to city disappearing and never the eternal shall rise
my country employed the hands that murdered you
unraveling night falls upon placid waters steaming into the starlight filtered immersed starkness
vast open water
compañeros

Santiago de Chile 1976

Lest We Forgive

To victims of U.S. Democracy across the Southern Cone of South America 1975 – 1985⁵:

In memory of a generation imprisoned, tortured, raped, robbed of life, children, the pursuit of happiness, by the government of the United States of America and its South American fascist allies.

The Disappeared and The Missing: There is no relenting when you know your friends—mother, father, child, wife, husband, brother, sister—and comrades have been arrested, imprisoned, tortured, raped, murdered by the tens of thousands across eight countries directed by Operation Condor and their children kidnapped with the full knowledge and support of the government of the U.S. What is instigation and support of mass murder and human trafficking: crimes against humanity.

A Personal Remembrance

For successive generations to understand the generation of the 1970s of left-wing political activists and revolutionaries and the purpose of Victor Jara "scribbling" the lines of his last poem "Estadio Chile"⁶ before his death in the Estadio Chile: that fascism will ultimately fail. The voices of a generation who struggled for an equitable land have not been silenced or written out of history.

Lest We Forget – Lest We Forgive – A Personal Remembrance

Woe The Hour Of Vengeance

We will one day take power, exercise stewardship, over Earth's resources and create an anti-fascist, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, non-racist, non-sexist, equitable, and sustainable landscape. Imagine! Capitalism cannot kill, imprison, every one of us. We will continue the struggle until death or that day of reckoning comes our way.

Woe The Hour Of Vengeance

Translation credit: March 16, 2023, letter Fundacion Victor Jara, Santiago, Chile, and Lest We Forget – Lest We Forgive – A Personal Remembrance translated into Spanish by Leyre Alegro.

¹ <https://allpoetry.com/Chile-Stadium>

² <https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1907/xx/revsong.htm>

³ <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/chile/2020-09-15/extreme-option-overthrow-allende>.

⁴ Kornbluh, Peter, "Declassifying U.S. Intervention in Chile," North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), September 25, 2007. <https://nacla.org/article/declassifying-us-intervention-chile>

⁵ Rohter, Larry, "Exposing the Legacy of Operation Condor," New York Times, January 24, 2014.

⁶ Jara, Joan, An Unfinished Song: The life of Victor Jara, Ticknor & Fields, 1984.

Streetcars Crossing Bridge, Bridge St. Houghton

by Jonathan Hill



1925 image of streetcars crossing Portage Lake Bridge, image credit Northern Michigan University, overlaid on image of modern day Bridge, St., Houghton, Michigan, 2024.

Excerpts from “The Infrastructures of White Settler Perception: A Political Phenomenology of Colonialism, Genocide, Ecocide, and Emergency”

by Paul Guernsey

As historically defining experiences, emergencies are an element of perception. Far from a private and personal affair, perception is social, structured by what Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky call a process of “inculcation”. Settler perception has a material-political infrastructure in the sense that it is underlain by economic and normative conditions that refract the colonial, White supremacist, and heteropatriarchal strategies of dominant society into the quotidian [everyday, common] understanding of events...These infrastructures are dynamic and multifaceted, but their alloyed effect regulates collective experience of emergencies always to the advantage of the settler state.

Infrastructures of settler perception obfuscate the ways in which Native communities experience environmental emergencies as cycles of settler colonial violence and ecocide. Emergencies such as global warming are described as “human-caused” rather than directly linked to settler colonialism, capitalism, and White supremacy. Many uncritical deployments of the term “Anthropocene” commit a similar fallacy, implicating people who have had little or nothing to do with the planetary ecological collapse. **In a White logic of death, or “necropolitics,” the structures of colonialism, genocide, war, and slavery represent not the beginning of crisis, but rather the end of violence and disorder.**

The infrastructures of settler perception tend to deflect away from fundamental causes and consequences of emergencies. What is perhaps most notable is the refusal to come to terms with emergencies insofar as they are characterized by social formations rather than isolated events. The invisibility of deeper social emergencies is coupled with the exploitation of disasters to further settler colonial capitalist accumulation. In an op-ed for Teen Vogue, Jenn M. Jackson writes “**Rather than seeing this pattern [of displacement, houselessness, and criminalization] as an emergency, Whiteness treats ongoing disasters afflicting these communities as economic opportunities**”. This tactic of White supremacy is afforded in part by a linear/progressivist perception of time that can only conceive of emergencies as caused by historical events or trends rather than embedded in social structures characterized by cyclical patterns that defy linear causalities. For example, the “climate crisis” is said to be “human caused.” We can point to various historical events that lead us here to the “Anthropocene.” But if there is a switch to thinking of emergencies as social structures, then, for example, we can consider White supremacy an emergency. It is a self-perpetuating social emergency that is both cause and effect of the disasters it produces.

For the United States and other settler nations, **there is no “environmental crisis” that is not both a cause and effect of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is the environmental crisis.** There is no “climate crisis” that is not caused by capitalism. Capitalism is the “climate crisis.” There is no “humanitarian crisis” that is not caused by xenophobic heteropatriarchy. Xenophobic heteropatriarchy is the humanitarian crisis. Hence, emergencies in this structural sense serve precisely to subordinate and control whatever groups stand in the way of White settler colonial capitalist domination. Emergencies are not just events. They are also self-perpetuating material-perceptual infrastructures that create ongoing conditions of death, disease, vulnerability, and servitude.

When “emergencies” are constructed through the lens of White supremacy, many emergencies are never seen at all. So powerful are the infrastructures of perception that even an “apocalypse for Africans and the indigenous” disappears into abstraction for the Whitestream. As Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte argues, the irony of White obsessions with dystopic futures imbued with environmental chaos is that the past and present dystopic realities of Native people

go unnoticed. In “Our Ancestors’ Dystopia Now” he writes “we consider the future from what we believe is already a dystopia.” If colonial infrastructures of perception produce the erasure of such dystopic realities, to what extent can Whitestream understanding of emergency be trusted, accurate, or even said to approach the reality of death, loss, and disaster in a minimal sense?

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